VOLUME ONE: RESEARCH COMPONENT

RELATEDNESS: HOW DO CARE LEAVERS REFLECT ON THEIR RELATIONSHIPS AS A SUPPORTING FACTOR IN THE PROCESS OF LEAVING CARE?

By

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Thesis Overview

This thesis comprises two volumes, submitted towards the Doctorate in Clinical Psychology.

Volume 1 contains three research chapters. The first chapter describes a systematic review of qualitative empirical papers in which innovative qualitative methods were used to study various aspects of interpersonal relationships. The review offers an original taxonomy of such methods, grouped as: affording, scaffolding, pre-reflective, in vivo and performative research methods. The use of these methods contributes to three relational perspectives in the study: the self in relationship, the other in relationship, and the relationship itself. In the second chapter, an empirical study is presented, in which care leavers' experiences of relationships in preparation for leaving care, during the process of leaving care and during the transition to university are explored. Seven young people produced visual representations of their relationships, which were followed by in-depth discussions. Using an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) framework, the findings highlighted the roles played by significant others during the transition process. The third chapter, a public dissemination document, accessibly summarises the two papers.

Volume 2 comprises five clinical reports. The first report illustrates two formulation models from a cognitive behavioural and psychodynamic perspective, using the case of Abby[1], a 22-year-old woman presenting a binge eating disorder, co-morbid with mild depression. The second report, a service-related study, explores staff knowledge and attitudes regarding psychological interventions for people with psychosis and possible barriers to their implementation in two community mental health teams. In the third report, the case of a psychological intervention with Jack, a 52-year-old male with a mild learning disability and a forensic history of sexual and physical violence, is presented. In the fourth is presented a single case experiment outlining a behavioural intervention with Ken, a 66-year-old male with mixed type dementia whose aggressive behaviours became a significant challenge for his carers. The fifth report comprises the abstract of an oral presentation on a psychodynamic-led intervention with Karen, a 42-year-old female with a history of depression, which began in her teenage years.

[1] All client names have been changed to maintain confidentiality.

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Table of Contents

a) Volume One: Research component

b) Appendices for Volume One

i) Appendices for literature review

ii) Appendices for empirical paper:

c) Volume Two: Clinical Practice Component

d) Appendices for Volume Two

List of illustrations

a) Volume One: Research Component

i) Chapter 1: Literature review

ii) Chapter 2: Empirical Paper

b) Volume Two: Clinical Practice Component

i) Clinical Practice Report 1: Psychological models

ii) Clinical Practice Report 2: Service-related research

List of Tables

a) Volume One: Research Component

i) Chapter 1: Literature Review

ii) Chapter 2: Empirical Paper

b) Volume Two: Clinical Practice Component

CHAPTER I

LITERATURE REVIEW

THE STUDY OF RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH INNOVATIVE/CREATIVE METHODS. A META-SYNTHETIC REVIEW OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Abstract

Background: Relationships are essential for humans. The benefits of positive relationships to physical and psychological health are well documented in literature. However, there are still questions about how relationships exert this influence; and therefore, finding ways of studying relationships in depth might prove to be useful. One could begin by identifying the contributions of innovative qualitative methods to the study of relationships, given that these methods showed promising methodological results in applied psychology.

Aim: The review synthesised the findings of qualitative studies on the contribution of innovative qualitative methods used within the study of human relationships.

Method: A selection of 23 empirical papers were identified by searching electronic databases, manual searches, and experts' suggestions. The papers were assessed for methodological quality using a standardised checklist for qualitative studies.

Results: The findings supported the development of a taxonomy of innovative methods useful in qualitative studies of human relationships. The categories identified were: Affording, Scaffolding, Pre-reflective, In vivo and Performative innovative methods. Each of the methods reviewed offered various perspectives within human relationships, with a focus on the self in relationships, the other in relationships and the relationships themselves.

Conclusions: Empirical studies showed that proponents' use of innovative/creative methods have presented multiple advantages to the study of human relationships. These methods facilitate engagement, enrich data collection, offer artefacts that can be interpreted as standalone data, and help to make scientific findings accessible to a broader non-academic audience. However, further systematic discussions about the unique contributions of innovative/creative methods, independent of other qualitative methods, are undoubtedly needed.

1 Introduction

Social relationships are essential for humans. Empirical studies and systematic reviews evidenced the role of social relationships, connectedness, and social networks in both psychological and physical health. Understanding the mechanisms through which relationships exert their effects is essential for further research and for designing psychosocial interventions. Qualitative research, in conjunction with innovative or creative methods, could offer an in-depth exploration of different aspects of social life and subjective experiences that might not be as accessible with the more traditional methods of interviews and focus groups.

This paper provides a meta-synthetic review of innovative qualitative methods used in qualitative research to study social relationships. Innovative qualitative methods are understood as any creative or innovative methods beyond interviews and focus groups. These include, but are not limited to, visual methods (drawing, photo, video, collage, mapping), creative writing, performing (dance, movement, music), textile arts and crafts, and theatre-based research. A distinctive feature of these approaches is that, in different ways, they mobilise the insights of participants beyond the straightforward invitation to provide a rational account of oneself, which underlies standard interview methods.

1.1 Psychological health and well-being

Most human activities occur in the social space of interpersonal relationships (Reis et al., 2000). Empirical studies showed that meaningful close relationships play a vital role in mental health and well-being. Furthermore, those who are more socially integrated and who experience more supportive and rewarding relationships with others, have better mental health and higher levels of subjective well-being. (Cohen et al., 2000; Cohen & Wills, 1985; Feeney & Collins, 2015; Kawachi, 2001; Lakey & Orehek, 2011; Lakey &

Cronin, 2008; Thoits, 1986, 2011). For example, strong associations have been found between social connections and various mental health conditions across different life stages (Levula et at., 2016).

1.2 Physical health

Studies reviewed by Holt-Lunstad (2018) evidenced that social connectedness influences longstanding health and longevity. People with fewer or weaker relationships appeared to have an increased risk of premature mortality (House et al., 1988). It has been proposed that social connection is biologically embedded in humans to serve the need for survival. In line with this argument, it was claimed that loneliness is a response activated in order to motivate social connectedness (Cacioppo et al., 2014). Moreover, studies in neurosciences showed that when surrounded by others, humans use fewer metabolic resources when coping with threat (Coan & Sbarra, 2015). These examples may suggest that social contact is biologically motivated for adaptation and survival.

1.3 Relationships models and their research challenges

Various psychological theories highlight specific concepts and how they interact to form models of social support. The next section reviews some of these models, their specific concepts, and ways in which relationships affect health and well-being. Challenges for research are also discussed.

The stress buffer model (Barrera, 1986; Cohen et al., 2000; Cohen & Wills, 1985) was developed from literature addressing stress and coping strategies (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). According to the model, relationships reduce the adverse effects of stress on health and well-being in two ways. Through the supportive actions of other people (e.g., problem-

solving, advice, practical support) or perceptions that support is available, thus reducing the threat of the stressor.

The model proposes two mechanisms of change:

- *'enacted support'* with effect on coping.
- *'perceived support'* with effect on appraisal.

Although the model is well researched, some methodological questions still need to be addressed. For example, it is not well understood whether supportive actions elicit coping efforts or if they contribute to changes in the receiver's coping strategies. A focus on the subjective nuances of relationships (nature and quality) could reveal what aspects (perceived or received) of the relationships influence coping efforts and styles. Furthermore, one can ask to what extent there is a need to match the supportive actions (quantity and quality) to the demands of the stressors, and perhaps even to the unique characteristics of the receiver (e.g., attachment and temperament). It is not clear how the perception that support is available is influencing the appraisals of the stressful event or ability to cope (Dunkel-Schetter et al., 1987).

Within **the social cognition model** (Lakey & Cassady, 1990; Lakey & Drew, 1997; Sarason et al. 1990), it is proposed that people with more stable beliefs that others are supportive tend to interpret the actions of other people more favourably. Furthermore, they could more readily access memories of social support in comparison with people with lower levels of perceived social support (Baldwin, 1992; Lakey & Cassady, 1990).

In-depth analysis of how people create meaning can help to understand how people make support judgements, how people see the supporters, and whether the supporters' characteristics are a matter of personal taste. This line of research might investigate whether the perceived social support reflects the unique relationship between the supporter and the receiver.

Proponents of **the social roles model** (Thoits, 1986; Thoits, 2011) further the idea that social roles provide "regularised social interactions", which promote a sense of identity and self-esteem through positive social reinforcements. According to this model, the patterns of pre-established social interaction affect health and well-being, rather than the type of support (emotional, tangible, instrumental, informational, etc.).

Although, there is evidence that being engaged in social roles is important for well-being and mental health, how the subjective experience and commitments of specific social roles influence identity and mental health, is less understood (Lakey & Cohen, 2000).

Researchers following **the relationships' attributes and processes perspective** (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1997; Reis et al., 2000; Rook, 1984; 1987) look at specific, independent relationship processes (e.g., low conflict, companionship, social skills, intimacy, partner responsivity). This perspective is less coherent and involves a range of hypotheses regarding how relationship attributes or interpersonal processes affect psychological and physical health.

How a relationship's qualities lead to emotional well-being is not yet well understood. Proponents of some hypotheses recycle similar mechanisms as described by previous models. Certain types of relationships can promote coping, increase self-esteem, or motivate active coping (Lakey et al., 1994; Rook, 1987). Others hypothesise that positive and stable relationships are motivated biologically by a desire to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) or a need for attachment (Bowlby, 1969; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2009).

In most of the studies reviewed, researchers considered social relationships as mediating or moderating factors for health and well-being. Cross-sectional, prospective, and experimental studies helped to navigate the complexity of the nature and determinants

of relationships by looking for associations between different factors. Often the methodological solutions for studying relationship processes were similar to the treatment of personality variables (Cohen et al., 2000). Attributing a single score to a relationship variable could lead to missing the nuances and dynamics of the relationship's processes, and was further evidenced by certain research challenges described above.

1.4 Rationale

Despite the increasing numbers of studies that stress the positive role of social relationships on psychological and physical health, the mechanisms through which relationships exert their effects are not fully understood. The models reviewed help us to understand what consequences social connections might have, and to plan further studies that examine relationships in different populations or contexts. Still, they leave us uncertain about how relationships lead to these effects.

Qualitative studies may help to answer certain questions regarding relational processes. In doing so, the first step is to identify the most appropriate methods for the study of relationships. Empirical research and reviews of studies that used innovative qualitative methods (Boydell et al., 2012; Guillemin, 2004; Umoquit et al., 2011) have shown the potential for creative and innovative methods to enrich the qualitative studies of various topics in psychological and physical health.

No similar reviews were found for the study of relationships. Therefore, in this paper, I look to explore the breadth of innovative qualitative methods used to facilitate data collection, produce data, and help disseminate the results about social relationships.

2 Aim

This systematic meta-synthesis review aims to produce a new and integrative interpretation of the qualitative research which informs us about the contribution of innovative or creative methods used in the study of the connection between human relationships and psychological health and well-being.

It is hoped that this will give a more detailed account of the strengths and weaknesses of innovative or creative methods used in the qualitative studies of relationships, offer ideas for debates regarding methodological development, and attempt to outline an understanding of the need for future research and potential implications.

3 Method

3.1 Type of literature review

The review followed the principles of meta-ethnography as described by Noblit and Hare (1998). This approach to synthesis was developed to bring together the findings from qualitative studies in an interpretative account. Meta-ethnography intends to go beyond a summative approach which simply aggregates the results of the primary studies. The interpretative approach of meta-ethnography has the potential to guide a higher level of analysis that can lead to new interpretations and explanatory frameworks.

The principal motivation for this approach was grounded in the review's research questions. It was intended to synthesise findings around innovative qualitative methods and offer an interpretative account regarding their contributions to studying interpersonal relationships. It is necessary to develop interpretative explanations which transcend the original interpretations of the primary authors. To meet this aim, the synthesis follows a seven-step process.

Table 1. The steps of meta-ethnography.

Getting started	Empirical articles and systematic reviews were consulted in order to identify the interest for this synthesis and to define the research question: the role of the arts-based methods used in empirical qualitative papers to aid the study of an aspect of relationships.
Deciding what is relevant	A systematic literature search was conducted in order to identify relevant empirical qualitative studies. Several questions (page 10) guided a preliminary search and analysis to help with the final articles search strategy (page 11). Additionally, new papers were included through manual searches.
Reading the studies	Each study was read and reviewed multiple times. Attention was paid to primary authors' comments, perspectives, concepts and references to the innovative methods used. Efforts were made to identify primary themes that captured the contribution of the innovative/creative methods to the research aims (collection, analysis, dissemination)
Determining how the studies are related	The interpretations made by the researchers of the original studies were organised in a tabular format for ease of comparison. It was noted that certain studies used innovative methods in similar ways, revealing similar aspects of human relationships. These similarities permitted for "reciprocal translation" between the themes and identification of common reasons for using specific innovative methods in the study of relationships. Researchers of other studies complemented each other by offering different views on both the use of innovative methods and the study of specific aspects of relationships. In this case, different classes of methods could be linked up together, creating the premises for a "line-of-argument" narrative.
Translating the studies	The table of the primary themes was produced by reading the papers in the chronological order of their publications. The themes from the first paper were compared with the themes from the second paper and the synthesis of the two with the third paper. The same algorithm was used for the rest of the papers. All themes contributed to identifying various functions of the methods offered for researching relationships.
Synthesising translations	The translations of resulted themes were synthesised in order to identify higher order encompassing themes. The synthesis took the form of a "reciprocal translation". This process allowed for the re-conceptualisation of the findings and attempting new interpretations. Based on these new third order interpretations, the methods were reclassified in such a way that permitted discussions about their contributions to the study of relationships.
Expressing the synthesis	The report was written as part of the doctoral thesis with the view to adapt it for publication at a later stage.

3.2 Systematic literature search

An initial list of innovative or creative qualitative methods was identified by Scopus and internet searches (e.g., using google scholar), as well as exploring the work of authors who used extensively innovative methods in their research. Articles' abstracts and keywords were scanned to identify a broad range of innovative methods that could be included in the systematic literature search. The list included:

- visual methods: drawing, photo, video, collage, diagram, mapping;
- narrative: poetry, use of metaphors, diaries, vignettes;
- performing methods: dance, movement, music, theatre embodied performance;
- textile arts and crafts.

Relationships were thought of in terms of connections and interactions with other people, with search terms intended to capture relational experiences in dyads, families, or greater social systems (Table 2). As the primary concern of the review was to identify and analyse innovative methods used in the study of relationships in applied psychosocial literature, specialised social sciences databases were used. The exclusion of broader humanistic oriented databases is acknowledged and discussed within the limitation section of the review (page 54).

The systematic search of the literature has been carried out using the following databases: PsychInfo (1967 – December 2015), Web of Science (1946 – November 2015), and Applied Social Science Index and Abstracts (ASSIA). The searched terms are described in Table 2, page 11.

The initial search of the three databases produced a list of 1331 articles. Duplications were removed, and, using the above list, abstracts of the 1331 articles were screened for innovative or creative methods beyond interviews or focused groups used within a qualitative research study. This step identified 149 potentially relevant articles

which were further screened (abstract, introduction, and method section) for discussion or mention of a methodological argument when using the innovative methods. Another 71 articles were excluded. The full text of the 78 reminder articles was retrieved, screened, and checked against the inclusion criteria (Table 3) paying particular attention to the following questions:

- What is the authors' rationale for using the innovative method?
- What type of relationship is studied?
- Are the contributions of the methods to research discussed by the authors?

Eighteen articles met the inclusion criteria. Reference lists and suggestions from other researchers made it possible to identify another five relevant articles. A total of twenty-three articles were included in the review.

Table 2. The search terms.

Search terms
Innovative methods ("image*" or "image-based research" or visual or "visual method*" or "graphic elicitation" or "graphic-elicitation" or photograph* or photo* or "photo-elicitation" or picture* or draw* or drawings or map* or "relational map*" or "projective techniques" or diagram* or video* or "video clip" or "video-clip" or "video diaries" or "participatory video" or poem* or poetry or metaphor* or "embodied performance" or "embodied experience" or "embodied word" or "dance movement" or dance* or movement or "movement metaphor" or "kinetic imagery" or kinaesthetic or art or "art-based research" or "creative method*" or "timelin*" or "timelining") **AND** ***Relationships / Connectedness*** ("interpersonal interaction*" or "interpersonal relation*" or "interpersonal experience*" or "interpersonal process recall" or "family interaction*" or "dyad*") **AND** Qualitative studies ("qualitative research" or "in-depth interview" or "interview*")

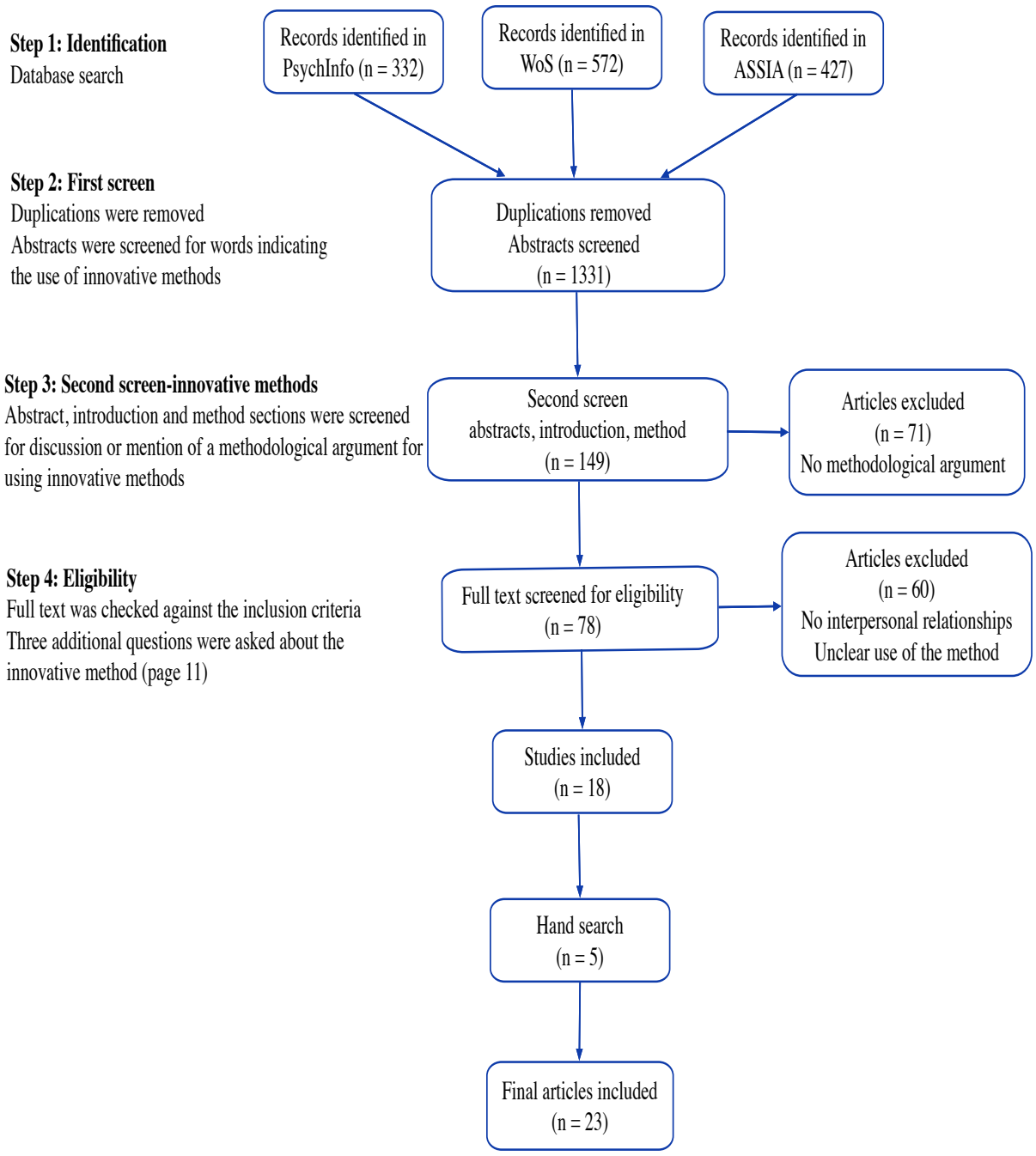

Figure 1. The flowchart of the search strategy.

The following table outline the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Table 3. Inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Qualitative research study	Book chapters, Case studies, review articles, systematic reviews; no empirical data
The study uses at least one innovative/creative method	Creative methods that could not be extrapolated to the study of relationships
The study investigates at least one aspect of relatedness/connectedness	
Published in a peer-review journal	
Written in English language	

3.3 Quality appraisal

The studies included in the review were systematically assessed for methodological quality with the view to further exclude the papers which lacked methodological rigour. For this purpose, the Critical Assessment Skill Programme (CASP) – Qualitative Research Checklist was used (Appendix 2). The CASP includes ten questions referring to the main components of qualitative research:

Table 4. Criteria for papers quality assessment.

Critical Assessment Skill Programme (CASP) – Qualitative Research Checklist
1. Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research? 2. Is a qualitative methodology appropriate? 3. Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research? 4. Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research? 5. Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue? 6. Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered? 7. Have ethical issues been taken into consideration? 8. Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous? 9. Is there a clear statement of findings? 10. How valuable is the research?

Each question could be answered with 'yes' – rated 2, 'can't tell' – rated 1, or 'no' – rated 0. The papers received a score by summing up the ratings for each question. The qualitative framework used does not offer scoring guidelines to establish the overall quality of the empirical papers. Therefore, the scores were used tentatively to orient the assessor and to flag methodological issues within the original studies. These were discussed in research supervision or with other researchers.

No qualitative frameworks that account for innovative methods have been found. In line with this, the evaluation of the studies was made with the reservation that CASP could indicate methodological issues, but could not indicate if the innovative methods were well used. Particular attention has been paid to the design of the studies. Very few studies proposed and discussed new research designs, making it harder to assess whether the design was appropriate for the research question. In such cases, I tried to evaluate whether the authors offered enough information to appreciate the replicability of the study. Questions about the methodological steps were asked to ensure that the authors offered enough information about how they used the innovative methods. A new criterion (column 14, Table 5) has been added to assess the quality of the research design, which included the innovative method (Appendix 1 shows an initial article analysis):

- Is the innovative method appropriately integrated within the research design to address the research aims?
  HINT:
  - Does the researcher offer a clear rationale for using the innovative method?
  - Is there enough information to replicate the procedure of using this method?
  - Are collection and data analysis specifically described in relation to the method?
  - Are the contributions of the innovative method assessed in the discussion?

The results of the quality appraisal for each of the selected studies are presented in the following table.

Table 5. Quality assessment of the papers – CASP.

	Authors	Year	Aim	Appropriate	Design	Recruitment	Collection	Relation	Ethics	Analysis	Results	Value	New criterion	Score
1	Barrington et al.	2017	y	y	y	?	y	y	?	y	y	y	n	18
2	Boden and Eatgouh	2014	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	22
3	Bondi	2014	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	?	21
4	Boydell	2011	y	y	y	y	y	?	?	y	y	y	n	18
5	Collins	2017	y	y	y	y	y	?	y	y	y	y	y	21
6	Corsano et al.	2012	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	?	y	y	21
7	Ducet	2001	y	y	y	y	y	y	?	y	y	y	?	20
8	Finlay	2005	y	y	y	?	y	y	?	y	y	y	?	19
9	Finlay	2014	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	?	21
10	Gabb	2009	y	y	y	?	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	21
11	Gabb	2013	y	y	y	?	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	21
12	Jonas-Simpson et al.	2011	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	22
13	Jonas-Simpson et al.	2015	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	22
14	Kerem et al.	2001	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	?	21
15	Kontos and Naglie	2007	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	22
16	Kontos et al.	2012	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	22
17	Majumdar	2012	y	y	y	?	y	y	?	y	y	y	y	19
18	McLaren	2009	y	y	?	y	y	y	y	?	y	y	n	18
19	Meneses and Larkin	2017	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	22
20	Murphy et al.	2017	y	y	y	y	y	?	y	y	y	y	y	21
21	Ross et al.	2005	y	y	y	?	y	y	?	y	y	y	y	20
22	Sibeoni et al.	2017	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	22
23	White and Belliveau	2011	y	y	y	n	?	y	y	y	y	y	n	17

The majority of the studies received a high-quality score on CASP alone, which may reflect the low ceiling on CASP. A new criterion was developed and added to CASP (Table 5 'New criterion') to strengthen the quality assessment of the papers. The following concerns were raised:

- A '**No' score** indicated that it was uncertain whether the innovative method was appropriately integrated within the research design. Several studies did not offer enough methodological detail about how the innovative method was used (Boydell 2011; Barrington et al., 2017; McLaren, 2009; White & Belliveau, 2011;).
- A **'Can't tell' score** indicated that it was unclear whether the research design including the innovative method could be replicated in a similar study by other researchers. For example, a 'can't tell' score was given to studies where researchers might need a specialised skill to implement the innovative method (Bondi, 2014; Finley, 2005; 2014). Other studies received a 'can't tell' score, because of a partial integration of the innovative method within the research design (Ducet, 2001; Kerem et al., 2001). The authors of the last two studies did not discuss the contributions of the innovative methods to research.

Even the studies that received a weaker quality assessment on the new criterion were retained for further analysis, because of their innovative method potential for the study of relationships. Therefore, all studies were included in the analysis.

4 Data extraction, analysis and synthesis

The following section synthesises the empirical qualitative studies identified and analysed in order to answer the research questions:

What contribution can the innovative or creative methods bring to the study of human relationships?

Firstly, the general characteristics of the studies in terms of country of origin, sample, innovative methods used, and the types of relationships studied, are described.

Secondly, remarks are offered about the theoretical frameworks underpinning the methodology chosen by the researchers. Thirdly, the findings are illustrated following a framework developed through the process of synthesis of the studies.

4.1 Description of studies

Twenty-three studies were included in the review. The search strategy aimed to identify papers published in English. Therefore, the studies were largely published by researchers in the UK (n=13), Canada (n=5), and USA (n=1). The remaining four were published by researchers in France, Italy, Malawi, and Israel.

