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The Fictional Onscreen Depiction of Looked-after Young People:
"Finding someone just like me"

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Research abstract

While there is significant interest in the lives of looked-after young people, little attention has been given to the way these young people are depicted onscreen. The aim of this study is to explore looked-after young people's perceptions of these fictional depictions and the impact these depictions have on them.

Drawing on Freire's seminal text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, I adopt a participatory approach throughout. Research methods involved viewing and discussing TV and film content depicting looked-after characters with a group of young people in care, followed by semi-structured interviews with group members. The data is analysed using a modified Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis protocol.

My research highlights that these young people perceive onscreen fictional depictions to be "unrealistic" and negative. These depictions have significant impact, particularly in terms of "presumed media influence", on how these young people perceive negative depictions to influence others. The young people offer a range of suggestions in terms of better depicting looked-after characters, drawing on their own experiences of care. My research also highlights the benefit of utilising a Freirean empowerment model, in terms of raising critical consciousness, for a group of looked-after young people.

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Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others.

Any ethical clearance for the research presented in this thesis has been approved. Approval has been sought and granted by the Faculty Ethics Committee on the 7th march 2014.

I declare that the Word Count of this Thesis is 83,582 words

Name: John Hickman

Signature:

Date:

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 My background and motivation

I am a thirty-six-year-old male of white British origin. I grew up on a council estate in Wolverhampton, living with my mother, father and younger sister. My father was a labourer and my mother worked a variety of part-time manual jobs throughout my childhood. My mother spent a lot of time with me in my first few years of my life. I believe that this nurturing and warm relationship enabled me to build trust with her, whilst simultaneously developing a positive sense of "self" (Bowlby 1988; Ainsworth 1985). My relationship with my father, however, was less clear-cut, as he was dependent on alcohol.

Although I wanted my family to remain together, even at a young age I realised my parent's relationship would be impossible to sustain. The period leading to my parent's marital breakdown was characterised by hostility and aggression. When my mother and father decided to separate, I was faced with the choice of staying with my mother or living with my father. I was aware of my father's vulnerability and felt he would struggle to cope without support, so I chose to live with him. It was at this time when I began to go "off the rails". Whether or not my parent's marital breakdown was the cause of my behaviour, I cannot be sure, but as Howe (1995) points out, witnessing parental conflict is likely to cause a child both behavioural and emotional problems. As a result, my adolescence was rife with antisocial and criminal behaviour. Fortunately, my mother was a great source of support and guidance to me throughout these years and I achieved good exam results in spite of my experiences. Subsequently, I was able to go on to study at university and leave my home town, embarking on a new life.

Even though I experienced difficulties while growing up, I feel I have developed into a successful adult largely due to the secure relationship I had with my mother and my resultant level of resilience (Fonagy et al. 1994; Newman and Blackburn 2002). At around my mid-twenties, I came to appreciate the opportunities I had been given. I felt a desire to give something back and wanted to assist young people to develop their own resilience and achieve their potential as I had. I contemplated teaching, but I did not feel it would allow me to address the welfare issues of young people, which was my main concern. It was at this time, around 2006, that I applied to be a social worker. So, like many people who come into social work, I hoped to make a difference to the lives of others (Cocker and Allain, 2008).

Although I undertook placements in a variety of settings, my desire was always to work with young people. As I progressed through my course, it became clear that looked-after children were the service user group I wanted to work with, as I felt I identified most with their experiences. When the opportunity presented itself to join a looked-after children's team, I leapt at it. I hoped to encourage and support children in care to achieve good outcomes and felt I could be a "triumph over difficult circumstances" role model to these young people, as someone who had overcome adversity to achieve success myself (Gauntlett, 2008). I wanted them to see they could use these adversities as fuel, to drive them forward, and their unique perspectives could be valuable to others.

Following qualifying as a social worker in 2009, I worked with children and families, and in 2010, I worked specifically with children cared for by the local authority. The work was generally enjoyable and positive, even when difficult and challenging (O'Loughlin and

O'Loughlin, 2016). The children and young people I worked with were in a variety of placements, came from a variety of backgrounds, and had varying experiences of the care system. They were eager to be involved in planning and were able to provide useful and illuminating insight into what being "in care" meant. This contradicted the depictions I saw, where the nature of care was simplified and the characters of looked-after young people homogenised (West, 1999). Throughout my time practising as a social worker, I felt privileged to have had been part of the lives of these young people and relished seeing them reach their undoubted potential.

When the opportunity arose to undertake a PhD, I knew that looked-after children would be my research area of interest. Initially, my aim was to investigate and improve the experiences of looked-after children involved in family court proceedings. However, my introductory research led me into different terrain; that of the onscreen fictional depictions of looked-after young people. As well as a career in social work, I also have a strong creative background, with a degree in animation and an MA in creative writing. I have written in both prose and script form, I am a published children's author, I have had numerous film scripts produced, and I have taught creative writing and filmmaking workshops with young people. Therefore, I was keen to work creatively with the young people and inspired in particular by the work of Kip Jones, whose script for the film *Rufus Stone* was based upon his research (Lichtman, 2013).

Jones states that, "From the very beginning, from the inception of the idea of a professionally made film to represent in-depth research—the first thing that motivated me is that a lot of research ends up on the shelf—or in journals on the shelf—not many people read it and it kind of dies a slow death there. In order to have impact in the larger world,

I thought it was necessary to move into a field where you could produce something that would be able to be diffused amongst a wider population" (Lichtman, 2013, p.3). Jones felt in terms of an older gay rural community, there were a lot of "myths that needed to be dispelled and a lot of consciousness-raising that needed to go on" (Lichtman, 2013, p.4). Similarly, Salzer (2012) states, "What really influences me is when I see a human face and hear a story told with heart and feeling. Increasing visibility and putting a face to issues through telling human stories can be an incredibly powerful form of advocacy" (p.235). Therefore, it would have been a disservice to reduce these young people's stories to data points. Their stories had to be told visually (Salzer, 2012).

1.2 Looked-after young people: the current context

The term "looked-after" was introduced in the Children Act 1989 and is used in England and Wales to refer to children under the age of eighteen who are in the care of the state. The term can be used to describe young people who are looked-after on a voluntary basis at the request of their parents (Section 20 of the Children Act 1989), and those subject to a care order (Section 31 of the Children Act 1989). The term "looked-after child" technically includes children who are remanded or detained and those living at home under a care order. However, throughout this thesis, I will apply the term to refer to children and young people living in residential or foster care, as it is more generally used.

In England and Wales, the legal framework around child care planning and review is largely informed by the Children Act 1989. Earlier research into the shortcomings of the care system, particularly the tendency of children and young people to "drift" in care in part informed the Children Act 1989 (Thomas, 2011). The Act "sought to

put the emphasis back on care as a service to parents rather than as a punishment for inadequacy" (Boddy et al., 2014, p.152), emphasising the importance of a child's welfare, and an obligation to take children and young people's wishes and feelings into account (Department of Health and Social Security (DHSS), 1985 in Thomas, 2011). Placing children away from their families continued to be viewed as a last resort, with the aim being returning children to their birth families as soon as possible (Boddy et al., 2014). Rowlands and Statham (2009) note the Children Act 1989 defined the grounds for making a care order, requiring evidence that a child is likely to suffer "significant harm" in the care of their parents.

The 2000 Leaving Care Act was prompted by research into poor outcomes for care leavers. Before the Act, "there was no statutory framework in place for care leavers, with each local authority determining what level of support it provided. With no nationally-set expectation about what was an adequate level of support, many care leavers received only minimal assistance. The 2000 Act introduced, for the first time, requirements on local authorities to: assess the needs of the young person once they left care; appoint a Personal Adviser for them; and develop a pathway plan" (HM Government, 2016, p.9). Following the 2008 Children and Young Persons Act, the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 came into force, with new statutory guidance on care planning, placement and case review (HM Government, 2010). More recently, The Children and Families Act 2014 introduced a 26-week time limit for courts to decide whether or not a child should be taken into care (www.nspc.org.uk).

As of March 2015, a total of 69,540 children and young people in England were under the care of local authorities, a number that "has

increased steadily over the past seven years and it is now higher than at any point since 1985" (Department for Education (DfE), 2015, p.3). This rise has been attributed, at least in some part, to a number of high profile infant deaths, which may have been prevented if these children had been removed from the care of their parents earlier (Macleod et al., 2010; Mezey et al., 2015). The majority of children in care (62% in 2015) are looked-after due to abuse or neglect (DfE, 2015).

There has been little variation in the ethnic breakdown for looked-after children since 2011. As of March 31st 2015, the majority of young people in care (73%) are from a White British background, similar to the general population of all children. There is a continued slight over-representation of children of mixed ethnicity, whereas children of Asian ethnicity are slightly under-represented in the looked-after population (DfE, 2015).

Looked-after young people are often perceived as living in "homes" (Hare and Bullock, 2006), yet the vast majority are placed with foster carers (52,050 or 75% at 31st March 2015), a number that continues to rise. Only ten percent (6,570) of these children and young people are cared for in secure units, children's homes and hostels.

There were 3,320 looked-after children placed for adoption at 31 March 2015 representing 5% of all looked-after children, and of all looked-after children adopted in 2015, the majority (76%) were aged between 1 and 4. While the number of looked-after children placed for adoption rose between 2011 and 2014, there has been a 15% reduction in this number in 2015 (DfE, 2015).

39% of the 26,330 former care leavers aged 19, 20 or 21, were not in education, employment or training (NEET), a slight increase from

2014, and just over three times (12%) the amount of young people NEET across the general population (Office for National Statistics, 2016). In 2015, 23% of former care leavers were in training or employment, an increase of 3% from 2014. Six percent were in higher education, and a further 18% were in education other than higher education (DfE, 2015). So then, while care leavers are depicted as having negative outcomes, the official statistics point to the fact that upon leaving care, 61% are in employment or education. While fewer young people leave care and enter education or employment than their non-looked-after peers, almost two thirds do, a fact that is often forgot.

Fostering and adoption remain a significant concern in contemporary Britain. David Cameron called "for the adoption process to be sped up to end the "tragedy" of children waiting to be placed in a loving family home" (The Guardian, 2015). With rising numbers of young people entering the care system and fewer young people adopted in 2015 than in previous years (DfE, 2015), it is imperative that depictions of care capture its reality and offer a balanced representation for these young people.

1.3 Research rationale

The disadvantages experienced by looked-after young people, when compared to their non-looked-after peers, are long-standing and well-documented (Goodyer, 2013), and occur at every stage of their lives, from their early experiences to their lives in the care system, through to leaving care (Vivienne Barnes, 2009). "Outcomes for care leavers remain much worse than for their counterparts in the general population and the quality of leaving care services provided by local authorities remains variable" (HM Government, 2016, p.6). Many looked-after young people experience disadvantages, such as a disrupted education, scrutiny of their private lives and a lack of family

contact (Goodyer, 2013). They suffer stigmatisation in care (McNeish and Newman, 2002), and numerous placement moves affect their relationships and education (Department for Children, Schools and Families (DfCSF), 2006; DfE 2015). A recent review undertaken by the Prison Reform Trust found half the children in youth custody had experienced being in care (Drew, 2015).

Portrayals of looked-after young people often rely on misconceptions about their needs and experiences. While their disadvantaged status should not be understated, good outcomes are ignored at the expense of negative ones and derogatory stereotypes often prevail. An example of these distorted views is that looked-after young people are often perceived as living in care homes, yet secure units, children's homes and hostels are only used for around 10% of all looked-after children (Hare and Bullock, 2006; DfE, 2015). "Looked-after young people are an administrative group in that they are defined by law and state responsibility and not by need. Hence, they will have little in common other than the fact that they are "looked-after" (Hare and Bullock, 2006, p.27). The looked-after population is varied and the reasons young people are in care will differ, along with their placement experiences and how long they stay in care (Hare and Bullock, 2006).

Young people in care "say that the general public's perception of "care" is important if not crucial to their lives" (West, 1999, p.253). West's research with young care leavers across England highlights the importance of the public's attitude to children from care, with almost three quarters of participants stating they never or rarely told anyone they had been in care (West, 1995, p.24 in West, 1999). In an individualistic society, such as ours, Vojak (2009) suggests responsibility for an individual's predicament is attributed to themselves rather than to structural inequalities, and that stigmatising

language reinforces these inequalities. She uses the example of the word "foster" as an example, stating the "'foster' label may suggest that the child is different and possibly damaged or at fault for his or her foster-care status; or that s/he comes from a family that is abnormal, irresponsible, abusive and perhaps criminal" (p.941). She notes further that the "stigmatized person expends considerable energy either managing information in order to conceal the stigma, or managing the stress and tension resulting from public knowledge of the stigma" (p.941). This can lead to looked-after young people having lowered self-esteem, experiencing anger, frustration, emotional denial and cognitive impairment, and becoming isolated from their peers, which in turn impacts on their aspirations for the future (Vojak, 2009). West highlights common themes experienced by looked-after young people and care leavers, such as stigmatising attitudes of members of the public, with young people either entitled to overly sympathetic attention or, more likely, demonised, "associated with courts and crime, portrayed as victims, burglars and prostitutes" (p.265). Young people talk of being victimised by other children, teachers, and of parents refusing to allow their children to play with them (West, 1999). But how do these children, teachers and parents arrive at their opinions? And from where do they derive their views?

The concept of representation has enabled academics to move beyond understanding media messages as simply a reflection of reality (Furisch, 2010). Instead, representations establish norms about groups and people in society (Hall, 1997). Beyond just mirroring reality, depictions in the media, such as in film and television, create reality and normalise specific ideologies or world-views. These representations and depictions are constitutive of culture, meaning and knowledge about ourselves and the world around us. Therefore, limited or poor representations can have a negative impact on social

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and political decision-making and in turn, in some way at least, sustain social and political inequalities (Fursich, 2010).

My introductory research led me to speculate that depictions of foster care in film and TV, are not all accurate or realistic portrayals. In fact, looked-after young people are portrayed in quite extreme terms. Some TV shows such as *The Dumping Ground* are overly positive and depict care as idealised, whereas other popular TV shows portray looked-after young people as "problem children" who have emotional and behavioural problems. For example, Scout Allen in *Waterloo Road* ran away from home rather than go into care and Faye Windass from *Coronation Street,* a young girl who was adopted, gave birth at the age of thirteen. Looked-after young people may be subjected to stereotyping in ways that would be unacceptable for other areas of diversity, such as race, gender and ethnicity (Lyn Meese, 2012). I was concerned about the ways in which these images might impact on young people in care, and how they would distort their thinking of themselves and their own lives. Therefore, questions I wanted my research to address, included:

* What are looked-after young people's perceptions of the onscreen fictional depictions of looked-after characters and care?

* What is the young people's critical analysis of these depictions in terms of their influence and effects?

* How can we better depict looked-after young people, and can my research work against any negative effects of these depictions?

* How do I employ a Freirean empowerment model when working with these young people, and what do I learn, in co-construction with these young people?

The voices of children and looked-after young people have been largely silent and silenced (McLeod, 2007). Therefore, my study aimed to give these young people a voice and explore, with them, their views, opinions, and perspectives.

In terms of the structure of my thesis, I will explore the current depiction of looked-after young people, as well as theories around character identification and media impact. In terms of working directly with young people, I wanted my research to not only be of theoretical value, but to have some practical worth to the young people themselves. I wanted to enhance their understandings of these images, so they could analyse and deconstruct them, and hopefully deepen their understanding of themselves. I also wanted to take a journey alongside the young people and felt there was a lot they could teach me. In this respect, the work of Paulo Freire (1970) and the concept of liberating education, proved to be key to my approach.

I would like to make it clear that throughout this thesis, I have chosen to write in the first person and used accessible, clear language. As well as adhering to social work values of inclusion that I still hold strong (BASW, 2012), writing in the first person will make my presence transparent, highlighting the influence of my subjective analysis (Wolcott, 2002).

1.4 Structure of the thesis
Chapter 2 looks at how looked-after young people are depicted in the media, and the importance of characters, drawing out themes which are

relevant to this study.

Chapter 3 discusses young people and media influence.

Chapter 4 discusses the ethical principles underpinning my research.

Chapter 5 looks at the research design and rationale.

Chapter 6 explores the methodology that was used in my research.

Chapter 7 describes the approach to the group sessions and the process of analysis.

Chapter 8 describes the approach to the semi-structured interview sessions and the process of analysis.

Chapter 9 offers reflections on the use of my approach and my interactions with the young people.

Chapter 10-14 offers interpretative phenomenological analysis of the group and interview data, alongside a theoretical discussion.

Chapter 15 is a summary of my key findings.

Chapter 16 describes returning to the research group to present my findings.

In **Chapter 17** I offer conclusions to the research, looking at implications for future practice and further research.

1.5 Definitions and terminology

Children and young people

Throughout this thesis I refer to "children" and "young people" to all age-groups under eighteen years, as is common in academic literature. I use the term "children" to refer to individuals under the age of ten and "young people" to refer those aged between ten and eighteen, as it seems inappropriate to refer to this age group as children (Vivienne Barnes, 2009). One of the participants in my study is over the age of eighteen and I hope he will forgive me for referring to him as a "young person" even though he is legally an adult.

"Looked-after"

This term denotes all children in public care, including those living at home who are subject to care orders (Children Act, 1989; Cann, 2012).

Children "in care"

I frequently use the term "in care" to describe young people living in residential and foster care. This is a generally accepted shorthand, used throughout by the young people in my study, even though the correct terminology (as defined by the Children Act 1989) is "looked-after" (Vivienne Barnes, 2009).

Foster care

Foster care is a way of providing a family life for children and young people who cannot live with their own parents and instead live with another caregiver referred to as a "foster parent". The placement of the child is normally arranged through the government or a social-service agency. Foster carers must be approved by fostering services registered with the Commission for Social Care Inspection (DfES, 2006).

Residential care/care homes

These terms are used interchangeably and mean a placement where the child or young person lives in a children's home and is cared for by professional carers (DfES, 2006). The Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 sets out duties for those providing residential children's homes for children.

Chapter 2

Onscreen fictional depictions of
looked-after young people

2.1 Why onscreen fictional depictions?

In terms of what factors impact on the lives of looked-after young people, why focus on fictional onscreen depictions? Why not examine issues such as educational attainment or care proceedings? To answer this in the first instance, literature already exists that explores these topics (Martin and Jackson, 2002; Masson, 2012), while there is very little in terms of the way looked-after characters are depicted onscreen. The media is a key source of information for many people and media accounts are often used to structure our understanding of the world (Hartley, 2011). These images are powerful, they inform how we think, how decisions are made and how policies are formulated. They can infiltrate our unconscious, providing ideas of what may be normative or ideal, or indeed what we think others believe is normative or ideal (McIntyre, 2006 in Hartley, 2011). A case in point is the connection I make myself between looked-after young people and care homes. Although I have worked with looked-after young people for years, in my roles as a social worker and researcher, when I initially think of looked-after young people, I think of care homes. This connection is so pervasive it overrides my own first-hand experience, albeit only momentarily. The care system, like many aspects of society is and has been, affected by its media representations. In turn, looked-after young people may well be affected by these stereotyped depictions. As Freire states, "All these myths... the internalization of which is essential to the subjugation of the oppressed, are presented to them by well-organized propaganda and slogans, via the mass "communications" media—as if such alienation constituted real communication!" (1974, p.140).

When exploring the depictions of looked-after young people, I could have examined newspaper articles, or television news reporting, or literary fiction, for example. However, there were a number of reasons I chose to focus on fictional onscreen depictions. Entertainment media is ubiquitous, accessible through laptops, tablets and smartphones (Shedloskyet al., 2014; McCreery and Krugman, 2015). Today's young people live in an environment in which electronic media technologies are intrinsic to everyday life (Livingstone, 2009 in Hartley, 2011). Children aged between five and fifteen spend more time watching television (on average 14.6 hours per week) than using any other media (Ofcom, 2014). So then, it seems reasonable to suggest that in terms of media, film and television have the most impact on young people.

Further, prior to undertaking any work with the young people, I consulted with the Participation Officer, who facilitated the group of looked-after young people I came to work with myself. She advised me the young people would engage more readily with creative visual activities, rather than any formal approaches, which led me to further conclude that looking at print media or literature may have been considered too much like "homework". This sentiment was echoed by the young people themselves, with one of the young people, Joey, stating, "I'd prefer to watch something, rather than reading." Additionally, I did not feel the young people would watch or read much in terms of news reporting. I also felt they would not read as much as they watched, perhaps viewing reading as "uncool". Finally, as a screenwriter myself, my personal interest lay with onscreen fictional depictions.

2.2 The power of television and film

Oatley (1999) notes, "George Eliot said that: 'The greatest benefit we owe to the artist, whether painter, poet or novelist is the extension of our sympathies... extending our contact with our fellow men beyond the bounds of our personal lot" (Pinney, 1963: 270 in Oatley, 1999, p.439). Narratives, whether in the form of books, television series, or movies, can influence an audience's beliefs, attitudes and behaviour (Brown, 2015). "Aesthetic works and fiction are intended to be emotionally powerful and, at best, initiate a search for deeper meanings" (Cupchik, 2001; Oatley, 1999 in Konijn and Hoorn, 2005, p.112-113).

Television and film have the power to change society. For example, taking "children into care as a means to 'resolve' family homelessness was memorably dramatized in the film *Cathy Come Home* in 1966" (Rowlands and Statham, 2009, p.81). Following the airing of the drama, the issue of homelessness was thrust into the spotlight. The impact of the film is still being felt today. Ken Loach, the film's director, states, "no one could expect that 40 years later we'd still be talking about it and that Cathy would become part of the national language about public events in politics" (Smith, 2006).

There have been several other notable examples of film having real impact on society. The documentary *Blackfish* drew attention to the dangers of keeping orcas in captivity, resulting in Seaworld's visitor numbers and share prices dropping. *Traffic*, the critically acclaimed feature film depicting the war on drugs, affected press reporting on drug policy and Ricker Schulte's 2012 analysis of the media and political response to the film suggests that "a blockbuster film... may have the capability to shift power to news media from institutional sources" (p.57). The Tom Hanks film, *Philadelphia*, did a great deal to

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change the perceptions, fear and misunderstanding that surrounded AIDS and homophobia, and helped destigmatize a subject that until then, few had wanted to discuss. HIV advocate Gary Bell stated, "It got people talking about HIV in a way that they really weren't, because it was always that thing we really didn't want to talk about" (Gordon, 2013).

Film and television represent an opportunity for viewers to engage in a meaningful relationship and provide an experience that can generate discussion and reflection. Linden (1970) states that film is a subjective/objective experience, which fulfils three main functions: it uncovers the circumstances of the era in which it is produced, it reveals fleeting details of things and people, and it invites us to see the familiar differently to that to which we are accustomed (Linden, 1970). Film has the potential to rearrange an "individual's perception about the ongoings of the everyday, of the making sense of what has been experienced at the most personal level or one's understanding of the world" (Suazo Zepeda, 2011, p.77). Film and television depictions of looked-after young people therefore have the power to show the public "a world never seen before" (Kracauer, 1965, p.299 in Suazo Zepeda, 2011) and alter the ways in which they perceive and think about this population. Henderson and Franklin (2007) note that "Popular drama offers important opportunities to address stereotypes and introduce diverse audiences to groups in society with which they may have little contact" (p.149). Further, "television has the power to inform adolescent viewers on a number of topics, and viewers may develop parasocial relationships with one or more of the central characters in these shows" (Ortiz and Brookes, 2014, p.50).

2.3 The power of characters

While the power of film and television cannot be overstated, the stories

we are shown onscreen are nothing without their characters. Fictional characters have a variety of appeal, such as acting as sources of information about the real world and life events, and offering emotional experiences, which counter boredom and apathy, as well as offering entertainment and a form of relaxation (Hoorn and Konijn, 2003).

How an audience engages with fictional characters is affected by a variety of factors, such as whether they like or dislike characters, the similarities or differences they perceive between themselves and the character (Cohen, 2011). They may also identify with characters (Cohen, 2001) or experience empathy (Zillmann, 1991). So what makes a viewer or reader empathise with or identify with a character? To ascertain this, I invested numerous hours into my literature search (Hart 2001 – my SW dissertation), exploring a number of databases (ASSIA, CINAHL, HSWE, Swetswise), and reference lists from both articles and key texts. My search focused on keywords "fictional" and "character", combined with terms "identification" and "empathy". Articles were selected for a variety of reasons: their relevancy to the topic, their currency, and their influence in the field. I must point out that this search was not exhaustive, and there were articles I was unable to locate due to issues of access.

In Cohen's 2001 study, he argues that while "the notion of identification with media characters is widely discussed in media research, it has not been carefully conceptualized or rigorously tested in empirical audience studies" (p.245). He therefore aims to define identity, presenting a theoretical discussion of the concept. Cohen states that, "Identification is a process that culminates in a cognitive and emotional state in which the audience member is aware not of him or herself as an audience member, but rather imagines being one of the

characters in the text. The process of identification may begin because of a production feature that brings the audience member to adopt a character's perspective (Wilson, 1993), an audience member's fondness for a specific character (Cohen, 1999), or a realization that a similarity exists between the audience member and a character (Maccoby & Wilson, 1957). These lead to a psychological merging (Oatley, 1999) or attachment, in which the audience member comes to internalize the characters' goals within the narrative. The audience member then empathizes with the character and adopts the character's identity" (p.252).

Cohen states that, "Identification is an imaginative process through which an audience member assumes the identity, goals, and perspective of a character... More than being an attitude, judgment, or response to media characters (e.g. liking, similarity, affinity, or attraction), identification engages the audience member during reception" (p.261). He notes that identification "increases the intensity of, and involvement with, the exposure to mediated texts and makes their meaning more memorable" (p.260) and therefore notes several consequences of identification. For example, identifying strongly with characters leads to greater enjoyment of media messages and potentially, greater impact. However, while identification likely increases involvement, "it is less likely to produce critical stances toward texts" owing to this level of involvement (P.260).

In Hoorn and Konijn's 2003 study, they depart from identification and empathy hypotheses, and offer a context-sensitive model, the Perceiving and Experiencing Fictional Characters model (PEFiC-model). The model defines an encoding, comparison, and response phase: "In the encoding phase, the observer appraises the ethics, aesthetics, and epistemics of a fictional character and the situational

context. Between the encoding and response phases, a comparison phase is assumed where the observer evaluates specific features relevant to his/her own goals and concerns... [and] identifies features in which the observer resembles the fictional characters, and assigns subjective valences to the specific features. Finally, in the response phase, we consider involvement and distance to be two levels of "engagement" with fictional characters" (p.251). They suggest that, "PEFiC can handle complex responses towards representations of (non-existent) others, such as attractive dissimilarity, the beauty in ugliness, the appeal of negative experiences, and fascination for evil, as well as mixed emotions, ambivalence, and neutral end-states that actually conceal emotional confusion" (p.250). They conclude that "the PEFiC-model considers more factors than earlier approaches, it is sufficiently flexible to allow complex interactions (and thus, complex emotions) and is embedded in the social and situational circumstances of fictional characters" (p.264).

In their follow up study, Konijn and Hoorn (2005) utilised their PEFiC theory. University students from Amsterdam were randomly assigned to eight experimental conditions. Eight protagonists were selected from contemporary feature films and participants viewed edited twenty minute excerpts. Immediately after exposure, participants completed an anonymous questionnaire, and engagement and appreciation were measured as a function of the ethics (good vs. bad), aesthetics (beautiful vs. ugly), and epistemics (realistic vs. unrealistic). Konijn and Hoorn state, "The PEFiC hypothesis was corroborated by multivariate tests, which showed that variation in the appraisal dimensions Ethics, Aesthetics, and Epistemics led to variation in the intensities of involvement, distance, and appreciation" (p.131).

They note that, "Positive appraisals enhanced involvement and

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appreciation, whereas negative appraisals enhanced distance" (p.131). Contrary to general ideas in the field of film and television studies, they found that relevance overruled realism in its effects on involvement and appreciation. They note that, "when a good FC [fictional character] appeared irrelevant, its positive effect on the observers' liking was erased... Relevance also overruled realism in its effects on involvement and appreciation, which is contrary to general ideas in the fields of film and television (e.g., regarding the popularity of reality TV)" (p.132).

Chory-Assad and Cicchirillo's 2005 study examined the relationships between television viewers' empathy and affective orientation and their identification with their favourite television characters. Empathy, perspective taking and empathic concern were measured and participants were asked to name their favourite television character and indicate their frequency of exposure to and identification with him/her, on a five-point Likert scale. The study found that "Viewers with stronger tendencies to view the world from others' perspectives… appear to have stronger tendencies to identify with television characters (p.155). In this way, the notion of a powerful audience is useful, and what that audience brings to their reading of media "texts" (Hall, 1980), as opposed to a powerful media (discussed in the following chapter on media effects).

In Derrick, Gabriel and Hugenberg's 2009 study, they examined whether favoured television programs provide the experience of belonging. They note that social surrogacy does provide this feeling, "even without having a ''true'' social interaction. As yet, it remains an open question as to whether such social surrogacy merely suppresses belongingness needs, or whether such surrogacy actually fulfils the need" (p.361). They find that while there is an argument that social

surrogacy is an impoverished experience when compared to "real" interaction, social surrogacy can serve as an alternative to "real" social interaction, and this is not necessarily "maladaptive" (p.361).

In Igartua's 2010 study, he analysed the effects of identification with characters in relation to enjoyment, the affective and cognitive impact and incidental persuasive impact of exposure to fictional feature films. In Study one, 300 participants were interviewed coming out of several movie theaters. In Study two, 54 university students viewed a drama dealing with the labour exploitation of immigrants, with participants completing a mood scale evaluation before and after viewing the film. In Study three, 93 students participated in a randomized experiment, viewing a comedy concerning the lives of immigrants. The film was presented under two conditions whereby participants in the control condition completed a questionnaire before viewing the film, about their attitudes, beliefs and emotions towards immigrants. In the treatment condition, questionnaires were completed after viewing the film. Igartua's study confirms identification with characters not only gives rise to enjoyment, but also contributes to explaining its affective and cognitive impact. Igartua notes that one of the most important results of study three was the observation of a statistically significant correlation between identification with the characters in the film and positive attitudes and beliefs with regard to immigration among the participants.

In Shedlosky-Shoemaker et al.'s 2014 study, they explored perceived self-expansion prompted by exposure to fictional characters. They found "immersion into narrative worlds can create opportunities for growth in which experiences, perspectives, and knowledge of fictional characters prompt readers' own development" (p.573). They note that a person can vicariously take part in new experiences without the

prospect of social rejection or physical harm and "the relationship between perceived self-expansion experienced through fictional characters and degree to which that character represented one's ideal self suggests that fictional characters have the power to be role models" (p.573).

2.4 What does this mean for looked-after young people?

Shedlosky-Shoemaker et al. (2014) note that, "outstanding role models inspire observers to aspire to high achievement, and... exposure to positive role models in narratives might provide a source for self-expansion and thus self-enhancement" (p.573). While the term "role models" itself remains ambiguous, the concept is commonly conceived in popular discourse as someone to base your character, values or aspirations upon (Gauntlett, 2008). The value of role models is in their ability to inspire and motivate people to challenge perceived limitations and boundaries to achievement, as well as offering figures who undermine stereotypes (Awan, 2007). Fictional characters, therefore, have the potential to be role models to looked-after young people.

In Gomillion and Giuliano's 2011 study, they examined the influence of the media on gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) identity using surveys and in-depth interviews. Survey participants "indicated that the media influenced their self-realization, coming out, and current identities by providing role models and inspiration" (p.330). Role models were seen as an inspiration, being a source of comfort, making participants more positive about their GLB identities. In contrast, participants also highlighted the negative impact of limited and stereotypical representations of GLB individuals, which made them feel excluded from society and limited their identity expression. They note that the perceived similarity between an individual and a role

model is an important predictor of the role model's influence. Therefore, looked-after young people may be more influenced by looked-after role models due to their similar identities.

Awan notes that role models do not exclusively operate as figures individuals seek to imitate directly. Instead, they can act as a "'tool kit' enabling these young people to utilise specific facets of these figures within the formations of their self-identities" (Awan 2007, p.239). However, little is really known in terms of the psychological processes at play when individuals utilise role models in terms of their self-development. Gauntlett (2008) states:

"That's okay, though, as it leaves the way clear for a straightforward understanding of how role models might work: that as people grow up, and indeed advance into their twenties and later years, they look for inspiring or comforting figures who offer positive-looking examples of how life can be lived. These identities are not 'copied' in any big or direct sense, but they feed into our on-going calculations about how we see life and where we would like to fit into society. As we construct our narratives of the self... we are able to appropriate (borrow) the positive bits of other people's attitudes or lives that we fancy for ourselves. This means that media stars can be seen as an inspiration for one aspect of their character but not for another... Because of this selectivity, it is perhaps unnecessary for authority figures to feel that 'role models' should be flawless" (p.174).

Shedlosky-Shoemaker et al. note that, "Audience members are able to create meaningful relationships with fictional characters and these relationships might entail opportunities for novel experiences and personal growth, particularly if individuals perceive those characters as representing their ideal self or if individuals are immersed in the world created by the story. In turn, the stories people are exposed to in entertainment media may help shape who they become, for better or worse" (2014, p.574). This is of particular relevance to looked-after young people, who are already disadvantaged when compared to their peers (Goodyer, 2013), and face further negative impact if the

characters available to them, who may shape who they become, are limited or poorly depicted.

Jung argues that "individuals are active agents who select role models from a number of available choices" (1986 in Awan, 2007, p.182). Awan (2007) notes that participants in her study "negotiated their role models in accordance with their aspirations, values and social context" (p.226). There is no evidence to suggest looked-after young people are not able to utilise onscreen role models for self-enhancement. On the contrary, the evidence seems to point to these young people being more inclined to look at fictional onscreen characters as role models, owing to a possible lack of role models in their own lives (McMurray et al., 2010).

Parasocial relationships refer to the "one-sided, emotionally tinged relationships" that people develop with media characters (Kaitlin et al., 2016, p.182). Shedlosky-Shoemaker et al. (2014) note potential benefits of creating meaningful relationships with fictional characters, "in part because of the lack of reciprocal interaction between relationship partners. The absent interaction means reduced risk of rejection, creating a safer context in which to form relationships" (p.557). These parasocial relationships could provide opportunities for self-expansion, "especially for those who are... isolated, those who have limited social relationships" (p.573), which could be said to describe some looked-after young people, who may be isolated as a result of their looked-after status (Vojak, 2009).

Shedlosky-Shoemaker et al. point out these "parasocial interactions have the capacity to offer the audience member an expansive range of experiences. For example, narratives may provide connections with others whom people would not ordinarily encounter in their physical

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environment, including people of different ethnicities, religions, or even other planets, thereby providing an avenue for developing new knowledge, skills, or perspectives" (Shedlosky-Shoemaker et al., 2014, p.557). It is therefore worth bearing in mind how these depictions might affect others who have had little experience of looked-after young people in their "physical environments". Further, they highlight that, "This may be particularly beneficial in environments where individuals lack strong, positive role models" (p.573). Looked-after young people may not have experienced nurturing caregiving and "may lack enabling role models through which to support the development of positive identities" (Madigan et al., 2013, p.391). Therefore, "parents and educators must take pains to expose children to a wider variety of potential role models than popular culture does... A variety of potential heroes and role models allows children to appreciate themselves and the diversity in others (Anderson and Carvallo, 2002, p.168 in Gauntlett, 2008)".

Derrick, Gabriel and Hugenberg (2009) note that, "people with low self-esteem, people with an anxious-ambivalent or preoccupied attachment style, people low in trust, and people high in the need to belong are more likely to experience parasocial relationships, experience stronger parasocial relationships, or are more likely to turn to parasocial activities than their more securely-attached or "better-adjusted" counterparts" (p.361). They claim that social surrogacy can serve as an alternative to "real" social interaction for those with very high belongingness needs, and may reduce chronic feelings of rejection or isolation. Looked-after young people could very well have "high belongingness needs" as they are often separated from their families and potentially trying to "fit in" in at school, in foster placements, and in peer groups, and may well be more inclined to seek out these parasocial relationships.

The concept of identification also emerges as something of particular significance. Cohen notes that, unlike parasocial relationships, "identification lacks an interactional component because when identifying, one lacks an awareness of the self, and, therefore, the distinction between self and other—necessary for interaction—is missing... Identification leads the audience member to experience the text as if he or she were inside the text, whereas for PSI [parasocial interaction] to occur, one needs to retain his or her self-identity and interact with the character, thereby maintaining at least a minimal social distance" (p.253).

Cohen (2001) highlights the importance of identification, particularly in terms of "its contribution to the development of self-identity. As self-identity is related to our perception of others and how they view us, media images are linked to self-identity... Identifying with media others allows us to experience social reality from other perspectives and, thus, shapes the development of self-identity and social attitudes" (p.246). Cohen further notes a number of factors that might make an audience member more likely to identify with a fictional character, for example, perceived similarity based on numerous factors such as demographics, attributes or situation; the duration of familiarity (e.g. more exposure to a character means a higher level of identification); the physical attractiveness of the character and favorable personality characteristics; and the "perceived realism of a character" (2001).

Further, Konijn and Hoorn (2005) introduce the concept of relevance, which they state is "stronger than realism" (p.133). They state that "Relevance is a key factor of emotional reactions (Frijda, 1986, 1993; Lazarus, 1991) and is guided by the relevance of particular features of the observed object to the observer's goals, motives, or concerns"

(p.112). They note that a viewer's concerns and goals might mirror those of a fictional character. However, what is more likely, is that a viewer will "tune in to several specific features that seem relevant to their own lives" (p.112). In this way then, perhaps the characters looked-after young people view onscreen do not necessarily have to be "realistic". They do however have to be relevant, if young people in care to engage with them.

Hall (2013, p.216) states that, "Representation is a complex business and, especially when dealing with 'difference', it engages feelings, attitudes and emotions and it mobilizes fears and anxieties in the viewer, at deeper levels than we can explain in a simple, common-sense way." Realism refers to the term we use when judging whether a fiction constructs a world we recognize as like our own. However, the concept of realism is problematic (Gledhill and Ball, 2013). Whose reality is being represented? Are all of our realities the same? Gledhill and Ball (2013, p.356) note that "in fiction, 'reality' is always constructed. *Verisimilitude...* refers not to what may or may not *actually be* the case, but rather to what the dominant culture *believes* to be the case, to what is generally accepted as credible, suitable, proper." Hall (2013, p.259) states that, "meaning can never be finally fixed. If meaning could be fixed by representation, then there would be no change – and so no counter-strategies or interventions. Of course, we do make strenuous efforts to fix meaning – that is precisely what the strategies of stereotyping are aspiring to do, often with considerable success, for a time. But ultimately, meaning begins to slip and slide; it begins to drift, or be wrenched, or inflected into new directions. New meanings are grafted on to old ones. Words and images carry connotations over which no one has complete control, and these marginal or submerged meanings come to the surface, allowing different meanings to be constructed, different things to be shown and

said."

Oatley (1999) states, "identification is a species of empathy, in which we do not merely sympathize with a person, we become that person" (p. 446 in Igartua, 2010). Repeatedly taking on the identity of another could therefore lead to long-term behavioural changes (Cohen, 2001; Brown, 2015). Cohen (2001), notes "This is especially true for adolescents who are in the process of forming their own identity and are susceptible to influence by media characters" (p.249). "Identification occurs when one individual shares the interests of another individual or believes that he or she shares the interests of another" (Burke, 1969, p.180 in Brown, 2015). So then, a further point here is that it is not simply onscreen characters the young people might identify with, but significant others, such as their peers. This highlights the usefulness of a group approach, offering the young people an opportunity to share interests and experiences and identify with one another.

It is also worth considering how these depictions impact on those with limited experiences of care. Awan (2007) notes the value of role models is in their ability to offer figures who undermine stereotypes. Gomillion and Giuliano (2011) state that "Given the substantial amount of evidence suggesting that positive role models enhance individuals' self-esteem... it seems plausible that increasing the representation of positive GLB media figures may also increase GLB individuals' self-esteem. However... societal prejudice against GLB individuals needs to also be substantially decreased in order to allow GLB individuals a greater opportunity to achieve healthy functioning" and "it could be argued that increasing the positive representation of GLB media figures may be an important first step toward reducing societal prejudice against the GLB community" (p.351). Parallels

could be made for the lives of looked-after young people. They too face stereotyped and negative attitudes in the media (West, 1999: Riggs et al., 2009), therefore, more rounded looked-after role models could also improve not only the self-esteem of these young people, but society's attitudes towards them.

Igartua notes that "an effective way to improve attitudes towards a stigmatized group... is to promote empathy with a member of that group... certain audiovisual productions (The Colour Purple, for example), which present the particular cases of persons forming part of the stigmatized groups, can be used to improve the image of these groups by allowing audiences to empathize with the characters; this then leads to attitudinal changes" (2010, p.369). Freire underlines this concept: "hands... need be extended less and less in supplication, so that more and more they become human hands which work and, working, transform the world" (1970, p.27). So then, in terms of the depictions we are presented with, creating characters who an audience can empathise with, which make these young people more "human", is key to reducing the stigma associated with being looked-after.

To summarise then, there is nothing to suggest looked-after young people are unable to identify with, empathise with and utilise onscreen characters as role models. In fact, it would seem they may be more likely to seek out parasocial relationships, owing to possible isolation in their own lives and likely to identify with characters, in terms of their developmental stage (Cohen, 2001). These role models have the potential to inspire and reduce stigma, not only for these young people, but for the wider public. So then, if these looked-after characters are portrayed in negative and stereotyped ways, or looked-after role models are absent altogether (West,1999), it is an issue of real concern.

2.5 The depiction of young people: an overview

So then, with the power of film and television discussed, and the power and importance of fictional characters established, I will now explore how looked-after young people are actually depicted in the media. In order to understand the onscreen depictions of looked-after young people, it is necessary to explore the general context of media representations of children and young people more generally. Children and young people are routinely depicted as troubled, troubling, and dangerous in news media (Wayne et al., 2008; Bernier, 2011). The demonisation of young people in the United Kingdom tends to rise and fall with broader societal tensions and dates back at least to the eighteenth century (Wayne et al., 2008). The post-Second World War era saw the creation of "delinquent" young people, from mods and rockers to punks, skinheads and ravers (Cohen, 2011). Since the 1980s, young people have become "folk devils", figures defined as a threat to societal values (Cohen, 2011) and the early 1990s saw a significant shift in the framing of young people in news media, notably the link between youth and crime. A defining moment came in 1993, when two-year-old James Bulger was murdered by a pair of ten-year-old children (Wayne et al., 2008). Today, "young people appear most commonly as either victims or perpetrators of crime" (Wayne et al., 2008, p.88). These ideas are important in developing the framework within which a particular construction of looked-after young people is generated (West, 1999).

2.6 Depictions of looked-after young people: a review of the literature

In terms of establishing the media depiction of young people in care, I again explored a number of databases and reference lists from articles and key texts. My initial search focused on keywords "foster care", "looked-after", "LAC", "care leavers" and "children in care" and later

expanded to include "orphans", "adoption" and "child abuse". Each of these search terms was then combined with "media", "television", "film", "fiction", "literature", "news", "children's literature", "books" and "depiction". British sources and articles from the last five years were searched initially, and yielded few results. I expanded my search criteria to article abstracts, articles written in English, published between 1980 and the present day. Subsequent searches proved more fruitful, turning up several articles, whose titles and abstracts were examined further. It should be noted there is a relative scarcity of relevant published work in this area, a sentiment iterated in the literature (Riggs et. al, 2009). With this in mind, I also sought out other academics who might be undertaking similar research. While there were no articles relating to the onscreen fictional depictions of looked-after young people specifically, one article looked at the literary depictions of orphans and several articles offered insight into media depictions more generally, specifically news media.

In Kimball's 1999 study, she examined orphan folktales from different cultures, finding that, "while the details of orphan stories vary, there are some universal elements" (p.558). She compared these patterns to literary orphan story, *The Secret Garden,* demonstrating how these elements were applied in children's literature. She notes that, "Orphan characters in folktales and literature symbolize our isolation from one another and from society. They [orphans] do not belong to even the most basic of groups, the family unit, and in some cultures this is enough to cut them off from society at large. In other cultures, orphans are regarded as special people who must be protected and cared for at all costs. In either case, orphans are clearly marked as being different from the rest of society. They are the eternal Other" (p.559).

She notes that "By the nineteenth century, the orphan heroine was an

established character in English and American literature" (p.567), citing classic novels such as *Heidi*, *Pollyanna* and *Anne of Green Gables* as examples and noting that, "Male orphans also had their place in the literature as exemplified by the novels of Dickens (Oliver Twist; David Copperfield; and Great Expectations)... but female orphans predominated" (p.567). She states, "The reality of orphans in society and their function as a hero type explains their presence in folktales, but the continuing use of orphan characters in literature for children indicates that they still hold great fascination for authors and have great meaning for readers" (p.567). Kimball concludes by highlighting common elements highlighted in orphan folktales and children's literature, such as the isolated orphan character, mistreatment of the orphan, a quest, obstacles to fulfillment of the quest and, in the end, happy rewards. She concludes by stating, "It is because the orphan so deeply represents the feelings and pain of us all that the character continues to exist in children's literature. And until the day when none of us feels the pain of isolation, orphans will continue to symbolize it for us" (p.573).

In Goddard's 1996 study, he reviews a series of news articles relating to child abuse. Goddard notes that, "for many people the media presentations of a social problem are their main source of information" and "that the mass media provide our greatest source of knowledge; we use the information we gather to construct our view of the world" (p.305). He argues that abused children are portrayed as a burden to adults in the mass media, rather than citizens with a right to safety and care. He concludes by stating, "In future, it should be possible for the voices of abused children themselves to play a more central role in the telling of these stories" (p.308).

West (1999) draws on conversations held with children and young

people, from different parts of England and Wales, over a four-year period (1995-1999), in addition to group discussions and interviews held specifically on the subject of media portrayals of care. He finds that young people from the care system are demonised, the nature of care simplified and the characters of looked-after young people homogenised. For children living in care and young people who have left care, the construction of "blame" in the newspapers extends to their own lives, a stigmatisation frequently realised in the reactions they experience from children and adults. The young people he spoke with saw "media stories as influencing adults in constructing and reinforcing their opinions" (p.265). He states that "Although children and young people from care are implicitly represented as different and separate from an approved ordinary family life, the popular construction of childhood depends very much on such a portrayal of children in care. As victims and as villains, children from care represent a negative of idealised children and childhood: through their representation in this way, the social norms emphasised in much of the press are articulated. But the consequences for the lives of thousands of children and young people are appalling" (p.265). So then, children in care are the binary depiction – the bad side of childhood, abused, damaged, unloveable, without families. This is in stark contrast to the idealised view of childhood, as a time of innocence, play, family and love (Simmons, 2009).

In Kline, Chatterjee and Karel's 2006 study, they used theories of stigma (Goffman, 1963) and media frames (Iyengar, 1991), and analysed 292 news stories pertaining to adoption that appeared on major US broadcast networks between 2001 and 2004. The study found that nearly a quarter of the news stories depicted adoptees in solely negative ways. By contrast, over 40% of news stories depicted adoptive parents and adoptive families and their interactions in solely

positive ways.   Media coverage of adoptees contained more problematic than positive depictions, with 14% of the news stories containing stigmatizing claims.

In Kline, Chatterjee and Karel's later study (2009), they analysed U.S. television news coverage of adoption between 2001 and 2005 to identify the types of news events covered about adoption.   Their analysis revealed a mixed set of findings about these news stories, yet found that many stories depicted adoptees as having deficits, such as being starved, or having emotional or identity issues.   They conclude that, "The lack of broadcast news stories about ordinary and positive adoptee experiences may create a misleading picture for news audiences about adoptees and their strengths" (p.66).

In Riggs et al.'s 2009 study, they analysed representations of foster care in the Australian news media over an 18-month period. They state that coverage accorded to looked-after young people was "entirely negative" (p.242), with reports "associating pejorative terms with foster children, or at the very least describing the life outcomes of foster children in negative ways" (p.242).   Their study very much mirrors the aforementioned work of Andy West (1999), where looked-after young people were constructed as "children out of place", or as Riggs et. al state, "as children who can't "just be children", as children who potentially are "intrinsically damaged" and as children who are always already in conflict" (p.242).   They highlight terms used to describe looked-after young people, such as "sex abuse girl" or "drug baby", which "depict drug dependency or sexual abuse as an inherent aspect of the identities of the children, the inference being that their life outcomes will automatically be negative. Although it is important to recognise how such forms of abuse do very much impact upon the lives of children, it must also be recognised that this is not the only

story to be told about children who have experienced abuse, nor will it be the only (or even primary) identity that they hold" (p.242). Riggs et al., note that while a predominance of negative representations of looked-after young people in their sample, the few positive examples they identified demonstrated it was possible for there to be spaces in which foster care in Australia was positively represented.

Michell's 2015 study analyses the published works of Australians, who spent time in foster care as children. She highlights that, "stories from those who have written of their time in State care show stigma is a theme which threads its way throughout the twentieth century" (p.673). She notes patterns of social inequality and abuse in the texts, where "children in State care are at the bottom of the heap" (p.673). It should be noted that some of these works were memoirs and autobiographical accounts, rather than fictional writing.

In Pemberton's 2013 article, she discusses fictional stereotypes of adopted people, who are portrayed as "damaged, at best, and violent criminals, at worst". She offers a series of examples where adopted people are depicted poorly. For example, "the penultimate episode of ITV crime drama *Broadchurch*, lined up a character we all thought could have carried out the murder. Nige Carter... looked like a man who could explode in violent anger but had a childish, needy side too. His back story: he had been adopted as a baby and hadn't known until his birth mother... had come to warn him he might have "bad blood"." She notes that, "The message – evil is inherited, and there was nothing in the storyline to counteract this". She cites further examples, such as the Truth Terrorist in Scandinavian drama *The Bridge*, a chilling, sociopath who was also adopted, and the eponymous serial killer, *Dexter*. She states, "Neither the Truth Terrorist nor Dexter are quite human. Both are cold, surgical and intelligent in their approach to

killing." She concludes, "Perhaps I am being over-sensitive and finding a narrative thread where there isn't one. Perhaps I've failed to balance my argument with adopted heroes, like Superman and Stuart Little. Or perhaps we've all become a little too normalised to the convention of the evil villain, with the back story of adoption, and have allowed another stereotype to creep unnoticed into our psyches."

Similarly, Canning (2016), looking at care leavers in literature in her PhD thesis, states, "I noticed that a lot of crime dramas seemed to feature care leavers as the baddie. A recent popular BBC psychological thriller, *The Fall*, portrays a serial killer who has spent his childhood in care homes. Kids in care are also often labelled 'problem children'. Jenni Fagan's recent novel, *The Panopticon*, (2012) takes the problem child to its extreme. The teenagers in this narrative are in a Victorian Panopticon, salvaged from its previous function as a jail, it is now a secure home for juvenile delinquents... Wheatle, (2002) delves into a children's home in *The Seven Sisters* and investigates the consequence of abuse on one of its characters. Carlton ends his time in the children's home by murdering his torturer." In Freirean terms, the oppressed becomes the oppressor (1970).

2.7 Reflections on the literature

So then, it would seem that looked-after young people are very much depicted in negative terms in fictional literature and the media. However, the studies outlined above are few and far between, with very little work seeming to have taken place in the UK. The fact that I have uncovered no literature in relation to the fictional onscreen depiction of looked-after young people, makes my study all the more important. The literature echoes my own observations that looked-after young people and foster care in movies and on television, are not accurate or realistic. Looked-after young people are portrayed in

extreme terms on television screens. Some television shows and movies depict orphans as superheroes battling evil or earning a family only through their own wits, magic, cunning, or good fortune, such as the *Harry Potter* series (Lyn Meese, 2012), or overly optimistic and idealised like those in the children's series, *The Dumping Ground*.

Other popular stories portray looked-after young people as "problem children" who have disabilities, or have emotional and behavioural problems, who run away, such as Scout Allen in *Waterloo Road*; are pregnant and under-aged, such as Faye Windass in *Coronation Street*, a young girl who was adopted and gave birth at age thirteen; or lost and alone like Lucy Manvers in the feature film, *The Unloved*. A recent Young Minds article states that, "Participants repeatedly stated that the only representation of children in care that others know is the television character Tracy Beaker and that they are tired of telling peers that they are 'not like Tracy Beaker'" (Levene, 2012). This draws attention to how infrequently looked-after young people are represented within the media, and highlights the fact there is considerable scope for increased and better depictions of looked-after characters and issues pertinent to these young people (Riggs et. al., 2009). To conclude, it is worth reiterating that, although it is important to recognise how abuse very much impacts upon the lives of children, but "it must also be recognised that this is not the only story to be told about children who have experienced abuse, nor will it be the only (or even primary) identity that they hold" (Riggs et al., 2009, p.242).

2.8 Young people and media influence

I will now discuss the effects of the media, from two theoretical standpoints – the pro-effects tradition, whereby the media is considered all-powerful and anti-effects theories, whereby the audience is considered to have power. The chapter goes on to present

criticisms for both models, before exploring the "presumed model", something of a middle-ground between these two positions. It should be noted that these theories do not refer to young people exclusively (Hartley, 2011).

2.9 Pro-effects tradition

Audience-oriented research into media effects is often motivated by public health concerns, whether implicit or explicit, and focuses on the media's negative effects on audiences, in particular, the effect on young people (Al-Sayed, 2010). These include issues such as early sexual activity (O'Hara et al., 2013), alcohol use (Hartley, 2011; Hartley et al, 2014) and aggressive behaviour (Mitrofan et al., 2014; Coyne, 2016). In the pro-effects tradition, researchers attempt to determine whether there is evidence of a direct causal relationship between the media and audience behaviour (Hartley, 2011). The earliest conception was the "magic bullet" theory, which proposes that the media has a direct influence on an audience and "inject[s] people with ideas which quickly led to undesirable behaviour" (Burton, 2000, p.224 in Simmons, 2009). Following on from this, social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) emphasises the importance of observational learning through modelling. People learn by observing others and imitate and engage in behaviours perceived as rewarding. The concept of identification is particularly relevant for social learning theory whereby the greater the perceived similarity between the child and character onscreen, the greater the likelihood there is for the child to imitate the character's behaviours and actions (Al-Sayed, 2010). Cohen (2001) notes that, "identification can produce modeling and imitation because it provides a glimpse of "what if," and these glimpses are powerful predictors of future behavior" (p.260).

Cultivation theory (Gerbner et al., 2002 in Hartley, 2011) further

supports the idea of the viewer as passive. This theory assumes that heavy television viewers are likely to adopt the world-views offered by television. These effects are gradual and indirect rather than being a direct process. "Those who spend more time watching television are more likely to perceive the real world in ways that reflect the most common and recurrent messages of the television world, compared to those who watch less television..." (Morgan, Shanahan, and Signorielli, 2009, p.34 in Al-Sayed, 2010). For example, people who are consistently presented with images of looked-after characters as criminals on television, will be cultivated into accepting these images as reality. This presents a different type of negative effect to social learning theory, whereby instead of television encouraging violent or negative behaviour, it creates feelings of fear and apprehension (Strasburger et al., 2013). The cultivation model suggests that, by offering a steady diet of repetitive messages over a long period of time, television can create a distorted version of social reality (Carveth and Alexander, 1985 in Al-Sayed, 2010).

Both social learning and cultivation analysis models are seen as potentially flawed with media and technology changing dramatically since the times when these models were articulated (Simmons, 2009). Content analysis studies that have used social learning theory to explain potential media effects have been criticised for their morally driven agenda, in terms of their focus on negative effects and socially unacceptable behaviour (Buckingham and Bragg, 2002 in Al-Sayed, 2010). It is evident that the majority of media influence research appears to be framed in terms of negative media effects with studies focused on public health concerns relating to young people, such as risky sexual practices, alcohol consumption, aggression, risky driving behaviour and smoking habits (Maass, Lohaus and Wolf, 2010; O'Hara et al., 2013; Mitrofan et al., 2014; Coyne, 2016). While the findings of

these studies vary, almost all indicate the media as having some effect on young people. Research into the impact and effects of the media, largely involve quantitative methods such as longitudinal studies and questionnaires, an idea supported by Hartley et al. (2014). However, these methods take a positivistic research stance that is not congruent with my own more qualitative position.

2.10 Anti-effects Tradition

Whereas the literature supporting the pro-effects tradition is largely US based and quantitative, the "anti-effects" literature is largely qualitative and UK-based (Hartley et al., 2014; Mitrofan et al., 2014). Milkie states that, "Media influence on the self can be studied in more detail through this qualitative approach, which probes further into the complexities of interpretations in examining how they matter and how they may or may not be powerful within the local context" (1999, p.191). She further notes, "Quantitative analyses often suggest that media have power to influence people, whereas interpretive work stresses individuals' power to resist ideology—to select and be critical of media" (1999, p.191). The "minimal-effects" or "anti-effects" terminology follows from Joseph Klapper's seminal publication *The Effects of Mass Communication* (1960 in Neuman and Guggenheim, 2011). Klapper found that during an election campaign, only a small fraction of voters changed their vote intentions, and an audience's prior beliefs and motivations influenced the interpretation of persuasive messages. These messages were often discussed among friends, giving strength to a minimal or anti-effects conclusion (Neuman and Guggenheim, 2011). Contrary to the pro-effects tradition, the anti-effects tradition regards the audience as active, rather than passive.

In *Encoding/Decoding*, Stuart Hall (1980) suggests media texts are open to interpretation by the individual, who is able to bring their own

experience and critical abilities to that interpretation. Hall distinguishes three types of decoding: dominant, negotiated and oppositional. Within the dominant reading, a viewer accepts the preferred meaning inherent in the media text, in other words, the direct effects hypothesis. However, if the viewer rejects this reading and decodes the text in accordance with their own attitudes and values, they take an oppositional reading. A negotiated reading means the viewer does not reject the preferred reading completely, but instead modifies it to meet their own needs (Williams, 2003). In addition, "readers" of media texts engage and interact with media content, rather than taking up the stories offered to them directly (Hartley et al., 2014). Readers draw on these images selectively, accepting, rejecting and modifying representations to suit their own purposes (Hodgetts and Chamberlain, 2003 in Hartley, 2011). Hall's work led to a tradition of critical media studies that involved a detailed analysis of audiences, with an emphasis on the ways in which individuals made their own meanings from their encounters with the media (Suazo Zepeda, 2011). Following on from the work of Stuart Hall, Bobo argues that a viewer engages with film "already possessing a certain knowledge of the world and other mediated representations" (Bobo, 1994, p.239 in Suazo Zepeda, 2011), bringing with them an accumulation of cultural, social, sexual, racial, economic histories, which all come into play when they interpret media content.

It should be noted that the dominant methodology used in these types of studies also has its weaknesses. Qualitative studies are unable to offer causal evidence and are often also reliant on self-reporting. Can people really tell when they have been affected by the media? (Hargrave Millwood and Livingstone, 2006).

2.11 Presumed media influence

Buckingham (2007) states, "The evidence of harmful [media] effects is generally less persuasive although that is not to say that there are no such effects. Equally, the evidence of beneficial effects is far from convincing either – although given that does not mean that such effects may not exist" (Buckingham, 2007, p.26). Hartley (2011) highlights one position that perhaps reconciles the tension between the "powerful media" and the "powerful audience", that of the "presumed media influence" model.

