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How Young People and Managers Construct the School to Work Transition: A Critical Discursive Psychological Approach

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

March 2020

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Sheffield University Management School
The Institute of Work Psychology

Acknowledgements

‘It takes a village to raise a child’¹ and I would say that it similarly takes a village to support someone through a PhD. This acknowledgements section is an important way for me to recognise and give heartfelt thanks to all the villagers who have supported me throughout my time back at university (again) and got me to the finish line.

My supervision team and the IWP village:

- To Dr Angela Carter who always said I had a PhD in me, despite my uncertainties. Thank you for reminding me to celebrate the milestones along the way and believing that I could do this.
- To Dr Malcolm Patterson for bringing his legendary dry wit to our meetings, for genuinely constructive feedback and delivering positive encouragement to help me get this ‘beast’ done.
- To Professor Rachael Finn, although you came to the project later on, thank you for jumping in at the deep end and ‘humanifying’ the PhD process for me. Your patience and understanding when I was struggling or doubting whether I could get through this have helped me so much.
- To everyone in IWP who has ever asked how it’s going, given me a hug and openly acknowledged how hard this can be, as well as how enjoyable at times – thank you for being a great group of people!

My PhD colleagues:

- To everyone who I have met and chatted with throughout my PhD on this shared rollercoaster journey - thank you! I have made some great friends, united by our struggles and our need for caffeine and sympathy.

My family:

- To Lotte (aged 9), thank you for all your little post-it notes of support and encouragement during the writing of this thesis. Each time I opened a new one I felt your love and kindness and it gave me a real boost. You are such a great writer and I have so much to learn from you! Your amazing charging hugs have kept me going.
- To Oscar (aged 6), thank you for your words of wisdom while I was going to the library at the weekends to finish my thesis. You were right ‘this is going to take some time and effort’! You are so good at bringing a story to life and I hope I have learned from you in how I tell my research story. Just like Lotte, your amazing charging hugs have kept me going. I hope you get the day off school you are looking forward to for my graduation!
- To Mum and Dad (Grandma and Taid), thank you (diolch) for always being part of my team, regardless of the crazy ideas I get (like doing a PhD!). Thank you for every time you looked after the kids and made space and time for me to work on this PhD. It would not have been possible to finish this thesis without you.
- To David, thank you for everything, as always.

¹ African proverb

Abstract

Research on the school to work transition (STWT) tends to privilege either young people's voices or employers. The current project adopted a relational perspective, exploring two under-researched populations in STWT research: young people from the 'missing middle', choosing work rather than university following the end of compulsory schooling; and small business managers. A qualitative, multi-modal approach (using interviews, drawings and photographs of organisational artefacts) was adopted. Thirteen young people from a school and further education college in areas of relative disadvantage in England drew pictures of their occupational possible selves and support networks prior to the STWT. Seven small business managers drew pictures of young people entering their workplace straight from school. A critical discursive psychological approach was used to aid interpretation of participants' talk about their drawings, looking at *why* (via dominant Discourses young people and managers reproduce and resist), along with *how* (via discursive devices used for positioning) identities are shaped in the STWT. Contributions focus on the STWT as a discursively contested and relational space, with potential for the reproduction of social inequalities and unequal power relations. Findings suggest that young people reproduce and resist dominant careers, aspiration-raising and meritocratic Discourses as part of their construction of future occupational possible selves, generating richer feared-for as opposed to hoped-for selves. Support prior to the STWT appears nuanced, with individuals positioned on the 'inside' (family, teachers, friends) or 'outside' (careers advisors). Findings also suggest that small business managers discursively 'other' young people in apparently positive and negative ways, reducing them in general to a 'less than' category. Othering is further interpreted as a form of paternalistic leadership discourse, used to relate to young people in work. The study offers several practical applications to support a range of actors across the STWT, including critical discourse interventions and career counselling tools.

The following publications have been produced from this thesis:

Parry, E. M. (2020). Going straight into work from school: Young people's hoped-for occupational possible selves. *EWOP In Practice*, 12.

Parry, E. M. (In Press, due out September 2020). Who helps and who hinders? Young people's construction of 'support' prior to the school to work transition. *Educational and Child Psychology, Special Issue: Working with young people aged 16-25*, 37 (3).

A selection of conference presentations made based on this thesis/research project:

Parry, E.M. (2020). Language matters: A critical discursive psychological analysis of managers' talk about young people. Paper presented at *Division of Occupational Psychology Conference, Stratford-Upon-Avon, January 2020*.

Parry, E.M. (2019). Young people's School to Work Transitions: Applying occupational psychology to the theory of possible selves. Invited talk at *Children and Young People: Applying Psychology to Make a Difference, BPS Scotland, Perth, September 2019*.

Parry, E.M. (2019). Young people's future occupational possible selves: Using drawings to talk about school to work transitions. Paper presented at *Qualitative Methods in Psychology (QMIP) Conference, Cardiff Metropolitan University, July 2019*.

Parry, E.M. (2019). The school to work transition: Young people's possible occupational selves and managers' talk about young people coming straight from school to work. Invited talk as part of *Expert Insights Series, UK Civil Service, July 2019*.

Parry, E.M. (2019). Using drawings to explore hoped and feared-for possible occupational selves prior to making the move from school to work. Paper presented at *Young Lives in Contemporary Times: Transitions, Challenges and Opportunities, University of Stirling, April 2019*.

Parry, E.M. (2018). Occupational psychology in practice: Supporting transitions from education to employment. Paper presented at *Division of Occupational Psychology Conference, Stratford-Upon-Avon, January 2018*.

Carter, A., & Parry, E.M. (2016). Developing work identities in uncertain times. *How Does Work Shape Our Identity?* Paper co-presented at *EAWOP Small Group Meeting, Sheffield, UK*.

I, the author, confirm that the thesis is my own work. I am aware of the University's Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means (www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means). This work has not been previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Thesis Aims and Overview

This thesis explores how different actors (young people, family, teachers, friends, careers advisors and employers) discursively shape (construct and constrain) the possible work identities of young people prior to the school to work transition (STWT)². Throughout this thesis, the STWT is presented as a contested liminal time and space of unequal power between young people entering work for the first time and managers. I use a critical discursive psychological (CDP) approach to explore (via drawings and talk) how dominant Discourses³ from education, family and the media may be normalised, reproduced, resisted or adapted by participants (young people and small business managers) in the STWT.

This thesis aims to contribute to critical research on the STWT, adopting a relational perspective (as advocated by Bessant, Pickard & Watts, 2020; and Wyn, Cuervo, Crofts & Woodman, 2017), by exploring:

- the dominant Discourses young people prior to the STWT normalise, re-produce or resist in everyday talk (and drawings) about occupational possible selves (OPS) (Chalk, Meara & Day, 1994) and support networks;
- the dominant Discourses small business managers recruiting young people straight from school normalise, re-produce or resist in everyday talk (and drawings);
- how young people going straight to work from school (the ‘missing middle’ (Roberts, 2011) construct their future work identities (via OPS);
- who supports young people as they construct their OPS and how is ‘support’ constructed by this group prior to the STWT;
- how small business managers (under-represented in STWT research) construct notions of ‘young people’ in work and how this shapes the STWT; and
- how visual methods contribute to OPS research and STWT research more broadly.

² The STWT acronym used throughout this thesis includes anticipated transitions from both school (Sixth Form) and Further Education college to work or apprenticeship.

³ Discourse is described using the Big D, little d analogy (Gee, 2015) detailed later in this chapter, where macro Discourses are Big D and everyday discourse is little d.

1.2 The Continued Relevance of the STWT as a Research Topic

The labour market across Europe has become increasingly unsettled and seemingly hostile to young people, with a reticence to take young people on, low rates of pay and increased risk of job loss and periods of unemployment for young people (McKay, Jefferys, Paraksevopoulou & Keles, 2012). In turbulent economic times, even the highest qualified in society (e.g., recent graduates), face difficulties in transitions to employment and getting careers established (Koen, Klehe & Van Vianen, 2012). Youth unemployment, is one of the significant factors that has eroded any notions of a 'standard' STWT for young people across Europe (Katsarova, 2016), with well documented negative and long-term 'scarring' impacts on an individual's wellbeing and mental health (McKee-Ryan, Song, Wanberg & Kinicki, 2005; Wald and Martinez, 2003). Fear of the future and potential unemployment post-education is now a common source of stress and anxiety for many young people (Monteiro, Santos & Goncalves, 2015).

When there are limited job opportunities in the labour market, organisations typically turn to older workers to provide quick and easy access to experience and young people can face added discrimination due to the additional risk of redundancy as a result of lower severance payments, for example (Katsarova, 2016). UK employers have appeared resistant to recruiting young people directly from education, with The UK Commission for Employment and Skills (2011) stating that less than a quarter of employers in England had recruited a young person directly from school/FE college. The majority of full-time posts created in the UK since 2000 have been professional or highly-skilled, out of the reach of younger workers seeking entry-level jobs upon leaving school/FE college (Pinman, 2019). The STWT remains highly relevant in research as the worldwide economic crisis has affected young people most of all with knock-on impacts on transition experiences and outcomes, such as increased risk of unemployment and longer transitions from education to employment (Katsarova, 2016). The continued economic, political and social relevance of the STWT has meant that research on the STWT is a broad field of interest (Goodwin & O'Connor, 2009; Woodman, Shildrick & Macdonald, 2020). I believe that new conceptual insights are however possible by approaching the STWT as a critical occupational psychologist, which are outlined in the following section.

1.3 Opportunities for New Conceptual Insights into STWT Presented in this Study

The following section outlines the opportunities identified where there is potential to gain new conceptual and theoretical insights into the STWT, organised in line with my approach as a critical occupational psychologist.

1.3.1 Insights Offered by Adopting a Critical Discursive Approach

Embarking upon a discursive approach to research entails wading through the muddy waters of the seemingly endless meanings ascribed by different scholastic approaches to defining, and subsequently analysing ‘discourse’ (Parker, 1990). To clarify my usage of the term, throughout this thesis, I refer to ‘discourse’ in two ways: the discourse within us (our individual discourse we use as everyday language in use when we talk in conversations with others); and ‘Discourse’ outside of us (societal, familial and media Discourses, for example). When I am referring to the micro-detail of discourse, I use discourse (with a small d); when I talk about macro-level Discourse, I use Discourse (with a big D) (Gee, 2015).

The productive power of Discourse to instil beliefs and ideologies about what is ‘best’ (educationally, for example) is highly relevant to research on the STWT. Yet critical discursive research is lacking on the experiences of two populations that are of interest to me due to their underrepresentation in STWT research in the UK: young people from the ‘missing middle’ planning on going directly to work from school, rather than to university (Roberts, 2011; Woodman, 2013); and SME (small, medium enterprise) managers recruiting such young people. Critical psychology has a great deal to contribute to careers research, especially work transitions where issues around social justice and reproduction of inequalities abound; yet research conducted via this approach remains sparse, despite calls to expand the field (e.g., Stead and Perry (2012) in a special issue of the *Journal of Career Development*).

Language is central to constructing and reconstructing our realities (Riley & Wiggins, 2019). That is, ‘language does not only describe the world, it does *things*’ (Parker, 2005, p.90). The productive power of discourse to shape an individual’s ways of doing or being, is of fundamental interest to those taking a social constructionist approach (Burr & Dick, 2017), adopted in this research. Prior to conducting my interviews, struggling with finding the ‘right’ words myself to frame potential interview questions, I became more attuned to the impact of language in research. I consequently began to pay more attention to talk and words surrounding

the STWT for young people from the ‘missing middle’ and for SME managers. For example, what Discourses dominate the experience of SME managers regarding the ways they talk about young people coming into the workplace directly from school/college? What Discourses influence young people from the ‘missing middle’ prior to the STWT and how do they respond to these dominant Discourses (rejecting, adapting or assimilating)? How do they reproduce or resist elements within their everyday discourse around future work identities accordingly?

To understand the role macro Discourses may play in the UK STWT, governmental policies and approaches surrounding the STWT are required for context. For example, the government target set by Tony Blair that 50 per cent of young people should go to university following school (BBC News, 1999), has now been achieved, with figures showing 50.2 per cent of young people entered UK higher education in 2017/18 (Department for Education, 2018). This policy focus on university as the ‘best’ option for young people has led to the past two decades being dominated by educational Discourses aligned with this objective. The drive to encourage greater numbers of young people from disadvantaged communities in the UK to enter higher education has been accompanied by the rise of ‘aspiration-raising’ Discourse (Harrison, 2018). Aspiration-raising Discourse is a deficit discourse that assumes (and blames) young people from marginalised or disadvantaged communities as lacking aspiration (Burns, 2018). The assumption being that once aspirations are raised, so too will university entrance levels by this group (Harrison & Waller, 2018). Research critiquing aspiration-raising Discourse has shown however that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds have high aspirations, but perhaps lower expectations (educationally and professionally), based on a range of factors including expectations and experiences of those around them, structural challenges and constraints (Harrison, 2018; Harrison & Waller, 2018). The additional pressures placed on young people in education from sustained Discourses of meritocracy (everything comes down to an individual’s talent and effort) also dominating schools and colleges, has culminated in teenagers reproducing the message that they are individually responsible for the supposed success (or otherwise) of their future in work (Clycq, Ward Nouwen & Vandenbroucke, 2014). Discourses of meritocracy and aspiration-raising appear to be underpinned by a macro individualisation Discourse, where we are all DIY projects with full agency assumed i.e., my future is all down to me (Alexander, Loewenthal & Butt, 2020; Evans, 2007; Giddens, 1991; Roberts, 2009). These Discourses appear heavily focused on individual agency. Agency and structure debates abound within STWT research (Côté & Bynner, 2008; Heinz, 2009; Schoon

& Lyons-Amos, 2016, 2017). However, there is a lack of critical discursive research in the STWT arena which looks at how both agency and structure may interact via macro Discourses (Big D) and micro (little d) discourse drawn from and utilised by actors within the STWT. This project aims to contribute to this gap, bringing a critical discursive psychological approach (Budds, Locke & Burr, 2014; Locke & Yarwood, 2017; Parker, 2015) to explore the active nature of discourse impacting upon individuals in the STWT. I look at how both forms of discourse construct and constrain the STWT, and in particular exert influence over the types of occupational identities young people envisage for themselves following the STWT.

1.3.2 Insights Offered by Working with Under-represented Voices in STWT Research

Two groups of young people remain the dominant focus for the majority of STWT research: university graduates; and those excluded from the labour market, sometimes labelled derogatively as NEETs (not in employment, education or training). There is a need to ensure that despite university to work transitions now being the dominant path to work for young people in the UK, we do not overlook the experiences and needs of a group of young people in STWT research, those comprising the ‘missing middle’ (Roberts, 2011; Woodman, 2013). This group of young people, going straight to work or apprenticeships following the end of compulsory schooling are particularly interesting to critical discourse researchers such as myself. This age-group are in the middle of a number of influential dominant Discourses (from school/college, family, friends and the media). How they may appropriate and resist these as they make their future career decisions brings valuable insights to the literature on critical discourse in education and youth studies. There is a gap in STWT research into the ways young people from the ‘missing middle’ may draw upon influential Discourses as they go about making career decisions or working on their future work identities, in addition to how managers may reproduce dominant Discourses to shape the STWT.

Employers recruiting young people directly from school/college, and particularly perspectives from SMEs (small, medium enterprises), are also overlooked in STWT research, despite their dominance in the UK labour market, where 99 per cent of employers are SMEs (Rhodes, 2018). This project aims to utilise a critical discursive psychological approach to explore the power dimensions within the STWT. Making in-depth interpretations of discourse used by SME managers to talk about young people in the workplace shines a light on how everyday discourse may in turn be shaping (constructing and constraining) our notions of ‘young people’ at work,

as well as young people's future experiences of work. A critical discursive approach to managers' talk from SMEs enables illumination on how managers may go about building distance between themselves and young people entering the workplace following compulsory schooling, as well as the ways that power, resources and the status quo may be maintained via discursive practices. Language is one way in which power relations are maintained, challenged or resisted (Parker, 2005). A critical discursive approach therefore brings useful 'ways in' to contested spaces and times where power relations are fundamental, and I argue throughout this thesis that the STWT is one such space and time.

1.3.3 Insights Offered by Extending Occupational Possible Selves Theory: New Methods & Groups

To explore young people's perceptions of future work identities following the STWT, I utilise the theory of occupational possible selves (OPS) (Chalk et al, 1994), based upon possible selves theory (Markus & Nurius, 1986). This involves asking individuals to imagine, and in the majority of possible selves research, write about or answer survey questions on, their future feared-for and hoped-for OPS. I have adapted this method to include visual depiction via participant-generated drawings of future OPS and verbalisation (through semi-structured interviews) in my research. Utilising visual methods (not previously utilised with OPS and not used in possible selves research in general), is a way of generating greater amounts and richness of talk when working with young adults (Bagnoli, 2009; McGrath, Mullarkey & Reavey., 2020). Other creative methods, such as young people writing hip hop lyrics to express possible selves have had success in interventions supporting young people from disadvantaged communities to flesh out their possible selves (Turner, 2015). Including drawings as a method for exploration of OPS, highlights the complexity of *how* young people go about constructing OPS (the processes), and not just the types or range of possible selves (the products) identified by individuals responding to fixed options surveys, which tends to be the focus of much of possible selves research (Packard & Conway, 2006). This research extends OPS research to look at new groups of interest, as to date OPS has focused on female university graduates (Chalk, Meara, Day & Davis, 2005) and low-income women in rural settings (Robinson, Davis & Meara, 2003).

1.3.4 Insights Offered by Adopting a Relational Approach to the STWT

Bourdieu (1998) emphasised the importance of a relational perspective and reminds us that everything that is real in our lives is relational. The STWT is no exception to this and recent calls have been made to bring a Bourdieusian-inspired relational perspective to the forefront of youth transition research (Bessant et al., 2020). Bessant et al., (2020) argue that a relational perspective removes some of the problems inherent in viewing the STWT through the more common substantialist lens applied to transitions research. A substantialist approach focuses on ‘things’ in the STWT such as labour market entry statistics or ‘destinations data’, instead of focusing on the relational aspects of the STWT, such as viewing the phenomenon of the STWT as a process where ‘hierarchical social positions can be reproduced or challenged’ (Wyn, Cuervo, Crofts, & Woodman, 2017, p.496).

This study adopts a relational approach in a number of ways. Firstly by exploring the relational components of how young people anticipate others’ reactions towards their future occupational possible selves; secondly how relational support is constructed by young people prior to the STWT; thirdly by asking SME managers about their perceptions of young people entering work from the STWT; and finally by including both experiences of young people and managers within the same study to emphasise the STWT as a relational process.

Feelings of anxiety and worry are prevalent for young people prior to the STWT (Chesters & Cuervo, 2019) and I would suggest the knock-on impact of this is felt within families also. There is therefore a need for greater acknowledgement of integral aspects of the STWT, such as support for young people about to go through it, as a relational process. Information on how those who are actively part of young people’s support networks prior to the STWT (family, teachers, friends) support young people through this transition milestone, with its propensity to negatively impact young people’s wellbeing is lacking in STWT research. There is a greater need for research findings which show the nuances of how young people from the ‘missing middle’ in particular, prior to the STWT, construct the notion of ‘support’ (Phillips, Blustein, Jobin-Davis, & White, 2002). Greater knowledge on what is seen as support for this specific group of young people could then translate into interventions to better support this marginalised group of young people taking the non-dominant route into the workplace.

1.3.5 Insights Offered by Small-Scale Rich Qualitative Studies in the STWT Field

Methodological approaches to STWT research have been dominated by quantitative and large-scale longitudinal studies, oftentimes dehumanising and disconnecting the ‘human’ or relational experiences from the STWT as a result. Research on the STWT appears to focus either on the economic aspects of making the move from education to employment or else has a sociological focus on structural constraints and challenges (such as transitions research within youth studies). Smaller-scale qualitative discursive studies of everyday lived experiences in contrast, bring the ‘human’ (and our use of language to shape experiences) to the centre of STWT research. Whilst the STWT has important economic elements, as critical occupational psychologists, I feel we have the potential to ‘humanify’ (Cunliffe, 2018b) research into the STWT, and see it as a deserving research topic due to its moral, ethical, political and social relevance.