Researchers undertaking the studies employed various innovative methods including photographs (photovoice, photo-elicitation), drawing and diagrammatic techniques, cards and visual layouts, emotional and relational maps, performative arts (drama, research-based theatre), embodied reflexivity (embodied and somatic empathy), and video and interpersonal process recall.

These researchers offered various perspectives on relationships: couple or family relations, interpersonal and friendship relationships, interprofessional relationships or relationships between the researchers and the participants, or relating with the community and the environment. Their review included studies using innovative methods with children, adults, and older people, from clinical and non-clinical populations. Furthermore, the focus of the papers was diverse. Most of the studies focused on health, mental health, cognitive abilities (dementia, brain injury), child development and older age, health professionals' skills, and community resilience.

The descriptive characteristics of the papers included in the review are summarised in the table below. The papers are listed in the alphabetical order of the authors' names.

Table 6. Descriptive characteristics of the empirical papers.

Author, Year	**Paper's focus**	**Innovative method**	**Type of data**	**Relationship type**
Barrington et al., 2017	Community resilience	Photovoice; photo production	Photographs Verbal accounts / interviews	Parent (care giver) – child dyad
Boden & Eatough, 2014	Guilt in intimate relationships	Drawing	Multi-modal: drawings, verbal account, bodily reactions	Couple
Bondi, 2014	The use of therapy skills in research	Embodied reflexivity	Transference; verbal account / interviews	Researcher – participant
Boydell, 2011	First episode of psychosis	Drama	Textual data from young patients; embodied experience	Professionals – patients
Collins, 2017	Transition of later life widowhood	Relationship diagrams	Diagrams; verbal accounts / interviews	Social networks of older widows
Corsano et al., 2013	Health / paediatric oncology	Drawing	Pictures	Child – health professionals
Doucet, 2001	Interhousehold relations	Household portrait technique	Diagrams; result of visual techniques; verbal account /interviews	Couple
Finlay, 2005	Therapy skills in research	Embodied empathy	Bodily reactions; embodied reflexivity	Researcher – participant
Finlay, 2014	Therapy skill in research	Embodied empathy	Somatic empathy	Researcher – Participant
Gabb, 2009	Family relations	Multi-genre	Diaries; emotional maps; vignettes; focus groups; interviews	Family relations
Gabb, 2013	Family relations	Photo elicitation	Verbal account	Father – child
Jonas-Simpson et al., 2012	Mental health Dementia	Drama	Textual data; Performative data	Professionals – patient
Jonas-Simpson et al., 2015	Bereaved children	Multi-genre (objects, photo, artwork) Video documentary	Textual data; verbal account;	Child – dead sibling

Author, Year	Paper's focus	Innovative method	Type of data	Relationship type
Kerem et al., 2001	Empathy	Relational maps (Josselson, 1995)	Verbal account supported by drawings (relationships maps)	Interpersonal relationships in everyday life
Kontos & Naglie, 2007	Mental health Alzheimer; Personhood	Drama	Focus group; survey	Professionals – patients
Kontos et al., 2012	Traumatic brain injury	Drama	Verbal account / interviews Observations	Professionals – patients
Majumdar, 2012	Personal relationships	Photo elicitation and production	Verbal account on photos showing objects as representations of the relationships	Close relationships and marriage
McLaren, 2009	Patient care	Photo walk	Verbal account; gestures; movement; pictures	Child - environment
Meneses & Larkin, 2017	Interpersonal relationships	Interpersonal process recall	Videos (scaffold) Verbal account	Interpersonal relationships
Murphy et al., 2017	Adolescents with ASD	Personal construct methods (dyadic construct elicitation task & "laddering")	Verbal account; interview data enriched by the innovative method	Interpersonal relationships Nature of relationships; maintenance of relationships
Ross et al., 2005	Interprofessional relationships	Personal construct theory	Cards, visual layouts;	professional identity and roles in terms of professional relationships
Sibeoni et al., 2014	Eating disorders	Photo production	Verbal accounts evoked by pictures	Adolescents; family interactions
White & Belliveau, 2011	Complex interpersonal and intrapersonal dynamics	Participatory action research and theatre-based inquiry	Internal voices representing multiple relational perspectives substantiated in the theatrical script	critical relational 'moments' in the professional lives of educators and artists

4.2 The theoretical frameworks of the papers

Very few papers distinguish between theoretical framework, methodology, and the methods used. One study which does so explicitly was published by Boden and Eatough (2014). The authors introduce the readers to the principles of the interpretative tradition of research, based on which they propose a multi-modal hermeneutic phenomenological methodology. Then the method for data collection is described in relation to the methodological framework: a creative form of interviewing, which produced multi-modal data permitting a fuller exploration of the lived experience of guilt as a socially/relationally constructed emotion. The coherence between the theoretical framework, methodology, and methods has a double advantage. Firstly, it can guide the researcher to make the most appropriate methodological choices depending on the research question. Secondly, it can help with the assessment of the quality of the study.

Although the majority of included studies do not provide detail about the ontological and epistemological assumptions upon which they rest, references to their theoretical orientations are made by their authors. Among the conceptual frameworks identified were: critical theory (Doucet, 2001), critical, subtle realism (Collins, 2017), hermeneutic interpretation (Boydell, 2011) and hermeneutic phenomenology (Boden & Eatough, 2014; Finlay, 2005, 2014), social constructivist theory (Murphy et al., 2017), constructionism (Sibeoni et al., 2017), psychoanalytic theory to research (Bondi, 2014), performative arts (Jonas-Simpson et al., 2012, 2015; Kontos et al., 2012; Kontos & Naglie, 2007a), and human geography (McLaren, 2009).

The nature of the theoretical framework presented in the studies is likely the product of the researchers' formation, 'philosophical' affinity, and academic experience.

4.3 The structure of the synthesis

The synthesis emphasises higher order concepts or themes, reflecting the contributions the arts-based methods made to the study of an aspect of interpersonal relations. The arts-based methods identified and analysed were grouped in five higher order themes: affordance, scaffolding, pre-reflective, performative, and in vivo.

The first two themes are conceptually related and derived from multiple reciprocal translations between the original interpretations of the researchers. The themes were developed slowly and involved a constant translation between the interpretations of the original authors and consistent confirmations with the existing literature. Moreover, affordance and scaffolding are two concepts already discussed in social studies and learning theories. However, often, the two concepts seem to be used interchangeably, which can lead to a loss of meaningful distinctions. Some differences and similarities between affordance and scaffolding will be discussed in the next sections.

The other three higher order themes, pre-reflective, in vivo, and performative methods, do not overlap. What brings them together is their contribution to the study of relationships. Thus, these themes join together in a more integrated picture, as distinctive methods employed to produce data and meaning, support data collection, and disseminate conclusions about relationships.

In addition to the higher order concepts, three sub-thematic categories were identified. Through the process of analysis and synthesis, it was noted that different arts-based methods open, in various degree, the following relational possibilities:

- To the self: the innovative method ‘invites’ the research participant to take a ‘phenomenological attitude/stance’ towards oneself in relationships.
- To the other: the method ‘invites’ the research participant to take a ‘stance’ towards (an)other with whom they are in a relationship or multiple relationships; (e.g. Gabb (2013) mother reflecting on the relationship between father and child)
- To the relationship: the innovative method ‘invites’ the participant to take a ‘stance’ towards the relationship itself.

In this paper, in the context of investigating relationships, the word ‘stance’ refers to a research participant’s psychological experience such as sensing, feeling, understanding, and engaging, or tendency to respond to the structure, function, or quality of a relationship. Starting from the individual as a research participant, the paper’s framework renders itself to be psychological. However, the relationships investigated by authors of the papers included in this review can be viewed systemically. That is to say that each of these relationships belongs to at least one of the following categories: the individual, family/group, or community level.

In the process of analysis and synthesis of the studies, the subthemes were identified before the higher order themes. As the higher order themes were developed, it was noticed that the subthemes could be located within each higher order concept. Grouped together, the higher order themes and subthemes led to the theoretical framework presented below, in Table 7.

Table 7. The synthesis of the higher order and subthemes resulted from analysis.

Concepts		Brief explanation and examples
AFFORDING		Methods can offer unlimited opportunities (chosen by the participant) for creating an "art product" which offers nearly unlimited interpretative possibilities (also chosen by the participant). For example, participants are given a camera and invited to take a picture to illustrate an aspect of a close relationship.
Relationship	To self (subtheme 1)	Methods that revealed an aspect of the self as manifested in relationships. For example, the participant draws the feelings experienced during a confusing conversation with a partner.
	To other (subtheme 2)	Methods that help participants to capture and contextualise the experience of (an)other in relationships with them. For example, visually representing a gesture or a statement the partner made during confusing conversations.
	To relationship (subtheme 3)	Methods that capture the relationship itself. For example, taking spontaneous photographs of family interactions around an event.
SCAFFOLDING		Methods that offer limited (chosen by the researcher) opportunities for creating 'art products' which provide unlimited interpretative possibilities (chosen by the participant). For example, participants are shown a picture illustrating a close relationship and are invited to talk about it.
Relationship	To self (subtheme 1)	Methods that elicit personal experiences about relationships. For example, interpretations of a controversial photograph depicting a taboo relationship.
	To other (subtheme 2)	Methods that support descriptions and interpretations of someone else. For example, the participants can get more understanding of another person by watching them in a video party.
	To relationship (subtheme 3)	Methods that facilitate exploration of relationships themselves. For example, mapping the existing network all one's social relationships. The map is then used to discuss the relationships.
PRE-REFLECTIVE		Methods that facilitate somatic responses in the researcher about the self, the other or the relationship, responses that are not yet formulated in language (e.g. somatic empathy, embodied reflexivity)
Relationship	To self (subtheme 1)	The response of the researcher to the participant can reflect the researcher's own role/contribution to the relationship.
	To other (subtheme 2)	The experience of the other is communicated unconsciously in the body of the researcher and remains to be picked up and decoded by the researcher.
	To relationship (subtheme 3)	The felt sense of the other illuminates the pattern of relationship. The researcher's empathic responses lead the participant to respond in ways that reveal patterns of interactions.
In VIVO		Methods that capture an aspect of an interpersonal interaction as happening live during the data collection or in support of data collection. Observing/recording of a naturalistic interpersonal interaction in an experimental setting (e.g. video recording of a natural conversation in the absence of the researcher).
Relationship	To self (subtheme 1)	Awareness and understanding (intuitive, affective, intellectual) of own experiences while in live interaction with another person.
	To other (subtheme 2)	In-depth understanding (intuitive, affective, intellectual) of someone else's experiences while in live interaction with another person. Renders possibility of understanding the processes involved in making sense of the experience of the other.
	To relationship (subtheme 3)	Ulterior observations and reflections of the relationship itself based on the recording of the interaction. Observing acts of bonding, sharing and mutual influence.
PERFORMATIVE		Methods that use dramatic performances, theatre or dance, to produce or communicate understanding about relationships with/within specific population groups.
Relationship	To self (subtheme 1)	Performances increased awareness and understanding about own self in relationships by watching dramatic performances.
	To other (subtheme 2)	The performances illustrate the experience of others in relationships.
	To relationship (subtheme 3)	Particular relationships are portrayed dramatically increasing awareness, understanding or promoting attitudinal changes about e.g. sensitive or intimate relationships of certain populations.

The next section, the findings, is structured following the table above. An introduction to the higher order theme is given, followed by the description of the subthemes relevant for the innovative methods. Supporting quotations illustrating the interpretations of the original authors are given. A critical analysis of how the methods were used in the context of the higher order themes is offered in order to identify the degree with which the innovative methods contributed to the study of relationship. When certain studies partially used these methods, an attempt to offer a fuller account on the utility of the methods for future studies is given. Therefore, it is hoped that the review could offer a modest sketch for a potential anatomy of existing methods and an architectural draft for creating new methods.

5 Findings

5.1 Affording innovative methods

'Affordance', a concept from ecological psychology, was introduced by Gibson (1979) and it was used in the study of visual perception to illustrate a specific, reciprocal interaction between the animal and its environment. According to Gibson, the environment affords physical or phenomenal proprieties which offer action possibilities for the living being that is able to perceive and make use of them. A property of the environment becomes an affordance in as much as the living being is able to perceive and use it. Extended to human beings, the environmental properties are given meaning by how the person uses them. Although, such meanings become "cultural artefacts" which guide the relationships with the environment, different people may use the same objects / proprieties in different ways. Therefore, affordances are relationship possibilities awaiting to be

discovered and taken. When some of the possibilities are not used, they do not automatically disappear.

In this paper, innovative methods that afford are the methods that can offer nearly unlimited possibilities to the participant to create a product that can represent data or supports data collection. For example, when the researcher offers the participant a blank canvas to draw a picture, the blank canvas becomes an affordance. When the researcher gives the participant a painting to be interpreted, the painting cannot be changed, but it becomes a support for unlimited interpretations. In other words, stimuli taken as methods for creation, exploration and expression afford, while stimuli, cues or prompts taken as methods to support interpretations scaffold. I acknowledge that there is an unavoidable degree of overlap between affordance and scaffolding. Scaffolding, the second higher order theme, will be described in the next section.

The affording innovative methods identified in the papers reviewed are described, below, in Table 8.

Table 8. Affording innovative methods.

Name	Description	How the method was used
Drawing		
Pictorial Assessment of Interpersonal Relationships (PAIR) Corsano et al., 2013	Coloured drawing following specific instructions.	Method: produced data. Each participant was asked to draw her or himself with a doctor or nurse from the ward while they were doing something. A4 sheet of paper, a pencil and 12 colour crayons were given. The drawing was not discussed but analysed using PAIR (Bombi, 2007) methodology. Data analysed: drawings.
Multi multimodal methods		
Boden & Eatough, 2014;	Spontaneous drawing as a response to an internal experience whilst	Method: facilitates and produce data. Participant were guided to evoke a memory about a time they felt guilty

Name	Description	How the method was used
	interviewed by the researcher.	about something that happened in an intimate relationship. Whilst attuned to their bodily experience, the participants used coloured pens, crayons to make an abstract drawing. Researchers made notes on the interview process, including their felt sense of the participants and their narrative. Data analysed: transcripts, drawings, researchers notes.
Multi genre (objects, photographs, artwork) Jonas-Simpson et al., 2015	Children who lost siblings selected objects, artwork, photographs with meaning for their experience of bereavement. These were used to support video interviews. The results were compiled in a documentary.	Method: facilitate data collection through video recorded in-depth interviews. Children brought significant photos, objects, artwork, mementos to be used in the interview and showed in the documentary. Data analysed: transcripts and video footage. Results dissemination: documentary.
Photo production Barrington et al., 2017	Participants take spontaneous pictures on personal themes or guided by researchers. The images are used to reflect on life experiences.	Adolescents and adults, one dyad from the same household, were told to take 10 photos of daily stressors in their community. Dyads selected their favourite photo together and brought it for the interview. The adolescents and adults were interviewed separately.
Majumdar, 2012	Spontaneous photos of objects and spaces related to the closeness of married life.	The participants, south Asian women, were given a disposable camera and were invited to take 10-12 photos of objects, spaces and places (not people) that reveal aspects of their experiences of marriage in daily life. The photos were discussed during an interview.
Sibeoni et al., 2017	Free photo of dinner table immediately after a meal.	The researchers told adolescents to take a photo of dinner table. People do not have to be photographed. The adolescents had the choice to take

Name	Description	How the method was used
		different photos and to choose one photo to be used for the interview.
Photo walking tour McLaren, 2009	Observations, photo and interview walking tour with hospitalised children.	Method was used to both collect and produce data. Inpatient children and the researcher went on a hospital tour. Children stopped at different points of their interest and took photos. The researcher asked them questions about the architectural or design feature photographed and explored children's perception, use and ways they navigate the physical space around them. All conversations were audio recorded. Observations of how the children expressed themselves physically (e.g. gaze, speed, agility of movement, exploratory behaviour, navigating the space) whilst on tour were also recorded. Data analysed: observations, verbal account, photographs.

The most used methods were photo production (Barrington et al., 2017; Majumdar, 2012; Sibeoni et al., 2014; 2017), followed by drawing (Boden & Eatough, 2014; Corsano et al., 2013) and the use of material artefacts (Jonas-Simpson et al., 2015).

Characteristic for the affording methods was the high degree of freedom offered to support participants' creativity. The research subjects had the chance to use the affording methods freely in order to produce creative outcomes. Some researchers (Boden & Eatough, 2014; Corsano et al., 2013) interpreted those products in order to analyse participants' experiences of relationships. Other researchers did not take this possibility and used the methods to facilitate conversations in order to enrich interview data.

Most of the affording methods revealed various aspects of relationships itself **(subtheme 3)** such as the nature, the quality of relationships and their emotional climate

(Barrington et al., 2017; Corsano et al., 2013; Majumdar, 2012; Sibeoni et al., 2014; 2017). The following researcher's comment offers an example:

"The positive emotional climate of the relationship emerged both through high and low scores respectively on the scales of Emotions and Conflict, and through some details, such as hearts, smiles, and kind words, written on the drawing (Corsano et al., 2013, p. 298)."

This seemed to be a methodological choice related to researchers' interest who shaped their instructions and interpretations in order to respond to their research interests. In doing so, other relational perspectives (**subthemes 1 and 2**) were neglected to some extent, although it can be argued that the methods afforded them.

Barrington et al. (2017) study exemplifies how photovoice techniques can be used to explore the participants' relationship with the community. The authors illustrate how cultural norms shape significant relationships, which can become daily stressors for the participants. The following quote illustrates the impact of Malawi's community norms on marital relationships:

"When the land becomes infertile, men may marry another wife with fertile land, leaving the woman alone to raise their children, which has a negative impact on the physical and mental well-being of both mothers and children. Participants talked about how men 'run away from the unfertile land' (Barrington et al., 2017, p. 763)".

The focus on self in relationship (**subtheme 1**) through innovative methods was illustrated by Boden and Eatough (2014) and Jonas-Simpson et al. (2015) studies. In the first study, participants' feelings of guilt are elicited by a drawing task. During the creative process, the participant is interviewed in order to intensify the expression of feelings and articulate in words what is initially expressed only in the drawing. The sense of self in the relationship, in which the guilt was experienced, became better articulated by the use of this multimodal research method. The method also prompted the participants to consider their reflections on the other in relationship (**subtheme 2**).

In the second study, Jonas-Simpson et al. (2015) explored the sense of self in the relationship of a child with a dead sibling through the experience of grief and mourning:

"The children described being attuned with their sibling's spirit through signs, symbols, and tangible objects such as a dress, hearts, stars, and butterflies. (p. 246)"

Nonetheless, the researchers remarked that the methods facilitated a better engagement of the participants with the research project. This engagement was identified across different age groups of participants, children, adolescents and adults. For example, Sibeoni et al. (2017) stated that the adolescents participants *showed creativity, thought, and also feelings of pleasure in taking the photograph (p. 4).* The same authors posed that *"the presence of the photo as the basis for the conversation made it possible to disinhibit the adolescent-researcher relationship" (p. 5).*

In summary, affording methods offered many options for the study of relationships from all three perspectives. Any 'limitations' were imposed by the researchers' interests conveyed through the instructions on how to use the methods. Further limitations came from the choices made by the participants. Here, most of the authors did not offer a clear rationale for their methodological choices, making more difficult to appreciate the full unique contributions of the affording methods.

5.2 Scaffolding innovative methods

The term 'scaffolding' is borrowed from the idea of 'scaffolded mind' which gained recognition from the debate about the boundaries between the mind and its environment (Sterelny, 2010). The debate proposed that the environment offers resources that can enhance or support human cognitive capacity (Sterelny, 2010). Similar frameworks, such as 'the extended mind' (Clark & Chalmers, 1998) or 'embodied cognition' (Clark, 2008) dispute the ways in which the mind is scaffolded. A detailed

discussion about subtle differences between theoretical models is beyond the intent of this paper. However, a useful addition to the idea of cognitive scaffolding is advanced by Colombetti and Krueger (2015). The authors claim that human affectivity is also environmentally supported, by material culture, other people and their interaction.

In this paper, innovative methods that scaffold are the methods with constellated configurations chosen by the researcher and used for the participants to imprint their reflections. Therefore, scaffolding methods are more structured, material and consistent in offering representational, often visual, support for interpretations. Because of this, scaffolding methods produce more comparable outcomes between participants.

The methods under this category are described in the following table.

Table 9. Scaffolding innovative methods.

Name	Description	How the method was used
Elicitation (visual or written)		
Photographs Gabb, 2013	Photo interview: thematic photographs are selected by the researcher and showed to the participants to support thematic interviews.	Method: facilitates data collection. The researcher selected specific photographs and presented them to the participants (e.g. families) for thematic discussions. In the cited study, the researcher used a particular image showing a man sharing a bath with a toddler aged 2-3 years old. The image sparked rich conversations about boundaries in adult – child intimacies and nudity. Data analysed: verbal account.
Vignettes Gabb, 2009	Written content oriented to research topics to facilitate interviews / focus groups.	Method: facilitates data collection. Thematic vignettes presented to participants allowed direct and sensitive discussions. The Data analysed: verbal account.
Emotion maps Gabb, 2009	Visual technique used to map patterns of affective and relational behaviour in families	Method: facilitates data collection and produces data. Researcher sketched out the floor plan of the participants' family house. Family members assigned a colour and

Name	Description	How the method was used
		given coloured emoticon stickers (representing sadness, anger, love/affection). Participants placed stickers on the sketch to mark where in the house and what type of interactions / affective behaviours happened. Data analysed: emotion maps and verbal account.
Household portrait Doucet, 2001	Participatory and visual interactive technique used with couples. It involves collaborative sorting and rating household tasks.	Method: facilitates data collection. Couple sorts, discuses, places and rates coloured slips of paper (household tasks) in one of five columns (woman, woman with help, shared equally, man with help, man). The couple identifies and discusses household tasks and responsibilities. Data analysed: interview transcripts.
***Personal construct theory methods*:** Dyadic construct elicitation & laddering Murphy et al., 2017	Use of cards to pair elements / people and to identify similarities and differences (bipolar construct) between them. The preferred pole of the bipolar construct is identified and discussed.	Method: facilitates data collection. Adolescents wrote the names of ten people (friends) on different cards. They paired the cards and for each pair they identified a characteristic or similarity shared by the people on the paired cards. They named the opposite of each characteristic and decided which pole they preferred. Data analysed: interview transcripts.
"Social network method" (Hargreaves, 1979) and "Salmon Line" (Salmon, 1994) adapted by Ross et al., 2005	Diagrammatic representation of interpersonal relationships	Method: facilitates data collection. Phase 1: Participants thought of a work-related scenario, wrote the names or jobs titles of those involved on arrow-shaped cards. The cards were placed on a piece of paper in ways that illustrated patterns of relationships. Phase 2: Bipolar constructs describing the nature or quality of the relationship were identified from discussing the visual layout; the arrow shaped cards were placed between the opposite constructs in order to discuss ways of improving the relationships. Data analysed: interview transcripts.
Relational diagrams and maps		Method: facilitates data collection.

Name	Description	How the method was used
Collins, 2017	Personal community diagrams used to capture relational changes over time	Participants are instructed to draw four concentric circles. The names of the people who were very closed to participants were written in the inner circle, those less important in outer circles of the diagram. The distance from inner to outer circle indicates the significance of relationships. Data analysed: interview transcripts.
Kerem et al., 2001	Relational mapping technique used to explore empathy in relationship	Method: facilitates data collection. Participants were asked to draw a 'relational space' by writing, then circle the names of most important people in their lives. Diagrams were drawn for 5 years intervals from the age of five to their present age. Data analysed: interview transcripts.

The most used scaffolding methods were relational maps / diagrams (Collins, 2017; Gabb, 2009; Kerem et al., 2001), followed by cards sorting (Doucet, 2001; Murphy et al., 2017; Ross et al., 2005) photo and vignettes elicitation (Gabb, 2009).

Compared to the affordance methods, the scaffolding methods were used to increase participants' engagement with the research project and to facilitate in-depth conversations for data collection interviews. For example, photo- and vignette- elicitation (Gabb, 2009) offered participants visual and written scenarios that were used to explore sensitive topics. In such cases, the methods scaffolded participants' interpretations about relationships. Here, the research subjects did not contribute creatively to make artefacrts. Other methods, such as emotional maps (Gabb, 2009) and relational diagrams (Collins, 2017; Kerem et al., 2001) functioned as 'memory tools', helping the participants to imprint representations of interpersonal relationships over different periods of time.

Scaffolding methods supported the study of relationships from multiple phenomenological perspectives. Most of the methods (photo-elicitation, vignettes, emotion

maps, personal constructs) were used to foster reflections on self in relationships (**subtheme 1)**, although a strict separation from the perspective of the other could be seen as artificial. For example, Gabb's (2009) use of a photo elicitation method gave the participants the possibility to safely position themselves in an imagined relationship and to reflect on the boundaries of intimacy between father and child. The method engaged gendered parental role reflections on a sensitive topic. Also, the research subjects gained insights and understanding of the relationships (**subtheme 3**):

"he [male participant] is expressing how embodied closeness and nudity do not pose a threat by default (Gabb, 2009, p.47)".

Similar methodological functions could be identified when vignettes were used. Scenarios depicting closeness in various relationships evoked emotions in participants who were able to position themselves in rapport to the described relationship. It became apparent how the method facilitated awareness of the participant's emotional sense of self (**subtheme 1**) and how his perception of his couple relationship elicited reflections on relational practices and boundaries (**subtheme 3**).

Methods derived from personal constructs theory (Murphy et al., 2017; Ross et al., 2005) offered mainly insights on relationships themselves (**subtheme 3**). Imprinting multiple relationships on paper, the participants produced visual representation of relationships density and quality. For example, Ross et al. (2005) showed how the participants were able to reflect on relationships and to compare them (**subtheme 3**). The participants were able to identify a wide range of interprofessional relationship and not only those that were strikingly either very good or very bad. In Murphy et al. (2017) study the characteristics of the people who made good relationships (**subtheme 2**) could be easier discussed by adolescents with ASD by using sorting cards.

We saw that scaffolding methods are supportive and engaging. These research methods helped the participants to externalise and imprint various aspects of relationships, which in turn offered ways to enhance reflections and enrich data collection.

Some of the methods, e.g. emotional maps and relational diagrams, were more comparable between research subjects independent on age, literacy or artistic skills. For example, children found emotional maps powerful tools for expressing their emotions about interactions in their family.