The idea that individuals perceive the mass media as having a greater influence on unknown others than on themselves, or the "Third Person Effect", has long been established (Davison, 1983; Perloff 1993). Perloff notes that "The effect appears to be particularly likely to emerge when the message contains recommendations that are not perceived to be personally beneficial, when individuals perceive that the issue is personally important, and when they perceive that the source harbors a negative bias" (1993, p.167). As Milkie states, "This belief reflects either a misperception of how others view or are influenced by media or... perhaps an underestimation of the media influence on the self" (p.192). Gunther and Storey's study (2003), "The Influence of Presumed Influence", coined the term "presumed influence" when they looked at data from a radio campaign designed to improve reproductive health, family planning, and gender relationships in Nepal. They found that the radio drama program had an indirect effect on significant numbers of people in the general population, aside from its intended target audience of health care providers. Therefore, the "presumed media influence" model means people will change their own attitudes or behaviour in accordance with the presumptions they have as to how the media will influence others (Gunther and Storey, 2003).

Milkie attempted to assess how girls might be affected by the portrayal of females in girls' magazines using surveys and in-depth interviews. Most of the girls in Milkie's study found the images to be "unrealistic". As Milkie states, "Many disliked the images for this reason, considered them harmful to themselves or to others and advocated that media producers should alter their products to include more "real, ordinary, or "normal" girls" (p.199). Milkie found a clear race distinction in terms of the girls' reactions to the images supposedly intended for and about all adolescent girls. While white girls "disliked the anxiety producing gap between their own physical appearance and a media-generated ideal" (p.203) they still wanted to look like these images. These girls perceived them to constitute others' views of adolescent femininity "and therefore could not easily opt out of a social comparison and self-evaluation in which they were sure to fall short" (p.200). White girls reported feeling negatively affected by them since they believed that their peers, especially the boys in their peer group evaluated them on the basis of these images. Therefore, the anticipated social comparison with peers overrode the girls' initial critical response to these images. However, ethnic minority girls did not compare themselves as negatively with these female depictions and nor did they emulate them. They criticised the lack of diversity on display in these magazines and the artificiality of the female depictions. They also did not believe that their female friends and boys from their peer groups were influenced by these images and therefore did not feel negatively affected by them.

Milkie notes that individuals believe others are more strongly affected by media portrayals than they are themselves, an idea in keeping with the "third person effect" (Davison, 1983; Perloff 1993). She goes on to state, "Even though an individual may consciously feel no effect from the media... because of social comparisons and reflected

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appraisals, individuals presume that the images effect significant and generalized others and, therefore, have an effect on the individual" (Milkie 1999, p.194).

In Hartley's PhD thesis (2011), she explored the possible influence of the media on teenagers' constructions of gendered identities, with a specific focus on drinking alcohol and engaging in sexual relationships. Her research adopted a theoretical approach which accommodated both the media-as-powerful and audience-as-powerful standpoints, that of "presumed media influence", drawing heavily on the work of Milkie (1999). Her sample included Scottish teenagers aged 13-16 years and comprised of 25 semi-structured group discussions with 11 follow-up individual interviews. Participants were asked to reflect on images from three British television series: *Skins*, *Hollyoaks* and *Shameless*. Her research found that the mass media does shape teenagers' perceptions and expectations of drinking alcohol and engaging in sexual relationships, and in doing so shapes their gendered identities. She notes the media influenced these teenagers' understandings of gender-appropriate engagement in sexual relationships more than it did for their understandings of gender-appropriate drinking. Importantly, the research confirmed Milkie's "presumed media influence" theory that resolves the apparently incompatible pro and anti-effects traditions to media influence, suggesting media influence might be all the stronger for not being readily recognised or acknowledged as influential.

Hartley et al.'s 2014 study, builds on Hartley's 2011 PhD thesis. Here they use empirical data from the group discussions and in-depth interviews in Hartley's original 2011 study, to explore how teenagers' alcohol drinking and sexual relationships are shaped by their quest for appropriate gendered identities. Their findings affirm that media

portrayals of sexual relationships appeared to influence the young people's constructions of gender-appropriate sexual behaviour, but were less influential in how they used and understood meanings of alcohol. This was perhaps owing to the teenagers having more first-hand experience observing drinking than sexual relationships. As Hartley et al. state, "Presumed media influence may be less influential if one has experience of the behaviour portrayed" (p.772). They note that while the processes of media influence appear complex, it seems to operate primarily through presumptions individuals make about how their peers are influenced, supporting the work of Milkie (1999).

2.12 Media impact on young people

Having described the various theories around media effects, it would seem logical to look at how the media might impact on young people specifically. Piaget, a developmental psychologist, developed theories based around empirically-evidenced age-related norms and achievements. Piaget's normative construction is frequently invoked to prescribe what children should like, want, achieve, or be capable of, at various age-related stages and so is easily allied to the design process of children's media and other resources. TV programmes are produced with some notion of serving the needs and desires of what we think to be this "normal" child within a Western, capitalist society (Whitaker, 2011).

Childhood theory forms an idealistic notion of childhood, placing children as non-adults, and rather than emphasise what children can do, it focuses on what they cannot (Simmons, 2009). Piaget, defines the various transitional stages a child passes through in order to function comprehensively. He distinguishes three key stages: Pre-operational Thought (two-six years), Concrete Operational (seven-eleven) and the Formal Operational (eleven+). The latter stage is

where a child moves into adulthood, maturing cognitively (Strasburger et al., 2013). Within the Pre-operational Thought stage, young children are "'likely to think in a binary way, that is, to respond in an all-or-nothing manner to television" (Noble, 1975, p.83 in Simmons, 2009) and therefore have difficulties separating fiction from reality. Children within this stage perceive anything that looks real as real, a concept known as the "magic window" perspective. Studies have found that children aged two and three would actually wave and talk to TV characters (Strasburger et al., 2013).

Piaget has been criticised for grouping children according to their age, rather than their level of maturity. Social conditions play a part in a child's development and not all children mature consistently. Buckingham (2007) opposes Piaget's ideas and the effects tradition in general, claiming children hold the critical skills that allow them to make mature readings of the media.

2.13 Implications for looked-after young people

So then, what does this mean for looked-after young people? Are they more or less likely to be affected by the images they view in the media? If these young people lack enabling role models (McMurray et al., 2010), have internalised stigma, lowered self-esteem, and experience social isolation (Vojak, 2009), it could be claimed they will be more likely to be impacted by the media, particularly if they turn to TV and films for parasocial relationships (Derrick, Gabriel and Hugenberg, 2009). This is potentially compounded by adverse experiences such as living in poverty, abuse and neglect, family dysfunction, all of which may have an impact on development (Madigan et al., 2013). However, as with young people from the general population, the way in which these young people are impacted by these media images is dependent on their level of maturity. Perhaps

looked-after young people are just as capable of making "mature readings of the media" as anyone else (Buckingham, 2007).

In terms of this study, "presumed media influence" appeared to be the most relevant theory for the young people I worked with. Milkie questions, "How does a belief that media images are powerful for others matter for individuals?" (p.193). To answer, the media may have a complex, indirect effect on these young people as they account for the effects of these negative looked-after depictions on others in their social networks "and are themselves influenced by perceptions of the way others see the media-distorted world" (p.193). Even if a looked-after young person believes his or her group is depicted unrealistically and does not like this portrayal, "because of the pervasiveness of media, and the way in which people believe that media affect others, it may be difficult to avoid some social comparisons with media images and felt evaluations (reflected appraisals) based on the media-depicted world" (p.193). Looked-after young people might disregard these media portrayals, and may not want to make a social comparison that is negative for their self. However, the extent to which that young person may be able to make this critical media assessment may depend on the extent to which these young people know that "significant others" have similarly assessed these depictions. Milkie notes that:

"peers may be a means of validating critical assessment if the peer network also is critical of such portrayals and if the individual knows the views of that group accurately. In such a case, an individual can act on criticisms, or they can be meaningful in protecting her self-evaluations, because she knows that the network or group devalues those images as well" (1999, p.194).

When depictions of looked-after young people are absent in the media or portrayed unrealistically, young people in the care system, who

share characteristics with these depictions, may well be dissatisfied. As Milkie states, "Inaccurate images may affect people in the sense that they alter the "true" social definition of the group in question. This "symbolic annihilation" especially affects disadvantaged groups; they have less control over the production of media myths than men and whites do, and must struggle to project a public self-definition that is more positive" (p.192). Gunther and Storey (2003, p.214) note, "the effects of presumed influence may be easily extended beyond campaigns with identifiable target audiences to the general media environment", clearly extending to looked-after young people's perceptions of looked-after depictions. Gunther and Storey also note positive depictions of looked-after characters could also have beneficial indirect effects for young people in care. In this way, people in the general population would observe these positive depictions, and as a result, develop positive expectations about looked-after young people. Positive attitudes would cause looked-after young people to perceive (and perhaps even contribute to) more positive and productive interactions with others (Gunther and Storey, 2003).

In Dirikx et al.'s (2011) study of attitudes towards the police, they found adolescents "stated that being confronted with the positive images of police officers in a continuous way, while hearing about and experiencing negative encounters with the police in real-life, made them feel frustrated with (the images of) the police" (p.128). So then, it would seem that first-hand accounts can disrupt the messages presented by the media. Therefore, engaging looked-after young people in discussion with one another, could potentially disrupt any negative impact of the depictions of these looked-after characters, again highlighting the potential benefit of adopting a group methodology. Further, Mitrofan et al. (2014) combined methods, adopting surveys and semi-structured interviews. This broader stance

in method perhaps resulted in more nuanced findings and it is worth noting, in terms of my own research, the benefit of methodological pluralism (i.e. using more than one method) (Frost et al., 2010). The only wholly qualitative study was conducted by Hartley (2011), with that same data used in her later paper (2014), where they utilised group work and semi-structured interviews. So then, the studies that had real appeal to me in terms of my research orientation (discussed in chapter 5), were that undertaken by Hartley (2011) and Hartley et al. (2014). Further, these studies held other particular significance to me, in terms of their discussion of "presumed media influence" (Gunther and Storey, 2003).

With all this in mind, I was confident my study could therefore have the potential to enhance these looked-after young people's ability to be critical of these media depictions, making my research project all the more vital. Additionally, a group work methodology could be of particular value, offering the young people a chance to view these images with their peers and get a real sense of how each other valued or as the case may well be, devalued the depictions of looked-after characters.

2.14 Defining stigma

One of the key ideas that emerges when considering the way looked-after young people are depicted in the media, is the concept of stigma (West, 1999; Riggs et al., 2009, Vojak, 2009). Goffman's (1963) *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* is considered to be one of the most significant texts on the subject of stigma. According to Goffman, the term, "stigma" originated in ancient Greece, and used to signify tainted groups such as slaves or traitors, with a visible mark or brand placed on individuals. In contemporary society, stigma does not involve a visible mark as such, but can still be used to discredit or disgrace people or groups. Therefore, the term

"stigma" is often referred to as the negative effects placed on any group as a result of being labelled (Gayle, 2006). This label can cover a wide range of experiences including race, mental illness, physical disability or sexual identity (Gayle, 2006). Stigma is understood to create barriers for stigmatised people, and influence all areas of their lives from self-perceptions and self-esteem, to educational attainment, employment and social and family relationships (Liegghio, 2016). It should be noted that, while the majority of studies relating to stigma have been undertaken with adults, issues that arise are also likely to be relevant for children and young people (Gayle, 2006).

Over the years since Goffman's work, the concept of stigma has been continually refined. However, despite this refinement, there remains variability within the literature regarding the elements pertaining to stigma. There is some agreement that stigma is socially constructed and has a negative effect on those who are stigmatized (Blythe et al., 2012). Bos et al. (2013) argues that two key aspects of stigma are consistent across the diverse range of literature that utilises the term – difference and devaluation. Rogers (2016) notes that, "Goffman (1963) described how difference can often be enacted in social interactions where people are framed or categorised as being either normal or abnormal. This difference can then lead to being devalued and socially excluded. For example, the normal non-stigmatised can belong within the 'in-group' whilst the abnormal stigmatised are excluded to the 'out-group'" (p.3).

Link and Phelan (2001 in Blythe et al., 2012) claim that stigma exists with the convergence of five interrelated components – labelling, stereotyping, separation, loss of status, and discrimination. Labelling, is a process of social differentiation and identification. When negative connotations are attributed to a label, this forms a stereotype. Hall

(2013, p.247) notes that "stereotypes get *hold of* the few 'simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasped and widely recognized' characteristics about a person, *reduce* everything about the person to those traits, *exaggerate* and *simplify* them." A separation occurs when a social distinction is made between the wider community and people who are labelled. Blythe et al. (2012) notes that "When people are labeled, stereotyped, and socially distanced from society, they experience a loss of social status and discrimination that leads to unequal treatment and opportunities" (p.236).

2.15 Looked-after young people and stigma

Having established that stigma can have significant consequences on the lives of stigmatised people, I will now explore stigma in relation to young people in the care system. Schofield (2002) notes that the "experience of being a foster child, of being `in care', has the potential for a sense of difference and feelings of low self-esteem (Weinstein 1960) and also the possibility of stigma (Goffman 1964), a spoiled identity' that needs to be managed" (p.18).

Ridge and Millar (2000) undertook research that examined the friendships of looked-after young people. They found that these young people worked hard to manage stigma, and "showed a keen sense of the social stigma and social difference associated with life in care. Children reported being singled out and stigmatised. Fears of being identified and labelled as "care children" permeated their accounts" (Ridge and Millar, 2000, p. 168, in Rogers 2016). Schofield and Beek's (2005) study of long-term foster-care also young people in care were well aware of being different and the potential for stigma. Rogers (2016) undertook interviews with a group of young people in care, finding that a number of the young people "described incidents where their care status had been used against them by their peers. The

young people did not overtly describe these incidents as bullying, perhaps due to the potential stigma associated with being seen as a victim. However, they did provide numerous examples of how their 'in care' status was used by their peers, in order to insult and/or exclude them" (p.9). He further notes that, "The insults that the participants in this study received from their peers often centred on a perceived rejection by their parents. This separation from a parent appears to be at the root of where the young people's stigma originates. This is what sets them apart from their peers; it makes them feel different and it can be used to make them feel devalued" (p.10-11). Rogers highlights however, "Being treated differently does not always come from wanting to be hurtful or to devalue; it can also come from the spirit of friendship and a desire to be caring and supportive. However, it still seems to reinforce these fostered young people's feelings of difference" (p.8).

West highlights common themes experienced by looked-after young people, such as stigmatising attitudes of members of the public, with young people either entitled to overly sympathetic attention or, more likely, demonised, "associated with courts and crime, portrayed as victims, burglars and prostitutes" (p.265). Young people talk of being victimised by other children, teachers, and of parents refusing to allow their children to play with them (West, 1999). It should be noted that current guidance in relation to looked-after young people also acknowledges issues of stigma. For example, The Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 (DfE, 2015) sets out duties and standards for those providing residential children's homes for children in terms of day-to-day care, education and welfare. The regulations note that young people in residential care may be worried about being stigmatised or ridiculed by their peers for being "different" because of where they live, and promotes the idea of professionals working to

address this issue.

Overall, research highlights that stigma is of particular importance for looked-after young people, owing to notions of the "in" group and "out" group, which can result in a person being excluded from a social network, limiting opportunities to build relationships (Rogers, 2014). Rogers (2014) notes that the young people he interviewed were active in practices to manage and lessen their stigma: "first, they attempt to carefully manage the disclosure of their different 'in-care' status with their non-fostered peers. Their disclosures served to strengthen friendships and bonds and when they did this successfully it enhanced close reciprocally supportive friendships. Secondly, they lessen the impact of being devalued and excluded by the in-group, by forming their own in-groups with their fostered peers" (p.11).

2.16 Coping strategies

Siegel et al. (1998 in LeBel, 2008) describe stigma management strategies along a 'reactive–proactive continuum'. Reactive strategies include concealment and proactive strategies include pre-emptive disclosure and social activism.

Concealment and avoidance/withdrawal

There is evidence to suggest people who experience stigma often attempt to keep their stigmatised status a secret, and "pass" as normal (Goffman 1963; LeBel, 2008; Bos et al., 2013). Therefore, a looked-after young person must decide what information to disclose, and to whom, and how they do this, along with when and where (Goffman 1963). West's research with young care leavers across England highlights the importance of the public's attitude to children from care, with almost three quarters of participants stating they never or rarely told anyone they had been in care (West, 1995, p.24 in West, 1999).

These young people must weigh up the benefits of disclosing their looked-after identity, and may feel that not having to worry about hiding their identity, and finding others who can help or express approval, may make this disclosure worthwhile. However, they may feel the costs of disclosing their identity, such as people disapproving of the stigma, worrying about what people think of them, and being excluded from opportunities, and may lead to them concealing their identity further (LeBel, 2008; Bos et al., 2013). Vojak (2009) notes that the "stigmatized person expends considerable energy either managing information in order to conceal the stigma, or managing the stress and tension resulting from public knowledge of the stigma" (p.941). This can lead to looked-after young people having lowered self-esteem, experiencing anger, frustration, emotional denial and cognitive impairment, and becoming isolated from their peers, which in turn impacts on their aspirations for the future (Vojak, 2009). Young people who conceal their looked-after identity may worry excessively about the risk of discovery and may have difficulties forming and maintaining relationships (Goffman 1963). They may also lose the benefits provided by associating with other stigmatised young people such as support and opportunities for social comparison (LeBel, 2008).

Acting as a wounded healer

A coping strategy potentially adopted by these young people, could be that of becoming a "wounded healer". LeBel (2008, p.419) notes that "in its most general form, a coping strategy of this kind can be thought of as the desire and commitment to 'reach back' and help other similarly stigmatized people... This is often accomplished by sharing one's experiences, strength, and hope with others; becoming a role model and mentor; and, for some, making a career of giving back and helping others who are less far along in the process of recovery." In some way, it could be that this is the coping strategy I myself adopted.

At the outset of my thesis, I stated that I identified with these young people owing to my own adverse experiences, in particular the sense of abandonment I felt when my father left. Perhaps then my own perceived stigma of being an "abandoned child" is what drives me to want to "reach back" myself and help these young people.

Social activism

Looked-after young people are not passive and powerless, and are able to confront stigma in an active way. Social activism, as a proactive strategy, involves challenging the validity of stigma. Therefore, as LeBel (2008, p.418) notes, "unlike the coping strategies of concealment and avoidance/withdrawal, social activism involves some form of 'coming out' of stigmatized individuals to confront stigma in the hope of changing public perceptions of the group and how the group is treated in society."

Coping over time

Research indicates that, over time, a stigmatised individual may progress from the use of one strategy to another (LeBel, 2008). LeBel (2008, p.419) notes that, "persons may employ reactive strategies (e.g. concealment) early in their 'stigma career' and then move toward the use of proactive strategies (e.g. preemptive disclosure or social activism) over time". This idea is clearly apparent in my own life. When I was younger, I concealed my early experiences, for fear of what people may think about me. As I grew older, I took on something of a "wounded healer" role, wanting to "reach back" and help others. Now I want to take social action, and challenge these stereotyped depictions and their contribution to a stigmatising perspective of looked-after young people (LeBel, 2008).

Peer Support

Rogers (2016) states that for looked-after young people, relationships provide a key protective factor in terms if coping with stigma (Rogers, 2016). He notes that "if one considers how carefully a person has to manage their stigmatised identity, being amongst others who understand and in fact share the stigma appears to lessen the pressures of managing a spoiled identity" (p.14). He therefore argues that interventions that increase looked-after young people's opportunities for peer support need to be developed, such as groups, which would allow these young people to meet and form friendships with others with similar experiences, without the pressure of managing their stigmatised identities.

2.17 Stigma-reduction strategies and interventions

Bos et al. (2013, p.1) note that "Stigmatization can be overt. It can manifest as aversion to interaction, avoidance, social rejection, discounting, discrediting, dehumanization, and depersonalization of others into stereotypic caricatures". Young people in care "say that the general public's perception of "care" is important if not crucial to their lives" (West, 1999, p.253). One approach to reducing stigma is changing the public's attitudes and beliefs that perpetuate discrimination and stigma. Research suggests situations where the public can interact directly with people from stigmatised groups have proven effective in improving stigmatising attitudes (LeBel, 2008). However, where there is no opportunity for direct interaction, media depictions take on more significance. Shedlosky-Shoemaker et al. (2014) point out that "parasocial interactions have the capacity to offer the audience member an expansive range of experiences. For example, narratives may provide connections with others whom people would not ordinarily encounter in their physical environment, including people of different ethnicities, religions, or even other planets, thereby providing an avenue for developing new knowledge, skills, or

perspectives" (p.557). This can affect and influence the attitudes of others with little experience of looked-after young people, who might have empathy with these characters and help reduce stigma (Igartua, 2010).

Protest and advocacy is another stigma-reduction strategy. Stigmatised groups such as those with physical disabilities, gay or lesbian groups, or people with mental ill health, have used their collective strength to change laws and policies (LeBel, 2008). LeBel notes that, "These sorts of empowerment oriented and proactive and collective attempts on the part of the stigmatized to change public perceptions and create a positive identity are increasingly being thought to be the target's most effective and enduring route to reducing prejudice" (p.425). He further notes that a "benefit of social activism over individualistic strategies such as concealment and avoidance/withdrawal is that any improved treatment will spill over across a variety of situations and improve the lives of other similarly stigmatized persons" (p.425).

With all this in mind – the benefit of peer support and social action, and the need to change public opinion to reduce stigmatising views – I began to look for an approach that would allow me to account for these ideas. The work of Paulo Freire (1970) began to appear to me to be of particular significance. Approaches underpinned by Freire's work, such as Mullender, Ward and Fleming's (2013) self-directed group work and Rindner's (2004) Freirean empowerment model presented themselves as approaches that would allow me to work with a group of looked-after young people (peer support), underpinned by a participatory approach (social action), and culminating in these young people developing a new set of representations (challenging public opinion). This approach would allow the young people to not only share experiences and thus reduce stigma, it would enable them

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collectively to become critical of these looked-after onscreen depictions.

2.18 Freire and Pedagogy of the Oppressed

I had always been interested in Marxist theory since my mid-teens as a GCSE and then A-level sociology student, when a sense of inequality burned in the pit of my belly. Having grown up on a council estate, I understood clearly there were people who had more money and more opportunities than me, and I felt frustrated and angry. In retrospect, it was perhaps this anger that propelled me into social work in the first place, wanting to challenge oppression and strive for equality. This anger that made me embark on a PhD in this area. That same sense of injustice burned inside me when I looked at these stereotyped depictions of looked-after young people. Whatever power I had, I wanted to use it to challenge these unfair and unhelpful images. When I first read Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), informed by those same Marxist ideas, I immediately felt a strong connection to the text and wanted it to underpin my research.

Born in Brazil in 1921, Paulo Freire was a celebrated educator, policy maker, author, and advocate for radically different educational approaches that empower oppressed people. Hegar (2012) notes that Freire's death in 1997 drew attention to his work in a variety of disciplines as well as education, such as psychotherapy, theology and medicine. In addition to his birthplace, Hegar (2012) also notes Freire's theories have been widely applied in Africa, the Indian subcontinent, Europe, and North America. Freire "left a legacy of practical and theoretical work equalled by few other educationists in its scope and influence... clearly there is something in Freire's work of ongoing interest to a wide range of scholars and practitioners" (Roberts, 2007, p. 505-506 in Beckett, 2013).

2.19 A review of the literature

In order to ascertain the usefulness of Freire's approach, I explored a number of databases (ASSIA, CINAHL, HSWE, Swetswise), and reference lists from both articles and key texts. My search focused on keywords "Freire" and "Freirean", each combined with "model", "method" and "approach". The initial searches unearthed a number of articles in a variety of disciplines, as indicated by Hegar (2012). Abstracts were examined further and articles were selected due to their relevancy to the topic, their currency, and their influence in the field.

Rebecca Hegar's 2012 article, states that by "underutilizing Freire's contributions, social work has neglected an apt mentor (Hegar, 2012, p.170). She goes on: "Mainstream social work has been generally unreceptive to radical voices, and Freire, though not a political revolutionary, draws extensively from critical theory that may be unfamiliar or discomfiting to many social work students, faculty, and professionals" (Hegar, 2012, p.169). She does however highlight instances where Freire's ideas have influenced practice, such as on the social work program at the University of Warwick in the 1970s and 80s, where students engaged in an educational process shaped by the philosophies of Freire and Gramsci, whose work was informed by more Marxist perspectives. According to Leonard (1993), "The role of the critical social worker was to be committed to conscientization, to enabling service users and others experiencing oppression to develop their consciousness of the structural forces which shaped their lives and their deprivations" (p.162, quoted in Hegar, 2012). Similarly, she quotes Ledwith and Springett (2010): "Freire's thinking was also instrumental in the participatory action research movement, which challenged the controlling assumptions of traditional research and its role in reinforcing the dominant interest in society... It offered an

eclectic range of methods within an action research approach that involved understanding and working with people in a process of mutual research, of action and reflection as a cycle of co-creating knowledge and acting together to transform situations" (Ledwith and Springett, 2010, p. 22 in Hegar, 2012).

In Rindner's 2004 study, she engaged adolescents in health education through the application of Freire's three stage empowerment model. She lays out a theoretical approach to the model and its application with adolescents in practice, synthesising nursing, medical, and health education literature. She highlights how nurses can support adolescent autonomy and collective learning through group process, peer teaching, and a development of critical thinking skills. She concludes, "Adolescents in primary, secondary, and tertiary psychiatric settings can identify their health needs, make health choices, and take action to achieve them by using Freire's model" (p.78).

She also reviews several studies that have used Freire's empowerment health education model with adolescents. Rindner summarises Wallerstein and Bernstein's 1988 research, where they presented a case study about an alcohol and substance-abuse prevention (ASAP) program for adolescents, who participated in a three-stage empowerment education program consisting of listening, dialogue, and action. Following the program, participants expressed more confidence in talking about drug abuse with friends and in groups, and reported a heightened awareness of the consequences of drinking while driving. She also reviews a follow-up study undertaken by Wallerstein and Sanchez-Merki (1994), who analysed previously collected data, utilising grounded theory, an ethnographic study, and a multisite case study. They found that "Participatory dialogue from the program appeared to start a three-stage process of self-identity change; and

within each stage, the youth experienced changes on an emotional, critical thinking and action level. In the first stage, youth developed an action orientation of caring about the problem, about each other, and about their ability to act in the world. In the second stage, youth began to act for individual changes, expressing an ability to help others who were close to them. In the third stage, youth reached a level of understanding of the need for social responsibility and the possibility for larger social actions" (p.111).

In Yosso's 2002 study, she applied a Freirean model of critical consciousness-raising to entertainment media. Utilising a multi-method research approach involving thirty-five Chicando community college students, she employed surveys, video-elicitation, a casting exercise, interviews, and participation in two sessions from a critical media literacy curriculum. Students watched a series of brief film clips from films such as *The Substitute*, *Dangerous Minds*, and *187*, among others, focussing on stereotyped characters. After viewing these clips, students were asked to think about their perceptions on why the filmmakers included these images as part of the story and what they would do differently if they were to remake these films. Overall, she notes that the students' brief experience with critical media literacy seemed to encourage confrontation with these stereotyped depictions and motivated them to change these images.

In Beck's 2012 study, he explores "the educational journey of one man, from leaving school in the mid-1970s, at the age of 14, through a period of chaotic drug use, and on to developing his career helping other drug users back to a "normal" life" (p.110). Although Beck focuses on an individual with a history of drug dependency, the article exposes issues that perhaps underlie the experiences of many working-class learners, such as education's ability to "liberate or domesticate".

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Beck suggests that adopting Freirean approaches to education and developing a negotiated curriculum: "Within this approach: The curriculum is not child centred or teacher directed. The curriculum is child originated and teacher framed. This approach values the knowledge of both learners and teachers, promoting a mutual respect and a context for learning" (p.123).

In Mullender, Ward and Fleming's text, *Empowerment in Action: Selfdirected groupwork* (2013), they draw on Freire's work to lay out a framework of principles, processes and values to undertake groupwork. The values underpinning the approach are outlined in the form of six practice principles, which emphasise the avoidance of labels, the rights of group members, assisting people to attain collective power through coming together in groups, and groups being facilitated rather than led (Mullender, Ward, Fleming, 2013, p. 49). Fleming and Ward (2013, p.59) note that, "Self-directed groupworkers provide the framework for groups to consider problems, issues and concerns. Group members provide the content, using their skills, knowledge and expertise. Group members create the knowledge and understanding through active participation: describing, suggesting, analysing, deciding, experiencing and reflecting".

In Yang's 2014 study, she "examines the positionality of migrant students and feminist teachers and how they react to othering in the educational process and in Swedish society" (p.1). Her study is based on her previous PhD project (2010) and fieldwork conducted at Women's Room, a women-only, feminist-identified adult educational institution, in Sweden. Her data consisted of nine months of participatory observations in and around the school between 2004 and 2005, and semi-structured interviews with teachers and students. Her research indicates that "although some students 'talk back' against the

representation of migrants, they have also internalized a great deal of mainstream discourse" (p.17). She states that, "Teachers and students in dialogue can effectively re-examine themselves and develop critical consciousness together to increase the solidarity of all women" (p.17).

2.20 Freire's relation to my work

As a former social worker, it was important to me that my research embodied social work values and ethics. As an address to the International Federation of Social Workers in 1988, Freire himself described his career-long association with social work and discussed the qualities of progressive social workers (Freire and Moch, 1990 in Hegar, 2012). Therefore, Hegar's study (2012) was of particular significance for me, even though she acknowledges mainstream social work has been generally unreceptive to Freire's work. However, she notes: "Freire's influence on empowerment-based practice and other compatible social work intervention models, such as community-based participatory practice and research and social development, social workers can become more salient in the lives of those with whom they engage for personal and social change" (Hegar, 2012, p.173). So then, while Freire is not a widely used theorist in terms of social work practice, there are, and their have been practitioners whose work has been influenced and underpinned by his ideas.

Drawing on the work of Mullender, Ward and Fleming (2013), and negotiating a way to work with these young people on a face-to-face basis, there are three key elements to Freire's approach that I found particular inspiring – the concepts of "dialogue", "problematization" and "conscientisation". Mullender, Ward and Fleming (2013, p.16) note that, "Dialogue is a process that breaks down the traditional relationship between teacher and taught, groupworker and group member, replacing it with a partnership where roles interchange and

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they are co-investigators in creating knowledge through 'critical reasoning'." The process of "Problematization" requires posing questions in order to draw attention to situations that require action. In this way, commonly accepted ideas are challenged by the posing of more and more questions – "digging beneath conventional or common-sense explanations of reality" (Mullender, Ward and Fleming (2013, p.16). Mullender, Ward and Fleming (2013, p.16-17) state that:

"It is problematization that gives Freire's work - and ours, in the form of asking the question 'why' - a distinctive critical edge. In asking 'why?', people are encouraged to pursue an issue until the root causes have been identified and exposed. Asking 'why?' enables people to break out of the demoralizing and self-perpetuating narrowness of introspection and self-blame that are created by poverty, lack of opportunity and exclusion. With expanded horizons of what is possible, people conceive of new explanations in the wider social, political and economic context and consider how they can identify and engage with these. It turns the spotlight away from people as problems, to the problems they encounter, and enables them to see opportunities to develop a much wider range of options for action and change."

The third component of Freire's model that I wanted to utilise in my own work, was that of "conscientisation", otherwise known as "consciousness raising" or "critical consciousness". Mullender, Ward and Fleming (2013, p.17) note that, "This Freire describes as a permanent critical approach to reality in order to discover it and to unpack and expose the myths that deceive us and help to maintain oppressing dehumanizing structures. Conscientisation goes beyond merely raising awareness to the development of strategies for bringing about change. Encompassing both action and reflection, it is simultaneously the product and process of problem-posing dialogue." For Freire, pedagogy, the theory and practice of teaching, became a liberating force "which must be forged with, not for the oppressed (whether individuals or peoples) in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity" (1970, p. 48). His approach connected with me as it

was my aim to "raise the consciousness" of these young people and give them a space to reflect on these fictional depictions, enhancing their critical abilities to challenge these representations. This pedagogical approach would open a space for the "oppressed", a space that could be filled with these young people's own words and representations. My hope was that, "As those who have been completely marginalized are so radically transformed, they are no longer willing to be mere objects, responding to changes occurring around them; they are more likely to decide to take upon themselves the struggle to change the structures of society, which until now have served to oppress them" (Freire, 1970, p.33). Freire talks a great deal about humanisation in his work and it is this which I strive for, to humanise these young people beyond the stereotyped depictions that are so prevalent. It should also be noted that Freire was an advocate of working with groups, which he termed "culture circles" (Rindner, 2004).

The oppressed in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire 1970) were living in extreme poverty in South America, while the young people in my research live in England, a country with greater social and economic equality. Although the social contexts differ between Freire's work and my own research, Freire's theories allow me think about my own work in important ways, for example, contexualising the oppressed and the oppressor. In Freire's writing, the two groups seem to be divided by class. Put simply, the oppressors are the "haves" and the oppressed are the "have-nots" (Yang, 2014). In my research, there are parallels, with the oppressed being looked-after young people, while the oppressors are broadcasters, programme makers, content creators, writers, directors and producers. While there are filmmakers from working class backgrounds, such as Shane Meadows and Andrea Arnold, it would appear, certainly at face value, that these two groups

also remain largely divided by class, with looked-after young people coming disproportionately from families living in poverty (Vivienne Barnes, 2009). Further, programme makers have shown themselves to disempower and disrespect young people in the programme-making process (Vanhaeght and Bauwens, 2016) and "Overall, TV production is not a nourishing context for symmetrical child–adult relations" (Vanhaeght and Bauwens, 2016, p.9).

Of the literature reviewed, the work undertaken by Rindner was of particular significance for me, in terms of a practical application of Freire's three stage empowerment model. Although her work was undertaken in psychiatric settings, the protocol she identifies offered me a structure to the group sessions that I was able to adapt and implement (Lange, 2012). Mullender, Ward and Fleming's (2013) work also offered me a means of structuring my group work, as well as a value-base to approach my face-to-face work with the young people, that was congruent with my own values and the values of social work research (Butler, 2002). Yoso's study (2002) undertaken with Chicando community college students was also useful in terms of highlighting a structure for me to discuss onscreen fictional depictions with the young people in my own study, and Yang's work also noted that through dialogue, teachers and students can develop critical consciousness together to increase solidarity (2014).

2.21 Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have explored the literature relating to fictional characters, media depictions of looked-after young people, concepts of stigma and media influence, and the work of Freire (1970). The culmination of this literature led me, very strongly, to conclude that a group methodology would be the best way to work with these young people. The following chapter will explore the ethical

implications of my work with a group of looked-after young people.

Chapter 3
Research Ethics with Young People

3.1 Introduction

Many ethical issues arise when undertaking research with children that are common to work with people of any age, including the need to obtain informed consent, the possibility of exploitation by the research process, the need for confidentiality and how to deal with disclosures which cause the researcher concern for someone's welfare (Alderson and Morrow, 2011). However, ethical issues are often viewed as more complex in research with children and young people than they are with adults (Heptinstall, 2000). In part the difference between researching with children, as opposed to adults, is due to a child's understanding and experience of the world being different from that of an adult's. Above all, however, it is due to different positions of power (McLeod, 2007). For instance, the issue of confidentiality may be made more complex when adults, who are responsible for children participating in research, want to know about the children's private lives, and the question of consent may be complicated by a requirement for both adults and children to provide consent (Thomas and O'Kane, 1998a).

Ethical considerations relevant to my study were examined prior to initiating my research, utilising the University of Northumbria's Ethical Review protocol. The documentation required information on consent, confidentiality and participants' rights to withdraw from the study, all of which will be discussed in detail further on. In completing this process, my supervisor and I spent a lot of time clarifying our own ethical positions and addressing particular dilemmas that arose.

3.2 Recruitment

The recruitment of looked-after young people for research purposes

can be time consuming, so I had to account for this when arranging my project's timetable (Thomas and O'Kane, 1998a; Heptinstall, 2000). I was also aware I would potentially have to obtain consent from a succession of "gatekeepers" such as social workers, foster carers, birth parents and social services managers, before I was able to approach the young people themselves (Fargas-Malet et al., 2010). Looked-after young people are often perceived as especially vulnerable because of their adverse experiences, and in need of protection. Therefore, despite having expressed a desire to participate in research, some young people may be prevented from doing so (Heptinstall, 2000). Prior to my research, I had to gain approval from a local authority service manager. She had several questions and concerns, relating to consent and anonymity, how long the research would take, what would be required of the staff involved, in particular the time commitments, and my ability to undertake the proposed project (Heptinstall, 2000), all of which I was able to allay before proceeding.

I approached a local authority in the North East of England, where I had previously practised as a social worker for four years. The area is a geographically large, North Eastern urban region of England. The Local Authority serves a community with several socially deprived areas. According to the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (2015), 48,000 residents live in areas described as among the 20% most deprived in the country. Approximately 25% of the population is made up of children and young people, with 20% living in poverty. The majority of the population in this county are White British with black and ethnic minorities accounting for 5.9% of the population. In 2015, there were 251 young people aged between 15 and 17, who were looked-after by the authority. My aim was to utilise my existing relationships and link in with the Children in Care Council (CiCC), an already existing group of looked-after young people in the area. The

CiCC is a group attended by ten looked-after young people between the ages of twelve and eighteen, though this fluctuates. Ten looked-after young people volunteered to participate in my study.

3.3 Informed consent

The ethical issue of consent in research with young people has generated considerable debate (David et al., 2011). Children have the right to participate in research and have their voices heard (Mudaly and Goddard, 2009), as well as a right to protection from exploitation. It was therefore a balancing act to ensure the young people's freedom to participate, while acknowledging the parental responsibility of adult caregivers, and ensuring the well-being and safety of these young people (Dockett et al., 2009; Vivienne Barnes, 2009). In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, researchers will usually seek parental consent for young people to take part in research when they are under sixteen, as children over the age of sixteen are able to consent for themselves (David, et al., 2001). Obtaining informed consent from the young people rested on four core principles, which involved a written agreement, consent being given voluntarily without coercion, consent only being given if the young people had a full understanding of the potential risks and benefits of being involved, and an ability to withdraw at any stage of the process (Tisdall et al., 2009).

When it comes to research with young people and informed consent, there is little in the way of specific guidelines (Armitage, 2012). Boddy (2014, p.94) notes that "Whilst an *over*emphasis on adult consent could risk undermining child consent processes, there is also an ethical rationale for seeking parent/carer permission: children might need or want support from familiar adults to reach decisions about consenting (or not)". After considering the guidance, and in accordance with the university's ethical protocol, I sought permission

from adult caregivers for those young people under the age of sixteen (Vivienne Barnes, 2009). The remaining young people were over sixteen and able to consent themselves.

To ensure the young people fully understood the potential risks and benefits of the research, during the initial meeting, they were given an age appropriate information sheet (Appendix 1). Additionally, a version of the same document was provided for responsible adults (Appendix 2). I went through the information sheet with the group and they were offered further time to read it through carefully themselves, and ask any questions of me (Fern and Kristinsdóttir, 2010). The young people were assured that they did not have to discuss anything they did not want to, and they also had the right to withdraw from the study at any point, messages that were reiterated and reinforced throughout the process (Dockett et al., 2009). I was also conscious of both verbal and non-verbal interactions, noting that the young people's body language could provide some important cues about their feelings around their involvement, an issue of particular significance in the latter stages of my research, when a young person clearly did not want to be involved in an interview (discussed in chapter eight) (Dockett et al., 2009). To ensure the young people understood the research process and what would happen, for example, in terms of how the results would be used, consent was only accepted when I believed they had fully understood their own involvement in the process (Alderson and Morrow, 2011). They agreed to sign and return a consent form from themselves and their carers, to the Participation Officer who facilitated the CiCC, if they wanted to be involved in the project. This approach was accepted by the Northumbria University School of Health and Life Sciences Ethical Committee (Armitage, 2012).

3.4 Privacy and confidentiality

"Privacy is a basic human right and a key factor in ethical research practice", of particular importance when research topics are sensitive or potentially stigmatising (Graham et al., 2014, p.8). However, ensuring the young people's right to privacy presented significant challenges, such as exploring what location best supported privacy and what were the limits to confidentiality in the event of any concern for safety (Graham et al., 2014).

Research with young people often takes place at home or school where private spaces are difficult to find and confidentiality can be compromised through parents' or others' curiosity and concern for the young person (Fargas-Malet et al., 2010; Graham et al., 2014). Fortunately, I was able to access the venue where the CiCC met to facilitate the initial sessions, and later, when I undertook semi-structured interviews, contacts at the local authority provided me with private rooms.

A central part of protecting the young people from harm was the recognition that confidentiality has limits (Armitage 2012). While the young people who agreed to take part in the research were offered the same degree of confidentiality afforded to adults, the exception had to apply to any situation where, in my professional judgement as a qualified social worker, the young person was being harmed, or threatening to harm themselves or someone else (Hartley, 2011; Graham et al., 2014). I was clear with the young people about these responsibilities during the initial meeting and in all of the written information I provided (Armitage, 2012). If there was any indication anyone was at risk of harm, the young people knew I had a responsibility to inform the Participation Officer.

All identifying details relating to the participating local authority and young people have been anonymised and the young people chose pseudonyms for use throughout the study (Pinter and Zandian, 2015). Group sessions were initially filmed, to inform my written work. However, to protect the identities of the young people involved, this footage was not used in presentations of my research. Data was stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act (Bailey, 2011). Transcripts were produced in an electronic format and stored electronically, accessible only through my secure password.

3.5 Protection from harm

As stated, a challenge I found throughout the process, was balancing the young people's rights to protection from any harm the research might cause, with their right to participate and benefit from the results (Graham et al., 2014). Looked-after young people have generally been exposed to significant harm arising from physical, sexual, emotional abuse or neglect (or a combination of these) (Goodyer, 2013; DfE, 2015). While my research study did not focus on these experiences specifically, there was potential for discussions to "open up old wounds", adding to the trauma already experienced by these young people. With this in mind, the young people were all assessed as competent to be present at a forum where sensitive and potentially distressing issues were openly discussed.

Furthermore, it can be argued that concerns to protect young people from exposure to such issues (Article 3 UNCRC) conflicts with their right to be heard (Article 12 UNCRC) and negation of this right adds to a sense of powerlessness often perceived by a young person who has been harmed or abused (UNCRC, 1989). The key issue was therefore to ensure appropriate mechanisms were in place to minimise the effects of harm. Therefore, all parent/carers were informed when and

where group sessions were taking place. Data collection methods were designed to minimise the impact of harm i.e. through the use of informal group sessions rather than a rigid question and answer format. A safe environment was also created for each research session, with availability of refreshments, opportunities to negotiate discussion topics etc, and "free time" following research sessions to allow the young people to relax and discuss any concerns in private (Hartley, 2011). And as stated, the Participation Officer was the initial point of referral in the event of a young person becoming distressed or in the event of a child protection issue being raised. Additionally, I had the support of my supervisor who I could telephone at any time if issues arose. As the young people involved were considered vulnerable owing to their looked-after status, additional safeguards were required to protect their welfare, such as an agreement from a Children's Services manager (Mudaly and Goddard, 2009). My position as a researcher required I completed a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check, and as a former social worker, I also upheld the professional code of conduct throughout the process (BASW, 2012).

I was aware that my journey through the PhD was also about my own childhood voice and it was important I considered how I ensured my own wellbeing. With this in mind, I was very open about my thoughts and feelings throughout the process with my supervisor, who assisted me to vocalise and work through any difficulties that arose (Armitage, 2012). For example, this involved discussing my feelings of abandonment as a young person, an issue highlighted as experienced by the young people themselves in the course of my research. It was vital therefore I maintained "reflexivity", a consciousness and ability to give account of my actions (Phillips, 1988). This ability required self-awareness, particularly in relation to issues such as my own early experiences (Finlay, 2002; Probst and Berenson, 2014).

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3.6 Role of the adult researcher

Issues of power and imbalanced power relations are the fundamental difference between research with adults and research with children (McLeod, 2010; Hartley, 2011), as adults generally hold more powerful positions in society than young people (Mayall, 2000). As stated, it is often difficult for researchers to approach young people directly and the presence of adult gatekeepers can undermine young people's right to take part in research (Thomas and O'Kane, 2000). Aside from consent, the research process itself could be impacted by these imbalanced power relations. For instance, young people might find it hard to disagree or challenge researchers. Therefore, it was vital I practised with reflexivity (Phillips, 1988), valuing and respecting the young people's feelings, ideas and opinions (Hartley, 2011). Further, it was imperative I understood how this powerlessness could shape the young people's responses. As someone who wanted to listen to looked-after young people, I was prepared for resistance, and open to having my own assumptions challenged (McLeod, 2010).

A central dynamic of the research process, was the relationship between myself and the young people. My presence, my identity, my dress and demeanour, were factors that would all impact on the young people and the research in some way. However, I cannot state how this may have manifested, as I was immersed in the interactions with the young people (Fraser, 2004 in Hartley, 2011). It is also worth noting, that as I was returning to a local authority where I had practised, there was one particular young person in the group who I had been involved with previously as a social worker. It was important for me to be mindful of any potential conflict of interests and be clear with him about the role I now held. As stated in my introduction, looked-after young people were the service user group I wanted to work with, as I

felt I identified with their experiences and had a genuine empathy with them. However, it was vital I appreciated the limitation in any attempt to be "like" the young people with whom I was working with as such an attempt would be "unwise and doomed to failure" (Greene and Hill, 2005, p.11 in Elsley, 2008).

3.7 Listening to looked-after young people

Kim (2015) notes that, "the role of children in social research has evolved considerably over the past few decades. Where children were once seen predominantly as the objects of research rather than subjects, more participatory approaches involving children" have been adopted (p.1). 1989 was a significant year for the emphasis on children's rights, wherein the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was adopted. Article 12 of the Convention states: "The child who is capable of forming his or her own views shall be assured the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with his or her age and maturity" (United Nations, 1989). With this in mind, I was keen for the young people to participate in my research, rather than simply be objects of the research (Winter, 2006).

However, there is a lot of evidence to support the idea that children, particularly those from vulnerable groups, often feel that their voices are not heard or respected. The more marginalised a young person is, the less likely they are to be listened to (McLeod, 2010). The most obvious reason for looked-after children not to be consulted when undertaking research is the difficulty in gaining access to them (Thomas and O' Kane, 1998). However, being listened to could potentially enhance these young people's well-being, promoting a positive sense of identity and develop their resilience (McLeod, 2010). While chaotic family circumstances and negative discourses of

difference can result in looked-after young people being unable to articulate their views effectively (Jones, 2013), if these young people are to be empowered to take control of their own lives, they need to given the opportunity to articulate their choices, wants and needs. It is their right to be heard, to be listened to. Freire notes that "to say the true word — which is work, which is praxis — is to transform the world, saying that word is not the privilege of some few persons, but the right of everyone" (p.69).

The theory of empowerment can be traced back to political activists such as Freire (1970), who suggested liberating the oppressed through education. As Freire notes, "The important thing, from the point of view of libertarian education, is for the people to come to feel like masters of their thinking by discussing the thinking and views of the world explicitly or implicitly manifest in their own suggestions and those of their comrades" (1970, p.124). Empowerment is regarded as a way to overturn the societal systems that diminish, control and oppress groups, and establish related ideas of citizenship, rights, choice and self-determination as a value base for progressive social systems (Jones, 2013). Over recent years, the term has become used across a variety of disciplines, such as social work, education and sociology, and is associated with groups which are oppressed or marginalised by society at large, such as looked-after young people (Lincoln et al., 2002 in Jones, 2013).

Freire (1970) states that oppressed people are "deprived of their voice" (p.32) and believed learning about social inequality could empower oppressed people, inspiring others to achieve social equality and finally liberating them. In other words, empowerment would need to involve a critical pedagogy, a process of increasing awareness of how the social and political structures contribute to the powerlessness of an

individual or group. He notes that this approach "must take into account their behavior; their view of the world, and their ethics" (p.37). Using these models and ideas together within a participatory group framework, I was optimistic that my research project would be an effective means of enabling looked-after young people to empower themselves. Or at the very least, open a door on this as a possibility. I also felt that by working with the young people to create content themselves would open up a space in which these young people "have the opportunity to collectively struggle against oppression to voice their concerns and create their own representations" (Kellner and Share, 2005, p. 371 in Blum-Ross, 2015).

3.9 Payment and compensation

When it comes to the question of whether young people should be paid for their participation in research, there is no clear consensus (Graham et al., 2014). Equally, what kinds of rewards are appropriate are also a point of debate – reimbursement, compensation, appreciation and incentive – all have ramifications for ethical practice (Tisdall et al., 2009). For example, as Graham et al. (2014) note, offering incentives to participate in "risky" research is not only exploitative, but it also undermines the public's trust and support for research with young people. With this in mind, I made no mention of payment throughout the research process, and it was only after the process was complete that I returned to the group, providing the participants with sweets and chocolates, as suggested by the Participation Officer.

3.10 Further ethical issues

It has to be acknowledged that some young people's views are more likely to be heard than others. For example, young people who are "engaged" are more likely to be heard than those who are disaffected (Cairns and Brannen, 2005; McLeod, 2010) and younger children are

less likely to be consulted than teenagers (Winter, 2006). All the participants in my research were drawn from the CiCC. By simply attending this council, the young people here demonstrated their engagement. The young people were diverse in terms of their experience, but none of them had been in residential care, so it would seem fair to say they were more "engaged" than perhaps some of looked-after young people who might demonstrate more challenging behaviours. Although the CICC is open to all looked-after young people, the youngest attendees are around twelve years of age. There were no disabled young people involved in the study and all participants were of white British origin, with their first language being English. While I was able to access the CiCC with relative ease, I had no influence over who attended the group. I have to acknowledge that the opportunity to participate in my research project was not offered to other looked-after young people in the borough. However, these young people were in the care of the local authority and very much a part of a marginalised "looked-after" group, whose voices are neglected (Holland, 2009).

While my research was undertaken and completed in the main without any ethical issues, following my final session with the group, I received a phonecall from the manager of the participation team, asking whether I had sent a Facebook friend request to one of the young people. I was shocked and stunned to hear this, pointing out this accusation was wholly untrue. While there was no further action from the participation team, I was left with feelings of anxiety and frustration. Having felt I had operated highly ethically throughout the process and with complete transparency, I was distraught about this potential blemish on my reputation. Did I press the matter further, and risk making more of the situation? Or did I leave the situation as it was, and deal with the doubt and unresolved feelings hanging over

me? I sought support from my supervisor, who advised me to contact the participation team manager to resolve the matter. The participation team manager later provided me the context I was missing – a staff member had overheard a young person talking – and it was felt the comment was throwaway and perhaps bravado in conversation with a peer. The participation manager stated there were no concerns relating to my practice and any uncertainty I felt was allayed. This further conversation gave me some much needed closure on the matter.

Chapter 4
Research Design

4.1 Ontology and epistemology

Deciding on a how to "look at" my research was a key decision for me. "Ontology" is concerned with the nature of being, and asks "What do we know about the world?" (Bailey, 2011). "Epistemology", the theory of knowledge, "provides a philosophical background for deciding what kinds of knowledge are legitimate and adequate", in other words, how do we know what we know? (Gray, 2013, p.19). There are two major traditions in epistemology, objectivism and constructionism (Vivienne Barnes, 2009). Objectivism views knowledge as an objective reality existing independently of consciousness. Constructionism on the other hand, holds that "truth and meaning do not exist in some external world, but are created by the subject's interactions with the world. Meaning is *constructed* not discovered, so subjects construct their own meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon. Hence, multiple, contradictory but equally valid accounts of the world can exist" (Gray, 2013, p.20). It was important I established where I stood in terms of ontology and epistemology, as it would clarify research design issues, such as the kind of evidence I would gather, and how I would interpret that data (Gray, 2013).

4.2 Theoretical perspectives

Deciding on a theoretical framework for my research proved to be especially challenging. Coming from a background in social work practice, where theory is taught throughout training, yet historically, treated with scepticism in practice (Rubin, 2015), this was a new area of knowledge for me to comprehend and I found myself lost and confused amid a vast amount of information. This was compounded

by the fact that not only there a "bewildering array of theoretical perspectives and methodologies, but the fact that the terminology applied to them is often inconsistent (or even contradictory)" (Gray, 2013, p.19 citing Crotty, 1998). Even so, my priority was always to move beyond simplistic interpretations of these theories and engage with the concepts in a way that gave me the depth and richness my data would demand and deserve.

I had to recognise and accept that there was no single, accepted way of undertaking research. How I chose to carry out my research was dependent on a number of factors such as my ontological stance, my epistemological position, the rationale and goals of my research, the characteristics of the young people involved in my project, and the audience who would receive my study. It was also important I was aware of the philosophical debates and developments arising from each theoretical perspective in order to ensure the quality of the research I produced and subsequently, the degree to which its findings would be accepted (Snape and Spencer, 2003). Gray notes that, "Of the different theoretical perspectives available, positivism and various strands of interpretivism are, or have been (arguably) among the most influential" (p.21). I will therefore give a brief overview of these perspectives, before stating my own position.

4.3 Positivism

From the 1930s through to the 60s, positivism was the dominant epistemological position in social science (Gray, 2013), with researchers seeking an objective truth through rigorous scientific inquiry (Gray, 2013; Cohen et al., 2011). Associated with the work of Auguste Comte (1798-1857), a positivist approach adopts an "objectivist" standpoint, whereby applying the laws of the natural sciences to the study of the social world, reality becomes as an

observable, concrete entity, external to the researcher (Gray, 2013). A major criticism of the positivist paradigm is its failure to take account of an individual's ability to interpret and represent their experience to themselves (Cohen et al., 2011).

4.4 Interpretivism

A major alternative stance to positivism is that of interpretivism. In epistemological terms, interpretivism is informed by constructivism, which unlike positivism, rejects the methods of the natural sciences, and claims that the social world can only be understood from an individual's perspective (Cohen et al., 2011). Interpretivism proposes that "natural reality (and the laws of science) and social reality are different and therefore require different kinds of methods. While the natural sciences are looking for consistencies in the data in order to deduce 'laws' (nomothetic), the social sciences often deal with the actions of the individual (ideographic). Our interest in the social world tends to focus on exactly those aspects that are unique, individual and qualitative, whereas our interest in the natural world focuses on more abstract phenomena, that is, those exhibiting quantifiable, empirical regularities" (Crotty, 1998, p. 68 in Gray, 2013. p.23). From this point of view, social phenomena, such as the onscreen depictions of looked-after characters, and the meanings they have for looked-after young people, can only ever be viewed from an individual's perspective, and therefore, never viewed as definitive (Bryman, 2016). A constructionist approach highlights the discovery of patterns and meanings, which are co-constructed by an individual's interactions with the world, and influenced by their personal and socio-cultural context (Snape and Spencer, 2003; Bailey, 2011).

In terms of my own work, I felt that an interpretive approach would be the most appropriate, as I was very much interested in ascertaining

what these young people thought and felt about these onscreen depictions, and the subsequent impact these images have on them, rather than establishing any facts around these depictions. I therefore aimed to obtain as much detailed information as possible about the lives of my research participants, from their own perspectives and my observations of them, and their engagement with the research (Snape and Spencer, 2003). While I decided on utilising an interpretivist approach, further theoretical perspectives are encompassed within this approach, such as phenomenology and hermeneutics, which I will discuss further.

4.5 Hermeneutics

The hermeneutic tradition proposes that social reality is socially constructed, and not rooted in objective fact. Therefore, explanation and description should be given less standing than interpretation (Gray, 2013). Hermeneutics argues that, "Social reality is too complex to be understood through the process of observation. The scientist must interpret in order to achieve deeper levels of knowledge and also self-understanding" (Gray, 2013, p.26).

4.6 Phenomenology

Phenomenology proposes that any attempt to understand social reality must be grounded in an individual's experiences of that reality (Gray, 2013). Therefore, phenomenological research has an emphasis on logic, an individual's subjective account and interpretation, and qualitative analysis of the data (Gray, 2013; Nyawira Githaiga, 2014).

Phenomenology uses relatively unstructured methods, and research produces "thick descriptions" of an individual's lived experiences (Gray, 2013). Often based on small case studies, there are concerns about the generalisability of its results and research may be difficult to

replicate, because the approach is generally unstructured. However, it should be noted that phenomenological approaches are, "not so much concerned with generalizations to larger populations, but with contextual description and analysis" (Gray, 2013, p.30).

4.7 Quantitative or qualitative?

Having established a constructivist ontological and epistemological stance, I decided my study would be underpinned by the theoretical perspectives of interpretivism, hermeneutics and phenomenology. An interpretive and idiographic approach appeared to be the most appropriate means of accessing and understanding these young people's attitudes towards onscreen looked-after characters and the subsequent impact these depictions have on them (Bailey, 2011). While I had established the theoretical underpinnings of my study, how I chose to undertake my research in practice was another question to answer. Positivist methods tend to be classified as quantitative, and include experiments or surveys, and an emphasis on gathering statistics (Blaxter et al., 2010). Interpretivist research methods include in-depth interviews and focus groups, and tend to be categorised as qualitative (Snape and Spencer, 2003). Qualitative research is considered the ideal approach for understanding young people's experiences, seeking as it does, to represent their perceptions and lived experiences (Schelbe et al., 2015).

Owing to the potential to yield rich insights into the young people's beliefs and experiences, I adopted qualitative methods within my own research, utilising groups and semi-structured interviews. Group discussions offered me a plethora of benefits (discussed in detail in the following chapter), in particular the opportunity for the young people to view looked-after depictions together and develop their criticality of these images (Milkie, 1999; Yosso, 2002). While I had not anticipated

undertaking individual interviews at the outset of my research, it was a method I adopted in response to the needs of the group (also discussed in detail further on). Both group discussion and semi-structured interviews allowed me to flexible and responsive to the needs of the young people, and both methods enabled "freedom for digression", giving control of the process to the young people (Hartley, 2011, p.85).

Of course, it would be remiss of me to not acknowledge the issues of using qualitative methods. Findings cannot be easily generalised or portrayed as representative of a particular group, and instead obtain a deeper and more contextualized understanding of a person's life and experiences (Neale, Allen, and Coombes, 2005 in Beck, 2012). Further, establishing the "validity" of reality that people present can vary according to the situation in which they are in and who they are talking to (Cornwell, 1984. p12 in Hartley, 2011).

4.8 Rationale for using IPA

I have no affinity to any specific approach, no agenda or bias. I simply wanted an approach that would offer a reflexive, adaptable way of working. However, I had to be realistic. My time was limited and as a novice researcher, being able to gain some sort of mastery of one method of analysis was going to prove challenging, let alone having to master multiple approaches, or a "pluralistic approach" (Frost et al., 2010).

Narrative research asks one or more individuals to provide stories about their lives (Riessman, 2008). Narrative research appealed to the storyteller in me, with its emphasis on exploring stories, examining them for content, form and function, and gaining insight into a person's understanding of the meaning of events in their lives (Frost et al., 2010). Further, as Riessman and Quinney (2005, p.392) note:

"Although narrative may have some roots in phenomenology (Ricoeur, 1991), applications now extend beyond lived experience and worlds 'behind' the author. A central area of narrative study is human interaction in relationships – the daily stuff of social work."

However, a narrative approach presented issues. In terms of a narrative approach, there are a range of definitions, often linked to discipline. At one end of the continuum, narrative can refer to an entire life story. At the other, a story could refer to an answer to a single question (Riessman and Quinney, 2005). In terms of my research, I had specific questions I wanted to explore in my analysis. I needed an approach that would not only allow me to draw out the narratives in the data, but would allow me to examine other concepts such as the voice of the young people and the themes of their discussions. Riessman and Quinney (2005, p.393) note that "Storytelling is only one genre, which humans employ to accomplish certain effects. Other forms of discourse besides narrative include chronicles, reports, arguments and question and answer exchanges, to name a few." It should be noted, however, that during the one-to-one interviews, some of the young people drew me into their stories. Perhaps a next step might actually be exploring the life stories of these particular young people, using a narrative approach (Wengraf, 2001).