1.3.6 Insights Offered by Working with Visual Methods

Within my definitions of discourse, I take a multimodal approach and include the visual as discourse (McGrath et al., 2020). For studies using occupational possible selves as a theoretical construct, there has, to my knowledge, been no usage of drawings as yet, utilising surveys and interviews in the main, reflecting the methods dominating possible selves research in general (Packard & Conway, 2006). Using drawings as a way to help young people connect with their future occupational possible selves brings a novel offering in this study. Creative methods, such as drawing, combine well with a critical discursive psychological approach and enable for deeper and richer discourse to be produced (and subsequently interpreted) through the research (Wiggins, 2017; Wiggins & Potter, 2008). In addition, drawings offer insights to participants themselves, being a useful reflection activity to think about and subsequently visualise and verbalise their experiences, hopes and fears (about their future in work in the case of young participants; or about their experiences working alongside young people for SME managers).

1.3.7 Insights into Power and Identity Prior and Post STWT

This thesis argues that the STWT is a contested discursive space and time, made up of the positive expectations and associated discourse (with an undercurrent of anxiety) of young people about to transition into work (Arnett, 2007), contrasted with negative expectations and discourse from SMEs who consequently appear to need persuading of the ‘business case’ in employing young people directly from school/FE college (e.g., CIPD, 2015). Power and

identity are key concepts in contested spaces (Tomaskovic-Devey & Avent-Holt, 2019) and are therefore key issues running throughout this thesis. SME managers are the gatekeepers and shapers of young people’s work identities as they embark on the STWT (Kyndt, Klehe, Trigwell & Lindbmo-Ylanne, 2017) and a critical discursive approach enables illumination of how this may be undertaken by managers. For example, some of the questions asked and explored within the findings chapters of this thesis are who holds the power in the STWT and in young people’s support networks, and how does power (and resistance to power) manifest itself through macro Discourse (big D) and everyday discourse (little d)?

1.4 Research Questions

The following research questions frame the specific areas of exploration within this project, focused on two groups of participants with active roles to play in a contested STWT space: young people from the ‘missing middle’; and SME managers. Table 1 shows the target group, research question/s aligned to the target group and a brief overview of methods to explore each research question (described in greater depth in [chapter four: methodology](#)).

Target Group	Research Question	Methods
Young People from the ‘Missing Middle’	Research question 1a: <i>How do young people construct their future hoped-for and feared-for occupational possible selves prior to the STWT?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Semi-structured interviews. • Participant-generated drawings of hoped-for occupational possible self and feared-for occupational self
Young People from the ‘Missing Middle’	Research question 1b: <i>How do young people construct the notion of support prior to the STWT?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Semi-structured interviews. • Participant-generated drawings of support network (who supports them prior to the STWT)

SME managers (with experience of recruiting and working with young people directly from school/FE college)	Research question 2: <i>How do SME managers construct young people making the STWT?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Semi-structured interviews. • Participant-generated drawings of a young person who has come to work for them directly from school/FE college • Photographs of organisational artefacts deemed as resonant to the topic of young people at work by the researcher
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Table 1. Summary of Research Questions by Target Group and Methods for Exploration

1.5 Positioning Myself within this Research

I am a critical occupational psychologist and have worked for many years in a UK-based SME on European social and community-based projects with young people supporting them into the workplace (either from school or university), or to start up a business. Many of the projects I have been closely involved with have had strong social justice and inequalities focus. I have enjoyed working alongside young people as a career counselling practitioner on several career development projects and have witnessed the uncertainty surrounding career transitions as well as the benefits from being part of a support network at these times. Working in an SME context for the majority of my career perhaps also means that I am drawn towards research exploring this perspective.

My supervisor for becoming a chartered occupational psychologist (a professional practice qualification), informed me about a funded doctoral project at the University to look at young people and organisations in the STWT. Taking up this project, I embarked on a non-normative transition myself (returning to university in my 40s to undertake a PhD). This has provided an additional element to my personal interest in the topic of transitions throughout this project. Despite my transition running opposite to the current research study (from employment back into education), I have found parallels to those featured in STWT research in terms of adapting and adjusting to role and status changes.

Finding the confidence to own one's voice as a doctoral researcher is complex and involves navigating (sometimes unspoken and often unclear) disciplinary norms and expectations of

how a thesis in the social sciences *should* sound (Weatherall, 2019). Fine (1992) highlights different types of positions available to researchers when writing about a project. I adopt a stance partway between researcher as ‘voice’ (creating a place for voices of unheard participants) and ‘activist’ (looking to reveal and challenge ideology through the research). Whilst at times during the research process I may have had to step into the role of researcher as ‘ventriloquist’ (a researcher with no apparent underlying political agenda/ideology), this has not been my intention in writing this thesis.

1.6 Becoming Critical

When I started this doctoral research journey four years ago, I would not have defined myself as a critical psychologist, but this is how I increasingly define myself now, and more specifically, as a critical occupational psychologist. Whether this is the result of learning more as a researcher about how and why we engage with research topics or whether more specifically, adopting a discursive approach for the current project (this is the first time I have ventured into discourse research), has resulted in greater criticality in my approach in general towards work and organisational psychology, I am unsure. Becoming more critically reflective is predominantly seen as a positive and necessary part of qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Brookfield (1994) however talks of critical reflection as a ‘contradictory reality, at once troubling and enticing’ (p.204). I relate to this statement regarding the double-edged sword of criticality, particularly as someone coming to professional criticality later on in my career. Brookfield (1994) developed five aspects individuals may grapple with as they become more critically reflective: 1) imposter syndrome (questioning your right/skills to take part or define yourself as a critical thinker); 2) trying to ‘run before you can walk’ (struggling with new ways of thinking); 3) seeking out new communities (the need for a support group for those engaged in the critical process); 4) cultural suicide (criticality may isolate you from colleagues/cultures you have previously felt part of); and 5) ‘lost innocence’ (moving from what appeared certain to uncertainty). As my criticality has deepened throughout this project (particularly as I have moved through deeper levels of methodological engagement and reflexivity), I have experienced, and will no doubt continue to experience, as I transition back into the workplace again, all five aspects.

The paralysis and disruption which can come with increased criticality was acknowledged by Foucault, about his own work which encourages readers to question everything: ‘so that the

acts, gestures, discourses that up until then had seemed to go without saying become problematic, difficult, dangerous' (Miller, 1993, p.235). Critical issues such as power and inequality in institutions (workplaces and/or educational institutions) are foreground throughout this thesis, along with questioning normative assumptions and dominant Discourses in order to explore the social and moral issues playing out for young people and SME managers in the STWT. In particular, one aspect of power that I have begun to reflect more upon as my criticality develops and which runs throughout this thesis, is that of invisible power. This is where dominant norms, Discourses and behaviours are internalised and accepted by the actors involved, leading to perpetuation of a socially unjust status quo (Oosterom & Scott-Villiers, 2016). Throughout this thesis as part of a critical approach, I situate my interpretations within our neoliberal context and associated policies (and Discourses) pervasive across research, educational and business establishments in the UK today (Bal & Doci, 2018). For example, one of the dominant Discourses which shapes the way we talk about work or careers, flows frequently throughout this thesis: the individualisation Discourse. This Discourse with its focus on individual agency, encourages individuals to view themselves as essentially DIY projects, with the subsequent internalisation of beliefs that everything in life must be self-managed (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002).

1.7 Thesis Structure and Signposting

The thesis is organised into 11 chapters, comprising an introduction, context and conceptual framework, findings and finally discussion and final thoughts/reflections. The following section provides a useful roadmap, introducing each chapter and its purpose in contributing to the overall research narrative presented in this thesis.

Chapter 2: The STWT in Context; provides the background context to the STWT as well as firmly situating my approach towards the topic as a critical occupational psychologist, focusing in on the ways that STWT represent sites of power, marginalisation and social inequality (Stead & Perry, 2012). The chapter aims to illustrate where my research is located within the field of STWT research, along with outlining the expected contributions of my research.

Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework; introduces the various theoretical constructs/ or 'sensitising lenses' (Liu, 2004) which I employ. The chapter introduces the reader to concepts or 'sensitising lenses' referred to throughout this thesis: Occupational possible selves - OPS

(Chalk et al., 2005; Markus & Nurius, 1986); othering (Jensen, 2011); and paternalistic leadership (Pellegrini & Scandura, 2008).

I review the underpinning theory of possible selves, critically reviewing another adaptation of the theory, future work selves (Strauss, 2010) and introducing the reader to the application used throughout this thesis, OPS (Chalk et al., 1994, 2005). I will also introduce the reader to the concept of 'othering', introducing key literature on paternalistic leadership (Pellegrini & Scandura, 2008) as a form of discursive othering and used as an interpretive lens on drawings and conversations with SME managers about young people starting work directly from school.

Chapter 4: Methodology; introduces the reader to my philosophical stance, along with other influences that have moulded my approach. The chapter considers issues pertaining to quality within qualitative research in general and also reflects on these more specifically in relation to my research. The chapter includes a brief overview of the participants (young people prior to the STWT; SME managers working with young people from the STWT). It also briefly introduces the notion of 'place' within this study, as a concept of relevance to young people prior to the STWT. The chapter ends with a more detailed look at discursive approaches in psychological research, providing the reader with a detailed description of the methods used (semi-structured interviews and drawings) and critical discursive psychological analysis.

Chapter 5: Participants' Reactions to Visual Methods; presents an un-anticipated set of findings relating to participants' reactions to producing drawings in the research interview. This chapter aims to illustrate how the methods we choose impact on our participants, ourselves, and the research as a whole, along with illustrating how visual methods are tools which potentially disrupt power relations (such as those within traditional research encounters) themselves. The chapter also reinforces a key argument made throughout this thesis, that drawings are both processes and products within a research project (McGrath et al., 2020).

Chapter 6: Young People's Occupational Possible Selves (OPS); presents the findings of how young people construct their hoped-for and feared for OPS prior to the STWT. The chapter includes how they talk about their own interpretations of the drawings produced, along with talk about expected reactions to the drawings from family, teachers and friends.

Chapter 7: Young People’s Construction of Support; presents the findings from young people’s talk and drawings of their support networks prior to the STWT. This includes interpretation of how young people position others (family members, teachers, friends and careers advisors) and leverage support as a form of proxy-agency (Bandura, 2002).

Chapter 8: Managers ‘Othering’ Young People in the STWT; presents the findings of how SME managers discursively ‘other’ young people (positively and negatively), in the ways that they talk about young people who they have recruited and worked alongside directly from school/FE college in the past.

Chapter 9: SME Managers’ Talk Viewed Through a Lens of Paternalistic Leadership; is the final chapter of findings within the thesis, presenting interpretations of managers talking about young people in the STWT as examples of paternalistic leadership discourse (PLD). This chapter also interprets artefacts (via photographs) from one participant organisation, and how these further contribute additional interpretive layers to paternalistic leadership discourse.

Chapter 10: Discussion; brings together the key arguments developed throughout the findings chapters. This chapter revisits the central research questions and maps key findings against these, highlighting research insights and contributions. The chapter also presents limitations of the current study, potential future avenues of research and practical applications.

Chapter 11: Final Thoughts; provides final reflections on my approach to end the research journey on.

1.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter has outlined my positionality within this research project and what brought me to consider this (both personally and professionally) as a ‘worthy topic’ (Tracy, 2010). Potential research insights from the approaches taken across this research project have been introduced. This chapter introduces the terminology used throughout the thesis pertaining to ‘discourse’, using the big D Discourse (macro Discourses) and little d discourse (micro-discourses) categorisation (Gee, 2015). A useful roadmap, outlining the narrative of each of the chapters, demonstrates the story arc of this thesis. The next chapter, starts the research narrative in

earnest, providing essential background context and relevant literature to show where my research project fits within the context of STWT research in greater detail.

2. The STWT in Context

2.1 Chapter Introduction

The previous chapter introduced the overall aims and insights offered by the research project, my positionality and beginning considerations of the STWT as a worthy topic for critical occupational psychology research. This chapter introduces the reader to the field of STWT research, situates my approach towards the topic, focusing in on the ways that STWT have the potential to be contested sites of power, marginalisation and social inequality (Stead & Perry, 2012).

This chapter provides contextual background to the topic of the STWT, introducing semantic debates, models and theories of transition in general. The chapter begins, where much research in the social sciences does, with definitional debates. The first section follows Kyndt et al., (2017) description of four key elements to the STWT, claiming they are temporal, transformational, psychological, and adaptive. I cluster the literature under four synonymous headings of my own creation within the first section (transitions and temporality; as inter-related processes of change; as psychological or social processes; and as processes of adaptation). The chapter moves on to outline transitions as liminal states (where power lies out of reach of young people) and explores tensions and debates around the role and functions of agency and structure as they play out in research focused on the STWT.

The second section presents the case for this project's focus on two specific populations within the STWT: 1) young people who are not planning on going to Higher Education and not excluded from the labour market: the 'missing middle' (Roberts, 2011); and 2) SME employers recruiting young people directly from school or FE college. The chapter finishes with a focus on broadening methodological approaches to STWT research, in line with a critical perspective, exploring the usage of visual methods and discursive approaches in STWT research to date and relating these to drawings and critical discursive psychology (CDP), adopted for the current piece of research.

2.2 Semantic Definitions and Debates within the STWT

'To choose a definition is to plead a cause' (Stevenson, 1944, p.210). Definitional disputes are the norm in academia, where they are used both to signify our research scope as well as to show

our ontological preferences (how we are choosing to construct ‘reality’ and knowledge relating to our research) (Schiappa, 1993). This chapter begins by laying out the dominant definitional debates in the STWT research, clarifying the stance I adopt (and those rejected) in my approach to the current research project via definitions adopted.

Transitions to adulthood are no longer standardised – there is no clear path or ‘right way’ for young people to move from youth into adulthood (Schulenberg & Schoon, 2012). Recognising this diversity of youth experiences has led to calls to disregard any notion of linearity in youth transition research, particularly STWT, and to acknowledge the heterogeneity or ‘diverse pathways’ instead (Schoon & Lyons-Amos, 2016). The word (and category) ‘youth’ itself is deemed problematic, used as a way of talking about an ambiguous period between childhood and adulthood. On top of this, ‘adulthood’ itself is increasingly viewed as an ever-changing, socially constructed end-point with shifting definitions and experiences (Woodman & Wyn, 2015). Normative ‘markers’ of ‘becoming’ an adult, such as gaining full-time employment, being in a stable relationship (traditionally defined as marriage) and owning your own home, may have been ‘normal’ aspirations for previous generations but appear increasingly incongruent with today’s reality for young people (Threadgold, 2019).

In transition research, calls to adopt non-linear terminology and metaphors such as ‘trajectories’ and ‘pathways’ (e.g., Shanahan, 2000), and even ‘pinball youth’ (Cuzzocrea, 2020), have been made to describe the diverse STWT that young people make. However, even within these terms, there are journey-based meanings, albeit with different amounts of speed, force or purpose to the journey. Trajectory, for example, is criticised for its structuralist connotations, lacking in any sense of agency for individuals within the STWT (Furlong, 2009). Whilst ‘pinball youth’ attempts to show that transitions for young people are individualised, fast and contain obstacles and opportunities, the ‘game’ element jars with my approach. I agree with Bradley and Devadason (2008) and Schoon (2015), that the term ‘pathways’ denotes a more organic and meandering journey, with terms such as ‘trajectories’ drawing us back to the illusion of a linear process along with a notion of impetus. As a result of the changing length, complexity and multiplicity of transitions that young people experience, some researchers (e.g., Fergusson, Pye, Esland, McLaughlin, & Muncie, 2000; Wyn, Lantz & Harris, 2012) have called for abandoning the term ‘transition’, stating that it brings with it outmoded illusions of a smooth and linear process. I disagree with this, seeing it as a case of ‘throwing the baby out with the bath water’. ‘Transition’ is still a useful term and malleable enough to include diverse experiences and

remains a key concept in youth studies to explore social changes, for example (Macdonald & Shildrick, 2018) I use the acronym STWT (school to work transitions) and use the term 'transition' throughout this thesis to situate my work in a recognised body of research. For me, the term transition conjures up notions of change, movement and adaptation which I feel echo the interests of my research exploring how participants talk about the STWT. Exploring these notions further, this section now moves on to present the following:

- how time has tended to be approached within STWT research (looking back);
- how transitions are inter-related transformations and role shifts;
- how the STWT is framed as a psychological or social process;
- notions of the STWT as an adaptive process.

2.3 Transitions and Temporality

Time is a central aspect of talk within research literature about transitions: whether they are fast or slow, delayed, lengthening, pre - or post, for example. STWT research has tended to focus on individuals' experiences and feelings *after* they have completed the transition (Heinz, 2009), with the preparation phase, prior to making the transition largely ignored (Jung et al., 2004). For models representing transitions via a lifecycle metaphor (again where time is a central concept) such as Williams' Model of Career Change and Transition Lifecycle (1999), a transition only begins once the life event or new status/role (such as starting your first job), has occurred. The current research aims to contribute to the research on the notion of time within the STWT. This project looks at who is helping young people *now*, as well as talking to young people about *future* work-related hopes and fears. Temporality also features through asking SME managers to *reflect back* on the past to their experiences recruiting young people directly from school or Further Education (vocational) college.

Pre-transitional experiences (how individuals feel and make sense of their experiences prior to an expected transition) have been explored in educational transitions research with young children. These have included studies looking at children moving from junior to secondary education, and the impact of pre-existing friendships on children's adaptability post-transition, for example (Aikins, Bierman & Parker, 2005). Pre-transitional emotions, including worries and hopes have also been researched with young children with special educational needs and their parents before moving from primary to junior school (Scanlon, Barnes-Holmes, McEntegart, Desmond & Vahey, 2016). Pre-transitional experiences of young people near

the end of compulsory education, seeking to move directly from compulsory education to employment (rather than continuing education), remains under-researched qualitatively (Brzinsky-Fay, 2014) and is one of the key areas this thesis seeks to contribute, focusing on young people and those who support them, prior to making the transition.

Since the beginning of the 2000s, young people lengthening or delaying the STWT has also caught attention of those looking at temporal aspects of youth transitions (Côté & Bynner, 2008; Lesnard, Cousteaux, Chanvriil & Le Hay, 2016; Ryan, 2003). The issue of speed or pace of an individual's STWT is wrapped up in the reproduction of inequalities. For example, young people with the familial resources to do so are lengthening transitions, resulting in a divergence of life chances or opportunities (McLanahan et al., 2004). As a result, those making relatively quick transitions, perhaps out of economic circumstances, such as not being able to afford to go to university, may be at a potential disadvantage in future occupational possibilities and life chances. This thesis seeks to contribute to research focused on those young people seeking a quicker STWT to explore their perceptions and expectations linked with decisions not to lengthen their transition to work by going to university first.

There are various age-related expectations with 'expected' timing and chronological order for major life transitions (e.g., getting your first job or becoming a parent), dictated or guided (depending on your viewpoint of the power and constraining forces of socio-cultural expectations), by 'normative timetables' (Elder, 1978) or 'scripts of life' (Buchmann, 1989). While there is certainly greater fluidity in the 21st Century regarding timing for achieving different roles, individuals who break from expected norms may still find themselves the subject of derision or shaming e.g., teenage mothers in education (Thompson, 2018). Context is crucial to deepen any understanding of an individual's specific experiences. The context of life course transitions are rooted in specific socio-cultural contexts, (the social and cultural contexts individuals operate in) including socio-economic factors, class, gender, race, and nationality. Transitions, as a result, differ in their timing, duration, content and meaning, both to the individual and to society (Elder, Shanahan, & Jennings, 2015). Research suggests that young people facing additional disadvantages to entering the labour market (over and above being young in itself); such as having a disability, being black or from a minority ethnic group, being a woman; have a more challenging time during the STWT (Blustein, Juntunen, & Worthington, 2000). Unfortunately this seems highly resistant to change and has been a

repeated pattern seen since youth transitions work in the 1980s first began talking about class, gender and race as key influences on an individual's STWT (Bates & Riseborough, 1993). For example, Blustein et al., (2002) found that social class played an integral role in the STWT, with individuals from a higher socio-economic class engaging in more career exploration activities, than those in a lower socio-economic cohort, resulting from unequal access to resources (family, educational and economic) to support such activities. As young people in the current study were from predominantly working class family backgrounds, access to resources will be explored as part of RQ1b around young people's support networks.