5.3 Pre-reflective innovative methods

Pile (1991), an exponent of emotional geographies field, was concerned with the possibility of enriching the qualitative methods by paying attention to the intersubjective space between the researchers and participants. Bondi (2015) stresses the "inevitable inarticulacy to feelings", following the idea that the pre-reflective experiences can be impoverished when translated into ever faithless words.

The methods identified are presented in Table 10, below.

Table 10. Pre-reflective innovative methods.

Name	Description	How the method was used
Reflexive embodied empathy Finlay, 2005, 2014	One to one, face to face in depth-interview following an experiential person-centred approach to therapy and phenomenological principles, which focuses on the experience of both researcher and participant.	The method was used to both collect and analyse data. In depth-interviews are recorded. The researcher aims identify her/his own bodily reactions during the interview to get a sense of the experience of the other. This, also, informs the direction of the interview. Embodied-reflexive notes are written after the interview, transcription and peer research "supervision". A second person stance is maintained. Data analysed: transcript and notes.
Embodied reflexivity Bondi, 2015	One to one, face to face interview with focus on unconscious communication as	The interviewer invited research participants to narrate stories about themselves in relation to three broad themes.

Name	Description	How the method was used
	conceptualized by psychoanalytic approaches.	Data analysed: interview transcript.

Both types of methods originate from the practice of psychotherapeutic approaches with a strong focus on the experiences of the therapist and the client. Finlay (2005, 2014) talks about practising the reflexive embodied *empathy* with a commitment to phenomenological and experiential person-centred (Rennie, 1998) principles. Similarly, Bondi (2014) draws on the psychoanalytic ideas of unconscious communication to elicit emotional responses in order to enrich the emotional dimension of the interview.

The analysis of these methods revealed that the use of own self, relationships to self **(subtheme 1)** is done 'fully' in the service of knowing the other or the experience of (an)other. In that, the knowing of own self is secondary to understanding of the other. Therefore, methodologically, these methods can be better used to investigate the relationship to other **(subtheme 2)**.

Finlay (2005) remarks "p*robing our own embodied responses thus potentially opens up rich understandings of our participants. This kind of self-understanding (grounded in the other's self-presentation) translates into other-understanding (p. 280)".* The author appeals to the phenomenological understanding of empathy to explain how the embodied reflexivity can be noted down and used as data for investigating the experience of the participants.

Bondi (2014) gives an account of embodied knowing by starting from a different theoretical framework. Drawing on the psychoanalytic literature, her focus was on identifying how the use of unconscious communication between herself as a researcher and the participant can inform research data collection. She posits that during the research

interview some of her internal experiences *"were emotionally charged and I felt the charge somatically before I found words to describe them." (p. 53).* Here, the researcher describes how the participant leaves a bodily imprint on her, that becomes a known yet to be formulated in words. Similar with the previous studies (Finlay, 2005, 2014), the awareness of the self in the relationship **(subtheme 1)** serves mainly to explore and understand the experience of the participant **(subtheme 2)**. "*I was able to think about what my body already knew, and to create "word pictures" for what I had felt. It seemed as if I had registered what would turn out to be visceral reminders of feelings that Katherine had conveyed to me" (p.52).* Moreover, it was noted that the way Bondi (2014) used embodied reflexivity, open the perspective over the relationship **(subtheme 3).** "*So not only did I unconsciously receive Katherine's unconscious communications, but, […] I unconsciously "transmitted" back to her something that she could "receive" unconsciously. These messages, I would argue, were saturated with (largely wordless) emotion: they related to how we felt in relation to one another, how we each sensed ourselves to be in the presence of, and affected by, the other. (Bondi, p. 48).*

Pre-reflective methods lend themselves well to the understanding of the experience of another person in relationship with the researcher. The intersubjective experiences between the researcher and the participants allowed for data collection and interpretation.

The method can raise several methodological and ethical questions. In terms of the participants, it seems that the method may work better with reflexive adults who are willing and able to explore difficult emotions that are not readily available to their awareness. Conversely, these methods may require the researcher specific training and skill. Researchers may need to access specialised supervision and to pay attention to the

potential influence of vicarious trauma. Issues related to the balance of power and invasion of participants' feelings may need careful ethical consideration.

5.4 In vivo innovative methods

In this paper, the theme In vivo refers to innovative methods such as video recall, that capture an aspect of the relationship as it is happening live, freely, without the researcher's intervention. Although, intended to be naturalistic, the setting in which the interpersonal interaction takes place is rather contrived.

The main method examined was Interpersonal Process Recall (IPR) a form of qualitative interview that uses video-assisted recall to access the experiences of the participants. Originally, IPR was proposed by Bloom (1954) as a video recording research method used in classroom discussions in order to help students to understand their thinking processes. The method was further developed by Kagan (1980, 1984) as a self-reflective method of learning, used to improve interpersonal skills related to helping professions. For this, the trainee is video recorded while in interaction with clients. Following the recording, as close to the moment of interaction as possible, the trainee and the teacher watch the video and the trainee is guided to reflect on their thoughts and feelings they had during the live interaction with the clients. A specific feature of this post-hoc observation is the opportunity for prompted or 'cued' reflection. In research with IPR, the interviewer can direct the participants' reflections of their thoughts and feelings as experienced during the live session in order to avoid self-criticism as they watch the video. In that way the participants can become more attuned to their internal processes as they occurred during the interpersonal interaction.

Table 11. In vivo innovative methods.

Name	Description	How the method was used
Interpersonal Process Recall (Meneses & Larkin, 2017)	Video recording of a short interpersonal interaction between two participants who did not know each other prior to the study. The video was used for an interview. In the same day, after the recording, the pair of volunteers watched the video and were interviewed together by the researcher.	The method was used to collect data, and happened in 3 stages: • Stage 1: A pair of student volunteers talked about a "happy story", in the absence of the researcher. The 15-minute-long interaction was video recorded. • Stage 2: Independently, the participants answered a brief questionnaire about their experiences during the verbal exchange. • Stage 3: A cued-recall interview with both participants was recorded. The video with the stage 1 interaction was paused at key moments (chosen by the participants) when the participants discussed their insights. Data analysed*:* the transcript of the cued-recall interview

Only one article was found and included in this review. Meneses and Larkin (2017) aimed to explore how we make sense of someone else's experience. Therefore, it can be assumed that the authors provided interpretations with a specific focus on the relational perspective on the other. However, an attentive analysis of how Meneses and Larkin (2017) used IPR shows that IPR can furnish multiple relational possibilities.

Firstly, IPR permitted insights and interpretations about oneself in relationship (**subtheme 1**). The paper's authors tried to identify how the participants came to understand the experience of the other. In doing so, it was shown that IPR facilitated various *"ways of understanding a multitude of experiences, those being narrated, those arising in response to the narrative, and those generated by the interaction (Meneses and*

Larkin, 2017, p. 12)". Moreover, the method "*enhanced the participants'* awareness *of the perceptive elements that were perhaps responsible for their interpersonal understandings.* The following can be brought to support this claim. The analysis of the cued-recalled interview showed that

"the terms knew, sensed, saw, picked, recognized, registered, understood, told, and heard were all used to describe their perceptive access to their partner's experiences (Meneses & Larkin, 2017, p.13).

Secondly, IPR offered premises for gaining insights into the experience of the other (**subtheme 2**). The method "increased the depth of our understanding of participants' experiences. It brought the happy story experiences to the participants' attention, and allowed them to "put words into" (Lauren) some type of implicit knowing that had happened more "subconsciously" (Kayla) during the storytelling stage (Meneses & Larkin, 2017). According to the authors, the novelty of their findings was represented by the consistent evidence of an intuitive understanding of the other's experience.

"Intuiting was rather about feeling that the other person was happy. It was s directly knowing act, informative of the partner's present experience via processes described as perceptive, sensory or experiential (Meneses & Larkin, 2017, p.24)".

Thirdly, the cued-recalled interview gave the opportunity to both participants to observe 'the relationship in action' and how they have positioned themselves in the rapport to the relationship (**subtheme 3**) and each other. The method highlighted moments of shared experiences, reciprocity and mutual influences on each other's experiences and actions. Furthermore, the video cued interview permitted the exploration of the process through which the *reciprocity* of sharing one own's experience sustained the communication and relationship:

"[…] were both cooperating for the goal of sustaining a fluid conversation, without having ever once 'discussed the process'. They intuited the partner's experience and then chose a suitable course of action. This was a relational communicative dynamic sustained by the intuitive listener and the intuitive teller (Menses & Larkin, 2017, p.22)".

It was considered that

"the significance of sharing was that it was a way of "relationship building," of personally "participating" in another's story, and having a sense of "being emotional together," or feeling "connected." Participants spoke of having a "special" bond to another person, and of a reassuring sense of togetherness and closeness. It was the feeling of "togetherness" that seemed to define the emotional nature of sharing in all the accounts. (Menses & Larkin, 2017, p. 15)

Menses and Larkin (2017) appraised some of the IPR advantages and disadvantages for qualitative research. The method helped to structure and guide the joint interviews, supporting and enriching the data collection. Specific for the video cued-recalled interview was the opportunity to observe own past interactions. The video recording facilitated the participants to reflect on their perceptual, intuitive experiences that were out of their awareness during the interactions.

At the same time, viewing the recorded dialogue seemed to focus the participants on the observed behaviour. As the experiences are less visible on tape, the significance of the behaviours could be exacerbated. Ideally, the behaviours seen on the video can facilitate the exploration of the memory of the 'then experience'. However, it can be more difficult to separate such exploration from the 'now reflection' of what is seen on the tape. In the latter case, the investigation of the different aspects of the live interaction is weakened. This can be addressed in the interview by re-focusing participants to the memory of their experience, rather than offering new reflections about the interaction.

5.5 Performative creative methods

The innovative methods discussed so far were mainly used to support data collection or to produce analysable data. The performative arts methods are brought into research to help with sharing findings to a wider audience, to the general public. Therefore, these methods have a wider impact on the social context where the research was done, by raising awareness and facilitating understanding of lived experiences of particular groups, for example people with dementia, traumatic brain injury (TBI) or psychosis. Often the authors use performative methods to influencing attitudes and modes of engagement within communities.

The performative methods are mainly based on ethno-dramatic approach such as research-based theatre (Jonas-Simpson et al., 2012; Kontos & Naglie, 2007a, Kontos et al., 2012) and dance (Boydell, 2011). They offer the researchers the opportunity to artfully express the research findings. The performative methods reviewed are presented in Table 12, below.

Table 12. Performative innovative methods.

Name	Description	How the method was used
Research-based dance Boydell, 2011	Dancing experiences of psychosis.	The method was used to disseminate the results of multiple case studies which explored in depth the psychosis pathways to mental health care, including the relationships of young people with psychosis. Creative (choreographer and dancers) and researcher teams translated textual data in dance performance. Data analysed: transcripts (case studies), observation and field notes (performance).
Research-based theatre 1. Jonas-Simpson et al., 2012 2. Kontos and Naglie, 2007 3. Kontos et al., 2012	Evaluating the impact of a dramatic performance on relational attitudes towards people with dementia [1], Alzheimer [2] and TBI [3].	The method was used to disseminate the results of qualitative studies. The results of the qualitative studies were presented to health care professionals as a theatrical play. The impact of the play on practice and attitudes' change was investigated. Data analysed: questionnaires, transcripts of interviews and focus groups.
Participatory action research blended with research-based theatre White and Belliveau, 2011	Enriching reflections on interpersonal interactions through theatrical scripting and performing.	The method was used for both collection, data analysis and dissemination. 'Actor' researchers wrote their reflections on professional and personal interactions as a script play (data). The script was rehearsed (analysis) and performed (dissemination) in front of various audiences. Further reflections whilst rehearsing and performing were recorded in order to reveal multiple inner voices / perspectives on previous (script) and current (performance) interactions. Data analysed**:** the script play during the rehearsal.

Performative methods offered possibilities to explore all three relational perspectives. Most of the authors used research-based theatre to disseminate the findings of

qualitative studies to a broader audience. In addition, White & Belliveau (2011) used the participatory action component to analyse scripted reflections (data) while rehearsing the play, in order to deepen reflections and to add multiple perspectives on complex interpersonal interactions:

"Particular attention was given to how these moments might unfold if one gave form to what is experienced and expressed through the inner voice. This brought with it a heightened awareness of the discretion that people use in determining what is included and excluded in dialogues with others (White & Belliveau, 2011, p.228)."

In Jonas-Simpson et al. (2012) study, the play gave the participants, the performance audience, the opportunity to question themselves about how they bring themselves in the relationship with the person with dementia. The authors describe how the participants gain awareness of their own believes and stereotypes which influenced the manner of relating to people with dementia. In this way, the performative methods helped the participants to notice their own self in relationship **(subtheme 1)**. Similar findings were reported by Kontos and Naglie (2007b), with the addition that the performance fostered an attitudinal shift in the participants, which led to a need to relate differently:

"Seeing the play made them aware of the need for staff to recognize and respond positively to patients' bodily movements and gestures in the context of dementia care (Kontos & Naglie, 2007b, p. 806)".

Examining the effect of the performance on the staff working with people affected by traumatic brain injury, Kontos et al. (2012) remark how the staff reflected on *"their own behaviour as well as acknowledging the sadness, variability in mood, and motivational struggles which might affect clients during therapy sessions (Kontos et al., 2012, p. 1621)".* Self-awareness in terms of cognitive and affective understanding prompted participants to reflect on the experience of the other (**subtheme 2**). For example, the play helped the participants to 'rediscover the person with dementia' in a way that expanded the perspective form a sufferer of a dreadful illness to *"rediscovering the whole*

person with mindful attention to the person's life story which we named 'seeing the whole' (Jonas-Simpson et al., 2012, p. 1949)".

The plays highlighted private relationship experiences **(subtheme 3)** of people with dementia and TBI, and therefore *"intended to demonstrate the struggles to re-establish intimacy and normalcy in social relationships (Kontos et al., 2012, p. 1621).* This influenced participants' *"movement toward the acceptance and professional facilitation of consensual sexuality of clients (Kontos et al., 2012, p. 1621)" and* fostered a *"newfound respect for a client's need for sexual intimacy and/or closeness with a spouse or partner and expressing emotional difficulties (Kontos et al., 2012, p. 1625)".*

In summary, we could see that cognitive understanding was enhanced by the emotional engagement of the audience with the plays, making the theatrical-based research a powerful method to disseminate research findings, in both specialised and non-specialised communities. Awareness and knowledge acquisition were increased when it was conveyed through multifaced methods, visual, audio, bodily habits, gestures and actions. In this way the communication transcended intellectual understanding and introduced an emotional understanding which could foster new memories and learning new attitudes about vulnerable people, negatively affected by the social stereotypes, stigma and prejudices. Therefore, performative methods can be used in the study of multiple relational perspectives, and with audiences where the attainment of complex wordy arguments is less accessible.

6 Discussion

6.1 A synthetic overview of findings

We saw that the innovative methods reviewed offered multiple methodological perspectives in order to produce or support knowledge generation and dissemination about interpersonal relationships.

Groups of methods provided different research possibilities. The first two groups of methods identified, affording (top of the cone), and scaffolding (bottom of the cone), can be seen on a continuum, as illustrated in Figure 2 below. Affording methods offered researchers and participants nearly unlimited opportunities for generating outcomes (Figure 2 – open possibility), which supported awareness, understanding, and expression of interpersonal experiences. Thus, interpersonal experiences can be explored in depth for meaning that was less accessible to both participants and researchers. It can be said that the meaning drives the process of creation, and it takes shape in the process of producing the artefact. Scaffolding methods offered more limited opportunities for creating artefacts (Figure 2 – limited possibility) because the researchers offered materials and instructions that constrained the participants to certain tasks. Researchers provided with investigation tools (e.g., photos, written cards, video clips) that guided reflection on themes relatively pre-established. Using scaffolding methods, the participants produced more similar outcomes, facilitating comparisons between the creative products and the participants' interpretations.

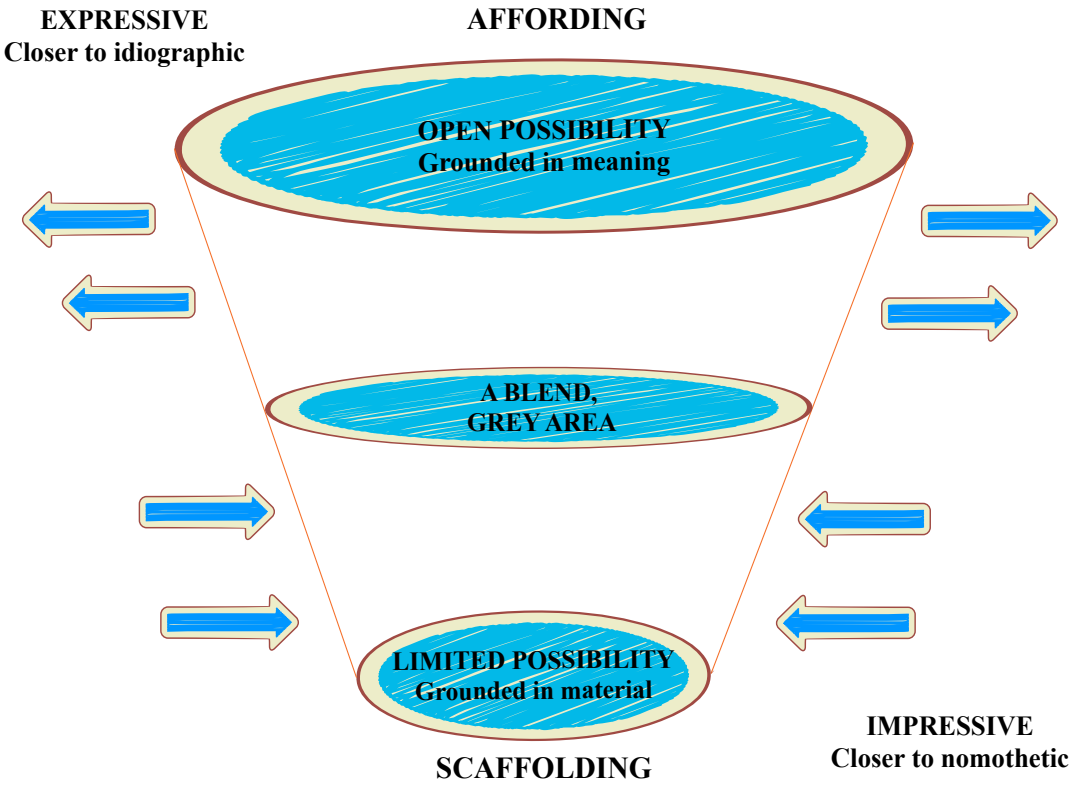

Figure 2. Affording and scaffolding theoretical continuum.

Another group of methods, pre-reflective, permitted in-depth explorations of immediate intersubjective experiences between the researchers and the participants. The researchers empathically tuned into emotional experiences the participants experienced during the interview, but which were not verbalised. The researcher introduced their empathic impressions in the interview in order to help the participants become more aware of these.

Specific to in vivo methods was the opportunity to study relationships as they occurred in real time. Interpersonal interactions were recorded, watched again, and interpreted, offering the participants the possibility for reflection on experiences of which they were not fully aware during their interactions.

The last group of methods identified, performative, were mainly used to disseminate information beyond the specialised academic language. Aesthetical forms,

such as theatrical and dance performances, were employed to raise awareness and influence attitudinal and relational changes regarding marginalised groups of people.

Boydell et al. (2012) reviewing innovative methods in health research, asked questions about how different art methods compare, what these methods contribute to research, and what rationales justify their use. Taking some of these questions further, the next section of the review will address the implications for the study of relationships using innovative methods. The following section will provide some suggestions for methodological development.

6.2 Implications for researchers wanting to study relationships

A wide range of innovative methods used in empirical qualitative studies to capture and study an aspect of social relationships were identified. Following a phenomenological tradition, I have identified three relational perspectives generated by the use of the creative methods in conjunction with other qualitative methods, primarily in-depth interviews. The first perspective focused on awareness and reflection on the participants' self in the relationships. The second perspective increased insight, intuitive, and cognitive understanding of (an)other in relationships with the participants. The third perspective studied participants' reflections on the relationship itself, as an object to be known in its own right. Following this line of thought, we could deduce a fourth stance, that of relationship to relationship. For example, a dyad/group reflecting and comparing its own relationships with those of another dyad or group of the same kind. However, no such papers were identified.

All three relational stances were identified within each of the innovative method categories, affordance, scaffolding, pre-reflective, in vivo, and performative. However, most of the authors have not reflected on the distinctions between these relational stances. I

will argue that these distinctions can help the researcher choose the most appropriate methods.

Scaffolding methods

Most of the innovative methods fell under the scaffolding category. As we can see in Figure 2 (see page 46), scaffolding methods are more prescriptive and precise. It was my impression that such methods helped the researcher study a more narrowly defined research question. For example, the researchers chose pre-existing photographs with specific themes, which invited specific interpretations, e.g., child – adult boundaries of intimacy (Gabb, 2013). In this case, the interpretations were grounded in the 'material' of the method represented by well-defined stimuli that could evoke a sense of feeling, emotion, and experience that could remain unnoticed if only interviews were used (Manning & Kunkel, 2014).

Most of the methods offered multiple relational perspectives. Photo elicitation, vignettes, emotional maps (Gabb, 2009), and personal constructs (Murphy et al., 2017) were used to increase awareness about personal needs, perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes in relationships (**subtheme 1**). The social cognition (Lakey & Cassady, 1990) and social role models (Thoits, 1986), reviewed in the introduction, could benefit from scaffolding methods. Innovative methods can help to explore in more depth the ways people form support judgements, and how these cognitive beliefs might be reinforced by memories of past interactions and evoked by associated emotions. For example, using emotional maps (Gabb, 2009) in a family context, narratives of supportive actions can be analysed in terms of beliefs, emotions, and mutual reinforcing patterns of interactions between family members. The methods may help with bridging cognitive beliefs about relationships with emotions and perceptions of support.

Social network methods (Ross et al., 2005), relational diagrams, and maps (Collins, 2017; Kerem et al., 2001) were mainly used to study the density of social networks or the nature and quality of multiple relationships (**subtheme 3**). Linking to social roles theory (Thoits, 1986), we can see how scaffolding methods (e.g., cards sorting, relational diagrams, and maps) can be used to explore the unique significance of social roles, and their interconnections and meanings for psychological health. Social roles hierarchy, comparisons, harmony, or conflicts can be mapped out and analysed. The methods can produce comparable relational maps, which could be analysed across multiple participants.

Although most of the authors did not comment upon the relational perspectives, scaffolding methods can be used to support reflections and enrich conversations about all relational stances.

Affording methods

The affording methods permitted a high level of expressivity, leaving the participants open to the possibilities of producing original, interpretable, and creative outcomes. In line with Guillemin (2004), the review highlighted that engaging with affording methods meant engaging in the process of meaning-making. For example, drawing (Boden, 2013), taking photographs (Barrington et al., 2017; Majumdar, 2012; Sibeoni et al., 2017), producing, or selecting and arranging material artefacts (Jonas-Simpson et al., 2015) contributed to producing knowledge, not only to supporting new interpretations of pre-existing knowledge.

Most of the affording methods were used to capture and externalise participants' representations of their relationships (**subtheme 3**). That meant that the participants and the researchers could 'see' the relationships represented in front of them, on original drawings or spontaneous photos. These products were used to facilitate conversations or

were analysed to bring to light new insights in addition to the interviews. Similar to scaffolding methods, affording methods can be used to study all three relational perspectives. It was my impression that all theoretical models of social relationships could benefit from using affordance methods, particularly when exploring participants' perspectives on new concepts or experiences which are less well defined. Therefore, affordance methods are best used in a co-creative space where both participants' and researchers' curiosities could lead to novel explorations of relational experiences.

The versatility of affording and scaffolding methods allows researchers to choose methods depending on their research interests. For example, with the methods situated in the grey areas (see Figure 2), the researcher could be more specific or leave the participants open to the possibilities of making innovative products which can be further interpreted. It would be interesting for the authors to reflect on their methodological choices based on the relational aspect they have explored. We can propose that affordance methods can support the in-depth, idiographic exploration of those relational aspects less studied, whilst scaffolding methods can support revealing relational aspects already known by the participants.

Pre-reflective methods

Previous researchers, such as Pile (1991), raised the concerns that sometimes the words fail to accurately express the feelings experienced in human interactions research. They proposed that focusing the research on the intersubjective space between the participants and researcher could help the researcher to experience the emotions felt by the participant during the research interview. In line with this idea, the pre-reflective methods proved useful to increase the understanding of (an)other (**subtheme 2**) experiences in relationships, through embodied empathy (Bondi, 2014; Finlay, 2005). Relational

attributes and processes (Reiss, 2000) could be explored in-depth for subtle, affective connections to support emotional well-being. For example, subtle changes in emotional intimacy, and its links to relational stability, emotional regulation, and mental health, can be explored beyond the defensive reactions activated by personal sensitivities.

In vivo methods

Bondi (2014) argues that qualitative relationship studies provide opportunities for "meaning-making in action" (p. 435). In vivo methods could capture interactions as they occur moment by moment. The dynamic and slight changes in interactions and across contexts, often pass unnoticed whilst people are engaged in real-time interactions. In vivo methods could help when exploring the supportive actions as they happen, in a real or staged interpersonal interaction. Drawing from the stress buffer model (Cohen & Willis, 1985), this method could facilitate the exploration and analysis of supportive actions in terms of mobilising coping efforts and learning new coping strategies. The mechanisms of coping and appraisal can be easily identified and scrutinised with the help of video recordings. Similarly, video-feedback methods are also used in attachment-based interventions for parents and their infants (Green, 2018; Moss et al., 2018).

In vivo methods lend themselves well to the study of all three relational perspectives. Analysis of recorded behaviours offers the possibility for increasing awareness of self in relationships and understanding the other and the interactions themselves.

Performative methods

Various studies (Kontos & Naglie, 2007; Rosenbaum et al., 2005) stressed the role of performative methods in conveying the importance of relationships in health care settings and communities for a particular group of people (dementia, psychosis, brain

injury, etc.). This review indicates that performative methods can offer a view on all three relational perspectives, with a unique contribution to increasing awareness and appreciation for the importance of the patient's perspective in relationships with health care providers. Performative methods might help in expanding social cognitive concepts and models from individuals to groups and communities.