Having decided on a group approach, I was unsure whether individual narratives would be lost among the group dynamic. Narrative interviewing would have involved undertaking long interviews, with the young people asked to give a detailed account of their story rather than answer a predetermined list of questions. I was conscious the young people might feel placed "on the spot" with such an approach, and would perhaps need more structure throughout the sessions. It would have generated considerable data, likely far too much for me to

analyse. From an ethical point of view, I was unsure whether these young people were ready to share their life stories (Butler, 2002).

Phenomenological research comprises a variety of approaches including Ethnography, Grounded Theory and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). While these approaches have some similarities, each offers its own method of obtaining understanding (Barker et al., 2002 in Bailey, 2011). My study adopts IPA in terms of an approach to analysis (discussed in detail in chapter seven), and it is an overarching theory that will be returned to throughout my thesis. Much like Flowers et al. (2001), I adopted IPA in my own research for numerous reasons:

"First, in contrast to many other qualitative approaches, it centres explicitly on the links between participants' talk, cognition and behaviour (Smith, 1996). This stands in contrast to discourse analysis, which rejects the very notion of cognition (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) or indeed grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which only implicitly theorizes the role of cognition" (p.182).

IPA is supported by an ever-growing theoretical foundation and a set of detailed practical, procedural guidelines (for example, Palmer et al., 2010; Tomkins and Eatough, 2010). A key element of the approach that appealed was its flexibility and adaptability (Frost et al., 2010). Nyawira Githaiga (2014) notes, "IPA's flexibility is evident in the application of its techniques with various methods, including individual interviews, postal questionnaires, electronic e-mail dialogue, observational methods, and focus groups (Brocki and Wearden 2006; Smith et al. 2010). IPA's flexibility also accords researchers the freedom to work with various emphases, for example, experiential and contextual aspects (Palmer et al. 2010)" (p.401). This was something of particular importance to myself. There were various

concepts I wanted to examine in the analysis, such as the young people's use of language, the group interaction, the narratives they told, and the development of their voice. IPA, and in particular, the protocol developed by Palmer et al. (2010), allowed me to incorporate these "various emphases". As well as deepening my understanding of these young people, and getting as close the their experiences as possible, these analytic emphases enabled me to build a new set of representations for these young people. Further, while an inductive nature is a feature of a qualitative methodology, rather than being unique to IPA, the approach is described as "flexible enough to allow unanticipated topics or themes to emerge during analysis" (Smith, 2004, p.43)."

Drawing on phenomenology and hermeneutics – traditions of particular resonance with myself – IPA offers a framework for research (Bailey, 2011). It is phenomenological, concerned with an individual's subjective experience, and interpretive, recognising that research is a dynamic process, and analysis is informed by the reflections of both the participant and the researcher (Brocki and Wearden, 2006). For the young people in my study, this was an opportunity to reflect on the fictional depictions of looked-after characters and their lives, and enter into a space to challenge deficits in the depictions they were witnessing.

These subjective lived experiences are investigated through detailed interpretation of transcripts of participant accounts. Interpretations are therefore dependent on an individual's ability to to articulate their experiences and a researcher's ability to analyse these accounts (Bailey, 2011). Although IPA aims to access a participant's perspective, the researcher's own perceptions will always complicate this endeavor. However, it is an interpretative process and the

researcher's perceptions are required, in order to make sense of the participant's experiences (Larkin et al., 2006; Charles, 2012).

A willingness to explore our self and our relationship with the research in IPA is of clear importance: "Through making ourselves aware of our own feelings about and expectations of the research, we can begin to fully appreciate the nature of our investigation, its relationship to us personally and professionally, and our relationship as a researcher and experiencer in the world to those with whom we wish to gather experiential data" (Shaw, 2010, p.235 in Charles, 2012, p.60). With this in mind, I came to realise I wanted these young people, who had experienced difficulties in their lives, to go on and succeed, in spite of these experiences. At a personal level, I wanted to show I could succeed myself, as someone who identified strongly with these young people.

I was aware I brought a range of preconceptions to the process of analysis, drawn from my personal and professional experience. As stated, I felt these young people being misrepresented, with the focus often falling on the ill effects of the care system, rather than highlighting successes, which I had seen myself. My social work career had also given me prior knowledge of some of the research participants. However, while my own experiences would enable me to make sense of some of the young people's accounts, they would also influence how I collected and analysed the data. Therefore, in order to give my research as much transparency as possible, I adopted a methodological stance that recognised this (Charles, 2012). It is worth reiterating, that while I brought my own experiences to the research, I was very open-minded and willing to have my preconceptions challenged. I wanted these young people to influence me as much as I was influencing them (Freire, 1970). However, I was also concerned

that the research would become about myself, and that was something I guarded against fiercely. While I was integral to the work, it was the voices of these young people I really wanted to capture and share, and hopefully I have maintained a balance in this respect throughout my thesis.

Chapter 5

Undertaking the group sessions

5.1 Freire and Pedagogy of the Oppressed

Having established the methodological underpinnings of my study, I had to decide on how I would approach the practicalities of my research in terms of working directly with the young people and structuring the group sessions. Initially, I wanted to present this chapter as simply as possible, detailing how I drew on the work of Freire (1970) to structure my work with the young people. This is however, only partly true. The reality is that my initial work with the young people was not underpinned by Freire's theories and it was only after I began working with the young people that I discovered Freire's work. After discussion with my supervisor and further reflection, I realised that by omitting this from my thesis, I was denying something of my own story.

At the outset of my research, I was keen to get "stuck in", working with the young people hands on. My practice, albeit highly ethical, was instinctive, underpinned by social work values of empowerment and respect (BASW, 2012). When I discovered Freire's work, it fit so well with the approach I had already been using, I felt inspired. While this acknowledgement perhaps complicates the narrative I wanted to present, the fact is that research is a complex, messy process (Blaxter et al. 2010), and openness, honesty and transparency are qualities I strive for throughout. As Freire himself states, "Those who authentically commit themselves to the people must re-examine themselves constantly" (p.42). Further, I feel this illustrates how Freire's ideas of empowerment are connected to social work practice, and it is therefore a terrible shame I had not encountered this theorist throughout my social work training (Hegar, 2012).

Freire (1970, p.66) states, "Political action on the side of the oppressed must be pedagogical action in the authentic sense of the word and, therefore, action *with* the oppressed". In this way, Freire was instrumental in terms of participatory action research (PAR) (Hegar, 2012). In order to empower the young people in my research, I decided to adopt a participatory approach (e.g. Pinter and Zandian, 2015). As Pinter and Zandian (2015, p.236) note, "This type of research can involve the use of a range of different tools (drama, stories, visual art and music), which have the potential to accommodate the emergence of children's views in natural and meaningful ways". They further highlight that participatory activities offer young people, "opportunities to shape the research agenda" (p.236). Young people have a right to participate in decisions integral to any research concerning them, including what is to be investigated, what data is to be collected, how this will be analysed, and also how the findings will be disseminated and applied. Furthermore, it could be argued that young people themselves should be the ones to carry out research on young people, rather than adults (Clark et al., 2013). In an ideal world, this participatory approach would have underpinned the entirety of my research, involving the young people at each stage of the process, from conception to conclusion (Day Langhout and Thomas, 2010; Pinter and Zandian, 2015).

However, as Pinter and Zandian (2015, p.236) note, "such a complete role reversal is not feasible in most contexts", and there were several reasons why my research could not be wholly participatory. Along with traditional concerns about the decisions of ethics committee members and access to young people, there are numerous complexities inherent in participatory research, in terms of children's lack of competence, issues around protection and power, and the complexity

of remuneration (Bradbury-Jones and Taylor, 2015), and as Spyrou (2011) states, research with children is "a time-consuming enterprise" (p.18 in Pinter and Zandian, 2015). In simple terms, "there are likely to be much easier, cheaper, less time consuming and perhaps more accurate means by which to collect and process qualitative data" (Carey, 2010, p.227).

Practical implications aside, I had to make research decisions when I was very much a "novice," with little prior theoretical or methodological experience (Collins, 2011). Could I have honestly facilitated a completely participatory project with confidence and competence? How fair would it have been to the young people involved in the research to attempt this? How ethical? For example, the analysis of the data was a complex process and a steep learning curve for me, having never undertaken any data analysis previously. How could I have taught the young people about data analysis when I was learning as I went along myself? With this in mind, while elements of my approach were participatory (such as the practicalities of the group sessions – time, venue, content, and the methods used), there were points where I made clear choices for the group, with a desire to bring a fruitful and positive resolution to the young people involved. However, it is worth pointing out that this is nothing out of the ordinary. As Pinter and Zandian (2015, p.236) note, "many researchers have promoted research *with* children, where adult facilitators work alongside children or in collaboration with them". Further, as Freire (1970, p.104) notes, "If the educators lack sufficient funds", or as in my case, time, "they can — with a minimum knowledge of the situation — select some basic themes to serve as "codifications to be investigated"... These aspects in turn involve many other themes". While I was unable to offer a completely participatory approach, I came to draw on Freire's ideas and utilise elements of a

participatory framework, as a means of enabling these young people to empower themselves (Jones, 2013).

5.2 Application of Freire's Empowerment Education Model

At the outset, one of my research questions involved how to employ a Freirean empowerment model when working with these young people. Rindner (2004) states, Freire "emphasized the oppressed group's active participation in their education and the need for them to take full control of their lives... Freire believed personal freedom and development of the individual should occur through supported interaction with others. He valued group learning over individual learning. His teaching occurred in small groups or "culture circles" (Freire, 1994, p. 44) through the process of engaging in dialogue and in problem-posing education" (p.79-80). Freire (1970) described the traditional "banking concept of education", where teachers deposit ready-made knowledge into the minds of passive students. Freire's vision of "liberatory" education consists of acts of cognition, not simply transferrals of information, in which teacher-student contradictions are resolved through dialogue. A Freirean empowerment model therefore encompasses three stages: generate group themes, pose problems, and act-reflect-act (Rindner, 2004).

Small groups or "culture circles" are considered the ideal format for a Freirean approach. Therefore, accessing a naturally occurring group – the CiCC – was an ideal fit. Further, there were a raft of reasons why a group format seemed the most appropriate method. As already discussed, groups would offer the young people the chance to discuss and analyse these depictions with their peers, working against any notion of "presumed media influence" (Milkie, 1999) and offer the young people further opportunities to identify with one another (Cohen, 2001). Further, groups are a particularly useful method to use with young people as they help to publicly recognise their expertise in

ways that other methods may not (Goodenough et al., 2003). Young people are comfortable with working in groups as it is a familiar scenario for them and does not put them "on the spot" as much as individual interviews can, especially if the adult is a good facilitator, following and encouraging rather than leading (Kitzinger and Barbour, 1999 in Hartley, 2011). Mauthner (1997) suggests group approaches benefit young people in numerous ways, such as increasing their confidence, helping them to generate ideas and look at things from different perspectives. Further, group discussions would allow me to observe how the young people's ideas and opinions were shaped and formed throughout the course of the discussion with their peers (Kitzinger, 1994). However, if group members feel they cannot talk in front of others, there is a danger group they may lose their individual perspective and identity (Lahikainen et al., 2003; Leeson, 2009).

Rabiee (2004) states that participants in focus group research are: "selected on the criteria that they would have something to say on the topic, are within the age-range, have similar socio-characteristics and would be comfortable talking to the interviewer and each other" (p.655). Given the potential difficulties engaging young children, I aimed to work with an "older" age group (e.g. 10-18), who would be able to reflect on their experiences with depth and understanding. The age range across the CiCC was 13 to 18 years, which was ideal, although I had to be aware of the ethical and practical implications in terms of age differences (Mauthner 1997). I considered this manageable, as the young people knew each other through attending the group and were used to discussing a variety of topics. The gender composition was evenly balanced, and all the members of the group were white, reflecting the overall ethnic homogeneity of the locality. Although a mix of gender, ethnicity, ability and so on would have been ideal, a sample of this size cannot be representative of all looked-after

young people in the United Kingdom and that was not the aim of my study (Vivienne Barnes, 2009). Further, Palmer et al. (2010) note that, "IPA with individual interviews requires the collection of data from a relatively homogeneous group of participants. The same requirement applies to IPA with focus group data" (p.118). Accessing a pre-existing group meant I very much utilised a purposive sample.

In terms of numbers, groups consisting of five to eight participants are considered ideal, as larger numbers may have limited the young people's opportunities to share ideas and insights (Krueger and Casey, 2015). As Nyawira Githaiga (2014) notes, "The rationale posited for group size is that the group should be large enough to furnish a wide range of views on the topic but small enough to allow for individuals to share their perceptions" (p.404). Nyawira Githaiga (2014) goes on, "Smaller groups are more appropriate for greater depth of discussion... when participants are motivated, well informed and/or experienced regarding the subject of discussion" (p.404). Ten young people participated in the group sessions, all of whom were keen to share their lived experiences of care and discuss the depiction of looked-after characters (Nyawira Githaiga, 2014).

While the use of already established groups may have enabled me to tap into 'naturally occurring' data (Kitzinger, 1994), I was conscious that the young people would discuss subjects they may not ordinarily engage with (Hartley, 2011). However, as noted by Bender and Ewbank (1994), "When participants know one another, they will usually prod one another to tell their own stories: in one sense, the prodders become the assistants to the facilitator" (p.66). Further, Freire notes, "The important thing, from the point of view of libertarian education, is for the people to come to feel like masters of their thinking by discussing the thinking and views of the world

explicitly or implicitly manifest in their own suggestions and those of their comrades" (1970, p.124).

In Rinder's model (2004), a "realistic schedule would comprise three to five meetings—one meeting for each stage or one meeting for the first two stages, and two meetings for the third stage, respectively" (p.82). She notes that the facilitator schedules a time, meeting room, and equipment for each session. Young people are often reliant on adults to facilitate their engagement in research, such as being driven to a venue by parents, and rarely have control over their environments, so the place in which the research was undertaken required particular consideration (Hennessy and Heary, 2005; Carter and Ford, 2013). The research was therefore carried out at a children's centre where the group usually met. It was a familiar place that was free from disruptions, and a "home from home" for the group.

I ran each group myself, with the support of the Participation Officer, who facilitated the CiCC meetings. While an assistant was involved for ethical purposes, in the event of any child protection concerns, she proved an invaluable addition in the running of the group, having an already established rapport with the young people (Krueger and Casey, 2015). Group sessions lasted for approximately one hour, dependent upon the young people's availability, and the flow of discussion. Additional time of fifteen to thirty minutes was incorporated into each session, outside of the discussion, to allow refreshments to be provided, and to help put the young people at ease, if they had any concerns (Bailey, 2011). Following each session, a short debriefing was held between myself and my co-facilitator, allowing us to consider what elements worked and did not.

It should be noted that my own approach did not mirror that laid out by

Rinder precisely, as I had undertaken one or two sessions prior to discovering Freire's work. However, even when I discovered Freire and underpinned my own research with these ideas, I still tailored my approach to these specific young people. Freire himself explains, "One cannot expect positive results from an educational or political action program which fails to respect the particular view of the world held by the people. Such a program constitutes cultural invasion, good intentions notwithstanding. The starting point for organizing the program content of education or political action must be the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people" (Freire, 1970, p. 84). Lange (2012) goes on, "Our job as educators who respect Freire's heritage is to think for ourselves and thus reinvent pedagogy in ways that relate best to the context we are working in" (p.16). Hegar (2012) also notes that, "Freire's work affirms that each individual is the expert concerning his or her own situation... people are not only capable of addressing and resolving their own concerns, they are the only ones who can do so" (p.163). Therefore, if I did not act to tailor the research method to respond to the individual needs of the young people, rather than acting in a liberatory manner, my actions would have been oppressive.

Freire states that, "investigators need to get a significant number of persons to agree to an informal meeting during which they can talk about the objectives of their presence in the area" (p.110). I attended an initial meeting with the CiCC, where I explained "the reason for the investigation, how it is to be carried out, and to what use it will be put" (Freire, 1970, p.110). Every young person in the group stated a desire to be involved. Once consent had been obtained from each young person and their caregivers following ethical approval, I met with interested group members to discuss the research process further and answer any initial questions. When undertaking the initial group

sessions, there were a number of factors I had to take into account: the young people's short attention spans, the use of clear, appropriate language, the need for careful pacing, and confirmation that the young people understood my questions (Ford et al., 2007). Other skills I had to employ included an ability to gain trust, follow the young people's stories and relate to their worlds (Sulimani-Aidan, 2016).

It is worth noting that while initial sessions were recorded visually as well as aurally, when I reviewed the camera footage, not all group members were visible onscreen, with young people missing from shot, or with their backs to camera. The video recordings were not adding much and the DSLR camera I was using would only record twelve minute clips. This meant I had to keep moving to the camera throughout the discussion to begin the recording again, leaving me feeling as though I was not engaged fully with the group. I decided against video recording the sessions as a result.

Further, in terms of my direct work with the young people, I adopted elements of a mentoring relationship. Sulimani-Aidan (2016) notes that, "The concept of mentor refers to a supportive adult... who provides guidance, emotional and practical support, and who can serve as a role model and advocate in addition to or regardless of parents" (p.1). She notes that, "Personal qualities of sensitivity, loyalty and trust are especially important in working with youth in care whose relationships with their birth parents and close adult figures are impaired and suffer from disappointment and mistrust... a good mentoring relationship can help the youth gain some of their lost trust in adult figures" (Sulimani-Aidan, 2016, p.6).

5.3 Young people who participated in group sessions

Please note that the young people's names have been pseudonymised

and it should be noted that some of the young people chose their own pseudonyms. Below is a short biography for each participant and their circumstances, written by the young people themselves where possible:

Joey is a fourteen-year-old male. He has three brothers and three sisters. He lives in a foster placement in and attends a local high school.

Daniel is a seventeen-year-old male who lives in a foster placement and is in part-time employment.

Ewan is a seventeen-year-old male who has been in care since he was fifteen. He recently left his foster placement to return home to his mother. He currently attends sixth form and is keen to get into employment in the next year.

Georgina is a fourteen-year-old female who has two brothers and two sisters. She is in the same foster placement as her sister, Carly, and is in year ten at high school.

Keira is a fifteen-year-old female. She is an auntie to three and foster auntie to six. She has five brothers. She lives in a foster placement in the local area, where she has been living for approximately eighteen months. She attends the local high school and feels she is making good progress.

Tommy is a fifteen-year-old male who has five siblings. He lives with his foster carer and attends a local high school.

Jae is a fifteen-year-old female who has a younger brother. She lives

in a foster placement and attends a local high school.

Carly is a sixteen-year-old female who is in placement with her sister, Georgina. She is undertaking her GCSE exams.

Rob is an eighteen-year-old male who has left his foster placement, and now lives in his own property. He is currently looking for work.

Sharna is a fifteen-year-old female, who lives in placement with her brother, Joey.

5.4 Stage 1: Generate Group Themes

In the first stage of Freire's three-stage empowerment model, Rindner suggests the teacher acts as a participant observer in the group, which was not appropriate in terms of my research, as I had to facilitate the sessions myself. At the first meeting, I introduced myself, explaining that I had been a social worker for four years, before moving back into education to undertake a PhD. My main interests were working with young people, in particular, looked-after young people, writing and filmmaking, and I wanted to combine these interests in my research. I explained that the young people would have control over the process, making choices and decisions. Freire states that, "efforts must be imbued with a profound trust in people and their creative power. To achieve this, they (teachers) must be partners of the students in their relations with them" (1970, p.75). One of the young people, Joey, told me, "I'd prefer to watch something, rather than reading." It was agreed that each session would involve viewing and discussing a piece of film or TV content that depicted looked-after young people, with the group bringing their own examples for discussion. I also explained that I would like us to offer a creative response (a play or a film, for example) to the things we had seen and learned together, which the

young people seemed excited about.

Once I had established some rapport with the young people, we identified problems and determined priorities (Wallerstein and Bernstein, 1988). The group produced a set of ground rules, encompassing respect, confidentiality, listening to one another and challenging statements, not people. It was clear that the group roles and norms had long been established and the group were able to moderate themselves, making sure everyone had a chance to speak.

We discussed the groups' viewing habits, whether they watched TV, film, YouTube, and what sort of shows and films they watched, establishing "themes". Freire notes, "investigators and the people (who would normally be considered objects of that investigation) should act as *co-investigators*. The more active an attitude men and women take in regard to the exploration of their thematics, the more they deepen their critical awareness of reality and, in spelling out those thematics, take possession of that reality" (p.106). The mention of *Waterloo Road* generated a lot of discussion and Georgina pointed out there were people living in foster care in the show. We agreed then that the programme could be one of our "codes". Rinder (2004) notes that while getting young people to select codes themselves is a departure from Freire's model, it is worthwhile because the young people take ownership of the code. It was also important that these codifications represented, "situations familiar to the individuals whose thematics are being examined, so that they can easily recognize the situations (and thus their own relation to them)" (Freire, 1970, p.114). I asked the group what would be the best way to contact them and after some discussion, it was agreed that I would set up a private Facebook group, where we could share links to videos and ideas. I asked the group to look for depictions of looked-after characters, when they were

watching TV and films, which they could share with the group.

5.5 Stage 2: Problem-posing stage

During "the problem-posing stage" of Freire's model, one of my central roles was developing "codes" – TV and film content that depicted looked-after characters. An effective code would represent a multifaceted problem that was familiar to the young people, but did not have ready-made solutions (Wallerstein and Bernstein, 1988).

In terms of establishing a baseline of the depictions of these looked-after characters, I considered undertaking a comprehensive content analysis, looking at a variety of media over a three-month period as Henderson and Franklin (2007) had done in their study on the TV representation of social workers. However, my desire was always to devote my time to more direct "hands on" and qualitative work with the participants, so I instead completed a brief analysis of the content pertinent to the young people in my study. Therefore, prior to each session, I viewed each "code", making notes and observations.

Four TV episodes (a television soap opera serial and two children's drama series) and a feature length film were selected for analysis, all chosen by the group, aside from the feature film, which I selected myself. The sample was composed of the following: *Tracy Beaker* (CBBC), *The Dumping Ground* (CBBC), *Waterloo Road* (BBC 1) and the feature film, *Short Term 12*. The young people selected content they were familiar with, where young people in care were a central feature of the story, and it should be noted that the content select by the young people were very much mainstream UK depictions. I selected *Short Term 12* myself, to offer the young people content from outside these mainstream depictions.

Validity

It should be noted there are limitations with the content selected. For example, it should be noted that given the long trajectory of these programme's storylines, and long-term development of their characters, I appreciate that a snapshot may not be representative of the entire content (Al-Sayad, 2010). Further, three of the four TV episodes and the feature film, depict looked-after young people living in care homes. While it may be that the majority of looked-after depictions do involve residential care (West, 1999), looked-after young people may also be depicted as living in foster care. An example of this was highlighted by Kiera when she referred to Rhydian in *Wolfblood*, a character who lives in foster care, and where care is not the primary focus of the story. Therefore, there may have been other content the young people would have identified with more easily, that reflected their own lives and circumstances. However, it should be noted that each young person was able to identify with characters or elements of characters they saw in the selected depictions (discussed in detail later on), so these opportunities were not negated.

While I would have liked to have viewed *Wolfblood* and other examples, with the group, during the *Short Term 12* session, the group disclosed deeply personal stories and seemed to be pushing for a private space to talk. This led me to undertake one-to-one interviews with the young people, meaning I was unable to view and discuss any further content with them.

Having said that, the content selected was that that was most familiar to the young people, was that which they had the most familiarity with, and understanding of. These programmes – *Tracy Beaker* and *The Dumping Ground* – are iconic when we think about young people in care and their representation onscreen, and therefore, the focus on these programmes, feels very much justified.

Session one: Tracy Beaker

The Story of Tracy Beaker (also known as Tracy Beaker) is a British children's television programme adapted from the book of the same name by Jacqueline Wilson, which ran from 2002 to 2006. The story takes place in a British care home, nicknamed "The Dumping Ground" by its residents, and is narrated by its lead, Tracy Beaker (www.bbc.co.uk).

Notes on looked-after characters

Tracy is introduced as difficult, angry and aggressive. It becomes clear that her foster placement has broken down and this is not the first time this has happened. She talks about being "difficult" and having "behavioural problems", and appears very self-aware for a ten-year-old. Tracy fantasises about her estranged mother, imagining her as an actress in Hollywood. Tracy is depicted as a liar and a tomboy, with a good sense of humour.

Session two: The Dumping Ground: series 1, ep 1

The Dumping Ground is a BAFTA-winning spin-off of *The Story of Tracy Beaker.* The series centres on the lives and relationships of the children and care workers of the fictional care home "Ashdene Ridge". The first series aired until March 2013, and at the time of writing, the show is currently in its fourth series (www.bbc.co.uk).

Notes on looked-after characters

As this show is an ensemble show, I was unable to track the names of each character, but they appeared to be an even mix of gender, aged approximately between six and sixteen, predominantly white, although there were two black and minority ethnicity females. One of the

characters was disabled, with cerebral palsy.

Session three: Waterloo Road: series 8, episode 1

Waterloo Road is a British television drama series set in the comprehensive school, Waterloo Road. *Waterloo Road* ran for nine years, comprising ten series and two hundred episodes (www.bbc.co.uk).

Notes on looked-after characters

When we first meet Jade, a mixed race teenager, she is running, having stolen a school uniform. She is resourceful and knows how to access support, and is able to stand up to her possessive boyfriend, Drew, to some extent. She presents as scared and vulnerable, and we soon realise she is pregnant. Ultimately, she stands up to Drew, placing her baby first, wanting to stay at school and access support.

Drew is possessive, controlling, suspicious and dismissive of Jade's desire to go to school. He seems violent, dangerous and vulnerable. He appears to have difficulty with authority figures.

Session four: Waterloo Road, series 7, episode 10
Notes on looked-after characters

Jodie "Scout" Allen is placed in a difficult situation, having to care for her brother, without her neglectful mother. She is loyal and protective of her brother, and will do anything to keep him out of care and prevent the two of them being separated. She is tenacious, defiant and stands up for herself. She takes action and does what she thinks is right, however misguided. This is particularly evident when she steals from a drugdealer and runs away, placing herself and her young brother at risk. It is also implied that she has sold drugs in the past.

Session five: Short Term 12

Short Term 12 is a 2013 American drama film centred around a group home for troubled teenagers (www.imdb.com). On a personal note, this is one of my favourite films and a film I believe to be very realistic in terms of its depiction of looked-after young people living in a care home. However, this was not necessarily a perception shared by the young people in the group (see chapter eight).

Notes on looked-after characters

Marcus is turning eighteen and due to leave the home. He's quiet, introspective and serious, and has a talent for rapping. He was abused by his mother and is prone to violent outbursts. Jayden is brooding and does not want to engage. She is difficult, but has a sense of humour and a talent for drawing. She comes to open up over time and develops a bond with the main care worker, Grace.

Viewing the codes

Having viewed these "codes", I would ask the young people to express their initial emotional reactions and encourage them to reflect on the meaning these images had in their lives. Following this, the group discussed any issues raised by the code, both for themselves and wider society. The goal at this stage was to promote autonomous thinking and critical reflection among the young people (Rindner, 2004). Freire notes that during, "The process of decoding, the participants externalize their thematics and thereby make explicit their "real consciousness" of the world. As they do this, they begin to see how they themselves acted while actually experiencing the situation they are now analyzing, and thus reach a "perception of their previous perception"" (p.115). Please note, a full and comprehensive account of the young people's discussions takes place over the ensuing chapters.

5.6 Stage 3: Act-Reflect-Act

In the third stage, the young people would act, reflect on their action, and then take further action, a process referred to as "praxis" (Freire & Macedo, 1998 in Rindner, 2004). This meant the young people seeking out further examples of fictional depictions of looked-after characters from their own lives and reflecting on these. This process would lead to raised consciousness, allowing the young people to become "reflective, self-conscious agents and critical thinkers capable of transforming the world" (Rudd & Comings, 1994, p. 314 in Rindner, 2004). Yosso (2002) notes that, in terms of "Freire's model of critical pedagogy, students may move through different stages of consciousness... from magical to naive to critical consciousness" (p.54). Yoso describes these stages:

"At the magical stage, students may blame inequality on luck, fate, or God. Whatever causes the inequality seems to be out of students' control, so they may resign themselves to doing nothing about it... At the naive stage, students may blame themselves, their culture, or their community for inequality. Students may try to change themselves, assimilate to the white, middle-class, mainstream culture, or distance themselves from their community in response to experiencing inequality... At the critical stage, students look beyond fatalistic or cultural reasons for inequality to focus on structural, systemic explanations. A student with a critical level of consciousness looks toward changing the system as a response to experiencing inequality." (p.54)

So then, it was my hope that these young people would come to look "toward changing the system as a response to experiencing inequality" (Yoso, 2002, p.54). In keeping with this approach, I had planned to discuss with the group ways in which we could better depict looked-after characters onscreen. Beck suggests "that a learning context in which there are opportunities to challenge existing knowledge and practices further enables an epistemological shift where learners become not just passive recipients but, rather, creators of new

knowledge" (Beck, 2012, p.123). However, I was unable to complete this process in the group format. There were several instances that indicated the group were searching for a private space to talk. For example, during later sessions, group members cited deeply personal experiences of abuse and I felt it appropriate to move to semi-structured interviews, to offer the young people space and privacy to discuss these personal stories further should they wish.

However, I was able to complete the Freirean empowerment model during the interview stage, where the young people reflected on how to challenge these depictions. And while I was unable to complete the Freirean approach as laid out by Rindner (2004), the move to interviews demonstrated a reflexive, responsive approach and illustrated that I respected "the particular view of the world held by the people" (Freire, 1970, p. 84). It should be noted, that although this was unplanned, the use of interviews in combination with groups also added validity to my research (Mitrofen et al., 2014; Frost et al., 2010).

5.7A creative response

At the outset of the research, the young people and myself agreed we would create something together, a response to what we had learned. The creation of a short film for example (Foster, 2012), could have been a "unique way of engaging young people, particularly those experiencing different forms of social or economic disadvantage (Hague, 2014 in Blum-Ross, 2015). Further, it could have provided the perfect fusion of voice and creative expression, allowing the young people to challenge misconceptions, as well as accommodating their interests, skills and experiences (Carter and Ford, 2013). In terms of acting-reflecting-acting, the young people would have been able to take their learning from the group sessions into a real world setting. This would mean the young people were creating their own codes and

becoming "reflective, self-conscious agents and critical thinkers capable of transforming the world" (Rudd & Comings, 1994, p. 314 in Rindner, 2004)".

Rarely are looked-after young people, or young people generally, involved in the creation of content that depicts their own lives, and this was something I wanted to address. A case is point is Vanhaeght and Bauwens's 2016 study, where they interviewed children who participated in a cultural TV show. Vanhaeght and Bauwens conclude that "although the concept of the show heralded the promise of a participatory project, decisions about how the children's art was presented and framed, remained largely in the hands of the media professionals and the art teachers. Quite a few children recognised their lack of decision-making influence and carefully criticised the disrespectful representation of their art form" (p.8). They note that within the context of television production "'ordinary people' are always reminded of the boundaries and hierarchies that help produce the legitimacy of the medium TV and its makers" (p.9) and "Overall, TV production is not a nourishing context for symmetrical child–adult relations" (p.9). However, young people are able to "make sense of television in light of what they know about genre and narrative, and the production process itself. They are much more sophisticated users of the medium than they are often given credit for" (Barker & Petley, 2001, p.13 in Simmons, 2009). In fact, children can make "thoughtful, critical and media literate video productions themselves" (Dickinson, 1998, p.122 in Simmons, 2009).

Of further relevance to myself, Freire's theory of Critical Pedagogy (Freire, 1970) was influential in the development of many pioneering youth media projects (Blum-Ross, 2015). Within these projects there is often a broad emphasis on fostering "critical media literacy". "In

addition to the skills associated with "accessing" and "creating" texts, the central argument for young people producing their own media is the idea of "understanding" or even "critiquing" mainstream media (Goodman, 2003) through developing in young people a "more questioning attitude" toward the media they encounter in their everyday lives (Blum-Ross, 2015, p.315). This therefore begs the question; why did I not simply undertake a creative media project with these young people from the start?

To answer, Blum-Ross (2015) states that in practice very few opportunities for media analysis arises in media projects, and the creation of digital media does not in itself guarantee critique, or even basic understanding (Buckingham (2003). It was incumbent on me, as a collaborator with the young people, to support the development of their critical media literacy. With this in mind, I felt that by breaking the project down into clear, simple stages (e.g. discussion of content, reflection on content and creation of content), I would ensure the young people had a shared understanding and criticality of these images, which they would be able to take into the creation of their own content. To underline this approach, Freire states that, "The more the people unveil this challenging reality which is to be the object of their transforming action, the more critically they enter that reality... There would be no human action if there were no objective reality" (p.35).

Unfortunately, I was unable to complete a creative project with the young people. Qualitative research is rarely straightforward, involving a complex system of data collection and analysis (Blaxter et al. 2010). Ultimately, I had to accept my original plans had been too ambitious, which was incredibly frustrating. Freire notes that "Trust is contingent on the evidence which one party provides the others of his true, concrete intentions; it cannot exist if that party's words do not coincide

with their actions. To say one thing and do another — to take one's own word lightly — cannot inspire trust" (p.72). With this in mind, I was conscious of abusing the young people's trust and letting them down. Therefore, I wrote a treatment, a short outline for a feature film project, informed by the research findings and the voices of these young people (discussed in chapter sixteen). Although we were unable to complete the creative project together, I was able to take the young people's words and turn them into something more than just another thesis dying "a slow death" on "the shelf" (Lichtman, 2013, p.3). The treatment gave them an opportunity to see their collective words come to life and although it was not quite what I had in mind at the outset of my research, it did enable me to draw the research together and provide a fruitful and positive resolution for the young people. It seemed the story really resonated with the young people too, with Rob writing, "it made me tear up its such a good story... the struggle is real I can relate so much to his story".

5.8 Benefits of a group approach

Having examined the group interactions in detail, I discovered a wealth of positives and benefits of a group approach, as well as some issues. A benefit of the group approach was that discussions facilitated a deeper understanding and identification with each other (Cohen, 2001). For example, when Jae disclosed the sexual abuse she experienced at the hands of her father, Tommy disclosed too, stating he "never actually thought of that." Jae's open and honest offer seemed to give Tommy a space to reflect himself. This empathic interaction and identification, nor this level of reflection, would have occurred in an interview setting.

In terms of the impact of these depictions, Milkie states that, "Even if someone believes that her group is portrayed unrealistically and does

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not like the portrayal, she may not know or believe that others share her criticisms. In other words, individuals see themselves through the eyes of others who they assume have been affected significantly by mass media imagery. It is clear that people ignore, dislike, and belittle media portrayals, and may not wish to make a social comparison that is negative for the self. Yet the extent to which such critical assessment of media is effective, or can negate effects, may depend on the extent to which individuals know that significant others have assessed the symbols critically in the same way" (Milkie, 1999, p.194).

She goes on to point out that, "peers may be a means of validating critical assessment if the peer network also is critical of such portrayals and if the individual knows the views of that group accurately. In such a case, an individual can act on criticisms, or they can be meaningful in protecting her self-evaluations, because she knows that the network or group devalues those images as well" (Milkie, 1999, p.194). This was of particular significance here, as the young people each knew each other's thoughts and opinions on these depictions, and agreed for the most part that these depictions were negative, stereotyped and largely unrealistic or irrelevant, and any negative impact upon them would hopefully be minimised.

5.9 Group session issues

Although I considered a group situation to be the most appropriate means of data collection, the process was not without disadvantages. Bryman (2016) notes potential difficulties, such as variability in contributions, with more vocal participants dominating and more reticent members opting to say less. This was something I encountered, with one group member in particular, not offering much. While I attempted to offer him opportunities to speak, he did not always take them.

Having developed an understanding of how the group worked together and of how particular young people enabled or constrained each other in offering perspectives on their experiences, I saw both what was gained and lost through the use of groups (Palmer et al., 2010). There were issues relating to group dynamics, and there were disagreements and conflicts within the sessions. Participants spoke at varying pitches and talked over one another, making transcription problematic. The group would also get into conflict, mocking each other for their verbal tics, for example.

Group situations can also make it difficult for the young people to access their true thoughts and feelings. For example, when I initially asked Joey about his feelings on *Short Term 12*, he was mocking and evasive. However, it should be noted that during the interview phase, Joey was much more open, honest and engaged. The group environment affected him, inhibiting him from opening up. It should be noted that asking the young people to reflect on their experiences is a considerable task, especially if these experiences are still raw. Having to do this in a group situation could have magnified their reluctance to offer. Often, being open and honest can also bring forth ridicule. For example, when Tommy described onscreen staff as "canny loving", this comment brought derision from Jae.

Smith (2004) states, "If the researcher is convinced that participants are able to discuss their own personal experiences in sufficient detail and intimacy, despite the presence of the group, then the data may be suitable for IPA" (p. 51). I believed this would be the case, however when Jae was incredibly open, disclosing sexual abuse, I felt that the group environment was perhaps not the best place to make such disclosures. This was a clear indicator that the young people needed a

private space where they could talk openly.

5.10 Reflections on adopting a Freirean approach

When reflecting in my approach, my findings echo those of Yosso (2002), and there are parallels between the reactions and attitudes of the young people involved with my research, as there were with students who participated in Yossos's study. Therefore, I will use Yosso's findings and the stages her students went through as a means to structure this section of the chapter.

Confrontation

As with Yosso's study, the young people here stated they had not contemplated the depictions of looked-after characters before the study. Tommy told me, "Care doesn't really bother me neither cos... I've been in and out for six and a half seven years of my life now... so it's nothing new". Sharna stated a similar feeling: "I mean I was born in care so it doesn't make a difference to me cos, I've been in more or less all me life". Echoing the reaction of the students in Yosso's study, the young people became angry when they saw the ways in which looked-after characters were depicted onscreen. For example, Ewan stated, "It's a bad representation of us us being in care... Not everyone does that kind of stuff in care." The exaggerated and unrealistic portrayals frustrated the group, particularly in relation to the way others might perceive them as a result. Sharna stated, other people would think "we're all the same and we don't know how to behave and like they wouldn't trust we and like, things like that." And Ewan told the group people "would think everyone in care's gonna be crazy, and getting pregnant early."

Yosso also notes that at the "magical stage" of the process, "students may blame inequality on luck, fate, or God. Whatever causes the

inequality seems to be out of students' control, so they may resign themselves to doing nothing about it" (p.54). This idea was apparent in my own research, for example, when Sharna said, "I've been in care for all my life and you sort of get used to it and like, things like that don't really make any difference... you're just gonna be stuck aren't you so you can't do anything about it anyway". These onscreen depictions had no relevance for her, because she was "stuck" and there was nothing that would change that.

Motivation

At the "motivation" stage, Yosso states, "Students' motivation is driven by a desire to prove to "them" – people who portray and perpetuate notions of Chicando inferiority that Chicanas/os can and do succeed" (p.56). While I did not get a sense from the group sessions that the young people were motivated to prove "them" wrong by succeeding in their own right, there were several instances where the young people felt the depictions they viewed were very much unrealistic. For example, in terms of *Short Term 12*, Tommy reacts negatively to the film:

"...it didn't sound non-fictional if you get no fictional fictional wait realistic I'll use the word realistic, it didn't sound realistic cos you wouldn't have in some cases you might have somebody cutting themselves but that's like, really really like really really bad things and that yeah but like, in other cases like y-you wouldn't have a radgie like ya erm whacking somebody with a baseball bat would you?"

Yosso states that, "At the naive stage, students may blame themselves, their culture, or their community for inequality. Students may try to change themselves, assimilate to the white, middle-class, mainstream culture, or distance themselves from their community in response to experiencing inequality" (p.54). This was particularly relevant in terms of my own research. For example, the young people felt the

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looked-after characters were depicted as "nutters", "tramps" and "horrible" people, and there was "a desire to make sure they were not perceived like those "losers"" (Yosso, 2002, p.57). For example, Sharna stated, "I don't mean it nastily but we're nothing like them kids [onscreen] we don't have like problems like them do..."

It should also be noted, there were signs of emerging criticality amongst the young people. For example, in one session, Keira's voice felt incredibly activated as she made connections between what we were discussing and other material: "In Wolfblood Rhydian's Rhydian's erm in care, cos there's one episode where, erm, Maddy goes to his house and Rhydian's got to jump out of the window, and then they meet each other, obviously he's got like wolf in him so he can jump from heights, he jumped down and erm, he was like "I've got to be careful, just in case my foster carers see us and we better run quick". She seemed excited as she recalled the story, realising there were more young people onscreen who were in care, offering us evidence of the character's care status by using direct speech (James et al., 2015).

There was also clear evidence of the group taking ownership of the research project, as I note in my reflective diary: "Following the session, I posted an update in the Facebook group, providing links to the next TV show we would watch, an episode from *Waterloo Road*. I noticed that the young people were taking ownership of the group, putting up a logo and header image. They were also posting old pictures of one another prompting discussion of shared memories of activities they had undertaken together". Freire notes that, "Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one

who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow" (p.80). This idea, the "peer tutor" was very much apparent when Keira brought her friend, Lisa, along to one of the sessions. My reflective diary notes, "Keira bringing along another young person to the group seemed to suggest an element of empowerment for her, becoming an advocate for the group".

Navigation

At this stage of the process, Yosso states that, "Students' navigational efforts are aimed at trying to change societal perceptions of Chicanas/os by defying the odds and making their way successfully through the educational system" (p.56). In my study, the young people offered a raft of suggestions as to how looked-after young people could be better depicted, that reflected their lived experience. For example, rather than see looked-after young people as aggressive or troubled, the young people offered an alternative viewpoint, such as showing young people who cope, who are generous and help, self-sufficient, ambitious, mature and understanding, loyal and loving. At the outset of the research, Georgina held quite binary, unshifting opinions in terms of Tracy Beaker being good and the majority of depictions of care being "bad". However, she was able to highlight something positive amongst the "bad" during the fifth session in *Short Term 12's* Sammy. In this way she was perhaps developing a more nuanced, critical and graded set of thoughts around these depictions, evidence of moving towards the stage of "navigation" (Yosso, 2002).

It should be noted that this navigation stage of the research process occurred during semi-structured interviews, and therefore will be reflected on fully in later chapters. However, it is worth stating these young people appeared to have had their critical capacity enhanced as

a result of this process, and were looking "toward changing the system as a response to experiencing inequality" (Yosso, 2002, p.54). There was also clear evidence within the interviews that echoed Yosso's claims about education, with each young person stating a desire to be successful educationally. Overall, it would seem that this method of working challenged the young people "not only to question the media images but to also take action to change such portrayals", therefore suggesting real value in adopting a Freirean approach (Yosso, 2002, p.56).

While simply stating the elements these young people would like to see in terms of a better depiction might seem insignificant, as Freire states, "Within the word we find two dimensions, reflection and action, in such radical interaction that if one is sacrificed— even in part—the other immediately suffers. There is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis. Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world" (p.87). And so, with the many thousands of these young people's words I had collated, I moved onto the next stage of my research, the analysis.

Chapter 6

Analysis of the Group Sessions

6.1 IPA and focus groups: a review of literature

Having selected IPA as my means of data analysis, I searched the literature for articles that had combined IPA with group data, focussing on key words "IPA", "interpretative phenomenological analysis", "groups" and "focus groups". International sources from 2000 to present day were included, and articles were selected due to their relevancy to the topic, their currency, and their influence in the field.

In Dunne and Quale's 2001 study, they used focus groups to work with women who had Hepatitis C. They note that, "IPA is usually applied to data gathered through semi-structured interviews between a single interviewer and interviewee" and "there is the possibility that the working out of the dynamics of the group might take precedence over consideration of the topic that the group has been brought together to discuss" (p.681). However, they believed the women would give the same account of their experiences and concerns if interviewed singly, rather than as part of a focus group, stating, "We are convinced that, as individuals, they would not have hesitated to dissent from any views with which they did not agree or identify" (p.682).

In Flowers et al.'s 2003 study, data from one-to-one interviews and focus groups was analysed using IPA. Flowers at al. note, "IPA was adopted as an analytic perspective for several reasons. First, in contrast to many other qualitative approaches, it centres explicitly on the links between participants' talk, cognition and behaviour (Smith, 1996). This stands in contrast to discourse analysis, which rejects the very notion of cognition (Potter and Wetherell, 1987) or indeed grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), which only implicitly theorizes the

role of cognition" (p.182).

In de Visser and Smith's 2007 article, combining group discussions and individual interviews, they worked with a diverse sample of young men living in London. They noted, "The use of group discussions and individual interviews was planned so as to provide complementary data with different – but inseparable – objects of analysis: the group discussions were designed to identify the range of ideologies of masculinity and drinking available in the interviewees' social contexts; the individual interviews were designed to explore how individuals saw themselves in relation to the available ideologies, and how this was related to their drinking behaviour" (p.598). They note that overall, "The group discussions and individual interviews produced very similar responses: each of the emergent themes was apparent in both sets of transcripts. Thus although the two modes of data collection differed, the broad analytic strategy, the types of responses, and the emergent themes did not" (p.600).

In Palmer et al.'s 2010 article, they inherited focus group data from carers of people with mental health problems, which they analysed using IPA. They note they "could not ignore the constitutive features of the interactive and social context of these discussions. A discursive analysis would certainly have accommodated the interactive aspects but would also have negated the centrality of the experiential components" (p.101). As a result, they developed a set of socially situated, interactively aware coding practices, alongside standard IPA analytic processes. They note that, "Previous applications of IPA to focus group data have focused more on the content of the data than on the process of working with them, and they offer little in terms of how such an analysis might be best approached to recognise and account for the synergy associated with using focus groups" (p.115).

They note that their protocol "does not guarantee a complete or successful analysis" and hope other researchers will find their "guiding questions helpful in deciding how to structure analyses of group data in such a way as to balance a deeper understanding of personal lived experience with the context of its expression" (p.117). They conclude that, "What has been striking about working with these data is that certain insights appeared to arise not in spite of, but because of, the shared experiences and understandings of the group. The group environment appeared to allow group members to co-constitute narratives and multiperspective accounts that would probably not have emerged in single interviews. Therefore, there would seem to be an advantage to working with pre-existing groups, in particular" (p.117).

In Tomkins and Eatough's 2010 article, they discuss the negotiation of part-whole relationships in the context of focus group work. They note that, "Although it is possible to adjust the IPA method for group data, there remain some profound theoretical and epistemological questions about whether the resultant focus on the group-individual dynamic and the discursive construction of experience represents too fundamental a shift from the idiographic and the psychological to be considered "true IPA." However, working through these issues and attempting to move from either/ors to both/ands are seen as being true to the spirit of phenomenological enquiry" (p.244). Drawing on extracts of their own focus group research on care, practical solutions are offered to address this tension. They conclude that, "The potential for phenomenological methods to bridge gaps, to blur distinctions, and to emphasize commonalities and interconnections is consistent with this philosophical commitment (Halling 2008). As Glendinning (2007) puts it, phenomenology is all about being alive to the possibility of launching and relaunching new ways of reflecting upon experience,

about taking the plunge" (p.260).

In Nyawira Githaiga's 2014 article, she draws data from her doctoral research examining the experiences of female caregivers in Nairobi. In this article, she examines the methodological considerations in her use of focus groups within an IPA framework. Overall, she highlights the adaptability of an IPA approach by demonstrating use with focus groups, to enhance understanding of phenomena. She notes, "This reiterates the possibility of IPA researchers being explicit and creative in their methods while remaining faithful to the foundational tenets of the approach" (p.416) and "underscores the need for IPA scholars to adapt their methods for contextual relevance" (p.416).

6.2 Reflections on the literature

While several studies have combined the use of IPA and group data (e.g., Dunne and Quayle 2001; Flowers et al. 2003; de Visser and Smith, 2007), there remains a question as to whether the theoretical grounding or the practical procedures of IPA can be lifted completely, without modification, from IPA using interviews into IPA with groups (Tomkins and Eatough, 2010). While groups may not be obviously suitable for IPA research owing to their considerably complex interactional environment, IPA is flexible in both its intent and its application (Brocki and Wearden, 2006). Combining IPA with focus group data is a proposition supported by pioneers of the approach (Smith, 2004), and Palmer et al. note that the approach is more commonly a "facilitated group discussion" (2010, p.100), as was the case with my own research.

However, this does raise the issue as to why I would choose to analyse group data with IPA. There were numerous reasons why I chose IPA as my analytic tool, not least its flexibility and adaptability (Nyawira

Githaiga, 2014). However, the group method, for me, was a positive choice for phenomenological research. I believed group discussion would elicit more experiential reflection than a one-to-one interview might, allowing "group members to co-constitute narratives and multiperspective accounts that would probably not have emerged in single interviews" (Palmer et al., 2010, p.117).

The young people's discussions offered rich and powerful insights into their experiences, personal accounts that were clearly embedded in a complex set of dynamics and well-established relationships with peers and siblings in the group (Palmer et al., 2010). It was imperative I engaged with these experiential accounts. Smith (2009) stresses the non-prescriptive nature of an IPA approach and acknowledges that such guidelines are just that, and are open to adaptation in the given research situation. Palmer and her colleagues (2010) use of IPA to analyse data from a series of focus groups with carers presented itself as a perfect template for which I could adapt in terms of my own analysis.

The protocol they set out in their research drew on insights from a variety of systemic, narrative, discursive, and critical psychologies (e.g., Crossley 2000; Dallos and Draper 2000; Parker 1992; Wetherell, Taylor and Yates 2001a, 2001b; Willig 1999, all in Palmer et al., 2010). Palmer and her colleagues' approach appealed to me as I would be able to offer an account of the young peoples' concerns and claims, keeping the commonalities of their experiences as the focus of the analysis, but also accounting for the context in which those concerns arose. However, as Palmer and her colleagues note, "the presence of multiple voices, the complexity of their individual and shared contexts, and the interactional complexity of the discussion itself" did make it difficult for me to infer and develop personal, phenomenological accounts

(Palmer et al., 2010, p.100). I had to acknowledge that any reflections or experiential claims were likely "to be nested within a fairly complex set of social and contextual relationships" (Palmer et al., 2010, p.100). Further, these accounts were likely shaped not only by my questions and reactions to the young peoples' responses, but also by a range of factors such as the nature of pre-existing relationships, the privacy or sensitivity of the subject matter, the degree of shared experiences among the young people and the developing dynamic of the interaction itself (Palmer et al., 2010). Therefore, I appreciated I would have to approach the analysis twice: "once for group patterns and dynamics and subsequently, for idiographic accounts" (Smith 2004, p. 50 in Palmer et al., 2010).

6.3 Balancing the individual and the group

While the interactive nature of groups can stimulate individual accounts in a different way to one-to-one interviews, this dimension is often lost in the write-up of research (Tomkins and Eatough, 2010). When combing IPA with focus groups, honouring both the group and the individual can prove challenging, "where individual subjective viewpoints of participants may be ignored and sole emphasis placed on shared viewpoints. This may communicate a false sense of consensus in focus group interactions" (Nyawira Githaiga, 2014, p.414). Tomkins and Eatough (2010) note that in some cases the individual can be overshadowed in favour of the group, which would seem to contradict IPA's analytical commitment to an individual's experience. Tomkins and Eatough go on to note that, on the other hand, privileging the individual would downplay the contextual and interactional aspects of the group and of how people made sense of this experience.

In light of this, I drew on the guidance offered by Tomkins and Eatough (2010). To summarise, they suggested that once I had created

the table of themes for the group as a whole, as is common in an IPA approach (Smith, 2011), I would go back around the analytical loop for each of the individual group members in turn, temporarily removing the individual from the interactive group context (Tomkins and Eatough, 2010). The group-level thematic classification would then be reviewed through the filter of the individual participant. In terms of my own analysis, I went a stage further, making interpretive and descriptive notes of each young person throughout and across sessions, giving me a real sense of each individual. So then, this approach combined with the protocol laid out in the work of Palmer et al. (2010) formed the basis of my approach to analysing the group data. It should also be noted that much like Flowers et al. (2003) and de Visser and Smith's (2007) studies, my analysis was linked between a series of group sessions and semi-structured interviews, further mitigating the potential for the individual to be lost among the group. Additionally, much like de Visser and Smith (2007), I also combined the data from the individual interviews and group discussions, presenting them together, in order to highlight similarities and differences across the stages of research, further ensuring the young people's individual voices were prominent.

6.4 Dealing with the data

As a qualitative researcher, I attempted to undertake sessions with a lightness of touch, trying to strike a balance between ensuring the issues specified on my session guide were covered, while allowing the young people to identify and pursue issues relevant to the research topic that I did not consider when devising the schedule (Hartley, 2011). Some of the young people used the sessions as a chance to pursue other issues that were either unrelated or only tangentially related to the research topic. I was aware that this might be the case, particularly as my research was dealing with the onscreen depictions of

looked-after young people, a topic that might be considered sensitive and one which the young people may never have had the opportunity to consider or discuss with an attentive listener before (Heath et al., 2009). There were times when participants wanted to describe all of their experience and had understandable difficulty organizing such substantial information. As a result, some transcripts can be quite fragmented, with participants covering many seemingly unrelated areas, darting from issue to issue and apparently contradicting themselves. I was conscious I would subsequently have to apply an analytic framework to the transcripts, and concerned that the chaotic nature of some sessions might render the resulting transcripts unusable. While it was a painstaking task, I ensured all of the sessions were transcribed and subsequently analysed (Smith and Eatough, 2007). The pool of data consisted of audio recordings of five sessions, totaling 2 hours and 37 minutes' worth of data. It should be noted that a further 2 hours and 44 minutes worth of data from individual interviews was as also used. While I did have some concerns about the quality of the audio, I was able to transcribe each recording with accuracy. Any lack of clarity in the audio recording is reflected in the transcription itself. The transcripts were also read by my supervisor to confirm their quality (Jeffrey, 2009).

My initial reaction to the transcripts was one of sadness for the group, all of which had experienced difficulty, which they discussed at various points throughout the sessions. However, my sadness was counterbalanced by optimism, engendered by the resilience the young people exhibited in the face of these experiences. I discussed these feelings with my supervisor and in doing so, it became clear that these feelings were in response not only to the data, but feelings about my own life. There is a sadness about some of my own experiences, particularly when I was growing up, but there is also a hope and

optimism that I can live a successful life. This reflexive process was vital, as it assisted me to be conscious of, and give account of, my actions in relation to issues such as my own childhood experiences (Finlay, 2002). As Garton and Copland (2010) note researchers should "highlight the baggage" they bring to the process (citing Scheurich, 1995, p.249, p.548). While some aspects of my "baggage" might be unconscious and not readily identifiable, I was fortunate to have a supportive supervisor relationship in which I could consider and question these issues (Smith, and Eatough, 2007).

6.5 Data analysis protocol

In working through the steps of the protocol suggested by Palmer and her colleagues, I hoped to develop a robust, meaningful analysis of these young peoples' lived experience while also acknowledging the wider socio-cultural factors involved in accessing their experiences in this way (Palmer et al., 2010).

6.6 Stage 1. Initial reading of the transcript

To begin with, I applied "standard" IPA practices, identifying the young people's experiential claims and concerns. The transcripts were read in detail numerous times and thoughts, reflections, possible interpretations and potential points of interest were noted.   These notes/questions were recorded in the left-hand margin of the transcript and set aside as a possibly useful line of inquiry I could follow later (Smith, and Eatough, 2007).

Some parts of the transcripts were richer than others and warranted more commentary.   Some of my comments were attempts to summarise, some were associations or connections that came to mind, and others were preliminary interpretations. At this stage I also found myself commenting on the use of the young people's language and a

sense of the young people themselves. As I moved through the transcript, I commented on similarities and differences, amplifications and contradictions in what the young people were saying (Smith and Osborn, 2007). A sample of data during stage 1 of my analysis is shown below:

Group transcript: first session	Initial notes:
JOHN: So what kind of character do you think Tracy Beaker is? KEIRA: A little snob. JAE: A little rat? JOHN: A little rat? CARLY: A liar. She is funny though. GEORGINA: A role model. DANIEL: A stereotype. JOHN: So she's a rat, she's a liar, she's a role model and she's a stereotype. KEIRA: She's a B-I-T-C-H. DANIEL: She's actually a stereotype.	Lots of names for TB She's not a liar, sees positive too Able to be positive in spite of all negatives around – voice Yet he likes her? Three negative, one positive Aggressive response, strong, stereotype in itself

Here we see an outburst of passion from the group. Well over half the group shouted out names for Tracy Beaker, each of them with a strong

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opinion. The names at first appear to be wholly negative, although Carly provided some nuance, stating Tracy Beaker is a "liar", yet "she is funny". Georgina contradicted the group, stating Tracy Beaker is a role model, while Daniel stated she was a "stereotype". I noted that the overwhelming feeling towards Tracy appeared to be one of negativity. I also noted that Keira's final response, referring to Tracy as a "B-I-T-C-H" was "aggressive" and a "strong, stereotype in itself", implying that Keira was acting the part of the aggressive looked-after teen.

6.7 Stage 2: Identifying and labelling themes

The next stage of analysis involved returning to the transcript and using the notes that had previously been made in the left-hand margin to produce themes in the right-hand margin. My initial notes were transformed into concise phrases which aimed to capture the essential quality of what I found in the text, a process that continued through the whole transcript. Freire notes that, "Listening to the tapes recorded during the decoding sessions and studying the notes taken... the investigators begin to make the themes explicit" (1970, p.120). Similar themes emerged as I went through the transcript and therefore, the same theme title was used. At this stage, I treated the entire transcript as data, and made no attempt to omit or select particular passages for special attention. I was also aware there was no requirement to generate themes and the number of emergent themes reflected the richness of that particular passage (Smith and Osborn, 2007; Smith et al., 2010). To illustrate this process, here is a section of the transcript, showing first the initial notes and then the emergent themes:

Emergent Themes:	Group transcript: first session	Initial notes:
Attitudes towards fictional characters Differing opinions / Voice Attitudes towards characters Playing the role	JOHN: So what kind of character do you think Tracy Beaker is? KEIRA: A little snob. JAE: A little rat? John: A little rat? CARLY: A liar. She is funny though. GEORGINA: A role model. DANIEL: A stereotype. JOHN: So she's a rat, she's a liar, she's a role model and she's a stereotype. KEIRA: She's a B-I-T-C-H. DANIEL: She's actually a stereotype.	Lots of names for TB She's not a liar, sees positive too Able to be positive in spite of all negatives around – voice Yet he likes her? Three negative, one positive Aggressive response, strong, stereotype in itself

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Here we see the addition of emergent themes. Several of the young people had an attitude towards the character of Tracy Beaker: Keira referred to her as a "little snob", Jae as a "little rat", Carly calls her, "A liar," but added, "She is funny though", indicating a more nuanced opinion. Georgina referred to her as a "role model" and Daniel stated she was a "stereotype", repeating his point, as to underline it. Keira went on to give the most vehement feeling about Tracy Beaker, stating, "She's a B-I-T-C-H." So even within this small excerpt from the transcript, there was a struggle for consensus, and a wide range of feelings towards the character, from the positive "role model", to the negative, "B-I-T-C-H", summarised by the theme "attitudes towards fictional characters". Clearly then, there appeared little consensus, though there did appear to be a leaning to the more negative interpretations of the character. This lack of consensus is highlighted by the theme "Differing opinions". In terms of "voice", I noted that Georgina was able to hold her opinion amidst the group, in spite of being one of the youngest. This also suggested the group was working well together, with the young people able to challenge one another without fear of reprisals.