2.4 Transitions as Inter-Related Processes of Change

There has been a tendency in youth transitions research to conflate the STWT with transitions from youth to adulthood in general. Whilst this is problematic, the transition to work remains a useful starting point to engage policy makers (and draw down funding or resources) with the additional (societal) problems young people may face as they move to adulthood (Bynner, 2001). 'Transition' (within the context of youth transitions) is an umbrella term made up of a series of inter-related processes of change. Coles (1995) work on social policy and youth instigated a broader policy focus, away from a purely economic one (focused on ensuring that young people become economically active) which had been the dominant policy approach beforehand, by illustrating three inter-related types of transition (see Figure 1). The need to integrate social policies on housing and domestic issues at the same time as policies on the STWT reminds us of their inherent interdependence.

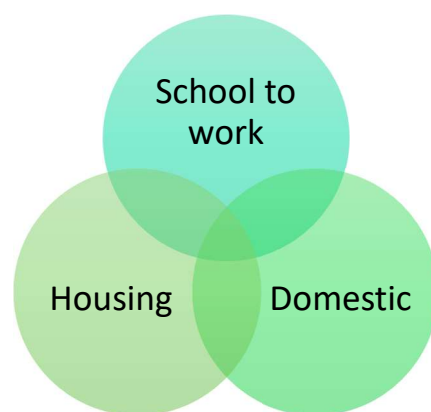


Figure 1. Inter-Related Types of Transition (Coles, 1995)

Coles described the STWT as moving from full-time education to full-time work. In the 21st century this needs revising to include temporary, fixed-term and other insecure contracts such

as zero hours. Insecure contracts have gained greater traction in the UK employment market in the last five years. For example, six percent of all employment contracts in the UK are now zero hours (no minimum number of hours offered), with 36 percent of people on these contracts aged between 16 and 24 years (Office for National Statistics, 2018).

Since Coles' model was developed, it is acknowledged that young people's transitions are often 'reversible, fragmented and uncertain' (Molgat, 2007, p.296). These concepts are wrapped up in the phenomena described as 'yo-yo' transitions (Molgat, 2007), seen as a consequence of insecure and precarious labour markets. 'Yo-yo transitions' (EGRIS, 2001; Molgat, 2007) describe young people alternating between states associated with youth or adulthood. Yo-yo transitions can result from several causes, with varying outcomes. The term 'yo-yo' however has a trivialising effect on what is a complex and often structurally imposed process on young people. This judgemental and deficit derogatory language, where young people are blamed for a perceived lack of stability or tenacity, echoes the dominant media Discourse on 'millennials' as entitled and lazy (e.g., Jacobs, 2013). A lack of empirical evidence has been found to support these supposed generational differences at work (Costanza & Finkelstein, 2015). Negative assertions around millennials appear to have taken hold in the popular press in the US and UK (e.g., Evershed, 2016; Jacobs, 2013; Sinek, 2016) presenting a dominant Discourse around young people in the workplace that managers recruiting young people may well be drawing upon and influenced by. Indeed findings presented in chapter 8, suggest this has been normalised and reproduced by SME managers from this study. Lundahl and Olofsson (2014) found a language of blame in the politicians and local government actors they interviewed in Sweden, who attributed problematic transitions (e.g., early school leaving) on young people lacking motivation or having unrealistic expectations, whereas the narratives from young people themselves revealed a far more complex interplay of family and educational contexts as the root cause of problems.

I would argue that the transition from school to work and work back to 'school' (encompassing multiple notions of 'school') can yo-yo at different times in individual's life-course, no longer only associated with young people. I myself could be described as undertaking lengthy yo-yo periods between full-time study and work over the last 20 years, building up resources through employment to enable a return to education as a mature student. Yet in the case of older people such as myself, this tends to be framed more positively as upskilling or re-training (rather than yo-yo-ing). Young people may move from education to work for a short time and then back to

education to upskill or retrain for the prospect of higher quality or more secure employment, or for those fortunate to be in more stable careers, for the purpose of ‘career development’. Young people may also move between employment and unemployment due to a lack of opportunity and the nature of precarious employment (Huegaerts, Puig-Barrachina & Vanroelen, 2017).

Whilst Coles' (1995) three youth to adulthood transitions (social; domestic; school to work) are still likely to be key milestones for many young people in the UK, young people are now more likely to experience simultaneous and overlapping transitions, with transition periods in different domains lengthening or being delayed, such as starting a family or living independently from family (Schoon, 2015). The employment focus of youth transitions remains a key policy focus in the UK, suggesting a lack of reconceptualisation to include overlapping types of transitions, despite social and economic changes warranting such a change. The inter-relatedness of the STWT with domestic transitions such as housing has been explored with young men from the ‘missing middle’ (Roberts, 2013).

The housing transition, when a young person moves out of the parental home, has changed due to social and economic influences such as higher house prices, stricter mortgage conditions and insecure employment for many young people leading to sharing houses and poorer living conditions for many young people (Roberts, 2013). Many policies and community-funded projects focus on getting young people into employment from disadvantaged communities (e.g., Talent Match) or to start up in business (e.g., BiG Make it Your Business) to circumvent problematic STWT. These could be seen as replicating projects such as the Youth Enterprise Allowance Scheme introduced by the UK government in the 1980s encouraging young people to ‘be their own boss’ (drawing from individualisation Discourse). Policies and programmes such as these are often directed at young working class people, making it the job of young people to rejuvenate their futures (and also their communities), with some young people not able to take on this burden and yet blamed again as being the ‘problem’, via these Discourses of deficit (MacDonald, 1993). These privilege-based Discourses need to be critiqued for their impact on young people and this thesis aims to explore the impact of macro Discourses of individualisation on young people’s constructions of their future occupational possible selves and identities, as well as looking at how employers (SME managers) draw from Discourses positioning or blaming young people as ‘the problem’ within the STWT.

2.5 Transitions Framed as Psychological or Social Processes of Change

As described in the previous section, transitions are times of complex and often overlapping changes. Accepted definitions of transitions often emphasise change, such as ‘Any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions and roles’ (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006, p.33). Transitions (as with ideas around ‘change’) are a subjective experience. One individual’s perception of a difficult transition may well be another’s time of ‘challenge’ to overcome. Although critically I would suggest that this in itself could come from internalised neoliberal Discourses, where we are told that difficulties (especially structural ones), are just challenges we as individuals need to work harder to overcome. Regardless of how individuals perceive them, transitions are suggested to be times of transformation, discovery and of ‘re-negotiating the self’ (Mercer, 2007). Again, this appears to put a positive spin on what can be a very difficult time to navigate for many young people (Domene & Arim, 2016).

Bourdieu’s idea of habitus (1977) proves useful to consider alongside identity changes and the social processes involved in making the STWT. Habitus refers predominantly to the ‘way things are done around here’ and when moving between the educational and work ‘arenas’, young people may have to adapt to potentially very different habitus. In occupational psychology, ‘theatres’ (school; workplace; home; and community) were proposed by Super’s (1980) career development model, as places where individuals play different roles as they progress through the five age-related stages (growth; exploration; establishment; maintenance; and decline). I would critique this model for overemphasising individualised notions of linear progressions, focused on chronological age-based stages, and underestimating structural challenges and constraints. However, its acknowledgement of the importance of ‘exploration’ for young people in terms of future occupational identities, remains a useful concept to draw upon in the current project.

Bridges (2004) proposed a similarly linear three stage process for moving through transitions (see Figure 2).

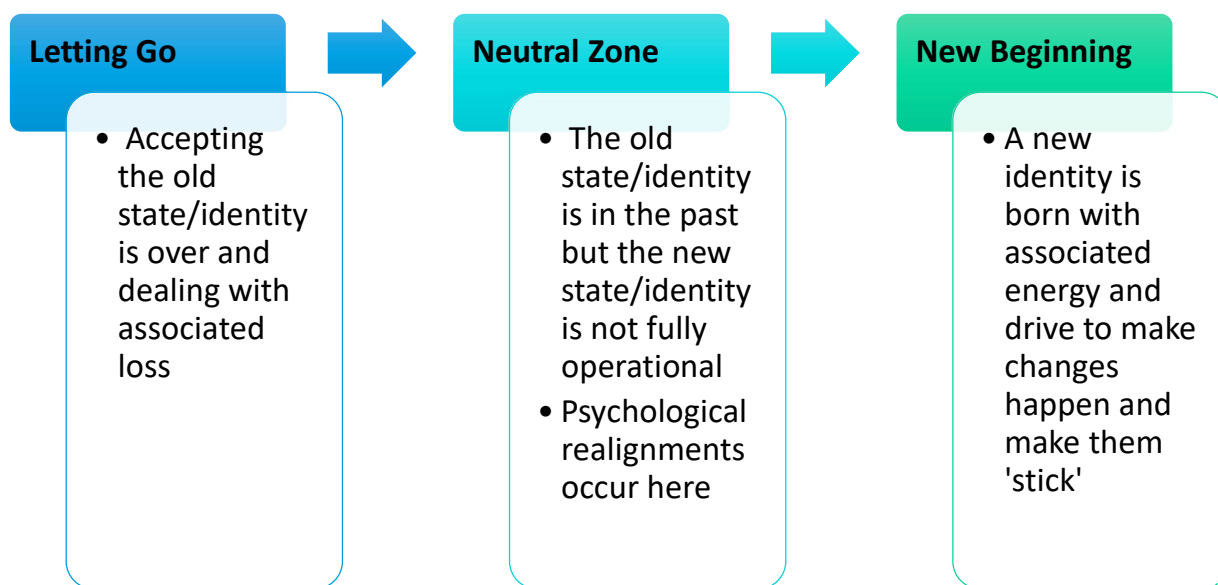


Figure 2. Bridges' Transition Process (2004)

Bridges' starting point was that every transition begins with an ending and individuals need to 'let go' before they can progress into a less emotionally-charged 'neutral zone', make realignments and create new beginnings. I would again critique the linearity and demand (or reification) of moving into 'neutrality'. Whereas in 'letting go', emotions appear tolerated, the model implies that as an individual moves through a role/status shift in a transition then any emotionality of the process must be neutralised and viewed positively by the end of the transition (the 'new beginning'). This cognitivist model appears to emphasise the individual both as responsible for, and in full control of, their inner emotional states, regardless of life circumstances or the interactions between the individual and others i.e., you just need to work hard enough at adapting to your new identity and let go of your old one. Once again reproducing dominant neoliberal or individualisation Discourse.

Bridges (2004) book on managing transitions argues that it is not the change (the outcome, such as starting work) that people struggle with, but the internal psychologically-driven processes within any transition. The choice of language in Bridge's model has become more troubling to me as my criticality has developed throughout this research project. For example, words such as 'letting go' include notions of high levels of agency, when in reality individuals

may have a role/identity taken away from them (through redundancy), rather than more romantic ideas around ‘letting go’ i.e., simply releasing yourself from things in your past seen as somehow holding you back. Also I am more sceptical now of ‘psychological alignments’ and would argue that this middle zone is where we come to terms with how others react to our new role/status (e.g., redundant, looking for a job etc.).

2.6 Transitions as Processes of Adaptation

The transition to adulthood involves multiple and varied social role shifts and associated processes of adaptation. The perceived success for young people adapting to transitions of role/status change such as the STWT has been shown to have strong links to social class and associated family resources. Schoon (2017) for example, found that levels of family resources in the UK (socio-economic resources) were strong predictors of future transition outcomes, with low resources highly correlated with becoming either unemployed or NEET (not in education, employment or training). The multiple disadvantages experienced within families with fewer resources (e.g., low levels of parental education, low income, poor housing and low status), were found to result in a vicious cycle culminating in lower levels of school attainment and risk of early school leaving for young people. The concrete advantages played out in adapting to the STWT for young people from families with greater resources are clear. For example, teenagers (age 16 years) who said they had family contacts who could help them get a job, when surveyed again aged 26 years were earning four percent more on average than those disagreeing (Mann, Kashefpakdel, & Rehill, 2017). This study suggests links between income inequality and social inequalities within the STWT, emphasising the importance of critically viewing the STWT as a site where inequalities are reproduced (Mills & Prag, 2014) and the centrality of family resources and networks to the STWT (Prince’s Trust, 2018). Family processes have been found to be at the heart of the transmission of privilege within middle class families (Allatt, 1993). Allatt’s ethnographic study of families with children at private schools for example (Allatt, 1993), found that they blended a number of different forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986). These included social, economic, cultural and crucially within familial contexts, emotional. Emotional capital includes assets and skills which are emotionally valued, such as the support, patience and commitment observed within families who treated education and the adaptation or transition to work as a ‘family project’ (Allatt, 1993). Findings suggesting the pivotal role of family for young people from the missing middle prior to the STWT in their support networks are presented in [Chapter 7](#).

Despite vast societal changes over the years, one of the key changes in role and/or status for young people, continues to be making the role shift from student to worker. Whilst in the past this transitional marker has traditionally been linked to starting full-time employment, an important caveat here is the recognition that the UK labour market offers an insecure and unstable reality for young people (Yates, 2019). It is troubling therefore that research shows that the quality of work that young people access appears critical to sustaining their place in the labour market in the early stages post STWT (Simmons, Russell & Thompson, 2014). Forms of employment available to young people are increasingly mutable – ‘temporary’ or ‘zero hours’ contracts are the reality for many, along with an awareness and acceptance about the precarious jobs they may need to accept upon leaving education (McKay et al., 2012). Young people have ‘adapted’ (or simply reacted), to this reality of a changed labour market, by ‘settling’ for a job that they do not want to be in. Young women and those from poorer family backgrounds settling in greater amounts, illustrating again the STWT as a time perpetuating inequalities such as those focused around gender and class (Hendry & Kloep, 2010). For example, surveying 1,484 young people, more women than men reported feeling that they had ‘settled for a job I don’t want’. Young people from poorer family backgrounds similarly reported greater identification with this statement than those from more affluent backgrounds (Prince’s Trust, 2018).

Discourse around young people struggling to adapt to what could be seen as a pernicious (or unadaptable) labour market has positioned young people who experience difficulties in this precarious reality, as ‘floundering’, or quickly moving from job to job (Clark, 2007). If young people are not seen to adapt emotionally (drawing from neoliberal Discourse of ‘resilience’) to precarious labour markets, then they are labelled as floundering internally, experiencing depression and anxiety during their transition to adulthood (Nelson & Padilla- Walker, 2013). Again, this brings in Discourses blaming young people for problematic transitions. For example, they are all snowflakes with lower resilience to setbacks (Roberts, 2018) and it is blamed on young people’s individual failings that one in six young people in the UK (16-24 year olds) have symptoms of a common mental disorder such as anxiety or depression (Young Minds, 2020), instead of critiquing the context of an unfair and challenging labour market. This contrasts starkly to the positive image presented by Arnett (2000) of young people ‘flourishing’ and positively adjusting during the STWT. Changes to status and roles have knock-on impacts on an individual’s wellbeing, stress and anxiety levels at any time and this would appear

heightened during transitional periods (both entry and exit), making it a time of negative emotions for many young people, particularly if their job satisfaction levels are low in their first experiences of work (Domene & Arim, 2016). Comparing organisational entries with organisational/professional exits, research carried out into athletes' transitions found, for example, that retirement prompted depression, identity crises and a wide range of other difficulties associated with substance misuse (Cosh, LeCouter, Crabb & Kettler, 2013), suggesting that difficulties adapting to major life transitions are not confined only to the young.

The previous section has presented and critiqued research and traditional psychological models of the STWT for their individualised, cognitivist and linear approaches. The next section explores concepts that underpin my interests in the STWT both as a time where the impact of social inequality is heightened and where narrative identity work is a salient feature. These include the notion of young people as entering a sort of liminal identity (an in-between state), when they are going through the STWT and how this links with constructing occupational possible selves (Chalk et al., 1994). The section ends by discussing debates on agency and structure within the STWT literature linked to the reproduction of social inequalities.

2.7 Liminality as a Core Construct within STWT

Williams (1999) talks of transitions as pivotal moments in time. Moments when individuals are on the cusp of major life experiences, bringing in the concept of 'liminality' (Rivera-Sánchez & Walton, 2013; Turner, 1987; Van Gennep, 1960). This is a relevant concept within my approach to the STWT as it denotes being in between roles or identities, and suggests that young people may begin to work on constructing future selves to move them through this uncomfortable liminal state, and may be a time when support from careers practitioners, for example, could be particularly useful.

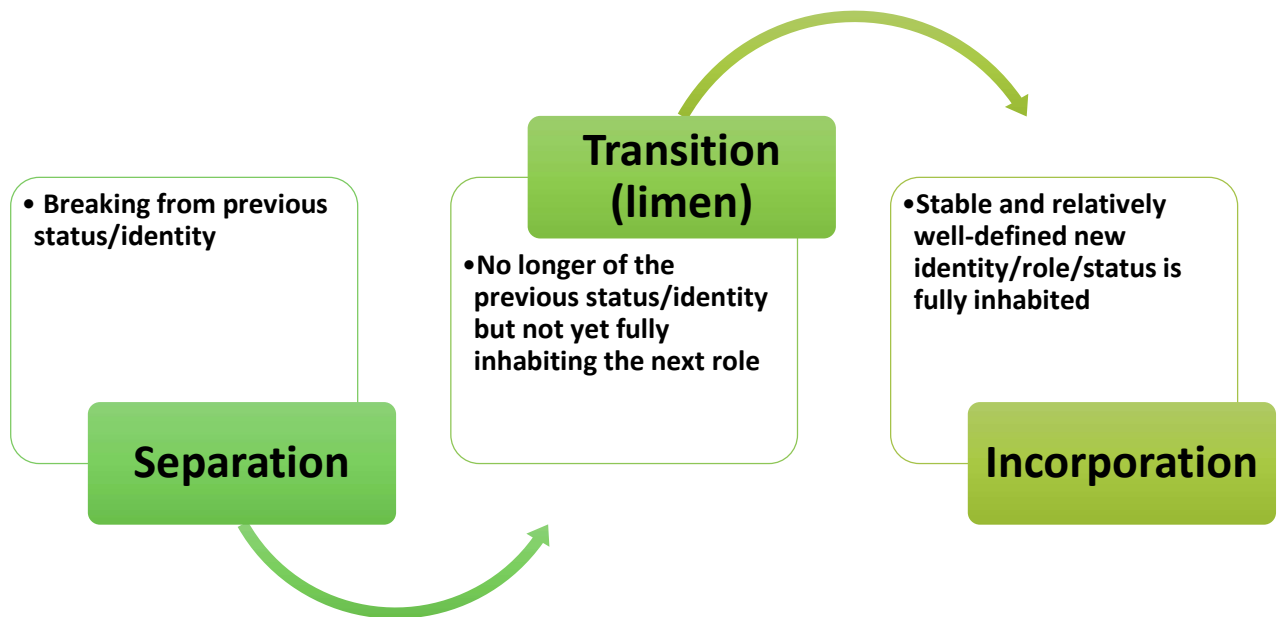


Figure 3. Three Stage Transitional Model Based on Traditional Rites of Passage (Van Gennep, 1960)

Van Gennep (1960) described three linear stages of role/status transition based on his work exploring rites of passage with indigenous Australians in the early 20th century where he observed individuals moving between different groups as passing through ‘corridors’ (limen) akin to moving between different rooms in a house, for example (Figure 3). Linear models have been widely criticised in STWT research, particularly by researchers exploring the transitions of young people entering non-traditional careers. For example, dancers studied by Ashton and Ashton (2015) did not move through a series of separate stages to enter their profession, but instead underwent lifelong preparation. However, I refer to the model here because it was the first to bring in the notion of liminality, which has continued relevance in STWT research today, in part to its links with identity work. Liminality has its origins in Latin, where ‘limen’ is translated as ‘threshold’. Liminality is where an individual is between identities, where their status and role within society is ambiguous and not easily categorised by society (Turner, 1987). Along with the sense of ambiguity and a lack of clear status/role identity, power issues arise in this liminal state of being ‘betwixt and between’, perhaps due to uncertainty necessitating reflection about past, present and future identities (Rapport, & Overing, 2000). Individuals between roles and identities may navigate more freely between directions or paths which may otherwise sit outside fixed social structures, in order to re-negotiate or re-think their identity (Rivera-Sánchez & Walton, 2013). In career terms, this may be where young people

feel more empowered to ‘try on’ a number of different work identities and where identity is ‘played’ with (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010). This mirrors the ‘exploration’ stage, one of the five stages in the career development model where young people (15 – 24 years old) are trying out skills and developing experiences (Super, 1980). The silver lining of the uncertainty that transitions bring may therefore be the opportunity to re-define ourselves through exploratory activities (Bowen, 2016) and break free with our past selves to renegotiate a new future self. However, again this necessitates posing the critical question on whether this ‘playing’ or renegotiating with new identities is truly open to all young people, or only those with greater resources and fewer structural constraints and limitations. The way that exploratory activities may link to occupational futures brings in one of the guiding theoretical approaches which I adopt in my research, possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986) and its application to work contexts, occupational possible selves (Chalk et al., 1994), outlined in detail in the next chapter.