Overall, very few authors detailed the motivation for their choice of methods for the study of a specific aspect of relationships. Further reflections where authors present their methodological rationale for methods choices are highly recommended.

In summary, and without prescriptive pretence, we can offer the following suggestions, depending on what the researchers might want to learn about interpersonal relationships.

Table 13. Innovative methods contributions to the qualitative study of relationships.

- Affordance methods: to study an aspect of relationships that is 'uncharted territory';
- Scaffolding methods: to identify, confirm or explore the experiences of a group of people about a concept or perspective relatively well understood by the researcher;
- Pre-reflective methods: can help to explore sensitive topics that are more difficult to formulate in language;
- In vivo: meaning making in the action of 'moment by moment' interpersonal interactions;
- Performative: giving voice to marginalised groups, raising awareness and changing attitudes.

6.3 Implications for methodological development

Some of the authors reflected on the benefits and challenges of using innovative/creative methods. Using the methodological taxonomy proposed above, some benefits can be listed as follows:

Table 14. Innovative methods contributions to qualitative research.

- Affording methods: engaging participants to express and construct knowledge through creative processes;
- Scaffolding methods: engaging and facilitating conversations with groups of people who find it more challenging to articulate their experiences verbally (e.g. children, adolescents on autism spectrum disorder) or to discuss sensitive topics;
- Pre-reflective methods: increase awareness and understanding when language fails to capture meaning; (caveat: these methods may require sophisticated participants and skilled researchers);
- Performative: communicate and disseminate information beyond academic papers; raise awareness and facilitate attitudinal and relational change, particularly towards specific groups of people.

In line with previous literature (Guillemin, 2004; Guillemin & Drew, 2010), some of the authors raised the concerns that, although visual methodologies offer unique contributions, their interpretations are limited to the ability to use the language. The nature of subjective interpretations, particularly in the case of the affordance and pre-reflective methods, was also highlighted (Boydell et al., 2012; Manning & Kunkel, 2014).

Finally, further theoretical and epistemological contributions from researchers are recommended. This could support a more precise articulation between theoretical frameworks, methodologies, and methods, so that anatomy and mechanisms of relationships could be studied in depth.

6.4 Review's strengths and limitations

The review identified and synthesised a diverse literature in order to provide an original, conceptual taxonomy that guides researchers in deciding what type of methods to use or further develop for the study of specific aspects of interpersonal relationships. These decisions could be considered based on researchers' theoretical frameworks, topics, and participant populations.

It was challenging to undertake a systematic search of empirical articles that used innovative or creative methods. Many authors indexed their articles by key terms, referring to qualitative methods but not innovative or creative methods. Furthermore, the databases used are specialised on applied social sciences where the more traditional, quantitative methodology is used. Studies using creative methods not retrieved by the searched databases might be covered by humanistic databases. The latter databases were excluded as it was intended to review empirical studies in applied psychology and social sciences. Manual searches and experts' suggestions were used to overcome this limitation.

6.5 Recommendations for further research

Several recommendations for further research are listed in the table below:

Table 15. Recommendations for further research.

- Further reflections on methodological rationales, with a focus on clear articulation between theoretical framework, methodology and methods used;
- Further discussions on the most appropriate quality assessment framework of papers using creative/innovative methods;
- Development of research design that could assess the unique contribution of the innovative methods independent of the other qualitative methods, such as interviews;
- Discussions of the ethical implication for the study of relationships using innovative methods; e.g. exploring unformulated feelings with pre-reflective techniques or multi-modal techniques;
- Future contributions to innovative/creative methods research should add specific search keywords, such as ‘creative methods’ or ‘innovative methods’.

In conclusion, we have seen that innovative or creative methods could enrich the study of relationships by researchers making systematic choices depending on the aspects of social support in focus, the nature of their research questions, and the researchers’ interests. These innovative methods offer the means of exploring the detailed nuances of relational processes that are more difficult to study by quantitative methods, or less accessible to interviews and focus groups.

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CHAPTER II

EMPIRICAL PAPER

RELATEDNESS: HOW DO CARE LEAVERS REFLECT ON THEIR RELATIONSHIPS AS A SUPPORTING FACTOR IN THE PROCESS OF LEAVING CARE?

Abstract

Introduction: Researchers agree that social support during the transition from care to independent living has a significant effect on care leavers' physical and mental health, education and employment, as well as on potential offending behaviours, homelessness and substance misuse. Understanding how more successful care leavers formed and used their relationships during the process of leaving care can help us to understand what makes a better transition. Entering higher education is seen as one of the reliable indicators of success. The researcher, therefore, aims to explore care leavers' relationship experiences in higher education and how these relationships helped them to transition to university.

Method: Seven care leavers at university participated in this qualitative study, which was informed by the principles of IPA. The young people produced visual representations of their significant relationships and discussed them in detail in the setting of a semi-structured interview.

Results: The following superordinate themes emerged from these interviews:

- ***A point of awareness and the need of other – the starting block;***
- ***Who keeps me going – the relational journey;***
- ***Am I ready to beat the odds? A view from the 'springboard'.***

In addition, nine subthemes were identified. The thematic analysis indicated that the nature and quality of relationships made a significant contribution to care leavers' transition to university. The visual representations facilitated the interviews and also illustrated the density and quality of young peoples' social networks.

Discussion: Based on the results, the author suggests that a transition from care that could be classed as 'successful' takes the form of a relational journey, which also coincides with the transition from adolescence to emergent adulthood. This double transition was smoother when study participants benefited from the ability of important people in their lives to take on meaningful relational roles.

7 Introduction

7.1 Care leavers' characteristics

The term 'care leavers' refers to children who leave the state care system and have to readjust their lives to live independently. In the UK, the process of leaving care starts when a young person reaches the age of 16, although a planned departure usually happens at 18 years of age, when the young person is expected to live independently. Support can extend until the person in care is 25 years old if the young person is in further or higher education (Department of Education, 2018).

Both in the UK and internationally, care leavers are described as having difficulties across many areas of their lives, including those of physical health, mental health, education and employment, and can include the potential for offending behaviour, homelessness and substance misuse (Akister et al., 2010; Vostanis, 2010). The transition from care is well-documented and can have a negative impact on such outcomes (Avery, 2010; Ferguson, 2018; Hiles et al., 2013; Stein, 2008). The transition from care coincides with the developmental period of late adolescence and 'emerging adulthood' (Arnett, 2000; 2004). Neuroscientific (Spear, 2013; Siegel, 2014) and psychosocial (Allen & Tan, 2009; Dallos & Vetere, 2009) theories on developmental characteristics of adolescence and life cycles models (Carter, 1989; Dallos & Vetere, 2009; Erikson, 1968;) can help us to understand the role of transition from care in this context.

7.2 Life cycles and the developmental context of leaving care

The authors of some developmental theories place a stronger emphasis on understanding the internal world of the person (Blatt & Luyten, 2009; Erikson, 1968), while others focus on relationships and family dynamics (Carter, 1989; Cassidy & Shaver,

2016; Dallos & Vetere, 2009). The common point of these theories is that human beings develop in successive stages by negotiating and resolving period-specific demands and tasks.

Adolescence, a developmental period between 13 and 25 years of age, is often characterised as a period of emotional semi-maturity in which adolescents may show an increased mood liability, may experience frequent changes of interests and may enact oppositional or high-risk behaviours. Neuroscience theorists (Casey & Jones, 2010; Spear, 2013) highlight that emotional and relational instability is a natural manifestation of the adolescent's brain at the peak of a remodelling process, and is characterised by high neuroplasticity, instability and malleability. These complex neurobiological changes and their social-relational consequences offer opportunities for growth and adaptation to an ever-changing social environment, thus preparing the adolescent for leaving home and embracing adult social roles (Siegel, 2014). This account of the remodulation of the adolescent's brain is in alignment with the theories of life stage (Erikson, 1968) and family life cycles (Carter, 1989; Dallos & Vetere, 2009). The following key transition tasks are important:

- Adolescents often strive to individuate their identity and express autonomy, which can lead to a more coherent sense of self;
- Adolescents show increasing interest in relationships outside their family (for example, with peers and romantic partners), which leads to a shift in attachment system, from parents or caregivers to peers;
- Adolescents explore and experiment with adult activities and roles, such as drinking alcohol, smoking, going out on their own, taking paid employment, sexual relationships and trying recreational drugs;
- Parents can feel redundant and potentially disrespected;
- Parents can face increasing conflictual conversations with their teens, as their teen's intellectual power grows.

During adolescence and emerging adulthood, the role of attachment and relatedness does not diminish but does change (Allen, 2013; Allen & Tan, 2016; Dallos & Vetere, 2009; Siegel, 2014). During adolescence, there is a significant shift form proximity-seeking to exploration, when the young person tends to rely more on peers than on parents; in moments of distress, the young person returns to the safe haven of a previous protective relationship – often, with their caregivers. Successful negotiation of the key transition elements of adolescence supports the young person's development of self and their readiness to embrace adult life.

Blatt and Luyten (2009) proposed a model of personality maturation based on the mutual interaction between two developmental dimensions: relatedness and self-definition. Relatedness and self-definition develop together, so that: *"An increasingly differentiated, integrated, and mature sense of self emerges out of constructive interpersonal relationships and, conversely, the continued development of increasingly mature interpersonal relationships is contingent on the development of a more differentiated and integrated self-definition and identity"* (p. 795).

The tension between the two developmental dimensions is even higher in adolescence, due to the strong urge for autonomy and self-definition, which is met with anxiety and conflict due to strained relationships with parents and the excitement gained through relationships with peers and romantic partners. Adolescents look forward to what they can become and simultaneously fear the uncertainty of this. Another form of anxiety and excitement is linked to an increasing awareness of self, through the reflection of the others: relational self (Andersen & Chen, 2002). The peer group also becomes more and more important as a sounding board (the self-looking glass (Cooley, 1967)).

The challenges of this profound developmental transition can lead to mental health struggles expressed both internally (for example, anxiety and depression) and externally (behaviours that challenge). For foster children, this developmental transition and leaving care is even more challenging.

7.3 The double challenge of leaving care

Stein (2008) posits that young people leaving care are forced through a *"compressed and accelerated transition to adulthood"* (Stein, 2008, p. 39). This puts them at a higher level of stress compared to other young people, who, unlike those in care, may be able to benefit from the financial, practical and emotional support of their families.

Different studies (Avery, 2010; Ferguson, 2018; Hiles et al., 2013) have underlined that a significant number of people leaving foster care are unable to form the relationships they need with adults and their peers. This group of care leavers also have great difficulties in accepting help from other people (Stein, 2008). The disruptive emotional legacy from their difficult family lives – trauma and associated developmental risk factors – rendered care leavers with a tendency to mistrust adults, probably due to the fact that they lacked experience of consistent, satisfying, reciprocal emotional interactions with adults.

7.4 Attachment security and mental health

Research into adolescence (Diamond et al., 2002; Diamond et al., 2010; Diamond et al., 2012; Moretti et al., 2004; Obsuth et al., 2006; Moretti & Obsuth, 2009) shows that attachment security is associated with fewer social-emotional and behavioural difficulties. In order to reduce associated difficulties, interventions were developed to build attachment security.

Connect (Moore et al., 1997; Moretti et al., 2012; Moretti et al., 2015), attachment-based family therapy (ABFT; Diamond et al., 2002; Diamond et al., 2010; Diamond et al., 2012) and mentalisation-based therapy for adolescents (MBT-A, Rossouw & Fonagy, 2012; Rossouw, 2018) are some of the most well-researched attachment-based interventions for teens and their parents.

Connect, a group intervention for adolescents' parents and caregivers, aims to shift parenting representations and parenting sensitivity, reducing attachment insecurity and improving affect regulation. Connect therapists work directly with parents.

ABFT proposes similar processes of change but with somewhat different implementation. Firstly, the group facilitators work with parents to help them be more aware, emotionally attuned and sensitive to adolescents' attachment injuries. In a second phase, facilitators work directly with the adolescents to build an alliance and better understand their attachment narratives. Family sessions follow, to address relationship ruptures, to increase attachment security, to strengthen parent-adolescent relationships and to promote adolescents' autonomy.

MBT-A is an intervention programme principally focused on adolescents themselves, aiming to help them restore their capacity to mentalise. Mentalisation (Allen, 2013; Bateman & Fonagy, 2004) is described as the capacity of understanding actions in terms of thoughts and feelings. It involves attributing intentions to self and others and understanding behaviours in terms of underlying motivations based on thoughts, emotions and wishes. MBT-A's main catalyst of change is the function of reflecting on internal mental states, especially in cases of challenging emotional experiences. The ability to step back and reflect while in the midst of intense emotions gives the young people the option

to choose healthier behaviours instead of acting out (for example, with self-harm or aggression). Family and teen group sessions are also included in the programme.

In addition to outcome studies, investigations were designed to identify models of change that may underlie the treatment outcomes. Moretti et al. (2015) undertook a mediation analysis to examine changes in the parent-child processes. Connect interventions were associated with shifts in parenting representations, changes in parenting sensitivities and decreasing in attachment insecurity and affect dysregulation. Researchers are investigating the ABFT treatment mechanisms in terms of changes in adolescents' attachment and changes in parent-teen communication around sources of conflict through ongoing follow-up studies and mediation analyses (Ewing et al., 2015). MBT-A (Rossouw & Fonagy, 2012; Rossouw, 2018) highlights the change in the reflective capacity of both parents and adolescents.

Most researchers in previous studies used parents' self-reported measurement of their teens' internalising and externalising symptoms and attachment. There is a lack of understanding around teens' experiences of what aspects of relationships and relational processes they found most effective in helping them cope with emotional and behavioural challenges. Narrowing down this area of investigation, it would be interesting to further explore the structures and processes underlying the 'reconstruction' of the adolescents' attachments systems and the negotiation of key developmental tasks. Fewer studies, however, focused on attachment interventions for foster parents and their teens (Moretti et al., 2020, in press), although it is acknowledged that care leavers face a 'double transition challenge'. As well as attachment family systems, another interesting area of investigation is the experiences care leavers have of helpful relationships beyond family that support their transition to university.

7.5 Rationale

Among care leavers, there is a group who have overcome these difficulties. There is a range of indicators that could be considered; one relatively high threshold for 'doing well' would be making a successful transition to university. Considering the small percentage of care leavers in higher education (12% (Harrison, 2017)) accessing and attending university is a crude social symbol representing a more successful transition.

Reviewing the literature about care leavers as a homogenous group, Hiles et al. (2013) highlighted the importance of social support in the process of transition from care to independence. However, there is a lack of understanding on how more successful care leavers have used their relationship networks in order to achieve success. Additionally, it is not clear whether or how the successful care leavers developed the 'ingredients' to search for, initiate and sustain helpful relationships. It makes sense, therefore, to consider exploring how this group of young people formed and used relational networks around them when leaving care. It is hoped that such understanding will offer some insights into how specific relational factors helped them with the transitions needed in order to attain success.

7.6 Aims of the project

The primary aim of the current study is to develop an understanding of care leavers' experiences of the relationships around them during the process of leaving care, and how these relationships help them during their transitions to university.

It is hoped that by understanding the network of relationships that care leavers have around them when leaving care, some practical conclusions can be drawn about how others and institutions can best support care leavers during this transition.

8 Method

8.1 Design

For the study in question, the researcher employed a qualitative research design using an IPA approach (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). This method was chosen because IPA was specifically developed as a means by which to scientifically conduct an in-depth analysis of participants' experiences. Care leavers might find it difficult to talk about relationships – either because it may be a sensitive topic for them or because they might find it difficult to step back and reflect on potentially difficult relationships. A visual method of representing relationships was chosen to help care leavers identify significant relationships and to enable them to reflect on their relational experiences. The main data collection method was an interview, which was facilitated by a visual representation of relationships, produced freely by the participants during their interview.

The study received favourable ethical approval from the University of Birmingham Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix 4 and 5). The following ethical aspects were addressed: informed consent (including confidentiality and anonymity), ensuring participants were psychologically well enough to participate, ensuring participation did not cause distress and allowing unconditional participation withdrawal.

8.2 Participant recruitment

A convenience sampling method was used to recruit participants who had relatively similar characteristics (that is, that they were care leavers in higher or further education, were aged 18 to 25 years old and had lived a minimum of one year in care) in order to identify a homogenous sample.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria used to facilitate recruitment are outlined in the below table.

Table 16. Inclusion/exclusion criteria and rationale.

Inclusion criteria:	**Rationale**
The participants must be care leavers in higher or further education.	Educational achievement and the ability to obtain success in education are considered a crude social indicator of success.
Mixed gender. Aged 18 to 25.	The research aims to identify the positive relationship factors manifested during the process of leaving care and entering higher or further education.
Have lived in foster or residential care for a minimum of 12 months.	The participants must have been affected by a significant change in their caregiving environment and to have lived separately to their birth families.
Exclusion criteria	**Rationale**
Participants are not experiencing an acute psychopathological episode and seeking engagement with secondary psychological services. This could be identified by a screening question such as: "Are you currently seeking help from a mental health institution outside of the university?"	
Participants who are not fluent in the English language.	The researcher will apply interpretative techniques to the participant's account of their experiences. Use of interpreters would introduce an additional degree of interpretation that may affect the quality of the research.

Half the participants were recruited through the universities they were attending and the other half through local authorities. Out of seven universities approached, only one responded positively. One university well-being officer acted as a recruitment gatekeeper. Four participants were recruited through local authorities. Two out of five local authorities approached responded positively. Six social and support workers facilitated contact with

potential participants. The gatekeepers alerted the researcher of young people interested in the study but not the total number of care leavers approached. Despite using multiple recruitment avenues, a relatively small number of care leavers responded, which might be related to personal characteristics, such as more confidence or sociability. This is discussed further in the critique section (page 119).

The study was introduced to the care leavers by relevant key workers, who pre-assessed the potential participants' suitability against inclusion criteria. Young people interested in the research project were given an information sheet (Appendix 6) and a 'permission to contact' slip (Appendix 7). The participants who consented to take part in the research were contacted via email and telephone to further discuss the study. They were given one week to reflect on the study, after which they were contacted to arrange an interview. The participants who remained interested in the study were invited for one interview with the researcher. The participants signed a consent form (Appendix 8) prior to the interview.

8.3 Sample

A sample of seven higher education students, with a range of ethnicities and aged between 18 and 24 (with an overall mean age of 21), participated in the study. All participants had been in care for more than one year. Table 2 offers a description of the research subjects' demographics.

Table 17. Introduction to the participants.

Given Name **Ethnicity** **Year of study**	**Participants' experience of foster care**
Ana White British 18 years old 1st year undergrad	Ana entered care when she was 13 years old as her biological mother could not take care of her due to mental health issues and heavy alcohol use. Ana has been with one single foster carer for most of her time in care, with an exception when Ana was placed with a foster family for one year.
Lucy White British 19 years old 1st year undergrad	Lucy and her sister fostered together since Lucy was 8 years old. At the age of 4, Lucy's biological father left the family. Since then, her mother experienced severe mental health issues, which led her to neglect her children. She and her sister were foster by a family for one year and, from the age of 9, she was with her current foster parents. Lucy is in contact with her biological mother.
Tracy Black Caribbean 24 years old The University of Law Final year undergrad	Tracy was first taken into care, for 8 months, when she was 4 years old. Her biological mother experienced severe mental health issues and disruptive relationships. Tracy went into care permanently when she was 11 years old. She described her placement experience as very unpleasant, but believed that *"it was for the best in the long run – taught me a lot".*
Jake White British 22 years old Master's degree	Jake entered foster care at the age of 7. He said that his mother dropped him and his siblings to social services in order to live with her abusive partner. He was fostered together with his older sister. Two younger siblings were adopted. Jake experienced only one placement, with which he was pleased.
Nicole White British 21 years old 1st year undergrad	Nicole was taken into care when she was 5 years old, as her mother was unable to take care of her and her father was in prison. For the first 2 years in care, Nicole stayed in a variety of different placements. She was paired with her younger brother but not with her two sisters. From the age of 7, she was fostered by one of her mother's sisters. Her biological mother broke all contact with her children and left the UK.
Kai Black African 22 years old Final year undergrad	Kai was 12 years old when he was taken into care. He thinks that his parents had *"no perspective of reality"*, probably due to mental health difficulties. He preferred not to think about his biological family. Kai experienced two placements.
Amara South Asian 22 years old Final year undergrad	Amara was first known to social services when she was 7 years old because her mother was physically and emotionally abusive towards her. Living in a tight community, the involvement of social services was seen as an embarrassment for the family and so Amara's difficulties were kept secret. At 15 years old, Amara was placed in an assessment unit. Soon after, as she turned 16, Amara was led to live independently *("dumped on my own"*), at which point she moved from one hostel to another. She described this as a difficult experience.

8.4 Data Collection

The participants were invited for one in depth-interview. At the beginning of the interview, each of the participants was given A4 paper, coloured pens and emotive stickers and asked to produce a visual representation of the main people in their lives. The young people used the drawings to explore the relationships represented.

One semi-structured interview (Appendix 9) was conducted with each of the participants at their preferred time and location. Five out of the seven interviews were conducted in a quiet study room at The University of Birmingham, one in a quiet room in a public library and one via Skype.

The interviews were audio-recorded and lasted between 54 and 150 minutes, with an average of 88 minutes.

The participants stated that the interviews were a pleasant experience. No participant withdrew from the study nor requested the recording to be withdrawn from the analysis.

8.5 Data analysis

Each interview was transcribed and examined in order to identify emergent themes within the data, which were then organised into superordinate themes. Connections and patterns across all of the data were identified. The following analytical steps (Table 18) for undertaking an IPA project were used (Smith et al., 2009).

Table 18. The steps used to carry out the IPA analysis.

1. Reading and re-reading of the transcripts, to become familiar with the data;
2. Adding initial exploratory comments to the transcript on areas of interest and data meaning;
3. Reviewing the comments to identify themes which are emerging from the data;
4. Searching for connections across the emergent themes to identify superordinate themes that group together several of the emerging themes into larger main themes;
5. Repeating this process for all of the transcripts;
6. Searching for patterns and recurring themes across all the data analysed;
7. Identifying quotes to illustrate the themes.

The visual representations of participants' relationships were also individually analysed as standalone interpretative artefacts. Based on the work of Boden and Eatough (2014), I have used an analytic framework, as described in the below Table 19.

Table 19. Aspects considered in the analysis of the visual representations.

1. Aerial view and type of visual representation;
2. Elements, topography and balance;
3. Focus (the zoom-in) / Out of focus (the zoon-out);
4. Self in the drawing (*Materials, texture, colours, text / verbal additions);*
5. Others in the drawing (*Materials, texture, colours, text / verbal additions);*
6. Type and quality of relationships;
7. General tone of the drawing;
8. Other comments.

Both transcript and visual representations analyses were combined and discussed in order to enable a greater exploration of the participants' relationships, their practical and functional basis, and what those meant to participants during the transition to university.

8.6 Validity and triangulation

Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis presents a double hermeneutic challenge (Smith et al., 2012): it means that, during the analysis, the researcher interprets participants' interpretations. There are, therefore, two types of interpretations between the relationships that are explored and the concluding claims of the research. In order that these claims are as plausible and connected to the data as possible, the following steps were taken:

- Each interview was coded a few times. The first time, it was done as quickly as possible, in order to expose the researcher's own biases and theoretical preconceptions – particularly regarding attachment literature. Re-reading these initial attempts to thematise, the researcher questioned his own personal and theoretical interests for the research topic;
- The researcher checked the validity of the thematising process in regular supervision meetings;
- The researcher attempted to triangulate the data by using multimodal data collection methods as described by Yardley (2000).

In line with the phenomenological enquiry, the researcher was aware that his personal experiences and theoretical predispositions could influence his interpretation of the data. Consequently, he scrutinised his own experiences and emotional reactions related to young people who have been in care. He was aware that, during the analysis, he was tempted to emphasise young people's positive experiences, as if to make it up for what he felt might have been their difficult interpersonal experiences. The researcher kept a reflective notebook to track and bracket his own emotions and memories related to friends that have been in care, which he used while coding the interviews. He refrained from reading attachment theories in depth before coding all the interviews in order to avoid taking a confirmatory bias attitude. Instead, he tried to interpret participants' accounts in the context of their language styles and visual representations.

9 Findings

9.1 Visual representations of relationships

All participants have taken the opportunity to produce visual representations of their relationships, with the focus on those with greater impact on their transition to university. The diagrams were used as a visual support for describing multiple relationships. Some participants added new relationships as the interview progressed. Because the visual representations were at the centre of the interviews, I am presenting the findings starting with their descriptions.

9.1.1 General overview of the visual representations

Most of the participants (Ana, Lucy, Tracy, Jake, Nicole) made relational maps. The care leavers drew important relational areas, such as education, foster family / parents, friends, work, from where significant relationships branched off. The maps showed various degrees of structure and organisation, illustrating the level of complexity and density of the participants' social network. For example, Lucy's map, Figure 3, below, illustrates high structure and hierarchical organisation.

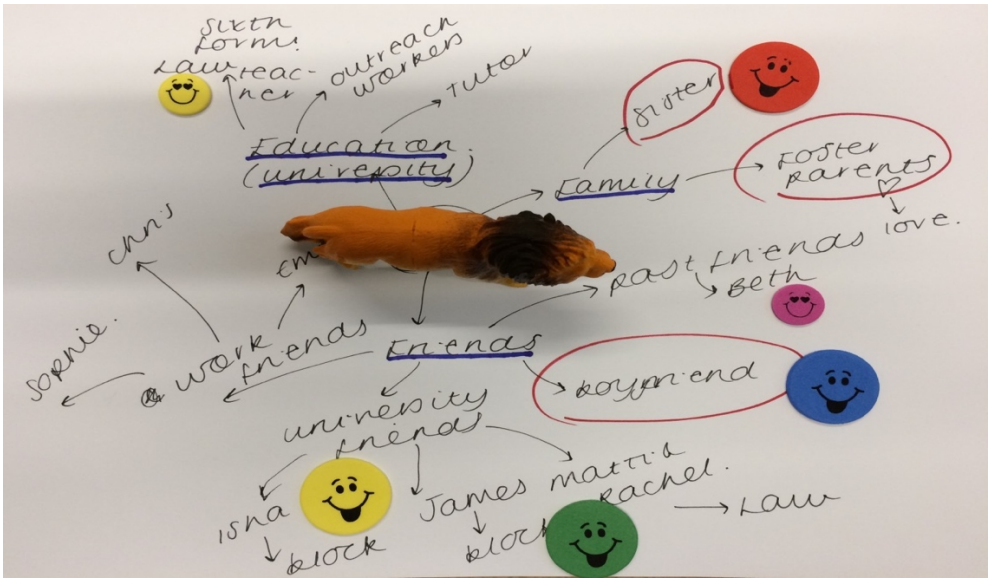

Figure 3. Lucy's hierarchical relational map.