6.8 Stage 3. What roles and relationships are described, and what do they mean to participants?

At this stage of their protocol, Palmer and her colleagues move onto "more focused coding", (2010, p.109). Here then, I examined references to other people outside the group context and asked questions such as what roles and relationships were described, and what sorts of meanings and expectations were attributed to these relationships? (Palmer et al., 2010). As discussed by Palmer et. al, while this move might be similar to the more interpretative coding used in standard IPA in that it involves asking further questions of the data, focusing on key features of the young people's accounts is

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distinctive, as a conscious decision to contextualise accounts. On a personal note, I have found that looked-after young people's families are incredibly important to them, so I felt this warranted individual attention. Again, this highlights why Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Smith and Osborn, 2016) was perhaps not useful in terms of my own analysis, as there were elements of the data I wanted to explore prior to analysis.

From their data, Palmer and her colleagues, "determined that relationships with professionals and organisations were especially important for understanding carers' experiences" (2010, p.109). However, Palmer et al. state, "steps 3 and 4 describe our attempts to situate our participants in the systemic contexts which were important to them, first at an interpersonal professional level and then at an organisational-health level. We believe that it would be useful to consider something like this when dealing with other focus group data from an IPA perspective, but note that the *levels* of context that are most salient for a given group of participants may well differ. For example, in another study, with another focus, we may find that interpersonal-familial or interpersonal-romantic are more important than interpersonal-professional" (p.109). From my own data, I determined that interpersonal-familial relationships were important to these young people and figures from outside the group, with siblings and other family members, along with carers and peers, often talked about. Further, the young people regularly made reference to the same people indicating a shared history and understanding. However, unlike Palmer's research, organisations were of less significance to these young people, so I omitted this stage of their protocol from my own.

Siblings outside of the group were discussed on seven occasions across the five sessions. It should be noted that there are two sibling groups

within the group – Sharna and Joey, and Georgina and Carly – and therefore they make little reference to siblings outside the group. Brothers and sisters were described in positive terms. For example, when talking about her brother, Jae stated, "I've seen my brother in a foster home and he doesn't act like all them kids on there [meaning badly]". Tommy talked about his sister in positive terms describing how she had to look after him and his siblings. He also talked about his younger brother very positively, describing him as a "canny kid".

Talk of siblings was often contextualised as a talk of absence. Both Jae and Keira described how they only see their brothers during contact and Tommy detailed how his siblings were located in a variety of places. Tommy's sense of dislocation from his siblings was underlined in his desire to probe Georgina for information when she mentioned she "buddied" his little brother at school.

When talking about siblings, most group members displayed a protective attitude. For example, Tommy was vehemently protective of his younger brother, threatening violence against anyone who harmed him. He mistook Georgina's use of "buddy" for "bully" and laughed, "when you said bully him you'd be out the window man." Carly stepped in here, "No she wouldn't cos I don't know if you realised but her sister's also here", further underlining this idea of a protective sibling. The only real instances of negativity towards siblings was when Jae described her brother as a "brat" and seemed to display possible resentment of her siblings for having to care for them when her mother was incapable: "what happened with me was I was looking after three [siblings], not one... Cos at the end of the day I did what I could, and I really shouldn't have had to go through that by myself." Extracts such as these tell me that siblings appear to be the most important relationships within and outside the group, with group

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members generally displaying a sense of loyalty and protectiveness towards brothers and sisters.

Other family members are discussed on six occasions across the five sessions. Parents in particular appeared to be a source of negativity and abuse. Jae stated she was "abused" by her father, Tommy told the group his mother was an "alcoholic", while Carly stated her father was a "drugdealer." The only positive reference to another family member was made by Ewan, who seemed to have a lot of affection for his granddad and was keen to share the fact he was a security guard. It should be noted that when the young people described these experiences, they did so in a very matter of fact manner, with seemingly very little emotion attached to their accounts. Perhaps this was because these young people had been in care for so long, they had become distanced from these experiences. It could also be that these experiences were too difficult to think about and attach emotion too, particularly in the group setting (Lahikainen et al., 2003). Carers were referred to on six occasions across the sessions, generally in the context of discussions around rules and regulations, when the group compared the onscreen rules to those in their own lives.

Peers were referred to and discussed on two occasions across the five sessions, often as examples, when a young person was attempting to make a point. For example, both Tommy and Sharna referred to their friends' self-harming behaviour. Initially, I had anticipated that peer friendships would have had a large impact on the young people, however, a lack of reference to peers perhaps suggests otherwise. There is also a point to be made that group members were so comfortable and familiar with one another, that this was their peer group. The members of the group might well have had more influence over one another than any friends outside the group. If that was the

case, this experience was all the more beneficial, in terms of enhancing their media criticality (Milkie, 1999; Yosso, 2002) and raising their consciousness (Freire, 1970; Rindner, 2004).

6.9 Stage 4. What kinds of stories do participants tell?

At stage 4, I examined the stories the young people told, looking at structure, genre, imagery and tone (Palmer et al., 2010). As Palmer and her colleagues note, "While this step may look like a remove from standard IPA, there is strong affinity between IPA and the various forms of narrative analysis, not least because of a shared interest in meaning making and in how narrative shapes our experience of the world" (2010, p.112). I also asked myself several questions about each narrative including: How do they begin their account? Time, location? What is their mood or frame of mind? What sense does this give? Were there any specific language elements (e.g. repetition)? What does this serve to do? What do they describe? How does the story end? What does the storyteller want from his/her listeners? Does it say anything about the group? What does sharing this story achieve? What does he/she communicate? Here I discuss some of these features in relation to Keira's experience of a care home.

"[There was] No one was downstairs, they were all in their bedrooms. Like, they were so miserable, they were really miserable. No one would come downstairs and say hi, like, one of the carers met you at, one of the people who worked there met you at the door, took you into there, went upstairs, obviously got my brother, and no one else was allowed anywhere around. Like, everyone was just sent to their room straight away if they were, like, when we went in, it was everyone upstairs and everyone had to go to their rooms, and they were in their rooms for obviously, two and half hours that I seen him."

Keira set the scene as a lonely, miserable place, and there seemed to be an atmosphere of fear and foreboding. The place she described sounded more like a prison than somewhere young people live. The

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repetition of "they were so miserable, they were really miserable", emphasises the bleakness of the situation. In some ways, Keira's narrative could be interpreted as a moral tale. If you misbehave, this is where you go. It could also be interpreted as horror, with its isolated, lonely feel, conjuring images of ghosts and darkness. She wanted to shock and disgust. She was also demonstrating her experience, placing herself as a figurehead of the group, someone who the other young people could look up to. She was one of the few group members who had been inside a care home and this made her one of the most experienced. Her tale gathered outrage and disbelief from the group, who struggled to comprehend things could be this awful and claimed they would not accept such poor treatment.

It should be noted that I was very conscious of how I handled the young people's narratives. Narrative research participants often feel that researchers' analyses of their stories fail to capture them fully in their personal uniqueness and individuality, or "feel" like them (Smthye and Murray, 2000). There would be potential for the young people to feel a subtle sense of betrayal, a feeling that I had undermined their authority to speak for themselves about their own experiences, or feel their words have been "stolen" (Apter, 1996, p. 31 in Smthye and Murray, 2000). As my research is concerned with the way in which looked-after young people are portrayed, I was aware I could take these young people's stories and misrepresent them. If this were the case, I would simply be adding to the problem, rather than assisting to challenge problematic depictions.

6.10 Stage 5. How is language used in the development of participants' accounts?

As with standard IPA, I also monitored the language used by the young people throughout the preceding stages, with a focus on the use of

metaphor, idiom, direct speech, hyperbole and so forth. I asked whether these identified in individuals or the whole group. I then looked at the function of the language used, asking questions such as how/why was certain language being used? For example, were the young people emphasising or backing up a point? Were they trying to shock, to provoke disagreement, agreement, to amuse or lighten the tone? (Palmer et al., 2010). This assisted me to contextualise and understand the key semantic choices made by the young people. This approach was also promoted by Freire (1970) who states, "[The investigators] register everything in their notebooks, including apparently unimportant items: the way the people talk, their style of life, their behavior at church and at work. They record the idiom of the people: their expressions, their vocabulary, and their syntax" (p.111).

Idiom

Idioms were the most frequently used figures of speech throughout. The use of idiom ranged from lightening the tone to illustrating a young person's mood, such as when Sharna stated, she felt "put on the spot", showing the group she felt uncomfortable and embarrassed and wanted to move on. Idioms were often used to highlight how experienced group members were in relation to the objects of their discussion. For example, the idiom, "at the end of the day" which means "when everything else has been taken into consideration", was used multiple times by various group members. For example, Tommy stated, when talking about people who have never been in care, "They won't actually, understand it as much as we would because like we've we've been there done it all and everything..." Again, the idiom "been there done it all" emphasises experience, and gives a sense of wisdom. He saw the group as having specific insight that other viewers would not, and therefore, a better understanding.

Idioms were also used to highlight and emphasise the lives some of these young people have had. Joey stated, "They've got they've got no idea what we go through," when talking about the filmmakers of *Short Term 12*. The idiom "what we go through" means "to experience something especially negative". This is emotive language, revealing that his experiences have been difficult. Tommy used language similarly, stating, "Care doesn't really bother me neither cos I've been in for if I've been in and out for six and a half seven years of my life now..." The idiom "in and out" means "alternating between locations". This gives a sense of never really being somewhere or another, highlighting perhaps his feelings of insecurity. Idioms were also employed to show the effects of abuse in stark, graphic terms. For example, Tommy stated, if someone sees "something really bad it could like scar them for life." The idiom "scar for life" means to "leave a permanent mark". This is vivid imagery, emphasising his feelings about the lasting effects of abuse.

Direct speech

During each session, the young people engaged in interactional work to help each understand their perspectives on a variety of topics and experiences. One way in which they did this, was the use of "dramatisation", which increased the social closeness between the young people in order to maintain involvement (Baynham, 1996 in James et al., 2015). Highlighting moments of direct speech was one of the ways I identified moments where the young people were using dramatisation in their discussion. By using direct speech as a device to re-enact a scene, the young people were taking the group on a journey to a moments of real significance to them (James et al., 2015). For example, when Sharna talked about being singled out for being looked-after, she stated, "And you go out of lessons like five or five times a day and then they go, "why have you done this, why you done

that?" it's like, "Well it's none of your business is it really". She quoted the questions that are asked of her, highlighting how often she has heard them and how tired she is of hearing them. Perhaps the saddest and difficult use of direct speech is when Sharna recounted an experience of abuse: "my mam got abused by my brother's dad and I was apparently I was five-years-old and apparently I went "mammy's getting hurt"." Here direct speech places us with her as an infant. Her language is childlike and given what is potentially invested in this highly personal re-enactment, we can gain a deep insight into her sadness and fear (James et al., 2015).

Metaphor

Metaphors convey an idea in a gentle and indirect medium which can bypass the defences affording the listener some protection when processing painful events (Long, 2013). Metaphor "presents us with the familiar, but from an unfamiliar standpoint… through imagery. By telling a story instead of explaining a concept we can reach a deeper truth… a deeper meaning than that which words can express directly" (Morden, 2003, p.6-7 in Long, 2013). Metaphors were often used to describe the characters, behaviour or lifestyle of the looked-after young people depicted onscreen. For example, Jae referred to Tracy Beaker as a "little rat", a negative term which conjures images of vermin and disease, a tell-tale and a liar. When talking about Drew and Jade's home, Keira described it as "Scabby", conjuring an image of an old wound, which perhaps relates to the characters' emotional states too. It seems the young people used metaphor to add weight and imagery to their ideas, often highlighting how negatively their perceived these characters and their lifestyles to be depicted.

6.11 Stage 6: Voice and agency

At this stage, I deviated from Palmer et al.'s protocol and examined the

transcripts in terms of the agency and voice demonstrated by the young people, as this was a key concern for me. Here I monitored the transcripts for instances where the young people used the interaction to power their voice and subjectivity and conversely, where the young people demonstrated oppression. I searched for key words and phrases that suggested diminished agency and sites where mutual relationships were established, and positions of certainty, opinion and belief were adopted (Evans, 2013). I asked the data a variety of questions such as how did the young people, and myself, support or prevent each other exercising voice, and whether the sessions were providing a space for the development of those voices. To analyse, I drew all the notable instances of voice or agency from the group sessions into a separate document, where I examined them in terms of patterns, both for the individual and across the group. Rather than group examples according to type, I kept them within the context of the group session, as to not lose the development (or lack of development) of voice and agency across the whole interaction.

I also searched each transcript systematically for a variety of words and phrases, such as "try" or "tried" which can be used to diminish agency or initiative, suggesting helplessness. Obligation, impossibility, chance or opportunity can be implied by verbs such as "I can't", "got to" and have to" (Evans, 2013). I also searched for intensifiers such as "really" and deintensifiers or hedging such as "like", "just", "kind of" and "sort of". This active negotiation of meaning through an overuse of words could indicate difficulty and pain, and establish sites where positions of certainty, opinion and belief were adopted (Evans, 2013). Further, I searched the transcripts for instances that indicated the young people as either agentive or helpless. As Capps and Ochs (1995) point out, "when an individual represents herself as "an experiencer" she uses her tacit knowledge of language to

"modulate her prominence as a referent" in her speech. This colours her role in the narrative, empowering and positioning her voice as prominent. Here... use of the first person, and use of personal pronouns (we, us) openly as well as possessives (my, your) fix the discourse on the narrator, the co-researcher and focus the narrative and the interaction" (p.69 in Evans, 2013).

During the first and second sessions, there were limited instances of voice or agency being exercised. This could have been in large part to the fact the sessions were our first together and relatively short. The clearest example of a young person exercising her voice was Keira discussing her experience of visiting a care home. Here, and throughout the session, she placed herself as an experiencer and her voice as prominent. Later in the session, when I talked about residential homes, she corrected me, stating, "Well foster home is the name of the home." In this interaction, she placed herself in the position of expert, with me as novice, correcting my terminology.

During the third session (our second together in physical terms), the group seemed to demonstrate their voice much more openly. Keira's voice felt incredibly activated as she made connections between what we were discussing and other material, "Ahh Wolfblood Rhydian's in care..." She seemed excited as she made this link, realising there were more young people onscreen who are in care. It could be that this for Keira, this is the positive depiction, a depiction whereby it is not obvious that the young person is even in care at all. Sharna also developed her own voice throughout this session. Not only did she formulate her ideas and opinions in response to the images depicted, she went against the group consensus, claiming these negative images were not representative of all looked-after young people. As a group member who contributed little during the previous sessions, this

marked something of a move to prominence for Sharna, who established herself as someone who was able to challenge.

During the fourth session, it should be noted that Tommy drew a picture throughout and wrote his little brother's name, "Nathan". It would seem the session opened up a space for him to think about his experiences, and his sibling was very much on his mind. I acknowledged this during the session, pointing out his drawing was "very good", realising the process at play. In this way, it would seem the session was having some therapeutic benefit to Tommy, providing him with a space to reflect.

During the fifth session, showing the group *Short Term 12* felt like a clear exercising of my own voice. The film is very close to my heart, having had an ex-partner who suffered abuse much in the same way as Grace, the film's central character had. It is the overcoming of this abuse, that resonates deeply with me. So when Joey challenged the film, "they've got no idea what we go through", I took this personally. It has to be stated that this was a strong moment from Joey. He spoke confidently, on behalf of the group. I responded by stating, "for me I think that out of all the things we've watched this this is the thing that I, well I like the best..." In this way I fixed the discourse on myself. This was the first session where I shared my own thoughts and opened up to the group. While I did not want to influence their thinking, I was confident they were able to hold differing opinions to myself, as illustrated by Joey's challenge. This also highlighted one of the clearest examples of how the young peoples' voices had developed throughout these sessions. Initially Joey presented as someone who did not want to be taken seriously, often "acting up". Slowly, however, he began to state his thoughts and opinions. It was challenging for him to articulate his words, indicated by stuttering, pauses and his overuse

of hedging. However, during this session, he was able not only to state his opinion, but to disagree with and challenge me, the facilitator of the group.

As well as seeing clear evidence in terms of Joey's voice, there was also evidence to suggest the sessions opened up a space for him to think and reflect further. He stated, "Do do you know in like different countries like you can only have like one child right? … so like if if say that if they have more than one girl or a boy erm they just like leave the children on the streets..." While it might initially appear Joey's offer was tangential, on deeper inspection, it seemed he was using the film as a springboard to think about "care" in other countries. He reflected on his own life in care and contemplated other people's experiences, for example, young people in China.

It seems that the authenticity I displayed (Awan, 2007), selecting something deeply personal to myself, opened up a real space for the group and the session appeared to be a turning point in terms of the group's openness. Jae disclosed that she was sexually abused by her father during this session and both Tommy and Carly reciprocated this openness, with Carly telling the group, "My dad was a drugdealer" and Tommy stating, "My mam was an alcoholic so I came into foster care." He also told the group, "Apparently when I was younger I got, physically (abused)". He went on to state, "I never actually thought of that (before)", underlining that the sessions were giving him a space to reflect on his experiences. The group demonstrated their voice here in the strongest possible terms, by talking freely and openly. However, for the first time throughout the process, I wondered whether the group format was the most appropriate space for these young people. It seemed that, while not explicitly stating the fact, their collective voice wanted a private space. It was this which prompted the move to semi-

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structured interviews.

6.12 Stage 7. The individual's journey

At this stage, drawing on the work of Tomkins and Eatough (2010), I marked everything an individual participant has said in a single colour as well as all the thoughts and interpretative activity inspired by these contributions. The coloured passages were then re-read as a whole text to get a sense of the overall account from that particular young person, temporarily focusing on the individual rather than the group (Tomkins and Eatough, 2010). I then made extensive descriptive and interpretive notes relating to each individual's contributions, covering their thoughts and opinions on the themes at hand.   Accounts were built up across the sessions, providing a real sense of each of the young people involved. So then, if we return to the discussion from stages 1 and 2, where the group discuss the character of Tracy Beaker and look at this interaction from an individual point of view, new insights emerge from the data.

Jae

Initially, Jae stated she hated Tracy Beaker. She affirmed this later on, stating, "I've seen it once and I absolutely hate it", "I absolutely hate it" and "I don't know how yous can watch that." Clearly then, it would seem that her attitude towards the show and the character of Tracy Beaker is one of complete negativity. She went on to describe Tracy Beaker as "a little rat", "She's something I'm not even gonna say". Her stance was consistent, impassioned and filled with negativity.

She went on to claim she did not believe the show was realistic: "I've seen my brother in a foster home and he doesn't act like all them kids on there... like, all the other kids act like that, but he doesn't, he's not like... really horrible towards people... Some of the kids I've seen in

my brother's foster home were mean to him once, the one time I've seen them all." Perhaps then, this was the reason she had such disdain for Tracy beaker. It conjured images of care homes that were far removed from her own lived experiences, experiences where her brother, clearly someone she cared for, was placed away from her, where he himself experienced difficulty. Dirikx et al. (2011) found adolescents "stated that being confronted with the positive images of police officers in a continuous way, while hearing about and experiencing negative encounters with the police in real-life, made them feel frustrated with (the images of) the police" (p.128). It would appear then perhaps, much like the young people in Dirikx et al.'s study, Jae's first-hand experience of care homes disrupted the messages presented by *Tracy Beaker*.

Keira

Keira began with a violent and vivid reaction to the character of Tracy Beaker, stating she would "smack her in the head, smack it off the floor". She stated that with regard to the show, "I've seen it a million times, I see it everyday." It was questionable whether she is exaggerating to make the point she had seen the show multiple times, or whether "I see it everyday", referred to others in her life who reminded her of Tracy Beaker, or further, whether she often saw poor depictions of looked-after characters. She reiterated this violent reaction to the character, "I would've smacked her head off a door." In this way, she was perhaps playing a role – the bad girl you do not mess with. In her interview, Keira talked about her experiences of living in a care home, with other girls who were cruel and violent. It could be that these images reminded of her of her own experiences, and the way she may have acted to protect herself in this environment.

She later described Tracy Beaker as a "little snob", going on to say

"She's a B-I-T-C-H", spelling the word out to emphasise her point. Her responses were aggressive and defensive, as though the very thought of Tracy Beaker incited violence in her. Later on, when Carly stated Tracy Beaker was "obviously trouble", Keira stepped in to defend the character, claiming, "There's a lot of reasons why though." This was the first time she showed any empathy towards Tracy Beaker and perhaps there was something in the character she identified with after all (Cohen, 2001). Perhaps people perceive Keira to be "obviously trouble" too.

Keira stated that the only been time she has been to a residential unit was when she visited her brother. However, in her interview, she told me she lived in a care home for a short period, giving a detailed account of her experiences. It could be that the group situation inhibited her ability to be honest (Lahikainen et al., 2003). Perhaps she was embarrassed or ashamed, believing the group would no longer see her as "one of them". Or perhaps she simply did not feel the need to share this experience.

She concluded by stating she did not believe some of the young people in *Tracy Beaker* would actually be in care homes. In particular, Louise, because "she's canny." Clearly then, she believed anyone who was "canny" or good, should not be in a care home, and this may well be the reason why she did not talk about living in a care home. She did not want the group to think she was not "canny" either.

Georgina

Georgina's first real contribution to the discussion was stating Tracy Beaker, or perhaps Tracy's situation "reminded" her "of Carly", another member of the group and Georgina's older sister. Initially, Carly assumed this to be an insult, as did I. However, when others

called Tracy names, Georgina stood out amongst them, stating Tracy Beaker was a "role model". In this way, it could be that she saw Carly as a role model too. She went on to state that Tracy Beaker was "what I wanna be when I'm older", which could imply she also wanted to be like her sister. It could be then, for Georgina at least, onscreen characters are less important, as she is able to access role models (i.e. her sister) within her own personal network (Awan, 2007).

Carly

When Georgina and Joey compared Carly to Tracy Beaker, she took this as an insult, stating, "She lies, I don't lie, I just tell people the truth." Here she clearly identified a trait in Tracy, she "lies", and made a clear distinction between the character and herself. It was unclear whether Carly simply meant she was honest, or whether she saw herself as someone who is direct, who tells people what is on her mind. She reiterated her displeasure at being compared to Tracy Beaker later when Joey attempted to apologise for the comparison. Clearly then to Carly, being compared to this fictional character was a not a good thing. However, while both younger group members (Joey and Georgina) compared her to Tracy Beaker, they were positive about the character and the show, so while Carly perceived this as an insult, as she did not like the character, Georgina and Joey did not intend it this way. Again, when the group were asked about their thoughts on Tracy, she repeated that Tracy was a "liar". She did however counter this negative remark by stating "She is funny though." In this way, perhaps she was realising she was being compared favourably and was acknowledging there was a characteristic in Tracy's personality she liked or identified with – her humour (Cohen, 2001).

6.13 Stage 8. Conflict and consensus

At this stage, I returned to the overall group transcript. Using the

knowledge obtained from the previous stages, I was able to gain a much fuller and richer understanding of the session by "returning the individual to the group". At this stage, my focus was on the overall group, looking at the interactions and dynamics at play. I reviewed one session at a time, looking at the experiences being shared, what the young people were doing by sharing these experiences, and how they were making those things meaningful to one another. I also looked for consensus and conflict, how this conflict played out, and if any of the young people's account were being marginalised (Palmer et al., 2010).

To illustrate, referring back to the group's discussion of Tracy Beaker, there was an apparent split and divide among the female group members, something that was not immediately apparent, nor would perhaps be, if I was simply looking at the data on a surface level. Jae and Keira underlined their disdain for Tracy Beaker, with Jae backing up and building on Keira's claim she was a "little snob", by stating, Tracy is a "little rat". They both had experiences of care homes that other members of the group did not and were perhaps bonded by these experiences. Carly attempted to support them, however, having been compared to Tracy Beaker previously and perhaps identifying with her in some way too, she negated her original statement, by highlighting something funny about Tracy Beaker, "[She is] A liar. She is funny though." Georgina supported her sister by stating Tracy Beaker is a "role model", having already drawn the comparison between the two. So it seemed then, there was a divide between the two sets of girls. Keira then stated Tracy Beaker was a "B-I-T-C-H". In this way, it could be interpreted as she was calling Carly a bitch. Daniel, perhaps sensing conflict, stepped in and made his offer, "She's a stereotype", a character the group were able to apply various labels to.

Joey went on to say he liked Tracy Beaker and Daniel agreed, "Yeah,

she speaks the truth." This time Joey attempted to alleviate the perceived tension. Georgina affirmed her admiration for Tracy Beaker (and her sister), "That's what I wanna be when I'm older." At this point, overall, the majority of the group seemed to favour Tracy Beaker and were able to see her positive qualities, as well as identifying with her on numerous levels. However, Daniel shifted his opinion, perhaps unsure whether he wanted to align himself with Carly, Georgina and Joey, "What, a scrubby little... thing?" Daniel was yet to make his mind up where he stood and who he sided with. Keira challenged him: "I doubt she would actually jump on Louise" and was immediately challenged by Carly, "Yeah she would". Perhaps Carly stated no initially in an attempt to align herself with the other girls, but seeing the support for Tracy's character (and identifying with her), argued her true feelings. Joey once again agreed with Georgina, that the show was realistic, and the two younger members were firmly in the Tracy Beaker as positive camp.

Jae offered first-hand experience of care homes, underlining her expertise on the situation: "Because I've seen my brother in a foster home and he doesn't act like all them kids on there." This went some way to explain the ferocity of her feelings. She opened up to clarify her thoughts, positioning herself as someone who had insight. Perhaps she wanted people to side with her and this was why she was giving something of herself, as it was hard for the others to counter this kind of experience. She went on, "like, all the other kids act like that, but he doesn't, he's not like... really horrible towards people."

This seemed to gain some consensus as Carly bought into Jae's story, demonstrating some understanding, "We're not horrible". In this instance, it seemed she was referring to the group. Perhaps she felt bad for having a conflicting viewpoint to Jae and this was, in some

way, an apology. Jae went on, underlining her point and experience, "Some of the kids I've seen in my brother's foster home were mean to him once, the one time I've seen them all." In this way she was showing the group that not only are they (the group) not horrible, but neither is her brother, as he is one of them (the group).

Finally, Daniel appeared to make a decision. He believed Tracy Beaker was realistic and he offered some explanation of her behaviour: "I think it's realistic. Because, well if Tracy, the character's been in care that many times, and she's been dumped in the same place obviously she's gonna be--" Sharna attempted to offer something for the first time, but she was immediately shut down by the others and her opinion on the subject remained unclear. And when Sharna interrupted, Daniel defended himself and his right to speak, "Hang on hang on... I should respect you when you talk," implying she should respect him when he talks.

Daniel continued to share his story, offering an alternate to Jae. "Aye but obviously like, if you're gonna be like dumped in the same care home for like, most of your life and get fostered like, for up to three months and then dumped back in the same place, you're obviously gonna be like angry and messed up in the head a bit, and like hate people around you because you won't be able to trust people around you. So, that's, and as Keira said, there's other reasons why. So, you can just like, give it one reason and go through it." Daniel went on to highlight Keira in his discussion, perhaps hoping for her approval or perhaps wanting to shift the focus from himself. Although he did not acknowledge that he shares Tracy Beaker's experiences, he went some way to explaining them, showing empathy, and it would appear reasonable to think that Daniel had experienced these feelings too. He felt ambivalent towards her, which would suggest for Daniel at least,

Tracy Beaker captured something of a real character. Good, bad, varying shades in between, and he saw some of himself within her too (Cohen, 2001).

Finally, Keira made her own plea, explaining her strong feelings on Tracy Beaker. She too had spent time in a care home, visiting her brother, "I haven't been in there, but I've been in to see my brother". It transpired that Keira had also lived in a care home herself, revealed later at interview stage, but she did not reveal that here. However, her negative experiences there might also go some way to explain her feelings on Tracy Beaker and the bleak, miserable picture she painted when talking about care homes. Jae highlighted her similarity with Keira, "same with me", and it was clear there was a bond between the two. Perhaps Jae was aware of Keira's true experiences and Jae had experiences she had not shared here that Keira was aware of too.

When Keira detailed a vivid account of a care home, she positioned herself as a leader and ended the argument. She did not win the younger members of the group to her way of thinking, but there was no more conflict. Perhaps she hinted at her true experiences of which some group members might be aware. Carly, finally, seems to have aligned herself with Jae and Keira, claiming she did not believe the children in Tracy Beaker's care home were authentic, perhaps considering the issue deeper following Jae and Keira's first-hand accounts, stating the characters felt "random" and "plonked in".

Finally, Keira agreed with Carly, the two now on the same side, faction leaders in agreement. The young people with first-hand experience of care homes devalued these images (Milkie, 1999). As the session drew to a close, it appeared while some group members found positives in the character of Tracy Beaker, the overall consensus seemed to be that

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the show was inauthentic and unrepresentative of a reality experienced by these young people.

Clearly there are additional interactional aspects to focus group data, with powerful and complex systems at play, which require analytic strategies that compliment a "standard" IPA approach. But rather than group members simply stating their feelings on a given subject, there is something even more complex occurring here, seemingly based upon common experiences and pre-existing relationships within the group. As I worked with the data, moving through this stage of questioning, I began to develop an understanding of how the group worked together and of how particular young people enabled or constrained each other in offering perspectives on their experiences (Palmer et al., 2010). For further discussions on the consensus and conflict that occurred during each group session, see Appendix 8.

6.14 Stage 9: Linking themes and identifying thematic clusters

At this stage, I adapted the emergent experiential themes (from stage 2) in light of the work done in subsequent steps. At this stage, I continued with the stages suggested in various practical IPA guidance (Smith, 2011), categorising the themes that had emerged across all the group sessions. I highlighted commonalities and differences between group sessions, revisiting the transcripts to check themes in relation to the original claims made to ensure accuracy. I also considered the analysis in the wider context of existing relevant theories, models and explanations (Palmer et al., 2010). I considered the emerging themes in relation to each other, highlighting connections between them. This enabled me to amalgamate some themes and discard others. The following list is constructed chronologically, taking the themes based on the sequence with which they appeared in the transcript from session 1:

Session 1:

Attitudes towards fictional characters

Awareness of content

Awareness of depictions

Awareness of process

Interactions

Awareness of my role

Connecting systems

Playing the role

Different to fictional characters

Attitudes towards programme

Differing opinions

Influence of group on individual

Identification with characters

Realistic depictions of care?

Conflicting opinions

Individual voice within group

Younger vs older attitudes

Lived experiences of care

Sibling relationships

We're not horrible

What are care homes really like?

Interactions around my role

Asserting voice

Naughty boys and girls

Influence of group on individual (changing opinions)

How is conflict handled within the group?

Voice

Metaphor – story

Impact of group on the individual: inhibiting openness

Lack of authenticity

The next stage involved more analytical ordering, as I attempted to make sense of the connections between the themes that were emerging (Smith and Osborn, 2007). Some themes clustered together, while some emerged as broader concepts. As the clustering of themes emerged, I checked the transcript to make sure the connections worked for the primary source material – the actual words of the young people. The process was iterative and involved a close interaction between myself and the transcripts. I returned to each individual group member to assess the relevance of each theme from their perspective (Tomkins and Eatough, 2010). I was able to assess which aspects of the themes were emphasised in each young person's account and which did not fully represent each individual. As a result, I identified themes that were representative of the whole group, or relevant to particular young people (Charles 2012). Having moved through the previous stages as outlined, I felt I was able to draw on my interpretative resources with confidence and make sense of what the young people were saying. At the same time, I was constantly checking my own sense-making against what the young people actually said.

I produced a table of the themes and gave each cluster a name, which represented the superordinate themes (Willig, 2013), a construct that usually appeared in all the young people's accounts (Charles, 2012). During this process, certain themes were dropped, because they neither fitted well in the emerging structure nor offered particularly rich evidence within the transcript (Smith and Osborn, 2007). The final table of themes for session 1 are used as an example:

Depictions of looked-after characters:

Awareness of content

Awareness of depictions

Identification with characters

Naughty boys and girls

Looked-after young people in reality

Playing the role

Different to fictional characters

We're not horrible

Sibling relationships

Metaphor – story

Depictions of care

Attitudes towards programme

Lack of authenticity

Realistic depictions of care?

Care in reality

What are care homes really like?

Lived experiences of care

Connecting systems

Interactions

Impact of group on the individual: inhibiting openness

Interactions

Differing opinions

Influence of group on individual

Influence of group on individual (changing opinions)

Conflicting opinions

Younger vs older attitudes

How is conflict handled within the group?

Voice

Voice

Asserting voice

Individual voice within group

Research process

Awareness of my role

Awareness of process

Interactions around my role

Some academics suggest that a smaller number of themes are preferable in order to represent a more thorough and synthesised analysis (Hefferon and Gil-Roderiguez 2011 in Charles 2012). In my case, I had already written extensively about voice (stage 6) and the interactional nature of the group (stage 8), so I felt these elements did not need to be represented in the superordinate themes. I did find it difficult to disregard aspects of the young people's accounts, and reducing the number of themes proved challenging. In order to do this, themes that were relevant for the group as a whole became more significant (Tomkins and Eatough 2010).

6.15 Stage 10. Continuing the analysis with other group sessions

As more than one group session had taken place, I integrated insights from across the sessions to develop an overall picture of the topic, a process that is similar to bringing together several interview analyses within a data set in standard IPA (Palmer et al., 2010). With each transcript, I started from scratch as though it was the first, though I was obviously aware of the themes that had emerged previously. I looked for repeating patterns, but also acknowledged new issues that were emerging as I worked through the other transcripts, aiming to respect

the ways in which accounts from each group were similar, but also different (Smith and Osborn, 2007). Once I had analysed each transcript using this interpretative process, I constructed a table of superordinate themes (Smith et al., 2010).

Superordinate themes

* Depictions of looked-after characters

* Depictions of care

* The reality of care

* Impact of depictions

The only theme to emerge subsequent to the analysis of the initial session was the "Impact of depictions", which became a much more salient topic during later sessions.

6.16 Reflections on the process: Layers of analysis

The benefits of developing my own IPA protocol, drawing on the work of Palmer and her colleagues (2010), cannot be overstated. Looking at the data systematically, each time through a different lens, drew out a depth and richness I did not imagine possible. Each stage in the process developed and deepened my understanding of the data, and more importantly, these young people. One of the clearest examples of this was when Tommy was talking about a friend of his being horrifically abused, which prompted Carly into making a personal disclosure, "I've had an axe at my head." Following this, Georgina asked Tommy, "Remember Nathan your little brother?" This immediately sparked Tommy's interest and diverted him away from his discussion around his friend's abuse.

Initially, I felt Georgina was simply trying to lighten the discussion, a

tactic employed by the young people on various occasions. However, each time I passed through this site in the transcript, my understanding developed and my interpretation deepened. When looking at the situation from an individual point of view, I realised Georgina was perhaps changing the topic to protect the identity of the young person Tommy was referring to, a young person she may have had some knowledge of. However, when I looked at the transcript through an interactional lens, I realised Georgina was perhaps trying to protect her sister from disclosing something personal, Carly having previously revealed a reluctance to discuss her "personal life".

In each instance my perspective changed and my understanding of the individuals' and the group deepened. Initially, I felt Georgina was trying to protect the group from Tommy's dark subject matter and stop group members bringing to mind their own difficult experiences. I then felt Georgina was protecting an unknown young person. Finally, I felt Georgina was protecting her sister, an idea in keeping with the general theme that emerged within the group, in terms of sibling loyalty. Of course, any of these interpretations would be valid. However, without using this analytical protocol, I would have stopped digging at the first interpretation and I would have missed the depth and richness that was there. As Freire (1970) notes, "It would be a pity if the themes, after being investigated in the richness of interpenetration with other aspects of reality, were subsequently be handled in such a way as to sacrifice their richness (and their force) to the strictures of specialities" (p.120). The semi-structured interview phase of the research will be discussed in the next chapter, before I turn my attention to the superordinate themes generated and a discussion of those themes.

Chapter 7

Semi-structured interviews and analysis

7.1 Semi-structured interviews as the exemplary method for IPA

As stated in previous chapters, interviews offered a private space for group members to talk on a one-to-one basis, enabling them to discuss more personal and sensitive aspects of their lives and experiences (Hartley, 2011). A structured interview would have involved sticking closely to an interview schedule and behaving with little variation between sessions (Smith and Osborn, 2007). I was aware that IPA studies often collect data using semi-structured interviews (Dunne and Quale, 2001), as "This suits the approach's idiographic commitments, allowing for rapport to be developed, and for one person's understandings to be explored in considerable detail" (Palmer et al., 2010, p.100). The ordering of questions was not important to me and semi-structured interviews would allow me to be responsive to the young people, modifying my questions in light of their answers, probing important and interesting areas that arose, and allowing the interview to follow their interests or concerns (Smith, 2009). The young people would be the experiential experts, introducing issues I may not have thought of. As my research was concerned with giving "voice" to the young people, semi-structured interviews would provide them with a space in which they could voice their opinions on their own terms (Armitage, 2012).

7.2 Deciding a sample

The detailed case-by-case analysis of individual transcripts is time consuming, and the aim of my study was to say something in detail about the perceptions and understandings of this particular group of young people, rather than making more general claims. Five or six participants has been recommended as a reasonable sample size when

using IPA (Smith and Osborn, 2007). This allows sufficient in-depth engagement with each case, but also a detailed examination of similarity and difference (Smith et al., 2010). A danger for myself, as a newcomer to IPA, would be that if my sample size was too large, I may have become overwhelmed by the vast amount of data generated, leaving me unable to produce an in-depth analysis (Smith and Osborn, 2007).

IPA researchers generally look for a homogeneous sample (Palmer et al. 2010). The logic being that if I was interviewing six young people, it would not make sense to think in terms of random sampling (Smith and Osborn, 2007). My sample was drawn from members of the CiCC, with similar demographic and socio-economic profiles, which was ideal in terms of IPA. There may also be a need or pragmatism when selecting a sample. For example, I could only interview the young people who were prepared to be interviewed (McLeod, 2007).

7.3 Constructing the interview schedule

An interview schedule allowed me to consider what I hoped the interview might cover, any difficulties I might encounter and how these difficulties might be handled. Considering the ways in which the interview may have played out gave me the confidence to concentrate thoroughly on what the young people were actually saying during the interviews (Smith and Osborn, 2007). I considered the issues I wanted the interview to cover such as the impact of these looked-after depictions, and placed topics in the most appropriate sequence, leaving more sensitive questions until later in the interview. This would allow the young people to become relaxed and comfortable speaking with me, before such areas were approached (Smith, 2009).

7.4 Constructing questions

Initially, when constructing my schedule, the first draft questions were perhaps too explicit. With feedback from my supervisor and subsequent redrafting, my questions became less value-laden and leading, but still enabled the young people to understand the area of interest and the fact they had something to say about it (Smith and Osborn, 2007). In line with Smith's guidance (2007; 2009; 2011), I avoided jargon and used clear, simple language. This had been an issue that had arisen in the group sessions, with a young person confused over the use of the word "stereotypical", for example. I also constructed open rather than closed questions, which would allow the young people to open up about their thoughts and feelings (Smith and Osborn, 2007). It was possible that opinions expressed in the group sessions might be different in a one-to-one situation, without the influence and interactions of peers (Hartley, 2011). My questions were as follows:

- What did you think of the group sessions?

- Before you came into care, did you have any ideas what care might be like?

- Where do you think you got these ideas?

- Thinking about the examples you've seen, how do you think looked-after young people are shown on TV and in films?

- Can you think of any examples you've seen that feel like they show your own life?

- Did this help in any way?

- Do you think the way looked-after young people are shown on TV and in films affects the way people treat you?

- How does this make you feel?

- What would you tell someone who didn't know about being in care, what it's like to be looked-after?

- If you could make your own TV show or film about looked-after young people, what would be important to you?
- If you could tell your own story, what would you want people to know?

Although several years of social work practice meant I have worked with young people on a one-to-one basis, in a variety of situations, formal research interviewing was a new activity for me. In preparation for these sessions, I undertook a practice interview with my partner, which enabled me to assess and reflect on my approach, and begin to learn the questions by heart, allowing the interviews to be more informal and relaxed. The schedule became a mental prompt, when I needed it, rather than something I constantly had to refer to (Smith et al., 2010; Smith, 2009).

7.5 Undertaking the interviews

All of the young people who participated in the group sessions were invited to have individual interviews. Although a sample of five to six participants would have been ideal, I was more than happy for any of the young people from the group to be involved in the interview process if they wished. Daniel and Rob's attendance at the CiCC had dropped off, and therefore, I could not offer them the opportunity to be interviewed. Despite my best efforts to encourage them, both Carly and Sharna stated they had no interest in being interviewed, as they did not like working on a one-to-one basis, further emphasising the benefit of a group approach for these young women. Ewan, while stating he wanted to be interviewed, did not turn up to the interview appointments I provided him, signalling his reluctance to be involved in the most concrete way (McLeod, 2007).

Four young people participated in the semi-structured interview-phase

of my study – Keira (15), Jae (15), Tommy (15) and Joey (14). Initially Georgina claimed to be happy to talk with me, however, during her interview, she answered questions with monosyllables and volunteered little in response to prompts. The use of open questioning did not elicit much from her and as a result, I found myself using closed and leading questions (McLeod, 2007). It became clear she did not want to take part in the interview, and had been coerced into attending, which was of great concern to me.

My diary entry in relation to that interview is as follows: "Georgina was very quiet as we made our way over to the interview room and not her usual chirpy self. The answers she offered to my questions were limited and almost monosyllabic, with her stating "I don't know" to the majority of my questions. As the interview progressed, it became very clear to me that Georgina was uncomfortable. I explained that she didn't have to do the interview and she told me didn't want to. She said my co-facilitator had made her do it, explaining that she doesn't mind group sessions, but is uncomfortable working on a one-to-one basis. I terminated the interview at this point and returned Georgina to the group. I spoke with my co-facilitator, who explained that sometimes the young people need a push when it comes to getting involved, and felt Georgina would be fine when it came to the interview. I explained that it was fine if the young people didn't want to be interviewed and I didn't want them to feel uncomfortable or forced into the process." In this instance, I picked up on Georgina's verbal and non-verbal cues, realising her discomfort (Dockett et al., 2009), and Georgina was able to be open and honest about her feelings. Following on from this, I made sure every other young person was comfortable being interviewed before I continued, reiterating there was no obligation or pressure on them to take part. It is worth noting that Jae was the first young person interviewed, and volunteered with excitement and

enthusiasm, illustrating that the move to interviews was a positive choice for her.

The interviews ranged from thirty minutes to an hour and there were times when they were intense and involved. With this in mind, I made sure the interviews could proceed without interruption as far as was possible, and conducted the sessions with each young person alone. As with the group sessions, four of the interviews took place at a children's centre where the group usually met. One interview took place at local authority offices, an alternative location where the CiCC also met, and both were places the group were all familiar with and comfortable in (Hennessy and Heary, 2005; Carter and Ford, 2013). I conducted interviews running alongside the CiCC sessions, causing minimum disruption for the young people involved.

I obtained further ethical approval from Northumbria University's Ethics Committee, following my decision to move to interviews, as the interview method was not part of my initial application, and further consent was obtained prior to the sessions. All interviews were recorded using the audio recorder app on my iPhone. I asked the young people prior to each interview whether they minded being recorded and they did not, seemingly used to it, having been recorded in the group sessions. I had considered simply taking notes during the interview, but I was concerned I would only capture the gist of what the young people were saying, missing important nuances. I also felt it would it would interfere with helping the interview run smoothly and establishing rapport (Smith and Osborn, 2007).

Prior to each interview, I asked the young people if they would like to use a pseudonym, explaining what the term meant, and most of the young people took great excitement in choosing their own names

(Pinter and Zandian, 2015). I began the interviews by providing each young person with an information sheet (see Appendix 5), which was slightly modified from the document I shared at the initial group session. I was aware some of the young people might have reading difficulties, and so to avoid any anxiety, I read aloud to the young people. I also provided each young person with a list of questions, which assisted them to prepare for what they might be asked. Some of the young people (Tommy in particular) referred to this list throughout their interviews, either pre-empting an upcoming question, or pointing out I had not covered a question (Armitage, 2012). I believe this partly confirmed the young people felt in control of the discussion, ensuring they knew I would not ask any questions they did not understand or if there were signs that they did not understand, I would rephrase my question (Heath, et al., 2009).

Although the interviews were based on my schedule, the young people were encouraged to lead discussions. Therefore, there were times when questions were not asked, or asked in different ways, often following on from the young person's cues and my perception of how they were responding. There were many occasions where the interview moved away from the questions on the schedule, and it was these tangents that I had not accounted for or predicted, that proved most valuable, because they came unprompted from the young people and, therefore, were likely to be of particular significance to them (Smith and Osborn, 2007; Hartley, 2011). As Pinter and Zandian note, "it is good practice for researchers to permit children to deviate from the pre-set questions" and to "listen to their unsolicited comments with as much attention, if not more, than those that... [are] elicited" (2015, p.240).

Throughout the interview sessions, I was mindful of how the young

people were experiencing the process (Dockett et al., 2009; Heath, et al., 2009). I ensured I did not rush in and gave each young person time to finish a question before moving on. I was aware that the most interesting questions needed time to respond to, and richer, fuller answers may be missed if I jumped in too quickly (Smith and Osborn, 2007). I used minimal probes, asked one question at a time and monitored the effect of the interview on the young person, paying attention to their non-verbal behaviour or how they replied. When I felt the young person was uncomfortable, I would back off and try again more gently, or as already highlighted, end the interview altogether. Sometimes I would decide it was inappropriate to pursue an area further with a particular young person, and the process was very much iterative rather than linear. Sometimes the young people were less forthcoming about their opinions at first, but usually by the end of the interview, they spoke freely and were generally relaxed, and able to talk about sensitive subjects. I closed each interview by providing a positive reflection on the young person's contribution to the research, confirming they were valued individuals whose opinions and experiences mattered. In this way, I hoped they took something positive from the experience (Heath, et al., 2009; Armitage, 2012).

I was also a "native", having spent several years living in the same locality as many of the young people and in addition to having prior relationships with the some of the participants, I had been social worker to siblings and friends of the group (Garton and Copland, 2010). I was able to draw on these pre-exising relationships to enhance my rapport with the young people and the interviews undoubtedly benefited from this "insider" status. They were less formal, allowing the young people to more relaxed and freer in their discussions (Armitage, 2012). Further, having worked with the young people during the group sessions, I also felt the rapport and

relationships already established facilitated discussions about intimate information (Beck, 2012). It was however incumbent on me to be mindful this of "native" role throughout all stages of the study. I often had to step back from my research to ensure I avoided the "general danger of over-reliance upon one's previous insider experience as the basis for such a perspective" (Hodkinson, 2005, p. 145 in Armitage, 2012). Having said that, my insider status related mainly to some shared understandings and living in the same locality, rather than any specific experiences. The age difference between the young people and myself enabled me to maintain a reflexive approach and gave me a sense of perspective on their accounts (Phillips, 1988; Armitage, 2012).

7.6 Interview analysis: Stage 1. Initial reading of the transcript

As with the analysis of the group sessions, I again followed Palmer et al.'s protocol, applying "standard" IPA practices, identifying the young people's' experiential claims and concerns. The transcripts were read in detail numerous times, and thoughts, reflections, possible interpretations and potential points of interest were noted, and recorded in the left-hand margin of the transcript (Smith, and Eatough, 2007; Charles, 2012). As I moved through the transcript, I commented on similarities and differences that arose from the group sessions (Smith et al., 2010).

7.7 Stage 2: Identifying and labelling themes

As previously, this stage of analysis involved returning to the transcript and using the notes that had been made in the left-hand margin to produce themes in the right-hand margin. Similar themes emerged to those from the group sessions, and therefore, the same theme title was used (Palmer et al., 2010). However, new themes also emerged, which I highlighted.

7.8 Step 3. What roles and relationships are described, and what do they mean to participants?

Although the protocol laid out by Palmer et al. (2010) was developed for use with groups, I wanted to maintain consistency between the group and interview stages, and utilised the protocol once again. Therefore, at this stage, I examined the young people's references to other people, asking what roles and relationships were described and what sorts of meanings and expectations were attributed to these people.

Siblings were once again discussed on multiple occasions, though only by Tommy and Keira. Generally, siblings were described in positive terms. Tommy talked in glowing terms about his older brother Jason, describing him as a "good kid" and Keira talked about her siblings with affection and love referring to "my Robbie" and "my Andrew".

Talk of siblings was again contextualised as a talk of absence and again the idea of separation was apparent, with Keira describing how she has not seen her brother Richie for seven years. She also stated she has not seen her little brother, since he was a baby, with the adoptive parents having "cut all contact". She discussed caring for him when she was younger, and talked with great pride and sadness about this lost relationship. Keira described the sadness she felt when she lost a possession that connected her to him: "I had and I had like, my b-big my baby brother's favourite one [book] and it had his handprint in, like, that that's valuable because obviously, it's the only thing I really have of my brother."

Siblings were also described by Keira as people she has learned from. She stated she had some understanding of what care would be like

because, "my Richie got taken away when he was, like a bit older than what I was, and he went straight into a care home." She also stated Richie showed her how to take control of her situation, forcing contact with her mother. Tommy and Keira displayed a sense of loyalty, pride and protectiveness towards their siblings throughout their interviews.

Parents were discussed by each young person, other than Jae. While the majority of references to family members during the group sessions were quite negative, mothers were referred to with empathy and understanding. When talking about an incident of hospitalisation, Keira described how her mother was unable to visit:

"they would not let my mom in the hospital at all, when I had my accident... Wouldn't let me mam come in at all... I used to wake up crying, for my mam, and then they went and told my mam that I was crying for her, if I was my mom I'd cry but they were obviously still refused to let her in the hospital..."

She went on to talk about how she forced contact with her mother: "Whether it's internet text, phone, I'll do it one way..." Again, the idea of absence was prominent when the young people discuss family members, underlined by Tommy talking about his mother no longer attending contact. The only real instance of a young person being negative about a parent was where Tommy stated, "I've never been... raised to be a good lad." I would suggest that he was laying some blame or reasoning for his behaviour with his parents. During the group sessions, parents appeared to be a source of negativity and abuse, whereas the ideas and thoughts were a lot more nuanced during the interviews, with young people defending their mothers. Perhaps the interviews offered the young people a space where they could reflect at a deeper level away from the group, and be more honest and open about their feelings.

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Peers were referred to by each young person throughout the interviews, much more frequently than during the group sessions. Both Jae and Keira talked positively about friends, with Jae stating, "every single one of my friends knows I'm in care, but they don't care" and Keira commenting that her "close friends" also knew she was in care. However, both Tommy and Keira described peers in negative terms. Keira told me that "people at school" were ignorant to the realities of care, believing "all care homes are fun like *Tracy Beaker*" and Tommy took this further detailing a situation where another young person mocked him for not having a family and threatened him with a knife.

Keira and Tommy also made reference to looked-after peers. Keira talked of other girls she encountered during a short stay in a care home, describing them as "proper bitchy". She also talked about how, "some people do like being get tret differently like I know a couple girls in my year who're in care and... They're like "yes" like, gathering the sympathy up..." It seemed she thought these girls enjoyed the attention and did nothing to aid a positive attitude towards looked-after young people. She did however talk about another looked-after young person with fondness, highlighting how he had passed his fitness training and entered the army.

An element that arose throughout the interviews, that was not present during the group sessions, was young people referring to other group members, who were not present. While not hugely prevalent, it was striking enough to warrant individual discussion. For example, Keira talked about Jae on several occasions, stating she has "known her like since I was three-years-old" and how they used to eat Easter "lollies" together. This perhaps explains the alliance I observed during the initial group sessions, where the two girls defended one another. The

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references to other group members, while limited, were characterised as playful, affectionate and indicative of long-standing, well-established relationships. These references highlight the positive nature of the group, and the overall benefit of conducting the initial stage of research using a group format. As Jae stated, "it was like nice for the group to be together and I liked watching some of the stuff that yous had for we to watch..."

Carers were discussed on several occasions, although predominantly referred to by Keira. Once again, the reactions to carers were mixed. For example, in negative terms, Tommy talked about one of his carers being raided for selling drugs, while Keira described how a carer had abused her physically, dragging her out of bed by her hair, who was "obviously not allowed to foster at all now". Keira also talked about several positive experiences of carers and described having to leave one carer she was very fond of as being the hardest thing she had done in her life. She also talked very positively of her current carer, who she felt settled with. Both Tommy and Keira referred to multiple carers by name. Their references were quite often factual, without little description, but it is clear they remembered each and every one of their placements and carers vividly, and I would suggest, all these people have had some impact on their lives.

While professionals were discussed throughout the group sessions, it was largely in relation to their onscreen depiction, rather than the young people's own lives. However, the professionals in the young people's lives became a much more meaningful discussion throughout the interviews. In this way, we see a development in the young people's ideas and thoughts, with them moving from the fictional to the real. They now have something to compare and contrast ideas, providing a context for discussion.

Social workers were talked about in positive terms by both Joey and Tommy. Joey described having a relaxed relationship with his social worker, which meant he was not caught up in the bureaucracy he perhaps saw overshadowing some other young people's lives. Likewise, Tommy spoke positively of his own social worker, stating that his social worker had been allocated to him for "ages and ages". Keira also stated she had had the same social worker since she was seven. However, she stated she "can't stand her guts", feeling she has done nothing to help her.

Similarly to social workers, teachers and teaching staff were presented in both positive and negative terms. Jae described a positive relationship with one of her support teachers, who she disclosed abuse to. Keira similarly described relationships with a PE teacher and an "amazing" maths tutor. However, both girls talked about instances where they had been singled out by classroom teachers, because of their looked-after status. Keira went into detail about a particularly difficult experience, where she was singled by a teacher, who "basically told the full class that I was in care..." It seemed support staff rather than classroom teachers were better thought of by the young people, and were people they would go to if they needed help.

7.9 Stage 4. What kinds of stories do participants tell?

Throughout the interview process, almost all of the young people had a story to tell. There were a number of reasons why the young people would perhaps want to tell their stories: storytelling could potentially provide the young people with distance from their potentially difficult experiences of abuse and vulnerability (Long, 2013). Additionally, once the story was in the process of being narrated, it could enable the young people to gain a different perspective on their experiences

(Holloway and Freshwater, 2007). The young people might also have wished to attribute responsibility, praise or blame to specific individuals (Long, 2013).

There were more stories told by the young people throughout the interviews, perhaps as a result of having more time and being freer to talk interrupted, and Keira in particular, told several free-flowing narratives. So then, during stage 4, as I had done during the analysis of the group sessions, I focused on describing the genre, structure and tone of significant narratives, asking myself the same set of questions. One particularly powerful narrative was shared by Keira, when I asked her what she would like to highlight about care:

"Erm, I'd put a lot of what people don't expect, like more movements and how people get moved and the way, your social workers move you, like I got moved a couple times in cardboard boxes... Like yeah like bin bags, you don't want your stuff in bin bags... Or cardboard boxes, but that's how it came, like black bags bin bags, like, fair enough some of my stuff had to go in bin bags because it was like we couldn't find a suitcase or something like that which is fair enough like, yer most of your stuff are in there, and a lot of things, carers keep, like I be I've had rings and everything go missing, and then I've seen them on Facebook the next day... Of old carers and things, like my my mam's my mam and dad's engagement ring, I got both them and I was wearing it one day and then, put it down five minutes to wash me wash me hands wash em plate wash dinner gone the next, haven't seen it since … and then me pra-I had prams on me dolls, they've gone, books they've gone, loads of quite valuable stuff have gone I mean books aren't that valuable but when it comes to something like The Hungry Caterpillar when I read it as a baby... And I had... And I had and I had like, my b-big my baby brother's favourite one and it had his handprint in, like, that that's valuable because obviously, it's the only thing I really have of my brother, like I've got nothing of my brother I've got a locket, which that, got stole, so I basically have nothing of my Harry I only have like a picture of him... i-it's just ridiculous."

She begins her account by explaining that a lot of people would not anticipate the number of placement moves these young people experience and for her, the appalling way in which these moves are

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handled. The time and location are vague as this appeared to be a cumulative experience, and the narrative gives a real sense of the lack of respect Keira felt she has experienced. She reference the word "bin bag" four times throughout her account, which conjures a strong image – rubbish, junk, homelessness, worthlessness. This once again highlights how poorly these young people can be treated, and links to the notions of poverty that are pervasive when considering young people in care (West, 1999). She lists all the items she has lost over a series of moves – rings, prams, dolls – which conjures an image of an ocean of missing belongings. Her story culminates with the possession that was lost that perhaps meant the most to her – a copy of *The Hungry Caterpillar* – that had her little brother's handprint inside. While she acknowledges this item had no real material worth, the value to her is incalculable.

Her story is also filled with mistreatment, where her belongings "go missing" or "got stole" and turn up on "Facebook the next day" and ends with her anger at not having any possession that links to her little brother, other than a photo. She finds the situation "ridiculous" and is clearly, and quite rightly, outraged by what has happened. Not only has she lost her family, but she has lost the few items that connected her to them. It seemed she wanted me to share in the sense of injustice she felt, and it has to be said, she managed to evoke that from me. By drawing attention to it, her hope, I assume, is that this would never have to happen to anyone else. It is such a simple thing, yet it something, perhaps naively, I had not anticipated or thought about prior to the interview – the loss of treasured items. In terms of implications for practice, the message here is clear, it is vital that carers and professionals respect these young people and the items they hold dear, and placement moves need to be handled with sensitivity.

Ethical issues were at the forefront of my mind throughout this stage and it was essential I practised with care and sensitivity (Holloway and Freshwater, 2007). It was vital the process was free-flowing and offered time and space to the young people. However, when telling their stories, the young people had the power to define their own identities and experience, rather than having their reality shaped by others. They were able to assert themselves, gain self-esteem and agency. Therefore, these narratives may help social workers, policy makers and content creators develop new understandings of looked-after young people (Holloway and Freshwater, 2007).

7.10 Stage 5. How is language used in the development of participants' accounts?

As with the group session analyses, I monitored the language used by the young people throughout the transcripts, with a focus on the use of metaphor, idiom, direct speech and hyperbole. Where these occurred, I once again clustered similar cases together in order to explore the patterns further, both within and between groups, looking for any differences in language used between the group sessions and interviews (Palmer et al., 2010).

Direct speech

Direct speech was the language element most frequently used throughout the interview sessions. As with the group sessions, it was used by the young people to draw attention to and highlight their own experiences (James et al., 2016). There was a plethora of examples of this, especially when the young people entered more free-flowing narratives. For example, when Keira described her experiences of feeling singled-out by her class teacher, she used direct speech throughout her narrative, working hard to enact the scene: "Oh I-I kicked off she was like, "I didn't mean to" I was like, "well you clearly

did otherwise... you would've just like parent slash carer like every other teacher does, but you said foster carer so, y-you clearly did." She also used direct speech to place us with her as an infant who learned from her mother: "I use to go like, "mam mam I'm holding him" and knock her hand so I so I hold him in the bath and she used to wash him, like I used to change his nappy because my mam was like, "you do it like this" and I picked it up straight away..."

Direct speech was also used to highlight bad practice or experiences where the young people had felt uncomfortable. Jae and Keira used examples from school where they felt singled-out. Jae stated, "Teachers and people will always go Jae, you're alright and I'm just like, "Yeah I'm fine, I'm just not in the kind of mood to talk right now"... Asking loads and loads of questions about like "are you alright, is something happening at home, is there, has this happened has that happened like"." Similarly, Keira told me her teachers, "go "ahh" and they give us sympathy and I'm like "I don't want sympathy"... just I'll get it in for as soon as I can and she's like "ahh, well you know if you can't get it in you don't have to bring it in" and it's like "well don't do that because you're making it, you're making me making us different treating me as different and I'm not different"." Here, both young people highlighted examples of how they have been made to feel different to their peers at school, using conversations they have had to illustrate their points. Jae went on to offer a practical solution to this situation, stating, "if they go "So and so, can you just stay behind, because I wanna ask you that, I wanna talk to you about something," like Id be like, "Yeah that's fine"." So here then, not only did she show me what she did not want from a professional, she offered a solution. She used direct speech to guide and advise, offering a template for good practice.