The idea of young people going through the STWT as inhabiting an ‘in-between’ state and the blurring of boundaries between youth and adulthood is viewed positively by some researchers. The theory of emerging adulthood, (Arnett, 2000) sees the period between 18 and 25 as a time for keeping options open; discovery; and flexibility whilst individuals seek to ‘find themselves’. Arnett’s (2000) stage theory includes a new stage, ‘emerging adulthood’ in response to societal shifts in transitions, such as young adults spending longer in education. Emerging adulthood has five elements: exploring possible identities; self-focus; instability; awareness of a number of choices; and ‘being in between’ - no longer adolescent but not yet adult. Research into young adults (17-20 year olds) from poorer backgrounds in the UK, found a lack of support for this ‘in-between’ stage. The young people interviewed self-identified as full adults, perhaps lacking the luxury of extending ‘youth’ due to limited familial economic resources and needing to move more quickly towards economic independence associated with full adulthood (Hendry & Kloep, 2010). Arnett’s focus on emerging adulthood as an overwhelmingly positive time has been the subject of critique by researchers focusing on social justice in the STWT. The negative impact of uncertainty and anxiety experienced in attempting to enter a precarious labour market has been linked with reduced wellbeing in young people (Chesters & Cuervo, 2019). Focusing on levels of optimism about futures in work, Hendry and Kloep, in their study of 38 young people between 17 and 20 years old (2010), found that almost half of participants were not optimistic about their futures in work, feeling trapped by their situations due to a lack of opportunities or resources. Arnett concedes in later work (2007), that this stage for young people is not always positive, noting the presence of anxiety for many and that in the move

from youth to adulthood ‘optimism frequently co-exists with an undercurrent of trepidation’ (Arnett, 2007, p. 25). I believe that taking a critical discursive approach enables exploration of the dominant Discourses young people are reproducing or resisting as they draw and talk about hopes and fears in their work futures, adding to this body of research.

Critics of Arnett’s stage theory such as Hendry and Kloep (2010) deny its broad applicability, stating that it largely applies only to young people in U.S. Higher Education and is highly class-related (as HE still recruits largely from the middle classes). Côté and Bynner’s (2008) paper questions the validity and value of ‘emerging adulthood’, as a stage in itself, preferring instead to describe how constraining economic conditions have resulted in young adults prolonging transitions, rather than the supposed quest to ‘find themselves’. For example, the rise in house prices in the UK and other countries has meant that owning their own property has become a distant dream for many young people (Threadgold, 2019; Yates, 2019). Others criticise the concept of emerging adulthood as failing to consider the constraints placed on young people, particularly those with lower resources (e.g., lower social class) (du Bois-Reymond, 2016) or the additional complex structural restrictions placed on individuals’ transitions once gender and ethnicity are added on top of this (Blustein et al., 2000; Molgat, 2007; Phillips et al., 2002; Wyn et al., 2017). There are also those who whilst they accept ‘emerging adulthood’ as a new identifiable phase, emphasise the heterogeneity of young people’s experiences within it (e.g., Nelson & Padilla- Walker, 2013).

Critics of Arnett’s stage model suggest that the five features of emerging adulthood should not be anchored to specific ages and could be associated with change at any time (du Bois-Reymond, 2016). Instead of being age-related, they are ‘turning points’ in an individual’s life course (Hendry & Kloep, 2010). Côté (2014) strongly criticises ‘emerging adulthood’ as playing into the hands of policymakers who wish to underplay young people’s transitional difficulties and therefore negate the need for policies to support transitions (and buffer against structural constraints), worsening transitions for those young people with limited capital/resources. I support these criticisms, believing that the ages between 18 and 25 years are not always a time of freedom of choice as emerging adulthood theory (Arnett, 2000) implies but heavily dependent on resources available and social and economic constraints (Schoon, 2017) which young people coming from less privileged backgrounds are only too aware of (Côté, 2014). Where you happen to live in the UK is one such constraint. Place is strongly tied up with social class and opportunities available to young people, with young people highly

aware of the limiting (or enabling) power of their communities. For example, the ‘Futures at Stake’ report (Prince’s Trust, 2018) stated that 71 percent of respondents (3,120 participants aged 11-30 years) believed that where you live in the UK totally changes the opportunities that are open to you. Place is a part of the current project, exploring the experiences of young people studying at school or FE college in a disadvantaged community (as defined by the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) measure (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2015)). [Chapter 4: Methodology](#), furthers this discussion on place as it connects to the STWT within my research.

2.8 Debates on Agency and Structure in STWT Research

Agency and structure are key concepts to explore within the STWT. Sometimes labelled as a ‘tired debate’ (Hansson, Hellberg & Stern, 2015), it remains as significant as ever, particularly if STWT transitions are viewed as pivotal times when social inequalities are perpetuated through structural constraints (Schoon & Lyons-Amos, 2017). The Journal of Education and Work’s Special Issue covering 40 years of STWT research up to 2009 (Goodwin & O’Connor, 2009) reports that much of the research and big D Discourse (Gee, 2015) around transitions pre-1975, described them as a ‘mass and homogeneous process, where young people were conditioned by class, family and education into accepting their labour market destination’ (Goodwin & O’Connor, 2009, p.341). Following the recession of 1973-1975, STWT were seen as ‘more dependent upon the individual’s ability to effectively navigate the risks and opportunities that come their way’ (Goodwin & O’Connor, 2009, p.341). This implies that structure (and associated dominant Discourses) was key to STWT prior to 1975 whereas agency (and again, dominant Discourses emphasising this) had a greater role post 1975. That is, in labour market terms you got what job you were given and ‘accepted’ it prior to 1975. From 1975 onwards, it was all down to you alone. Structurally, 1975 perhaps marks the start of a number of recessions in the UK throughout the early 1980s (Elliott, 2012). This could link with the rise of individualisation and associated neoliberal Discourses in the West.

There is an acknowledged bias in policy and interventions aimed at youth employment which has been criticised for over-emphasising the power or agency young people have to overcome structural constraints (Flynn, Mader, Oosterom & Ripoll, 2017). Flynn et al., (2017) call for academics to cast the net wider to the demand-side of the equation in youth employment, to undertake research with employers and organisations to better understand the basis of expectations they have of young people and the role of organisations in improving youth

employment. Spoonley (2008) highlighted a number of demand-side issues intertwined with the mismatching of people to jobs including recruitment practices and employers' expectations, and yet these continue to receive scant focus in the literature on STWT. Employers continue to talk about young people not being 'work-ready'. For example, two in five UK employers (190,000 employers surveyed), state that school and college leavers are not ready for work, although employers appear more willing to acknowledge the role they themselves have to play in working more closely with schools and colleges to support young people's development of skills for work (CBI & Pearson, 2019). This term 'work-ready' has been critiqued for focusing on only one aspect of education's role in preparing young people for the future, and that a more rounded approach of 'life-ready' should instead be the focus in education, rather than placing all power with employers to decide what 'work-readiness' means (TES, 2015). Employers have a strong and powerful voice in the demands and expectations placed on education (and thereby young people), coupled with deficit Discourse they use to express their disappointment in both, yet little accountability (Gleeson & Keep, 2004). Young people are not deemed employable enough, or not possessing the required competences for work (e.g., Hennemann & Liefner, 2010). The current emphasis on young people as the ones who need to be 'fixed' in order to be able to enter the labour market removes any need for employers to critically examine themselves and their policies and practices which may be discriminatory or dismissive towards young people. As Handel (2003) states, 'The skills mismatch discourse blames the 'victims', rather than focusing attention on neoliberal policies and management shortcomings' (p.139). The need to look at individual narratives qualitatively is emphasised by Macdonald and Shildrick (2019) who re-iterate the need to explore individual stories in-depth, whilst acknowledging structural conditions that may constrain individuals' choices and possibilities. My research aims to add to this research by applying a critically discursive lens to both the talk and drawings of those on both sides of the STWT: young people and SME employers.

Some researchers caution against promoting a false structure-agency dichotomy (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) believing both to be important determiners of life outcomes. Bradley and Devadason (2008) found evidence for both agency and structural impacts on STWT in their transition pathways research. The young people they interviewed (from a range of affluent and poor backgrounds) had developed an adaptable mindset as a result of precarious conditions, perhaps illustrating how structural constraints can inform an altered sense of self which could be perceived by others as heightened agency. However, they acknowledged that as their

research was published at the start of the 2008 recession their respondents' optimism would need to be revisited a decade later to see the impact of continued structural constraints (e.g., low pay and precarious employment) on adaptability and mindset in general.

Furlong (2009) rejects the individualisation narrative (agency) and emphasises the continuing importance of structure on an individual's life outcomes and particularly in youth transitions. Approaches which underplay the role of agency in youth transitions in general, have been heavily criticised, insisting at the very least on a recognition of 'bounded agency' (Shanahan, 2000) to describe the complex impact (and restraining force) of structure upon agency. Furlong (2009) cautions however that whilst outcomes are predominantly determined by structural elements in society, the role of personal agency remains crucial in how an individual's resources and capital can be deployed. It is a complex interaction between structure and agency at the core of both the generation and reproduction of social inequalities. Bandura (2002) emphasises that having the *intention to influence* how you function and your overall life circumstances is key. Individuals may have the intention, yet lack the *ability* (or power) to 'influence', in which case 'proxy agency' is sought. Proxy agency is a socially mediated form of agency where we look to others who have the power to help us get what we want, or where we want to get to (Bandura, 2002). The idea of proxy agency is under-explored in STWT research and merits more attention given its potential links with leveraging power within the structure-agency debate. My research will explore this through conversations with young people about their notions of support, prior to the STWT (RQ1b).

Furlong (2009) argues that a perceptual shift in societal Discourse to neoliberalism and individualisation (talk about increased opportunity, self-determinism and active agency for the individual) has resulted in 'illusions regarding the disappearance of class' (p. 344). Yet ingrained patterns of socio-economic inequality continue to dominate and determine an individual's life course where opportunities, choices and chances, are still largely determined by power and associated class structures (Atkins, 2016; Blustein et al., 2002; Furlong, 2009; Furstenberg, 2008; Griffin, 2011). Young people may have internalised aspects of the individualisation Discourse pertinent to the labour market, such as needing to accept precarious employment as a natural feature of today's labour market. This is a similar story to that found in Bates' ethnographic work on working class young women working in care homes post-transition from school (1993) who believed there were no real alternatives to working in care

jobs for them. The rosy view of the STWT as a time for potentiality and freedom appears intermeshed with class, wealth and privilege.

Beck (1992) and Giddens (1991) focus on individualisation and its rise in modern society emphasising individual agency as the most important factor affecting individuals' life chances. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) see social class (and associated structures) as irrelevant in modern society, arguing instead that individuals are free to choose between different options, including which groups they most identify with in society. Social inequality through this definition is reduced to the level of the individual and does not link back to social class at group level. Social inequalities in STWT are still heavily influenced by structures such as social class and the power-holders/gate-keepers' groups in society (e.g., employers, educational and government institutions) (Schoon & Lyons-Amos, 2017; Woodman, 2013). The intersections of social class and young people's transitions to adulthood in general is viewed as controversial by those who adhere to a Discourse of meritocracy, believing that equality of opportunity is open to all young people irrespective of social class (Furstenberg, 2008). Social class has indeed been suggested to be at its most damaging to individuals during the STWT (Blustein et al., 2002; 2000). The need for a continued focus on social class and its role in shaping STWT experiences is highlighted in Furlong's review of 40 years of STWT research (2009). Furlong (2009) names the challenge for youth transitions researchers being to 're-conceptualise social class in ways that find greater resonance' (p.351) with young people and modern life in general. More recent empirical research has shown clearly the facilitating or limiting role of resources (familial, social and economic) and class play in easing or problematising transitions accordingly (Schoon, 2015; Schoon, 2014). The current study's exploration of talk (and drawings) from young people studying in relatively disadvantaged areas in England, whilst not heavily focused on class, is expected to add useful discursive elements to what are traditionally economically-focused studies in STWT.

The two sections above have outlined the value of the concept of liminality within my research along with the need to reflect critically on the role of structure, agency and class within the STWT. The next section of the chapter presents my attempts to bring a relational approach to the current study, including both young people and employers.

2.9 Broadening Approaches to Include Under-represented Actors

Two currently under-represented populations in STWT research form the relational focus of my study: young people from the ‘missing middle’ (Roberts, 2011); and SME managers.

2.9.1 *Young People from the ‘Missing Middle’*

In sociological youth studies, the call to pay more research attention to the ‘invisible majority’ of ‘ordinary working class’ pupils was made back in the 1980s by writers such as Brown (1987). The field of STWT research continues however to focus on young people at the two extreme pathways of the STWT: a) those taking an academic route from HE into employment; and b) those completely excluded (e.g., young people not in education or training) (Roberts & MacDonald, 2013; Schoon, 2015). Sociological researchers in the field of youth transitions or youth studies (as these are sometimes situated), have themselves acknowledged tendencies to be ‘drawn to the unusual, the untypical and those at the margins of society’ (Goodwin & O’Connor, 2013, p.1). This approach leaves young people who fall in between both under-researched and as a result potentially under-supported by any resultant policy changes (Roberts, 2011). Due to the popularity of theories such as the theory of emerging adulthood described in the previous section (Arnett, 2000), placing its emphasis on longer transitions from youth to adulthood, many STWT studies have focused in on lengthening transitions (e.g., Côté & Bynner, 2008; Lesnard et al., 2016). Delayed transitions to adulthood, achieved predominantly by lengthening time spent in education, is a phenomenon associated with relative privilege. Those who experience relatively fast transitions are more likely to be from a less privileged family (Schoon, Chen, Kneale & Jager, 2012). Research focused on those young people who choose not to continue on into higher education (at least initially) and leave compulsory education to attempt to enter the labour market is scarce (Witteveen, 2017). These young people have therefore been referred to using terms suggesting loss and marginalisation, such as the ‘missing middle’ (Roberts, 2011) and the ‘forgotten half’ (Birdwell, Grist & Margo, 2011), perhaps perpetuating notions of deficit through using such terms. I continue to reflect on terms which do not position young people from this group as ‘less than’, yet struggle myself to find neutral yet positive language which itself does not slip into educational neoliberal Discourses where everything is ‘brilliant’. For example, in my son’s primary school where ability sets are labelled as ‘brilliant’, ‘marvellous’ and ‘fantastic’, whilst the children themselves know the underlying ranking connotations. I therefore continue to use the term ‘missing middle’ throughout this thesis, whilst acknowledging these challenges.

There has been a call to further explore relational and family influences and support in the STWT process. Research by Blustein, Philips, Jobin-Davis, Finkelberg, and Roarke (1997), found both instrumental and emotional support shown by family members of young people in the STWT. Studies have shown that parental support and expressions of warmth and affection are crucial to the success of children's preparation for transitions between primary and secondary schools in the UK (Rice, Frederickson, Shelton, Riglin & Ng-Knight, 2015; Scanlon et al., 2016). We know less about how support impacts on young people (or how young people construct or access support) in the time prior to the STWT. Do parents continue to be key to young people's support as they prepare for the STWT or are other sources of support more important? This study aims to explore the roles of others in providing support to young people from the missing middle prior to the STWT, foregrounding support within a relational approach.

2.9.2 Small and Medium Enterprise Employers

A great deal of focus in STWT research (and subsequent policies) is on the young person making the transition and how they need to change (Flynn et al., 2017). For example, how young people need to develop competences for future employment or employability skills (Hennemann & Liefner, 2010). This deficit approach and associated language, problematizes young people and results in research and subsequent policy recommendations focused on how we can 'improve' young people to be 'better prepared for a new future in work' (Flynn et al., 2017). Including a wider set of actors, such as organisations (employers) as well as young people could be one way to bring greater balance to the field of transitions research (Kyndt et al., 2017).

Bringing in (and more crucially, critiquing) managers' perspectives within STWT research about the 'missing middle' (Roberts, 2011), appears essential and yet a missing part of the jigsaw surrounding the construction of young people's future OPS, and how these may be influenced by others. Employers (specifically individual managers) are a key group of actors that shape the STWT, being the first people that young people encounter within the recruitment and induction processes in their first job following compulsory schooling. Ninety nine per cent of businesses in the UK are SMEs (Rhodes, 2018) and it is therefore highly likely that the first job following school for those making the move directly from school to work will be in an SME, making this group ideal for this study.

2.10 Broadening Methodological Approaches to STWT Research

Just as the previous section advocates a broadening out of the groups traditionally involved in STWT research, the next and final section of the chapter calls for a broadening of the methodological approaches within STWT research. The field of STWT research remains dominated by hypothesis-testing with a lack of detailed exploration of the complex processes going on for the individual across the STWT (Brzinsky-Fay, 2014). My study aims to bring detailed critical discursive exploration of young people's hoped and feared-for OPS and support prior to the STWT, as well as managerial perspectives of young people from the STWT, adopting more creative methods to do so.

2.10.1 Visual Methods within Organisational and STWT Research

The use of creative methods in organisational research is growing as researchers embrace a wider set of methods to explore the lived experiences of people in organisations (Broussine, 2008) yet appears rarer in occupational psychology (Bal et al., 2019). There still appears resistance or uncertainty about the compatibility of creative methods with 'serious' research; perhaps as neutrality and seriousness appear conflated in academic disciplines such as the pure sciences, for example (Dick, 2013). Positivism still occupies a stronghold in 'scientific' research, which occupational psychology (as a branch of psychology) aligns itself with (Bal & Doci, 2018). Additional concerns include that 'data' developed from creative methods are seen as resistant to categorisation and labelled as inferior due to its subjectivity (Broussine, 2008). Drawings are seen as acceptable for management or consultant usage in team away-days, for example, but have tended to be de-legitimised as appropriate organisational research methods (Broussine, 2008). Creative methods however move thinking and talking to a more reflective space, enabling discussions on a more nuanced basis within interviews, for example, making them ideal methods to use to move beyond everyday descriptions of topics or phenomena of interest (Kara, 2015). These facets of creative methods are highly suited therefore to exploring the nuanced experiences of young people prior to the STWT, as well as the nuanced constructions of young people by SME managers in the current study.