Here, Lucy used arrows to link herself to three relational areas, family, friends and education. From each area, she either represented subareas or indicated relationships by writing peoples' names. Lucy's drawing gave me a feeling of a strong sense of well-connected relationships. A less structured diagram was produced by Jake (Figure 4). His drawing looks like a rugby field where people were represented as groups of players. The absence of links between Jake and the other people on his map gave me an impression of less connected relationships.

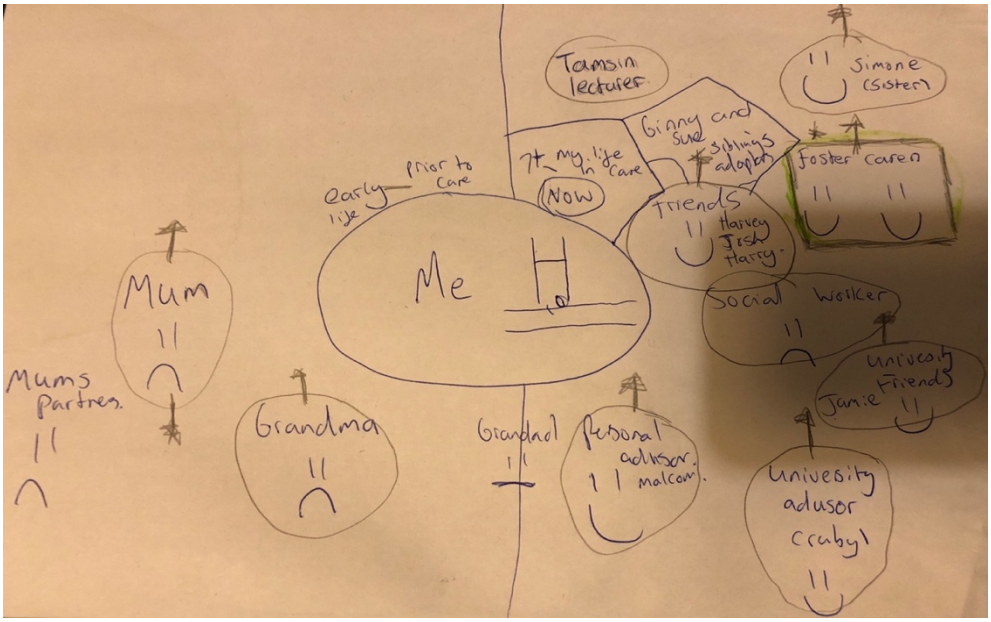

Figure 4. Jake's rugby field visual representation.

Other participants (Amara and Kai) did not produce relational maps. For example, Amara's diagram, Figure 5, below, tells a story about her mental states. Looking at her drawing, my attention was captured by her concerns to control her emotions and life decisions. The relational domains (family, friends, work, education, social services) gave me the impression of 'tools' (e.g. pie charts) used to support Amara's efforts to improve her mental health and develop a comfortable future. She developed the diagram as the

interview progressed, with new elements added as her story evolved. In the absence of the guiding narrative, the diagram is more difficult to follow, due to a high mix of elements gathered together.

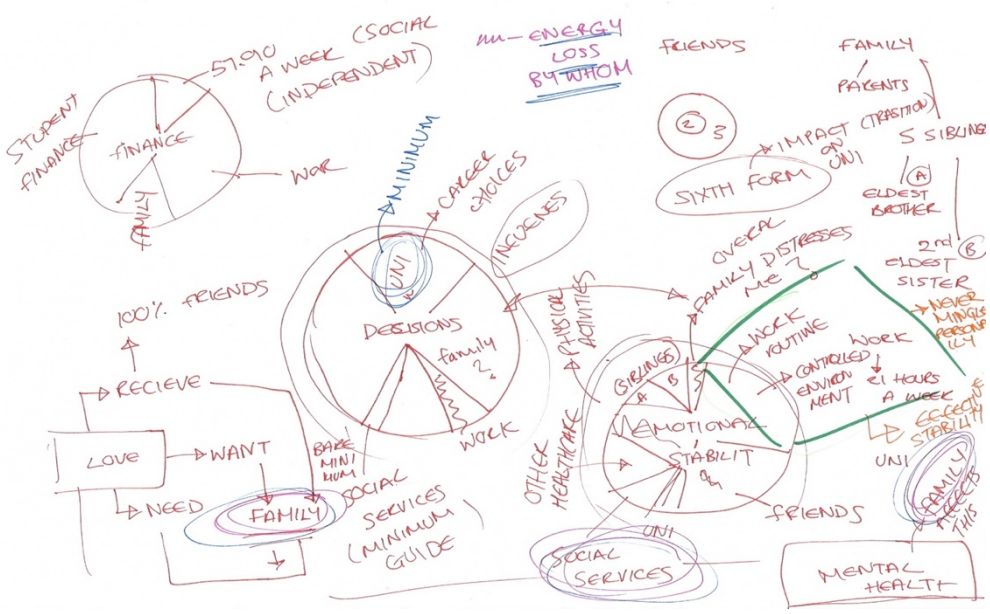

Figure 5. Amara's visual representation with a focus on her states of mind.

Most of the participants drew relational maps. Others drew flow-chart like diagrams (Kai) or assemblies of geometrical shapes (Amara). The visual representations were produced either, almost in full, at the beginning of the interview, or were developed as the interviews progressed. The participants used the drawings to imprint detailed information, reduce cognitive load and enrich the interview.

9.1.2 Visual elements and the quality of relationships

Young people illustrated relationships using various visual elements. Most of them placed themselves in the middle of the diagram and connected themselves with other people through lines and arrows.

Colours were used to illustrate the significance of people and the quality of relationships. For example, Tracy, Figure 6, represented *'good relationships'* with green and *'bad relationships'* with red arrows. Lucy (see Figure 3, above) circled with red the most important people in her life. In this way she drew attention to the more stable relationships, clearly differentiating her foster parents, sister and boyfriend from the other people.

The distance between people reflected certain aspects of relationships. Some participants (Ana, Tracy, Nicole) represented close relationships by drawing people next to themselves. Jake drew further away from him, either people who were not in his proximity (sister living abroad) or current in his life (transition mentor from his previous university).

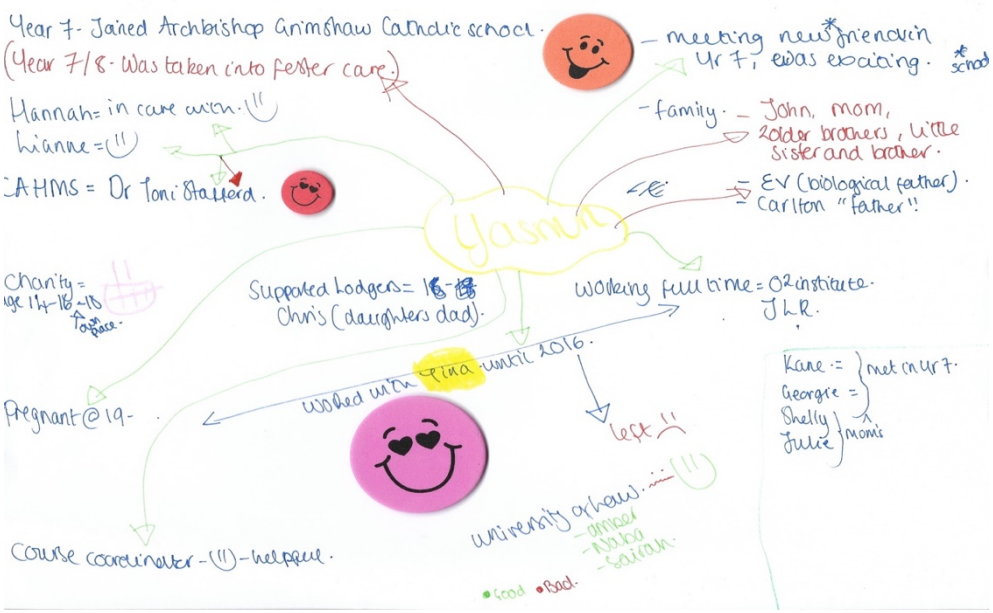

Figure 6. Tracy's relational map.

Smiley faces of different sizes and colours were also used. Pleasant emotional tones were symbolised through smiley faces, whilst negative ones through upset faces. Kai's visual representation offers an example (see Figure 7, below).

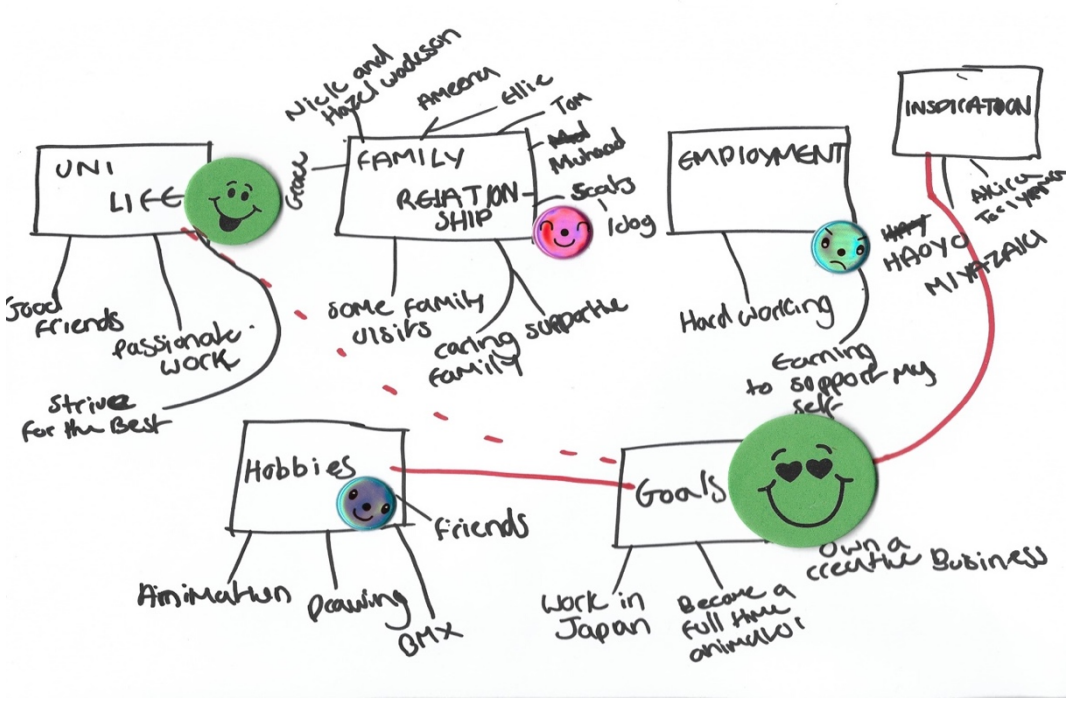

Figure 7. Kai's flow-chart like diagram.

Here Kai showed that he was not happy with his current employment which he saw as a temporary necessity. He suggested that the career goals and hopes for the future made him happy.

Only Lucy and Nicole used symbolic representations. Lucy illustrated her courage and determination by using a small lion figurine. She also drew a heart to show the reciprocal feeling of love between her and her foster parents. Nicole drew the 'Superman logo' in relation to her partner to show that she is feeling protected and cared for by him.

The visual representations offered:

- Support for the interviews by representing on a piece of paper a high number of relationships than expected
- Thematic insights in addition to interviews data

Among the insights offered by the visual representations were the centrality of the self, overall emotional tone of care leavers' relationships and the number and quality of relationships.

Most of the young people took ownership and responsibility of their relationships by placing themselves in the middle of the diagrams. In doing so, they illustrated themselves as the point of support and development of their relational network. Positive and useful relationships dominated the emotional tone of the diagrams. This focus on people who are helpful and important anticipates the key themes in the next sections. A few young people tried to offer a balanced view by indicating negative influences. At the end of the interview, all of the participants were surprised to see on paper more people and stronger connections than expected.

In summary, the visual representations facilitated rich data collection and also offered thematic insights in addition to interview data.

9.2 The results of the interviews

All young people used the visual representations to guide the explorations of their relational experiences. During the process of analysis, it became apparent that the topics discussed in the interviews could be organised around concepts such as 'a relational self', 'self-discovery', a 'relational journey from care to university', and a sense of 'successful transition'. In keeping with the aims of the study, my analysis focussed upon data which were related to the experiences and meaning associated with 'relationships', in the context of getting ready and transitioning to university. Data which were less relevant for this 'relational journey' are not presented here.

The themes and subthemes are synthetized in the following table:

Table 20. Superordinate and subordinate themes.

Superordinate theme	**Subordinate theme**
1. A point of awareness and the need of other – the starting block	1.1 Awareness of a vulnerable self – relational tensions 1.2 The experience of what I needed – relational attunments 1.3 Becoming a 'better self';
2. Who keeps me going? The relational journey	2.1 The protector 2.2 The responder 2.3 The motivator 2.4 The fellow traveller
3. Am I ready to beat the odds? A view from the 'springboard'	3.1 The other present in my mind 3.2 Building and accessing new relationships 3.3 Transition and future

9.2.1 Superordinate theme 1: A point of awareness and the need of other – the starting block

All participants initiated the conversation about their relationships by referring first to their own self. This was also evidenced in the relational drawings, with most of the participants placing themselves at the centre of the drawing (see Figures 3, 4 and 6). As the participants made sense of their relationships, there was a sense of them holding themselves at the centre of the discussion, to illustrate their awareness about themselves. It became apparent that there were two components in this: an earlier aspect of self, from a part of their life with which the participants seemed 'dissatisfied', and a newer aspect of self, related to how the participants saw themselves currently. These reflections seemed to be relational dependent, where the consistent response of another was significant in offering the participants a 'starting block' – a stable, consistent platform for containment, awareness and change.

9.2.1.1 Awareness of a vulnerable self – relational tensions

This theme is about a previous part of relational self that had caused some relational tensions with other people. All participants contributed to this theme.

The interview respondents drew attention to an aspect of themselves described in pejorative terms.

It was my impression that the interviewees located this part of themselves in the past, which was suggested by interviews' content and the respondents use of the past tense. All of the examples in Table 21, below, refer to a self whose qualities are clearly located in the past.

Table 21. Quotes illustrating the subtheme 'relational tensions'.

Participant	**Quote**
Ana	*I know I got a bad attitude sometimes, that it's just me. I had someone and just I couldn't put the effort in.* *I just was going out a lot, was going to a lot of* *parties, and it was quite frustrating, me coming late in the morning, early hours in the morning and sleep all day, for a long period of time. So, it was just me being irresponsible really.*
Lucy	*here [pointing the university friends] they know me well, current me. […] Yeah like the university, new challenges for all of these.*
Tracy	*I think it's because in school and social services and everybody told me like I won't live or I won't get passed 25; like the way I was living: I was doing drugs, I was drinking, I am doing all nighters on the street, I was reckless, I was a reckless child.*
Jake	*You still hold onto your past, like your family [biological] so it's like once you let go of that, that's when you're able to move on to, you know, move on to getting on with your life …* *[..] you have, that you have like, hmm, obviously I don't have it anymore but like when I was younger you have like , not flash what's the word for it, not flash but you remember how it was at home so it's you know they couldn't, it makes your behaviour, what's the word for it. so you don't act out but it's you, because of these events and your triggers and especially like do you know supervise contacts and stuff like that can trigger more memories on things that happened at home, then your behaviour would be out then you play up at school.*
Nicole	*I don't know but yeah, then we just kept arguing a lot so, at that point I was just stubborn I couldn't back down (laughs)*

Kai	*Them ... as me [laughs], err what I use ... cos I used to be so lazy [laughs] but I think that moving out changed me.*
Amara	*We are kidding over that time and would laugh about how reckless I was when I was younger ... I'd just act out, I'd burst. I got into fights.*

These historical qualities are judged critically by the participants. For example, the comments of Ana (*"it was ... me being irresponsible"*), Tracy (*"I was a reckless child")*, Nicole (*"arguing, stubborn, not backing down"*) and Amara (*"reckless, act out, burst"*) all reflect on aspects of their personality from which they now seek to distance themselves. It was my impression that the behaviours associated with these 'previous selves' resembled with the qualities of an adolescent self, somewhat defiant and oppositional impinging on the limits and boundaries in relation to another person.

We might see Jake's description as a complement to the account above. He seemed to attempt to make sense of these difficulties (*"behaviour would be out then you play up at school"*) by drawing attention to his internal struggles. He talked about psychological reactions such as *"flash...", "memories",* which he linked to a disturbing past from a time when he was living with his biological family. He stresses the battle of letting go of the past and moving on (*"once you let go of that, that's when you're able to move on"*). The language is even more suggestive of this battle; hesitations, incomplete words, less coherent sentence structure. We might think that Jake's fragmented narrative mirrors a sense of fragmentation of an aspect of his self.

Two participants offer a more guarded perspective about a potential negative aspect of themselves. Kai's description appears more passive (*"I used to be lazy"*), which may indicate a morose and maybe depressed position. This interpretation is in line with his comments about accessing support from his foster parents, described later in the next section (Table 22).

Lucy's comments about *"the current me"* suggested that it might be another aspect of herself that is not so present or currently upfront in her mind. Lucy talked about the importance of close relationships in her life, reassuring herself that in case of *"a disaster, a complete emotional breakdown"* very close people will be there for her. This image could invoke a sense of a fragile, vulnerable self, looking for security.

All participants described a vulnerable part of their self, which most of them saw as belonging to their past. The awareness of this aspect of their self opened the possibility for identifying developmental needs in relation to other people. The participants also talked about their experiences of the encounter of this vulnerable self with important people in their life. This is presented in the next section.

9.2.1.2 The experience of what I needed – relational attunments

This theme described what the participants believed it was important for them to receive in relation to their vulnerable self. All participants talked about someone who was able to notice, understand their vulnerabilities and respond to what they needed. Table 22, below, offers examples from all the participants about how another person met the needs of the vulnerable self of the respondents.

Table 22. Quotes illustrating the subtheme 'relational attunments'.

Participant	**Quote**
Ana	*It was a lot of talking about it, a lot of her saying that it was unacceptable. You just have to respect boundaries, don't you?* *Ehmm she is alright (laughs), yeah it's fine I think, she's good, she keeps me on track (laughs).*
Lucy	*they just make me feel like I am safe, like I am comfortable, just the normal feeling you would feel around your parents, around your family and they would just offer that in a way.*
Tracy	*Erm […] she spoke about me and what I needed, what was good for me. […] It was like my own zone. Like from all the chaos, once a week I kind of look forward to it because I couldn't speak to these [family, friends]* *She had time for me you know and patience for me whereas everyone else just laughed*
Jake	*They did tell you what you was doing was wrong by misbehaving and stuff but then they would understand that there was a deeper underlying issue there so …*
Nicole	*Ehmm well I learned the lesson the fact that you have to behave (laughs slightly) and it will be better and then the fact that if they're ranting at you, if they're just shouting just go with it, don't argue back*
Kai	*I love my family* *I just know that they are really loving parents. They really care about me if anything…* *If anything's going bad, I'm always contacting them and let them know if I'm feeling depressed or what not.*
Amara	*Yeah it was good. Yeah I know. No. Good. They made [sixth form teachers] the best they made. Yeah. They always encouraged me to live out, to live in an accommodation, make friends. …* *And then they reminded me that I was talented that I was intelligent, like I was well-spoken you need to be. But I'm very. But they also highlight my flaws and they always said that you need to work on this you need to work on a temper, or you need to work on your spontaneity because I'll just act out first, I'd burst.*

In the quotes above, the participants described the responses their foster parents, teachers or other significant people in their lives offered in relation to their vulnerabilities. We could notice some complementarity between the needs expressed by the foster children and the responses offered by the adults in their life. For example, Ana talked about how her foster parent 'kept her on track', set limits and maintained solid boundaries. Lucy state

that her foster parents made her feel safe and comfortable. Tracy finds a place for herself where her needs are considered, where she can bracket the chaos leading to disruptive behaviour. The consistent and persistent nature of relational attunement offered by the significant others was strongly illustrated by Jake who said:

Jake: "One day as I've left and got older obviously, I appreciate, you know they've [foster parents] shaped, moulded their life around [me]".

Somewhat different from most of the participants was the case of Nicole. She seemed to have learned on her own terms about the impact she had on other people, and how to adapt to them. The idea of reflection and learning about relationships takes us to the next identified subordinated theme.

Although, the needs of the participants and the responses from their significant others seemed different, the common denominator between most of the participants was the complementarity: the need of the self and the attunement and meeting of the other. This complementarity offered an opportunity for reflections on the self and the choice to stay the same or change.

9.2.1.3 Becoming a 'better self'

This subtheme is about participants' desire to become a 'better self'.

Most of the participants reflected on the effects of their interpersonal interactions on their image about themselves. We could notice a tension between the participants dissatisfaction with their past image of themselves and the satisfaction with the present image or the hope for a future better self. It was my impression that this tension highlighted the care leavers' desire to change or to become a 'better self'. This desire to change was shared by most of the participants.

Some of the participants, such as Nicole *("it will be better"),* Amara *("I'll make it")* and Lucy *("I want to make [them] proud")* seemed to hold a future image about

themselves that could be seen as a guide of their becoming. The following excerpt from Nicole's interview illustrates her satisfaction that changing an aspect of herself was helpful.

Nicole: "I learned the lesson the fact that you have to behave (laughing slightly) and it will be better".

Amara expressed hope *("I'll make it")* and content with the place in her journey to become a 'better self' *("It's nice to reminisce about those things and how far you've come")*.

Jake and Tracy stressed even more their change over time. For Jake it was important to acknowledge the moment when he was able to let go of his past as a way of changing himself. Tracy's exclamation gave me the impression that her choice for independence and change was unavoidable, somewhat a necessity that did not come easy:

Tracy: "So, the only person that is able to do it is me. […] If I didn't do it, I wouldn't have had anything and that's a fact".

In contrast with Tracy, Lucy seemed to embody a current, effortless attitude to change which made her developmental journey easier:

Lucy: "I love change. It's just something I [pause] embrace. [...] an opportunity like to come to university, do different things, I jump to it".

Similarly, Kai's new identity is sealed in the present by the rewarding acknowledgments from other people 'I love people saying that I'm hard working; It's just normal for me to be hard working'.

In relation to the other participants, Ana seemed to have been at an earlier stage in her transition to 'become a better self'. The following excerpt from her interview is suggestive:

Ana: "I know I got a bad attitude sometimes, that it's just me. I had someone and just I couldn't put the effort in".

She was aware about her attitude and the impact it might have on other people, but something was missing: "*I don't know what I could have done to change that".* Instead of initiating the change herself, I had the impression that Ana was expecting the other person to do something different that could change the relationship:

Ana: "It was something I didn't like, and she stopped doing what I didn't like, and I'd be fine with that".

To summarise, we can think that for the participants, their experiences of an earlier vulnerable aspect of their self and the experiences of relational attunements offered by an important other were linked to a desire to becoming 'a better self'.

Superordinate theme 1 described a form of positive relational dependency, where the awareness of an earlier, unsatisfactory aspect of self was a result of an intersubjective meeting between disruptive behaviours and containing responses. In other words, for the participants, the awareness of a vulnerable part of their self seemed to originate and to be connected to a relational experience to a person who was able to attune and respond to them.

Thus, the young people found themselves on a starting block – stable, consistent and persistent – from where they could start to navigate the myriad and intricacies of their relationships in order to become a 'better self'.

9.2.2 Superordinate theme 2: Who keeps me going – the relational journey

When exploring how participants made sense of their relationships, all participants emphasised different roles significant people had in their lives. We might have well expected that significant others played an important role in foster children's development. However, the respondents stressed the roles of significant others in such a way that made me think that they viewed their significant others as 'relational guides'. In the next pages, we can see how the respondents benefited from different types of companionships along

their journey through foster care to university. The following categories of 'relational guides' were identified from young people's accounts: the protector, the responder, the believer, the fellow traveller. These roles are presented next as the subthemes of the Superordinate theme 2.

9.2.2.1 Someone to rely on – the protector

Most of the participants talked about the importance of having someone in their lives who they can rely on in difficult moments. The young people stressed the qualities of reliability and dependence of another person who could offer protection and security, when needed. We could see 'the protector' relational role as a continuation of the concept of 'starting block'. If the 'starting block' offered consistent stability and structure, 'the protector' intervened and took charge in moments of difficulty. Ana, Lucy, Tracy, Jake, and Kai all recognised the value of a protective, reliable other.

The following excerpt from Lucy's transcript reflects the concerns of most of the participants.

Lucy: "I want everybody to be there for me, but in the same time I realise that in a case of a disaster, I have a complete emotional breakdown, I don't know what that would, the real people who will be there for me, will probably be, my boyfriend, my sister and my foster parents".

Here, Lucy illustrated the importance of knowing that in the worst-case scenario she will not be left on her own. The ability to bring in her mind the images of several people ('the real people') who will be there for her, even in a case of disaster, is more than reassuring. It was my impression that the immediate thought of 'the real people' in an ultimate condition of a 'disaster', offered a persistent sense of security, reassuring her that she has the right support to cope and overcome difficult situations. A similar idea is stressed by a transcript excerpt from Kai's interview:

Kai: "If anything is going bad, I'm always contacting them [foster parents] and let them know if I'm feeling depressed or what not. I just contact them. They're like the first person like to contact so…"

Kai talks about an internal struggle associated with depression when he may be feeling hopeless about something that is going bad. I felt that Kai was talking about seeking protection against his difficult thoughts and feelings. Tracy joined Kai in supporting the idea of a protective other who is able to hear and bear difficult experiences of others. As we can see from the quote below, Tracy's 'protector' was able to contain and turn a negative situation in a positive.