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Direct speech was also used by Keira to illustrate feelings of agency, and conversely times when she has lacked agency. For example, when she described being moved from a placement, she stated, "I went to school the next morning then me school me social worker picked us up and I was in another place the next day, I was like, "oh well OK." Her use of "oh well OK" appears to have a resignation about it, underlining her feelings of helplessness and a lack of control. On the other hand, she also used direct speech to underline moments when she had taken control of her life. When talking about having contact with her mother, she told me her social worker attempted to stop this contact, but she "just basically turned around, "you know one way or another I'm gonna have my I'm gonna do it anyways"."

The use of direct speech often placed the young person as the voice of experience. For example, when Keira talked about her feelings on care, she stated, "I was like "ahh well I've been it's been like this before"" and Jae told me, "Think like, "this is where I'm living at the minute and I've just gotta get used to it"." Here they both positioned themselves as the experts of surviving the care experience. Jae went on to use direct speech to offer guidance to other young people in care, stating, "I can imagine there are kids out there who're like, "ahh yeah there's no one like me, nobody understands me" when really, there'll, one day they'll come cross somebody who's just like them..."

Idiom

Following direct speech, idioms were the most frequently used figures of speech throughout the interviews. As with the group sessions, idioms were once again used to highlight and emphasise the difficulties that some of these young people have experienced. When Tommy talked about a violent altercation, he stated he "grabbed a hold of his jacket put his hood up and just "flattened him down", meaning

he was able to physically dominate his assailant. He also told me when "Somebody does my head in then I hit them". Similarly, when Keira told her story of being singled-out in class she stated she "kicked off", and would have "punched" the teacher's "face off" and "made her life hell." When talking about her social worker, she also described how she could not "stand her guts" and "kicks off" with her. Tommy's language is violent and aggressive – images of flattening someone down and Keira's talk of punching her teacher's face off is similarly hostile. This highlights the anger and frustration these young people feel on occasion, how aggressively they act when they feel they are being made to feel like victims.

When talking about the realities of care Keira used idioms to describe what she felt were people's perceptions, "it's a piece of cake", when in reality, "You get moved from pillar to post" and "tret like a piece of crap". The idiom "from pillar to post" conjures images of transience, someone without stability. Being treated "like a piece of crap" highlights her feelings of worthlessness. She talked about her cousin entering care and "being wrapped in bubble wrap", stating that she, like every other person wants to be treated the same, and not feel over-protected. She also talked about her younger brother and how the "adoptive parents have cut all contact", conjuring images of finality, giving a strong sense of what she has lost. However, she managed these negative elements and is able to "Keep me hea-me head abo-above though", giving the idea she is surviving in a sea, she is not drowning. However, it certainly did seem this was against the odds and her sense of loss, of family, of possessions, of a normal life, felt hugely significant for her.

Idioms were used by the young people when describing how they would want care to be depicted. Keira stated she would like "to be

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told the truth and not like sugarcoat it... or not put too much of a downer on it really (she laughs), it it goes both ways it really does." The idiom "sugarcoat" means to make something unpleasant easier to accept. She did not want things presented as sweet and fun, as she felt they were in shows like *Tracy Beaker*. Likewise, she did not want care presented as too negative and instead stated a desire for balance, using the idiom "goes both ways", which means to have equal effect on both sides. Tommy stated, "Life's not easy. Life has its ups and downs, there's pros and cons. Nobody stays on the sunny side of the road all the time, everybody has their moments." Again, we see a desire for balance. He wanted to explain that not only does life have its "twists and turns", but so does his behaviour. These idioms ("pros and cons", "ups and downs") make him sound much older than he is. It seems as though something has been lost, his childhood perhaps, and this fills me with great sadness. Stein suggests that looked-after young people commonly take on board adult responsibilities and higher levels of independence than they would if brought up in other environments, meaning their development is simultaneously "accelerated and compressed" (Stein 2002, p. 68 in McMurray et al. 2011).

7.11 Stage 6: Voice and agency

At this stage, I examined the transcripts in terms of agency and voice. Much like the previous stage, I monitored the transcripts for instances where the young people used the interaction to power their voice and subjectivity and conversely, where the young people demonstrated oppression. I will use Joey's interview as an example here (please note the findings from both Keira and Jae's interview for this stage of analysis can be found in the Appendix 9).

Joey struggled to articulate himself and formulate his thoughts and feelings on multiple occasions. He stated he felt the material we

viewed presented looked-after young people poorly: "they were all like horrible kids and like, they were, like all messing around and everything, they were... like... not very nice... So like like that's what people might think about us, but..." The use of hedging here shows how difficult it was for him to form and express his ideas. Perhaps his hedging was motivated by politeness, by a desire to save face, either his or mine (Brown and Levinson, 1987 in Schröder and Zimmer, 1997). Perhaps he felt that I may have worked with some "horrible kids" myself and did not want to offend them, or me. Or perhaps this hedging was motivated a fear of being proved wrong. Being imprecise may have made it possible for Joey to say that his claim was only tentative, protecting himself from potential anger, contempt or humiliation (Hübler, 1983 in Schröder and Zimmer, 1997). If this was the case, maybe he was unsure of how "horrible" the characters onscreen were, or in fact, whether other people "might think that" about him at all.

When I asked Joey whether he felt anyone treated him differently owing to his looked-after status, he told me, "Na erm like everyone just treats me the same in school and all that, they like, because like they know that I'm in care but like they just treat me the same." He hedged once again, perhaps defending against the idea that he was treated differently. He goes on, "Well like sometimes I do get pulled out of lessons to like see me men-mentor and all that, but like... that's like... it's like, but then people don't ask us like, "Ahh why you being pulled out and all that?" Here he perhaps began to realise he *was* treated differently, but defended against it, citing the fact none of his friends questioned him. He stated he had a mentor and that other young people at school did also, "like people who aren't in care, they are like really naughty and all that, they'll get and then they'll get a mentor." Here he hedged and stuttered, and I would suggest he was

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realising how looked-after young people are differentiated, treated the same as the "naughty kids". His use of "we" might be a defence against that, however. He was now talking about a group of young people rather than just himself.

Joey went on to describe an instance where he helped a friend who was experiencing abuse: "Because me friend right, erm he was like getting abused by his mam, so then like he was was "Ahh right where do I go?" and all that to get help, so and like I told him that you have to like the, where is it again, on the high street..." This account appeared especially difficult for him to articulate, perhaps because he did not like to think about or acknowledge he was in care. He was however positive about care and described the conversation he had with his friend: "he was like, "Ahh is it good and that?" And I was like, "Yeah you get tret well and all that" and he was like, "Right then I'll go after school," so..." Helping others, offering empathy, these are the actions of an empowered young man. Perhaps though, detailing this experience was painful, bringing back memories of entering care himself and leaving his own family. He might have also felt guilt, believing he was in some way responsible for his friend being separated from his family too.

Later in the interview, Joey talked about the fictional character Little Orphan Annie, stating, "Like like she gets like abused and all that doesn't she like... By the, by the like carer person but erm but like..." Here Joey hedged again, perhaps realising the patterns that are at work in the world in terms of how looked-after characters are depicted. He seemed excited as he made connections and his eyes were being opened. He went on, "I haven't seen the new one, but the old one like, she like gets, like hit loads so then she runs away and erm... so it's kind of like that and people must think like, "care ahh right, you get abused

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and all that there, must be a horrible life." But like, it isn't really." The effect of the research approach was paying off, with Joey able to draw in other sources, uncover patterns and assess them critically. However, his account of *Annie* does not quite ring true. While Annie did run away, she was not hit and in the end, she was rescued and restored. Perhaps the story he was telling, was his own story rather than Annie's, and at this point at least, he was not yet ready to own that.

Joey went on to talk about what care was really like, and how he would like people to see, "stuff like that happens in real life, not like things that people thinks happens just like, like, from err from a young person's like perspective like just to like, what they do and how, what they think of care instead of just like making it from about, like people like, getting hit and all that and running away, it's just..." His hedging here shows he was contemplating how he would combat the negative patterns he was uncovering, yet he was unsure and did not want to be proved wrong (Hübler, 1983 in Schröder and Zimmer, 1997. This was difficult for him, because he had to think about what his life was like, and how he would present it.

What he would like to show people was, "just how life is for me basically and just... how well I get tret and erm... just that... Just like, well I, well I have like, I live in a nice house..." Once again there was a lot of hedging and he seemed excited or anxious. Perhaps he realised he could tell his story, he could change these depictions and the way looked-after young people are perceived. Whatever the case, there seemed to be a real development of voice throughout his interview, in terms of Joey making connections and seeing potential to change these depictions.

7.12 Stage 7: Linking themes and identifying thematic clusters

As with the analysis of the the group data, I adapted the emergent themes (from step 1) in light of the work done in subsequent steps. I noticed very quickly that themes from the group analysis were re-emerging in the interviews. I began to cluster these themes in relation to the themes highlighted previously. The next stage was much more straightforward than it had been during the analysis of the group data, as the themes were clustering together much more organically. I once again produced a table of the themes, which I ordered coherently, and gave each cluster a name, representing the superordinate themes (Willig, 2013; Ashworth, 2016). At this stage, while some of the emerging themes were similar to the themes that emerged from the group data (de Visser and Smith, 2007), a new superordinate theme was also emerging: "A better depiction".

7.13 Stage 8: Continuing the analysis with other interviews

I integrated insights from across the interviews, as I had done with the group sessions, to develop a bigger overall picture of the topic (Palmer et al., 2010). With each transcript, I looked for repeating patterns, but also acknowledged new issues that were emerging as I worked through the other transcripts. Once I had analysed each transcript using this interpretative process, I constructed a final table of superordinate themes (Smith et al., 2010):

Superordinate themes
* Depictions of looked-after characters
* Depictions of care
* The reality of care
* Impact of depictions
* A better depiction

Before I discuss these themes further, I will reflect on my approach and interactions with these young people.

Chapter 8

Reflections on my approach

Initially I was anxious about using elements of a participatory approach, concerned how chaotic the process would become, and whether I would be able to keep the young people engaged (Carey, 2010). However, I was compelled to work in such a way, informed by social work values initially and subsequently by the work of Freire. Freire states, "From the investigator's point of view, the important thing is... to verify whether or not during the process of investigation any transformation has occurred in their [the young people's] way of perceiving reality" (p.88). While I have made reference to my approach in previous chapters, I feel it is important to further examine its effectiveness.

One of the questions I set out to answer, was whether my research could work against any negative effects of these depictions. To begin, there is evidence to suggest the process not only enhanced the young people's ability to be critical of these media images (Yosso, 2002), it also enabled them to find characters they could identify with (Cohen, 2001; Igartua, 2010). As an example, during the earlier group sessions Jae could not find any elements of characters she related to and reacted with vitriol towards Tracy Beaker. However, during the last group session and her interview she was able to state the similarities between herself and *Short Term 12's* Jayden, in terms of the disclosure she made to a staff member at school and a maturity they both shared. This suggests that showing content the young people were unfamiliar with allowed her to see a broader range of depictions, increasing her opportunities for identification (Gauntlett, 2008). Also, exploring these depictions in a group situation and then a one-to-one interview, helped develop her thinking, and she was able to reflect much more

deeply on the similarities between herself and Jayden. Further, this developed thinking extended to Jae's thoughts about herself. In the group sessions, she referred to herself as "not a very nice person". However, she was able to be positive about herself in her interview, referring to herself as "mature" (Cohen, 2001).

To explore the impact of my approach in detail, I have focussed on the interview stage of the research, as this was the culmination of the Freirean model (Rindner, 2004), and in particular, my interaction with Tommy. Freire notes that, "efforts must coincide with those of the students to engage in critical thinking and the quest for mutual humanization" and "must be imbued with a profound trust in people and their creative power. To achieve this, they [teachers] must be partners of the students in their relations with them" (p. 75). He goes further, "Only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking. Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education" (p.73-74).

With this in mind, I adopted elements of a mentoring relationship throughout the interviews. Sulimani-Aidan (2016) notes that, "The concept of mentor refers to a supportive adult... who provides guidance, emotional and practical support, and who can serve as a role model and advocate in addition to or regardless of parents" (p.1). Further, she notes that studies of careleavers have found the presence of an adult mentor is associated with improved outcomes in adulthood including better mental health, higher life satisfaction and lower involvement in risky behaviours. "Personal qualities of sensitivity, loyalty and trust are especially important in working with youth in care whose relationships with their birth parents and close adult figures are impaired and suffer from disappointment and mistrust... a good

mentoring relationship can help the youth gain some of their lost trust in adult figures" (Sulimani-Aidan, 2016, p.6).

At the outset of the interview, I reach out to Tommy, utilising listening and communication skills, attempting to build a relationship with him (Berridge, 2013). When we talk about local celebrity "Buzzcocks", I point and that my friends and myself find Buzzcocks "hilarious." Although I never overtly express detail about my personal experiences, these sorts of offers present Tommy with an opportunity to identify with me (Cohen, 2001). Burke (1969) theorised that "identification occurs when one individual shares the interests of another individual or believes that he or she shares the interests of another" (p. 180 in Brown, 2015). Here, I show Tommy we are not that different. Sulimani-Aidan (2016) notes that a "successful mentor is described as a person from a background similar to that of the adolescent, who has successfully coped with life's challenges" (p.6).

Tommy talks more about being "kicked out" of school for "Effing and blinding, being a dick, all them kind of things." He then asks, "This [the phone] is still recording innit?" He talks about his problems at school, then becomes self-conscious. I tell him, "you've got your head screwed on, you're not you're not stupid so, do you think... you'll just kind of get your head down at some point?" While I am conscious of "social working", he has been honest with me, and I want to reciprocate that honesty. On a personal level I identify with Tommy here as someone who did not always behave at school and was often in trouble (Cohen, 2001). I also want to challenge this negative self-image he has, that may be in part related to these negative depictions (Riggs et al., 2009) and show him he is not a "bad kid", and he has the potential to choose another identity.

When I ask how seeing images that depicted his own life would make him feel, he states, "It would show us exactly what I'm like innit. Are we still still on the second question?" Here he shows vulnerability – the idea showing "him" to himself or presenting "him" to others is obviously challenging for him – and he once again becomes conscious of the interview, using the interview structure to remind him/me of his boundaries. However, it also seems he cannot believe how long he has been focused. In this way he is challenging his own perceptions of himself, and his voice and identity are developing. Further, his use of "we" suggests we are in this together, we are taking the journey alongside one another (Freire, 1970).

Not long after, Tommy plays with his lighter. It is unclear whether this is a sign of his masculinity, a threat, or whether he is distracted and does he not want to deal with the question of how seeing himself onscreen would make him feel. I press him further and he states the images would "shock" him. He goes on, "I'm fairly mouthy, do you know what people say? … "Once you let go of the gas the flame goes..." So so people are stupid aren't they? … Right what's next?" Here he seems to be performing, presenting himself through the words of others with the use of direct speech (James et al., 2016). Perhaps he is distancing himself and does not want to face how he might feel if he saw his life onscreen. "Once you let go of the gas the flame goes." Perhaps here he is referring to himself. If he lets go of his own gas, his flame dies. If his fire – his anger – goes, does he feel that does something would leave him? Does he think he would change as a person? When he states, "So so people are stupid aren't they?", it is unclear whether he is talking about people's ideas around flames and lighters or people who perceive Tommy in a certain way, a way he does not perceive himself. Whatever the meaning of his words, he seizes control of the interview, indicating a development in his voice.

"Right what's next?" he says, directing proceedings.

Tommy talks about being in multiple placements, and tells me, "I've always broke the rules... I'm not a good lad like. I've never been... raised to be a good lad." He reflects on his upbringing and how that has impacted on him. He is however mature, acknowledging that his early care was not the best. This appears to be a strong self-image, seeing himself as the rule-breaker. However, it seems the approach is working because he opens up another side of his personality: "I do get my head down sometimes but sometimes I can be a divvy... how long's this recording actually went on for?" Again, he structures the interview. I praise him for his hard work, which he apparently cannot believe: "I think the longest... I've stuck me head down for is about ten minutes." Here he makes himself softer and opens up. However, he remains mindful that people are listening. It could be that his words will be used against him, however it could also be positive too. He can show a different side of himself to the world. He also seems proud that he has been interviewed for such a long period of time. Hopefully my faith in Tommy and focus on his positive sides "may lay the foundation for a process that gradually leads to improvement" (Sulimani-Aidan, 2016, p.7).

After describing his new school to me, he takes my iPhone, seizing the device and control of the situation. He pushes back, he is changing, and growing in confidence. The phone is a status symbol, yet it is also a symbol of his voice in this interaction. This is a softer, more playful interaction than when he played with his lighter, which was underpinned by a potential threat. It seems we are building trust. Freire states, "Founding itself upon love, humility, and faith, dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between the dialoguers is the logical consequence" (p.71). I remind him to be

careful that he does not turn the phone off. While I am happy to let him have control, I still have the interview fixed firmly in my mind, in this case, the recording of it. Perhaps my fear is that his words will be lost and no one will get to hear his voice. Following on from this, Tommy asks, "Are you actually gonna listen to these [audio recordings] all night?" When I tell him I will, I am telling him his words matter, and I will give them the time and attention they deserve. Tommy then talks about his behaviour improving in care and I ask, "Do you think being in foster care has kind of, be able to kind of manage your kind of temper or whatever better?" My hedging here seems to indicate excitement. It feels like a breakthrough in terms of him opening up. In this moment, I know my approach is working.

When describing care, Tommy states, "I'd probably say like... it's good but it's also has like its downsides as well care, because... you don't get tret the same as like, a normal kid like, you've got rules and that... you're not allowed in your foster carer's bedroom and that. But if you're a little kid right, you love to wake up in the middle of the night and like sleep with your mam don't you, so, if you're a little kid that would be quite hard won't it?" He coughs, and adds, "I'm just looking at these bars going up and down [on the phone]." It is touching to see his reflection on foster care come directly after asking whether I will listen to the interview that night. Freire states, "Dialogue cannot exist... in the absence of a profound love for the world and for people. The naming of the world, which is an act of creation and re-creation, is not possible if it is not infused with love" (p.70). This exchange exemplifies our love infused dialogue and shows how his voice has been enabled in our conversation. He saw himself as a rule-breaker who has never had a chance to learn the boundaries. However, throughout this session, I show him I am not afraid of his voice, demonstrating he is not evil or bad. He states eloquently that perhaps

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some of these rules and regulations set up young people to fail. This is a moment of real insight – perhaps as deep as he goes all session. Did this this happen to him as a child? This offer comes after he has changed the rules and seized the power. He steps out of the interview once again after expressing his thoughts on care, and perhaps these memories are too painful. However, he keeps contact with me, he is still thinking about it. He wants to tell me more, but all he can tell me is what he is doing – watching the bars go up and down on my phone.

He goes on: "Aye well yeah because that's just, that's just life for me innit? Like being naughty is just me I'm not like, I can be good but it's quite hard for us do you know what I mean? … Are you actually gonna listen to these all night?" He once again refers to being naughty, yet it seems with every reference he is considering and examining his thoughts: "I can be good". Our positive interaction is providing a fresh context from which he can explore his image of himself. While he again steps out of the interview, this seems different. Perhaps he feels I am I am going to listen to him, to understand him, unlike the carer who did not, when he was little and in need of comfort. He wants to know what am I going to do with his voice, whether he will make any impact on my life, or whether I will walk away and bear him no witness.

Tommy later goes on to state that his behaviour has improved since he has been in care, "when I first came into foster care when I was ten-years-old err I was wrecking the house I was doing all that kind of stuff, erm it was, I was just like when I was angry and that I'd get angry easily but now I can just have a little blip where I'll just be cheeky and then I'll only take like five minutes when I was in a err, mood with my carers for like an hour or something..." His use of "my" suggests he is taking responsibility. He is conscious of his

behavioural problems, and acknowledges he has improved since he was younger. There is a progression of his "bad lad" story, moving from the negative to positive. The idiom a "little blip" clearly contradicts the idea of someone who always "breaks the rules". This use of language highlights the change in him and shows his progress. Sulimani-Aidan (2016) notes that the functional roles of mentors include "being like a parent, as well as providing guidance and advice, providing emotional and practical support and serving as a role model. Because youth in care live apart from their families and their parents are not close enough to take care of them, this role in the mentoring relationship seems especially important. 'Parental gestures' are those that make the youth feel as if they were the mentor's child and as a result feel they are being cared for deeply and loved" (p.8). In Freirean terms, the interview becomes a "love-infused dialogue", and gives Tommy a real space to consider his behaviour and challenge his negative self-image. This could work against the potential negative impact of these depictions that might also be contributing to him seeing himself as a "bad lad" (Riggs et al., 2009).

When the topic of siblings arises, I realise I was a social worker for Tommy's older brother. While I was conscious of sharing this information, I wanted to reciprocate his honesty (Berridge, 2013). Abell et al. (2006) note "interviewer self-disclosure as a strategy for addressing power dynamics within interview interactions. It is claimed that by 'doing similarity' and invoking shared experiences, interviewers can provoke elaborated interview talk, particularly about sensitive or delicate issues" (p.241). When talking about his brother and how well he has done, I say, "Tell him I said hello, if... he should remember me..." On reflection, my words here are quite sad. It feels I am in a deeper place with Tommy, and I mirror his vulnerability and desire to make an impact on those he encounters.

Tommy talks about the benefits of being in care and how it has helped his behaviour: "you've got support, you've got your social worker, you carers and that, while with your mam you've only got her and what if she's got a lot of kids and that?" It is clear he feels let down by his mother, yet he realises there may be reasons she could not cope. In care, there is support, and he knows other people will give him the attention his mother could perhaps not. This is a mature level of thinking, far removed from Tommy's initial presentation. This follows on from him talking about a positive change in behaviour, and now his maturity is evidenced.

He goes on, explaining contact is "once a year... but, but everybody knows she won't come so but I don't, we don't even bother thinking about the contact..." I feel a real sadness at the realisation I supervised the last contact Tommy had with his mother. It almost feels unbelievable to me. However, his use of "we" when he talks of his feelings about the situation, indicates he has a good social group around him. He is supported. He is not alone. And this is not about him, there is a social distribution of decision-making. When I ask how he would like his story told, he states, "there should be a err a charity thing and I'd tell my story on there, I'm err, I'm gonna be raising, I'm doing a charity thing next week with my school I'm shaving these off (his legs)... For err for err for NSPCC... Cause I went to NSPCC and that helped us a lot..." It seems he would like his story told in a sympathetic way. He associates his story with charity and this seems a strange choice – young people presented as victims – particularly as he has fought so hard to against the victim label throughout his interview. This perhaps highlights the impact of these depictions. He cannot see any other way to show these young people, other than victims, the connection is so pervasive. His generosity also contradicts a plethora

of negative stereotypes around looked-after young people. He has a social conscience, awareness of how services supported him, and wants to give back to the community. He is also excited here, and I would suggest, realising the importance of the research and how he himself, can make a difference to the world. In Freirean terms, he is becoming liberated and when he is free, he will not become the oppressor himself (Freire, 1970).

He closes by stating, "direct people on the right track, don't let them be mad little divvies like me, who'll literally run and back flip off any-anything." Here he returns to his original representation, his mask and cape back on. However, there is still an insight which will hopefully last. He wants people to learn from his own experiences, and he realises perhaps, he can be a role model to others himself.

Young people in care relate to adults they believe to be from similar backgrounds (Sulimani-Aidan, 2016), and as I stated at the outset of my thesis, I identified with looked-after young people due to the difficulties I experienced as an adolescent. While I hope my interaction with the young people was imbued with this authenticity and empathy, one regret I do perhaps have is that I did not share my own story explicitly with the young people – the story of my own early life and my relationship with my father. However, an opportunity never presented itself to do this and it did not feel appropriate or necessary, even when Scott challenged me on what I knew about being in care.

I believe this interview provides evidence of the usefulness and benefit of my approach. "Mentoring relationships that are based on trust and faith in youth translate into the mentor's ability to allow the youth to see beyond their barriers, encourage them to see the best in

themselves, believe in their abilities to succeed and motivate them to aspire higher" (Sulimani-Aidan, 2016, p.7). In this example, I was able to show Tommy he is not "bad", enabling him to think more critically not only about these depictions, but more importantly, about himself.

Chapter 9

Superordinate Themes:

Findings and Discussion

9.1 Introduction

Throughout this chapter, I will discuss the superordinate themes highlighted in the group and semi-structured interview transcripts, presenting my findings together (De Visser and Smith, 2007). These themes include the depiction of looked-after characters, depictions of care, realities of care, the impact of these depictions and ways in which looked-after characters could be better depicted. I will present these findings, drawing on research literature, as well as accounting for the group's interaction throughout (Tomkins and Eatough, 2010). I have presented the findings and discussion together to maintain some sense of coherence given the huge quantity of data that had been generated. It is worth noting that a lot of the excerpts used throughout this chapter have multiple themes and have therefore been trimmed for brevity. While it was challenging to cut the young people's words, the volume of data that was generated left me with little choice.

9.2 Superordinate theme 1: Depictions of looked-after characters

So then, what are these young people's perceptions of the onscreen fictional depictions of looked-after characters and care? This section (and the following two sections) will explore this question, highlighting similarities and differences observed across the group and interview sessions.

9.3 "They were troubled characters"

In terms of how looked-after young people are depicted, in session 3, Georgina notes similarities in how the TV programmes she has viewed depicted looked-after young people:

"On on every show, about foster care, they always make make m-make it sound like they've had a bad start, I mean obviously that's why they're in care but it makes it like, as a, like, they're like in a bad situation and they've done something really bad, like, in Coronation Street, Faye, actually Coronation Street... Like Jade ran away because she was pregnant and obviously in a bad relationship with her boyfriend, this is what, she got pregnant and so that made it bad..." (Session 3, lines 219-225)

The idea of looked-after young people as "a problem" is a recurring theme throughout the literature, highlighted in West's work in particular, looking at looked-after young people in the media (1999), and there were several instances where the group referred to onscreen characters as "troubled". Carly states her thoughts on *Short Term 12*:

"Erm, dunno showed really troubled like, kids that were in care not like just normal ones... Like ones that are just like... Like they're just theirselves... They just get on with it." (Session 5, lines 89-97)

Carly suggests that "normal" young people "just get on with it", whereas the young people depicted onscreen, are unable to deal with their experiences. Riggs et al., state this in terms of media depictions, "Foster children... try as they might, they are likely to "turn out bad" as a result of abuse" (2012, p.243). Perhaps then Carly does not identify as being looked-after and sees herself as a "normal kid". She goes on:

"...it just showed like it showed like different children on a different background and it's not all like the same... It could affect them in different ways, depends on the person." (Session 5, lines 798-806)

Carly highlights that the young people onscreen are different to her in terms of their background and also the way in which they deal with their experiences. This idea is supported by Jae, who states:

"...things like Tracy Beaker, they use like a stereotype, they've got like really bad issues like anger issues and like they're emotionally

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troubled. Sometimes that's not always the case, yeah they've got,some kids have got really bad behaviour issues, but not everybody has, just like everybody's got their own kind of backstory." (Jae's interview, lines 53-56)

Hall (2013, p.247) notes that "stereotypes get *hold of* the few 'simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasped and widely recognized' characteristics about a person, *reduce* everything about the person to those traits, *exaggerate* and *simplify* them."   Although they are often depicted as such, looked-after young people are not a homogeneous group, and are in fact from various backgrounds, with various experiences (West, 1999), and it follows, they deal with these experiences in different ways.

9.4 "Everyone's mental in care"

Following a viewing of an episode of *Waterloo Road*, in which the central characters, Drew and Jade, a young couple, find themselves experiencing mental health problems and pregnancy respectively, Keira states:

"[It] does make a horribly bad representation as well, because like... the lad, obviously he had some serious mental mental like mental health problems-- And like that portrayed it as basically they didn't know, but that kind of portrayed him as being an absolute err an absolute nutter..." (Session 3, lines 223-239)

This is a theme echoed by the group – young men presented as having mental health problems. In terms of his thoughts around the show, Ewan is confident and explicit, stating, "Basically [other people will be] thinking everyone who's a lad in care is a mentalist." He goes on to talk about Drew being "weird and strange" and "paranoid" and concludes, by stating people, "would think everyone in care's gonna be crazy..."   The association between looked-after young people and mental health problems is long-standing. West cites news stories with

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sensational headlines such as "Overdose tragedy of the teenager torn between her two families" where a "teenager said to have been torn between foster parents and her natural family killed herself with an overdose of sleeping pills" (West, 1999, p.260). When Daniel points out Scout Allen, from another episode of *Waterloo Road* (session 4), seems to have mood-swings, Rob states, "I think she's got bi-polar." This appears to be a throwaway comment, but the connection between looked-after young people and mental health issues is so prevalent, it becomes casual.

Joey agrees with Keira that the episode of *Waterloo Road* is a "horribly bad" representation of looked-after young people, stating "It implies that everyone's mental in care." Like Ewan, he focuses on the male depiction – the "mental" young man. It could be that this is to do with gender and a perhaps on some level he "identifies" with Drew (Cohen, 2001), as a young man of a similar age. However, he does not have empathy with him and it would appear both Joey and Ewan are unable to create a meaningful relationship with Drew, limiting opportunities, "for novel experiences and personal growth" (Shedlosky-Shoemaker et al., 2014, p.574). In session 5, when discussing *Short Term 12*, Ewan states:

"I think it was about people mental that had, mental health problems and, people were there just to try and treat them". (Session 5, lines 29-30)

Ewan highlights the mental health difficulties experienced by the young people onscreen once again and the almost impossible task to help them, as indicated by the use of "try" (Elliot, 2010). Sharna is the only group member to argue these depictions are not representative of every male in care:

"But it's not really saying that every lad's like that, it's just like saying, he was he was obsessed with her so, like it didn't like exactly say it's not exactly like pointing that every lad in care is a mentalist really... Someone in care someone not in care can be mental..." (Session 3, lines 246-258)

Sharna seems to be the only group member who is able to separate the fictional from the real, and perhaps has more faith in "others" being able to view Drew in a more nuanced way. "Third Person Effect" (Davison, 1983; Perloff 1993) is not as powerful for Sharna as it is for others within the group, and she demonstrates empathy with the character. This underlines the importance of adopting a Freirean approach (Freire, 1970; Rindner, 2004) with these young people, increasing the group's criticality of the images will offer a chance of being able to see how others might see and understand them.

9.5 "They had anger issues"

When referring to the looked-after characters in *Short Term 12*, Georgina states, "they had anger issues". She does not seem to identify with these characters, other than Sammy, who "was really quiet." In this way, the negative perceptions she holds of them seems to "distance" her from the characters (Konijn and Hoorn, 2005). In session 3, When the group are hypothesising what might have caused Drew's "violent" behaviour, Joey also suggests, "He could have anger problems." Although Georgina stated previously she felt TV shows depicted looked-after young people as being from bad backgrounds, a point she seemed to disagree with, she states:

"He wasn't very raised well when he was a youngster... Because he was dead angry, and all the time." (Session 3, lines 252-254)

It seems that she directly attributes his behaviour to his background, a message that is pervasive in the media (Riggs et al., 2009). Even though Georgina has previously acknowledged that not all looked-after

young people come from "bad" backgrounds, the connection is strong enough to override her criticality on the issue. She makes this assumption when she has no evidence to support this notion, other than a reference to Drew's mother having had mental health difficulties. When talking about Tracy Beaker, Daniel states:

"Aye but obviously like, if you're gonna be like dumped in the same care home for like, most of your life and get fostered like, for up to three months and then dumped back in the same place, you're obviously gonna be like angry and messed up in the head a bit, and like hate people around you because you won't be able to trust people around you. (Session 1, lines 159-163)

Previously Daniel identified with the aggressive elements of Tracy's character, and offered some explanation as to why Tracy might be angry. It could be that Daniel's identification with the character of Tracy Beaker has helped him understand his own behaviour and modify it as a result (Cohen, 2001; Brown, 2015).

9.6 "Always end up turning out being pregnant"

Keira states that girls in care "always end up... being pregnant." When Georgina contradicts this point of view, Keira states, "My opinion." When Joey backs Georgina up claiming Keira is not pregnant, she tells him to "Shut up." Keira is forceful and confident. This is obviously something she feels passionate about. She goes on:

"Like they always have always have all the ones I've seen that have been in care, they've always either been pregnant or they've had the child so it's like, saying that basically saying that, more likely to have kids but at a young age. But it probably is kind of is true, because there's a lot more things like, the trouble teenage girls follow their mam's footsteps." (Session 3, lines 167-171)

She negates her own point of view, her own disagreement with the pregnant teenage girl in care image by stating there is some truth in it,

and that "teenage girls follow their mam's footsteps." It is worth stating there may well be some truth in her observation however, as evidenced in the literature. West (1999) states, "Young women in and from care are often associated with sex and teenage pregnancy, in a way that ignores but contrasts with the abuse experienced by many children in care" (p.260). Keira does however state "Never here though", which I interpret as issues such as teenage pregnancy not happening in the group. It is worth iterating the importance of the group approach once again. Although Keira seems to rail against the idea of a pregnant girl in care, the image is so strong, she does perceive it as reality. However, the group offers her an alternative viewpoint directly, in that they disagree with her, and indirectly, in that the young women in the group are not pregnant themselves. Perhaps then, this knowledge, enhanced by the "group" and her reality, although not demonstrated here, will enhance her criticality of these media images that have distorted her perceptions (Freire, 1970; Milkie, 1999; Yosso, 2002). Keira later states that the depiction of looked-after girls being pregnant:

"...kind of annoyed me cos like, it's trying to think that trying to say like all girls particularly, because you never, you never think of boys... Like, you never think of boys doing something like it's like clearly the worst possibility for a girl." (Session 3, lines 188-193).

In this way she highlights an oppression that is twofold – a negative attitude about looked-after young people compounded by negative attitudes towards females. Perhaps it is twice as hard to be female and in care? Ewan seems to be in agreement with Keira, stating people, "would think everyone in care's gonna be crazy, and getting pregnant early." He maintains his own view – others will think people in care are "crazy" – and builds on it using Keira's ideas. In this way the group approach is useful for Ewan. Exposure to his peers' thoughts and beliefs help protect his self-evaluations, because he knows the

group devalues these images too (Milkie, 1999).

It should also be noted that the idea that looked-after young women are depicted as "getting pregnant early" faces more challenge than the notion looked-after young males depicted as having mental health problems. Georgina, Sharna and Joey draw on fictional images (*Tracy Beaker*) and personal lived experiences (female group members) to challenge the idea that girls in care find themselves pregnant at an early age, illustrating evidence of a nuanced opinion and a developing criticality (Yosso, 2002). As if to underline this nuance, Georgina does offer some support to Keira's argument, citing Faye Windass from *Coronation Street*, as an example of a young person from the care system, who gave birth at the age of thirteen.

9.7 "Wrecked ninety-fives"

Another depiction of looked-after characters highlighted by the group, is the "poor young person", an idea echoed in West's 1999 study, who notes that the young people he interviewed felt the media made them out to be "no hopers" (p.262). When talking about Drew and Jade's lifestyle, Keira states:

"Like she was like clearly mustn't have had enough food... She had to actually go and look in people's houses and stuff for clothes." (Session 3, lines 616-620)

These onscreen characters do not even have food and clothes, two of life's basic necessities. When talking about the couple's living conditions, Joey describes them as "trampy" and points out, "They broke in they didn't pay any rent or bills they didn't pay any rent." This echoes Riggs et al.'s ideas who state, "young people from care are implicitly represented as different and separate from an approved ordinary family life... children from care represent a negative of

idealised children and childhood: through their representation in this way, the social norms emphasised in much of the press are articulated. But the consequences for the lives of thousands of children and young people are appalling" (2009, p.265). This idea is emphasised in Tommy's interview, where he states that looked-after males "are just shown as tramps with nits, proper muddy clothes, hood up... wrecked ninety-fives", and goes on to state looked-after young people are:

"...shown as, like, they're different. They're shown as they're different people, they're not humans, in Waterloo Road like... they're shown as tramps, from living with their mam and dad... They're just they're just shown as tramps who don't have a life." (Tommy's interview, lines 137-145)

These are strong words and strong images, and it is as if he feels these characters are presented as "sub-human", as though this is what being separated from a family makes a person. Rogers (2016) undertook interviews with a group of young people in care, finding that a number of the young people "described incidents where their care status had been used against them by their peers... in order to insult and/or exclude them" (p.9). He further notes that, "The insults that the participants in this study received from their peers often centred on a perceived rejection by their parents. This separation from a parent appears to be at the root of where the young people's stigma originates. This is what sets them apart from their peers; it makes them feel different and it can be used to make them feel devalued" (p.10-11). These ideas underline West's thoughts:

"A key element in the construction of care is children being away from family. This places children in care outside conventional ideals of childhood spent within the family. Stories about family life, and problems when parents are not present, have implications for the way in which children in care are thought of, because they are regarded as without parents or certainly with absent parents" (West, 1999, p.260).

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Similarly, in Keira's interview, she notes characters are depicted as:

"...out of place, and that's how I think that's they always, try and make, the looked-after children look out of place and not look the same as other children..." (Keira's interview, lines143-144)

Note the idea of a "They". She gives perhaps a sense of conspiracy against looked-after young people, which is perhaps borne from the sense of injustice she feels. This perhaps points to a growing awareness of inequality and developing critical consciousness (Freire, 1970). This idea of being "out of place" chimes with the work of West (1999) and Riggs et al. (2009). Keira goes on to state:

"...when you look at the TV you can kinda see the picture of which ones you think kind of are in care because they always, sometimes they don't get obviously the, same clothes as everyone else kind of like the up-to-date fashions and that kind of that's that's kind of a big, giveaway... like Tracy Beaker she nev she always wears that same black and red jumper... Like she never has that off, because obviously and then that makes her stand out from everyone else at her school and things because, she never, like she hasn't got the the newest top the newest trends or anything like that, it's just the same, clothes really...." (Keira's interview, lines 156-169)

For Keira, these looked-after characters are "out of place" and do not fit in. Like Tommy, she talks about appearance and clothing not being up-to-date, as a means by which looked-after characters are depicted as different. Clothes are important to her, as a young teenage female, important to the ways she performs her own identity. In depicting looked-after young people in such a manner, negative stereotypes prevail and an already problematic stigma is added to.

When the group attempts to understand Drew's behaviour, Sharna suggests he could have been "raised perfectly fine", and Georgina agrees, "He could've been raised with a rich family." Here Georgina equates perfectly fine with a "rich family". This underlines the idea

that looked-after young people are portrayed as being from poor, working class families (West, 1999). Riggs et al. note "particular class-based representations of foster care continue to predominate and... perpetuate the belief that child abuse only occurs in certain (economically marginalised) households, rather than across a broad spectrum of family forms" (2009, p.245). Alternatively, Georgina could also be referring to the ability of affluent families to manage their resources (e.g. financial, educational) to avoid social services involvement and keep their children at home.

9.8 "They don't like it"

Another theme highlighted by the group, was the notion that young people hate being in care. Georgina states that an episode of *Waterloo Road* made her "aware" of "People being in care like, they run away because they don't like it or they wanna be with someone." The idea of "running away" from care appears to be novel to Georgina and suggests her experience of care has been positive. Joey states something similar, when talking about *Waterloo Road's* Scout Allen:

"...she went through a very difficult time... And erm, that it just could've been solved by her just like going into care and like instead of just like running away and, like getting more and more people involved in it she could've just like solved it by like just doing one simple thing." (Session 4, lines 124-128)

The idea that care is awful and the last possible thing you would want for anybody, is pervasive (West, 1999; Riggs et al., 2009), but this group appear to have had relatively positive experiences of being looked-after. When talking about Scout Allen, Dylan states:

"She like, didn't want to go into care that much right, so she didn't realise how much danger she was putting herself and her brother, like stealing that money from a drugdealer and trying to runaway, and she didn't have enough money like, to buy a house and keep, like and or

accommodation to keep her and her like brother safe and warm... So theys would've won both been living on the streets...” (Session 4, lines 320-326)

Daniel suggests Scout would have been much safer in care. The idea that going into care is so bad, she would rather put herself and her brother lives at risk, does not sit well with these young people.

9.9 “Friends” and “Family”

It should be noted that not all the elements the young people highlighted in terms of the onscreen depictions were negative. For example, when talking about the characters in *Short Term 12*, Jae states, “It's just like most of them are friends”, and Sharna points out:

“Did you not think that they make you feel like a family because they've all got problems and, like they understand each other?” (Session 5, lines 522-523)

She talks positively about the group, with themes of family and understanding. Her choice of words, “make you feel like a family”, rather than “make them or each other feel like a family”, seem to indicate that this was for all of us. Perhaps then, as Linden (1970) states, the film invited her to see the familiar differently to that to which she was accustomed. I would suggest she saw elements from the group reflected back to her, particularly the idea of being a “family”, an element that had some relevance to her (Konijn and Hoorn, 2005).

9.10 Tracy Beaker: “I love it, me”

While there was a lot of negativity displayed towards the character of Tracy Beaker and the show's depiction of care homes, there were positives too. Clearly for Daniel she is a character he identifies with, having felt he was like her (Cohen, 2001), potentially inducing

changes in his behaviour (Igartua and Casanova, 2016). While I would have liked to explore this further with him, he was unavailable at the time of interview, so I was unable to.

Georgina states that Tracy, "reminded me of Carly", Georgina's older sister, and states Tracy Beaker is a "role model" and "what I wanna be when I'm older." Clearly then, to Georgina at least, Tracy presents something to aspire to. This is one of the few instances where any of the young people refer to the media having any direct influence over them (Bandura, 1977). Shedlosky-Shoemaker et al. (2014) note that, "outstanding role models inspire observers to aspire to high achievement" (p.573). This again highlights the need for onscreen looked-after role models, who these young people are able to engage with. Carly herself was also able to find something in Tracey's character she liked – her humour.

9.11 "She doesn't want to give up on her sibling"

As highlighted in the previous chapters, siblings are vitally important to these young people. Therefore, it is no surprise that there was a focus on sibling relationships when viewing these onscreen depictions. Both Sharna and Tommy highlight how *Waterloo Road's* Scout Allen "doesn't want to give up" on her younger brother and note how much she "loves him". It would seem they both identify with this sibling bond, an idea particularly evident to Tommy throughout the group sessions and into the interviews (Oakley, 1999). Jae, Georgina and Rob all have empathy with Scout's actions:

Georgina: "She, she was very very ambitious... Because, even though her mam told her not to go, she wanted to be have the best for her brother, Liam." (Session 4, lines 292-298)

Jae: "...not being with her brother would make her, be be more stressed as well... Because she's always been with her brother." (Session 4,

lines 55-58)

Rob: "I think like, what she does for her brother is quite sweet though the fact that she's willing to risk all that for her little brother... To make sure her little brother's OK I think is really nice." (Session 4, lines 220-223)

So then, several group members highlight Scout's desire to protect her younger brother as positive. This may well be a characteristic they could each identify with, perhaps noting similarities between hers and their own situations (Cohen, 2001). Even though they do not condone running away and stealing, they understand and empathise with her actions.

9.12 "Not her fault"

The young people show empathy towards the onscreen characters throughout the sessions. Where they highlight behavioural issues they do not perhaps agree with or relate to, they try to understand why these characters might be acting in these ways. An example of this is when Rob talks about Scout Allen:

"I felt really sad for her, erm because obviously I mean no child no matter what age you are what your situation is you shouldn't have to go through what she went through... Everyone should have someone who's there to care for them she shouldn't have to look after her brother... And it was just really sad to see that happening." (Session 4, lines 70-79)

Rob speaks with a lot of wisdom, empathy and understanding. He goes on:

"I think she's went though a lot of different problems that has made her, do the things that she does... It's not her fault the negative things like obviously she's the one that's done them, but I can understand why she's done them and it's not her fault that she's had to do that..." (Session 4, lines 228-233)

Tommy identifies with Scout in the strongest of terms, speaking for himself and the group:

"Probably everybody in here (long pause)... Everybody in this room possibly has went through it as well though, like what she had to go through there." (Session 4, lines 28-36)

Tommy believed the whole group would be able to empathise with Scout, because they had "went through" similar experiences to her. While none of the young people condone Scout's actions, they do not blame her either, and place the fault with her mother. For example, when Joey ridicules Scout's hygiene, Daniel lays this responsibility at the feet of her mother. Georgina also adds, "It was mammy bear's [fault]." Similarly, when the group discusses Drew's behaviour, Keira explains, "his mam got took away to an an... (institution)", which impacted on his behaviour.

The idea that being in care is not a young person's fault resurfaced several times throughout the group sessions. When Georgina states, "Some of the children like, are brought into care because of abusive parents or grandparents", Carly adds, "Or mothers, alright that's parents... Abusive uncles." And when Tommy states, "My mam was an alcoholic so I came into foster care", Carly states, "My dad was a drug-dealer." Perhaps then it would seem that seeing these characters, and having empathy with them, has allowed the group to open up about and understand their own experiences.

The notion of blame is particularly resonant here. In an individualistic society, such as ours, Vojak (2009) suggests responsibility for an individual's predicament is attributed to themselves rather than to structural inequalities, and it is often the case that young people in care are blamed for their situation. Further, West notes the young people he

interviewed felt "blame" was "heaped upon them": "We get it from everywhere. From children down our street, from their parents, and from the papers" … "We get the blame for everything, because we're in a kids' home" (p.264). However, as seen above, the group are able to challenge this concept of blame, building on one another's reasons as to why they each came into care.

9.13 "In a way I kind of related to Jayden a bit"

There are instances where the young people talk about how they relate to the characters onscreen, or make their connections to the characters explicit in terms of their own lives, thus shining a light on their own experiences and the similarities and differences therein.   Jae talks openly about relating to *Short Term 12's* Jayden:

"...cos like she got abused by her parents, you know how she got abused by her dad, I got abused by my dad as well so in a way I kind of related to Jayden a bit." (Session 5, lines 811-813)

She points out the reason she related to the character is because she has had similar experiences, she identifies with her (Cohen, 2001). Her disclosure prompts disclosures from both Tommy and Sharna:

Tommy: "Apparently when I was younger I got, physically abused my err little brother's dad." (Session 5, lines 819)

Sharna: "My mam did and my mam got abused by my brother's dad and I was apparently I was five-years-old and apparently I went mammy's getting hurt... Just saying so, I dunno how I done that." (Session 5, lines 825-828)

In Sharna's example, we see her protecting her mother as a child, taking on adult responsibility (McMurray et al. 2011). While these sorts of disclosures prompted me to adopt semi-structured interviews, in order to offer the young people a more private space, it should be noted that group effect here is positive and supportive. Not only do the

young people open up and share with one another, bringing them closer, they access deeper thinking that perhaps would not have been possible otherwise. For example, Sharna reflects on the abuse she witnessed, but also her own resourcefulness as a child: "I dunno how I done that". So then, while these young people may move to distance themselves from these depictions and make claims of inauthenticity, there are elements they identify with and relate to, and these elements prove useful in terms of deepening their thinking. As Shedlosky-Shoemaker et al. (2014) state, "immersion into narrative worlds can create opportunities for growth in which experiences, perspectives, and knowledge of fictional characters' prompt readers' own development" (p.573).

The young people were able to highlight individual positive qualities in the onscreen characters. One such character, Marcus, from *Short Term 12*, seemed to stand out to the males. This was however, for his personal characteristics rather than necessarily a connection to his experiences (Cohen, 2001). In session 5, Joey highlights Marcus as the character that stood out to him the most:

"...because like, he like... like he was like he like wrote like a rap and everything about his like-- Yeah and then he'd like that the, worker just knew him and everything." (Session 5, lines 444-447)

Joey states that he liked Marcus because "he was like open" and that he felt bad for him. So then, perhaps Joey admires this quality – openness, and as a result, felt empathy for the character (Cohen, 2001). Ewan highlights Marcus as standing out to him too, because "he, made everyone else make a birthday card for like Jayden." It seems then Ewan is drawn to Marcus's warmth and generosity. Tommy also highlights Marcus "because he was a good rapper... he was talented and he's h-he looked scared to show his talent though." It would seem

then for these young males, Marcus is a character they are able to identify with, their "positive appraisals enhanced involvement and appreciation" (Konijn and Hoorn, 2005, p.115). Shedlosky-Shoemaker et al. note that, "Audience members are able to create meaningful relationships with fictional characters and these relationships might entail opportunities for novel experiences and personal growth, particularly if individuals perceive those characters as representing their ideal self..." (2014, p.574). So, clearly there were elements of Marcus's character these young people aspired to – his openness, his warmth, and his talent, and it is possible, he might have presented a role model for them (Awan, 2007; Gauntlett, 2008).

9.14 Superordinate theme 2: Depictions of care

This section includes a look at the the young people's perceived depiction of care, highlighting similarities and differences observed across the group and interview sessions.

9.15 "Very very very realistic"

In terms of *Tracy Beaker*, Joey claims the show was "Realistic, um, yeah kind of. Yeah, it was good". When probed further about why it was realistic, he states:

"Um, how like, because like, when I think of residential homes, I think of like, people who misbehave and that, like. For some reason." (Session 1, lines 147-148)

So then, Joey, who along with the majority of the group has already stated little to no "first-hand" experience of care homes, believes this depiction of care homes to be realistic. However, he has no frame of reference to base this on, other than the media images available to him (Hartley, 2011). As Cohen states, "perceived realism is a very important feature to television viewers in their reactions to texts in

general and, more specifically, to characters. Realism, however, does not necessarily mean the similarity of a character's behavior to the real life of an audience member; it may be a similarity to a stereotype held by a viewer (e.g., a poor viewer) regarding the life of another social group (e.g., a rich character)" (2001, p.259).

Georgina also states she believed *Tracy Beaker* to be realistic in terms of the character's behaviour, maintaining her position in the face of disagreement from her sister. Daniel states Tracy's behaviour is realistic, owing to the fact she has "been in care that many times" and "dumped in the same place". In terms of Scout Allen's story, Georgina states she felt it was "Very very very realistic" and when discussing *Short Term 12*, Georgina she also found Jayden's situation to be "very realistic" because "kids get abused from parents." So then, for Georgina in particular, there were elements in each of these programmes and films, she believed to be realistic, such as young people entering care, owing to abuse. Of course, the majority of children in care looked-after due to abuse or neglect (DfE, 2015), however, it seems that "realism" for Georgina needs only to be painted in the broadest of strokes.

During the interviews, while most of the discussion around looked-after depictions was framed negatively, some of the young people were able to find something positive in the examples they had seen, characterised by what they felt was "realistic". Joey states *Short Term 12* was the best example he had seen because:

"...it did have people like hurting each other and all that, but like, in the other ones it was like, everyone just like messing around and everything and just... I dunno, just being horrible." (Joey's interview, lines 71-71)

It seems then that *Short Term 12* presented more rounded characters

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and perhaps a more balanced sense of life, even though he found it overly dramatic. Jae also states she liked *Short Term 12* and that it:

"...was like more realistic than Tracy Beaker... Because it shows that like not all young people in care are like troubled. It had like different like people like, characteristics and all that, like it reflects their personality... it shows that, like yeah, not all kids have like behaviour problems like I've said... everybody is troubled, but they show it in their own way." (Jae's interview, lines 63-72)

While it is hard to ascertain exactly what she means by "realistic", she does draw attention to the range of behaviours expressed by the onscreen characters and how each of them copes with their experiences. She goes on:

"Like the lass that cut herself-- Like she liked to show, show it that in, that she was troubled in her own way by cutting herself... And then the boy, the little boy that ran away, that kept running away, like that shows that he's troubled as well, like, other, like, people have their own ways of showing it, their like troubles, like their own troubles, they've got their own ways to show it." (Jae's interview, lines 74-81)

It seems then that the film portrayed the characters as individuals, showing their "troubles" individually. Perhaps Jae also highlights this particular film as the onscreen experiences of Jayden resonate with her deeply.

9.16 "They just seemed like random kinda kids just plonked in"
So then, while there were instances where the group claimed depictions to be realistic, or instances where they related to the onscreen situations, the young people felt there were many more examples of unrealistic depictions. Milkie states that, "Researchers have suggested that one reason why people are critical of media is that the media distort reality and reflect groups in distorted ways" (1999, p.198). West (1999) notes that a "perception that newspapers lied

about care was a consistent theme, and one young woman's immediate response to raising the subject of the media, was that the press are "very biased against us" (p.262).

During the initial session, when discussing *Tracy Beaker*, Jae claims she does not believe the show to be realistic. The programme depicts a care home far removed from her own lived experiences, where her brother was placed away from her, where he himself experienced difficulty. When Keira supports this viewpoint, giving her own account of life in a care home, the other young people in the group cannot believe the poor treatment of the young people, responding to Keira's story with outrage. For Jae and Keira, personal experience counteracts the depictions in *Tracy Beaker*. During her interview, Keira talks further about her own experiences of care homes:

"Well in Tracy Beaker ev err like being in a care home makes it sound, th-the programme makes it sound or look like it's a piece of cake... And like that that's not how it's like in a care home, normally you have some really roughies and they just like drink and take drugs all that obviously if you're in a care home y-you can't really stop them... I've been in one for three... it's not it wasn't nice like I was in with five other girls... the care workers tret us with no respect just literally get in your room, stay there... and I was in a room with five girls... They were all proper bitchy, it was there was lots of things going ra things getting thieved... you couldn't put things down in the care home like in Tracy Beaker you could put something down it'd be there ten minutes later, in a real care home if you put it down it's gone... it's like, it's like you'd be so lucky if you got in a care home like that..." (Keira's interview, lines 175-235)

Her opinion reflects that of a young person in West's study, where a newspaper article reported foster care a success: "'it's a lie, if that's the truth then we'd all be in foster care'" (1999, p.262). Further, if Keira believes care homes are only for "bad children", and she has lived in one, how does this impact on her sense of self? When talking about the young people in *Tracy Beaker*, Carly states:

"...all them children just seemed like, I dunno, like random... I dunno, like, children that can't be fit into a foster home because of like, the way they act or like, how their behaviour is, or like, their situation. Like they just seemed like random kinda kids just plonked in." (Session 1, lines 207-213)

Carly states these "children" seem "random", they could be anybody. This contradicts her understanding that young people are in care homes, "because of like, the way they act or like, how their behaviour is, or like, their situation." She goes on to state that she is not sure whether the show is realistic, as she has, "never seen, like, kids in a residential, so I don't know what it would be like." So unlike Joey, she claims to hold some reservation about her ideas around care homes, because her first-hand experience is limited. However, she believes young people in care homes are there because of "how their behaviour is" or "the way they act". So even though she feels unable to assess how realistic these depictions of care homes are because of a lack of experience, she still makes assumptions, potentially underpinned by media images (Hartley, 2011). Also, it seems she might blame these young people for their own circumstances, a message that is pervasive in the media, and society generally (West, 1999; Vojak, 2009). Keira claims she did not find *The Dumping Ground* to be realistic. She did not believe in the temporary care worker character, explaining to the group what would have really happened under those circumstances:

"Cos they would've sent an an extra person to come in and check on them to see which care worker and if she couldn't provide a valid... council thing then, whatever." (Session 2, lines 28-29)

Georgina states that the care worker "said no food", which, "wouldn't happen", underlining what the majority of the group felt – this temporary care worker was not a believable character. Carly also points out the ridiculousness of the episode:

"Yeah, but they wouldn't be, wouldn't be let in a house on their own, they wouldn't have grenades, they wouldn't dunno, it just, it's just surreal." (Session 2, lines 14-15)

She states *The Dumping Ground* is "surreal" and clarifies what reality in this situation might look like:

"...they would get checked up if they were going on holidays, they would they would have care worker people in coming in... every so often to check on them.... So really that wouldn't have been able to happen." (Session 2, lines 17-27)

The whole episode is built on a premise that would not happen in the real world. Whether *The Dumping Ground* attempts to capture the real world is another matter, but it certainly does not reflect reality as far as Carly, or the majority of the other young people, are concerned. Towards the end of the discussion, Daniel states he found *Tracy Beaker* more realistic that *The Dumping Ground*, stating, "I mean how can Thea look like a carer... she doesn't even look fifteen she's like thirteen." In terms of *Short Term 12*, Tommy reacts negatively to the film:

"It was it wasn't it didn't sound non-fictional if you get no fictional fictional wait realistic I'll use the word realistic, it didn't sound realistic cos you wouldn't have in some cases you might have somebody cutting themselves but that's like, really really like really really bad things and that yeah but like, in other cases like y-you wouldn't have a radgie like ya erm whacking somebody with a baseball bat would you?" (Session 5, lines 132-136)

This idea – this sensationalism of the truth – was evident in West's work, where young people often felt the same, but understood "the commercial motives behind press reporting of care" and that "changing the general story won't sell papers" (1999, p.263). So then, perhaps in terms of onscreen stories, the creators of this content

believe the real lived experiences of looked-after young people will not entertain an audience and they have to over-dramatise stories. This idea was emphasised during the interviews, where both Joey and Tommy felt they had not seen anything onscreen that resembled their own lives. Keira also states:

"Nothing's been near [her own life] it nothing's been close... Cos everything's too far-fetched, like it's either dramatically brilliant life or it's really really bad... I've never had I've always been kind of in the middle..." (Keira's interview, lines 246-251)

She very much echoes my own feelings on the extreme ways these young people are represented, from the idealised "dramatically brilliant" *Dumping Ground* to films such as *The Unloved*, which depict a "really really bad" life. In Session 5, Tommy goes on to compare the behaviour of the young people onscreen, to his own behaviour:

"And swearing at the carers all the time... I swear at my carers, not that not that often but I don't even like scream, I wouldn't go "fuck off like"." (Session 5, lines 139-142)

While he can see some comparisons with his own behaviour, he has boundaries that he perceives the young people onscreen as not having. During the group sessions, when I state my personal feeling that that *Short Term 12* feels the "most realistic" thing we viewed, Joey challenges me fiercely:

"No I don't think it is... They (the actors) haven't been in care... They haven't had like experience... They're just actors that take it for granted." (Session 5, lines 225-231)

This offering is angry and passionate – he believes that the "actors" who we can assume as the people who created the film, have "no idea" what he has been through. He does not find the film realistic and is vehement in his thoughts on this. Essentially, this was my feeling

initially, prior to commencing my research. I believed that as Joey said, looked-after young people were "taken for granted" in his words, and their depiction often stereotypical and unrepresentative of reality. While the matter is much more complex than this, it is clear that in some instances and for some individuals, this is the case. Perhaps then, Joey is also advocating the use of non-actors, people with actual experiences of the lives they are depicting, as used by filmmakers such as Ken Loach, Shane Meadows and Andrea Arnold. When asked if there were any characters she related to in *Short Term 12*, Sharna states:

"I dunno I just like its just like a film and I dunno what like maybe if it was like real life then I know it's real life if it was real life it would probably be more than a film..." (Session 5, lines 617-619)

In this sense, she seems to be saying that it would have made more impact on her had it been "real life". This attitude echoes Milkey's findings, whereby the girls in her study reported they would be more influenced if media portrayals were more like real life (Milkie, 1999: Hartley, 2011).

9.17 Superordinate theme 3: Realities of care

This section includes a look at the the young people's perceptions of the reality of care, highlighting similarities and differences observed across the group and interview sessions.