Visual methods are gradually becoming more acceptable as valid and appropriate empirical research methods, with calls made in management research, for example, to make a 'visual turn' (Bell & Davison, 2013). Drawing is recognised as both a critical and reflective practice in itself. As a research method, it therefore brings these practices to the ways that researchers

and participants engage more actively in the research process itself (Garner, 2008). These practices make it ideally suited to research working with young people where researchers benefit from the ability of drawings to bring out greater talk with participants or other groups sometimes harder to engage as participants in organisational research, such as SME managers (Blackburn & Stokes, 2000). The perceived benefits (and drawbacks) of using participant-generated drawings within a research interview are discussed in greater depth in [Chapter 4](#), along with reactions to the method from participants themselves ([Chapter 5](#)).

2.10.2 Discursive Methods within STWT Research

Contrasting with relatively low levels of adoption of creative research methods in organisation and management studies, discursive research is more common in these fields, with critical discursive research regularly published in journals such as *Management Learning* and *Human Relations*, for example. ‘Discursive studies have the power to examine the truth claims made by organisational actors, and trace the ways such claims bear the imprint of dominant cultural meanings and relations of power’ (Heizmann & Liu, 2019, p.1). As has been discussed in this chapter, the STWT is a time when dominant cultural meanings (and associated Discourses) that underpin the STWT are played out and reproduced. The STWT would appear therefore to be a topic well suited to a critical discursive approach. For example, cultural understandings and social constructions of the notions of ‘work’ or ‘young people’ act as constraining forces within the STWT. The way that people with key roles in the STWT talk about others in the STWT has the potential to offer up an opportunity to explore the different ‘truth claims’ from various actors in the STWT and explore any inherent tensions and contradictions within such claims. This is particularly useful when viewing the STWT as the argument presented throughout this thesis suggests, as a contested space of power between young people and SME managers.

Talk around blame appears to feature strongly in STWT Discourse. Employers lay blame at two levels: blaming young people as not ‘employable’ enough; and educational establishments for creating worthless knowledge (Handley, 2018). These criticisms appear to have been normalised by much of the careers services Discourse, especially in Higher Education (Fotiadou, 2018) perpetuating messages to young people that it is their role to be ‘work-ready’ rather than policymakers placing greater responsibilities on employers to train and support young people in their first job. Aspiration-raising Discourse also lays the blame on young people and is dominant within academy types of schools in disadvantaged areas (Purcell, 2011)

such as the one in my study. It lays the blame on young people who due to high levels of structural disadvantages may not be able to ‘rise above’ their life circumstances (Harrison, 2018).

Whilst on the surface appearing as a playful method, drawings instigate a great deal of talk and discussion (Broussine, 2008), particularly when used with young people (Bagnoli, 2009; Literat, 2013). This makes them ideal methods to mesh with critical discursive approaches. They have also been found useful to gain deeper reflection in entrepreneurs (Clarke & Holt, 2019), a sample aligned to my participants (three of the SME managers were owner-managers, whilst four could be seen to have adopted entrepreneurial approach to management due to the small size of business).

2.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter has introduced the reader to the STWT literature at a general level to provide context essential to any qualitative project (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The field of STWT research is vast and as a result this chapter has focused on elements and constructs relevant to the approach that my research takes towards exploring the STWT from a critical occupational psychology lens, where power, agency and structure are central, rather than adopting more traditionally individualised cognitivist approaches. The chapter presented an overview of definitions of transitions, examples of models utilised within the STWT and their corresponding critiques. It also summarised the way that time has tended to be approached within STWT research (looking back after the work transition is ‘complete’); how transitions are inter-related transformations for young people experiencing complex and multiple role shifts; as psychological or social processes; and the notion of the STWT as an adaptive process. Connecting my approach to the STWT with my position as a critical occupational psychologist, this chapter introduced key concepts concerned with issues around power and social justice within the STWT: namely liminality, agency and structure. The chapter made the case for the current research project’s focus on under-represented groups in STWT research as participants: young people from the ‘missing middle’ (Roberts, 2011; Roberts & MacDonald, 2013; Woodman, 2013) and SME managers. The chapter ended by outlining the rationale for the choice of visual methods (drawing) and a critical discursive psychological approach for the current study, as attempts to pluralise methodological approaches adopted in STWT research to date. This context forms a useful bridge to the next chapter, outlining my conceptual

framework and the 'sensitising concepts' (Liu, 2004) used to scaffold my thinking and approach throughout.

3. Conceptual Framework

3.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter introduces the reader to the two main ‘sensitising concepts’ (Blumer, 1954; Liu, 2004) used as guiding devices and synthesised to form a conceptual framework for my research project. Sensitising concepts provide ideas about where to look when researching a topic of interest, without being overly prescriptive and retaining the ability to progressively refine them as research progresses (Blumer, 1954). Some concepts inform my research approach prior to conversations with participants, others have been added in after, as findings in themselves and to help me to better understand findings. In this chapter I illustrate how I connect sensitising concepts to research questions, methods and interpretation. I aim to present how the concepts presented have guided my approach in exploring the contested space of the STWT.

Concepts are viewed as more general notions than constructs and are instead a means to include ‘qualities that describe or explain a phenomenon of theoretical interest’ (Gioia, Corley & Hamilton, 2013, p.16). Putting concepts together into a framework helps to provide ‘an argument about why the topic one wishes to study matters, and why the means proposed to study it are appropriate and rigorous’ (Ravitch & Riggan, 2012, p.xiii). Conceptual frameworks provide ‘an organizing structure or scaffold that integrates related ideas, mental images, other research, and theories to provide focus and direction to the inquiry’ (Rallis, 2018, p.355). According to Rallis (2018), conceptual frameworks comprise three aspects: personal experiences and views of the researcher; knowledge about the topic of study already ‘out there’; and relevant theory. Situating the researcher’s personal interests in the topic as a valid and important part of a conceptual framework, matches with my epistemological and reflexive stance throughout this project. A framework acts as an inductive and deductive topic map for a research project, supporting coherence in developing research questions, and methodological choices as well as providing starting points for interpretation and re-interpretation (Rallis, 2018).

Throughout my project, one of the tools I utilise to reflect and organise my thoughts, has been to draw mind maps and frameworks, constantly adapting and shaping these as my thoughts, questions, and interpretations have developed. These mini conceptual frameworks form part of

my active reflexivity work (see Appendix A), the extension of which is presented as a conceptual framework diagram (Figure 4) in this chapter.

This chapter firstly presents the sensitising theoretical concept I use, both as a scaffold to encourage drawings (and talk) about future possible occupations with young people and as a lens to interpret subsequent findings from conversations: Occupational possible selves (Chalk et al., 1994). The main sensitising concept presented which I used to view data from the SME Managers, is paternalistic leadership discourse (Aycan, Schyns, Sun, Felfe & Sahers, 2013; Pellegrini & Scandura, 2008; Salminen-Karlsson, 2015), again brought into the project during interpretation of conversations, drawings and photographs from managerial participants. This chapter provides a definition and overview of my application of these two central concepts within my approach, providing examples of relevant literature, anchoring the concepts to my particular approach and insights sought on the STWT topic and illustrating my rationale for their inclusion in the framework.

This conceptual framework is formed as an attempt to address limitations identified in the literature reviewed in the previous chapter, enabling a critically discursive qualitative approach to how young people and SME managers construct the STWT rather than a linear quantified approach. The theory of occupational possible selves is brought in and applied in a qualitative context to also enable a more creative approach to explore the complex and nuanced experiences of young people (again identified as lacking in much of STWT research) and their future constructions of work through the medium of drawings. Similarly by focusing on the concept of paternalistic leadership discourse (presented as a way that SME managers engaged in discursive othering) the conceptual framework moves away from the hypothesis-testing dominating much of STWT and into a more open and creative approach to looking into the ways that managers shape and control the field of 'work' by shining a light on discursive power techniques explicitly used to perpetuate inequalities in the STWT.

These concepts also importantly emphasise my anti-cognitivist stance throughout this thesis and emerging out of my critique of the individualised cognitive approach of much of the STWT literature discussed in chapter 2. Adopting a critical discursive approach to the STWT topic within these two primary concepts presented in the framework, enables a more nuanced exploration of the STWT as a relational process where power relations and the associated

‘classification struggles’ (Bessant et al., 2020) between young and old(er), (new and experienced worker) are centre stage.

The STWT is acknowledged as a time where power and inequalities come strongly into play, yet critical psychological research exploring the ways that power and inequalities may be reinforced or reproduced by individuals involved in the STWT is lacking (Stead & Perry, 2012) and is acknowledged in the conceptual framework by recognising the power differentials between young people and SME managers. This framework responds to the call within recent STWT research for researchers to adopt a relational approach, by including and exploring different groups’ perspectives and methods of analysis or interpretation e.g., exploration of macro and micro level discourses (via critical discursive psychology) of the two under-represented groups in the project: young people from the ‘missing middle’ and SME managers..

3.2 Conceptual Visualisation

The conceptual visualisation (Figure 4) acts to provide a visual overview of how different concepts nest together for my research project. Figure 4 is split into two ‘boxes’, each representing one of the participant groups involved in the study. Each box shows the context of dominant Discourses and associated habitus influencing the two different participant groups. For young people these are shown as educational Discourses, including aspiration-raising, meritocratic and individualisation Discourses. For SME managers these are negative generational Discourse (millennials) and individualisation Discourse. It shows how findings from the research have inspired the use of a posteriori lenses to support insights, as well as the theoretical lenses I went into the project with.

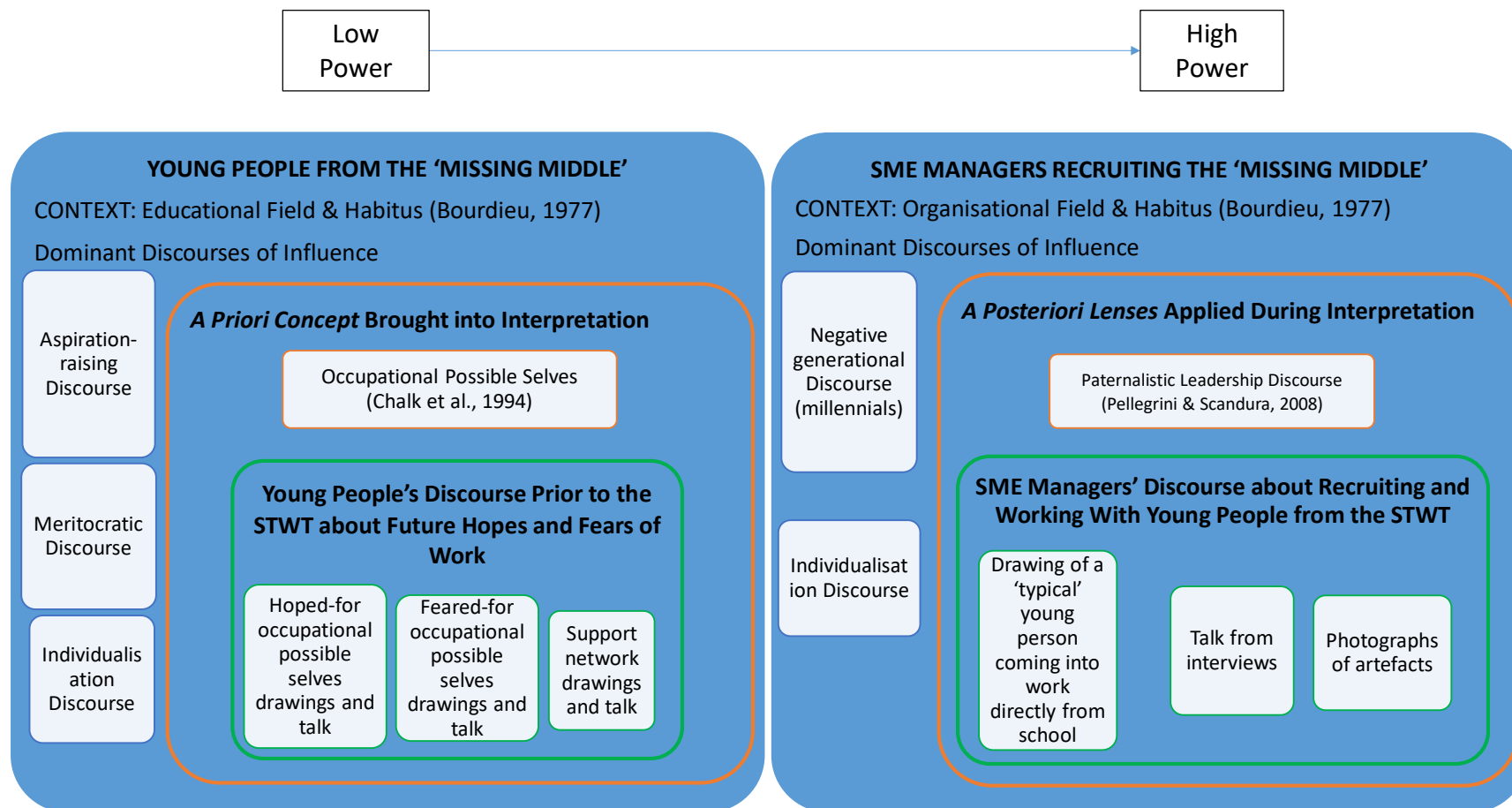


Figure 4. Conceptual Visualisation

Figure 4 visually presents how the two main sensitising concepts are applied in the research context according to the group of study explored: young people (OPS); and SME managers (paternalistic leadership discourse (presented as a form of ‘othering’). The conceptual visualisation shows that this research brings in a priori theories and concepts such as OPS, and empirically-based (a posteriori) concepts such as paternalistic leadership and its associated discourse.

Whilst the STWT is not itself a physical space or place, it has places of origin (school), and destination (work) which can also be viewed metaphorically as ‘fields’ with associated habitus, or ‘how we do things/what we value around here’ (Bourdieu, 1977). Bourdieu’s original term ‘le champ’, translated predominantly as ‘field’, was intended to be more akin to the English word ‘arena’, bringing with it notions of struggle and competition, rather than the passive quiet associations we may have with the English interpretation of ‘field’ (Bessant et al., 2020). It is these underlying principles of power, competition and struggle that I have in mind when I use the term ‘field/arena’. A change of habitus as an important part of the STWT, was mentioned in [Chapter 2](#). Young people (and their identities) are arriving at a field/arena (work), with associated habitus (Bourdieu, 1986; Sweetman, 2009), departing the educational field/arena and attempting to enter and adapt to the new field/arena of work (Bourdieu, 1977).

Power is a uni-directional aspect of Figure 4, which is perhaps over-simplifying power in the STWT, yet attempts to emphasise that in the main it is the managers who hold the power and associated resources in the STWT, rather than the young people making the transition. ‘Classification struggles’ are part of these power relations emphasised by Bourdieu as wrapped up in the way youth or young people are represented by older people, such as the STWT, as age is viewed as a socially constructed phenomenon, just as gender and class are (Bessant et al., 2020). In particular, the interpretative lenses I apply to transcripts and drawings from SME managers enables focus on the discursive ways managers classify young people in the STWT, and how this may form part of the struggle between managers and young people, leading to my description of the STWT as a contested space and time between these two groups.

3.3 Occupational Possible Selves

The psychological theory of occupational possible selves (Chalk et al., 1994) is set out as a framework to better understand how young people develop and internalise future possibilities

during the education to employment transition. Occupational possible selves is built upon possible selves theory (Markus & Nurius, 1986), where possible selves are viewed as ‘future-projected’ aspects of self-knowledge or an individual’s perception of what is potentially possible for themselves. They are described as cognitive images of an individual’s hopes, fears, and fantasies for the future. As will be detailed in [Chapter 4: Methodology](#), my critical discursive psychological approach is anti-cognitivist. Throughout this thesis, I attempt to move away from traditional psychological notions of internal states as drivers of future hopes and fears, towards interpretations based on a socially constructed approach. My application of this theory is therefore more as a tool, to critically engage with participants about their hopes and fears in relation to futures at work.

Possible selves include both positive and negative possibilities. Selves we hope we are moving towards, and those we are fearful of becoming (‘hoped-for selves’ and ‘feared-for selves’), as well as ‘expected selves’ (‘probable selves’) (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Possible selves are an individual’s perception of what is potentially possible for themselves in the future. Possible selves theory corresponds with the idea that transitions may be a time for ‘re-negotiating a sense of self’, when new possible selves may be constructed or sought out (Bowen, 2016; Mercer, 2007). Possible selves also links with transitions may be times of role, identity and status change, as times when moving between different ‘arenas’, we are forced to think about ‘what’s next?’ (Ng & Feldman, 2007). *Occupational* possible selves (OPS) in careers research was put forward by Chalk et al., (1994), following possible selves theory in its hopes, fears and expectations but centred on future occupational selves rather than more general selves.

As previously mentioned, notions of cognitions do not usually sit well with social constructionists, nor do they sit well with critical discursive psychological approaches to research (Parker, 2015). However, my application of OPS is as a methodological tool to support young people to think, talk and reflect upon future hopes and fears in work. My subsequent discursive approach sits with my epistemological stance which focuses *how* young people construct ideas of their hoped-for and feared-for OPS through discourse (verbal and visual). For example, exploring the dominant Discourses young people may normalise, reproduce or resist; and discursive devices employed to achieve this. Possible selves (and OPS) theory is flexible enough to be applied across different research paradigms, lending itself to qualitative interpretative approaches (Packard & Conway, 2009). Much of OPS research (and possible

selves more generally) is however quantitative in its approach, administering structured questionnaires such as the Possible Selves Questionnaire (Markus & Nurius, 1986) or the OPS measure (Chalk et al., 1994), which tend to gather limited information, lacking in depth or richness around the possible selves of young people (Lee, 2013). Drawings are seen as ideal methods to generate rich data and for researching topics or issues that are ‘complex, multifaceted, emotive, and dynamic’ (Mazzetti & Blenkinsopp, 2012, p.651). Throughout this thesis I argue that expressing our OPS is complex, emotional and more nuanced than static questionnaire measures allow for and therefore drawings support an in-depth exploration of OPS.

The concept of a ‘future work self’ (Strauss, 2010) applies the theory of possible selves (focused predominantly on the positive ‘hoped-for selves’) directly to work. The future work self is described as an ‘individual’s representation of himself or herself in the future that reflects his or her hopes and aspiration in relation to work’ (Strauss, Griffin & Parker, 2012, p.580). In a study on doctoral students, positive future hoped-for work selves were found to motivate proactive career behaviours such as setting goals and developing experiences to enhance future employability (Strauss et al., 2012). However, the downplaying of ‘feared-for selves’ in the original research (Strauss, 2010) and its focus on a specialised sample, as well as its cognitivist stance, means it lacks relevance for my approach. The hoped-for self has been a focus for many intervention-based studies, particularly those in school settings where the aim is to increase educational performance (e.g., achieve higher grades). These interventions encourage students to imagine the hoped-for self, and place attention on the importance of actions and self-directed goals students need to put in place to achieve the hoped-for self, relating to higher performance (e.g., Oyserman, 2008; Oyserman, Bybee, Terry, & Hart-Johnson, 2004).

Future work selves’ (FWS) (Strauss, 2010) focuses (as with school research mentioned above) on ‘hoped-for selves’, in a work context, whereas OPS includes all three notions of future self (expected, hoped and feared)(Chalk et al., 1994). In my study, I adopt a middle ground, including hoped and feared-for OPS, and reflect on this as a subsequent limitation in [Chapter 10](#). Future work selves focuses on proactivity at work and appears useful as a theoretical concept in occupational psychology research to support organisations and managers in the quest for improving employee performance and productivity for management benefits, which critical psychologists such as Bal (2019) believe that much of modern occupational research

sets out to support, rather than supporting the individual. As such, FWS appears more useful to research contexts focused on improving individual performance and productivity, and is less useful in critical approaches. The focus in FWS appears more on developing ‘proactive’ employees, not necessarily considering structural factors, constraints or the impact of inequalities within the workplace (which may be obstructing an individual’s hoped-for OPS).