Tracy: "I thought she was strong. Cos she must have heard some horror stories [laughs]. And that she was brave and what's the word… she was like she always had a positive. She made a positive from a negative situation".

Most of the participants valued having someone in their lives who they could rely on in difficult situations. The role of 'the protector' became a constant presence in the mind of the participants as someone who was 'strong', able and could provide security when external or emotional disasters could happen.

9.2.2.2 Someone who is available and initiate for me – the responder

In this subtheme, the respondents stressed how important it was for them to have someone who was available and responsive when they needed help. Moreover, some of the participants highlighted that it made a big difference when, other people such us, family, friends, professionals or colleagues took the initiative to contact them and to offer support, even before they were asked for it. Conversely, some participants expressed their disappointment with professionals who presented themselves as busy and less accessible.

Tracy, Jake, Nicole, Lucy, Ana and Amara, all offered clear accounts of a number of people who were available when needed. We could think that availability and

responsiveness were characteristics that helped young people to build trust in another person. A few excerpts from Jake's transcript illustrates this:

Jake: "She [transition mentor] made herself available as well it's just beyond the educational role so that wasn't her job she looked more personal, caring and she did a lot of work with you know the care leavers […] yeah she was my main ones."

Here, Jake gave me the impression that he was spelling out that someone who is available becomes more familiar and personal. In the next extract, we can see that his trust in her is building alongside his perception of the other as a caring person. The importance of offering more than professional advice and of showing an interest in the young person is highlighted here:

Jake: "She [undergraduate lecturer] went out of her way to make sure that I, you know, she used to give me books and stuff all the time from her collection and how I'm working and stuff and then even now she still messages me now".

This relational aspect of being available and responsive to the young person is furthered by the expression of genuine interest in care leaver's well-being. The following paragraph from Jake's transcript is suggestive:

Jake: " She [student mentor] was ringing me without me ringing her and check how am I and stuff, how, sometimes obviously when the uni is quite ... you're [lonely] hearing from people for weeks on end, you're like, obviously you're hearing from friends, but you won't hear from family so checking up how you're doing or what have you whatever is like ... all the people you're hear them how their mom and dad ringing them saying how you getting on with this".

This idea is also backed up by Lucy: *"he [friend] snap out of his boy typical attitude and he would be there to comfort me"* and Nicole:

"I've had my school friend (laughing) (inaudible) she came from Manchester to see me for over a day and I've got (laughing) she was all over the way from Manchester, she just had a really long trip from Lincolnshire."

Taking the role of 'responder' one step further, Tracy highlighted how important it was for her that the responder took the initiative to problem solve for her:

Tracy: "When I get time, I'd get back to you, but with Tina, it was like what's the problem? How can we sort it out? Where are we going from here?"

On a similar note, Ana is talking about her brother, who is supporting her in intimate relationships ‘boy issues I speak to him (laughs) and he sorts that out for me’.

In this section we have seen the second type of ‘relational guide’ described by young people. The person – family, friend, professional or colleague – becomes a responder because of their openness and willingness to initiate contact and problem solving. In contrast with the protector, whose stable presence is almost taken for granted by the foster child, the responder is more distant, not actually present in their life, but ready to be available and responsive. We can assume that the responder is a significant factor in helping the young person to build and foster trustful relationships.

9.2.2.3 Someone to believe in me and stand up for me – the motivator

This theme is about the motivation and confidence the participants received from others. All participants contributed consistently to this theme.

Young people stressed how important it was for them the be around someone who believed they were capable of achieving. Having someone – ‘the motivator’ to believe and encourage them became a driving force for our young people. In addition, a couple of participants (Tracy and Nicole) described that having someone to stand for them in difficult situations was equally important. The examples in Table 23, below, illustrate these motivational forces.

Table 23. Quotes illustrating the subtheme 'the motivator'.

Participant	**Quote**
Ana	*She really wanted me to go to university.*
Lucy	*Although I can't say she [sister] has inspired me, she has always encouraged me to do what I want and what is best for me.*
Tracy	*She encouraged me [...] she used to say Tracy, oh no you're so much better than this. […] She'd say you're bright, you're bright, she'd say I know you can do it. You just need to believe in yourself, she really encouraged me.* *He stood up to her [mother]. And nobody does ... and he said to her ... Look […] I'm staying here with my friend, you're not the boss!*
Jake	*They [foster carers] like give me the option, well they made me aware that uni was an option whereas the people I speak to, their carers don't really promote, or say that they're capable of going to university.* *[grandmother's influence]: I'm capable of doing things*
Nicole	*I moved in with my sister with one of my sisters when cos she gave me the opportunity* *[I] stood up for myself […] I actually do complain to friends and like "oh that's not on" all of this and then they're like "oh you should stand up to them".*
Kai	*They [foster carers] support me in everything; they helped with career choices*
Amara	*He was like he, he saw a potential in me when not a lot of people didn't. Even my art teacher my sixth form was because I didn't do an art GCSE but I wanted to do that as a level because I just loved the thought of doing art. She talked into my skills and helped me.* *They all encouraged me; they're so proud of me what I made because my behaviour had changed significantly.*

The quotes above illustrate the participants' experience of being encouraged and motivated by important people to them. We could identify two relationship qualities from our young people' accounts: someone to believe in them and someone to stand up for them. Clear verbal messages that carried encouraging meanings were described by most of the participants (Lucy – *"always encouraged me"*, Tracy – *"she encouraged me"*, Jake – *"I'm capable of doing things"*, Amara – *"they all encouraged me"*). For other participants, similar messages were conveyed non-verbally. Here, the others either showed options to the participants or offered them opportunities (Jake – *"gave me the option"*, Nicole –

"gave me the opportunity", Ana – *"really wanted me to go to university"*). We are being shown that others believed in the young peoples' abilities to take these options and succeed, and that the young people noticed and valued this. In situations where the young people's own power was threatened, it was important to have someone to stand up for them (Tracy's friend – *"you're not boss"* said to Tracy's mother who no one dares to confront) or to be supported and encouraged to stand up for themselves (Nicole's friends – *"oh you should stand up to them"*).

It was my impression that the role of the motivator had a powerful effect on fostering young peoples' confidence. We might think that having someone to believe in them, helped the young people to build a self-image congruent to the believe that they could succeed.

9.2.2.4 Someone to take my hand – a fellow traveller

All participants talked about their experiences of having someone of the same kind, who could 'take their hand and show them the way'.

The 'fellow traveller' appeared as a person who walked alongside the respondents whilst taking on important projects, such as transitioning to university. The respondents described the 'relational guide' as someone who was experienced with the project, and therefore a knowledgeable and trustworthy guide able to take them on the same path. For example, many of the participants found a 'fellow traveller' in their siblings, who went to university before them.

Table 24, below, illustrates with transcript excepts the role of the 'fellow traveller' as described by each of the participants.

Table 24. Quotes illustrating the subtheme 'the fellow traveller'.

Participant	**Quote**
Ana	*Anna [friend] she'd used to work at the yard she's obviously the year above, so she went to uni before me. When she came back, she told me a lot of stories and then obviously I wanted to go.*
Lucy	*So me and my sister were fostered together; very close. She is two years older. She also goes to university.*
Tracy	*He calmed me down cos he was so ambitious too, made me appreciate it. And then obviously [...] I knew I wanted to do something where it made an impact, but I didn't know what I wanted to do* *I was so anxious. My first day ... I went to the door, my sister was with me, no… I gotta turn around, I'm not going in.*
Jake	*Arhh. I'd say my sister for that. Because she took me to the open days. And she'd finished Uni then. She qualified as a teacher then. She was asking the questions then, emailing people for me, telling me what was it like and yeah, checking what uni was suitable.*
Nicole	*Moved in with my sister and she told me to the open days, she showed me where about the Uni was, how to meet with my UCAS, helped me do all of this.* *I'll take her advice too hard because she's gone through it all, come out the other side with it at first degree, like really really well, so I was like "ok I'll take your word for it then", if you say something then I'm going to do it (laughs) cos you've been through it* *She's been through it and she's pushy but in a good way like encouraging and it's like she's been through it, she knows what she's doing*
Kai	*I feel like I want to be that person [Miyazaki]. To get to that level of animation really. Yeah. That's it really. It's part of what pushes me to work really.*
Amara	*If I needed something or if I needed someone like my brother so pro education I'll be in the library until 3:00am in the morning and he will come out pick me up at 3:00 in the morning.*

Most of the participants appreciated having siblings, partners or friends who had mastered similar situations to those which they faced. For example, Nicole trusted her sister's advice completely ("*I'll take your word for it"*) *because "she's gone through it all, come out the other side with it at first degree, like really, really well"*. When the

participants (Jake and Nicole) were in doubt, not knowing what to do, their 'fellow traveller' showed them or resolved the problems for them. The experienced other helped some of our young people to manage their fears. Tracy's example illustrates the concerns some other participants (Jake, Amara, Nicole) expressed. Preparing for her first university day, Tracy felt anxious. She wanted to give up. Her sister reminded Tracy that she had come a long way to start university. Tracy felt the courage to face her feelings, start university and meet her new peers.

Facing long term challenges, such as going to university, the participants benefitted from someone, like them, who had dealt successfully with inherent obstacles. I called this person a 'fellow traveller', because they walked alongside the participants for the duration of the challenge. The 'fellow traveller' offered practical advice, took the initiative to solve problems on participants' behalf and helped them to manage anxieties and avoidance.

Superordinate theme 2 illustrates the roles the 'relational guides' played in young peoples' journey from foster care to university. The respondent's accounts gave me the impression that they travelled a sinuous journey, where challenges were unavoidable. The young people reflected on the involvement of other people whilst they tackled challenges and continued their journeys. As the young people and others approached and distanced each other intersecting their own journeys, the others appeared clearer as 'relational guides'. The participants described the following types of relational guides:

- The protector: someone to rely on;
- The responder: someone who is available and initiate for me;
- The motivator: someone to believe in me and stand up for me;
- The fellow traveller: someone to take my hand.

9.2.3 Superordinate theme 3: Am I ready to beat the odds? A view from the 'springboard'

This superordinate theme reflects care leavers' view of their transition and future lives anchored in current relationships.

9.2.3.1 Models – the other is present in my mind

Referring to transition to university and their future lives, all participants identified at least one person, who was present in their lives, who had an inspirational role. The impact this person had on the lives of young people was highlighted by participants' words, such as "*someone to look up to"* (Ana), *"inspire me to be successful"* (Lucy), *"had a kind of impact on me"* (Nicole), *"I want to be that person"* (Kai), *"very inspirational"* (Amara). The role in the transition, choices of the career and future life was emphasised by Lucy's quote:

Lucy:" I think that the only person I could think of was, perhaps, my law teacher. She said she did work at university, she was a very, very smart, lovely lady, I think just that relationship was enough to almost inspire me, to be successful".

Although most of the participants talked about a direct role model, Jake gave a different account. He stressed the reversal role model played by his biological mother. The quote bellow illustrated how Jake kept his mother's image in his mind and how he strived to be different from her:

Jake: "Well basically because of her actions, that's what led to my life in foster care and I'd say that's what led on me to do this master's degree. I'd say if that didn't happen, I wouldn't be doing this course, I wouldn't be following this path of life, so .... yeah, I'd say I'm model most of my life on her. So, I try to do the opposite of what she did".

The participants further illustrated what personality characteristics the models needed to have in order to leave a significant impact and maybe become an internalised figure. For some participants it was important that this person was intelligent (Ana, Lucy), lovely, ethical/fair and strong (Lucy, Tracy, Nicole) or has impressive skills in an area the

participants admired (Kai and Amara). We might ascertain that people can become models, someone to guide and inspire, if they possess desired personality traits (character and skill).

The influence the model had on participants was suggested by Kai's contrast between his internalised aspirational model: *"I feel I want to be that person; to get to that level of animation really […] It's what pushes me to work really"* and his disappointment with his peer students and academic tutors *"I don't know ... is discouraging ... for the people that have that sort of attitude towards what they're doing".* In order to resolve this contrast and overcome the discouragement, Kai seemed to keep his inspiration alive by watching online videos of his 'model' : "*whenever I get brought down, I mean … not that I usually am, I'd been looking a lot of videos on how to …".*

We have seen that all participants were able to reflect back on time and to identify a person who they referred to as a model, who more or less knowingly fostered their future choices and developmental aspirations.

9.2.3.2 Springboard – building and accessing new relationships

All participants talked about the importance of engaging with a current social network and building new relationships. We could see how participants become more active in their interpersonal relationships by using them to access emotional and practical support. Current relationships and the participants' ability to use them became a 'springboard' – more flexible and mutual responsive – from where the participants could safer launch themselves in future choices.

Most of the participants described new relationships, recently formed, as they transitioned to university. The type of relationships varied and covered friendships or professional relationships with academics and tutors.

In the next excerpts from Lucy, Jake, Tracy, Nicole and Kai, we can see how participants made use of their new relationships. For example, Lucy showed that she was able to find and access new relationships to obtain security and emotional comfort:

Lucy: "I spoke on the phone once, there were various emails, just something like that was like a comfort blanket, that would be someone there had I needed anyone".

Jake found security by having someone to intermediate for him and help him resolve practical and financial problems:

Jake: "I found that security I'd say. I reckon if he [support worker] wasn't be good I wouldn't care, wouldn't need him that close cos I'd have no use for him".

Returning to Lucy, we can see from her account that reciprocity was an important quality of her new, close relationships. She pointed out that the development of close friendships at university involved a mutual listening and presence for each other.

Lucy: "It is development in there, I think there is almost chance to talk about anything in that way. The fact that those, both will be there, listen and I would do the same for them, it's just got that [hesitate, smile with a giggle] close relationship […] I got she's kind, caring, very good listener, very good. Hmm I'd also like to be there for her, as well, it's not like is one-way relationship. We are there for each other".

Tracy complemented Lucy's account by adding that it was important to *"always keep an open mind and listen to people"* for developing new relationships. She stressed how difficult it was for her, in the past, to listen to other people and not push them off.

However, an open mind and heart may not be enough when relational tensions are unavoidable as Nicole remarked. She showed empathic understanding and effort to be less reactive, although, previously, she used to react immediately and respond back.

Nicole: " we've argued once in the past eighteen months […]ehmm so cos with friends you don't wanna argue so when you are building that relationship you do everything to just please the other person".

For Kai, it was important that new relationships offer him something more practical and substantial. He found a fellow student with similar values and hobbies with whom he shared the results of his animation projects.

Kai: "I'd say it's one person we have the same hobby, I'd say. Arhmm He does animation. We do actually share our work, […] I used to share kinda lot of my work, he used to share his, yeah. There is something close in what we want to do.

In summary, we might assume that the new relationships the participants were able to form and use to meet current needs (at university) and to foster their better selves, had the role of a 'spring board', more flexible, but supportive to propel them in their current challenges with their university life and future development.

9.2.3.3 Transition and future – binding emotions and values

At the end of the interview, the participants offered their perspective on their transition to university. They all talked about motivating feelings and engaging values.

Overall, all of the participants asserted that their transition to university was successful. Some of the participants, especially those who were in the final year (Tracy, Kai, Amara) or graduated and were enrolled on a master's degree (Jake), made strong claims about having transitioned well. For example, Jake exclaimed: "*I've finished so, … yes"*, Tracy was even more categorical *"most definitely I made a successful transition"* and Kai certified *"I do think so, definitely".* Amara hesitated as she seemed to differentiate between a horrific assault whilst on the university premises and the process of transition: *"I think I'm making a successful transition. Apart from being attacked at uni. I mean I did make a successful transition like, I did".*

Those who were in their first year of a bachelor's degree (Lucy, Nicole and Ana) were more tentative, but still positive. For example, Lucy acknowledged the difficulty of her first year of a law degree at a prestigious university. In the same time, she expressed satisfaction that with confidence in herself, determination and support from close relationships, she *"transitioned so well".*

We can ask ourselves what psychological factors can describe the anatomy of the participants' successful transition. Searching for an answer, we can see that all participants talked about a combination of emotions and values that crated a constellation of reasons to stimulate motivation and sustain action to succeed. Three concepts were identified: 'imagined future', 'pride' and 'values'.

Firstly, some of the young people talked about making a safe future for themselves and / or their children (Amara, Tracy, Nicole, Jake). Tracy provides an example that reflects many of the participants' concerns:

Tracy: "There was nothing that I could look up to her [mother] ... whereas I knew for my children I knew I wanted to be a role model, I wanted to ... I didn't want to be another statistic".

For Amara her desired future was free of emotional pain and better mental health. She stressed that developing her future with the help of her siblings was essential:

Amara: "They're very pro education because you must think big. If I don't have my education, if I don't complete it, then I'll just be miserable, will be at home and they don't want that for me".

Nicole's career choice depended on her perceived future and job security:

Nicole: "I've gone for teaching English because it's a very safe job, the idea of it being very safe is quite important because obviously the last thing I want is to be out of a job and then scraping after all that hard work".

If Nicole, in the first year of university, talks about a projected future, Jake, finishing his master's degree, was confronted with overcoming more immediate obstacles of ending the course. The concerns of a tough competition for jobs and secure future became a drive to cross the finishing line.

Jake: "In the market now everyone has got a master's degrees and whatever, you don't want to be disadvantaged, you got this far you might as well just continue and finish".

Secondly, feelings of pride and wishes to make other people proud of their career choices and successful transition, was highlighted by several participants (Lucy, Tracy, Jake, Kai). An extract form Lucy's interview provides an example:

Lucy: […] "they think that I love law, and I do love law, and I do really want to be here, but I wouldn't have been here if I hadn't wanted to make these people proud, I think".

Thirdly, for some participants it was important to choose a career that reflected their strong values. Here, Tracy and Jake's quotes are very suggestive:

Tracy: "I knew I wanted to do something where it made an impact. […] I said I want to change things like in the system and help people who are taking into or taking out of care".

Jake: "I want to work in leading care service because there is massive, massive injustice there, where people are just not, … they're not qualifying them, they don't understand how to help people, so I feel like, if I use my own experience to benefit people's lives then you know".

We might have well expected that a successful transition and hopeful images of the future would be well represented in the minds of the participants. Being aware of themselves and the image they have in society as foster children, the care leavers were keen to connect together emotions, passions and values in order to attempt to beat the odds, become a person and not remain "*just another statistic".*

Superordinate Theme 3 highlighted the care leavers' reflections on their current position in their emerging adult life. All considered that they were making a successful transition from care system to higher education. With a focus on the psychological factors, we have seen that three aspects were important for a successful transition to university:

- Having readily access to an internalised inspirational model
- A sense of security and confidence to form and access new relationships for emotional and practical support
- Ability to convert emotions and values into persistent action.

10 Discussion

10.1 Overall view of the findings

The care leavers at university strongly stated that they made a successful transition from foster care. From a position of success, and contrary to most professionals' beliefs, the young people were confident about their futures. Care leavers' accounts crystallised as a relational journey, which can be further detailed and explained by models of psychological development and different theoretical perspectives of social support.

Figure 8, below, offers a diagrammatic view of the relational journey; it will support the discussion of the research findings.

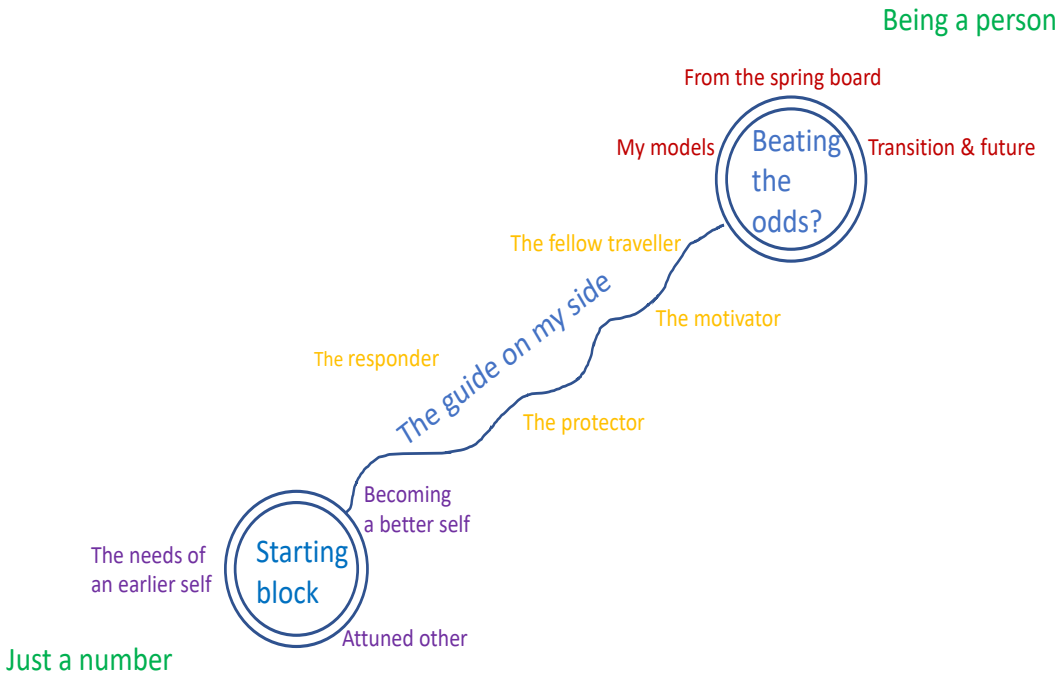

Figure 8. Graphical representation of care leavers' relational journey to university.

The diagram indicates a traditional starting point for this journey: 'Just a number'. This was the image most professionals held about foster children. Despite unfavourable

predictions, there are foster children who beat the odds and succeed to access higher education, opening doors to a hopeful future and reclaiming the status of being a person. The experience of relationships with other people who could listen and respond effectively to their relational needs helped the young people to find their starting blocks. Stable and consistent relationships functioned as a secure base from which young people could experience emotional intimacy and conflict. Interpersonal interactions facilitated young people's abilities to reflect on themselves and others. The perceptions of a current self-image were used to build desired possible self-images (**Theme 1**). Our care leavers continued their journey with the support of other people, who are identified as 'relational guides' (**Theme 2**). Each participants' journey was unique. Some young people travelled faster, while others were slowed down by various obstacles. Close to leaving care, the foster children who succeeded and went to university could remember their "inspirational models". Moreover, the young people were able to develop and/or access new relationships for emotional and practical support (**Theme 3**).

10.2 Attachment and identity: Developmental perspectives on leaving care

Within the themes, it is possible to see that the process of transition challenges and that of negotiating key developmental tasks act as an amplifier for tensions and the need for integration between relatedness and self-definition. This was predicted in the theoretical polarity between the two developmental dimensions (Blatt and Luyten 2009). Further to this, the developmental dilemmas (Erikson, 1968) force family adjustments and reorganisations (Dallos & Vetere, 2009) of the attachment systems (Allen, 2013; Allen & Tan, 2009; Cassidy & Shaver, 2016; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2009) social roles and self-identities.

The relationships between care leavers and caregivers constantly adjusted, to form a '*starting block'*. This seemed to originate from the junctions between young people's reflections on vulnerable aspects of their self (identity – **Theme 1.1**) and the attuned responses from the significant others (relatedness – **Theme 1.2**). The tensions and reciprocal encouragement between the two dimensions led young people to the desire to develop a 'better self' (**Theme 1.3**).

The *'starting block'* can be seen as a safe platform for self-exploration (a secure base) and seeking comfort when distressed (a safe haven). In line with attachment models in adolescence (Allen, 2013; Allen & Tan, 2009), the young people stressed the need to explore and, more specifically, to reflect on their own self. We can see this reflexive capacity as a form of mentalisation (Bateman & Fonagy; 2004; Rossouw & Fonagy, 2012) that can not only hold current states of mind, such as a vulnerable self, but also desirable states of mind, such as an ideal self.

Young people's reflections were evoked by the interactions with a significant other. Firstly, the care leavers appreciated when their vulnerabilities were recognised and attended to by others and when they were structured and oriented to meet the young person's attachment needs, whether these responses were sensitive or less sensitive. Even when not sensitive, the caregiving response was seen as protective and perceived to be delivered with good intention. Attachment literature on infants describes a similar concept, 'secure base provision'; the degree to which a caregiver meets a child's attachment needs, even in the presence of highly insensitive behaviour (Cassidy et al. 2005; Woodhouse et al. 2018).

The caregiving component of the attachment models in adolescence has been the subject of significant scientific scrutiny. As seen in the introduction of this paper, multiple

interventions study authors (Diamond et al., 2002; Diamond et al., 2012; Diamond et al., 2018; Moretti et al., 2012; Moretti et al., 2015; Rossouw & Fonagy, 2012; Rossouw, 2018) have aimed to identify the active ingredients that contribute to teens' affect regulation and decreased insecure attachments. Differently, but complementary to the above studies, the researcher for the current investigation focused on care leavers' experiences of caregivers' presence and their responses in attached relationships. Young people found it useful when their caregivers were available and maintained their 'presence', even in the conditions of an intensely emotionally charged interaction. The caregiver's ability 'to hold their ground', to maintain boundaries and to address conflict were also appreciated and interpreted as caregivers' good intentions and desire to help the young person stay safe from immediate destructive emotions and actions. Concepts with similar functions are identified in attachment-based interventions: ABFT (dyadic affect regulation), Connect (coregulate difficult effect) and MBT-A (containment and mentalising). In addition to the existing literature, participants in this study interpreted their caregivers' behaviours as directed to help them become 'a better self' and so to shape a better future. This seemed to lead care leavers to experience dissonance between their current self-image and ideal self (Festinger, 1957; Aronson, 1969; Swan, 1983). It is possible that the caregivers' contribution to a young person's capacity for awareness and reflection was through a 'marked mirroring' mechanism (Fonagy et al., 2007; Gergely & Watson, 1996), whereby young people's unhelpful actions and distressing emotions and thoughts were consistently reflected back to them.

Throughout **Theme 1**, it is clear that the foster children and the adults actively participated in forming partnerships. The adults – often foster parents – attuned,

understood and responded to vulnerable self needs. The foster children received the adults' responses which, likely in good time, enabled them to reflect and to desire a 'better self'.