9.18 "He'll be safe she he'll be safer as well"

There were several instances when the group present care as a positive experience, rather than negative. When talking about Scout Allen and her fears around going into care, Tommy is able to see the positives of being looked-after, for her younger brother in particular, who will "be safe" in care. Similarly, Daniel suggests Scout would have been much

safer in care, rather than running away. Carly notes a similar idea when referring to *Short Term 12*, believing others would "think it [care] was quite hard and, upsetting... And, really depressing, but really it's not that bad." During interviews, while the young people all highlighted difficulties around living in care, they were once again positive and optimistic about their experiences. For example, Tommy states, "The good things are like you get tret like... you get tret good, you know when your dinner's gonna be on the table... you dress smartly... and like you've got somebody there who's helping you..." He highlights positives – structure, security and his presentation – elements that contradict the way care is often depicted. Likewise, Keira, although having experienced numerous placement breakdowns, describes being settled and the difference this had made to her:

"I dunno, like think I'd say I'm a lot more happier... I'm like I'm more cheery I'm doing a lot better, like in my classes... I'm working at my level that I should be getting which is like a B, so... I'm erm I'm quite good." (Keira's interview, lines 423-429)

This simple excerpt challenges a whole plethora of stereotypes, for example, the idea that looked-after young people have low self-esteem and do poorly in education. She goes on:

"[I] think I'm gonna try to stay there [in her current placement] as long as I can really until I've got everything sorted, get a job (she laughs), try and get a job even if I'm just wanting to work with horses, really at the minute..." (Keira's interview, lines 836-838)

Even though she defends her mother throughout her interview, she still understands that her current placement offers her stability, and gives her a platform from which she can get "everything sorted". Keira also talks with real affection about a former carer, stating she sees "her most Saturdays". She states:

"I was only meant to be there for a couple of a couple of weeks I was there like a year a half (she laughs), but then because she was getting too old they had move us and literally that was probably the hardest thing I've ever done in my life, moving from such a stable place..." (Keira's interview, lines 756-759)

It seems moving from this carer was "the hardest thing" she has "ever done" in her life, which would include, leaving her mother. So then, could it be that this carer provided her with the most important relationship she has ever had? Jae is also able to reflect on her experiences and understand why she is in care and how she is doing better as a result of it. She states:

"...like with me, I wasn't getting very good health, I wasn't, I didn't get very good health at all and I wasn't getting a good education, since being in care that's changed, I'm in good health, I'm in I've got great health and I've got great education..." (Jae's interview, lines 406-409)

While she acknowledges "you love your family to bits", she also understands her health and education, have improved while she has been in care. Unfortunately, positive stories about looked-after young people are often neglected, in favour of more negative depictions (West, 1999).

9.19 "Don't you get put in a residential unit because you have to be separated from other, kids?"

The idea that looked-after young people live in care homes is a common misconception (West, 1999; Hare and Bullock, 2006). If we take the content the group viewed throughout these sessions as an example, three were set in care homes, and in one other, the young couple had run away from residential care. Only Scout Allen's episode of *Waterloo Road* did not depict a care home. However, only 10% of looked-after young people actually live in residential care (DfE, 2015), and the young people in this study had very little first-hand knowledge

or understanding of what life was like in a care home. Both Joey and Carly explicitly state they have no experience of care homes, and only Jae and Keira state they have any experience, which amounts to visiting for contact with a sibling. Although, Keira does later tell me she was in a care home for a short period during her interview.

During the group sessions, Georgina highlights her uncertainty around residential care, "Don't you get put in a residential unit because you have to be separated from other, kids?" Although she probably has a better idea than her non-looked-after peers about residential care, her knowledge is still lacking. When talk of care homes occurs in session 5, Carly refers to a "naughty boys" school and Joey tells the group his carer threatened to send him to a "naughty boys' home" if he misbehaved when he was younger. So then, this outdated reference has been used by their foster carers, and it perhaps becomes clearer why both Joey and Carly make the association between residential care and being "naughty". They are influenced by their carer's ideas, who we could assume have been influenced by the media. Joey then asks:

"Can we go for a visit at a prison some time?... I only wanna see what one looks like." (Session 5, lines 252-256)

Joey suggests the group should visit a prison, making this connection when a discussion around care homes takes place. There is perhaps a reason for this identification, as West notes, "The term 'in care' has connotations of being inside, that is in jail, and sounds like a truncation of incarceration, so it is not surprising that it was formally replaced - but it seems that associations, even if not deliberate, will continue to be made. The association of care and crime means that stories about children in secure units, and about children's jails, will be conflated with care" (1999, p.259). Whatever prompted this connection, it is an alarming thought process for a looked-after young person to make.

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9.20 "I swear"

When watching *Short Term 12*, the group seemed to struggle with the behaviour depicted – violence, aggression, self-harm. However, one element that sparked a protracted discussion was swearing, an issue they could all relate to. Joey does not condone the young people's behaviour, when they swear at staff, stating, "If if I swore at my carers, I'd get told off", making a distinction between the onscreen characters and himself. Sharna states she does not swear at her carer. Tommy talks about his experience of swearing:

"I swear at my carer and she just laughs... My my carer swears like... My carers swear but like... But they don't they don't do it like I don't literally when I'm in a rage... It's like "ahh, Ok then" you know what I mean." (Session 5, lines 298-308)

Here he seems to be presenting a balanced relationship between him and his carer. He might swear, but he would not do it in anger, there is a boundary, unlike the characters onscreen. He supports his point by providing interactional evidence, utilising direct speech as he re-enacts his experiences (James et al., 2016). In a way, these characters present a mirror for his behaviour, and a lot of other group members, who perhaps see themselves as opposite to the characters onscreen. It is hardly surprising, when their appraisals are largely negative, that there is a distance between the young people and these characters (Konijn and Hoorn, 2005). Following the group's discussion on swearing, I state "I think it's really interesting though we've watched that film... And your thing is swearing..." I clearly find it difficult to believe, with everything that happens in the story, the young people focus on something to me at least, that is so unimportant. Perhaps then the film is so far removed from these young people's own experiences, this is one of the few elements they have some experience with and can

therefore relate to.

9.21 Changing placements

A theme that emerged throughout the interviews was the number of placement moves some of these young people have experienced and the impact this has had on them. For example, Tommy lists a number of carers he has stayed with, showing clear and vivid memories of each. These placements, these people, they are important to him. Keira describes her experiences of placement moves in very negative terms:

"...You get moved from pillar to post, you're passed on like every every so often, and you just get tret like a piece of crap pretty much when you're there if you're only there for say a short term or you're there for a couple of weeks... You're just starting to settle and then you're being moved again... I've been with more than forty-five carers? … Within nine thirteen year... It's been ridiculous cos it's always been short-term placements, like I was in one short-term placement for two year and I was only meant to be a month two month..." (Keira's interview, lines 272-287)

She goes on to share an experience related to moving placement and how poorly she feels it was handled:

"Ahh a lot, think I was in a house for one night, one day, not that was it and then I went to school the next morning then me school me social worker picked us up and I was in another place the next day, I was like, "oh well OK"." (Keira's interview, lines 392-394)

She states this experience made her feel "crap". When she uses direct speech and says "Oh well OK", she enacts her passivity (James et al., 2016), and does not seem to have any agency or power in this situation. I can only imagine how saddening and frustrating this must have been for her.

9.22 Importance of sibling relationships

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While this has been discussed at length in previous chapters, it is worth highlighting how important sibling relationships are to the young people. For example, Tommy talks positively about both his younger and elder brother, whom I myself had worked with. Similarly, Keira talks about her own brother protectively, blaming the system and the poor handling of his ADHD for the fact he is in prison.

9.23 Strong parental bonds

In the group sessions, the young people presented parents as a source of negativity and abuse, blaming fictional and real parents for their children being placed in care. However, in the interviews these ideas and thoughts were a lot more nuanced, with Keira and Tommy defending their parents. Keira in particular paints a sad narrative of a child who was taken from a loving parent. When talking about her little brother, Keira states:

"Haven't seen him since he was two month old, because I used to look after him, the err social workers tried to tell me that my mam that I looked-after my brother, on my own, when considering any, young, girl, would wanna help out their baby brother like,every time my mam bathed him I use to go like, "mam mam I'm holding him" and knock her hand so I so I hold him in the bath and she used to wash him, like I used to change his nappy because my mam was like, "you do it like this" and I picked it up straight away, and like now, you leave me with a baby, I could tell you everything to do, like everything around cos my mam was teaching us as, as she was doing everything with Harry, like "this is how you do this and how you do this this is how you do this" and I used to just, learn and do it so I ended up one day, my mam went, "Keira change his nappy" and I changed his nappy straight away... (I was) about four five, still knew what to do, and like, it wasn't as if, it wasn't me mam couldn't be bothered she just wanted to see if I'd learned it, and like "Keira changed his nappy" straight away done it, because I knew hadn-I knew what to do, cos I'd been watching and taking everything in what me mam had been doing." (Keira's interview, lines 488-504)

She seems to be project a sense of injustice, explaining why she wanted to learn to look after the baby and how her mother was

teaching her. She talks of family bonds, that were taken from her, which must have been incredibly difficult. There is also something in here of what it means to be a woman, with a mother passing on skills to her daughter. This was a powerful moment in the interview, deeply sad and affecting. We see that in being taken away from her mother, Keira feels torn. She defends her mother with all her might and gives a reasoned explanation for why she might have been placed in care, laying the blame on herself, if anything. Of course, this would not be a reason in isolation, but perhaps this is what she wants to believe. Her story places her family as victims of an unreasonable state. She tells a further story, of a time she had an accident and was not allowed to see her mother:

"...they would not let my mom in the hospital at all,when I had my accident... I got hit by a car on a zebra crossing... It snapped my tibia and fibia... Wouldn't let me mam come in at all, erm, yeah, just m-my carer, and like, it was really bad cos I woke I used to wake up crying, for my mam, and then they went and told my mam that I was crying for her, if I was my mom I'd cry but they were obviously still refused to let her in the hospital. I was in there I was only in for two nights' hospital... I was just like, I just lay in bed most nights just like text my mam (she laughs)..." (Keira's interview, lines 791-807)

Again, her sense of injustice permeates the account, as she describes crying, calling for her mother, and not being allowed to see her. This gives an image of a lost, lonely girl, who is desperately in need. She continues to describe keeping that contact with her mother, in spite of what her social worker told her to do. While not as directly, Tommy offers a similar feeling about how difficult it is to be separated from your mother:

"...there's foster care rules like you're not allowed in your foster carer's bedroom and that. But if you're a little kid right, you love to wake up in the middle of the night and like sleep with your mam don't you, so, if you're a little kid that would be quite hard won't it?" (Tommy's interview, lines 389-392)

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He states eloquently that perhaps some of these rules and regulations set up young people to fail. It would seem that this is Tommy's lived experiences, seeking out his mother as a child, when he woke up "in the middle of the night". Perhaps then the interviews offered the young people a space where they could reflect at a deeper level away from the group and be more honest and open, without fear of embarrassment or reprisals. In this sense, the move to interviews and a private space, proved to be positive for these young people, and in terms of an exploration of attitudes towards parents, adds nuance and depth.

9.24 School experiences

Another theme that emerged strongly in the interviews, particularly with Keira and Jae, related to their school experiences, often centring around instances where they felt they had been singled-out because of their looked-after status. Jae states teachers ask:

"...loads and loads of questions about like "are you alright, is something happening at home, is there, has this happened has that happened like", you don't really wanna answer them questions because you don't want people to know about like like your backstory, like you don't want people to know like what's happening, because you're not feeling like up to it, to open up about it... When once everybody else has left like, I'd be happy to answer the question... And tell the teacher what's going on rather than telling the teacher when everybody's there... It kind of feels like I'm getting singled out, you're getting singled out but, you don't really want to..." (Jae's interview, lines 236-287)

For Jae, this lack of privacy (Ford et al. 2007) and being "singled out", could impede her ability to ask for help. Catchpole (2013) notes that being singled out in school adds to a perceived sense of stigma.

9.25 Attitudes towards professionals

During the group sessions, the young people highlighted both positives and negatives in terms of the way the onscreen staff were depicted. For example, when discussing Drew's behaviour, Keira states the head teacher used "a soft tone of voice," which was "reassuring" and Ewan supported this, claiming staff treated Drew and Jade "fairly." The young people also noted positives in the staff depicted in *Short Term 12*, with Tommy stating they "were canny loving" and Ewan claiming Grace, a care worker in the home, was "open to the children" and "there for them". There were negatives too. In terms of the staff treatment of Jade and Drew, Sharna states, "They were like, on a knife straight away", meaning they were hyper-alert and reactive. Joey also felt there were issues with the staff depicted in *Short Term 12*, stating "they didn't take their job seriously". Throughout the group sessions, there were very few references to professionals in terms of the young people's lives. However, during interviews, references to professionals related to the young people's own lives. Perhaps then, this is evidence of a developing criticality, with the young people making connections between the fictional and the real (Yosso, 2002). For example, Tommy talked about his social worker, indicating positive relationships and a relative consistency between workers. However, Keira offers a different point of view:

"...they [social workers] don't stick to what they say sometimes and they don't inform you aswell like Tracy Beaker Elaine the Pain was always there when she when they needed her the most... But, that's not like that, it's not like that in real life, you've gotta actually ring your social worker if you want to see them out of the cont out of the contact dates, I never want to see my social worker because I can't stand I can't stand her guts." (Keira's interview, lines 287-296)

Again, she cites Tracy Beaker as a counterpoint to her own lived experiences. As well as finding the care home in which Tracy lives to be idealised, Keira perceives Tracy's relationship with her social worker to be overly positive too. It would seem that, for Keira at least,

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the world of care, as depicted in *Tracy Beaker*, does not resemble her lived experiences in any way.

9.26 Superordinate theme 4: The effects of fictional onscreen depictions

What was these young people's critical analysis of these depictions in terms of their influence and effects? This section explores this question, highlighting similarities and differences observed across the group and interview sessions. In the first part of this section, I will look at the direct influence of these depictions on the young people. Following, I will look at how they considered these depictions might influence others.

9.27 Impact on self: "I'm just not a very nice person"

While Jae states that *Waterloo Road's* Scout Allen would be scared, "not being with her brother", I ask how she felt while watching the episode. She states, "I don't have feelings when I'm watching things like... I'm just not a very nice person (laughs)." Several negative descriptions of the onscreen looked-after characters have been detailed, and clearly, as someone who identifies with at least one of these characters (*Short Term 12's* Jayden), it is feasible that these negative depictions are having an impact on Jae, causing her to see herself as "not a very nice person". Riggs et al. (2009) note the media coverage observed accorded to looked-after young people in their study, was "entirely negative" (p.242), with reports "associating pejorative terms with foster children, or at the very least describing the life outcomes of foster children in negative ways" (p.242). These negative depictions "can affect not only the ways in which the public perceives foster care, but also how foster children view themselves within this media-constructed reality" (West, 1999) (Riggs et al., 2009, p.237). Stigma is understood to create barriers for stigmatised people,

and influence all areas of their lives including their self-perceptions and self-esteem (Liegghio, 2016). So then, it could be that Jae has internalised this stigma. Of course, this is speculation, and it may be that this internalisation has occurred as a result of other life experiences or relationships (McMurray et al., 2011). What I can say with certainty is that looked-after young people, as a marginalised group, are beset by negative stereotypes (West, 1999; Riggs et al., 2009), and these portrayals will certainly not be helpful for Jae, in terms of combating this negative self-image. Freire states that, "Self-depreciation is another characteristic of the oppressed, which derives from their internalization of the opinion the oppressors hold of them. So often do they hear that they are good for nothing, know nothing and are incapable of learning anything—that they are sick, lazy, and unproductive—that in the end they become convinced of their own unfitness" (1970, p.63). In terms of my own work with these young people, I challenged negative self-perceptions whenever they arose, as discussed in depth in chapter nine.

9.28 Denying looked-after identity

West's research with young care leavers across England highlights the importance of the public's attitude towards looked-after young people, with almost three quarters of participants stating they never or rarely told anyone they had been in care (West, 1995, p.24 in West, 1999). There is evidence to suggest people who experience stigma often attempt to keep their stigmatised status a secret, and "pass" as normal (Goffman 1963; LeBel, 2008; Bos et al., 2013). Young people who conceal their looked-after identity may worry excessively about the risk of discovery and may have difficulty developing long-term social relationships (Goffman 1963). Keira comments that only her "close friends" know she is in care and talks about the anger she felt when a teacher revealed her looked-after status to her classmates. This would

seem to indicate she had concealed this knowledge from her peers, forming a barrier to friendships, which in turn could potentially impact on her aspirations for the future (Vojak, 2009). It seems reasonable to suggest these negative and stereotyped depictions, only enforce these barriers and further isolate these young people (West, 1999).

9.29 Distorting opinions

There were multiple examples of how these depictions may have distorted the views of the young people. For example, Joey points out he had seen *Tracy Beaker* prior to entering care:

"I like, thought like, that if you go in care you're in like one big massive care home with loads of other people... But like that's not how it is." (Joey's interview, lines 39-42)

Tracy Beaker had distorted his perspective and ideas around what care might be like, and even though he realises care is not one "big massive care home" due to his personal experiences, these images still have real influence over him. During her interview, Keira states:

"I came into care when I was three erm but then a couple of years later when I was about six or seven... I always thought it would be care homes all the time... But when I got to about erm eight or nine, and then obviously obviously when I got put with, carers I thought "ahh well it's not as bad as I thought it would've been", but then I was like, younger..." (Keira's interview, lines 28-37)

So then, the idea that she would go into a care home was also taken for granted by Keira. How scared must she have been, assuming she was going to be placed with all these other young people? However, what she finds is, she is placed with carers and "it's not as bad as I thought it would've been". It could be that in these instances, the young people are experiencing what is known as cultivation theory (Gerbner et al., 2002 in Hartley, 2011), which assumes heavy TV viewers adopt the

world-views offered by television. Therefore, looked-after young people who are consistently presented with a certain view of the world or themselves, will be cultivated into accepting these images as reality. In this instance, the message is that all looked-after young people live in care homes, and the young people in these care homes are "bad", which we could assume to mean, all children in care are bad (West, 1999; Riggs et al., 2009). Keira goes on to state this distorted thinking extends to others:

"...people at school... Like they don't understand that, there's carers, but and there's there's like care homes and thinking if they think that all care homes are fun like Tracy Beaker and and it's not." (Keira's interview, lines 75-79)

She states that others assume she lives in a care home and focuses on the care home in *Tracy Beaker* and how positively it is presented. She has first-hand experience of care homes and does not find them as "fun" as is depicted, underlining how others' opinions on care have been distorted.

9.30 Role-models

One positive that emerged from the sessions, in terms of direct media impact, was the concept of role-models (Awan, 2007; Gauntlett, 2008). Georgina said Tracy Beaker was a "role model" who she aspired to and Daniel also claimed an affinity with the character (Cohen, 2001). Also, for Joey, Ewan and Tommy, *Short Term 12's* Marcus presented positive traits such as openness, warmth and a talent for rapping. Jae describes identifying with *Short Term 12's* Jayden:

"...it kind if like helps like you to know that there's someone out there who's more like you than you probably like, because sometimes you think I'm all alone and there's no one like me, but really there is, there's probably millions of kids out there who're just like me"." (Jae's interview, lines 87-195)

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She reiterates the usefulness of positive depictions, offering images a young person can identify with and relate to, showing her there are people out there like her, which make her feel less alone. She links the discussion of the fictional to the real and beyond, and talks about finding someone and identifying with them on a deeper level. Of course, this depiction is just outside the mainstream, so it may be these young people have to search for these role models, or be directed towards them. So then, while looked-after role-models could be of huge value to young people in care, their absence is concerning. When you consider these young people are already disadvantaged when compared to their peers (Goodyer, 2013), they face further potential deficit when the characters available for them to identify with, who may shape who they become, are negative or absent (Shedlosky-Shoemaker et al., 2014). West notes, "there 'are no role models' of people from care publicised and praised for young people to identify with. The care background of famous people, however, is often known to young people from care, although this fact may be disregarded by the general public" (1999, p.263). An example of this was when Joey referred to a stunt woman who had been in the James Bond films, having had a care background. It is therefore important these young people are directed towards looked-after role models. Anderson and Carvallo (2002 in Gauntlett, 2008) note, "parents and educators must take pains to expose children to a wider variety of potential role models than popular culture does... A variety of potential heroes and role models allows children to appreciate themselves and the diversity in others (p.168)".

However, it is worth noting that although there may not be many obvious role models for looked-after young people in film and TV, they may well be able to access role models in their own lives.

Gauntlett states "A person's general direction… is more likely to be shaped by parents, friends, teachers, colleagues and other people encountered in everyday life'" (2002, p. 250 in Awan, 2007). Of course, for looked-after young people, where parents may be absent, they might look to other role-models such as carers, teachers, siblings or friends. An example of this is when Georgina states that Tracy Beaker, who she referred to as a role model, reminded her of her sister, Carly. While we may think of looked-after young people as not having enabling role models (McMurray et al., 2010), they may still be there for some after all. However, for those young people that do not have these figures in their own lives, looked-after role models could only be of benefit.

9.31 A raised awareness

One other benefit of these depictions is their ability to raise awareness and show group members what life might be like for other young people in care. Georgina states *Waterloo Road* made her "aware" of life in care as experienced by others, albeit in a negative sense. Similarly, there was also evidence to suggest the sessions opened up a space for Joey to reflect on what life is like for young people in China. Shedlosky-Shoemaker et al. (2014) point out that "parasocial interactions have the capacity to offer the audience member an expansive range of experiences. For example, narratives may provide connections with others whom people would not ordinarily encounter in their physical environment, including people of different ethnicities, religions, or even other planets, thereby providing an avenue for developing new knowledge, skills, or perspectives" (p.557). This "raised awareness" broadens the young people's understanding of other lives and gives context to their own lives and experiences. Further, this can affect and influence the attitudes of others with little experience of looked-after young people, who might have empathy

with these characters and help reduce stigma (Igartua, 2010).

9.32 Impact on others: "We're not horrible"

In terms of the impact these depictions might have on others, Joey shows concern:

"I think err err err that it would be a bad influence on like people and that they wouldn't wanna hang around us like, people in care and everything because erm because they'd think we were crazy and everything and err and nutters and no good and everything." (Session 3, lines 730-733)

He is clearly concerned that these depictions might impact on his attempts to build relationships himself, imposing barriers and perhaps resulting in him concealing his looked-after identity (Vojak, 2009). Onscreen depictions have the opportunity to challenge these negative stereotypes and misconceptions, and tell stories that feel real to these young people, that could help, rather than hinder, their relationships with others. One approach to reducing stigma is attempting to change the attitudes and beliefs of the general public that perpetuate stigma and discrimination. Where there is no opportunity for direct interaction, media depictions take on more significance (LeBel, 2008). Shedlosky-Shoemaker et al. (2014) point out that "parasocial interactions have the capacity to offer the audience member an expansive range of experiences. For example, narratives may provide connections with others whom people would not ordinarily encounter in their physical environment, including people of different ethnicities, religions, or even other planets, thereby providing an avenue for developing new knowledge, skills, or perspectives" (p.557). This can affect and influence the attitudes of others with little experience of looked-after young people, who might have empathy with these characters and help reduce stigma (Igartua, 2010).

This idea that these negative depictions will impact on others resurfaces multiple times throughout the group sessions and interviews. West notes that the young people he spoke with saw media stories as influencing adults in constructing and reinforcing their opinions (1999). For the young people in my study, "Third Person Effect" was very much in evidence (Davison, 1983; Perloff 1993). Although they generally understood these images to be unrealistic, they still perceived this would not be the case for others (Milkie, 1999). Ewan and Sharna demonstrate this concern:

Ewan: "(People) would think everyone in care's gonna be crazy, and getting pregnant early." (Session 3, line 722)

Sharna: "Well like we're all the same and we don't know how to behave and like they wouldn't trust we and like, things like that." (Session 3, lines 706-707)

This idea that, "we're all the same" is echoed in West's work, with young people claiming negative media representations "make out that everyone in care is the same" (1999, p.263). The way these images impact on others is a clear cause of concern for these young people. They are worried they will be thought of as "crazy", "nutters" and untrustworthy. There may well be some truth to their concerns, with evidence supporting the idea that these negative depictions have an impact on the wider public. Riggs et al. (2009) state that problems associated with recruiting foster carers, "may in part result from the negative perceptions about foster care that circulate within society more broadly... Many carers reported negative responses from friends and family when they announced their intention to become carers. Friends and family... suggested that foster children would "all be trouble" and... implied that carers would be left open to allegations of abuse" (p.237). They go on, "As such, negative representations of foster care hold the potential to undermine attempts at recruitment and

thus may contribute to the shortfall in the number of available carers" (Riggs et al., 2009, p.238). Logically then, this idea could easily extend to recruitment of social workers and other professionals, such as residential care staff. Igartua notes that "certain audiovisual productions... which present the particular cases of persons forming part of the stigmatized groups, can be used to improve the image of these groups by allowing audiences to empathize with the characters; this then leads to attitudinal changes" (2010, p.369). So then, in terms of the depictions we are presented with, creating characters who an audience can empathise with, is key in reducing the stigma associated with being looked-after.

When Jae claims some of the young people in her brother's care home were horrible, Carly states, "We're not horrible." In this way, she makes a divide between her (and the group) and young people in care homes, and we perhaps get an indication of an "us and them" mentality, as she moves to distance herself from these characters (Konijn and Hoorn, 2005). It is possible she blames young people in residential care for these negative depictions. If this is the case, this could further marginalise young people in care homes (the 10% minority) from young people in foster care more generally, a group they would perhaps expect some empathy and understanding from. This idea of blame runs through the work of West (1999), who found the "connection of blame, newspapers and neighbourhood" meant looked-after young people felt they were blamed "for everything" because they were in a care home (p.264).

9.33 "They stay in line"

Keira states that these negative images could inhibit a young person asking for help, fearing the stigma that comes with being in care and pregnant, as an example:

"So it's like, a like a young teenager and they stay in line cos it's like, with what do people think if you were to tell them oh my god she might be pregnant..." (Session 3, lines 195-196)

So then, if Keira was pregnant, she would be reluctant to disclose this fact, for fear of the stigma that would follow, potentially placing her in danger (Milkie, 1999). Positive depictions of looked-after young people therefore, could have beneficial indirect effects for her. If people in the general population observed these positive depictions, they might develop positive expectations about looked-after young people. These positive attitudes could cause looked-after young people to perceive (and perhaps even contribute to) more positive and productive interactions with others, which in this instance would mean Keira disclosing her pregnancy, and therefore being able to access help and support (Gunther and Storey, 2003).

9.34 "They won't actually, understand it as much as we would"

Group members also show concern that the wider public would not have the level of empathy or understanding they have. For example, when talking about Scout Allen, a character who draws a lot of empathy from the group, Tommy and Rob state:

Tommy: "They [the public] won't actually, understand it as much as we would because like we've we've been there done it all and everything, like we we understand it like quite clearly... But like if it was somebody who's not in care they're like, well why would you have to do that, why would they have to go to a stranger, can't can't she just look after err her brother herself, and do that..." (Session 4, lines 346-353)

Rob: "...we could all sit here and understand why she's made those dec-decisions yeah we know they're wrong but we can understand why like she made them whereas someone who doesn't know anything about care and all that sort of stuff they wouldn't understand why she did it, they would just think, "uh that's wrong, she shouldn't have done that", they don't get why she might've done it, and they wouldn't

understand the like, the sort of distress that she would be through like gone through with all that sort of going on so yeah." (Session 4, lines 374-380)

Why would these young people feel Scout would get no empathy from the public? Perhaps it is more evidence of Third Person Effect (Davison, 1983; Perloff 1993), or perhaps there is some weight to the fears. Goddard argues abused children are portrayed as a burden to adults, rather than citizens with a right to safety and care (1996), and West notes, "'because of the association of care and crime, the children are not really believed, and are deemed to be of lesser worth" (1999, p.265).

9.35 "I wanna be tret the same as everyone else"

Another theme raised by the young people was their concern around how these negative images night cause others to treat them. Georgina states:

"they might think that they need more, more, they have to have more standards because they are looked-after, like, like teachers they treat them, more different..." (Session 3, lines 742-744)

It seems that she resents being singled-out and treated differently owing to her looked-after young people status. For her, this was:

"bad because they because like because I wanna be tret the same as everyone else, well like I get frustrated when they treat me different..." (Session 3, lines 763-764)

Sharna agrees:

"Like at school we get help erm how we get yeah we get help from like RHELAC all the time... And you go out of lessons like five or five times a day and then they go, "why have you done this, why you done that?" it's like, "Well it's none of your business is it really"... Yeah like people recognise more children in care in care than they do if they're

not in care." (Session 3, lines 744-753)

These depictions could well influence the way others treat looked-after young people, either garnering sympathy or suspicion (Wayne et al., 2008; Bernier, 2011). Either way, the interaction is coloured by "more" of something, as underlined by Georgina: "they might think that they need more, more, they have to have more..." Bos et al. (2013, p.1) note that "Stigmatization can be overt. It can manifest as aversion to interaction, avoidance, social rejection, discounting, discrediting, dehumanization, and depersonalization of others into stereotypic caricatures". A theme that ran through the interviews was the idea these young people felt they were treated like victims, with the onscreen depictions of looked-after characters exacerbating this. Jae states:

"Well it's like if some people don't really know what it's like being in care, they've seen things like Tracy Beaker, it does tend, like, it does tend to like give them a reason to be like more harsh with you... like say, a pers, like, a pupil in the school is talking to you about being in care, they'll probably treat you like you're just a random kid who's in care and they'll feel sorry for you... And most kids in care won't want people feeling sorry for them, because obviously, it's, like some kids can't deal well with people like hovering around them and stuff, and asking them like loads and loads of questions." (Jae's interview, lines 229-237)

She picks up on the idea she will be treated differently, as a "random kid who's in care" rather than just a young person. She also raises the issue of being singled-out, having attention that is unwanted. She goes on, citing her own experiences:

"...you get singled out because like the teacher's like "Jae are you alright,because yesterday you were all fine and today you're just like all upset"... It kind of feels like I'm getting singled out, you're getting singled out but, you don't really want to... because it makes people treat you differently..." (Jae's interview, lines 282-284)

She states she would rather have these issues raised in "private rather than being out in the open." She states:

"It makes you feel under pressure because you're like you want to tell somebody about how you're feeling but at the same time you don't, because you don't want everybody to know about, like your whole backstory and everything... It makes it like harder for you to open up about things if they single you out in classes." (Jae's interview, lines 301-303)

Therefore, for Jae, this "singling out" can exacerbate a young person's vulnerability, by pressuring them and making them not want to open up. This fear of being "singled out" and stigmatized could impede her ability to ask for help (Rogers 2016). When I asked Keira whether she thinks the way looked-after young people are shown on TV affects the way people treat them, she states:

"most people in school and stuff, like, people make an exception, like if I say I say I can't get I can't do my work say I've moved placement then I will have to go and speak with my teacher, and they go "ahh" and they give us sympathy and I'm like "I don't want sympathy"... just I'll get it in for as soon as I can and she's like "ahh, well you know if you can't get it in you don't have to bring it in" and it's like "well don't do that because you're making it, you're making me making us different treating me as different and I'm not different"... It's just I'm not with my mam, you know what I mean I'm not with my family. It-it's weird." (Keira's interview, lines 567-577)

Later, she states:

"some people do like being get tret differently like I know a couple girls in my year who're in care and they love being tret differently they're just like.. They're like "yes" like, gathering the sympathy up if you know what I mean?" (Keira's interview, lines 648-651)

She does not want to be seen as a victim and pushes back at this idea, and much like Jae, she wants privacy and to be treated as an "ordinary" young person. However, she does acknowledge that perhaps some

people thrive on added attention, "gathering the sympathy up". She is unable to speak for all looked-after young people, and is able to offer a balanced perspective.

Further, the young people talk about feeling angry and reacting aggressively when their looked-after status has been used against them. When Tommy talks about a violent altercation, he states he "grabbed a hold of his jacket put his hood up and just "flattened him down". Similarly, when Keira tells her story of being singled-out in class she states she "kicked off" and that she would have punched" the teacher's "face off". Rogers (2016) undertook interviews with a group of young people in care, finding that a number of the young people "described incidents where their care status had been used against them" providing "numerous examples of how their 'in care' status was used... in order to insult and/or exclude them" (p.9). So then, if people perceive these young people to be aggressive and treat them differently as a result i.e. single them out, these young people are likely to act aggressively, building a vicious cycle of expectations and behaviour, and a potential self-fulfilling prophecy (Merton, 1948 in Sharma and Sharma, 2015). Rogers highlights however, "Being treated differently does not always come from wanting to be hurtful or to devalue; it can also come from the spirit of friendship and a desire to be caring and supportive. However, it still seems to reinforce these fostered young people's feelings of difference" (p.8).

9.36 "It's not as bad as I thought it would've been"

One salient point that was raised during the interviews was how these negative depictions of care might inhibit young people from coming forward and disclosing abuse. Joey talks about advising a friend who was experiencing abuse on what to do and what care would be like. It is worth questioning what this friend would have done if he had not

had access to Joey's experience of care, and whether he would have disclosed his abuse at all. If all he saw were care homes filled with troubled children, these distorted opinions could well have deterred him from opening up and disclosing his abuse.

Further, these negative depictions of looked-after you people might inhibit disclosures from young people in care themselves, for fear they will not be listened to. This is something highlighted by West (1999) who quotes the young people he interviewed: "'You know the big scandals. Well no one takes any notice. [Young] people are disclosing [abuse] all the time. No one listens because it's acceptable. That is, because of the association of care and crime, the children are not really believed, and are deemed to be of lesser worth. 'The public think, they don't mind [about what happens] because "they are the people who rob us" – they think so anyway'. 'The public see young people [in care] as shite — and it's wrong'" (p.265).

9.37 Superordinate theme 5: A better depiction

At the outset of my research, I aimed to explore how could we better depict looked-after young people. In this section, I highlight ways in which looked-after characters could be better depicted, as suggested by these young people, reflecting their own lived experience. It is worth noting that this theme emerged during the interview stage, the final stage of the Freirean empowerment model (Rindner, 2004). At this stage of the process, Yosso states that, "Students' navigational efforts are aimed at trying to change societal perceptions" (2002, p.56). Freire (1970) states, "Human existence cannot be silent nor can it be nourished by false words, but only by true words, with which men and women transform the world. To exist humanly is to name the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new naming" (p.69). Stigmatised

groups have used their collective strength to change laws and policies (LeBel, 2008). LeBel notes that a "benefit of social activism over individualistic strategies such as concealment and avoidance/withdrawal is that any improved treatment will spill over across a variety of situations and improve the lives of other similarly stigmatized persons" (p.425).

9.38 Young people who cope

Numerous unhelpful stereotypes are prevalent in the onscreen depictions of looked-after characters. From presenting young men as having anger issues, to young females becoming pregnant in their early teens, these negative depictions are at best insulting, and at worse, harmful, impacting on a young person's sense of self (Riggs et al., 2009), how others treat them (West, 1999), and on their ability to ask for help and disclose abuse. Simply by virtue of these young people being engaged with my research and impassioned about their representation, they challenge these stereotypes and misconceptions.

Perhaps one of the biggest issues highlighted by the young people in terms of onscreen depictions, was a character's inability to cope. Characters were angry and frustrated, turning to drugs or alcohol as a means of dealing with difficulties. However, the young people engaged in my research were able to cope. In fact, throughout the interview sessions, they were able to offer insight into techniques that helped them cope. For example, Jae uses her identification with Jayden as a means of describing a coping mechanism she uses:

"Yeah,when she's in her room and she's listening to her music and has her headphones on, that's what I do, I just sit in my own room with my music and just tend to do my own thing in my room... Like when I'm really really upset, I tend to listen to music..." (Jae's interview, lines 145-152)

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Jae goes on to offer guidance to others who might be struggling to cope:

"...speak to someone if you've got any problems... And then maybe they'll be able to talk about it and like, sort it out rather than just keeping it all to yourself and bottling it all up, then one day you're just like, angry at everything because like nobody understands you." (Jae's interview, lines 364-368)

Not only does Jae show how she copes, she is also aware of her emotional health needs, contradicting the stereotype of a looked-after young person with mental health problems (West, 1999). Similarly, Tommy shows he has the ability to deal with life's adversities:

"[Contact is] supposed to be, it went from once a week to once every two weeks to once a month, once every two months, three times a year. Now it's once a year... But, but everybody knows she [his mother] won't come so but I don't, we don't even bother thinking about the contact..." (Tommy's interview, lines 528-532)

While it is clear his mother has let him down on many occasions, his use of "we" indicates he has a good social group around him and he is supported, again iterating the support care provides (Riggs et al., 2014). Keira also shows a great ability to cope with adversity:

"It's like you don't understand how it hard it is to be away from your mam for ss-for so lon-for such an amount of time, and it is really really scary when you first go into care, but you've just kinda gotta go through it really and have the support and help that you need..." (Keira's interview, lines 714-717)

It seems that these adverse experiences have given her a greater understanding on these issues, and perhaps life generally, and she maintains a healthy perspective on her situation. Rather than being out of control, angry or frustrated, these young people show a high level of maturity and understanding when discussing their lives, thoughts and

feelings. For example, Jae compares herself to the fictional character Jayden from *Short Term 12*:

"'Cause in a way she's [Jayden's] like me, in a way, like I don't cut myself obviously, but like, she's more mature about things... And I will show it, like act in a more mature way than I usually will in different situations." (Jae's interview, lines 87-97)

Jae identifies with a characteristic in Jayden – her maturity (Cohen, 2001), a characteristic that runs counter to conceptions of reckless pregnant teens. She is also positive about herself here, having stated she was not a "good person" during the group sessions. Perhaps then, this is further evidence of an enhanced criticality of these media images, with Jae able to select and relate to that which she finds positive in these depictions (Yosso, 2002).

9.39 Young people who care

Throughout, the young people displayed a desire to share their experiences in the hope they might reach others and help them. Freire notes that, "Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow" (p.80). For example, when I ask Jae what she would want people to know about care, she states:

"You'd kind of like want them to know they're not alone, that they can talk to anybody about it, but just don't feel like under pressure to talk about it if you don't want to, don't make, don't let kids pressure you into talking about things you don't really wanna talk about." (Jae's interview, lines 315-318)

Here, she gives a message to other young people, advising them to maintain their privacy. She acts as a guide, an adviser, a role model, again challenging preconceptions and stereotypes. When talking about what she would tell a person about care, Keira states:

"Probably it's nothing to be scared about because, yes you might go through some absolutely crappy placements, but then in the end it kind of always gets better... [and] they actually find the right carer, like they have done with, [name redacted] like, everything works... Yeah, it's gonna take a while but it always kind of, it always comes with good at the end if you know what I mean, erm, and just, kind of be comfortable in that..." (Keira's interview, lines 636-647)

This is who she perceives as important to know about care – other young people who might enter care. She understands that a negative depiction might make it harder for young people who are entering care and those who are considering disclosing abuse. When Joey talks about helping his friend disclose their abuse, he too is an advocate for care, presenting a view of care that combats the depictions that are presented to us. He is empathetic, caring, using his experiences to help others. Tommy too talks about his positive charity work:

"I'm gonna be raising, I'm doing a charity thing next week with my school I'm shaving these off (his legs)... For err for err for NSPCC... 'Cause I went to NSPCC and that helped us a lot..." (Tommy's interview, lines 717-726)

His generosity contradicts a plethora of negative stereotypes around looked-after young people. He has a social conscience, awareness of how services supported him, and a desire to give back to the community. It also could be that Tommy was acting as a "wounded healer", a strategy often used when coping with stigma, reaching back to help similarly stigmatized people (LeBel, 2008).

9.40 Young people who do well

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If we were to believe the literature, then there would be little hope for looked-after young people in terms of educational attainment. However, some looked-after young people do well academically and some of those who enter university report "the benefits of their being in care on their eventual educational progress (Pritchard and Williams, 2009, p.287 For example, both Keira and Jae were very positive in terms of their education and achievements.

9.41 Young people who have interests and talents

These young people have talents, hobbies, interests. For example, Keira talks excitedly in her interview about her love of horses:

"Anything else, they can that that's fine I can't I'm not allowed to do that that's fine but horses, like no one tells me to ride but I just like bulldoze my way there I'll be like "I'm going"... Got my own loan horse... He's really naughty, like that, a monstrosity." (Keira's interview, lines 603-613)

When I ask "Is it a big one?", she tells me "Sixteen three." She explains, "Nearly seventeen, like your hands going up", and is able to demonstrates her expertise and passion.

9.42 Characters with a sense of humour

The young people seemed to respond to and like characters with a sense of humour. An example of this was when the group were discussing Tracy Beaker. The words used to describe the character appear to be wholly negative, although Carly provides some nuance, stating Tracy Beaker is a "liar", yet "she is funny". So then, while Carly saw negatives with Tracy, she found positive too – Tracy's humour. And it should be said, although sessions were at times chaotic, they were also enjoyable, with each young people's sense of humour unique and highly entertaining.

9.43 Young people who are young people

Perhaps one key element in looked-after characters the young people responded to, was young people simply being young people. When Keira highlighted Rhydian in *Wolfblood*, she seemed excited, realising there were other young people onscreen who were in care. However, the fact Rhydian is in care is not immediately obvious, because there is more about his character than simply being looked-after. It could be that for Keira, even though Rhydian is part werewolf, this is a very relevant depiction. Konijn and Hoorn (2005) note that relevance is "stronger than realism" (p.133) as a viewer will "tune in to several specific features that seem relevant to their own lives" (p.112). For Keira then perhaps, the characters she views onscreen do not necessarily have to be realistic, such as someone who is part-werewolf, but they do have to be relevant (e.g. a young person going through adolescence), if she is going to engage with them.

9.44 What would these young people would like to see?

All of the young people interviewed were confident enough to voice their feelings on what they would like to see from depictions of onscreen looked-after characters. In terms of how he would like looked-after young people depicted Joey states:

"Like, stuff like that happens in real life, not like things that people thinks happens just like, like, from err from a young person's like perspective like just to like, what they do and how, what they think of care instead of just like making it from about, like people like, getting hit and all that and running away, it's just... Like 'cos like you get tret well, you get like proper food... you don't really think that like y-you're in care, it's like it's like your your house like, yeah." (Joey's interview, lines 241-225)

So then Joey sees lots of positives about being in care. He wants stories that are less dramatic and more "realistic". He wants to show the positive aspects of care and contradict these negative images, such

as looked-after young people living in poverty (Riggs et al., 2009). Jae also focuses on presenting living conditions that are much better than the stereotyped idea of poverty that prevails when thinking about looked-after young people. She further states:

"I'm in care but I'm not alone, like I can talk to so many different people... That I know that I'm not alone and I don't have to go through everything alone... Kind of like, you'd want them to know that they're not alone and that they can talk to anyone." (Jae's interview, lines 377-384)

She is not alone. She has people around her who offer her support should she need it. She does not have to be treated differently or be offered special attention. In terms of how he would like looked-after young people to be depicted, Tommy states:

"I'd show like the different personalities that a foster care kid could have, the down the posit- the pros and cons of err being in foster care and all like, the other things like what, what's the difference between being in foster care and living with a mam, and like, but also like if you were living with your mam and that like, you wouldn't know like how, you wouldn't know, like you'd know if there was food on the table or anything. While on err, in foster care you always know when I get home I'll have, tea on the table." (Tommy's interview, lines 421-426)

It is important to represent real characters rather than stereotypes for him and a balance, "realism", the good and bad sides of being in care. He goes on:

"Life's not easy. Life has its ups and downs, there's pros and cons. Nobody stays on the sunny side of the road all the time, everybody has their moments..." (Tommy's interview, lines 596-597)

There it is once again, the desire for something balanced. Keira also wants to see a balanced depiction. She wants:

"to be told the truth and not like sugarcoat it, like quite a lot of them do they do sugarcoat it a lot and it's just like, that's it really, yeah... or not put too much of a downer on it really (she laughs), it it goes both ways it really does." (Keira's interview, lines 898-902)

The young people talked extensively throughout both the group and interview sessions about a desire to see realistic depictions of looked-after characters onscreen, echoing the findings of Milkie's study (1999), where the teenage girls there stated a similar desire to see realistic images and "normal" people. It is not simply positive depictions, they want to see, but depictions with authenticity. For example, *The Dumping Ground* offers positive depictions, however, they are overly optimistic and idealised. While these positive depictions might reduce stigma (Igartua, 2010), the young people viewed them as inauthentic or "surreal". If these fictional characters are to be role models for these young people, they do not need to be overly positive or flawless (Gauntlett, 2008). They do however, need to be relevant and authentic. Perhaps this leads into another suggestion made by the young people, albeit indirectly. During the group sessions, when I state my personal feeling that that *Short Term 12* feels the "most realistic" thing we viewed, Joey challenges me fiercely:

"No I don't think it is... They (the actors) haven't been in care... They haven't had like experience... They're just actors that take it for granted." (Session 5, lines 225-231)

This offering is angry and passionate – he believes that the "actors" who we can assume as the people who created the film, have "no idea" what he has been through. He feels looked-after young people were "taken for granted", and their depiction often stereotypical and unrepresentative of his reality. As previously stated, realism refers to the term we use when judging whether a fiction constructs a world we recognize as like our own. However, the concept of realism is problematic (Gledhill and Ball, 2013). Whose reality is being

represented? Are all of our realities the same? Gledhill and Ball (2013, p.356) note that "in fiction, 'reality' is always constructed. Hall (2013, p.259) states that, "meaning can never be finally fixed. If meaning could be fixed by representation, then there would be no change – and so no counter-strategies or interventions... But ultimately, meaning begins to slip and slide; it begins to drift, or be wrenched, or inflected into new directions. New meanings are grafted on to old ones. Words and images carry connotations over which no one has complete control, and these marginal or submerged meanings come to the surface, allowing different meanings to be constructed, different things to be shown and said." This raises the issue of authenticity, a concept explored by Moore (2002). Awan (2007) notes that, "Within popular music he argues that authenticity is constructed by a performer's ability to convey unmediated expressions of their experiences and circumstances which, in turn, the audience interpret as an articulation of their own emotions and environment... Furthermore, he states that this quality of authenticity is confirmed and bestowed subjectively by the audience to indicate their own authentic character (Awan, 2007, p.208). Perhaps then, Joey is also advocating the use of non-actors, people with actual experiences of the lives they are depicting, as used by filmmakers such as Ken Loach, Shane Meadows and Andrea Arnold. It could be that the use of non-actors could give TV and films depicting looked-after characters that authenticity that is needed – real people saying real things.

Chapter 10
Summary of superordinate themes

Overall, the young people found the onscreen depictions of looked-after characters largely negative, with themes from the group sessions echoed in the interviews. The negative themes the young people identified in these characters ranged from mental health issues, teenage pregnancy, to looked-after characters living in poverty. They also discussed characters as not being happy in care, a sentiment that the group did not appear to share. In the interviews, there was no discussion in terms of pregnancy and mental health issues, however, themes of looked-after young people depicted as different or "out of place" (West, 1999; Riggs et al., 2009), particularly in relation to appearance and clothes, were strong. Perhaps then, these themes became more refined in terms of what is important to these young people, such as characters being "out of place". It is a simple fact that, for some of these young people, mental health issues, poverty and issues of teenage pregnancy did not appear to be a feature of their lives.

However, there was nuance among the negatives. For example, when the young people discussed depictions of teenage pregnancy, they were able to cite looked-after characters who had not been pregnant. The group were also able to highlight positives in these depictions, particularly in the group sessions, where they were able to empathise with characters and show understanding with their situations. While some of the young people held quite binary positions of what was "good" and "bad", even they came to see the light in the darkest of situations. The young people were capable of examining an issue from a variety of perspectives, and proved to be considered and thoughtful. Where they observed behaviour they could not relate to, their

discussions opened out and they attempted to empathise with a character and understand their actions.

This nuance, this light and shade, was particularly illuminating for me. I was not looking for absolutes in this process. How could such a thing even exist when the subject at hand is so complex, steeped in each individual's experiences? (Bryman, 2016). Add to that the deeply embedded systems at work in the group and the notion that any consensus was achieved is almost unbelievable. However, at the outset, I believed these depictions were wholly negative and their impact powerful and detrimental to a group who were already marginalised by society (Davison, 1983; Perloff 1993). Freire notes, "The students—no longer docile listeners—are now critical investigators in dialogue with the teacher. The teacher presents the material to the students for their consideration, and re-considers her earlier considerations as the students express their own" (p.80). Having spent time with these young people, and having listened to and examined their words in depth, I realise there is positive to be taken from these depictions. The importance of role models, for example, and the young people's ability to identify with elements of onscreen characters. There is optimism. Something to build on.

While group members did cite instances of realism in the depictions presented, overwhelmingly they viewed these depictions as unrealistic, when compared to their own experiences. These young people believed that life in care is nowhere near as dramatic as depicted onscreen. Issues of mental health, violence, suicide attempts and self-harm do not appear to be issues the group can identify with or relate to in any direct way (Cohen, 2001). In fact, their lives appear to be much more mundane, with a focus on more minor issues depicted onscreen, such as swearing. The young people were not overly

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negative about care as was depicted, and were able to highlight the benefits of being in care such as having support, structure and boundaries. A raft of new themes emerged throughout the interviews that related to the reality of care, such as placement moves, strong parental bonds and school experiences. This perhaps suggests a move from the general to the personal, with the young people offering more in terms of their lived experiences. This could have been for a number of reasons. Perhaps they felt more comfortable sharing on a one-to-one basis, perhaps their ideas had progressed following the group sessions, or perhaps the relationships between the young people and myself had developed. Whatever the case, the move from the general to the personal suggests these young people became comfortable enough to offer more of their own lives, and the research undoubtedly benefited from this investment.

At the outset of my research, I had considerable concern about the way these depictions impacted on young people in care (Davison, 1983; Perloff 1993). While there is no clear evidence to discern how much these images impact on the young people directly (Bandura, 1977), there were several instances where these young people referred to themselves in negative terms in both the group sessions and interviews. Although I can only speculate as to how deeply these depictions have affected the young people's self-images, what I can say with certainty is that negative portrayals will not be helpful in terms of combating negative self-images. Further, these negative depictions have distorted these young people's ideas around what they expected from care, with some believing they would be placed in one "big massive care home" prior to becoming looked-after.

One positive that emerged from the sessions, in terms of media impact, was that of role-models. For example, Georgina states Tracy Beaker

was a "role model" she aspired to. However, generally, role models for looked-after young people are lacking (West, 1999). This is particularly worrying when you consider that role-models could be especially beneficial to these young people (Gomillion and Giuliano, 2011; Shedlosky-Shoemaker et al., 2014). It should be noted that my work with the young people assisted them to find elements in characters they were able to identify with. A case in point was Jae's feelings towards *Short Term 12's* Jayden, whose experiences she could relate to in a specific and real way.

While there was little evidence in terms of direct media effects (Bandura, 1977), there was much more evidence in terms of "presumed media influence". Although the young people understood these images to be unrealistic, they still perceived this would not be the case for others (Milkie, 1999), and were concerned they would be thought of as "crazy" and "nutters" and untrustworthy as a result of these depictions. There may well be some credence to their concerns, with evidence supporting the idea that these negative depictions have an impact on the wider public (Riggs et al., 2009). The young people seemed to display an "us and them" mentality, in terms of themselves and young people depicted onscreen, who largely lived in care homes. These negative depictions perhaps place a divide between the two groups, with the young people in this study moving to distance themselves from these onscreen characters (Konijn and Hoorn, 2005). This could potentially marginalise young people in care homes from young people in care more generally.

Group members showed concern that the wider public would not have the level of empathy or understanding with the onscreen characters that the group had. Perhaps this was due to Third Person Effect (Davison, 1983; Perloff 1993), or perhaps there is some weight to the fears

(Goddard, 1996). The young people were concerned these negative images might cause others to treat them differently, garnering sympathy or suspicion (Wayne et al., 2008; Bernier, 2011). This theme also ran through the interviews, with young people stating they were treated like victims and singled-out, owing to their looked-after status. They felt this "singling out" could exacerbate a young person's vulnerability further, by pressuring them and impeding their ability to ask for help. Positive depictions of looked-after young people could have beneficial indirect effects for young people in care. If people in the general population observed these positive depictions, they might develop positive expectations about looked-after young people. Positive attitudes could mean looked-after young people perceive (and perhaps even contribute to) more positive and productive interactions with others (Gunther and Storey, 2003).

One salient point raised during the interviews was how negative depictions of care might inhibit non-looked-after young people from disclosing abuse, for fear of what life in care might be like. A better depiction of care and looked-after characters could assist young people to open up in such situations. Further, these negative depictions might inhibit disclosures from young people in care themselves, for fear they will not be listened to. This notion is supported by West (1999) who notes that looked-after young people, "are not really believed, and are deemed to be of lesser worth", because of the connection between care and crime (p.265).

However, while there is much talk about in terms of the negative impact these depictions might have, there is cause for optimism. The young people acknowledge these depictions could address negative stereotypes and misconceptions (Hare and Bullock, 2006), and could offer balanced depictions and rounded, credible characters that young

people could identify with and relate to, that would help contextualise their experiences and show them there are "millions of kids out there" who are just like them.

During the interviews, the young people offered a raft of suggestions as to how looked-after young people could be better depicted, that reflected their lived experiences. For example, rather than showing looked-after young people having mental health problems or being under-age and pregnant, the young people offer an alternative viewpoint, such as depicting young people who cope, who are generous and want to help, self-sufficient, ambitious, mature and understanding. They highlight a number of issues and dilemmas that are salient to them, such as placement moves and experiences of being "singled-out" at school.   The young people talked extensively throughout both the group and the interview sessions about a desire to see realistic depictions of looked-after characters onscreen, echoing the findings of Milkie's study (1999). They want to see the good as well as the bad, the "ups and downs" and the "pros and cons". The overall theme described by the young people was one of "going through it", but surviving, coming through the side.

Chapter 11

The return to the group

Evidence suggests that young people are rarely involved in the dissemination of research findings, even though when research results are fed back to them, they respond well and ask pertinent questions (Pinter and Zandian, 2015). Pinter and Zandian cite Grover (2004) as stating, "even older children, those between the ages of 16 and 18 years, rarely have the opportunity of 'providing data regarding personal reflections on the topic studied or their experience as research participants' (p. 82), despite the fact that it is considered the research participants' inherent right to contribute their unique views about issues such as 'the formulation of the research problem and their experience of the research processes'" (2015, p.237). Many young people involved with research report feeling disillusioned after their involvement, with findings ignored or forgotten instead of being implemented (Pinter and Zandian, 2015). With this in mind, it was imperative I returned to the group to share my research findings. This not only me to ensure the validity of my findings with the young people, it also offered the young people a chance to reflect on the research and access some of their understanding of the process. Pinter and Zandian (2015) note that, "These deeper layers may not necessarily be more 'authentic' views, but they do help to show how degrees of understanding can grow and take on new aspects in time" (p.245).

The session was attended by eight young people, half of which were not involved in the research study. The reality is that group membership fluctuates and as these young people get older or develop other interests, they leave the group. I began by refreshing the group on the research project, with participants informing other group

members who were not involved, about the films and TV programmes we viewed and their feelings about the content. I then summarised my research findings, focusing on the questions I highlighted at the outset of my research. The group appeared to agree with my findings and there was nothing contentious, and they were keen to know what I planned to do with my findings. I explained that I hoped my research would be published in academic journals for students and lecturers to see. I asked them who else they thought they would like to read the research and they suggested parents, carers, social workers, teachers and other young people in care themselves (Pinter and Zandian, 2015). I also explained that I hoped we could still complete the creative part of the research project, and hoped, with their help, to write a film script based on a story that emerged from the research findings. I also asked the young people whether they felt they had found the project useful and the young people involved stated they had.

Prior to this session, I had discussed what I could offer the young people as thanks for their involvement with my co-facilitator, and she suggested sweets and chocolate, as offering iTunes vouchers for example, might exclude new group members who were not involved in the project. Therefore, at the conclusion of the session I presented the group with sweets and chocolates, a gesture of thanks for participating in the research, to show them their time and opinions were greatly valued (Heath, et al., 2009).

Following this session, I shared the treatment I had written (discussed in the following chapter) with the group using our private Facebook group. I felt it was best to offer the young people a chance to view the treatment this way, in their own time, as many were missing from our final session. The treatment gave them an opportunity to see their collective words come to life and enabled me to draw the research

together, providing a fruitful and positive resolution for everyone. It seemed the story really resonated with the young people too, with Rob writing "it made me tear up its such a good story... the struggle is real I can relate so much to his story".

Pinter and Zandian (2015) note that in their own research, "even though in the briefing session at the beginning of the research it had been emphasised that their views and opinions mattered and the researcher was keen to represent their own 'voices'... children did not really know what this meant in practice" (p.243). However, much like in Pinter and Zandian's research, by discussing the research findings and film treatment, the young people realised "how pervasive their own words actually were" in my thesis (p.243). Pinter and Zandian note that young people, "assume that the researcher's interpretations of their own words would automatically override what they had to say and how they said it. This signals an assumed lack of authority and expectation to hand over power and responsibility to the knowledgeable and competent adult" (2015, p.243). Clearly then, for these young people, the realisation of the weight and gravity I had attached to their words made them feel listened to, appreciated and valued (Pinter and Zandian, 2015). They know their time with me amounted to something, which is an incredibly positive outcome in and of itself.

Chapter 12
The Treatment

12.1 What informs the treatment?

Inspired by the work of Kip Jones, whose script for the film *Rufus Stone* was entirely based upon his research (Lichtman, 2013), at the outset of my research project, I agreed with the young people that we would create something together, a response to what we had learned – a film for example. In terms of acting-reflecting-acting (Rindner, 2004), the young people would have been able to take their learning from the group sessions into a real world setting. Unfortunately, I had to accept my original plans had been too ambitious and while this was frustrating, I was able to write an outline for a feature film project, informed by the research findings and the voices of the young people in this project, which I was able to share with the young people via our private Facebook group.

Perhaps one of the biggest issues highlighted by the young people in terms of onscreen depictions, was the character's inability to cope. Characters were angry and frustrated, turning to drugs or alcohol as a means of dealing with difficulties. However, the young people engaged in my research were able to cope. In fact, throughout the interview sessions, they were able to offer insight into the means with which they cope. So then, it felt important to me that the protagonist in our film also had this ability to cope. He listens to music when he is feeling sad and is also aware of his emotional health needs, maintaining a healthy perspective on his situation. Even though there are occasions when he is combative, feeling he is singled-out, particularly at school, he does well academically, and has talents and ambitions, with dreams of working with animals. He has a good sense of humour and a quick wit. However, when faced with difficult

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dilemmas, our character does not always make the best choices. He is impulsive and loyal to a fault, and would do anything for his younger sister.

Ultimately, as in Jones's script for *Rufus Stone*, my protagonist is a composite of all of these young people, their stories and experiences. As Jones states, "By using composite characters we've created a fiction in the end. They're still true to the research and even lines that they say in the dialogue often are verbatim lines that people said in the interviews. The story, however, is fictional—it didn't really happen exactly as it is told in the film to any one person. Using fiction, we were able to enhance not only the interpretive utility of the research, but also the 'entertainment value', and by entertainment value I mean that in the strictest terms of entertainment as something that makes people really think and makes them think at a very deep level" (Lichtman, 2013, p.5). Jones notes further, "I tend to see auto-ethnography when it's working best as using myself as a conduit to other people and other people's stories and events in their lives. This became quite apparent to me when I was writing the treatment for the film. We knew what the story was and we knew what the characters were doing, but we needed detail. I realised that I had to rely on my own experience as well" (Lichtman, 2013, p.7). This was something I very much kept in mind when writing my own treatment, and I was very much a conduit for the voices of these young people.