Research shows the STWT as a time of fear and anxiety concerning the future for many young people (Blustein et al., 2000; Chesters & Cuervo, 2019). In my study, I wanted young people to feel able and supported to talk about both hoped *and* feared-for future OPS. I asked participants to draw both their hoped and feared-for OPS, in order to explore how reflecting upon what we do *not* want to happen in our future, can be equally interesting and revealing as reflecting on what we *do* want to happen. In addition, I argue that feared-for OPS may generate talk about constraints, essential to include in any study wishing to explore contested spaces, such as the STWT. I sought to explore how asking participants to imagine future ‘hoped-for’ or ‘feared-for’ selves via drawings mobilises different discourses. My approach attempts to place equal emphasis within research conversations to both the hopes and worries of young people about their occupational futures. My aim is to normalise and open up talk about fears, rather than privileging and reifying talk about ‘best selves’ aligned more with dominant Discourses of aspiration-raising and individualisation. As mentioned, studies often focus on positive future identities, perhaps due to assumptions that talk about feared-for possible selves will result in lower wellbeing or be detrimental to performance and motivation (Oyserman, Destin, & Novin, 2015). Markus and Nurius (1986) discuss in their original conceptualisations of possible selves theory that both hoped-for and feared-for possible selves are motivating, in context-dependent ways. Building on this, Oyserman et al. (2015) found that in contexts where failure was seen as being a more likely outcome, thinking about feared-for possible selves was *more* motivating than thinking about hoped-for possible selves. It does not therefore appear damaging to individuals to facilitate talk about feared-for future selves in work contexts. As an ethical practitioner, I needed to feel confident about adhering to principles of ‘do no harm’ (Ethics Committee of the British Psychological Society, 2018) prior to inclusion in my framework and research with young people. Occupational possible selves theory fits well with my desire to explore how individuals construct their future work identities and discursively navigate hopes and fears prior to the STWT.

My use of OPS has the potential to be further developed into an intervention to support young people through the STWT in a career counselling context, discussed further in [Chapter 10](#).

Discourse as Doing Identity

Discourse is one way that individuals *do* identity (Wetherell, 2007) and therefore a key element to explore at times of identity change such as the STWT. A critical discursive psychological approach sees this link between discourse and identity as constitutive and constructive. For example, macro Discourses (big D, dominant Discourses), may constrain and shape our identities and yet our everyday discourse (little d) shows in practice how we may adopt or push back against such Discourses (Budds et al., 2014). Having a coherent narrative, or story, that shows who we are (our identity) both to ourselves and others, is seen as one of the primary motives for engaging in identity work, defined here as:

‘the mutually constitutive processes whereby people strive to shape a relatively coherent and distinctive notion of personal self- identity and struggle to come to terms with and, within limits, to influence the various social-identities which pertain to them in the various milieux in which they live their lives.’ (Watson, 2008, p. 129).

When individuals engage in identity work via discourse, they are trying to make connections two ways: out to others and inwards (reflectively) towards themselves (Watson, 2008). Young people are seeking, via discursive practices, to show social others such as teachers, family, friends, careers advisors (and perhaps myself as the researcher), that they have a coherent narrative regarding their futures: a neat and tidy story that makes sense. When young people feel they lack this coherent narrative (as perhaps is the case prior to the STWT for those young people unclear of their next steps) this can be a cause of anxiety and uncertainty (Noble-Carr & Woodman, 2018).

Possible selves are closely linked with an individual’s future identities and the desire for coherence between who we are now and who we wish to become (building on or rejecting who were in the past). Connections between identity work or ‘Identity Play’ (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010) and possible selves are clear. Young people may be ‘trying out’ different work personas as they imagine OPS (Ibarra, 1999; Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010). Individuals on courses where placements are integrated, such as nursing students, for example, benefit from ‘trying out’ a professional work identity (Hood, Cant, Leech, Baulch & Gilbee, 2014). In courses and educational settings where placements are not fully integrated, instead relying on an

individual's networks or connections, it is those individuals with the required resources to find and complete placements who gain the associated benefits. Placements therefore often reproduce inequalities in both education and the labour market according to class, race and gender (Allen, Quinn, Hollingworth & Rose, 2013). The increasing availability of apprenticeships providing opportunities for combining paid work and training may open up opportunities for young people to test out new occupations, but the reality is that young people are tied into long-term apprenticeship agreements of between one and six years, reducing potential for experimentation (Prospects, 2019). A growing concern is that even when young people have decided or been able to find a job/career they want to pursue, it is increasingly difficult for young people to have the stability and time available to build a work identity, when the available work on offer is unstable and temporary (Carter & Parry, 2016).

Alvesson, Lee Ashcraft and Thomas, (2008) state that major life changes, especially those with a transformational element, such as STWT, are triggers of identity (re-)construction. Bringing in again the idea of 're-negotiating the self' (Mercer, 2007). For example, a young person may have a clear and well established identity as a school pupil, but will need to build, or at least re-define, a new identity moving into work. 'Identity threats' (Petriglieri, 2011) whereby individuals go through experiences of anxiety linked to a disruption of their professional identity e.g., upon retirement for some individuals, are complex processes that require more understanding in the context of the STWT for young people, particularly since identity threats are acknowledged to have a negative impact on wellbeing (Selenko, 2016).

Positioning is one key way we do identity through discourse (Bloor & Bloor, 2007; Davies & Harre, 1990). The ways that SME managers position young people in the STWT is closely linked with the concept of identity. For example, how do SME managers make claims about the 'way young people are at work', positioning young people in various ways and at the same time constructing and constraining the possibilities for young people's work identity? Conflicting ideas and narratives around 'work' or 'young people' may collide at the STWT. When we consider the power differentials as context, how is such a contested space discursively negotiated and navigated by individuals from such different 'arenas'?

3.4 ‘Othering’

Taking a discursive psychological approach heightened my attention to the ways that SME managers were talking about young people in stereotypically reductive language, ‘othering’ young people coming directly into the workplace from school. Exploring the concept of othering in sociological writings (e.g., Jensen, 2011; Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012) sparked curiosity in whether this would help me frame how SME managers were positioning young people in my study. Viewing the concept of othering as a sociological as opposed to psychological definition, Spivak (1985) highlights three dimensions present in reductive othering: power (especially making sure the subordinate knows who has power); morality (the other is constructed as pathologically and morally inferior to those in power); and knowledge (the powerful hold the knowledge, the ‘others’ do not). In social psychology, othering is viewed through the lens of in-group/out-group theory (Tajfel & Turner, 2004) as a *cognitive* process of thoughts, attitudes or perceptions. I use an approach more compatible with a critical and constructionist stance, that of exploring how we socially construct the ‘other’ through discourse (Jensen, 2011), as categorisation of groups are themselves ‘socially constructed and negotiated’ (Tomaskovic-Devey & Avent-Holt, 2019, p.48). Through othering, ‘heterogeneous social groups are perceived as a homogeneous category’ (Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012, p.300). ‘Young people’ as a term itself is often applied homogeneously. Othering through the categorisation of ‘us’ and ‘them’ on the surface may not necessarily seem problematic. For example, categorisation could be a way of grouping individuals into staff categories e.g., academics or professional services staff, according to the type of job activities undertaken. Within research, ‘othering’ is encountered in the way researchers using methods viewed as different to the norm are othered and may face difficulties with publication and developing their academic career as a consequence (Cunliffe, 2018a). However, by categorising individuals into groups, particularly status groups, we construct narratives and hierarchies of power and reproduce associated inequalities (Tomaskovic-Devey & Avent-Holt, 2019).

Whilst othering is commonplace due to everyday categories of various groups we may identify as being part of (nor not) e.g., parents versus non-parents; it becomes a mechanism for prejudice when we view ‘them’ (the group that we do not identify as belonging to), as inferior, or less-than ‘us’ (Vichiensing, 2018). The negative impacts of othering for example were shown in a discursive research study exploring how educational professionals ‘othered’ autistic students through dominant Discourses of disability, reproducing and sustaining power imbalances and

inequalities for this group of students (Wood & Milton, 2018). According to Foucault (1982), power comes about through social interaction and action. The ways people act with each other and talk *to* or *about* each other and engage in othering is therefore viewed as useful in this study when exploring power relations between groups or individuals. Discursive power techniques, such as othering, categorise individuals and reduce or subjugate them (Foucault, 1982). Jensen (2011) reminds us that power is always at play during othering. Power and struggles over power, are described as a key organisational process, locally developed and central to organisational habitus i.e., the way things are around here, which may underpin othering as a way to maintain the status-quo for the powerful (Tomaskovic-Devey & Avent-Holt, 2019), such as the SME managers in my study, for example. I locate the STWT as a place and time where young people are expected to ‘learn and adopt’ (not challenge or resist), an SME’s way of doing or being. When young people attempt to enter the workplace ‘arena’ for the first time, they are making claims that they are deserving of the resources that will need to be allocated (time, money, physical space within the organisation in some cases etc.). Discursive ‘othering’ could be viewed as a discursive power technique used by those with power (current SME managers) to assess and judge the validity of other members’ claims on organisational resources.

My research, and particularly my writing about the research, (along with many research projects) could itself be ‘othering’, due to its generally reductive nature and highly interpretative nature (Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012). Fine (1994) discusses various tensions between the self and ‘other’ in research, and the different ways that qualitative researchers may unwittingly engage in this, such as romanticising or privileging certain narratives and voices over others. When a group with power describes a less powerful group, ‘the other is always the other as in inferior, not as in fascinating’ (p.65). I have attempted to follow advice from writers such as Krumer-Nevo and Sidi (2012) resisting othering when undertaking and writing up my research. Openly acknowledging my positionality, vulnerabilities and aiming for constant reflexivity within my research, I hope to other participants within this thesis in an empathetic manner, viewing them as equal ‘others’ rather than inferior. I openly admit however that ways of othering may be so internalised according to my own background, culture and experiences that readers from different backgrounds to myself may interpret instances of othering in my writing which I may not be aware of.

Due to its coherence with identity work (via identity formation), discursive processes and explicit recognition of power differentials, I use the definition of othering provided by Jensen (2011). Othering is referred to in this thesis as ‘discursive processes by which powerful groups, who may or may not make up a numerical majority, define subordinate groups into existence in a reductionist way which ascribe problematic and/or inferior characteristics to these subordinate groups’ (Jensen, 2011, p.65). SME managers are represented as the powerful group in my research by virtue of having the resources (jobs) sought after by the young people (subordinate group). Othering is a discursive process achieved by both the ‘small d discourse’ we use and the ‘big D Discourse’ (Gee, 2015) we are exposed to and draw upon. It is socially and culturally constructed, used as a way of making claims that promote exclusion and dehumanisation of the ‘other’ (Jensen, 2011). Othering is a reductive labelling endeavour that labels ‘others’ as belonging to a socially subordinate category (Jensen, 2011). The argument that managers employ reductive categorisation of young people who have made the direct STWT as ‘less-than’ ‘others’ is made in [Chapter 8](#).

3.5 Paternalistic Leadership Discourse

I present Paternalistic Leadership Discourse as a type of discursive Othering engaged in by the SME managers in this study. Aycan et al., (2013) highlight that paternalistic leadership has gained greater research traction through industrial globalisation and the finding that countries with high power differentials and collectivism, such as the Middle East and Asia, tend to operate within this model. Aycan's (2006) categorisation of paternalistic leadership, considers the behaviours and expectations of both employers and employees. Paternalistic leaders aim to emulate a ‘family atmosphere in the workplace’, building close relationships with employees, expecting (and/or demanding) loyalty, whilst also maintaining their status and authority as the person in charge. Employees similarly adopt a ‘workplace as family’ metaphorical stance, often involving themselves in the manager’s personal life and believing that the manager has the employee’s best interests at heart. It is acknowledged however that what makes a ‘family’ environment, is itself contested and a social construct highly influenced by culture (Aycan, 2006).

Pellegrini and Scandura (2008) criticise Aycan's research (2006) for its singular focus on benevolent paternalistic leadership and argued for the inclusion of the negative side of paternalistic leadership, that of exploitative paternalism. When paternalistic leadership is

exploitative, the manager purports to care about the employee purely due to the economic gains they can make from them. Key features of both styles of paternalistic leadership approaches are that managers/employers maintain authority and control (Salminen-Karlsson, 2015). According to Salminen-Karlsson (2015), the gaze of Western researchers is more attuned to seeing the negative and oppressive elements of paternalism, whereas in countries and cultures where paternalistic leadership is more prevalent, researchers interpret the approach more positively. This emphasises the importance of acknowledging our positionality within qualitative research, and I present my own subjectivities in greater detail in the next chapter ([4: Methodology](#)). Leadership approaches based heavily on relationships and inter-dependency are seen as incongruent with Western work preferences for independence and ‘detached professionalism’ (reproduced in individualisation Discourse), and may influence researchers’ interpretations, depending on cultural backgrounds (Aycan, 2006).

In my research, I have applied the theory of paternalistic leadership discourse abductively, as a result of interpreting the conversations with SME managers about their perceptions and narratives around young people starting work in their first job since leaving school or FE College. I focus in on elements of my conversations with both lenses of paternalistic leadership discourse: benevolence; and exploitation. Contradictions and tensions within and across transcripts relating to the ways SME managers talk about their experiences working with young people directly from school/college appear to make more sense when viewed through a paternalistic leadership lens (Pellegrini & Scandura, 2008).

The ‘family metaphor’ is prevalent in organisational literature, particularly regarding small businesses (Michael-Tsabari & Tan, 2013). I have worked in a micro-business for 18 years and have lived experience of these fuzzy notions of ‘work as family’. I have experienced paternalistic leadership approaches in an SME environment, not as a dualistic model, but rather a continuum where benevolent paternalism can at times tip over into exploitative paternalism, acknowledging that tipping points for different individuals may be subjective. This represents part of my personal knowledge that I bring to the project, acknowledging the place of a researcher’s personal experiences in any conceptual framework (Rallis, 2018). [Chapter nine](#) considers paternalistic leadership discourse via a multimodal approach, including interpretations of: the pictures SME managers draw when talking about young people in the STWT; SME managers’ talk during our conversations; and photographs of organisational

artefacts from one SME premises. The sensitising lens of paternalistic leadership discourse has been brought in during my interpretation phase, as a way-in to facilitate interpretation of how SME managers employ discursive power techniques in their talk about young people, positioning themselves as senior family members and young people as their children.

3.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented my conceptual framework and its two main concepts: OPS; and paternalistic leadership discourse (as a form of discursive othering). The chapter presents the idea of the STWT as a contested space where the two participant groups from two ‘arenas’ meet and negotiate identities.

This chapter openly lays out how concepts are brought into qualitative projects prior to, during or following interactions with participants (Ravitch & Riggan, 2012). I ascribe to Ravitch and Riggan's (2012) view that ‘the way we collect and analyse data is a process of *making* rather than *discovering* meaning’ (p.18). Adding in unexpected theoretical constructs, outside of my disciplinary-based knowledge (othering; paternalistic leadership discourse), I view as a benefit to working in qualitative domains. The current chapter provides the conceptual framework as a metaphorical pair of glasses, enabling clearer understanding for my methodological choices, described in detail in the next chapter.

4. Methodology

4.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter outlines my professional influences (critical occupational psychology), research principles drawn upon (feminist and transformational), along with my epistemological approach (moderate social constructionism). Following recommendations from good practice (while attempting to present the *real*), within qualitative research, this chapter presents my subjectivities, to bring transparency and clarity to my methodological choices (Braun & Clarke, 2013). I introduce my research questions (including earlier iterations) to demonstrate how these have evolved. This chapter also aims to openly explore the issue of ‘quality’ within qualitative research and how my work maps onto criteria suggested by Tracy (2010). The methods used are described (interviews, drawings and photographs of organisational artefacts) along with my approach to interpreting the ‘data’. The chapter finishes by presenting an overview of the participants involved.

4.2 My Philosophical Position and Influences on My Approach

4.2.1 *Research as a Critical Occupational Psychologist*

I employ a critical approach within my qualitative research framework, although at times this has been difficult to co-locate alongside my professional background as an occupational psychologist. ‘The Future of WOP’ (Work and Organisational Psychology) movement with its associated manifesto (Bal et al., 2019) has provided a ‘place’ for me to feel more comfortable identifying as a critical occupational psychologist with its recommendations on increasing responsibilities within WOP towards the individual, society and reducing inequality. I position my research as an example of a WOP project which questions the status quo within WOP, agreeing that ‘managerial and employer interests in profitability, productivity and other business - or performance-related outcomes should not be prioritized as the ultimate and unquestionable goals of our research.’ (Bal et al., 2019, p.3). My critique of future work selves theory laid out in [Chapter 3](#), for example, emerges from a critical perspective of occupational psychology research’s dominant focus on productivity and performance within the workplace, argued by authors such as (Bal & Doci, 2018; Bal, 2019). I view my move into usage of a critical discursive psychological approach as part of my move towards greater criticality, both as a researcher and practitioner.

4.2.2 Drawing Upon Feminist Research Principles

My approach has been influenced by feminist research ethical principles, such as a commitment to using methods reflectively and critically, with one of the end aims being some form of social justice (Ackerly & True, 2008). Reflections on how far it has been possible to achieve these research aims will be revisited in the discussion of this thesis ([Chapter 10](#)). Part of the aims of my research has been to uncover biases, unpack positions and seek out dominant Discourses (impacting on young people and/or managers), within the pre-STWT space. Aspects of my research sought to bring focus on how knowledge is produced by those with power. For example, how do managers produce (and re-produce) knowledge within the STWT about what it is ‘really’ like to recruit and work alongside young people directly from school? How do those with less power (young people pre-STWT) internalise, resist or challenge dominant educational or societal Discourses impacting upon them prior to the STWT?

Feminist perspectives led me to the notion of a ‘reflexivity of discomfort’ (Pillow, 2003) and the value to be gained from adopting a ‘methodology of discomfort’ (Burdick & Sandlin, 2010), embracing methodological approaches that resist the ‘neo-colonialist impulse to grasp, to understand, to classify’ (Burdick & Sandlin, 2010, p.354). In the spirit of this, I acknowledge several areas of discomfort within my methodology. For example, unease arising from ‘exposing’ uncomfortable findings in this thesis from participants who I identify with (SME managers); unease from being overwhelmed by the data at times; and unease as a novice critical researcher whether I am ‘getting it right’. Embracing the reflexivity that arises from acknowledging these discomforts, the idea that a researcher is ‘outside’ of their research is one that I firmly reject. Instead throughout this research project I align myself with the viewpoint that ‘the researcher’s identity and standpoint do fundamentally shape the research process and the findings’ (Willig, 2001, p.7). I feel this brings a more nuanced approach to my findings than other more quantitative approaches may have allowed for. Throughout this chapter I aim to show how my identity, interests, discomforts and constraints may have shaped my research accordingly.

A Relational Approach

The status quo within the STWT in the UK is the dominant path (and associated Discourse) of going to university straight from school along with accepting the dominant negative

generational Discourse around ‘millennials’ which describes young people as ‘snowflakes’, narcissistic and entitled (McGraw, 2016; Sinek, 2016; Twenge & Campbell, 2009). Ignoring the power and privilege some groups have in society ignores the impact powerful groups can have over others in society and privileges one ‘truth’ over another. For example, organisations have greater power than young people in determining young people’s positioning in the labour market today. Adopting a relational approach frames the current research project, presenting and contrasting discourses of ‘reality’ on this topic from two of the major groups involved (young people, and by proxy their families, teachers and friends); and organisations (via SMEs managers’ perspectives).