Several papers on care leavers' relationships (Ferguson, 2018; Hiles et al., 2013; 2014; Stein, 2006; 2008) have shown the fragile stability of these partnerships. In comparison to participants in this study (care leavers at university), care leavers outside of such developmental partnerships might find it difficult to experience a stable relational environment that supports reflection on self-identity and imagination of a 'better self'. The role of self-identity reflection (**Theme 1.3)** is also in line with the concept of 'possible selves', as proposed by Oyserman et al. (2004). The research from Oyserman et al. showed that youths improved their academic outcomes when they had a positive future self-image. The authors explained that the 'possible selves' contributed to self-regulation, a mechanism linked to behavioural changes (Oyserman et al., 2004).

Often, these partnerships break down because of care leavers' difficult and disruptive behaviours (**Theme 1.1**). In their separate reviews, Ferguson (2018) and Hiles et al. (2013) emphasised how care leavers' pre-care experiences of difficult relationships with biological family negatively influenced later relationships. Therefore, the importance of the presence of at least one adult capable effectively of understanding, attuning to and responding to (**Theme 1.2**) the distressed foster children was strongly highlighted in this paper and by previous research on placement stability. Oke et al. (2013) identified particular attributes in foster carers that contribute to creating a successful, stable placement. Foster carers' commitment and ability to create a sense of belonging for the child were significant factors for placement stability. Ability to exercise a firm but flexible 'parental authority' while building hope and resilience in the relationship with the foster child was equally as important.

In contrast, the challenges of the developmental transition of our care leavers seemed to have been buffered by positive experiences with significant others. It is also acknowledged that our care leavers' ability to use relationships might have been positively influenced by a potentially higher level of intelligence and sociability and lower levels of disruptive behaviours.

10.3 The experience of other: A relational journey to success

The young people interviewed described their relational experiences with people other than foster parents or caregivers; these were described as shorter in duration and more specific in function and nature than the relationships with their caregivers. These relational experiences could be classified in specific roles taken by others, which helped care leavers to prepare for their transitions to university. In extension to the attachment models based on the premise of the need for fewer and closer long-lasting relationship, the 'relational guides' concept can also be considered as linked to a wider social support perspective, which includes the stress buffer model (Cohen & Wills, 1985), the relational regulation theory (Lakey & Orehek, 2011), the social roles model (Thoits, 1986; Thoits, 2011) or the concept of thriving through relationships (Feeney, 2004; Feeney & Collins, 2015).

The expansion of young people's social lives could also be explained by the concept of 'emerging adulthood' (Arnett, 2000; Avery, 2010). This is considered a life stage between the ages of 18 and 25 and is characterised by the slow progression from adolescence to adulthood; it is associated with the development of emotional and social maturity. The young person explores and faces dilemmas related to new social roles, career, health and risk behaviours, and capacity for intimacy and romantic relationships.

The protector was pictured as a powerful other who could intervene and take charge in difficult situations (**Theme 2.1**). The attachment theory explains that young people remain attached to important people in their lives. Although there is a significant shift from attachment to exploration during adolescence, including with new relationships, young people return to the safe haven of a protective relationship in moments of significant distress (Allen, 2008; Allen & Tan, 2009). Some of the young people grew to be able to trust and described new people in their lives (for example, friends, romantic partners or professionals) as a protective other.

A number of studies have shown that care leavers lack safe havens. Multiple changes in placements, frequent turnover of professionals and the discontinuity of peer relationships led foster children to experience emotionally painful incidents. The pain of lost relationships motivates young people in care to protect themselves by avoiding close relationships. Often, care leavers choose mistrust as a means of avoiding disappointment (Hiles et al., 2013).

Participants reflected on who they could rely on for protection, and why. Were the care leavers at university feeling safer because they were able to think of people in their lives on whom they could rely?

The responder (**Theme 2.2**) was described as someone who was available and responsive. The care leavers expressed their gratitude for professionals and friends who checked on them and initiated problem-solving in the face of adversity. In doing so, the responder acted as a 'stress-buffer', helping the care leaver to navigate the stressful situations. Cohen and Wills (1985) proposed a model of social support to explain how enacted support reduces the effects of stress when the support is perceived as helping to cope with stress. Many young people in care would have had an opposite experience (Stein

2006, 2008). This research highlighted the importance of responsive adults who could initiate contact and problem-solve for foster children.

The motivator (**Theme 2.3**) was not only an engine for will power, encouraging young people to dream and pursue their goals, but also one for fostering confidence and building a positive self-image. Feeney and Collins (2015) highlighted the need to consider relationships that promote thriving by participating fully in life and nurturing the desire to seek opportunities for growth. More specifically, Cooley's (1967) 'looking glass self' concept shows the motivator as a reflective mirror of qualities and attributes, which care leavers could incorporate into their self-concept. Self-belief was built through the beliefs of others (Andersen & Chen, 2002). What messages and actions could help young people to build a realistic self-concept?

The fellow traveller (**Theme 2.4)** was someone who had experienced and managed challenges similar to those the care leavers were facing during their transition. The fellow traveller can be seen as an 'informal mentor'. In a qualitative study, Dallos and Comley-Ross (2005) explored young people's experiences of mentorship schemes. Drawing upon attachment theory, they suggested that mentors were seen by the young people as 'good objects' with whom they were able to form positive relationships and facilitate change. In contrast with the concept of the mentor, who seemed to be close in role to that of a professional counsellor, the fellow traveller (often a sibling or a friend) offered their life experiences. The practical and emotional support was conveyed through daily conversations and shared activities – relational mechanisms highlighted by relational regulation theory (Lakey & Orehek, 2011).

All care leavers at the university concluded that they had made a successful transition (**Theme 3.3**). Close to the time of transition to university, the care leavers were

able to draw upon the positive influences from their 'relational guides' in order to form and access new relationships for practical and emotional support during the transition (**Theme 3.2**). Care leavers' efforts to persist in their attempts to go to university were also sustained by the memories and feelings elicited by their inspirational models (**Theme 3.1**).

10.4 Implications for research and practice

The researcher has here shown that the 'more successful' care leavers' transition to university occurred as an individual relational journey for participants in this study and believes that the findings suggest new implications for research and practice.

Research implications

What were care leavers' experiences of helpful relational processes?

As predicted by the existing literature on attachment, our care leavers highlighted the importance of their partnership with their caregivers – the 'starting block'. In addition to the literature, it is clear that there was a dynamic complementarity between young persons' developmental needs and a flexible response from their caregivers underlying this partnership (for example; sensitive and supportive or insensitive but firm, and in line with a developmental need). The consistency of these relational processes helped to reduce in-relationship conflict and was linked to young people's capacity for self-reflection. The ability to reflect on a vulnerable part of their self led to further development of their self. This illustrates the role of relational processes in fostering young people's capacity to be reflexive. Further research on naturally occurring relational processes underlying adolescents mentalising capacities might offer some additional insight into further mechanisms of change, beyond attachment-based interventions.

What were care leavers' experiences of helpful relationships, beyond family?

One novel aspect of the current investigation is that of care leavers' accounts of their transitions as a relational journey. Different people, including friends, professionals and other adults, supported care leavers' transitions by stepping into specific roles. It is extremely likely that some young people did not have the experience of a 'starting block'. Therefore, it would be interesting to further explore whether the 'relational guides' would have a similar effect on young people who did not benefit from a 'starting block. Can some of these roles and relationships be provided by institutionally designated peers or mentors later in life (for example, during emerging adulthood)?

Another line of research could be to explore the nature and quality of relationships of successful care leavers with different backgrounds – for instance, those who spent significant amounts of time in residential care or those who did not go to university but achieved successes expressed by maintaining successful jobs and close relationships as partners and/or parents.

Practical implications

In terms of care leavers and their caregivers, it could be beneficial to consider how to better support foster carers to consistently engage with their adolescents in order to provide the necessary stability and continuity for building a 'starting block'. Despite stormy conflicts and temporary dissatisfying interactions between caregivers and their teens, this researcher has shown that care leavers can succeed and be grateful for their support. Existing educational and intervention programmes could be strengthened by instilling hope in caregivers (i.e., specific changes in their parenting beliefs) that their persistence in setting limits, 'mark mirroring' and addressing conflicts has developmental benefits for teens' reflective capacities and development of the self.

Regarding organisations and institutions, it could be beneficial to consider that, when preparing to leave care, young people's sensitivity to rejection and abandonment could be anticipated and addressed by considering the idea of the 'springboard', which is sufficiently supportive and gives young people the flexibility to be able to enter and use new relationships. The concept of 'relational guides' could be used to avail professionals, peers, mentors or well-being officers of care leavers' specific needs and to step into corresponding social roles. Services may, therefore, consider the potential benefits of training professionals to use the social roles described in this paper with confidence and flexibility, in order to help young people to build trust, seek relationships and stay socially connected.

11 Critique

The participants offered detailed descriptions and interpretations of relationships that helped them transition to university. However, causal explanations are beyond the remit of qualitative research. Therefore, the claims included in this paper reflect possible explanations for what type of relationships can be useful and how participants accessed and used them.

This group of participants shared specific characteristics: they each had a sense of successful transition, they had benefitted from a 'starting block' and 'relational guides', and they had enrolled in higher education. Further characteristics, which were not controlled, can be hypothesised as factors that influenced care leavers' participation and the findings of the study. For example, being at university might indicate a higher level of intelligence, which, in turn, might have buffered the level of disruptive behaviour supporting the transition to university. Furthermore, the impact of early trauma, temperamental characteristics and the level of disruptive behaviour in relationships was not

formally assessed. The findings, therefore, need to be cautiously interpreted beyond this specific group. This was in line with the nature of the IPA research, which aims for in-depth analysis of a small group of carefully chosen people, rather than extensive generalisability. Further research is needed in order to determine extensive theoretical transferability.

12 Conclusion

On reflection of the results, the researcher concludes that they have proven that young people can surpass unfavourable predictions and succeed against the odds. Some of the care leavers moved more smoothly and quickly through their relational journeys to university and the majority expressed pride and hope for a better future. The people in their lives, the roles those people played and the quality of these relationships were described as important factors for a successful transition.

This researcher attempted a microscopic anatomy of various dyads and relational partnerships that supported the care leavers, rather than a more distant and sociological description. However, more research is needed in order to understand whether this success is sustained later in life when care leavers take on full adult roles.

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CHAPTER III

PUBLIC DISSEMINATION DOCUMENT

THE STUDY OF RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH INNOVATIVE/CREATIVE METHODS. A META-SYNTHETIC REVIEW OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH AND

RELATEDNESS: HOW DO CARE LEAVERS REFLECT ON THEIR RELATIONSHIPS AS A SUPPORTING FACTOR IN THE PROCESS OF LEAVING CARE?

In this summary, Ovidiu Adrian Harasemiuc offers an easy-to-read description of his literature review and empirical paper, as part of the Doctorate in Clinical Psychology.

Literature Review: The study of relationships through innovative/creative methods.

Background

Relationships are essential for human well-being. In this study, by 'relationships' it is understood all interpersonal relationships, including familial, peer-to-peer, romantic, and professional. Many scientific papers have shown that both a higher number of relationships and a good quality of relationships have significant benefits for physical and psychological health (Levula et al., 2016).

Despite scientific efforts to understand how social support (Cohen & Wills, 1985; House et al., 1988; Lakey & Cassady, 1990; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2009; Reis et al., 2000; Thoits, 2011) affect physical and mental well-being, we do not know how and why relationships are beneficial. Understanding how relationships are experienced may shed some light on how relationships positively impact on people.

One crucial first step is to identify which methods are the most appropriate for the study of relationships. When used alongside qualitative methods, innovative/creative methods (e.g. drawing, photo, video, dance or movement) have shown promising benefits as research methods in psychological and health studies (K. M. Boydell et al., 2012). For this review, the author sought articles that employed innovative methods to facilitate data collection, produce data and/or help to disseminate the results on social relationships.

Method

A total of 23 journal articles were identified by searching electronic databases, conducting manual searches and seeking expert suggestions. All papers have been assessed for methodological quality.

Findings

The author offers two methodological perspectives, based on the results of this study. Firstly, it was found that a wide range of innovative/creative methods can be used to improve the quality of research on human relationships. Secondly, specific carefully chosen categories of innovative/creative methods can be used to support the exploration of three perspectives on interpersonal relationships. These three perspectives are: reflections on the self while in a relationship, reflections on the other person while in a relationship and reflections on the relationship itself.

An original classification of innovative methods was proposed as a means by which to enrich traditional qualitative research methods for this study. The first two categories of innovative methods can be visualised as on a continuum.

At one end of the continuum, lies a group of methods (named '**affording methods'** in this study) that allows the participants to express freely their creativity (e.g. drawing or taking pictures) to produce artefacts. Some researchers used these artefacts to facilitate interviews, whilst others have interpreted the artefacts to answer their research questions.

At the other end of the continuum, lies a group of methods (named '**scaffolding methods'**) that offer more limited opportunities for creating original artefacts. Researchers provided study participants with investigation tools (for example, photos, written cards or video clips) as a means by which to guide reflection on pre-established themes.

In addition, there were three other categories identified. The category of **pre-reflective methods** made use of the researcher's empathic abilities as a means by which to pick up on and discuss relational experiences as they occurred during the interview and of which participants were less aware.

Another category of innovative methods involved capturing interpersonal interactions as they occurred in real-time on video. This category of methods was called '**in vivo'** to highlight that live interactions between people were recorded for exploration. The recordings were played back during the research interview, supporting in-depth reflections on the recorded interpersonal exchanges.

Lastly, **performative** methods employed dramatisation techniques to make research results more accessible to the general public or to change attitudes and views about relationships in the wider population.

To a greater or lesser extent, all the above categories above supported reflection on three main types of relational perspectives. The focus was to promote a better understanding of some or all of the following areas: oneself in relationships, the other in relationships or the relationship itself.

Recommendations

Based on the categories of the methods proposed and their contributions to the study of relationships, the following recommendations were offered:

- Affording methods: To study an 'uncharted territory' aspect of relationships. These methods are the most versatile, meaning that all social relationship models can benefit from them.
- Scaffolding methods: To identify, confirm or explore the experiences of a group of people about a concept or perspective relatively well-understood by the researcher. For example, vignettes or photographs could be designed to depict specific aspects of the relationships, which would facilitate the exploration of participants' cognitions about relationships, the associated emotions and the perception of support.
- Pre-reflective methods: These can help in exploring sensitive topics more difficult to formulate in language. For example, the emotional impact and meaning of the relational process – such as intimacy, conflict or a partner's responsiveness – could be explored in more depth.
- In vivo: This term includes the act of meaning making in action, in the context of moment-by-moment interpersonal interactions. Thinking about the models of social support, these methods can help participants to reflect on their perceptions and attitudes related to supportive actions (for example, their coping efforts and appraisal). Participants can then reflect together on the impact supportive actions have on the receiver's ability to cope – and how their coping strategies could change.
- Performative: The use of these methods gives voice to marginalised groups, raises awareness and changes attitudes related to the needs of connection/relationships in these groups of people

Empirical paper: How do care leavers reflect on their relationship as a supportive factor in the process of leaving care?

Background

A high majority of foster children leave the state care system to experience many difficulties across multiple aspects of their lives, including physical and mental health, education and employment, and such potential actions as offending behaviour, homelessness and substance misuse (Akister et al., 2010; Vostanis, 2010). However, some care leavers have managed to overcome these difficulties and have successfully transitioned to higher education, which is considered to be a reliable indicator of a person 'doing well'.

Although there is an agreement that the social support received by care leavers during their transition is important (Hiles et al., 2013), there is a lack of understanding around how more successful care leavers have used their relationship networks in order to achieve success. Considering attachment theories (Bowlby 1969; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2009) and models of social support (Cohen & Wills, 1985; House et al., 1988; Lakey & Cassady, 1990; Reis et al., 2000; Thoits, 2011), the researcher aimed to explore how this group of young people formed and used interpersonal relationships around them when leaving care and going to university.

Method

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, a qualitative research approach, was used to explore the experiences of relationships of seven care leavers at university. The young people produced visual representations of their relationships. The visual representations were used to support in depth interviews and were also analysed as standalone data.

Findings

Drawing conclusions from the three main emergent themes, the author posits that the more successful care leavers' journeys to university were relational in nature. Nine subordinated themes emerged, from which the author offers a more detailed picture of the nature and roles of relationships that helped participants in their transition to university.

Firstly, study participants (the care leavers) mentioned a metaphorical space – a 'starting block' – in which they formed consistent, persistent and stable relationships with important people in their lives. Considering attachment theory in relation to this, the 'starting block' could be seen as a combination of 'secure base' and 'safe heaven'. Within the 'starting block', the young people experienced 'relational partnerships' that helped them to reflect on their vulnerabilities and difficulties in relationships. This motivated care leavers to reflect on themselves and supported a desire to change for a better future.

Secondly, the young people described a number of social roles others had stepped into in order to support their transition to university. In this way, it was clear that the transition as a relational journey was facilitated by a number of 'relational guides'. That is, various people – such as friends, partners, professionals or family members – who took on a different role or roles.

The following types of relational guides were identified:

- *The protector: Someone to rely on.*
- *The responder: Someone who is available, and problem solve for me.*
- *The motivator: Someone to believe in me and stand up for me.*
- *The fellow traveller: Someone to take my hand.*

Thirdly, all care leavers interviewed thought that they were making a successful transition from the care system to higher education. In the view of the young people, and in their own words, the psychological factors that aided a successful transition to university were:

- *Being able to remember and think about a person that inspires me.*
- *Feeling confident that I can form and access new relationships for emotional and practical support.*
- *I can feel and think about what maters the most for me and do what it takes to get there.*

Conclusions

The young people were able to overcome unfavourable predictions and beat the odds. Some of them moved more smoothly and quickly through their relational journey to university and most expressed pride and hope for a better future. The people in their lives, the roles they played, and the quality of those relationships were described as important factors for a successful transition.

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Vostanis, P. (2010). Mental health services for children in public care and other vulnerable groups: Implications for international collaboration. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, *15*(4), 555–571.

APPENDICES FOR VOLUME ONE

Appendices for Literature Review

Appendix 1. Preliminary analysis of the articles: Focus on innovative method.

Paper 1: Sibeoni, J., Costa-Drolon, E., Poulmarc'h, L., Colin, S., Valentin, M., Pradère, J., & Revah-Levy, A. (2017). Photo-elicitation with adolescents in qualitative research: An example of its use in exploring family interactions in adolescent psychiatry. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health, 11.*

Innovative method: "photo-elicitation involves the use of photographs as support during a research interview" (p. 1)

Type of relationship: family interactions.

Question 1: Does the researcher offer a clear rationale for using the innovative method?

Answer: YES

"It appears to improve the quality of the data collected by promoting active cognitive involvement and better participation in the research. The principle of photo-elicitation empowers participants, by putting them in a more active position and thereby giving them the opportunity to influence the research process more strongly. Photo-elicitation may also facilitate the construction of a bond between participants and researchers and may promote verbalization of thoughts and emotions." (p. 1)

Question 2: How was the method used? Is there enough information to replicate the procedure of using this method?

Answer: YES

Authors described the study design in detail in Table 1 (pp. 3-4)

"Adolescents were asked to take a photograph of a family meal that would subsequently be discussed in two individual interviews a week later, first with the adolescent, and then separately with one or both parents." (p. 2)

"During the interviews with the adolescents, the photo was at the centre of the verbal exchanges. The presence of the photo as the basis for the conversation made it possible to disinhibit the adolescent-researcher relationship." (p. 5)

Question 3: Is data collection and analysis in relation to the innovative method described?

Answer: YES

Detailed description of the methodological steps in article's text and summary in Table 1 (pp. 3-4)

Data = verbal accounts; (photographs not treated as data, facilitate the interviews)

Question 4: Is the unique contribution of the innovative method to the research discussed?

Answer: YES

Three points are discussed, without a great emphasis on the innovative method:

a). "taking the photo promoted the adolescents' involvement in the project and generated a positive feeling toward it." (p. 11)

b) "most adolescents are quite skilled at photography, and this gives them the opportunity to better express their point of view". (p.11)

c) "photo-elicitation was a tool that enabled us to obtain rich narratives of experiences that led to innovative results." (p.11)

The authors do not analyse in detail the unique contribution of the innovative method to the study of relationships.

Comments: Article retained for further analysis. Although, I feel the authors did not use the innovative method to its full potential for the study of relationships, there is a detailed methodological discussion on the contribution of the innovative method to qualitative research.

Appendix 2. Quality appraisal: CASP Qualitative Checklist.

Critical Appraisal Skills Programme Qualitative Checklist.	**Yes**	**No**	**Can't Tell**
1. Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?			
2. Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?			
3. Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?			
3. Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?			
5. Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?			
6. Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?			
7. Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?			
8. Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?			
9. Is there a clear statement of findings?			
10. How valuable is the research?			

More details about CAPS can be found at**:** https://casp-uk.net/casp-tools-checklists/

Appendix 3. Example of translation of 2nd order interpretations.

Method used	Second order findings – primary authors findings/interpretations				3rd Order Findings
	Engagement/Participation Overcome sensitivity	***Elicit emotions Affective knowing Sharing an experience***	***Facilitate meaning Cognitive knowing***	***Bonding / sharing/ exchange / doing together / flow / reciprocity***	***New interpretations Relationships vocabulary / perspectives***
Drawing (to draw him or herself with a doctor or nurse from the ward while they were doing something)	Drawings, in particular, allowed thoughts and feelings to be communicated which may be difficult to verbalize.	The positive emotional climate of the relationship emerged both through high and low scores […] and through some details, such as hearts, smiles, and kind words, written on the drawing. (Corsano et al, 2012)	[…] the perception of the relationship with the health staff as mediated by medical instruments.	[…] hospitalized children developed close, intimate and cohesive relationships with the health professionals who cared for them, particularly nurses, with whom there was virtually no conflict. (Corsano et al, 2012)	Interpretative steps: - what contributions the method brings: emotional expression, engagement with research; - mainly perspective on the relationship itself; some potential for self-awareness, own emotions in relationships - highly expressive, creative = **AFFORDING** method
The household portrait technique (creative participatory technique – large sheet of paper; coloured slips representing household tasks; couples sorted, rated them together then interview)	Household portrait encourages discussion and analysis of the definition of each task and who performs the task (Doucet, 2001, p. 336).	Emotional responsibility; Some women and men described the varying dimensions involved in taking emotional responsibility for children and how it changes over time (p338).	Portrait technique allowed both partners to reveal how they differed in their interpretations of what domestic responsibility entailed Ducet, 2001, p. 336).	Negotiations that underpin domestic labour (silent and overt) were partly revealed through these discussions. (Ducet, 2001, p336); Technique assisted the couple to remember, conceptualise and articulate how […] (337) Shared caregiving	- method encourage discussions and negotiations; facilitate engagement. - analysis of self in the couple through domestics' tasks; relationship at centre sharing / negotiating in couple; multiple relational perspectives. - method as an extended memory, more limited = **SCAFFOLDING** method.
Reflexive embodied empathy	Second, the example reveals how the world (more specifically, the Other) discloses itself through one's own bodily subjectivity. "It is as if the other person's intention inhabited my body" (Finlay, 2005, p. 280)	As I was listening to Kath, it seemed that what I was feeling was, in some sense, mirroring something in her. I rode with this idea. If this was the case, one way into understanding Kath's experience was to try to understand what was happening within me— (Finlay, 2005, p. 280)	to understand something in another, one needs to link it to something familiar to oneself (Finlay, 2005, p. 280)	Capture intersubjective meaning (Finlay, 2005, p. 287). Part of this reflective process involves a dancing in and out of the relational involvement when researchers choose a methodology.	- unusual research method; there is a high blend Self-Other; could facilitate exploration of Other's subjective experience, especially emotional – therapy skills led; - focus on knowing the Other though empathic resonance in researcher's / therapist body: - bring to awareness something that is experienced first in the body not in the intellect = **PRE-REFLECTIVE**

Appendices for Empirical Paper

Appendix 4. University of Birmingham Ethical Review Committee approval.

Application for Ethical Review ERN_16-1461

Samantha Waldron

Mon 03/07/2017 16:05

To:'m.larkin@aston.ac.uk' <m.larkin@aston.ac.uk>; Gary Law <G.U.Law@bham.ac.uk>;

Cc:Adrian Harasemiuc <OAH549@student.bham.ac.uk>;

Dear Dr Larkin & Dr Law

Re: "How do care leavers reflect on their relationships as a supportive factor for the process of leaving the foster care?"
Application for Ethical Review ERN_16-1461

Thank you for your application for ethical review for the above project, which was reviewed by the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Ethical Review Committee.

On behalf of the Committee, I confirm that this study now has full ethical approval. You will still require approval from the governance departments in the local authorities you will be working in **before** this project can begin.

I would like to remind you that any substantive changes to the nature of the study as described in the Application for Ethical Review, and/or any adverse events occurring during the study should be promptly bought to the Committee's attention by the Principal Investigator and may necessitate further ethical review.

Please also ensure that the relevant requirements within the University's Code of Practice for Research and the information and guidance provided on the University's ethics webpages (available at https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/accounting/Research-Support-Group/Research-Ethics/Links-and-Resources.aspx) are adhered to and referred to in any future applications for ethical review. It is now a requirement on the revised application form (https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/accounting/Research-Support-Group/Research-Ethics/Ethical-Review-Forms.aspx) to confirm that this guidance has been consulted and is understood, and that it has been taken into account when completing your application for ethical review.

Please be aware that whilst Health and Safety (H&S) issues may be considered during the ethical review process, you are still required to follow the University's guidance on H&S and to ensure that H&S risk assessments have been carried out as appropriate. For further information about this, please contact your School H&S representative or the University's H&S Unit at healthandsafety@contacts.bham.ac.uk.

Kind regards,

Miss Sam Waldron
Deputy Research Ethics Officer
Research Support Group
C Block Dome (room 132)

Appendix 5. Research governance ethical approval – Solihull Council.

FW: application for research governance approval

Barnes, Sarah (Business Transformation Directorate - Solihull MBC) <sbarnes@solihull.gov.uk>

Wed 09/08/2017 13:37

Inbox

To:Adrian Harasemiuc <OAH549@student.bham.ac.uk>;

Cc:Bishton, Darren (Childrens Services - Solihull MBC) <dbishton@solihull.gov.uk>;

Dear Adrian

Following on from my email below, I have now received responses from my colleagues and can confirm that they are happy with the proposed arrangements e.g. around recruiting research participants and protecting information.

I am, therefore, in a position to give research governance approval on the basis set out in your application.