The film treatment aimed to capture authenticity and realism, the good and bad sides of being in care, while not being over dramatic. In terms of depictions of care, the idea that looked-after young people live in care homes seems to be a common misconception (Day Langhout and Thomas, 2010; West, 1999), and overall, the young people here had very little first-hand knowledge of what life was like in residential care. It was important therefore, that this story moved beyond the care home. Although I wanted to draw in as much "real life" as possible, with issues such as placement moves, school experiences and the

importance of sibling relationships being key to the story, I wanted to create a story that would reach those "others" the young people were concerned about (Milkie, 1999) and transcend real life. The young people might perceive others experiencing this story having their ideas about young people in care altered (Suazo Zepeda, 2011). Potentially, this could change the way these young people engage with others themselves, perceiving increased empathy, resulting in more productive interactions and relationships (Gunther and Storey, 2003).

12.2 The Treatment

The treatment I shared with the group was entitled *Hawk*, an eighty minute coming of age drama, about a teenager in foster care who steals a horse and makes an incredible journey across Britain's countryside, to save his little sister. While this might not be a realistic storyline, I believe it is relevant to these young people, in terms of the lengths they would go for their own siblings (Konijn and Hoorn, 2005).

This is the story of self-sufficient Jamie (14) who grew up in the care system after being removed from his mother when he was five. Having experienced the breakdown of several foster placements, he finds it hard to trust people. But even though he's gone through some tough times, he copes. He has a good sense of humour, does well at school, and has dreams of working with animals. There are occasions when he is combative and impulsive, and he is fiercely loyal, particularly towards his little sister, Molly (8). He might not always make the best decisions when faced with tough choices, but we understand why he does what he does.

When Jamie is singled out by a teacher for being in care, he is outraged that his looked-after status has been revealed to the class. To make matters worse, after school, Jamie's social worker is waiting for him with his belongings. Jamie has to move again, without warning, with all his stuff in bin bags and boxes. He arrives with new foster carer, **Debbie**, who lives in the countryside, in the middle of nowhere. While Debbie does her best to make him welcome, Jamie's understandably unsettled and unhappy. Depressed and dejected, Jamie withdraws to his bedroom. He searches his belongings and realises he has lost a necklace that belonged to his estranged mother. In need of someone to talk to, he calls his little sister Molly over Skype, who cheers him up.

Debbie attempts to reach out to Jamie, taking him to the stables she owns. He shows a natural ability with the animals and Debbie suggests he could get a part-time job there. The pair momentarily bond and it looks like she might be able to get somewhere, but Jamie remembers how many promises have been made and broken in the past and he leaves, exploring the neighbouring area. He finds another horse named Hawk, tethered in the front garden of a nearby housing estate. It looks sad and neglected and Jamie immediately connects with the animal.

At home, Debbie attempts to engage with Jamie, revealing she too was in care as a child. Jamie is surprised to hear this, particularly as Debbie has done so well for herself and she explains that she had someone who took a chance on her when she was young, and she wants to give that to Jamie. She promises she will not give up on him. Finally, she makes a breakthrough and Jamie agrees to give the placement a go.

Jamie talks with Molly again over Skype, wanting to tell her about his new placement and the horses. However, Molly seems distressed and Jamie is worried about her. When Jamie is visited by his social worker, Jamie voices his concern for his little sister. His social worker reveals adopters have been found for Molly and although she has recommended Jamie and Molly maintain contact, the adopters might not agree. Jamie is gutted, believing he will never see his little sister again. When his frustration turns to anger, Jamie flees Debbie's home. Unsure what to do, and driven by impulse, Jamie steals Hawk from the housing estate.

Jamie knows he needs a saddle, and reluctantly snatches one from Debbie's stables. Jamie and Hawk head off together, into the night. But as day breaks, Jamie is hungry and out of his depth. He takes Hawk to Debbie's home, wanting to offer the horse sanctuary at her stables. However, he finds Debbie with the police and believes he is in trouble for stealing from the stables and running away. It looks like yet another placement will break down. Realising he has nothing to lose, Jamie takes Hawk and heads off with a new resolve, determined to rescue his little sister.

Jamie journeys through Northumberland, across fields and through forests, on the back of Hawk. The journey is tough, with Jamie doing everything he can to keep to the back lanes and shadows, determined not to get caught. When news of a sighting of Jamie finds Debbie, she sets off in search of him, their separation pulling them closer together. The further away Jamie and Hawk get, the closer the pair become, with a bond developing between them. But the journey takes its toll and the pair grow weary. When Jamie attempts to steal food, he is chased and shot at by a farmer.

Jamie and Hawk finally arrive at Molly's home, having journeyed through the town centre and housing estate where Molly lives. Desperate, Jamie sneaks into Molly's house. Molly is shocked to see her brother, but agrees to leave with him. Her shock is magnified when she meets Hawk! The two climb onto Hawk's back and travel together through the estate, towards the countryside. Molly wants to know where they are headed and as night draws in, Jamie realises he has nowhere to go. He is terrified he will never see his little sister again and does not want to give up.

When Molly tells Jamie she is looking forward to having a new family, Jamie realises he cannot care for her and has no choice but to return Molly to her carers. It is the right thing to do. When Debbie arrives, Jamie expects to be told she cannot cope with him, but she tells him no such thing. She finds his bravery inspiring, and reminds him she has no intention of giving up on him. She believes that his relationship with his sister is vital and will do everything she can to help him maintain contact with Molly.

Some time later, Jamie receives praise from a school teacher, for a poignant short story he has written. After school, Jamie is collected by his social worker and taken to Debbie's stables, where he now works with the horses. Hawk is looked-after here now too, and the two are clearly happy to be together. When Molly arrives with her adopters, the brother and sister share a big hug, delighted to see each other and Jamie thanks Debbie for keeping her promise.

12.3 Writer's Notes

Hawk presents the culmination of my PhD research into the onscreen fictional depictions of looked-after characters, and explores the life of a young man in care, as a character often under-represented or depicted

poorly onscreen. While Jamie's looked-after status is not the main focus of the story, its inclusion will help challenge stereotypes and stigma. *Hawk* will have an almost fairytale quality, with Jamie travelling through the countryside atop a horse. The dialogue will be naturalistic and understated, and the characters believable, rounded and credible. Having worked with young people from the care system for a large part of my career, as both a social worker and researcher, I find these young people have little to no positive representations onscreen. I hope to give them an opportunity to see themselves, vibrant and victorious.

Films that have influenced this project include British movies that focus on young, marginalised characters often forgotten in cinema, such as *Catch Me Daddy*, *Fish Tank* and *The Selfish Giant*, as well as films with a relationship between a young person and animal at the heart of the story, such as *Kes* and *Free Willy*. While *Hawk* draws on ideas explored in these films, its central character drawn from the care system, its road movie elements, something rarely attempted in British cinema, and its fairytale qualities, give it a freshness. *Hawk* taps into a rich vein of orphan folktales, where protagonists avenge wrongs done to siblings, giving the story a timeless feel.

Hawk will be packed with heart and warmth, and the situation lends itself to unexpected twists and turns. The world will be populated with complex, credible characters, that will appeal to a diverse audience who will question how they would act if they were placed in Jamie's situation. The combination of drama and warmth will give the film a balance that will make it appealing to an audience looking for something gritty, yet accessible for viewers looking for something more upbeat and optimistic. Although Hawk taps into subjects such as responsibility and loss, at its heart it is a story about a loyal and loving

brother desperate to be with his sister.

12.4 My reflections

The writing of the treatment has tied things together for me, providing a synthesis of the learning I have undergone throughout my PhD into a narrative form, serving as an example of a new representation, informed by the voices of the young people I worked with. Having been a conduit for these young people's voices, I see there is something of me in this story too. My desire to overcome whatever obstacles are placed in my way, and that same sense of loss Jamie feels for his mother, I too have felt for my own father. I do not want to separate myself from these young people, I am as much a part of this story as they are. Much like Jamie, I have made an incredible journey throughout the course of this PhD.

Three years ago, I was a novice researcher, unsure of my decisions. I was sceptical of theory and I felt alienated by the inaccessibility of academia, lost amidst the various paradigms and positions. I struggled with the contradictions and complexities of research. There was a tension between my existing identity as a social worker and my new identity as a researcher. I did not just want to document and detail, as I felt a researcher would, I wanted to "do". I identified strongly as a qualitative researcher, rejecting positivism and the notion of using any quantitative methods.

I started out with a belief that these young people were depicted poorly in stereotyped ways, and these depictions would have significant influence over these young people. However, I have learned that there is much more nuance, and there are characters and scenarios onscreen that these young people were able to identify with and take something from.

I have also come to understand myself much more. At the outset of my thesis, I stated I identified with these young people owing to my own adverse experiences, in particular the sense of abandonment I felt when my father left. Perhaps then my own perceived stigma of being an "abandoned child" is what gives me that identification. When I was younger, I concealed my early experiences, for fear of what people may have thought about me. As I grew older, I took on something of a "wounded healer" role, wanting to "reach back" and help others. Now I want to take social action, and challenge these stereotyped depictions and their contribution to a stigmatising perspective of looked-after young people (LeBel, 2008).

Three years on, and I have moved much closer to resolving those dual identities – the social worker and the researcher. I know longer feel I am simply a qualitative researcher. I am now much more pragmatic (Grbich, 2013), and I will adopt whatever method or approach that best serves the question I am trying to answer. Research is a complex, messy process (Blaxter et al. 2010), but I feel I have embraced the chaos, the contradictions and the complexity, and produced a piece of work that not only has real significance and value, but also, that I am incredibly proud of. I am no longer fearful of the chaos. I want to use different methods and approaches to enhance my understanding and build my experience. I see this as my responsibility, not only to the research community and to participants I work with, but to myself. The passion I have for working with these young people now extends to research practice, and I am excited by the possibilities.

Chapter 13

Conclusion

13.1 Original contribution to knowledge

This research opens up the discussion around the fictional onscreen depictions of looked-after young people. This research has implications for a variety of people, including professionals working with young people in care, policy makers, content creators, commissioners and broadcasters, and looked-after young people themselves. Further it contributes to the literature in terms of IPA use, utilising and adapting the protocol laid out by Palmer et al. (2010) with both group and interview data.

Clearly these onscreen fictional depictions have some effect on these young people, making it imperative that content creators consider the messages they convey to their audience (Gomillion and Giuliano, 2011). More relevant, authentic and realistic images of looked-after young people should be included in mainstream film, television and other media so that a distorted, narrow image does not continue to deflate the self-evaluations of young people in care (Milkie, 1999). As Henderson and Franklin (2007) note, "Popular drama offers important opportunities to address stereotypes and introduce diverse audiences to groups in society with which they may have little contact" (p.149). This research offers a new range of representations for content creators to draw on, and the young people in my study offered several examples of how looked-after characters could be better depicted. For example, rather than see looked-after young people as being "troubled" or "monsters" (West, 1999, p.262), let us see them as being able to cope, being generous, self-sufficient, ambitious, mature and understanding. Rather than depicting young people as a homogeneous group, from poor, working class backgrounds (Riggs et al., 2009), let us see their

diversity in terms of their race, class, sexuality, ability and gender. Rather than highlighting issues of substance misuse, pregnancy and violence, let us see issues that are real to looked-after young people, such as family contact and placement moves. And rather than just showing us the "bad", or the idealised, let us see the "ups and downs", and the "pros and cons" of care. Fictional onscreen depictions have the ability to address negative stereotypes and misconceptions, and offer balanced, authentic depictions and rounded, credible characters that young people can relate to, that can help contextualise their experiences (Shedlosky-Shoemaker et al., 2014). Ultimately and ideally, looked-after young people would be depicted simply as young people, with a focus on adolescence, rather than being in care.

As Franklin and Henderson (2007) state, "It is common practice for medical or police professionals to act as consultants to popular television dramas, thus helping to ensure credibility" (p.149). This idea could easily be extended to programmes involving looked-after young people, who could serve as consultants and even writers and producers themselves. Goddard (1996) states that the voices of these young people should "play a more central role in the telling of these stories" (p.308). It would be remiss of me to not acknowledge that issues of access could prove problematic here (Thomas and O'Kane, 1998a; Heptinstall, 2000). Therefore, why not use adults who have been in care as an alternative? As Riggs et al. (2009) note, "As research continues to highlight (e.g. O'Neil, 2004), adults who were raised in foster care consistently report positive experiences of care, and are often highly capable of telling their stories and providing alternate accounts of foster care" (p.245).

Further, why not use non-actors, people with actual experiences of the lives they are depicting, as used by filmmakers such as Ken Loach,

Shane Meadows and Andrea Arnold. Or, search out actors with care experiences? It could be that the use of non-actors would increase this authenticity and give TV and films depicting looked-after characters a realism that is required.

It should be noted that this learning will inform my own creative work from this point on, and I will strive to utilise these new representations where possible.

13.2 Future opportunities

My PhD thesis gives rise to several potential follow-up studies. These include:

* A follow-up study with non-looked-after young people, to ascertain their perceptions of the depictions of looked-after young people. This study would explore presumed media influence further and look at whether the young people's concerns around the impact of these depictions on others has any significance.

* A content analysis, looking at the fictional depictions of looked-after young people. This would contribute to the knowledge base, in the same way as Henderson and Franklin's content analysis of social work depictions (2007).

* Follow-up studies undertaken with looked-after young people further marginalised owing to the ethnicity, disability and refugee status, to ascertain findings across a diverse spectrum of young people in care. Similarly, a follow-up study undertaken with young people in residential care would be particularly useful, as these depictions potentially impact on this group more than the general looked-after population.

* A similar study undertaken with care leavers, to ascertain their feelings on these depictions and the impact they have had on their lives.

* A study using the models and methods tested and developed here, to work with a group of social workers, critically exploring the depictions of social workers and the impact this has on practitioners.

* The completion of a creative film project with a group of looked-after young people. As stated, this was something I deeply regret not being able to undertake. However, I am determined to finish this project and offer a piece of work that depicts these young people with realism and relevance.

13.3 Implications for social work practice

As a former social worker, it was important that my research also had some practical applications for social work and was not simply theoretical. One of the questions I aimed to explore, was what I learned about using a Freirean empowerment model, in co-construction with these young people. The Freirean empowerment model enhanced the young people's ability to be critical of these depictions. The young people were able to interact with peers and get a sense of how each other viewed these images. There was real evidence, borne out particularly in the interviews (the culmination of the approach), that these young people had in fact developed their criticality and voice. The Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 (DfE, 2015) sets out duties and standards for those providing residential children's homes for children in terms of day-to-day care, education and welfare. The regulations note that young people in residential care may be worried about being stigmatised or ridiculed by

their peers for being "different" because of where they live, and promotes the idea of professionals working to address this issue. There is therefore a duty on professionals working with looked-after young people in residential care, to employ strategies that minimise the stigma these young people experience. I would therefore suggest adopting a Freirean empowerment model (Rindner, 2004) with any marginalised group, helping them to build criticality of media images, negating the negative effects of stigma these depictions contribute to and turning participants into active creators of content.

Work could be undertaken with young people upon entering the care system, dispelling myths and misconceptions about care, and highlighting relevant and authentic characters and narratives that these young people can identify with, showing them there are others out there who're "just like" them. This could be achieved with the use of a DVD or Bluray, or providing web-links to online content. A national database with images and clips that practitioners could use would be of particular benefit. These characters and narratives could prove to be protective and preventative for these young people. To reiterate, professionals "must take pains to expose children to a wider variety of potential role models than popular culture does... A variety of potential heroes and role models allows children to appreciate themselves and the diversity in others" (Anderson and Carvallo, 2002, p.168 in Gauntlett, 2008).

The knowledge created here could be introduced into social work training and teaching, dispelling misconceptions around looked-after young people, such as a focus on negative outcomes for these young people (Riggs et al., 2009) and the idea that most looked-after young people live in care homes (West, 1999; Day and Langhout Thomas, 2010).

This research also highlights a number of issues pertinent to these young people. Sibling relationships appeared to be vital to these young people, so a promotion of sibling contact and the maintenance of sibling relationships is of utmost importance. The young people also highlighted placement moves as an issue of real significance to them. Therefore, the way in which these moves are should be handled with sensitivity and respect, unlike the scenario presented by Kieira, where her belongings were moved in "binbags".

It is also vitally important these young people are given the opportunity to participate in research. This project highlights the experience and insight these young people are able to offer, and it is our duty to ensure these voices are heard.

13.4 Limitations of the study

While I believe I have made a useful and thought-provoking contribution to the knowledge base around looked-after young people, my study is not without its limitations. The research group was homogeneous and relatively small, comprised of white young people aged between twelve and eighteen from one locality in a North Eastern urban region of England. No black or minority ethnic young people participated in the study, nor did any disabled young people. It may be that these young people suffer additional stigma due to their ethnicity or ability, and would have a different viewpoint on these depictions. As well as this, the young people were recruited from an already established group, with the majority living in foster placements. Although foster placements represent the living condition for the majority of looked-after young people (DfE, 2015), the non-involvement of young people living in residential care is an obvious limitation. While young people living in care homes might only

account for 10% of the looked-after population in Britain (DfE, 2015), they are perhaps the worst affected by these depictions.

I would have liked to adopt a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach throughout the entirety of my research, from concept to culmination (Day Langhout and Thomas, 2010; Pinter and Zandian, 2015). However, as stated, I had to make decisions on my approach when I was very much a "novice" researcher (Collins, 2011). I was conscious that the demands on myself in terms of time and skills would be considerable, and I was unsure I would have the time to complete my PhD if I adopted a fully-realised PAR approach. Therefore, I ultimately adopted elements of such an approach, underpinning my work with the ideas of Freire (1970).

Additionally, at the outset of the research, the young people and I agreed we would create something together based on what we had learned. Unfortunately, this was something I was unable to achieve, and this is perhaps the biggest regret I will take away from the process. However, while this was incredibly frustrating, it makes me all the more determined to realise my original intention once I have completed my PhD, and complete a creative project with these young people.

13.5 Three years on: where am I?

At the outset of my research, I aimed to address the following questions:

* What are looked-after young people's perceptions of the onscreen fictional depictions of looked-after characters and care?
* What is the young people's critical analysis of these depictions in terms of their influence and effects?
* How can we better depict looked-after young people, and can my

research work against any negative effects of these depictions?

* How do I employ a Freirean empowerment model when working with these young people, and what do I learn, in co-construction with these young people?

I feel that I have achieved what I set out to, answering these questions, as discussed in the previous chapters. Throughout my time practising as a social worker, I felt privileged to have had been part of the lives of the young people I worked with and I relished seeing them reach their undoubted potential. This sentiment is very much echoed following my experiences as a researcher. When the opportunity arose to undertake a PhD, I knew instantly that looked-after children would be my research area of interest. I am happy with my choice. Delving into an area that is largely unresearched was exciting and exhilarating, and as I progressed through my PhD, I came to see the value of my work. Not only was I establishing a research platform in terms of the onscreen fictional depictions of looked-after young people, but I was making a difference to the young people I was working with. I was opening their eyes to these images and showing them they had the power to change what they saw (Freire, 1970).

My passion for working with looked-after young people is stronger than ever and I remain determined to give these young people a voice and improve their experiences. While these looked-after depictions are not all bad, it is often the case that these young people's stories of achievement and success are lost. I will therefore continue to challenge these negative stereotypes, and strive to see these young people's diversity accepted and celebrated. As Laura Beveridge, a care leaver, speaking at a recent Tedx talk on behalf of looked-after young people, said, "We need this revolution, we need to own our identity and stop apologising for who we are" (Tedx Talks, 2016).

northumbria
UNIVERSITY NEWCASTLE

Participant information sheet: young person

"The Media Representation of looked-after Children: redressing the Balance"

Your information sheet

Who am I?
My name is John Hickman. I used to be a social worker, but now I'm I'm a student at Northumbria University. This information sheet will tell you about a study that I'm doing and how you might take part. Your parent(s)/carer(s) will need to agree too, but this doesn't mean you have to.

What's the study about?
I am interested in finding out about how the media (film, TV) represents looked-after children and young people, what impact this has on you and what we can do to address any negative impact.

What do I have to do?
If you decide you want to take part, I will arrange to meet with you and other young people who want to get involved, to talk about the research study in more detail, and to begin to get to know more about you. We will meet in groups and these can be activity-based, where we can create things like films, music, writing and drawings, that allow you to express what it really means to be in care. I will have some ideas about what I'd like to find out, but we can agree how we go about this together. We can decide together how best to make a note of what you want to say. As well as group sessions, it might also be useful to have interviews, where you can discuss your thoughts and ideas with me on a one-to-one basis. Your own name won't be used in any recordings and the film will be just for my own record, to help me write up my research and I will not show it to anyone else.

Who will find out about what I tell you?
What you choose to say in the sessions is confidential, but if you tell me something that makes me worried for your safety, I will need to tell [Name redacted], who works for Children's Services.

What happens if I agree and then change my mind about taking part?
That's not a problem. It's okay to change your mind at any point. You can decide you don't want to take part any more, or you can decide you want to leave a session. You

don't need to give me a reason for your decision.

What happens to what I tell you?
All records of what you tell me will be kept in a locked drawer and no one other than me will see these. I will make sure that your thoughts and ideas are included in the written account of the study, but you won't be identified. If you would like a record of what you have told me over the time we spend together, I will put this together for you. I will also give you a summary of the overall findings from the research study and copies of any creative work we produce (films, writing etc.)

What happens if I'm not happy about the research study, or want to make a complaint?
If you're not happy with any aspect of the research study and want to talk about this with someone else, then there are two people you can contact.

Dr Deborah James is my research supervisor and you can email her at this address: deborah.james@northumbria.ac.uk, or phone her on 0191 2156287.

[Name redacted] is the Participation Officer for [Location redacted] and you can email her at this address, [redacted], or you can phone her on [redacted].

What happens next?
If you want to take part, I will ask you to sign a consent form. Your parent(s)/carer(s) will be asked to agree to you taking part in the research study. I will then arrange to meet with you to talk about what happens next. Taking part, or not taking part will not change the nature of your involvement with your social worker.

If you want to find out more, then do get in touch. My email address is john.hickman@northumbria.ac.uk and my phone number is 07961 950271.

Thank you for reading this.

Best wishes
John

Appendix 2:   Parent/carer information sheet

Participant information sheet: parent/carer
"The Media Representation of Looked After Children: redressing the Balance"

Dear parent/carer

My name is John Hickman and I am undertaking a research study as part of my PhD at Northumbria University. I am a qualified social worker, however, I am no longer practising at this time and undertaking the research as an academic. I am providing you with more information about the study as your child has expressed an interest in taking part.

Purpose of the study:
The study will explore how the media represents children who are in the care of local authorities and the impact this has on the children themselves.

What the study will involve:
The research study will involve a group of children who are looked-after talking about their perceptions of the media representation of looked-after children. These sessions may be activity-based, and may involve activities chosen by the young people (film-making, creative writing), to create pieces of work the young people feel are representative of their lives. There may also be the need for interviews, where the young people can discuss their thoughts and ideas with me on a one-to-one basis. I will ask your child's permission to record the session, and transcribed information will be shared with your child to ensure I have taken an accurate record.

Possible benefits of your child taking part:
The information provided by the children who take part in the study will contribute to practice developments in what is a very under-represented area. The research process should be fun and enjoyable for everyone involved, and increase the confidence and self-esteem of those who take part, and enable them to make a difference.

Possible disadvantages of your child taking part:

Your child will be advised that she/he doesn't have to talk about anything she/he might find upsetting and she/he can ask for the session to end at any point. Likewise, I will end the session if I am concerned that your child has become upset.

Confidentiality

I have a duty to view what your child says as confidential and her/his own name or any other identifying details will not be used in the research study. Sessions will be filmed as a means of documenting the research. The footage will not be shown publicly or presented as part of my research. The filmed footage and notes that I take of our sessions will be kept in a locked drawer in my home and will be destroyed once the study is finished. The only time I will have a duty to pass on information is if your child tells me something that leads me to worry about her/his safety and protection. If this happens, I will contact [Name redacted], who is my named contact person in the Children's Services Department.

The research findings:

The research findings will be written up and presented as part of my doctoral thesis in August 2016. Your child will be provided with a record of the information she/he has given over the course of the study, as well as any creative works, and I will also provide her/him with a summary of the overall research findings.

Dealing with a problem or a complaint:

Every effort will be taken to ensure your child's welfare throughout the study. If you are concerned about your child's involvement in the study at any point please do not hesitate to get in touch with myself or my research supervisor and we will investigate your concern. Alternatively, you may contact [Name redacted] [Location redacted]'s participation officer. The contact details are included at the end of this information sheet.

Consent to take part:

Your child's involvement in the study is on a voluntary basis and she/he can decide not to take part or to withdraw from the study at any point. If your child decides she/he wants to take part in the study, I will ask her/him to sign a consent form and return this to me.

If you agree to your child taking part, could you please sign the form and return to myself. You are able to withdraw your consent at any point in the research study.

Thank you for taking the time to read this. Please don't hesitate to get in touch with me if you would like further information about the study.

Best wishes
John Hickman
Contact details:
John Hickman
Email: john.hickman@northumbria.ac.uk
Tel: 07961 950271

Dr Deborah James (supervisor)
Email: deborah.james@northumbria.ac.uk
Tel: 0191 215 6287

[Name redacted] (Children's Participation officer)
Email: [redacted]
Tel: [redacted]

Appendix 3:   **Young person's consent form**

northumbria
UNIVERSITY NEWCASTLE

Consent form: young person

"The Media Representation of Looked After Children: Redressing the Balance"

Consent form for:_____(Please enter your name)

I have read and understood the information provided.	**Yes**	**No**
I have had a chance to ask any questions about the study.	**Yes**	**No**
I understand the group sessions will be recorded and agree to this.	**Yes**	**No**
I understand that what I say in the sessions will be kept private, unless John becomes worried about my safety.	**Yes**	**No**
I understand that I can decide not to take part in the study after it starts, and I don't have to say why.	**Yes**	**No**
I have decided that I want to take part in the study.	**Yes**	**No**

Signed: ....

Please print your name here: ……………………………….........................

Date: ....

northumbria
UNIVERSITY NEWCASTLE

Consent form: parent/carer

"The Media Representation of Looked After Children: redressing the Balance"

I understand that agreement for _____ (enter child's name here) to take part is on the following basis:

I have read the updated information sheet provided.

I have had an opportunity to ask any questions about the study.

I understand that _____'s involvement in the study is voluntary and he/she can change his/her mind at any point.

I understand that the decision for _____ to take part or not to take part has no relation to my family's involvement with North Tyneside's Children's Services Department.

I agree to/do not agree to (delete as applicable) _____ taking part in this study.

Signed: ....……………………….....parent/carer

Please print your name here: …………………………….......................

Date: ....

Appendix 5:   **Interview consent form**

northumbria
UNIVERSITY NEWCASTLE

Consent form: young person

"The Media Representation of Looked After Children: Redressing the Balance"

Consent form for:_____(Please enter your name)

I have read and understood the updated information provided.	**Yes**	**No**
I have had a chance to ask any questions about the study.	**Yes**	**No**
I understand the interview sessions will be recorded and agree to this.	**Yes**	**No**
I understand that what I say in the sessions will be kept private, unless John becomes worried about my safety.	**Yes**	**No**
I understand that I can decide not to take part in the study after it starts, and I don't have to say why.	**Yes**	**No**
I have decided that I want to take part in the study.	**Yes**	**No**

Signed: ....

Please print your name here: …………………………………….....................

Date: ....

Tracey Beaker (18/11/14)

JOHN: Had you all seen that before?

JOEY: No.

KEIRA: Yes.

JAE: I hate Tracey Breaker.

JOEY: Can we watch the one where she's older? Can we watch another one?

KEIRA: I'd smack her in the head, smack it off the floor.

JOHN: So...

DANIEL: I'm boiling me.

John sits.

JOHN: Have yous all seen that before?

KEIRA: I've seen it a million times, I see it everyday.

DANIEL: Is that camera still rolling?

JOEY: It's not even on the telly any more.

DANIEL: I just sniffed my armpits. I just sniffed my armpits with the camera still rolling.

JOHN: So I picked Tracey Beaker, because when I think about looked-after kids on TV, Tracey Beaker's the first thing that comes to my mind.

JOEY: Work Beaker.

JOHN: Do you think that's fair?

JOEY: No.

JOHN: No?

JOEY: Yeah.

DANIEL: We've all seen them. We've all seen the newer one?

JOHN: The newer one? Which, what's the newer one?

GEORGINA: Tracey Beaker returns.

DANIEL: With RHELAC.

JOHN: Is she a care worker there?

CARLY: Yes.

JOHN: So what did you think of that then? I guess... (I nearly go into leading, but stop myself) what did you think?

GEORGINA: It reminded me of Carly.

JOEY: Yeah, it reminded me of Carly that.

KEIRA: I would've smacked her head off a door.

SH laughs.

CARLY: She lies, I don't lie, I just tell people the truth.

DANIEL: I tell people what I think of them, me.

JOEY: I wanna be that kid who flicks the clock.

DANIEL: What?

JOEY: I wanna be that kid who flicks the clock.

DANIEL: Thought you said flicks... the...

Daniel, DJ, C and SC laugh. G holds her head.

GEORGINA: Oh my god.

JOHN: Doesn't take you long does it?

SHARNA: Is it videoing?

JAE: Yeah.

KEIRA: Who flicks the... she makes a noise "eirgh"

DANIEL: So how long is that going to be videoing for?

John turns back to the camera behind them.

JOEY: Carly (he holds his hands up)

CARLY: No because you said I was Tracey Beaker.

DANIEL: Because it's actually directly at me.

JOEY: Na, I didn't say you were Tracey beaker.

CARLY: Yeah but why does that remind me of you, it's got no relation to it.

JOHN: So, um, yous all watch Tracey Beaker?

KEIRA: Na.

JAE: I didn't, I've seen it once and I absolutely hate it.

JOHN: You hate it.

DANIEL: I love it, me.

JAE: I absolutely hate it.

DANIEL: I love it me, I used to be like her.

JOHN: You used to be like her?

JAE: I don't know how yous can watch that.

DANIEL: I used to smash kettles.

JOHN: So what kind of character do you think Tracey Beaker is?

KEIRA: A little snob.

JAE: A little rat?

JOHN: A little rat?

CARLY: A liar. She is funny though.

GEORGINA: A role model.

DANIEL: A stereotype.

JOHN: So she's a rat, she's a liar, she's a role model and she's a stereotype.

KEIRA: She's a B-I-T-C-H.

DANIEL: She's actually a stereotype.

JOHN: You think she's a stereotype?

All the group begin to shout answers and things out.

TOMMY: Does just one person want to talk, because we're filming and we can't hear each other.

DANIEL: I think she's a stereotype. We have all just given her a label, stereotyping the way we're seeing her.

JOHN: Explain that to me.

DANIEL: I don't know how to tell it, it's not that difficult.

John laughs.

JOHN: I'm pretty stupid.

DANIEL: She's a stereotype because we've all gave her labels, of what we says she is, like prat, like little snob and all that.

JOHN: So do you think she's like, a negative character?

DANIEL: Yeah.

JAE: She's something I'm not even gonna say.

JOHN: So do any of you like her as a character?

JOEY: (Emphatic) Yeah!

JAE: No.

DANIEL: Yeah, she speaks the truth.

JOHN: Joey loves her.

JOEY: Woah, love is a strong word.

GEORGINA: That's what I wanna be when I'm older.

JOHN: What, Tracey Beaker?

GEORGINA: Yeah.

DANIEL: What, a scrubby little... thing?

The group act about.

JOHN: Do you think it feels realistic as a TV programme?

KEIRA: No.

CARLY: No.

GEORGINA: Yes.

CARLY: (To G) No.

DANIEL: Actually, kind of...

KEIRA: I doubt she would actually jump on Louise.

CARLY: Yeah she would.

JOHN: Did you think it felt realistic?

GEORGINA: yes.

JOHN: What about you, scott?

JOEY: Realistic, um, yeah kind of. Yeah, it was good.

JOHN: So you liked it?

JOEY: Yeah.

JOHN: And you liked it as well Georgina?

GEORGINA: Yeah.

JOHN: And what about you, Ewan?

EWAN: it was all right.

John turns to the camera and laughs.

TOMMY: So do people think that's a realistic thing, being a looked-after child? Being in care, is it realistic?

JOEY: Yeah.

JAE: No.

DANIEL: Not really.

TOMMY: DJ, elaborate on no.

JAE: Because I've seen my brother in a foster home and he doesn't act like all them kids on there.

JOHN: In what way?

JAE: What d'you mean, in what way?

JOHN: Well, he doesn't act, so how does he act?

JAE: like, all the other kids act like that, but he doesn't, he's not like... really horrible towards people.

JOHN: Right. So are you saying that it makes children in care homes seem like they're not very nice?

CARLY: We're not horrible.

JAE: Some of the kids I've seen in my brother's foster home were mean to him once, the one time I've seen them all.

JOHN: A foster home, do you mean like, in a residential unit, like Sycamore House?

KEIRA: Well foster home is the name of the home.

DANIEL: Like Riverside?

KEIRA: Like a "home".

JOHN: Right, OK.

TOMMY: Joey, do you think it's realistic?

JOEY: Yeah, I've already said.

TOMMY: Why do you think it's realistic, what parts are realistic?

JOEY: Um, how like, because like, when I think of residential homes, I think of like, people who misbehave and that, like. For some reason.

TOMMY: So you think it's where naughty kids go to?

JOEY: Yeah, like naughty boys and girls school.

DANIEL: I think it's realistic. Because, well if Tracey, the character's been in care that many times, and she's been dumped in the same place obviously she's gonna be--

SHARNA: Well the reason why she's been dumped there--

CARLY: She's obviously trouble.

DANIEL: Hang on hang on...

JOHN: Let him speak.

DANIEL: (To SH) I should respect you when you talk.

KEIRA: There's a lot of reasons why though.

DANIEL: Aye but obviously like, if you're gonna be like dumped in the same care home for like, most of your life and get fostered like, for up to three months and then dumped back in the same place, you're obviously gonna be like angry and messed up in the head a bit, and like hate people around you because you won't be able to trust people around you. So, that's, and as Keira said, there's other reasons why. So, you can just like, give it one reason and go through it.

JOHN: What did you wanna say? Did you wanna say something?

CARLY: No.

G laughs.

JOHN: You only want to speak when someone else is speaking, is that right?

DANIEL: Yeah, that's what she does.

Daniel laughs. Carly imitates his laughter.

JOHN: What about you, Sharna, what did you think, because you're sat there quiet?

SHARNA: Um, what of the programme?

JOHN: Did you think that it was, did it feel kind of realistic to you or did you think that, were the things that you thought, "That's not right", or...

SHARNA: I dunno. (She shrugs) I've never seen, like, kids in a residential, so I don't know what it would be like.

JOHN: Have any of you ever been into a residential unit?

DANIEL: No.

KEIRA: I haven't been in there, but I've been in to see my brother.

JOHN: What's it, so you've been in to visit?

KEIRA: Hmm-mm.

JOHN: And what was that like?

JAE: same with me.

KEIRA: No one was downstairs, they were all in their bedrooms. Like, they were so miserable, they were really miserable. No one would come downstairs and say hi, like, one of the cares met you at, one of the people who worked there met you at the door, took you into there, went upstairs, obviously got my brother, and no one else was allowed anywhere around. Like, everyone was just sent to their room straight away If they were, like, when we went in, it was everyone upstairs and everyone had to go to their rooms, and they were in their rooms for obviously, two and half hours that I seen

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him.

JOHN: They had to go to their rooms?

KEIRA: Yeah.

CARLY: Two and half hour?

Carly nods.

CARLY: Couldn't.

GEORGINA: They can't force you to stay in your rooms.

JOHN: Yeah, I dunno, that sounds a bit, I dunno. Or was it they just chose to be in their rooms?

KEIRA: No, they had to go in their room, because it was for my contact.

TOMMY: So they had to leave the room where you were having contact?

KEIRA: No they were in the rooms, because every time we went around, they were all in their rooms, because we even got showed upstairs.

TOMMY: Carly, did you think it was realistic?

CARLY: I dunno.

TOMMY: You know young people in resi homes.

CARLY: I know but like, all them children just seemed like, I dunno, like random.

TOMMY: right, so what's your images of children's homes?

CARLY: I dunno, like, children that can't be fit into a foster home because of like, the way they act or like, how their behaviour is, or like, their situation. Like they just seemed like random kinda kids just plonked in.

JOHN: OK, that's interesting, so do you think those kids wouldn't be in a residential home?

KEIRA: I doubt that some of them would.

GEORGINA: Because what about Justine, her dad was canny?

KEIRA: Louise wouldn't probably have been, because like Louise...

JOEY: They give them money.

KEIRA: Louise wouldn't be in there, because she's canny.

Appendix 7:   Keira interview (09/06/2015)

JOHN: OK so just to start off generally, how did you erm, how did you find the group sessions?

KEIRA: Good they were/

JOHN: Yeah?

KEIRA: Quite, yeah they were OK (Laughs).

JOHN: Yeah, you can be honest if you thought it was rubbish you can say.

KEIRA: No they were they were OK it was just like everyone was screaming and shouting over each other and it was just like a bit hectic.

JOHN: Yeah, the discussions yeah I tried to, kinda keep a bit more control over it, but it's tough I-I/

KEIRA: When you've got S just S.

JOHN: Yeah, well, there's a few of you can be quite, you can/

KEIRA: Huh who's that going towards?

JOHN: You can you can err erm make sure your voice is heard can't you so, but ever but erm, but did you find them interesting?

KEIRA: Yeah.

JOHN: Yeah.

KEIRA: Pretty.

JOHN: And erm did it make you think about things?

KEIRA: Yeah a lit a lot more.

JOHN: Yeah? Good. So erm how old were you if you don't mind me asking when you came into care?

KEIRA: Three.

JOHN: Three right, so because the question I would ask is erm, before you came into care did you have any idea what care might be like, but I guess, if you're that young, you wouldn't know would ya?

KEIRA: Not really but like I came into care when I was three erm but then a couple of years later when I was about six or seven, I got put with my mam put back and then I got taken away again, that happened several times/

JOHN: Right/

KEIRA: And then obviously by that time I was like ahh well I've been it's been like this before and I always thought it would be care homes all the time/

JOHN: OK.

KEIRA: But when I got to about erm eight or nine, and then obviously obviously when I got put with, carers I thought ahh well it's not as bad as I thought it would've been, but then I was like, younger.

JOHN: So, you thought that if you came into care you'd come into a care home?

KEIRA: Yeah that's what cos Robbie my Robbie got taken away when he was, like a bit older than what I was, and he went straight into a care home.

JOHN: Right that's your brother.

KEIRA: Yeah.

JOHN: Why did he go straight into a care home?

KEIRA: Dunno erm there was no one available at the time/

JOHN: Right/

KEIRA: That, was there so he went straight in [Location redacted].

JOHN: So like an emergency kind of thing? And did he did he stay in care homes?

KEIRA: Erm yeah but then he got put with a family but his ADHD got the better of him and he kicked off quite a bit because doctor still hadn't sorted out his tablets that he was needing,so then they basically give up on him and he went back to [Location redacted] and then he went to Durham in a care home and then moved back down here, and then because of his ADHD again that was eight moth on the line this they still hadn't sorted his medicine out yet and put him in jail.

JOHN: He's in jail now? That's crap.

KEIRA: I haven't seen him since I was... nine.

JOHN: How old are you now, fifteen?

KEIRA: Fifteen.

JOHN: So you've not seen him for six years?

KEIRA: Pretty much, he's seven year, sorry seven year next year since I've seen him.

JOHN: So... what where did you get your kind of information about care from like what made you think you would go into a care home?

KEIRA: Robbie.

JOHN: So from your broth kind of seeing what had happened to your brother?

KEIRA: Yeah.

JOHN: Right OK, so you had I guess what I'm asking is did had you seen anything like on the TV or anything or about/

KEIRA: Tracy Beaker.

JOHN: Tracy Beaker?

KEIRA: Yeah.

JOHN: Yeah it seems like that's what, a lot of young people kind of/

KEIRA: That's what everyone that's what everyone like obviously my going to school and

things still ask "Ahh you're in a care home," and I'm like, "No I'm with a I'm in a placement but."

JOHN: Who said that to you?

KEIRA: Just people at school.

JOHN: Right.

KEIRA: Like they don't understand that, there's carers, but and there's there's like care homes and thinking if they think that all care homes are fun like Tracey Beaker and and it's not.

JOHN: No no.

KEIRA: It's nothing like that.

JOHN: No.

Pause.

JOHN: So... if we if you think about the examples I've shown you maybe what you've seen yourself as well kind of erm programmes and erm films about people in care erm how do you think, young people in care are kind of portrayed?

KEIRA: As rebel as like rebellious.

JOHN: Rebellious?

KEIRA: Yeah every like Tracy Beaker's rebellious, the woman on Hollyoaks/

JOHN: What's that one?

KEIRA: There's two there's like a boy and a girl.

JOHN: OK.

KEIRA: And they ran away together.

JOHN: Is that err in the moment a story line at the moment?

KEIRA: Erm I think so.

JOHN: Right OK.

KEIRA: They ran away together and they ended up staying in the school's outhouse erm.

JOHN: Oh do you mean Waterloo Road?

KEIRA: No this is Holly the one on Hollyoaks.

JOHN: S-so the school have got an outhouse?

KEIRA: An out-outhouse in the middle of the field.

JOHN: Oh right like a kind of shed thing/

KEIRA: Yeah like that/

JOHN: Ahh I see/

KEIRA: The school didn't realise they were staying there but that's where they were

staying erm because their mam had kicked them out.

JOHN: So is that brother and sister?

KEIRA: Hmm-mm, brother and sister they were living together in this outhouse thing

with a erm

mattress that was all.

JOHN: Ahh right.

KEIRA: And then they were going obviously when school started, they were going into

school, then they were going back there/

JOHN: Ahh/

KEIRA: Then they always thought they were always getting into trouble and they were

like I'm gonna ring your parents, but there was like, no one they rang their parents like

and it was ahh it's got nowt to do with me.

JOHN: Hmm/

KEIRA: They're with their auntie so...

JOHN: So are they in, where are they now are they in a foster placement?

KEIRA: No they both died.

JOHN: They both died?

KEIRA: Yeah.

JOHN: God that's depressing.

K laughs.

JOHN: How did they die?

KEIRA: Erm, I think they were moved they were moved out of the outhouse and then this man came and attacked them.

JOHN: What killed them? Jesus that's a bit err miserable innit God. So think think err they're shown as rebellious?

KEIRA: Yeah rebellious and naughty.

JOHN: Naughty, erm... do you think there's any difference between the way males and females are portrayed?

KEIRA: Erm I dunno I think, mostly girls are made to look a bit harder than they're actually like than they actually like are, when in real life cos you see most of the girls that are in care and that like on the TV and that like, don't know how to describe it like, they all look hard like, like they look from [location redacted].

JOHN: Like rough?

KEIRA: Yeah.

JOHN: Right.

KEIRA: Like really rough and just like out of place, and that's how I think that's they always, try and make, the looked-after children look out of place and not look the same as other children, and plus obviously on the TV they never get, they never get nothing

ever gets brought up about things we can and cannot do.

JOHN: Hmm.

KEIRA: Like, we can't do quite a lot of things because we're in care we're classed as vulnerable, they're not, on the TV, so it's like there's really there's a different contrast between o0bviously real life and that.

JOHN: Hmm-mm.

KEIRA: Although it's meant to s-considered like reality TV, some it it is true and some it is like completely blown out of proportion.

JOHN: Hmm. So, I think there's some really interesting things there that you've just said so, you said that the kids are kind of out of place, how do you think that erm how do they show that do you think?

KEIRA: I dunno you can just kind when you look at the TV you can kinda see the picture of which ones you think kind of are in care because they always, sometimes they don't get obviously the, same clothes as everyone else kind of like the up-to-date fashions and that kind of that's that's kind of a big, giveaway.

JOHN: Right.

KEIRA: Erm because obviously you only have so much to spend on the child, like a carer, erm and you see that quite you see that quite a lot in most of them, on like the TV, like Tracy Beaker she nev she always wears that same black and red jumper.

JOHN: Hmm.

KEIRA: Like she never has that off, because obviously and then that makes her stand out from everyone else at her school and things because, she never, like she hasn't got the the newest top the newest trends or anything like that, it's just the same, clothes really.

JOHN: Yeah, that's really interesting, erm... yeah yeah so you said that erm, some if it's

true and some of it isn't, what just/

KEIRA: Hmm-mm.

JOHN: Kind of ex-expand on that a little bit more what what can you tell me what you mean by that?

KEIRA: Well in Tracy Beaker ev err like being in a care home makes it sound, th-the programme makes it sound or look like it's a piece of cake.

JOHN: Hmm.

KEIRA: Like obviously there is bits where Tracy Beaker thinks her mam's gonna come like gonna come and get her and things, but, they all think that's, gonna be, like a like a family because that's what Tracy Beaker kind of is, it's a care home but they're all like a family.

JOHN: Yeah.

KEIRA: And like that that's not how it's like in a care home, normally you have some really roughies and they just like drink and take drugs all that obviously if you're in a care home y-you can't really stop them.

JOHN: Hmm.

KEIRA: Erm and obviously people think that, it's like, it's just really easy to be in a care home and it's it's clearly not it's not in reality.

JOHN: Hmm-mm.

KEIRA: It's like it's really horrible to be fair cos I've been in one.

JOHN: Have you ac you've, have you lived in one?

KEIRA: I've been in one for three err three days.

JOHN: OK.

KEIRA: Err it's not it wasn't nice like I was in with five other girls.

JOHN: Where was that?

KEIRA: [Location redacted].

JOHN: Ahh right so how did you find that?

KEIRA: It wasn't nice.

JOHN: No.

KEIRA: It was an emergency move because I just I just couldn't handle I just didn't
wanna go back.

JOHN: You didn't wanna go back to your placement?

KEIRA: Hmm-mm. Because it was it wasn't a nice place, erm, the care workers tret us
with no respect just literally get in your room, stay there, and obviously with being a bit
bigger,bigger house, there's a lot more people who want to watch things on the TV in the
night time (laughs) so you're obviously always struggling to do anything.

JOHN: Hmm.

KEIRA: And the rooms aren't that big err like the living room wasn't big, when you think
about it you've got, say twenty kids in a care home, in err probably, the room the size of
the room opposite, but which isn't that big.

JOHN: Is that how many kids were there twenty?

KEIRA: There was twenty-five in our house.

JOHN: Bloody hell.

KEIRA: And then there was there was twelve bedrooms it was a big up top bedroom
thing, and I was in a room with five girls.

JOHN: And that wasn't, it wasn't a good experience?

KEIRA: They were all proper bitchy, it was there was lots of things going ra things
getting thieved.

JOHN: Right.

KEIRA: Cos y-you were in with the four of them you had to guard that phone with your life or else they would nick it.

JOHN: Hmm.

KEIRA: And you can't buy you couldn't put things down in the care home like in Tracy Beaker you could put something down it'd be there ten minutes later, in a real care home if you put it down it's gone.

JOHN: Hmm. Yeah.

Pause.

JOHN: Yeah, I mean think erm, it, I think the thing with Tracy Beaker is isn't it,in some ways, well my perception of it and you might think differently is that it's positive in one way, because at least you're seeing, children who're in care and maybe it kind of works away a bit those a bit of the stigma around it, makes it seem like it's nice, but the problem with that is it's just, it's so far from the truth isn't it that it's?

KEIRA: Yeah it's like, it's like you'd be so lucky if you got in a care home like that.

JOHN: Yeah. I don't well I don't think they exist do they?

KEIRA: (Laughs) No, but it's ridiculous when they put ket cheeky young children into care into care homes like Jae's little brother, he's eight and he's in a care home, an all boys care home.

JOHN: Yeah I mean it's it's, from my experience it is like you say in an emergency or it's young people with real behavioural problems who, who go in care homes, erm, well that's really interesting. Erm,in in the things we've seen can you think of anything that you felt reflected your own life?

KEIRA: Not really.

JOHN: No?

KEIRA: Nothing's been near it nothing's been close.

JOHN: No.

KEIRA: Cos everything's too far-fetched, like it's either dramatically brilliant life or it's really really bad/

JOHN: Right/

KEIRA: I've never had I've always been kind of in the middle, erm, so it's never been, na not really.

JOHN: W-would you say erm dramatically brilliant is that way you, are you talking about Tracy Beaker

KEIRA: Yeah.

JOHN: Right so it's kind of really nice or it's really shit.

KEIRA: Yeah pretty much.

JOHN: Yeah.

Pause.

JOHN: What erm, did you watch Short Term 12 with us, the film?

KEIRA: Hmm don't think so.

JOHN: And it's like in America and it's like a care home in America?

KEIRA: Ahh I think I did yeah.

JOHN: So you know if if you did see something that you felt resembled your own life do you think that would be good for you or how do you think that would make you feel?

Pause.

KEIRA: I dunno probably a bit upset but probably a bit more happy that people have got a better understanding, because not everyone's life is brilliant when they're in care.

JOHN: Hmm-mm.

KEIRA: You get moved from pillar to post, you're passed on like every every so often, and you just get tret like a piece of crap pretty much when you're there if you're only there for say a short term or you're there for a couple of weeks.

JOHN: Hmm.

KEIRA: You're just starting to settle and then you're being moved again,so it it it's kind of, it'd be good for people to know actually what it's what it's like, and then they kind of know that's how it is and it's probably never gonna change.

JOHN: Hmm.

KEIRA: Because so far, me being in care thirteen years that hasn't changed, I've been with more than forty-five carers?

JOHN: Really?

K:Within nine thirteen year.

JOHN: God.

KEIRA: It's been ridiculous cos it's always been short-term placements, like I was in one short-term placement for two year and I was only meant to be a month two month, so it, I don't, they don't stick to what they say sometimes and they don't inform you aswell like Tracy Beaker Elaine the Pain was always there when she when they needed her the most.

JOHN: Was that the social worker?

KEIRA: Yeah.

JOHN: Right.

KEIRA: But, that's not like that, it's not like that in real life, you've gotta actually ring your social worker if you want to see them out of the cont out of the contact dates, I never want to see my social worker because I can't stand I can't stand her guts.

JOHN: Who's your social worker?

KEIRA: [Name redacted]. Can't stand her guts sh, I've had her since I was like, seven, but she's done nothing nothing to help me at all, like recently, I had to get [Name redacted] my IRO, erm me my mam, and [Name redacted] and one more teacher from school had to sit down at my review and me and my mam had to kick off about my contact, because obviously I've been seeing my mam six times a year for, thirteen year.

JOHN: Hmm.

KEIRA: And it's not changed for two for two hours six times a year and then [Name redacted] me mam kicked off and [Name redacted] went actually that's that's correct you should be getting more and I'm saying I want once every once a month... for like five six hours, so it's like it's so much like it's nicer, and, I'm there that that's on the care homes you never ever once see, anyone see their farth see their mam or dad, very, not even that much, you's see, it's unlikely you see, sometimes you see them for about five ten minutes and then everything goes off, and it's like, everything on like Tracy Beaker, all the like parenting b-bonds always break, straight like they'll see them for a couple of times and then they break, it's never been a relationship where it lasts, ever in reality shows, never ever you always see some something go wrong and then, "ahh I never wanna see you again" and that's it, you never see anything like, when social workers come into help, you never see that, it's always just nothing (she laughs).

Pause.

JOHN: Yeah. And you, so you think that... it so it sounds like it's kind of all or nothing where as in reality it's a lot more complicated.

KEIRA: Yeah.

JOHN: Yeah. Yeah I mean I think, it's difficult to kind of like capture real life isn't it in

lots of ways cos it is so complicated, erm/

KEIRA: Pretty mu-everything really is, it's like, me being moved I was yeah like I was meant to be there for like two month and I was there for two year, in that two year, I had ran away, I had done everything to move but social services just weren't taking no notice.

JOHN: Because you wanted to move?

KEIRA: Hmm-mm.

JOHN: Oh right.

KEIRA: They weren't taking no notice I was she was proper she was getting me up by my hair in the morning, like dragging me out of/

JOHN: What your carer?

KEIRA: Yeah

JOHN: Oh my god.

KEIRA: She's erm/

JOHN: Is she still a carer?

KEIRA: No.

JOHN: Good.

KEIRA: But err I put a complaint in because she had hit us once, I put a complaint in, and then, the, she got, she's obviously not allowed to foster at all now, she she had her kids taken off her.

JOHN: Wow shhh.

KEIRA: So I was like at least one thing came out of it kind of... so.

JOHN: So how long have you been in your placement that you're in now?

KEIRA: Erm a year, and, two month three months.

JOHN: And ar-is that settled?

KEIRA: Yeah.

JOHN: OK.

KEIRA: I love it there.

JOHN: So you feel settled?

KEIRA: Yeah.

JOHN: Is it like the first time?

KEIRA: Pretty much it feels like I've been there for ages, doesn't feel like I've been moved it just feels like, because I was originally with [Name redacted] and I was only there with I was only there, for about, I actually lived with her for a week, I'd been there two weeks but I only lived in the house for a week, because I went on respite for two weeks, and I was up in all up in [Location redacted]

JOHN: [Location redacted] where's that?

KEIRA: Just past [Location redacted] [Location redacted].

JOHN: Right.

KEIRA: And erm I was in a little farmhouse, but I was quite at home I wish I had stayed there.

JOHN: Sounds nice.

KEIRA: It was lovely she had horses and everything, so I was well at home, erm because obviously I love my horses and I went, it was amazing being up there little farmhouse, fields, it was lu(sh)-it was really nice... erm, and then obviously, I goes back to school for another week and then I just refused to go back because it was getting to the point where her mam, her mam was getting quite old there was five girls under one roof and/

JOHN: Oh I know [Name redacted], up in erm like [Location redacted] way?

KEIRA: Hmm [Location redacted]?

JOHN: Yes.

KEIRA: Five girls in one in one house it was me Georgina, her and her mam.

JOHN: Georgina? (From the group)

KEIRA: No erm...

JOHN: A different Georgina?

KEIRA: Can't think of her second name.

JOHN: It doesn't matter.

KEIRA: Yeah but she has she's got she's got learning difficulties so she goes to [Location redacted]... [Name redacted].

JOHN: Right.

KEIRA: Erm but she sees her twin sister aswell but... there was like six of us, it was ridiculous, how many people was under one roof, really bad, and then obviously I refused to go back, and then I was with, [Name redacted] who's with who's where Georgina and Carly are with at the minute, I was only there for two nights,and then I got moved to [Name redacted] and I've been there ever since.

JOHN: You got moved to?

KEIRA: [Name redacted], I've been there ever since.

Pause.

JOHN: Ahh it sounds it does sound like you've moved about a lot.

KEIRA: Ahh a lot, think I was in a house for one night, one day, not that was it and then I went to school the next morning then me school me social worker picked us up and I was in another place the next day, I was like, "oh well OK."

JOHN: And what does what does that feel like being like kind of like moved around like that?

KEIRA: Crap but, when you find when you know you find the right carer, well you think you know you find the right carer it's quite worth it, but normally, it normally doesn't last/

John tuts.

KEIRA: It takes you like patience, especially with me because obviously, no one wants a teenager.

JOHN: I don't know if that's true.

KEIRA: S-seriously, you ask anyone who comes into care my age, or fourteen fif-like fourteen thirteen fifteen they don't want it, that's why people can't get adopted that's why people can't get put in placements, that's why most of the teenagers, are in care homes.

JOHN: Hmm.

KEIRA: Not because they're naughty it's just cos no family wants them you know what I mean not that they don't want them just that they can't take on teenager.

JOHN: Yeah I th-I think, it's a, difficult time isn't it kind of like the time in most people's when you act out isn't it teenage years where you're kind of like like rebellious is a really good word for teenagers I think.

KEIRA: I'm not.

JOHN: You're not rebellious?

KEIRA: No.

JOHN: OK (he laughs).

KEIRA: I'm not! I'm bloody not.

JOHN: Erm but I'm I'm I'm pleased that you you're settled now do you, has that made a difference to you as a person do you think?

KEIRA: Yeah.

JOHN: In what ways?

KEIRA: I dunno, like think I'd say I'm a lot more happier.

JOHN: Right.

KEIRA: I'm like I'm more cheery I'm doing a lot better, like in my classes.

JOHN: OK.

KEIRA: I'm working at my level that I should be getting which is like a B, so...

JOHN: Brilliant.

KEIRA: I'm erm I'm quite good.

JOHN: What erm what school do you go to?

KEIRA: [Location redacted].

JOHN: Have you seen erm Daniel knocking about?

KEIRA: He left ages ago.

JOHN: Yeah no but erm, you'd see him though wouldn't you from time-to-time?

KEIRA: Erm/

JOHN: Because isn't [Name redacted] friends with somebody...

KEIRA: Erm my carer and quite good friends with [Name redacted] but obviously, Daniel got kicked out.

JOHN: Did he get kicked out? What happened?

Pause.

KEIRA: J give him a key, for the house, and he thought well I'll give it to my best his best mate he's known this kid since he was like, two-years-old, so he gives he gets another key copied, and gives it to his mate just say "look, if I lose this key that's my backup key do not lose it do not use it", and he trusted he trusted him, and then erm, J he tells J

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obviously that he's give him the key just to, kind of keep, un so if you need to find yourself locked out he's got a spare one, and J went that's it and blew her top and kicked her out kicked him out.

JOHN: God.

KEIRA: And then he stayed with Jae for a couple of weeks, he stayed with Steven, little Steve in there for a couple of weeks and then he's, with J again for six weeks and then he's going into erm, this accomodat-erm supported accommodation.

JOHN: Right. Hey he's a silly lad.

KEIRA: But it wasn't erm she took it cos she took it complete blown it completely out of proportion.

JOHN: Hmm.

KEIRA: She give him it, like, it was a key, but it was like you can get ones where you get this clear cap over it where it won't fit in the door, so if he wanted to get in that house he'd have to take the cap off but he didn't know there was a cap on.

JOHN: Right.

KEIRA: So if he'd tried to get in the house anyways he wouldn't be able to.

Pause.

KEIRA: I think J just blew the straw out, like, really out of proportion.

JOHN: Maybe it was like, one thing, too many.

KEIRA: He was well hmm suppose so, like he's still not, my family's still not speaking to him after what he did, so he's lost my A now, so...

JOHN: Oh cos he was good mates with A wasn't he?

KEIRA: Yeah, until he nicked a hundred and fifty quid out his bank. So A's completely, he talks to him to be civil, but he they weren't they're not like how they used to/

JOHN: Yeah/

KEIRA: They used to be like joined at the hip.

JOHN: Well I know because when I used to because you know I used to be Daniel's social worker, erm when I used to go round sometimes A'd be there he'd kind of like do like odd jobs and that around J's wouldn't he? So, Daniel.

KEIRA: He's my third oldest brother.

JOHN: A?

KEIRA: I've got five brothers.

JOHN: And just you? (John laughs) God.

KEIRA: I've got, four older and one younger, I'm second youngest, hate being second youngest.

JOHN: You're like the baby?

KEIRA: No, my Jordan is eleven, but he's adopted, somewhere in Wales.

Pause.

JOHN: D'you ever, see him speak to him?

KEIRA: The err adoptive parents have cut all contact

John tuts.

KEIRA: Haven't seen him since he was two month old, because I used to look after him, the err social workers tried to tell me that my mam that I looked after my brother, on my own, when considering any, young, girl, would wanna help out their baby brother like,every time my mam bathed him I use to go like, "mam mam I'm holding him" and knock her hand so I so I hold him in the bath and she used to wash him, like I used to change his nappy because my mam was like, "you do it like this" and I picked it up straight away, and like now, you leave me with a baby, I could tell you everything to do,

like everything around cos my mam was teaching us as, as she was doing everything with Jordan, like "this is how you do this and how you do this this is how you do this" and I used to just, learn and do it so I ended up one day, my mam went, "Keira change his nappy" and I changed his nappy straight away.