Talking to a group of young people who are often absent from STWT research is central to my desire to include side-lined voices in my research. Young people from the ‘missing middle’ (Roberts, 2004) or the ‘forgotten half’ (Birdwell et al., 2011) deciding to go straight to work following compulsory schooling are crucial to the current study. However, I acknowledge that due to my critical discursive approach, I am not merely re-presenting ‘voices’ within this thesis, but instead presenting my interpretation of these voices. Recognising this aligns with feminist approaches where the researcher’s role is not to act as a saviour for participants, who may be viewed (erroneously) by the researcher as occupying lower positions of power (Råheim et al., 2016). The concept of ‘representing voices’ itself may be used to disguise the essentially unequal power base between ‘the researcher’ and ‘the researched’ (Finlay, 2002) and one which I attempt to be reflexive about during my research. The relationship between a researcher and participants is key and demands constant awareness of our power relations or inequalities. I identify with both groups of participants in this research. I have moved through the STWT several times, am from a working class family and the first person in my family to go to university. I have also worked as a manager in an SME for many years recruiting young people. I knew that building trust and rapport equally with both groups was essential. Reflections on these aspects of relational issues, in addition to reflexivity more broadly, is covered in the next section.

4.3 Reflexivity

In line with recommendations about approaching reflexivity within management research (where occupational psychology sits), (Johnson & Duberley, 2003) I will now discuss how all

three types of reflexivity they discuss (methodological; epistemic; and hyper-reflexivity) were integrated into my research approach.

4.3.1 Methodological Reflexivity

Methodological reflexivity is where the researcher reflects and evaluates how well and appropriately the methodology has been carried out during the research process. As I embarked on the 'data collection' phase I was aware that the visual methods I was planning to utilise are less used and seen as slightly unconventional in my discipline of management/occupational psychology research (Mazzetti & Blenkinsopp, 2012). I ensured I had all the necessary resources for participants to engage with my visual methods 'well' and 'appropriately' i.e., I had a large pad of plain paper in each interview and a pack of felt tip pens and pencils. The notion of 'treating people as people' (Cloke, Cooke, Cursons, Milbourne & Widdowfield, 2000, p.136) instead of objects to be studied or examined, is one which I tried to keep at the forefront of my mind when reflecting on how to explain the drawing tasks, for example. Whilst physical resources (pens, paper) were essential to the success of the visual methods, the emotional resources required to ensure that the method was carried out well and appropriately were just as important. I provided information that I would be asking people to draw pictures in the interview before I met them, in the participant packs (Appendix B; Appendix C). I attempted to reassure participants as I described the drawing task that there would be no judgement, as this is a common fear encountered when using drawing methods (Clarke & Holt, 2019; Guillemin, 2004; Kearney & Hyle, 2004; Rainford, 2019).

4.3.2 Epistemic Reflexivity

Epistemic reflexivity required me to examine my internalised notions of the phenomenon of study (STWT) and acknowledge my 'researcher subjectivities' (Braun & Clarke, 2013). My subjectivities within the research process were many and varied. These included (but are not limited to): my exposure to media coverage of young people; being a parent to two young children; working alongside predominantly young colleagues within my PhD cohort; and working for 20 years in an SME where we recruited and worked with a large number of young people.

Epistemic reflexivity brings in the process of 'bracketing' (common to phenomenological studies), where the researcher tries not to influence participants' descriptions of a phenomenon

through ‘betraying’ their own experiences (Chan, Fung & Chien, 2013). I consciously attempted to put aside my own knowledge and working experience of young people’s transitions and views of young people, more in the spirit of being open-minded, rather than as a means of bracketing. I found this difficult when talking to the SME managers and in those moments when the tape recorder was turned off and the ‘official’ interview completed, I engaged (or colluded) in exchanges of stories about working with young people when I worked in an SME. Additionally, non-verbal or additional signals I may have passed on to participants e.g., laughing, may have put across my views. Embracing the researcher’s active role within interviews is encouraged within discursive approaches, as ‘the interviewer’s active involvement are a central part of the data and as such are not to be hidden away from the reader’ (Nikander, 2012, p.9). In line with this, I include interpretation of my own discourse inextricably linked with that of participants’, across the findings chapters (chapters 5,6,7,8 and 9). It is acknowledged that bracketing is problematic in interviews (e.g., Dick, 2013), and understanding of a phenomenon gained prior to carrying out research is difficult to completely put aside. Instead, as Braun and Clarke (2013) suggest, I view my subjectivities as a strength, leading to more potential for deeper interpretations and believe that bracketing is both impossible and unnecessary within research providing the researcher openly presents their positionality when writing up research (Heidegger, 1962; Tufford & Newman, 2012) .

4.3.3 Hyper-reflexivity

The final form of reflexivity involved questioning how knowledge from the current study was produced. I have consciously acknowledged that my passion and politics privileged the young person’s perspectives initially, whereas the organisational perspective was less politically interesting to me and imposed from the project that I had been granted funding from. As the project has progressed, due to its in-depth and reflexive nature, both sets of participants became equally interesting to me, in different ways.

4.3.4 Walking the Talk – Developing and Using a Reflexive Research Diary

I kept a reflexive research diary where I noted down decisions made, reflections, and emotional reactions along the way. Some of the entries were discussed during supervision meetings in line with common practice for practitioner psychologists, and these reflexive notes have been useful when writing this methodology chapter, for example (see Appendix D for a diary entry).

4.4 A Moderate Social Constructionist Approach

From the outset of undertaking this research, I have been comfortable with my position regarding ‘truth’, not claiming to be revealing one final truth in my research, or seeking a sense of finality or a ‘neat and tidy’ conclusion in my research (Gergen, 1985). Gergen and Davis (1985) outline four key assumptions made by social constructionists, which I relate to my current study:

1. The need to take a critical approach to knowledge which is ‘taken-for-granted’ or assumed.
2. That our ‘knowledge’ of the world is situated both historically and culturally.
3. Our knowledge is produced and reproduced by social processes.
4. Our knowledge and social action are linked together – whatever we take on as our ‘truth’ at a given moment has associated actions and normative ways of being.

As a result I was under no illusion of seeking one truth amongst my participants or being an ‘objective’ researcher, separated from the wider social context impacting upon the young people or SME managers involved in my study. Whilst rejecting the positivist standpoint of the possibility of a universally acknowledged ‘truth’, I do however accept that it is possible to have ‘specific local, personal, and community forms of knowledge’ (Järvensivu & Törnroos, 2009, p.101) and therefore place my flag in the camp of Moderate/Critical Constructionism. I cannot ascribe to the pure relativist position that there is no reality beyond the individual, particularly in light of the social, economic and political structures and influences which impact upon individuals in the STWT. As a moderate constructionist I subscribe to the view that within communities ‘versions of reality are socially constructed and shaped by a variety of factors, including social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, gender, disability, or other cultural lenses’ (Mertens, Bledsoe, Sullivan, & Wilson, 2010, p.198). Due to these different ‘versions of reality’ some groups in society are viewed negatively or stereotypically by those with power e.g., the derogatory term ‘snowflake’, describing young people as less resilient and more prone to offence than previous generations (Roberts, 2018).

My study involved looking through different ethnographic windows (Cloke et al., 2000). These consisted of my data corpus gathered from semi-structured interviews with young people and managers in the STWT (participants’ drawings; audio recordings; interview transcripts; relational maps; researcher reflections; documents; and photographs of artefacts). Moderate

Constructionism fits with my approach as it emphasises the situated nature of truth as being community-based and co-created, in addition to deriving from empirical data and being abductive in nature (Mertens et al., 2010).

4.5 Research Questions

Whilst there is an assumption (or perhaps pretence) of a linear process in the development of research questions, some authors challenge this and suggest that the process can and should be iterative, particularly in qualitative work (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2013). Shifts of focus and wording tweaks within my research questions have taken place as the project has progressed; as my thinking has deepened or been challenged by others; and as I have listened to, read through and interpreted participants' contributions. Accepting the possibility that insight generation as the research progresses may require a reformulation of research questions, provides the required flexibility when carrying out qualitative research (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011). In the spirit of this, the final research questions along with earlier iterations are presented in Table 2 and Table 3.

Young people (prior to the STWT)	SME managers (post-STWT)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RQ1a. <i>How do young people construct their future hoped-for and feared-for occupational possible selves prior to the STWT?</i> • RQ1b. <i>How do young people construct the notion of support prior to the STWT?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RQ2. <i>How do SME managers construct young people making the STWT?</i>

Table 2. Final research questions (refined during interpretation and thesis writing)

Supply-side perspectives	Demand-side perspectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How do young people co-opt others (proxy agents) (e.g., intermediaries, peers, family members) to help them through transitions?</i> • <i>How are possible selves expressed by young people about to transition from school to work?</i> • <i>How do young people about to leave school/college for work make sense of and reflect upon their changing identities?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How do hiring managers perceive young people's school to work transitions?</i> • <i>How do hiring managers reflect on and explain their approach to the recruitment, induction and development of young people?</i>

Table 3. Initial research questions (entering my data collection phase)

The semantic shift from initially choosing supposedly ‘objective’ and economic terminology (‘supply’ and ‘demand’, for example), towards a more discursive style of wording, illustrates the shift in my own thinking regarding my own approach to the STWT topic as my research has progressed. It also signifies the shift in awareness around dominant Discourses that I myself had normalised around the STWT and was attempting to resist. Whilst the core of the research questions’ interests remain unchanged, the wording has changed to more accurately attempt to guide the reader in what I was most interested to explore within my research and the methodological approach which would most suits these interests.

4.6 Aligning Methods to Research Questions

At the research proposal stage, I had been intending to utilise Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as I had a ‘comfort’ with this mode of analysis from prior usage and familiarity. Researchers’ preferences and being welded to certain methodological approaches (methodolatry) are warned against in methods literature, including psychology and qualitative methods (Reicher, 2000). IPA delves deeply into individual experiences and what it is really like for that person to experience something. It does not allow for language to be in any way constitutive or enable the researcher to explore the different ways that individuals *talk about* (and thereby construct different versions of) experiences or events (Willig, 2013). The detailed process of applying for university ethics approval supported my reflections that whilst STWT are complex and individual, they are also nested within wider familial and social contexts (and associated Discourses). I wanted my method of ‘analysis’ to have ‘space’ for including these broader economic, political and social issues, but more crucially I wanted to explore the detailed ways that participants (both young people and managers) talked about (and drew pictures of) the STWT in the future (for young people) and past (for managers). This need pulled me towards adopting a discursive approach, leading me firstly to explore Foucauldian-inspired and discursive psychological approaches, before finally finding (what I deem to be) a best-fit for the current research: a critical discursive psychological approach.

4.6.1 *Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA)*

Foucauldian approaches focus on how everyday language and Discourse is a direct influence of the world we live in. Its attention is firmly fixed on the contextual discursive resources we draw from to take up specific subject positions which empower and constrain us and ‘facilitate

and limit, enable and constrain what can be said, by whom, where and when' (Willig, 2013, p.130). It is emphasised that there is no one approach that exemplifies FDA and it is seen as perhaps un-Foucauldian to be methodologically prescriptive with researchers using this approach talking in terms of being 'Foucauldian-inspired' (Arribas-ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008). In Foucauldian approaches to analysis, samples of Discourses are selected to exemplify the Discourse and how it goes about constructing things, such as 'young people'. Subject positions are a key part of FDA as Discourses are seen as ways to offer individuals a position from which they can then speak their 'truth' (Arribas-ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008). For example, in my thesis the subject position of being a 'young person' or 'SME manager' and what can (or should) and cannot be said by those in these positions is highly dependent on culture and context. In the context of the STWT the context of power is key. Who has the power in the STWT? Is it the young person starting work, full of ideas and enthusiasm, but perhaps lacking in real-world experience or the managers acting as gatekeepers to the workplace? As a result of this, I moved my methodological attention to Discourse Analysis (DA), and in particular, Foucauldian-inspired Discourse Analysis (FDA) where 'discourses facilitate and limit, enable and constrain what can be said, by whom, where and when' (Willig, 2013, p.130). However, this approach felt like the methodological focus had swung too far the other way, too focused on the structural and societal/political forces on individuals, and not paying as much attention to the discursive constructions used by individuals themselves. I needed an approach that would enable me to shine a light on both individual discourses and contextual Discourses (societal, familial, organisational and educational). See Willig (2013) for a thorough and practical introduction to Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA). Critical discursive psychological approaches draw elements from FDA, such as a focus on macro Discourses, positions and power and how these are paid attention to during interpretation is described in the following sections.

4.6.2 Discursive Psychological Analysis (DPA)

Discursive psychology (DP) views discourse as having three essential features: being action-oriented; situated; and constructive (Hepburn & Potter, 2004). Common beliefs (within psychology) that what an individual says is a way to gain direct access to an individual's inner states are rejected by DP (Parker, 2015). Applying this to analysing drawings, DP would also reject approaches taken by contentious psychological measurements applied via drawing, such as the 'Draw a Person' test, for example, critiqued by Joiner, Schmidt and Barnett (1996). DP

is therefore fundamentally anti-cognitivist (Hepburn & Potter, 2004; Whittle & Mueller, 2010). In DP, the words an individual uses in a given interaction are interpreted in terms of how they perform particular actions through talk. Discourse analysts focus for example on the way an individual may attempt to achieve certain goals within a dialogue or to construct and represent knowledge and position themselves in different ways according to different contexts (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Discourses position individuals in different ways – constraining what can and cannot be said about a topic. This in turn connects to narrative identity work: *how we make sense of ourselves* (past, present and future) *and others* (O’Farrell, 2005). Positioning (where we place ourselves and others, in categories, for example, ‘good student’ or ‘bad student’) (Davies & Harre, 1990) and narrative identity work are linked, as talk and positioning within talk, is one common way to shape identity (Korobov, 2010).

To define discourse analysis is a complex process. Broadly speaking, there are two broad orientations to the term ‘discourse’ within psychological research. In [Chapter 1: Introduction](#), I outlined differences between big D Discourse (macro) and little d discourse (micro) (Gee, 2015). The first sees discourse as distinct and identifiable, something that can be identified within and across interview transcripts, for example. This approach looks at Discourse with a Foucauldian-inspired lens from a top-down perspective. The second orientation to discourse views it from a bottom-up perspective, where discourse is viewed as a process of individual construction and actively contributing to social practices and cultures (Hepburn & Potter, 2004; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Whilst these two perspectives on discourse may seem opposing, there are those who are interested in bringing the two approaches together: integrating both top-down and bottom-up views of discourse (Edley & Wetherell, 1997; Hallam, Lee, & Das Gupta, 2011; Potter, 2004). It is this joint approach to discourse which aligns best with my approach within this thesis: looking at how Discourses ‘out there’ shape, influence and constrain individuals (young people and SME managers) in the STWT; and how individuals construct discourse to actively engage in narrative identity work in the STWT. Discursive approaches within psychology also importantly move away from an inner state focus and ‘re-interpret the psychological subject as social rather than individual’ (Taylor & Smith, 2014, p.544).

4.7 Critical Discursive Psychological Analysis

As with all analytic methods, both FDA and DP have limitations (Willig, 2013). The main drawback of DP is that it does not enable or encourage the researcher to look ‘out there’, beyond the interaction under scrutiny. In this way, it does not consider power or social, cultural and economic contexts, which for me are an essential part of exploring a phenomenon such as the STWT, so heavily situated within these contexts. In contrast to this, due to its focus on individuals as largely passive receptacles of Discourse, FDA’s primary weakness is that it prevents exploration of the agency I believe individuals possess within language use, choice and construction within narrative identity work, for example (Willig, 2013). Bringing these two approaches (FDA and DP) together, with a dual focus on bottom-up and top-down discourse, has been termed critical discursive psychological analysis (CDP) by the authors Edley and Wetherell (1997) who first synthesised the two in psychological contexts.

The active part of ‘doing’ discourse is at the core of CDP, where discourse is believed to be both constitutive (moulding, providing, restricting possibilities for our identities) as well as constructive (a tool for narrative identity work) (Budds, Locke & Burr, 2017). Using a CDP approach is appropriate within my study as it provides a way-in to look in detail at the ways that young people and managers talk about the STWT, how these ways of talking may shape experiences and identities, as well as how they position themselves and others in the STWT. CDP also works well with visual methods although it appears rarely used in this way. For example, Burke (2018) applied CDP to video footage to explore discursive othering of Jews and Muslims by the far right party, Britain First. A CDP approach enables my exploration of the ‘hows’ as well as the ‘whys’ within discourse. How participants use discourse as a means to build upon and perform identity work via narrative (micro), as well as the whys (macro). CDP has also been described as particularly useful to researchers looking to ‘capture missing voices’ in order to inform policy landscapes e.g., Locke & Yarwood's (2017) CDP analysis of ‘involved fatherhood’ and potential impacts on work-family policies.

4.8 Combining Visual Methods with a Critical Discursive Psychological Approach

Critical discursive psychological approaches can be used to interpret images as text, where images are seen as another valid form of discourse in themselves (Reavey, 2011; Rose, 2001; Wiles et al., 2012). Using visual methods is a participatory method (Sweetman, 2009). Exploring, understanding and interpreting the drawings together in real-time during the

interview, enabled more of a collaborative process between participant and interviewer. I employed visual methods as part of my semi-structured interviews as an appropriate device to support individuals to talk about their future identities in work (via their occupational possible selves). I also used drawing as a tool for the participant to illustrate their positioning of others in the STWT by drawing a support network (similar to relational maps used by Bagnoli (2009) in work exploring young people's identities). Participants were constrained in their drawings as I imposed a structured request for them to draw pictures of a hoped-for OPS, feared-for OPS and support network map. This structure had benefits for me in that it enabled me to compare drawings between participants more easily than if my instructions regarding drawings had been totally free from constraints:

'Informant-generated visual displays . . . are most appropriate for ideographic inquiries treating each informant or organisation as a unique entity. Researcher-generated displays [those where the researcher provides structure], on the other hand . . . appear more suitable for nomothetic inquiries seeking to draw comparisons across informants, organizations, or time' (Meyer, 1991, p. 232).

It may ultimately have been more daunting for participants if no structure had been imposed on their drawings (Bagnoli, 2009). This approach reflects my interests in exploring not only how individuals talk about and draw future OPS, but also how these contrast across individuals.

Whilst the images produced by participants have been interpreted as standalone sources, taking a CDP approach has meant that the verbal discourse alongside the pictures, as individuals' talked me through their drawings, was essential. The two needed to come together as drawings do not have inherent meanings in themselves (Clarke & Holt, 2019; Kearney & Hyle, 2004) and can be over-interpreted by researchers without participant discussion (Honkanen, Poikolainen & Karlsson, 2018). Participants were part of the initial stages of interpretation in this way (although I am not making claims that participants were co-researchers), adding their own thick descriptions of the drawings during the interview, and thus laying the foundations for my own subsequent interpretations.

Reactions from both groups of participants (young people and SME managers) about being asked to draw pictures resulted in a series of reactions ranging from amusement to fear of ridicule. Prior to undertaking this research, I had not considered participants' reactions to the methods. During transcription however, I became fascinated from a methods perspective of how participants react to the different methods we use and see this as an un-intended set of

findings, presented in [chapter 5](#). Others engaged in visual research methods similarly note the duality of visual participative methods as being both a process and product, where participants' reactions are integral (Clarke & Holt, 2019; Guillemin, 2004; McGrath et al., 2020; Reavey, 2011).

4.8.1 Applying Visual Methods to Researching Occupational Possible Selves

Surveys continue to be the most common method chosen to study 'possible selves' (Packard & Conway, 2006). In their review of methodological approaches on the topic, Packard and Conway (2006) found that visual methods were rarely used in research on this topic, but that these could be useful and complementary approaches to interview approaches. Due to the future-focused talk within OPS theory I felt that using visual methods would enable participants to engage more easily with questions where researchers ask individuals to 'imagine' or 'put yourself in the future'. As a result, I asked young people to draw pictures to represent their future OPS (feared-for and hoped-for) and a support network diagram (relational map) to act as a focus for talk about who was supporting the young people prior to the STWT. This thesis therefore aims to make a methodological contribution to the OPS literature by integrating visual methods (via participant created drawings) as a way of supporting individuals to talk through their hoped-for and feared-for OPS.