Please link with my colleague Darren Bishton to arrange the details of how research participants will be recruited. His contact details are:
Darren Bishton
Team Manager
Children's Service and Skills
0121 788 4283
dbishton@solihull.gov.uk

I am sure that you will share a copy of the completed research report with Darren but I would also appreciate a copy. I hope that the research goes well and I look forward to seeing the results in due course.

Best wishes

Sarah

Sarah Barnes
Head of Business Intelligence and Improvement
Solihull Council
0121 704 8347
sbarnes@solihull.gov.uk

From: Barnes, Sarah (Business Transformation Directorate - Solihull MBC)
Sent: 03 August 2017 13:06
To: 'OAH549@student.bham.ac.uk'
Cc: Murphy, Paul (Business Transformation Directorate - Solihull MBC); Harrison, Adam (Resources Directorate, Solihull MBC)
Subject: RE: application for research governance

Dear Adrian

Thank you for your application for research governance. Our process for dealing with requests is:

a) **The paperwork supplied is assessed to see if it contains the information required and the application is asked**

Appendix 6. Participant information sheet.

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Title of Project: How do care leavers reflect on their relationships as a supporting factor in the process of leaving foster care?

Researchers: Adrian Harasemiuc and Michael Larkin

We would like to invite you to take part in our research study exploring care leavers experiences of their relationships during the process of leaving foster care. Taking part is entirely up to you, and before you decide whether or not you would like to take part, we would like you to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve if you did take part. Please take time to read through this information carefully. If you have any questions or require further information, then please contact us on the contact details overleaf.

What is the purpose of this research?

The study is being conducted by Adrian Harasemiuc, a Trainee Clinical Psychologist, as part of his doctoral training at the University of Birmingham. Adrian and his research supervisor, Michael Larkin, are interested in finding out about how care leavers may use and make sense of their relationships during the process of leaving foster care.

We know that growing up in foster care can be hard and can influence people's ability to make lasting friendships, keep a job, form a family and stay out of trouble with the authorities. However, despite these difficulties some people manage to succeed and live a fulfilled life. The quality of the relationships and how the care leavers use them while they are moving from foster care to independent living may have a beneficial effect in this difficult time. Therefore, exploring how successful care leavers experienced their relationships while leaving foster care may help us understand how we can better facilitate the process of leaving care.

Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited to take part because you are a care leaver in higher or further education.

What will happen to me if I agree to take part?

If you express an interest in the study, then you will be asked to sign a permission to contact slip so that the main researcher (Adrian) will be able to get in touch to discuss the study in more detail and to answer any questions that you may have. You will then be given time to think about the study and Adrian will contact you around a week later to see whether you would like to take part or not. If you would like to take part, then a date will be arranged for the interview to take place.

During the interview, you will be asked about your experience in foster care and your transition from this, as well as about the relationships you may have had around you during these times. You will be asked to create a map (this can be in any form you like) of the network of relationships that you

had around you during your transition from care. This will then be used as a prompt to talk about a few of the key relationships that may have facilitated your transition, in more detail, such as by asking when, why and how you may have experienced these relationships and what they meant to you. You will also be asked if there are any parts of your relationships, which you felt were not so positive for your transition, and whether there is anything else that you think facilitated your process of leaving care that we have not already discussed. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions. We are interested in your experiences and what sense you made of these. It is expected that the interview process will take up to 1½ hours, though we can arrange to take a break during this if you would like to.

After the interview you will also be asked whether you would be interested in potentially being contacted at a later date to provide feedback on the findings from the study. It will be up to you whether or not you choose to take part in this part of the study.

What will happen if I do not want to carry on with the study?

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you do decide to take part then you will be given this information sheet to keep and will be asked to sign a consent form. You are still free to change your mind and withdraw your decision to take part before, during, and up until 2 weeks after the interview. You do not need to give a reason for withdrawing, and any information, which you may have provided us with, will be securely destroyed.

What are the possible disadvantages/risks to taking part in the study?

Sometimes people can find it difficult to talk about certain experiences. Although the interview will focus on positive experiences, you may find it upsetting, or you may experience a change in your mood, when talking about some of your experiences in foster care and relationships. However, you do not have to talk about anything that you do not want to.

If the researcher notices that you may be finding it difficult to talk about something, or are becoming upset, they will respond sensitively and check whether you are ok to continue talking about this. They may also suggest taking a break or stopping the interview. The researcher will also ask your permission to telephone you the following day after the interview to check upon your wellbeing. They will be unable to offer direct support, but will be able to discuss particular services and sources of information, which you may find it helpful to access if you feel that your mood has been affected.

What are the possible advantages/benefits to taking part in the study?

There are no direct benefits to taking part in the study. However, we hope that you will find it an interesting and useful experience to talk about your positive experiences when leaving the foster care, and your relationships during this time. Also, we hope that taking part in this research will help us to understand how other care leavers could be helped to access higher/further education by understanding the role and impact of relationships on the transition from care to higher education.

What will happen to my information?

Your name and any contact information that you provide during your involvement with this study will be stored securely and will only be accessed by the main researcher. If however you reported that you or someone else was at risk, then the researcher would need to pass on this information to

relevant services to help to keep you/others safe; the researcher will always aim to discuss this with you before doing so.

The information provided during the interview will be typed up in an anonymised form by the main researcher. The anonymised typed interview will then be explored to develop an understanding of your experiences by looking for connections and themes within what you spoke about. The findings from all of the participants who were interviewed will be explored together to identify any similarities and connections in what was found. The researcher will then produce a report with the key findings and will use anonymised quotations from the interviews to illustrate these. Your relationship map will also be looked at by the researcher to examine what it tells us about the relationships that people had during their transition from care and what function they may have played in this process. You or others you mention will not be identifiable from any of the information used in the report.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The research study and results will be written up by the main researcher, Adrian, for his thesis as part of his Clinical Psychology Doctorate with the University of Birmingham; a copy will be held at the university library. The research may also be written up for publication in a scientific journal and summaries may be shared with relevant organisations. You will not be identified in any report or publication.

Expenses and payments

The interview will be arranged at a mutually convenient time and location. However, if you feel that you have incurred a particular expense to attend the interview, please speak to the researcher about this. At the end of the interview, each participant will receive vouchers in value of £20.

What happens if I have any further concerns?

If you express an interest in participating, then the main researcher will be in touch with you to discuss the study in more detail and to answer any questions that you may have. However, if you would like to discuss any aspect of this research please contact:

Adrian Harasemiuc (Trainee Clinical Psychologist)
School of Psychology
University of Birmingham
Edgbaston
Birmingham
B15 2TT
E-Mail: oah549@student.bham.ac.uk

Appendix 7. 'Permission to be contacted' slip.

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

PERMISSION TO CONTACT SLIP

Research site: .....
Participant Identification Number: …….

Title of Project: How do care leavers reflect on their relationships as a supporting factor in the process of leaving foster care
Researchers: *Adrian Harasemiuc, Michael Larkin*

	Please initial box
1. I give permission for the key worker to provide the main researcher, Adrian Harasemiuc, with my telephone number so that Adrian can contact me to discuss my possible involvement in the research project.	☐

.....	.....	.....
Name of participant	Date	Signature

.....	.....	.....
Name of researcher	Date	Signature

Appendix 8. Study consent form.

CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Research site: .....
Participant Identification Number:.....

Title of Project: How do care leavers reflect on their relationships as a supporting factor in the process of leaving foster care?
Researchers: Adrian Harasemiuc and Michael Larkin

	Please initial box:
1. I confirm that I have understood the information sheet dated February 2017 (version 2) for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time during the research interview, without giving any reason.	☐
3. I understand that the research interview will be audio-recorded.	☐
4. I understand that following the research interview I will have a two-week period for reflection. Up until this time I may contact the researcher to withdraw my interview entirely or in part, without giving any reason.	☐
5. I understand that the data collected during this study will be looked at by the researcher and relevant others at the University of Birmingham to ensure that the analysis is a fair and reasonable representation of the data. Parts of the data may also be made available to relevant services but only if any previously undisclosed issues of risk to mine or other's safety should be disclosed.	☐
6. I understand that direct quotes from my interview may be published in any write-up of the data, and used for training purposes, but that my name will not be attributed to any such quotes and that I will not be identifiable by my comments.	☐
7. I understand that parts of my relationship map may be published in any write-up of the data, and used for training purposes, but that my name or that of others will not be attributed to this and that I and others will not be identifiable from this.	☐
8. I agree to take part in the above study.	☐

.....	.....	.....
Name of participant	Date	Signature
.....	.....	.....
Name of researcher	Date	Signature

Appendix 9. Semi-structured interview schedule.

The interview schedule below is just a guide. Although, I will follow the main topics of the schedule, it is very unlikely that I will ask each participant exactly the same questions. However, the interviews will not cover areas that are not outlined below.

Setting the stage / Context

We are meeting today to talk about the people that were around you when you were preparing to go to university. We'll discuss about how those relationships were like. I'm particularly interested in how those relationships helped you.

There's lots of different coloured pens and stickers you can use to show different aspects of your relationships, and it's completely up to you how you choose to put them on to the map. You can draw pictures, or use shapes, or just write names – it's completely up to you. There's no right or wrong way to do it.

And I'm interested in what you tell me about your relationships as well as what you draw on the map, so it doesn't matter if it gets messy or if you can't capture exactly what you want to say about the relationships. As long as you can also tell me about your drawing, that will be great.

Do you want to ask me any questions about it before we start?

Visual representation

- What I'd like us to do is to make a visual representation / drawing that shows all the relationships you had / have with different people in your life. I would like to start with you looking at this blank piece of paper and think how you might use to show different areas, places, aspect of your life: home, group of friends, university, social services, family, places where you practice a hobby, previous school, anything that you feel is important for you. Ok? Have you got it in your mind? You can mark, label, write, divide the page, as you like.

Relationships

- Would you like to add a person or people who you think were the most important in your life when you were thinking about going to university? Can you add them on the paper? And where would you put yourself on the paper? (you can draw anything to represent yourself: a shape, or write your name, do a drawing of yourself, or use any objects on the table)
    - Tell me about them
    - What made you add them there and not in a different place on the paper
    - Can you tell me what made you represent yourself like that? And what does that mean to you?
    - How would you describe the relationship with them?
    - What does this relationship mean to you? How do you keep in touch? What do you do together? Missing / wanting more of /less of

Optional questions

- How did you meet?
- How do you think about X? How do you feel about X?
- What do you think they think about you? Feel?

    - Was this relationship always like that? How, when did it change? How did you feel when it changed? What helped you?
    - Would you say you have a more equal or a more unequal relationship with them? Say more.
    - What makes you approach/distance from this person?
    - If you imagine having an argument with them, how do you think it will be best solved?
    - Do they know any of other people on your map?
    - What did you take from this relationship?
    - How can you use this experience for future relationships?

- Are there any people who you see most days / often who are not on the map? Would you like to add them? Can you tell me a bit about your relationship with them?

- Are there any people who you see rarely who are not on the map? Would you like to add them? Can you tell me a bit about your relationship with them?

- Are there any people you don't know really well, but who you think are part of your everyday life? Would you like to add them? Can you tell me a bit about your relationship with them?

- Explorative topics if not covered so far

    - Who would be the person who you feel is the most supportive of you?
        - Emotionally / financially / practically
    - Is there anyone here that you feel you are supporting?
        - Emotionally / financially / practically
    - Is there anyone you feel you have a not-so-good, or difficult relationship with? Are they in your life at the moment?
    - Is there someone you think you have a really special bond with? What makes you think that relationship is a special bond?
    - Who would be the person who you feel would help you out if you needed something, or if you were in trouble, or if something unexpected or upsetting happened? What type of help might they give you?
    - Is there someone who looks after you/comforts you when you're ill or upset?
    - Who would you say best understands you? Is there anyone you think you can really be yourself in front of? Is there anyone who you feel really at home with / really comfortable with?
    - Do you have a 'partner-in-crime'?
    - Who do you have the biggest laugh or joke with?
    - Who would you say you most trust?
        - Who might you confide in? Who could you tell a secret to? Whose opinion do you trust? Who would you ask for recommendations? Who do you ask for advice?
    - Is there anyone here who you might see as a role model / who you look up to? Who do you ask for advice?
    - Who do you share good/bad news with?
    - Is there someone who you think misses you when you're not there?
    - Is there someone who makes you feel special?

Transition

- **Can we use the image to think a bit about the transition to university?**
- What can you tell me about your transition to university /FE? How did it go? How did you manage it?
    - Prompts: Would you say you are making a successful transition? What did it feel like leaving care?

- Can you point and name the people who were around you at that time? What did others do that helped? That didn't help?
- Who do you think facilitated your transition to university the most? How did they do that?

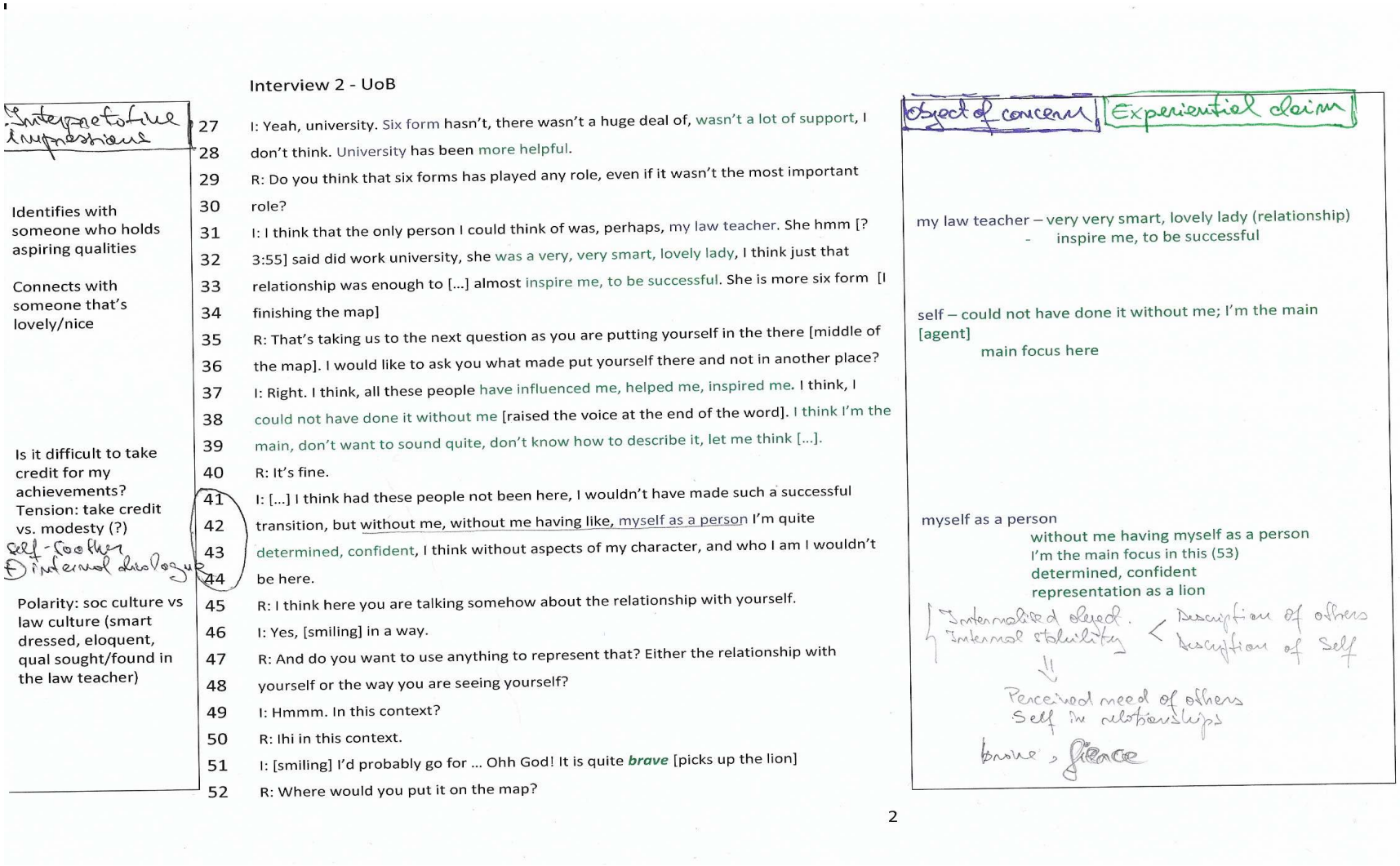
- [For the key relationships identified] Can you talk about how you feel that they facilitated your transition?
    - Prompts: When do you remember accessing these relationships? Why do you think you accessed them? How did you access them? What did your experience of this relationship mean to you?

Aerial view of the map

- Looking at the map as a whole …
    - Are these people clustered together for a reason? (if I was an alien and I didn't know what family/work/friends meant, how would you describe the differences in these relationships?)
    - Is there anyone else that we've not spoken about yet who you'd like to add?
    - Looking at your map now as a whole, do you notice anything about your map?
    - Is there anything you want to tell me about your relationships with people that we haven't already covered?

Demographics

Appendix 10. Example of the exploratory transcript coding / case level interpretation.



Interview 2 - UoB

Interpretative impressions

Identifies with someone who holds aspiring qualities

Connects with someone that's lovely/nice

Is it difficult to take credit for my achievements? Tension: take credit vs. modesty (?)

Self-soothing / internal dialogue

Polarity: soc culture vs law culture (smart dressed, eloquent, qual sought/found in the law teacher)

27 I: Yeah, university. Six form hasn't, there wasn't a huge deal of, wasn't a lot of support, I
28 don't think. University has been more helpful.
29 R: Do you think that six forms has played any role, even if it wasn't the most important
30 role?
31 I: I think that the only person I could think of was, perhaps, my law teacher. She hmm [?
32 3:55] said did work university, she was a very, very smart, lovely lady, I think just that
33 relationship was enough to [...] almost inspire me, to be successful. She is more six form [I
34 finishing the map]
35 R: That's taking us to the next question as you are putting yourself in the there [middle of
36 the map]. I would like to ask you what made put yourself there and not in another place?
37 I: Right. I think, all these people have influenced me, helped me, inspired me. I think, I
38 could not have done it without me [raised the voice at the end of the word]. I think I'm the
39 main, don't want to sound quite, don't know how to describe it, let me think [...].
40 R: It's fine.
41 I: [...] I think had these people not been here, I wouldn't have made such a successful
42 transition, but without me, without me having like, myself as a person I'm quite
43 determined, confident, I think without aspects of my character, and who I am I wouldn't
44 be here.
45 R: I think here you are talking somehow about the relationship with yourself.
46 I: Yes, [smiling] in a way.
47 R: And do you want to use anything to represent that? Either the relationship with
48 yourself or the way you are seeing yourself?
49 I: Hmmm. In this context?
50 R: Ihi in this context.
51 I: [smiling] I'd probably go for ... Ohh God! It is quite ***brave*** [picks up the lion]
52 R: Where would you put it on the map?

Object of concern | Experiential claim

my law teacher – very very smart, lovely lady (relationship)
- inspire me, to be successful

self – could not have done it without me; I'm the main [agent]
main focus here

myself as a person
without me having myself as a person
I'm the main focus in this (53)
determined, confident
representation as a lion

Internalised shred. / Internal stability < Description of others / Description of Self

Perceived need of others
Self in relationships

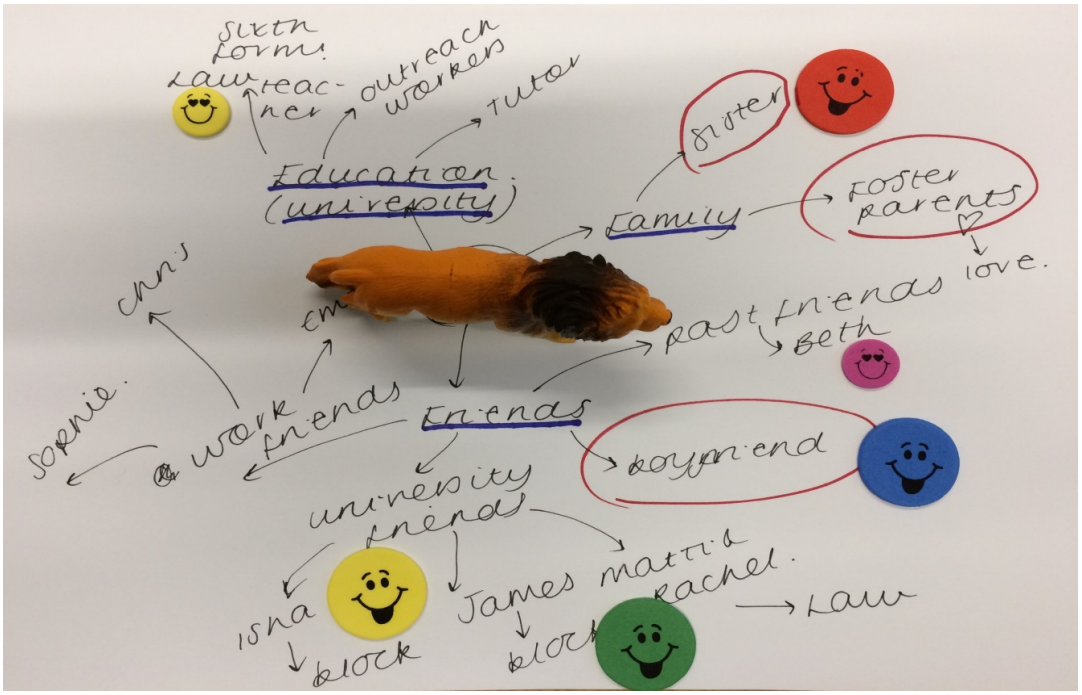
brave, fierce

2

Appendix 11. Example of a subordinate theme development.

Subtheme	Who	Meaning	Contributors / Quotes
Someone to take my hand and show me	Friend – showed me	Been there before me; told me how is it like; Emulated excitement; Vicarious experience	I1) Ana [93 – 96]: Arhhh. Anna she'd used to work at the yard she's obviously the year above, so she went to uni before me. When she came back she told me a lot of stories and then obviously I wanted to go. Ana [98 – 99]: She's made me want to go to Uni I reckon. She's having a good time.
	Sister	Beeng there before me; Telling, encouraging Vicarious experience	I2) Lucy [83-84]: So me and my sister were fostered together; very close. She is 2 years older. She also goes to university, she is doing dance, in Edgehill and she's being telling me […]
	Ex-partner	Ambition – I want it to / vicarious experience – [but not about university] Encouraging Finding someone to show	I3) Tracy [344 – 351]: He calmed me down cos he was so ambitious too, made me appreciate it. And then obviously [...] I knew I wanted to do something where it made an impact, but I didn't know what I wanted to do. Then I fell pregnant and went into my laptop. And then he, my ex said what about children if they need help, they need protection. I said in what sense? He said do you want to be a social worker? I said, no, I don't want to be a social worker. I said want to change things like in the system and help people who are taking into or taking out of care. And he was like what are you looking into? Cos his mum is a lawyer. So why aren't you looking into law?
	Sister	Took my hand; took me there	Tracy [1149 – 1153]: I was so anxious. My first day ... I went to the door, my sister was with me, no… I gotta turn around, I'm not going in.
	Sister	Been there before me; Took my hand and showed me. Succeeded	I4) Jake [641-643]: Arhh. I'd say my sister for that. Because she took me to the open days. And she'd finished Uni then. She qualified as teacher then. S she was asking the questions then, emailing people for me, telling me what was it like and yeah, checking that uni was suitable.
	Sister	Been there before me; Showed me; Succeed: Vicarious experience.	I5) Nicole [580-582]: I moved in with my sister and she told me to the open days, she showed me where about the Uni was, how to meet with my UCAS, helped me do all of this. Nicole [586-589]: I'll take her advice too hard because she's gone through it all, come out the other side with it at first degree, like really, really well, so I was like "ok I'll take your word for it then", if you say something then I'm going to do it (laughs) cos you've been through it
	Artist	From an ideal, image, not a person around Show me how to do it well; (also inspiration / model)	I6) Kai [585-587]: I feel like I want to be that person [Miyazaki]. To get to that level of animation really. Yeah. That's it really. It's part of what pushes me to work really.
	Brother	Fostering educational motivation	I7) Amara [310-314]: If I needed something or if I needed someone like my brother so pro education I'll be in the library until 3:00am in the morning and he will come out pick me up at 3:00 in the morning. They're very pro education because you must think big if I don't have my education if I don't complete it then I'll just be miserable, while be at home and they don't want that for me.
	Sister	Been there before me;	Amara [318-319]: But it's just to know that I have I have them there to develop my future in terms of developing my future […] she is a dentist and she's keen to verbalise it cause she's so pro education.

Appendix 12. Example of analysis framework applied to visual representations.



Aerial view and type of visual representation

Relational map: spider diagram; hierarchical and highly structured

Elements, topography and balance

Self in the centre linked by arrows (pointing out) to important relational areas in Lucy's life: education, family, friends. Names of people are expanded for each area. All elements are symmetric and well balanced in the centrality of the Self. The friends are better represented.

Focus (the zoom in) / Out of focus (the zoon out)

The eye is drawing to the centre where the Self is strongly represented by an animal figurine. The attention follows the important relational areas represented in the right side of the drawing and circled with red colour. Less represented is work which is placed on the right side of the page.

Self in the drawing (*Materials, texture, colours, text / verbal additions)*

Lucy started the drawing by writing in the middle of the page "Me". After she drew the family, friends and education she represented herself as a lion. She explained that the characteristic of the lion: brave and determined helped her to succeed. The lion faces significant people and dominates the page. She added: lion is the leader of the pack. Identity and sense of control?

Others in the drawing (*Materials, texture, colours, text / verbal additions)*

Others are represented by text; their names.

Type and quality of relationships

People in important, reliable and stable relationships are circled in red. The emotional quality of relationships is represented by smiley faces, where the size indicates the intensity of emotions.

General tone of the drawing

The drawing gives me a warm, positive feeling towards friends and fosters family. In the interview, Lucy also expressed emotions of warmth towards family and friends. The arrows show her sense of connection to other people. There is an exclusion of not so good relationships.

Other comments

The drawing was produced from the centre = Self and expanded to education, foster family, friends and sister. As she was drawing Lucy talked about what she was representing as if she was offering an introduction.