JOHN: How old would you have been then?

KEIRA: About four five, still knew what to do, and like, it wasn't as if, it wasn't me mam couldn't be bothered she just wanted to see if I'd learned it, and like "K changed his nappy" straight away done it, because I knew hadn-I knew what to do, cos I'd been watching and taking everything in what me mum had been doing.

Pause.

JOHN: Quick learner.

KEIRA: Well, I'm fostered but not now.

John laughs.

KEIRA: Keep me hea-me head abo-above though.

JOHN: You you sound like you're doing good at school and stuff. Do you give the teachers any, aggravation,or are you well behaved?

KEIRA: I was I'm I'm pretty good except in math and erm French, aye well in year nine in year nine, we, that class had been really naughty and me included sitting there at the front, and erm people kept telling us erm shut up and get her to like stop it and, she got aggravated at me and I was like, "unh, all I'm doing is just like looking behind and telling 'em to pack it in when they hit us on the shoulder", and then, erm someone screams "I don't care", she going trying to have a go at them and like someone sings I don't care and she thought it was me, and I was like, "what?"

They both laugh.

KEIRA: And then, two minutes later, she was like "I'll go and tell your parents and carers that, I'll go and tell like your parents and stuff", someone was like "I don't care" Chloe's like "I don't care" next to like next to me, "they wouldn't care anyways" and she was like she looked at, started screaming at me and basically told, "I think your CARER", and I was like, basically told the full class that I was in care.

JOHN: That's not that's not cool/

KEIRA: And erm I turned around I was like "excuse me", and she was like "what?" I was like "well you've just told the full class I'm in foster care", she was like "no I haven't" I was like "yes you did like recall what you've just said", she was like "I didn't" and I just stood there and she was just like "I didn't" and I stood there for about ten minutes going "well you did I've we've I've just heard you I'm I'm not deaf" and then erm, I kicked off with her, and, all them lessons after it was quite err quite early on in the year I just, didn't do no work/

JOHN: Hmm/

KEIRA: I just point blankly refused to do it because obviously she'd not she didn't apologise, nothing like that she just carried on with lesson I thought "you know what how how like selfish can you get?" And the head of Fre-the head of department had to apologise cos she didn't have the guts to do it or otherwise I would've punched her face off, so I was like, I just made her lessons hell, made her life he-made her life hell in them lesson-in the the like, seven month we still had, left.

JOHN: So is it that d-did other people not know that you were in care?

KEIRA: No, only my close friends knew.

JOHN: Right, so she had no right to do that, she had no right to do it anyway but that's very spiteful isn't it?

KEIRA: Oh I-I kicked off she was like, "I didn't mean to" I was like, "well you clearly did otherwise… you would've just like parent slash carer like every other teacher does, but you said foster carer so, y-you clearly did," and then everyone just kicked and like I kicked off and everyone else kicked off with us because they were like "that's not on", but no one like stayed in that, no one stayed in the lesson everyone just, left.

JOHN: So do you think that the way that looked-after children, and young people are shown on TV and that, do you think that affects the way people treat them?

KEIRA: Yeah. Like my, well my cousin Dee, she's just been brought into care, and obviously her Nana rang up and was just told everything what happened but she's in her care plan and that and her Nana kind of told everybody that, told them what happened and, now everyone's being basically a licky-bum to her, like she's always up in [Location redacted] now cos of like her where you for like ill or you can't physically move if you've got like broke leg or something, erm she's constantly up in [Location redacted] people are bringing work to her, she's basically getting, rubbed-wrapped in bubble wrap, and I think that that's completely that's completely like, she is completely inappropriate she is she doesn't want that, she wants to be tret like every normal pers-every other person, so so do I and I'm pretty sure does everyone else.

JOHN: Hmm-mm.

KEIRA: But, teachers, people can't help not doing that like, you see most people in school and stuff, like, people make an exception, like if I say I say I can't get I can't do my work say I've moved placement then I will have to go and speak with my teacher, and they go "ahh" and they give us sympathy and I'm like "I don't want sympathy"… just I'll get it in for as soon as I can and she's like "ahh, well you know if you can't get it in you don't have to bring it in" and it's like "well don't do that because you're making it, you're

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making me making us different treating me as different and I'm not different"/

JOHN: Hmm-mm/

KEIRA: It's just I'm not with my mam, you know what I mean I'm not with my family. It-it's weird.

JOHN: So y-it sounds so what d-so, do people treat you like what like a victim?

KEIRA: Yeah pretty much.

JOHN: That sounds like w-yeah, and how does that make you feel?

Pause.

KEIRA: Err it just make you feel like I'm nowt really because, you don't see them doing like that with anyone else, I mean, now it's not much of a problem, because I know all the teachers and I and I get on really well with all of the teachers so they don't do that, erm, like my PE teacher, like I've got a PE teacher's number (she laughs), cos like, she felt that, I needed cos I just told, one day I just told her and she was going "ooh we need to carry this conversation on" and I was geet "OK", she was like she went "actually here", she was like "we'll just carry it on tonight", so when I was walking I was walking home I was like talking to her on the phone (she laughs).

JOHN: So she gave you her number?

KEIRA: Yeah just in case like/

JOHN: She's brave! (John laughs).

KEIRA: No she trusts me enough that.

JOHN: That's really nice.

KEIRA: Like I really like I really like her she's like, always been there from like day one, like that ss-like year seven, there was like always like I dunno like a bond if you would say that, between we and we always just got on really, cos she always keeps telling us

that I shouldn't horseride but I'm just like rebellious and say no.

JOHN: Just like Tracy Beaker, rebellious?

KEIRA: Nooo I'm only rebellious on horses.

They both laugh.

KEIRA: Anything else, they can that that's fine I can't I'm not allowed to do that that's fine but horses, like no one tells me to ride but I just like bulldoze my way there I'll be like "I'm going."

JOHN: Right, you like horseriding?

KEIRA: Yeah. Got my own loan horse.

JOHN: You got your what?

KEIRA: Own loan horse.

JOHN: Loan horse, what's it called?

KEIRA: Hamish.

JOHN: Hamish? (He laughs) That's a funny name for a horse.

KEIRA: He's really naughty, like that, a monstrosity.

JOHN: Is it a big one?

KEIRA: Sixteen three.

JOHN: What does that mean?

KEIRA: Nearly seventeen, like your hands going up.

JOHN: Ahh right.

KEIRA: Seventeen of your hands/

JOHN: Wow/

KEIRA: And then three inches on top, that's how big he that's where his back is.

JOHN: What?

KEIRA: That's where his back is.

JOHN: His back, oh is it like length?

KEIRA: No/

JOHN: Height/

KEIRA: Height.

JOHN: Oh OK.

KEIRA: If you go up seventeen hands, and then stop that's where his ears well his ears would be down here and his head would be even hi-higher (she whispers, inaudible).

JOHN: That's cool. So, i-if you were gonna tell someone, what it's like to be in care someone who didn't know what it was like erm whether that's an adult or a young person whatever what would you tell them?

Pause.

KEIRA: Probably it's nothing to be scared about because, yes you might go through some absolutely crappy placements, but then in the end it kind of always gets better, unless you're the really odd one that doesn't but.

JOHN: What's that?

KEIRA: Like nobody always gets better, cos y-you end up, putting you, like th-they put you on trial and error like with one carer right this didn't work this worked, next carer will find something that worked and something different and aww well that didn't work until they actually fight the right carer, like they have done with, [Name redacted] like, everything works.

JOHN: Took them long enough though uh?

KEIRA: Yeah, it's gonna take a while but it always kind of, it always comes with good at the end if you know what I mean, erm, and just, kind of be comfortable in that, dunno

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some people do like being get tret differently like I know a couple girls in my year who're in care and they love being tret differently they're just like/

JOHN: Right/

KEIRA: They're like "yes" like, gathering the sympathy up if you know what I mean?

John laughs.

KEIRA: Cos th-they do get everyone gets all the girls get sympathy, and it's just like I don't see the point like you know you're not an alien you're not different you just, have different circumstance it's not like, certain people life-threatening illness like fair enough, it's just you're not with your mam, it's not it's not changed anything really you're still, an ordinary person.

JOHN: Of course. (Long pause) So, if you could make a TV show or a film about looked-after young people or about being in care what would be important to you to kind of have in it?

KEIRA: To presh-I'd probably pick footage, like put in a massive footage thing and just like what, I think just like--

The lights go off. Movement gets them back on.

JOHN: What time is it?

KEIRA: Just looking the lights went off.

JOHN: I know.

KEIRA: Erm, I'd put a lot of what people don't expect, like more movements and how people get moved and the way, your social workers move you, like I got moved a couple times in cardboard boxes.

JOHN: Really?

KEIRA: Like yeah like bin bags, you don't want your stuff in bin bags/

JOHN: No/

KEIRA: Or cardboard boxes, but that's how it came, like black bags bin bags, like, fair enough some of my stuff had to go in bin bags because it was like we couldn't find a suitcase or something like that which is fair enough like, yer most of your stuff are in there, and a lot of things, carers keep, like I be I've had rings and everything go missing, and then I've seen them on Facebook the next day/

JOHN: Right/

KEIRA: Of old carers and things, like my my mam's my mam and dad's engagement ring, I got both them and I was wearing it one day and then, put it down five minutes to wash me wash me hands wash em plate wash dinner gone the next, haven't seen it since (inaudible) and then me pra-I had prams on me dolls, they've gone, books they've gone, loads of quite valuable stuff have gone I mean books aren't that valuable but when it comes to something like The Hungry Caterpillar when I read it as a baby/

JOHN: It's not,doesn't matter does it/

KEIRA: And I had/

JOHN: It's yours/

KEIRA: And I had and I had like, my b-big my baby brother's favourite one and it had his handprint in, like, that that's valuable because obviously, it's the only thing I really have of my brother, like I've got nothing of my brother I've got a locket, which that, got stole, so I basically have nothing of my Jordan I only have like a picture of him... i-it's just ridiculous.

JOHN: So you'd want people to see that?

KEIRA: Yeah, because like obviously, think a lot more bout it and, hopefully--

JOHN: Be a bit more respectful?

KEIRA: Yeah. Yeah.

JOHN: Is there anything else that would be important to you to show or...

KEIRA: Not really, no, no not really, just as long as people heard the reality, and it's not like some, everyday thing that you do really like, you see a lot of people joking about "ahh me mam says I better pack buck my ideas up or I'm going into care" it's like no, you don't you don't, why say that,why would a parent want to say that to your child? Like I-I wouldn't/

JOHN: No/

KEIRA: I wouldn't dare, and there's people like, when people go like, "I hate my mam", well one day you'll know, one day, wake up and she's not there, you're in a different house, with someone else, then ya-then that becomes scary, and people think like "eeh god yeah", I'm like so just don't say it, it's like it's like people always, s-says me someone says that I was I'd have a right go at them because I'm thinking, there are people who are in your situation that don't have a mam or their mam's died or they don't live with their mam and you're turning around going "I hate my mam errerrerr"/

JOHN: Hmm/

KEIRA: It's like you don't understand how it hard it is to be away from your mam for ss-for so lon-for such an amount of time, and it is really really scary when you first go into care, but you've juts kinda gotta go through it really and have the support and help that you need.

Long pause.

JOHN: So, if you could tell your story, what would you want people to know?

Pause.

KEIRA: Erm... probably, the carers that I've had really, the amount of carers and how it

hasn't worked liked most of them have been short-term but I've ended up staying with them for quite some time, like, obviously the one for two month that ended up two years but that that was probably the worst placement that I had so far, erm, and I had other, other ones where I probably still could've been with one of them right now, if she hadn't been too old, like she'd be seventy... eight this year.

JOHN: Who's that?

KEIRA: [Name redacted].

JOHN: Ahh, I know [Name redacted], I had erm [Name redacted] he's like, is he still with [Name redacted], do you still see her?

KEIRA: He's in the army.

JOHN: He got in the army? He was always that was that was always his err/

KEIRA: He done his fitness training and he's been/

JOHN: I a-always tried to tell him to not go in the army but he was adamant.

KEIRA: He done his fitness training and he gets shipped off in a couple of weeks.

JOHN: Ahh good for him.

KEIRA: And then [Name redacted]'s like, [Name redacted]'s like "nope, he doesn't want to go."

John laughs.

KEIRA: She's been trying to res-she was she's been trying to resign him.

John laughs.

KEIRA: Behind his back so he and erm she went on the internet the other day and tried to take his application out and er take him make him fail his fitness test! (She laughs).

JOHN: By what giving him loads of cakes?

KEIRA: Hmm-mm.

John laughs.

KEIRA: Making him fail his fitness test and erm, he came down the one day and went "[Name redacted] what the hell you doing on the laptop?" "ahh I'm just checking your application" "no you're not, get off it now!" (She laughs).

JOHN: So you still see [Name redacted]?

KEIRA: See her most Saturdays.

JOHN: She's lovely [Name redacted] int she?

KEIRA: I go and see my little erm, my little Archie.

JOHN: She's probably one – ahh the little dog – she's probably one of my favourite foster carers I think that I worked with.

KEIRA: A lot of erm, I was only meant to be there for a couple of a couple of weeks I was there like a year a half (she laughs), but then because she was getting too old they had move us and literally that was probably the hardest thing I've ever done in my life, moving from such a stable place, plus it was near Jae, cos I used to live know how she's on [Location redacted], and you've got, it one house here and her house here the church down the road?

JOHN: Right.

KEIRA: You know the chu-the house here, next to the church Jae used to live there with her little sister.

JOHN: Oh.

KEIRA: And like on Easter/

JOHN: Is that how you like got friends?

KEIRA: Ahh why I've known her like since I was three-years-old, and on, Easter Sunday and Sundays and stuff I used to take we're Easter lollies out and sit on the erm, thingy

and subathe, know the little bit of grass/

JOHN: Hmm/

KEIRA: Before you go on our street, sit and sunbathe on that grass... I used to take Archie for a walk all the time... he's my dog.

John laughs.

KEIRA: He's like twenty-four now I'm like "Ahh my baby".

JOHN: Is that how old he is twenty-four years? Bloody hell.

KEIRA: He's really old.

JOHN: That is really old.

KEIRA: But he's still walking like seven or eight miles a miles a day.

John laughs.

KEIRA: [Name redacted]'s like "come on Archie!" She's like, with him goes down steps.

John laughs.

KEIRA: He's a fit little dog.

JOHN: So it'd be important to you to kind of talk about how many placements you've had and, all the kind of upheaval?

KEIRA: Yeah.

Pause.

JOHN: Yeah. And what is it you'd like people to know about that?

KEIRA: Just that you will go through quite a few placements not the not the first one's gonna be your, your ulti-your ultimate one, l-like you're gonna stay there forever, and also obviously like my accident, like they would not let my mom in the hospital at all,when I had my accident.

JOHN: What accident?

KEIRA: I got hit by a car on a zebra crossing.

JOHN: Oh god.

KEIRA: It snapped my tibia and fibia.

JOHN: How old were you when that happened?

KEIRA: How old am I now fifteen about, four-thirteen, it was two thousand and twelve.

JOHN: Right god. And they wouldn't let your mom see you?

KEIRA: Wouldn't let me mam come in at all, erm, yeah, just m-my carer, and like, it was really bad cos I woke I used to wake up crying, for my mam, and then they went and told my mam that I was crying for her, if I was my mom I'd cry but they were obviously still refused to let her in the hospital. I was in there I was only in for two nights hospital.

JOHN: Just at [Location redacted]?

KEIRA: Where I was born... still crap, I was just like, I just lay in bed most nights just like text my mam (she laughs).

JOHN: It sounds like you have a lot of contact do you have a lot of contact with your mom?

KEIRA: Never used to I was I wasn't allowed, but when I got my first one I was "yes, number, A, now" (laughs) and now I just speak to me mam all the time now I'm allowed to.

JOHN: Yeah, it's hard to stop you isn't it really?

KEIRA: Ahh I but they did try, because I'm nearly sixteen they think they can't do anything, and they've tried to stop me before and I've just basically turned around, "you know one way or another I'm gonna have my I'm gonna do it anyways."

JOHN: Hmm.

KEIRA: Whether it's internet text, phone, I'll do it one way even if I have to meet up with

her I used to meet up with her all the time after school... and they didn't know until a couple of weeks, later.

JOHN: It's what happens isn't it.

KEIRA: If the if the stopped, if they tried to stop my contact, all the time, and I just, kicked off, and they knew anyways, and eventually they, they kind of give in, and like my Robbie, was erm, he was with [Name redacted] and [Name redacted] since he was in care and at the age of fourteen he kicked off so bad that they put him back with me mam, erm at the age of four at the age of fourteen he went back and now we-we all we all under a full full care order, erm, until you're eighteen, you're still care, so erm, so Robbie still had his social worker/

JOHN: Hmm-mm/

KEIRA: Erm but I if I choose to go back at sixteen I'll still have my social worker, well I'll have a leaving care social worker not [Name redacted] thank god for that.

JOHN: Do you think/

KEIRA: Otherwise I would murder her/

JOHN: Do you think you'll go back of d'you think you'll stay where you are?

KEIRA: Erm I don't know yet, I think I'd probably stay, think I'm gonna try to stay there as long as I can really until I've got everything sorted, get a job (she laughs), try and get a job even if I'm just wanting to work with horses, really at the minute.

JOHN: Is there any opportunities do you think?

KEIRA: Police stables.

JOHN: That'd be good.

KEIRA: That's my main goal at the minute just to work in the police stables, but it takes four years.

JOHN: What, the training? Well if it's something you want, you've gotta,the reality is you've gotta/

KEIRA: It's not it's not looking after the horses that's the problem, it's the maintaining, and obviously they need to have err, cack cleaned every day.

JOHN: Well it's very specific, kind of ambition so, I'm pretty sure you could do it.

KEIRA: To be fair, all I need to get into [Location redacted] into study it, is erm, C's in maths, C's in science which I've already got my C's in my in my science and my English, then I need erm, all my BHS certificates which I've got five already and there's twelve.

JOHN: Brilliant, well it sounds like you're, well on course.

KEIRA: Well they says that they says I've got a place anyway whether I do whether I get my BHS certificates or not I'm still on the course as long as I'm get my three C's, then I'm sorted.

JOHN: You have to--

KEIRA: I've got my C's anyways in my English and me things is me maths I really need to err focus on, cos I'm absolutely dumb.

JOHN: I don't think that's true.

KEIRA: I am at maths.

JOHN: Well you're not dumb are you maybe you just find maths more difficult that other things, I-I always found maths quite difficult.

KEIRA: I'm thick in maths.

JOHN: Well it's not thick is it maybe it's just/

KEIRA: No I am thick in maths.

JOHN: OK, erm/

KEIRA: That's why I get extra tutoring I've always put all my like hard work, and we also

get more opportunities us being in care like, if we're struggling in a subject, we they try

and get us after school tuition which I do on a Thursday night, oh get in he's got us some

sweets! Erm, on Thursday I got erm...

JOHN: Is that through liket he PEP thing?

KEIRA: Yeah.

JOHN: Hmm-mm.

KEIRA: He gets paid for doing after school tuition, erm...

JOHN: Is that like comes to the house?

KEIRA: No no I stay at school/

JOHN: Right/

KEIRA: That's why I have it after school, so it'll basically be, on, Thursday I will maths

class on Thursday so it'll be like,get dropped off at home, get down there for four for five

past three, get down there have me maths he's got some s-sour sweets that he wants us

to give us, seriously/

JOHN: Is that how he kind of bribes ya?

KEIRA: No no I go anyways I still go anyways like I like him really like him I've had him

for four year/

JOHN: Ahh well/

KEIRA: Three years, yeah four err four... erm, so he's been amazing.

JOHN: Brilliant

KEIRA: He's a crease though.

John laughs.

KEIRA: He come like, I'd been talking to his son, and then his son was being horrible to

us, so I said so I told him, and he was like "ahh get away with yourself" and I was geet

"your son called us a slag" and he was like "I can't really comment on that" I was geet...

you're basically calling us a slag. It's alright I punched him it's fine.

John laughs.

JOHN: So you know, the stuff that we we watched and the the sessions we did as a

group, did that make you erm, think any differently about your own story or how you'd

like your story told, in any way?

KEIRA: Not really, just to be told the truth and not like sugarcoat it, like quite a lot of

them do they do sugarcoat it a lot and it's just like, that's it really, yeah.

JOHN: Or it goes the other way and it's really like miserable?

KEIRA: Yeah, or not put too much of a downer on it really (she laughs), it it goes both

ways it really does.

JOHN: Yeah.

Pause.

JOHN: Is there anything else you'd like to, say? Any questions?

KEIRA: Nope.

JOHN: Well I thought you were fantastic, I appreciate your honesty, erm,I thought that

was, it was a really good interview and I think, it sounds like you're doing really well in

spite of every-everything that's happened and all the kind of, chaos through your life

sounds like you've kind of, got yourself sorted, so/

KEIRA: Eventually/

JOHN: So that's erm deserves a lot of credit for that I think.

She laughs.

JOHN: No I'm being serious, so, good work.

KEIRA: Thanks. I'm really tired, and my muscles are aching, legs.

JOHN: That was brilliant thank you, I really appreciate it, it was a really good interview.

Interview ends.

Session 2

During the second session, Daniel begins by initially defending The Dumping Ground, stating, "Aye but they don't know that they're in a house by on their own." Carly however, once again explains what would happen in reality, "Yeah I know but they would get checked up if they were going on holidays, they would they would have care worker people in coming in...Every so often to check on them." The debate continues, "Aye but that's the thing though, they send the care worker home." Keira offers her contribution, "Yeah that care worker cos that care worker would've went to their boss, if there were a group and they'd be going in checking." Daniel now seems less certain of his opinions. Perhaps two against one, or perhaps it's that Keira has joined in. Does her opinion hold more sway with him? Whatever the case, Daniel now seems to turn his opinion. The group gain consensus via ordering arguments and garnering support. Keira continues, "Cos they would've sent an an extra person to come in and check on them to see which care worker and if she couldn't provide a valid... council thing then, whatever." And now his turnaround to the girl's side would appear to be complete as he helps them out with their discussion.

When the matter of realism in The Dumping Ground is raised, there is consensus amongst the young people. Even though the girls answer differently, it seems they're in agreement this time. The different answers would point out my own poorly worded question. Joey supports the group, pointing out another unrealistic detail of the show, "She actually told that lass to get the blue out of her hair", something they all relate to. Daniel supports this perhaps underlining his opinion being altered by the group, "I would've smacked her for that". His response if aggressive, as if to underline his new allegiance. The group highlight issues around hair and food. Appearance, something that feeds into identity and food, a basic human right. It would seem that group consensus is being achieved in this discussion, with each building on the other's points. Georgina states, "And then she said no food..." and Carly builds on that point, "Yeah, I know. No food for the rest of the day..." Other group members make this link too, highlighting the importance of their hair to them. Daniel states, "I buy my hair dye myself... She can't tell us to stop." Daniel says "us" and it could be that he means the group, they will not be told to stop dying their hair.

Although the group did not feel overall Tracey Beaker was realistic, Daniel, Carly and Joey do believe it is more realistic than The Dumping Ground. As there is no challenge to this, I will assume this is the sentiment of the whole group. Joey supports and builds on the idea that the Dumping Ground isn't realistic, citing grenades as evidence of this, "Because they wouldn't be allowed grenades in the house. Joey continues his discussion around the grenade and debates the details with Daniel. This conversation dominates

the discussion for a period and the only other male – Ewan – makes his first contribution to the discussion. Is it that there's something in this topic that prompts him. Grenades, weaponry, it can be claimed as a male area of interest, and this is borne out by the fact none of the girls are involved in this discussion:

JOEY: And as soon as they telt... there was five seconds to get rid of the grenade it won't like.

...

DANIEL: You know the little leader? That kid kid that first burst in, it won't go off.

JOEY: Yeah I know--

DANIEL: As soon as you let go you'd have five seconds to hoy it.

JOEY: Yeah I know, but as soon as he let go it didn't go off straight away so it's not like realistic.

EWAN: Someone landing on a cushion.

...

DANIEL: It was deactivated it--

EWAN: Released it under the cushion.

DANIEL: ...It wasn't live.

...

DANIEL: To be honest it would've been better if it blew up in the house.

JOEY: Yeah.

DANIEL: Kaboom!

Again, Daniel defends the show, attempting to explain away some of the plot holes. Has he been hiding his true feelings about the show throughout, fearful he'll stand out from the others as the one liking the more "surreal" show. Daniel draws a line under the discussion claiming blowing up the house would've been better. Does he simply mean it would've added drama to the story or does he mean that he wants to retract his conflicting opinion and simply blow everything up? Perhaps Daniel regrets his decision defending the show, as he's a lone positive voice in the group, suggesting, "To be honest it would've been better if it blew up in the house", emphasising this idea with a "Kaboom!" This can be interpreted as Daniel desiring more drama from the situation, more reality. It could also be that he has no affinity with the characters and therefore would've felt little if they had been harmed. Also, it could be that he regrets his position of positivity towards the show and would like to erase it, "kaboom!"

When Joey once again shifts the discussion to his own interests, "Who's watching I'm a Celebrity tonight?", Ewan responds, "Not me I think it's the worst programme" clearly unafraid to voice his feelings. Daniel on the other-hand wants to be part of things, he wants to be part of the discussion and identify with others, "What chan what channel?" Maybe this is why his opinions seem to be so changeable, or at the least why he might mask or camouflage his true opinions.

Jae and Keira agree that Tracey Beaker is the most accurate of the two shows. I would suggest this means something, as these two have established themselves as something of an authority on the topic. Daniel goes on to point out the characters are all "brats" who are "geet rotten spoilt". This appears to be quite a dramatic turnaround from his initial position, using language that conjures strong imagery. He goes onto to criticise the episode's plot now, contradicting points he made previously to defend the show: "I mean how can Thea look like a carer... she doesn't even look fifteen she's like thirteen." It would seem that, out of all the group members, Daniel is the least confident in maintaining his opinions. The group influences Daniel, rather than the other way around and it seems that he navigates these interactions by continually searching to identify with the other group members, even if it means undermining his own opinions. Daniel also agrees and emphasises using the grenade as evidence, "Yeah. You have more angry kids like kids with grenades", seemingly happier to go with group consensus than perhaps his true feelings. Jae backs this idea up, citing evidence from her own experiences. She includes her own brother in the discussion, who she'd previously gone to great lengths to defend, "I'd say that about every kid in the home I see – even in my own little brother's home... Carl's a brat, I'm talking about my brother." Is this how she really feels, is it a fact of how she feels, or is she simply retracting, perhaps regretting opening up and sharing?

The group attempt to come to consensus around the number of YP at the DG. Daniel offers a counterpoint. It's a number, not controversial, but perhaps he feels the need to assert himself here, having had his own views potentially subsumed by the group.

Session 3
The session begins with something of a power struggle between Keira and myself. Keira offers a scapegoat, which I reject. And now I take the opportunity to highlight her as one of the most difficult group members, because in actuality, she's probably one of the most confident. I'm showing the group I'm unafraid to challenge Keira, hoping that in some way this will win her respect and give me the authority I need to steer the group:
JOHN: Well you I think everyone to be fair, apart from Ewan everyone was as kind of as bad as each other, you were, I think you were particularly erm a main culprit
E laughs.
EWAN: Ohh, shots fired.
KEIRA: Shots fired totally wait until he gets outside I'll chin him.
Keira threatens me with physical violence but I'm not threatened and brush her claims away, moving on, showing the group I'm unafraid of her. Keira takes Georgina's chair, which causes conflict between them. Perhaps having lost some power/control to me, she needs to reclaim it and exerts her dominance over a younger group member. Georgina stands up for herself though and is no pushover.

I refer to Sharna as "an expert on Waterloo Road" and in doing so I am welcoming her contribution and valuing it, conscious she didn't contribute much during the last session. When Keira points out Georgina's an expert too, is she apologising for stealing her chair, valuing her contribution too? However, I am conscious I am placing Sharna on the spot and offer her a way out, "If you've got if you haven't got an answer, it's fine I'll just--" Keira pounces on this, "Can we just say "pass"?" In this way she's establishing her own new rules within the new boundaries I'm setting for the group.

Keira states, "Can I just ask you Georgina what's your carer gonna say when she finds out your phone cover's covered in cellotape?" In questioning this, is Keira offering us the every day dramas the group face? For example, what would happen if you covered your phone in cellotape? These are the real life bad choices the group make, the things that get them in trouble, in contrast to the over dramatic scenarios seen onscreen.

When Keira makes her point that looked-after girls on TV are often pregnant, "It's better just like, you see them on more than less erm TV programmes like they always end up turning out being pregnant", Georgina challenges her, "They always turn out end up being pregnant". Is this an overhang from their earlier clash over the seat? Or is it that these two are generally at odds, something I noticed in the previous sessions. Keira points out this is "My opinion" and maintains it, in spite of Georgina's challenge. Joey defends his ally Georgina, "You're not pregnant though are you?" He is immediately met with aggression from Keira, "Shut up". Georgina then backs him up, "Not yet", pointing out it's only a matter of time before Keira becomes pregnant, which brings laughter from the group. The two younger members once again working in tandem. Keira continues, "Like all the ones that I've seen like children that have been in care, they've all have the girls that have been pregnant or had a baby." Joey challenges again, "I object, Tracey Beaker didn't get pregnant". This time Ewan steps in to defend Keira, "Ahh just shut up Joey", perhaps sensing she is trying to make a point that is personal to her, or perhaps feeling she's being ganged up on by Joey and Georgina. This shuts Joey down, allowing Keira to make her point. Keira, with Ewan's input, is able to make and elaborate on her feelings. She then goes on to point out that there is perhaps some truth in the idea that looked-after girls are young mothers, explaining this is probably due to the examples set to them by their own mums. This is either something she has experienced herself, or these images are so powerful, they overpower her own lived experiences: "Like they always have always have all the ones I've seen that have been in care, they've always either been pregnant or they've had the child so it's like, saying that basically saying that, more likely to have kids but at a young age. But it probably is kind of is true, because there's a lot more things like, the trouble teenage girls follow their mam's footsteps." She does state, "Never here though", and appears to be referring to the group. If so, she's making a clear distinction that no one in the group would ever get pregnant. This would seem to be positive, showing her respect for the group, as young people who've perhaps

not been set great examples, but who have gone against the apparent grain.

Keira and Georgina both agree that the show is a "horribly bad" representation of looked-after young people. Georgina accepts that there must be something bad in their lives as they wouldn't be in care, but perhaps not everything is as bad as portrayed. She mentions Faye from Corrie, then stops, seemingly because she feels this is off-topic. However, does she not talk about Faye further, realising Faye was a teenage mum (at 13), information that would back up Keira's point and contradict Georgina's own earlier claims? Joey agrees, "Because I think, basically like, everything that like, if like people are in care and they're removed like they imply like that's what people like are always like in care but really it's not really true" as does Keira who states, "It does make a horribly bad representation as well, because like…"

There also appears to be general consensus in the group that this episode depicted males in care as having mental health issues:
KEIRA: And like that portrayed it as basically they didn't know, but that kind of portrayed him as being an absolute err an absolute nutter so it's basically…
EWAN: Basically thinking everyone who's a lad in care is a mentalist.
JOEY: It implies that everyone's mental in care.
However, there is a sole voice of dissent – Sharna. She states, "But it's not really saying that every lad's like that, it's just like saying, he was he was obsessed with her so, like it didn't like exactly say it's not exactly like pointing that every lad in care is a mentalist really. Cos he isn't actually in care he's run away." The discussion continues:
EWAN: He was.
KEIRA: He's still in he's still in still in the care system though.
SHARNA: Yeah but he ran away.
JOEY: He ran away from his carer.
SHARNA: And?
JOEY: Exactly so it means he's in care.
SHARNA: Look Joey--
The earlier conflict between Sharna and Joey plays out here. They're clearly used to going toe-to-toe with one another. It seems that Sharna will argue with Joey, but perhaps will not do this with other group members. She seems to be feeling her way into the discussion, showing that she's unafraid of conflict however, her voice is growing. She underlines her point, "Someone in care someone not in care can be mental doesn't really have to point like…"

Again there seems to be some form of consensus that Jade was controlled by Drew, implying an abusive relationship. Georgina states she "was really easily persuaded", Ewan states, "She was scared of him" and Sharna agrees, "She was scared." Georgina underlines this agreement, "Erm, like I said she was very easily persuaded. Yeah I agree

with everyone else she was scared and stuff like that. Because, he was mental."
However, all the female group members (all 3 positions) are able to find positives in Jade's:

GEORGINA: She was because she said she wanted to like stay with him and stuff.

KEIRA: I think it's good that she actually acknowledged what had happened.

SHARNA: And she has a baby out of all of this. See some people don't think that's a bad thing and some people... and how she kind of realised that she had to stop running away and stuff because she was pregnant and she trying to like

Sharna offers a different POV on having a baby, it could be a positive. Is this because they identify with the character stronger than the males, and therefore see positives in themselves?

There is clearly something of interest in the way in which the young people interpreted elements of the show. For example, Georgina and Sharna lock horns over tone. Georgina sees it as sad and depressing, whereas Sharna feels it's more positive.

GEORGINA: It was dead depressing... The letter thing that he wrote to her, 'cos, was dead sad.

SHARNA: How was it depressing?

GEORGINA: It's just sad.

SHARNA: It says that he's gonna get better and he's gonna--

GEORGINA: Because, because even though he's like mental he still wanna he still loved her

SHARNA: And then he's like erm

KEIRA: He would've changed for her aswell.

SHARNA: So how is that depressing if he would've changed for her?

JOEY: Because.

GEORGINA: Well it's not...

The group come to agree through the development of their discussion that the situation is sad and depressing, with Sharna finally conceding. Although it's unclear whether she actually believes this. It does seem though that they are both able to see the sadness and optimism in the conclusion. Again, Sharna finds positives in the story's conclusion. Whereas Georgina finds the ending "sad" and "depressing", Sharna points out, "It says that he's gonna get better and he's gonna-- So how is that depressing if he would've changed for her?" She is able to forgive and forget, give people a chance. Does she something of her own dad in this? Did he change? This is mere speculation of course, but she argues with passion on the topic that it seems close to her. Or is it that she wants to change herself, and she needs that understanding too?

The group seem to build on each other's version of the story here, adding and gaining a consensus, agreeing that his upbringing might have been good and there simply could've been one significant incident – his mum's mental health – that changed everything for

him:

GEORGINA: Because he was dead angry, and all the time.

JOEY: He could have anger problems.

KEIRA: He could've been ADHD.

SHARNA: He could've been he could've been raised perfectly fine.

EWAN: But the teacher told him

JOEY: He could've been raised with a rich family.

EWAN: He found out about his past.

JOEY: Aye.

KEIRA: Aye the day that his mam left him.

SHARNA: Exactly.

KEIRA: Well his mam didn't leave him his mam got took away to an an...

EWAN: Institution, because she couldn't cope.

KEIRA: So really he he I think he had like a good upbringing until that point.

Here the group discuss why Drew may have been so aggressive. Keira points out he could've had ADHD, something she herself has personal experience with, while Sharna states his behaviour could've been nothing to do with his upbringing. Once again she acts as the lone voice of dissent in the group.

When a discussion arises around the school's procedures (or lack thereof), as Keira states, "I know, but it didn't come up like yeah it was the real address but..." Sharna once again offers a different point of view, "But it would've been registered it would've been..." As she is defending the school, is it that she's defending the show – something she's an "expert" in – rather than having genuinely differing opinions to the group?

The group seem to agree completely that Drew and Jade's living conditions were poor. Each using humour and developing this idea and drawing in other references, such as other eps of Waterloo Road. Keira describes the house as "Scabby" and Sharna states, "You could've got fleas like... Like no because actually there was that episode and these two kids are living rough and they've got fleas haven't they". The two experts prove their expertise, drawing in other references. They're showing the group they know about this series:

GEORGINA: Lisa and Lenny Brown.

SHARNA: Lisa and Lenny Brown, yeah and like.

When talking about the staff treatment of Jade and Drew and the way in which their behaviour differentiated, Ewan states the staff were "Soft and gentle (with Jade) but him firm and, straight" and that they were harsher with him. Sharna comments, "But they had to be didn't they sorry." Sharna counters an opinion again and apologises. Perhaps she realises she's being very oppositional to the group and feels bad in some way for that. However, she's compelled to make her points.

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Session 4:

Tommy picks up on the fact that Scouts' scared about coming into care, it's that fear of the unknown, a fear that perhaps all of the group have experienced, "So like, it'll make it'll make people feel like scared cos they don't know who it is really do they?" Jae builds on Tommy's idea, adding that the stress of being separated from her brother would also impact on her, which Tommy agrees with, "And not being with her brother would make her, be be more stressed as well." Jae speaks from experience here, we know she has been a carer for her siblings and was separated from them. Tommy and Jae have had very similar experiences and are in agreement. As there is no challenge from the group, we can assume consensus. Jae goes on, "She's just like me but only what happened with me was I was looking after three, not one." Tommy states, "It's the same with my sister she had to looked after look after me James and me little brother Nathan." Jae speaks for herself, unlike Tommy who speaks on behalf of the group. She isn't a leader in the same way.

Joey and Georgina express negative views about Scout's character, with Joey stating, "I think she was like, a scruffy thing", and Georgina adding, "Bit of a hygiene problem?" Joey adds, "Yes (Laughs) She needs to take a shower once in a while wooh!" Daniel challenges them, tells them to be sensible, "It's recording you know be sensible." Is he doing this out of duty to me? Or is it that the group have already identified with Scout, Tommy and Jae in particular. If Scout is insulted, are they insulted these other YP too?

Sharna contributes little to the early discussion. When Tommy talks about his sister, she states, "Ahh Katherine", clearly knowing who he's referring to. Jae goes on to point out she had to similarly look after her siblings like Tommy's sister, and Sharna apologises, "I'm sorry." It's unclear whether she's apologising because she's interrupted or she's sad about Jae's predicament. Either way, it seems Sharna is a lot less forthcoming than in the previous session. Is this because she felt she was too challenging previously and regretted acting this way? When I ask Sharna her feelings on the episode, she says, "Well, erm, I don't know, there was erm, I don't know what to say." I even comment "OK OK you did good you did really good last time so I'll let but I think you take a little while to get warmed up don't you... like a computer you have to turn you on and then..." So in my mind at least, the previous session's contribution from Sharna probably took a lot of effort out of her. Not only did she offer a lot, but generally her opinion was in opposition to someone else, quite often several others at once.

In fact, there was relatively little conflict in the session to talk of. Is it that the group have formed and harmonised at this point? Or is it merely to do with group dynamics or a myriad of other factors at play, such as the young people' energy levels etc.

Session 5

Tommy sets out his reasons why the film isn't realistic – such as the level of violence on display. He talks about his own care situation, using this as a counter example as to just how unrealistic the film is, something the whole group relate to, the issue of swearing at home:

TOMMY: And swearing at the carers all the time.

JOEY: And deliberately swearing at like

TOMMY: I swear at my carers, not that not that often but I don't even like scream, I wouldn't go "fuck off like".

JOEY: If if I swore at my carers, I'd get told off.

GEORGINA: They were troubled.

TOMMY: Yes they were troubled... They were troubled characters.

He uses the example of swearing, as perhaps, it is one of the few elements, on a behavioural level, that he can connect to and has some experience with. Joey makes a similar connection and shares his own experience. Georgina goes on to point out these characters were "troubled", as if to highlight the difference between "us" and "them". The conversation continues:

GEORGINA: I think it's wicked that they swear.

TOMMY: I swear at my carer and she just laughs... My my carer swears like

JAE: Swears like, "Get to your effin bedroom!"

TOMMY: My carers swear but like

JAE: So do mine.

TOMMY: But they don't they don't do it like I don't literally when I'm in a rage

GEORGINA: Swearing

JAE: I swear at my carer.

TOMMY: It's like "ahh, Ok then" you know what I mean.

GEORGINA: Ooh bad ass Jae.

SHARNA: I don't swear at Susan.

JAE: I swear

JOEY: I swear at my auntie and uncle right and they washed my mouth out with soap and water.

Georgina thinks swearing is a good thing, perhaps meaning the carers do not separate themselves from the young people, they communicate with them on their level. The group then discuss the issue of carer swearing, with each describing how swearing plays out in their homes. In this way, the group seem to be establishing what is acceptable/normal, reaching some consensus about an issue they all have experience with. They each make their offer, agreeing that there are rules around swearing, even if they are different between each household. Joey, perhaps realising he is in the minority, ends the conversation by revealing his abuse, potentially to shock or derail the conversation, as it seems it is only he who has such strong feelings about the onscreen carers

I explain the reason these onscreen young people are in a care home is because they have these behavioural problems. Joey points out he live in a home, perhaps showing he's no different, or that he is different, he's able to manage his difficulties. And now the conversation moves onto care homes and the group attempts to establish what they know about these. Sharna asks Jae about her brother, remembering previous discussions where Jae talked about her brother being in a care home. It's clear that their knowledge is limited, with Carly and Joey using terms like "naughty boys' school". These places being used as a threat, the idea established by Joey, is discussed as something passed down from generations, showing how dated these ideas are, and perhaps that the young people's experiences have similarities to the adults in the group.

Joey continues to show his disapproval of the care staff depicted:
JOEY: Well like, the like when somebody runs away they just run and rugby tackle them to the floor.
SHARNA: Yes but Joey it's to stop them from getting out how else are you supposed to handle them talk to them and they run a mile I mean that wouldn't work would it?
JOEY: And then and then they're geet swearing at the like children and everything and erm so like they're basically encouraging them to use like bad language, when they should be like like they shouldn't be encouraging them.

In this instance, we see Symbolic Interactionism at work. Joey once again states his feelings that the staff were inappropriate, citing their use of "rugby tackles" as aggressive towards the young people. However, Sharna views this action differently, viewing it as protective of the young people, stopping them from hurting themselves. The same incident then has two interpretations – aggressive and protective.

In the following exchange, I show how the discuss shifts and changes my own opinion. Carly highlights the character of Sammy as one that stood out to her, explaining that she didn't understand his behaviour and referring to him as "wrong in the head". Georgina points out he had "anger issues" and I state he was "deeply traumatised". However, Frank, a student social worker who was present, makes a different offer:
FRANK: But then it was a game at the end because he'd turned it around
Ewan laughs.
FRANK: He'd looked how far he'd gone and he went "wahey!" and then turned around and ran back didn't he that was quite funny that.
JOHN: Yeah so at the at the start obviously he ran out didn't he, if you if you think but at the end he kind of
JOEY: And then workers just like rugby tackled him.
JOHN: He runs out again doesn't he but it's kind of like yeah it's more like a game isn't it so that's quite nice I think in a way.

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SHARNA: Do you think that's why he put the cape on?

JOHN: Yeah so it was like

EWAN: (Laughs) Aye.

JOHN: Yeah he's gonna really go for it this time in his cape (laughs).

Frank points out a change in Sammy's character, pointing out his initial attempts to flee the care home were because of distress, however at the end, he was playing a game trying to dodge the staff. This is something I hadn't realised and my realisation of this, and perhaps that this character had a happy outcome (in the film at least) is clearly evident, this illustrating how the group can highlight and influence ideas and opinions including my own. It is evident here that I learn and realise something I had missed from my own viewings, and I am more than happy to run with this new interpretation.

Jae opens up and shares about the abuse she experienced. In this way, she shows the group she is unafraid to talk about her past and is willing to share:

JAE: Kind of like Jayden cos like she got abused by her parents, you know how she got abused by her dad, I got abused by my dad as well so in a way I kind of related to Jayden a bit.

This prompts a similar response from both Tommy and Sharna, who both share their early experiences:

TOMMY: Apparently when I was younger I got, physically abused my err little brother's dad.

SHARNA: My mam did and my mam got abused by my brother's dad and I was apparently I was five-years-old and apparently I went mammy's getting hurt.

Perhaps in this way, the group are demonstrating their expertise and experience. They have had these awful experiences, yet that have managed to adjust and they do not demonstrate the behavioural difficulties the onscreen characters do. Tara and myself, rightfully, advise the young people they do not need to express these experiences here. However, I did feel we were impeding the group in this way and felt it necessary to offer them a private space to talk in the form of an interview. Tommy states, "No but I never actually thought of that", highlighting the beneficial nature of the group interaction, and more broadly, the benefit of the research approach.

Consensus: Carly opens the discussion of self-harm amongst young people – pointing out that two of the young people depicted had self-harmed, "Like she had slits like she already slits on her arms and that... And that bloke at the end, I've forgot his name.. He had cuts on his arm and he..." Tara points out that self-harm amongst young people is a common thing and Carly challenges that notion, stating that "I know but like not all young like people in care do it". Tara agrees, but points out this is an issue amongst young people generally, not just those in care and both Sharna and Tommy support this, stating they have friends who do it, who presumably are not in care:

SHARNA: My friends I know a couple of people at school that do it.

TOMMY: I know a young person that does it.

Tommy goes on to point out that he does not understand what his friend gets from self-harming, as if to underline the notion that not all LAC do this, "I ju-I ju-he does it on his thighs and but I can't say what it is, why he appreciates that do you know what I mean". In this way, the group appear to be agreeing that while self-harm is not necessarily an issue that affects looked-after young people solely, it is perhaps an issue that affects young people more generally, and after all, these group members are young people first and foremost.

When Tommy talks about a friend of his who was horrifically abused Carly makes another personal disclosure, "I've had an axe at my head", then comments to Georgina, "I'm sure you know." It seems that her personal disclosures follow on from contributions from Tommy. Is she trying to open up to Tommy? Is she trying to show him she is no different from him, they have some common ground? Is she reaching out to him? She goes on to state, "I think I know who this is", referring to Tommy's friend. Quickly afterwards, Georgina asks about Tommy's brother. Perhaps then, simply than trying to lighten the discussion, maybe she was trying to steer the conversation away from hie friend, as to protect their identity? This seems to make sense, especially as Carly seems like she might say a name. Later on, she steps in to protect Georgina once again, this time from Tommy, "No she wouldn't cos I don't know if you realised but her sister's also here", although Georgina acts as though this is out of the ordinary. Perhaps again she is showing Tommy here that she is no different to him, she is a match for him. It could be that she is making a play for leadership, or it could be that she has some interest in him.

When Georgina states that it is stereotypical that Jayden was abused by her father, she in fact means it was typical. "Some of the children like, are brought into care because of abusive parents or grandparents." This idea is backed up by both Tommy and Carly, who point who their parents' behaviour as the reason they entered care:

TOMMY: My mam was an alcoholic so I came into foster care.

CARLY: My dad was a drugdealer.

In this way, perhaps the young people are agreeing that their circumstances, their experiences, and those depicted onscreen, are not the responsibility of the young people.

Finally, when Tommy asks, "Remind me one more time me why I'm allowed outside?", Ewan points out, "Because you're not joining in." In this way, Ewan appears to be defending the group. He wants the discussion to run smoothly with people who want to be there. However, perhaps this is more personal. With a relationship between Ewan and Jae already established, at this point in the discussion, Tommy and Jae are arguing, albeit playfully. Jae questions why she ever went out with Tommy, evidencing they have had a relationship previously. Therefore, perhaps this is Ewan defending Jae, or

perhaps he's biting at Tommy, jealous of the relationship he had with her.

Appendix 9:   **Voice and agency – interviews (cont.)**

Jae interview:
Jae states that, "things like Tracy Beaker, they use like a stereotype, they've got like really bad issues like anger issues and like they're emotionally troubled. Sometimes that's not always the case, yeah they've got,some kids have got really bad behaviour issues, but not everybody has, just like everybody's got their own kind of backstory."   She hedges throughout here, showing she is developing her thoughts and ideas, connecting the images she has seen to her own life, and it is perhaps this idea that is difficult for her. She goes on, "Like yeah, it shows that, like yeah, not all kids have like behaviour problems like I've said, and that like everbody's, everybody is troubled, but they show it in their own way."   She has already connected her experiences to the character of Jayden, having both been abused by their fathers and perhaps she is considering this here, which is what makes it difficult and preparing to discuss it further.

She goes on to make this connection explicit, "Cause in a way she's (Jayden's) like me, in a way, like I don't cut myself obviously, but like, she's more mature about things.... And she would kind of act the same where I would, like when she, when she cried and started telling people her life story and all that, like that's what I did, like I just poured, like I talked to the support teachers at school... like that would be exactly me, like crying and just, getting it all out."   Her hedging here indicates it is difficult for her to talk about her own disclosure – it's hard to go back to that place, those experiences.

Jae pushes the comparison between herself and Jayden further, "Yeah, when she's in her room and she's listening to her music and has her headphones on, that's what I do, I just sit in my own room with my music and just tend to do my own thing in my room."   Her use of "my" here suggests she is focused on herself here, thinking and talking about how she copes. She goes on, "Like that kind of resembles me because like, I'm used, when I'm upset, I do tend to listen to loads of music... Like when I'm really really upset, I tend to listen to music... There's a couple of songs on my iPod that when I'm like in a really depressed mood, I'll listen to it, but then that just makes me cry, and, sometimes crying is just like, obviously it's, like, for your health and everything because like, you'd just be a mess if you didn't cry."

She continues to discuss and develop her ideas, pushing her ideas further: "there is kids out there who are in care and who aren't in care that can relate to me, like, in ways, that they don't really, 'cause I can imagine there are kids out there who're like, "ahh yeah there's no one like me, nobody understands me" when really, there'll, one day they'll come cross somebody who's just like them..."   Her hedging here indicates this is difficult for her, but it seems she is developing her ideas and feelings. She is not alone, it seems that she might have been at some, but she found people she can talk to, relate to, and she

wants to share that with me and other young people.

She talks about people hovering over her, feeling sorry for her, "And most kids in care won't want people feeling sorry for them, because obviously, it's, like some kids can't deal well with people like hovering around them and stuff, and asking them like loads and loads of questions." She feels confident enough to talk for "most kids in care" indicating what she does not want the majority of the looked-after population would not want either. This is a strong and clear indication of voice, of a leader, of a young person who feels confident enough to stand up and talk on behalf of others.

Jae talks about an instance where she felt she was singled out in class and goes on to offer a solution as to how this should have been handled: "Like or if they (teachers) say, if they, like just before the bell goes, like, if they go "So and so, can you just stay behind, because I wanna ask you that, I wanna talk to you about something," like I'd be like, "Yeah that's fine"." Her hedging here suggests a development in thoughts and perhaps indicates discomfort around these remembered situations. At any rate, she is able to offer insight, experience and guidance into a situation where perhaps a lot of looked-after young people would feel singled-out, showing her developing confidence and voice, and as an advocate for other looked-after young people.

She goes on to offer further experience to other young people who might be entering the care system or in care: "You'd kind of like want them to know they're not alone, that they can talk to anybody about it, but just don't feel like under pressure to talk about it if you don't want to, don't make, don't let kids pressure you into talking about things you don't really wanna talk about." Her hedging here perhaps hints at the times where she has felt alone, but her voice is powerful, overcoming this. She is speaking from experience, and offering guidance to others. She goes on, "And like ask a teacher not to single you out in classes like, maybe go up to them before the lesson even starts and go, "Yeah,I'm in this kind of mood,I'd appreciate if like, you didn't kind of like single me out a lot and ask me like loads of personal questions that maybe are too hard"." Her hedging here shows she is developing an answer to deal with a problem she has highlighted. In this way she is powering her voice. The use of "me" suggests she is seizing focus; this is her way of dealing with things. She continues in this vein as an experiencer, an expert, a mentor to others: "yeah you're in care but sometimes it's for the best, like it's not the most important thing, like your education and your health are more important than being in care." Here, the use of "your" fixes the focus on her, these are her experiences.

Keira interview:
Keira states that while she got a lot of her understanding of what care might be like from her brother's experiences, she had seen Tracey Beaker. She states: "That's what everyone that's what everyone like obviously my going to school and things still ask "Ahh

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you're in a care home," and I'm like, "No I'm with a I'm in a placement but."… Just people at school… Like they don't understand that, there's carers, but and there's there's like care homes and thinking if they think that all care homes are fun like Tracey Beaker and and it's not." So then, rather than highlighting how negatively foster care is depicted, Keira focus on Tracey Beaker and how positively it is depicted. Here she gives her lived experience, reporting, enacting a scene she has been in, she has experienced. She is helping me understand what it is like to be her, she is putting in a lot of effort to explain what life is like for her. It could be that her identity constructed in these interactions, how she has to be a fighter, be rebellious, to even get on an even keel with her peers. She is telling me that life is not like it is in Tracey Beaker, giving me evidence, pushing back at this representation with interactional force. This means something to her.

When talking about whether there is a difference between the way males and females are depicted, she states: "I think, mostly girls are made to look a bit harder than they're actually like than they actually like are, when in real life cos you see most of the girls that are in care and that like on the TV and that like, don't know how to describe it like, they all look hard like, like they look from [location redacted]… Like really rough and just like out of place, and that's how I think that's they always, try and make, the looked-after children look out of place and not look the same as other children, and plus obviously on the TV they never get, they never get nothing ever gets brought up about things we can and cannot do." She highlights that girls are depicted as "harder than they're actually like than they actually like are", pointing I would suggest to aggressive stereotypes. She notes where these characters would be found in her own lived experience and once again refers to looked-after characters being depicted as "out of place" who do not "look the same as other children". Note the idea of a "They", "they always, try and make, the looked-after children look out of place and not look the same as other children". There is a sense perhaps that there is some sort of conspiracy, and it is perhaps borne from the sense of injustice she feels.

She goes on to talk about how looked-after young people are depicted as being "out of fashion": "like Tracy Beaker she nev she always wears that same black and red jumper… Like she never has that off, because obviously and then that makes her stand out from everyone else at her school and things because, she never, like she hasn't got the the newest top the newest trends or anything like that, it's just the same, clothes really…." Her hedging here shows she is working through her thoughts and feelings and also perhaps suggests she is defending against memories where she stood out from everyone else. When she says "she nev she always", here we see a dysfluency, she is actively thinking with me.

When talking about her social worker, Keira states, "Can't stand her guts sh, I've had her

since I was like, seven, but she's done nothing nothing to help me at all, like recently, I had to get [name redacted] my IRO, erm me my mam, and [Name redacted] and one more teacher from school had to sit down at my review and me and my mam had to kick off about my contact, because obviously I've been seeing my mam six times a year for, thirteen year." Her use of "me/my" here suggests the narrative is very much focused on her. This would seem to be the turning point in the interview where she takes real focus, and in terms of voice, this shows a real development.

She talks further: "...on the care homes you never ever once see, anyone see their farth see their mam or dad, very, not even that much, you's see, it's unlikely you see, sometimes you see them for about five ten minutes and then everything goes off, and it's like, everything on like Tracy Beaker, all the like parenting b-bonds always break, straight like they'll see them for a couple of times and then they break, it's never been a relationship where it lasts, ever in reality shows, never ever you always see some something go wrong and then, "ahh I never wanna see you again" and that's it, you never see anything like, when social workers come into help, you never see that, it's always just nothing (she laughs)." She talks about a factor that is clearly of massive importance to Keira – her relationship with her mum. Her hedging here indicates this is not her experience, she is stating her own opinions. She uses the the interview as a means to air her views, a clear indication to me that her voice is powered and growing.

Keira shares another experience related to moving placemen: "Ahh a lot, think I was in a house for one night, one day, not that was it and then I went to school the next morning then me school me social worker picked us up and I was in another place the next day, I was like, "oh well OK"." I ask her, "And what does what does that feel like being like kind of like moved around like that?" She states, "Crap but, when you find when you know you find the right carer, well you think you know you find the right carer it's quite worth it, but normally, it normally doesn't last..." Her use of "me/my" suggests a focus on the personal and her hedgig suggests this was a difficult moment in her life. Keira has clearly had lot of placements and it is really hard to hear her talk about these things, knowing that all she wants is to be stable and settled. When she says "Oh well OK", it seems that she enacts her passivity, it does not feel she has any agency or power in this situation. I can only imagine how saddening and frustrating this must have been for her.

When talking about what she would tell a person about care, Keira states, "Like nobody always gets better, cos y-you end up, putting you, like th-they put you on trial and error like with one carer right this didn't work this worked, next carer will find something that worked and something different and aww well that didn't work until they actually fight the right carer, like they have done with, [name redacted] like, everything works..." She later states, "you will go through quite a few placements not the not the first one's gonna be your, your ulti-your ultimate one, l-like you're gonna stay there forever..." Her

hedging and uncertainty suggest her establishing opinion, but possibly also defending the pain from all those failed placements. Her use of "your" and "my" very much fixes the narrative on her, as an experiencer. She understands that a negative depiction might make it harder for young people coming into care, might make it harder for them to disclose abuse they might be suffering. We expect young people to go into foster placements and it to simply work out, yet where else in life would we expect relationships to simply work out? We make a lot of assumptions about looked-after young people, take their wishes and feelings for granted, why would we assume their first placement would be their last? Is it any wonder so many placements fail with this approach?

When I ask her how she would like to present looked-after young people, she states, "To presh-I'd probably pick footage, like put in a massive footage thing and just like what, I think just like--". Her hedging here suggests possibly that she is defending against the power I have offered. It seems this might be a big responsibility for her, yet she is working with it nonetheless.

Keira talks about all the belongings she has lost throughout a series of placement moves: "And I had and I had like, my b-big my baby brother's favourite one and it had his handprint in, like, that that's valuable because obviously, it's the only thing I really have of my brother, like I've got nothing of my brother I've got a locket, which that, got stole, so I basically have nothing of my Jake I only have like a picture of him... i-it's just ridiculous. Her use of "my/me" suggests the narrative becomes more personalised as do her possessions. Her hedging suggest pain here, a difficult experience. She finds the situation "just ridiculous" and is clearly, and quite rightly, outraged by what has happened. Not only has she lost her family, but she has lost the few items that meant something to her aswell. She has lost everything, and she is being dragged about with bin bags, like a homeless person. As with her previous stories, it seems she wants me to share in that sense of injustice she feels, and it has to be said, she once again manages that. She is very clear that this is something, a situation where she has been made to feel completely worthless, yet it is a situation that should not occur. There is no need for this to happen and she wants to do something about it. By drawing attention to it, her hope, I assume, is that this should never have to happen to anyone else. It is such a simple thing, yet it something I had not even anticipated or thought about, the loss of treasured items. In terms of implications for practice, the message here is clear, it is vital that carers and professionals respect these young people and the items they may hold dear. In terms of voice, she is showing professionals how not to do things.

Even though Keira tells me she has fought hard for contact with her mum, in terms of her current placement she, states, "Erm I don't know yet, I think I'd probably stay, think I'm gonna try to stay there as long as I can really until I've got everything sorted, get a

job (she laughs), try and get a job even if I'm just wanting to work with horses, really at the minute..." Her use of "try" here suggests hopelessness, perhaps she is unsure how long her placement will last. Her hedging also suggests that it is difficult for her to consider these things might not work out for her. However, she is fighting on: "Police stables... That's my main goal at the minute just to work in the police stables, but it takes four years... To be fair, all I need to get into [Location redacted] into study it, is erm, C's in maths, C's in science which I've already got my C's in my in my science and my English, then I need erm, all my BHS certificates which I've got five already and there's twelve." So then, even though she defends her mum with vehemence throughout this interview, she still understands that her current placement offers her that stability she craves, finally, and gives her a platform from which she can get "everything sorted". This shows a real level of maturity and insight and concludes her story if you will. She remains loyal, yet she has to do the best for herself. Her use of "my" suggests she is focussed, confident. A young person who is very much ready to exercise her voice.

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