4.8.2 Including Photographs of Spaces

Educational Spaces

I took photographs of the FE College as many of the artefacts around the cafeteria space where I met participants I found fascinating. For example, signs reproducing aspiration-raising Discourse around developing a 'growth mindset' to overcome any challenges (Dweck, 2008) on each café table. I do not include these particular photographs in the thesis as they would render the educational establishment identifiable and did not have consent from the college staff to include them. Instead I have used these photographs to re-immense myself in the context of the interviews, recreating in my mind the sights and sounds around me during the interviews on site. I did not take photographs of the secondary school as this felt a more highly 'policed' environment than the college, particularly in terms of mobile phone usage, for example, with signs all around the school prohibiting photographs due to safeguarding issues.

Work Spaces

I also took photographs at several of the SME workplaces and again used these photographs to remind me of the contextual spaces my conversations with the SME managers took place in. I include photographs (with permission) from one of the SMEs in [Chapter 9](#), as part of my interpretations of paternalistic leadership discourse from SME managers. The photographs add to the multimodal approach taken within this study, adding a small amount of visual ethnography (Schwartz, 1989), whilst acknowledging strongly (as I do for drawings) that interpretations of the photographs included are highly individualised (Keats, 2009).

4.9 Being Mindful of Quality in Qualitative Research

In the effort to promote rigour within qualitative methods, accusations abound of promoting the idea (particularly to early career researchers eager to carry out methods ‘the right way’) that qualitative research is purely a matter of following guidelines or a coding script, outlined in books such as *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (Saldana, 2013). Potter and Wetherell (1987), use the metaphor of riding a bike to explain the process of undertaking discourse analysis (you are doing several things at once, but will need to break each part down as a learner), whereas they state that undertaking experiments and analysing survey data is more like baking a cake from a clearly prescribed recipe. These metaphors represent attempts to express what soon becomes clear to anyone deepening their application of qualitative research methods. The analytical process in qualitative work is not simply a matter of ‘steps’ to be undertaken in sequential order. Rigorous qualitative research requires deep, critical and reflexive thinking, something that develops both throughout a project and with each subsequent research experience (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

How the research community (including both quantitative and qualitative researchers) view the concept of quality within qualitative research has changed over time and is situated within context and current concerns in academia, such as the Research Excellence Framework (REF, 2019). For the early career researcher, having guiding quality criteria or ‘universal hallmarks’ (Tracy, 2010) is useful to provide confidence that the underlying principles of quality are considered in your research, rather like assessment matrix support students prior to submitting assignments. ‘Rules and guidelines help us learn, practice, and perfect’ (Tracy, 2010, p.838). This is true in any domain, academic or practitioner; particularly so in the early stages of a career in either. I attempted to be mindful of and stay close to the eight hallmarks Tracy (2010) provides (see Table 4). Striving for the development of high quality qualitative research, yet

recognising the inevitable challenges and tensions to these within the research process, is a difficult balancing act.

I have mapped Tracy's eight criteria (2010), against different parts of this thesis. I have addressed the criteria of 'worthy topic' in [Chapter 1: Introduction](#) and [Chapter 2: The STWT in Context](#). Within the current chapter I illustrate my study's approach to consideration of the criteria of 'rich rigor', 'sincerity' (in the section on reflexivity) and 'ethics'. I also include elements of 'meaningful coherence' in the section on appropriateness of methods. In future chapters I cover criteria of 'credibility' (through presenting 'thick description' i.e., contextually rich data, (Cornelissen, 2017; Dawson, 2012)) and 'resonance' (Findings Chapters 5,6,7,8 and 9). The remaining criteria of 'significant contribution' and 'meaningful coherence' map onto [Chapter 10: Discussion](#) and [Chapter 11: Final Thoughts](#), as well as cutting across the thesis as a whole.

In the next section, I describe how I attempted to interact with quality criteria, adopting subheadings from Tracy (2010) and reflect honestly where future qualitative research endeavours could be improved.

Criteria for quality (end goal)	Various means, practices, and methods through which to achieve
Worthy topic	The topic of the research is <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant • Timely • Significant • Interesting
Rich rigor	The study uses sufficient, abundant, appropriate, and complex <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theoretical constructs • Data and time in the field • Sample(s) • Context(s) • Data collection and analysis processes
Sincerity	The study is characterized by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-reflexivity about subjective values, biases, and inclinations of the researcher(s) • Transparency about the methods and challenges
Credibility	The research is marked by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thick description, concrete detail, explication of tacit (nontextual) knowledge, and showing rather than telling • Triangulation or crystallization • Multivocality • Member reflections
Resonance	The research influences, affects, or moves particular readers or a variety of audiences through <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aesthetic, evocative representation • Naturalistic generalizations • Transferable findings
Significant contribution	The research provides a significant contribution <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conceptually/theoretically • Practically • Morally • Methodologically • Heuristically
Ethical	The research considers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procedural ethics (such as human subjects) • Situational and culturally specific ethics • Relational ethics • Exiting ethics (leaving the scene and sharing the research)
Meaningful coherence	The study <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieves what it purports to be about • Uses methods and procedures that fit its stated goals • Meaningfully interconnects literature, research questions/foci, findings, and interpretations with each other

Table 4. Eight quality criteria for qualitative research (Taken from (S. J. Tracy, 2010))

4.9.1 Including Appropriate Theoretical Constructs

Psychological theories should ‘play an exceedingly important role as a sensitising device’ (Gergen, 1973, p.317) alerting researchers to potential findings that may emerge on a given topic and suggesting directions to pursue (Blumer, 1969), but crucially allowing freedom and flexibility for the researcher to be open to emergent findings. Within my research, I use the term ‘sensitising concept’ to avoid ‘imprinting’ a theoretical viewpoint or definitive concept, (prescriptive about what findings to expect or what to look for), and prefer the notion of guidance and suggested directions, which the term ‘sensitising concepts’ embraces (Liu, 2004). Using theories as a guiding framework supports a conjoined approach when developing research projects, where theory and practical research are intertwined, but neither one has

priority over the other (Silverman, 2013). I have included appropriate theoretical constructs to support my research questions, such as OPS theory (Chalk et al., 2005), as a springboard to start to talk to young people about their future possibilities in work (via their drawings) once they finished compulsory schooling. I have also used constructs of paternalistic leadership (Pellegrini & Scandura, 2008; Salminen-Karlsson, 2015) as a form of discursive ‘othering’ (Jensen, 2011) to aid interpretations of conversations and drawings with SME managers (see [Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework](#)).

4.9.2 Sufficient Data and Time in the Field

The project has sufficient breadth of data including: 19 verbatim interview transcripts (one transcript was not produced due to my mistake of not correctly recording) totalling approximately 146,289 words; 40 plus pages of researcher field/post-interview reflective field notes; 46 drawings; and several photographs. I feel I spent time in the field appropriate for my primary method of semi-structured interviews, for example, meeting young people in particular beforehand for taster sessions/chats about my research prior to them deciding to take part in the study. I have however been attempting to build on the time spent in the field e.g., attending careers fairs and talking to young people about their career interests at both educational establishments involved in this project. For me, this is part of my ethical obligations to participants and adds to the transformational aims of the research. It is important for me not to be a researcher who swoops in, ‘collects’ data and leaves (evoking a colonial approach to research, (Burdick & Sandlin, 2010)); but instead attempts to ‘give back’ to the community who supported the research in whatever small way I can.

4.9.3 Negotiating Access to Educational Settings

Local colleges in South Yorkshire were approached first to recruit one group of participants (young people prior to the STWT). Accessing participants based within educational establishments outside Higher Education has well documented challenges (Wanat, 2008; Widding, 2014). Negotiating access to undertake research with young people in educational settings is at the mercy of ‘gatekeepers’ with whom relationships need to be built – all of which takes time and is a rather ill-defined process (Wanat, 2008). Time is a limited resource in any research project but particularly so for a piece of doctoral research. It is important that research access is seen as a two-step process at least - gaining access to the research setting does not

secure co-operation in the research from participants within that setting for example (Wanat, 2008).

I spent a great deal of time attempting to negotiate access to one local Further Education College. This negotiation for access was ultimately unsuccessful. There seemed to be unease about why I wanted to talk to their students, which one contact stated was because I had been put in touch with them via a contact at a recruitment agency (one of my managerial participants). Lengthy and complex access negotiations are common within research projects and constraints on time can perhaps understandably lead researchers to engage in convenience sampling. I acknowledge that my sampling was partially convenience-based in that it was geographically constrained (due to logistical constraints of not wishing to travel long distances away from family). Access was finally gained to two educational establishments (one FE college; one secondary school with a sixth form) due to developing a reciprocal relationship with both (providing a psychology career's talk for the FE college; attending a careers fair at the sixth form school). Gaining personal contacts at both institutions (via a friend and colleague) eased the process of accessing students at the institutions, highlighting the value of social capital as a social researcher (Gray, 2004).

After securing access to the FE College, my college contact requested that a member of staff be present during my interviews with students as part of safeguarding concerns. This request challenged my notions of what was the purpose of the research interview, and my feelings that the participants should be able to talk freely without feeling censored by having college staff present. It also cemented the notion that gaining access is not the same as gaining collaboration in the research process (Wanat, 2008). I sympathised with the cause of the request, having student safety at its core. I spoke to my college contact on the phone about her concerns and presented her with my enhanced DBS check for working with young people (I have this certificate as I regularly work with young people on projects and was a trustee on a local childcare setting at the time of the research). I felt it was important to acknowledge genuine concerns, rather than put forward a series of research demands in order for the research to take place. We compromised that I would interview students in the college cafeteria, in a booth in the corner (one side of the booth was transparent) where careers staff sit with students. I was happy with this compromise as I felt it was important that students felt comfortable talking with me, and arranging to meet in the familiar cafeteria would help with this, as well as the

booth giving us a relatively private space to have a conversation. On reflection, it was interesting that this issue was not raised in the secondary school setting, where the assumption was that I would conduct the interviews on a one to one basis in a private room. I gave my contacts in both educational settings a copy of the initial questions and shared all project information documentation (project information sheet, university ethical approval letter, and participant consent form – see Appendix B). As the young people were under 18 years of age I also needed active consent from parents/guardians and subsequent assent from the young people themselves. Assent is defined as ‘agreement given by a child / young person, or others who are not legally empowered to give consent’ (NHS Health Research Authority, 2019). I therefore prepared an additional parental consent form, which the educational settings sent out to participants’ via email and potential participants were informed that they would not be able to take part in the interview without this signed consent form (see section on Ethics for a discussion of the ethical implications).

4.9.4 Selection of Study Participants

I deliberately recruited and selected participants with rich knowledge of the topic being researched (either as a young person about to make the move on from school/college or as a SME manager with direct experience of recruiting and working alongside young people directly following compulsory schooling). Managerial participants were recruited via contacts I have previously worked with, those involved in previous research with one of my PhD supervisors and organisations reached more widely through making new contact for research purposes. Calls to participate in the research were sent out via email and via Social Media on relevant networks such as LinkedIn, Twitter and Chambers of Commerce. Following this initial purposive sampling, snowball sampling was used to recruit managerial participants –gaining access to other participants via those currently engaged as participants. Snowball sampling method is widely used across qualitative research within the Social Sciences as it is a way to support researchers to access participants they otherwise may not have encountered, but who are relevant to the research topic due to shared social networks (Noy, 2008).

4.9.5 Appropriateness of Sample

The sample of young people (including those at a sixth form in school and in FE college) is appropriate given one of the primary goals of the study being to look at young people’s experience from groups that are under-represented in STWT research i.e., they are neither

NEET (not in education, employment or training) or university graduates. The sample of managers used in the study also matches with the research aims of exploring perceptions of managers who have recruited but also worked alongside young people in their organisation straight from compulsory schooling. The sample of managers focused on those working in SMEs. In my original sampling plan, I considered interviewing large and small organisations. On deeper reflection, and considering pragmatics of gaining access to participants (I worked in an SME for many years and had a network of other managers working in similar contexts), I decided to focus on recruiting managers who were ‘close’ to the topic of young people’s STWT. For this reason, I concentrated my sample on SMEs who had experience of taking on apprenticeships or employing young people directly from school/college. This has resulted in novel project findings that would not have occurred if the managers had been coming from more diverse organisational contexts and makes them particularly relevant in the context of the UK labour market, where over 90 per cent of employers are SMEs (Rhodes, 2018).

4.9.6 Having ‘Enough’ Data

The contentious question that makes all qualitative researchers inwardly (and often outwardly) groan is ‘how many interviews have you done/got?’ Whilst acknowledging the premise of the question has consideration of ‘rigour’ within it, pertaining to data sources and sample relevance, there is something about the underlying meaning of ‘done/got’ that irks me due to its mirroring of a quantitative approach, where there is power in numbers; with claims that ‘bigger samples are usually better’ (Bofinger, 1985, p.84). Additionally, it implies we are merely ‘collecting’ interview participants or respondents, akin to the school playground games of collector cards that my six year old enjoys, where talk of ‘got’ or ‘need’ takes place within an economic type of acquisition Discourse. ‘Saturation’ as a formalised concept of this, is mentioned in passing in many qualitative research papers but not often backed up with the details of the author’s application of the term (Bowen, 2008). Saturation is essentially a Grounded Theory concept (integral to the constant comparison process) whereby it is deemed that no new insights or themes are coming out of data analysis and therefore data collection can be stopped (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As I continued interviewing participants, I became increasingly uncomfortable with, and perhaps more attuned to, the positivistic semantics of ‘data collection’ and ‘saturation’. The concept of saturation is regularly used within qualitative research and seen as an arbitrary granting of ‘permission’ (granted by the researcher themselves usually), to call a stop to data collection (or talking to people, in my case). In doctoral research,

there is not an endless time period to be in the field with participants. To talk about ‘achieving saturation’ also felt superficial to me in my constructionist positionality as a researcher who sees each individual as contributing individualised, distinct perspectives. In this way, saturation could never be achieved or hoped for, and neither should it be. Critical discussions of the concept of ‘saturation’ conclude that the answer to whether saturation is a useful concept within qualitative research is ‘it depends’ (Braun & Clarke, 2019) but that for reflexive approaches it is neither useful or ‘theoretically coherent’ (p.12). Saturation as a concept does not cohere to my epistemological stance and I prefer ‘Information Power’ (Malterud, Siersma & Guassora, 2016) which links more with ideas of breadth and depth of information gained from a variety of sources for a study. Information power also ties into my stance as a moderate social constructionist in that I do not support the premise within qualitative research to look to gather a certain number of facts or ‘truths’. As my research project aims are fairly narrow, with highly specific participants recruited, supported by established theory, with a strong interview dialogue and in-depth exploration of discourse, I determined that I did not require a large sample size in order to fulfil the concept of information power.

In addition to these considerations, other more pragmatic issues linked to determining the sufficiency of my study’s information power (see Appendix E) including:

- Pragmatically the time of the data collection had just reached the period prior to the summer holidays when schools and colleges were about to break up and it would have been even harder to recruit young people as participants;
- Reviewing drawings gathered from all participants and realising that these had been building up during the research process to be a significant amount of information (breadth and depth) for interpretation;
- I had been transcribing during the same period as carrying out interviews (for both young people and managers) and scanning transcripts realising that data was already building up to the depth required for a discursive study.

As a result I decided that I had sufficient information power for my discursive analytical approach when I had spoken to thirteen participants for the group of young people in the STWT and seven participants for the group of SME managers involved in the STWT.

4.9.7 *Field Notes*

To ensure rigour in terms of the quality of field notes collected, I developed the research practice of building in time (prior to and in between each interview), to re-centre and re-energise myself in order to be able to give a quality experience to the participant (in terms of being ‘present’ actively, listening well and reacting appropriately). I used this time to calmly and methodically write my researcher reflections before and after each encounter (see Appendix F for examples). I focused on how I was feeling, any worries or anxieties about the planned encounter, setting or how the research was progressing in general. When writing field notes I looked to ethnographers such as Coffey (1999) who states that ‘fieldwork is personal, emotional and identity work’ in itself (p.1) in addition to Hall, Lashua and Coffey (2008) who advise recognising emotionality in our reflexivity whilst out in the field. In line with the multimodal focus of my research, I tuned into multiple modalities within my field notes, recording visual impressions, auditory aspects of the environment as well as sensory perceptions in general. Attending to the multiple modality of research encounters adds to the richness of information gathered and also enables us to further reflect on what we as researchers are attending to (perhaps illustrating our privileging of certain aspects of the research encounter) within a particular context or environment (McGrath et al., 2020; Reavey, 2011).

4.10 Appropriateness of Methods

4.10.1 *Using Semi-Structured Interviews*

Interviews continue to be the most commonly used method to collect data in qualitative psychology and perhaps as a result have a high level of comfort and understanding for potential research participants (King & Hugh-Jones, 2019). As a moderate social constructionist I see interviews themselves as a social encounter, despite not being naturalistic encounters (Alvesson, 2003). Due to practitioner experiences of regularly engaging in coaching-type conversations, I feel I have well-developed skills to create rapport, trust and comfort for participants in an interview context. In common with other authors focused in on the interactional nature of interviews (Dick, 2013; Fontana & Frey, 2005; Holstein & Gubrium, 1997; Holstein & Gubrium, 2003), I ascribe to the view that interviews are a site of joint knowledge and discourse construction on a topic. They are not sites of ‘actual representations or true experiences’ (Koro-Ljungberg, 2008, p.431) or sites for mining for ‘truths’, where the interviewer is represented as pulling out the ‘subject’s vessel of answers’ (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997, p.116). Alvesson (2003) typology of the research interview, defined this as a critical

‘localist’ perspective, stating that interviews produce ‘situated accounts’ suited to discursive analytical approaches. Viewing interviews as a critical site of situated accounts aligns well with the use of semi-structured interviews which are favoured in this research for the flexibility they provide whilst still providing some ‘scaffolding’ during the interview process (Qu & Dumay, 2011). Analysing talk from interviews versus naturalistic settings is a contested topic in DA (Nikander, 2012). Time constraints around accessing naturalistic data predominantly meant that interviews were the most suitable method for this project. I acknowledge that naturalistic data may have resulted in different findings and discuss this further within limitations in [Chapter 10: Discussion](#). An alternating pattern was initially planned for carrying out interviews (interviewing managers then young people in an iterative cycle). In practice, due to the logistics of individual availability for interviews, there was not a fixed number of interviews carried out with one group before the other. I switched between interviewing managers and young people, transcribing interviews where possible in between the interviews and beginning to explore findings by the necessary immersion in research conversations that verbatim transcription entails (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

4.10.2 Deciding on Length of Interviews

When deciding how long the interviews would be, I thought primarily of my samples’ needs and expectations. For young people still at school or at college, accustomed to teaching sessions of one hour in length as standard, I felt this time limit would be appropriate. I also based my decision on various coaching sessions I had previously had with clients in private practice around career counselling topics, where one hour had provided enough time to go through a couple of exercises/tools as well as discuss a topic reflexively. Again, when thinking about my group of SME managers I felt that a ‘meeting’ of one hour was standard business practice and that this would result in minimal disruption to their working day and therefore people would be more likely to sign up and engage with the study.

4.11 Ethics

This section focuses on the procedural ethics as well as my engagement with ethical issues within the research project. I gained ethical approval in January 2018 to carry out this research from the University of Sheffield, based on completion of a detailed application form and information sheets and consent forms to the Management School Ethics Committee (see Appendix G).

4.11.1 Informed Consent and the Right to Withdraw from the Study

All participants were given an information sheet prior to deciding to take part in the research. Two different versions of the information sheet were developed, one for young people and one for managers (see Appendix B and C). The information sheet was based on an approved template by the university and contained details about the nature of the research, type of involvement, risks and benefits to taking part, in addition to assurances of confidentiality and storage of data. Due to the introduction of new data protection legislation (General Data Protection Regulation - GDPR) which came into force part way through my interviews with participants (University of Sheffield, 2018), I re-developed my information sheets. In advance of interviews I emailed the information sheet and consent form to participants so that they could read both documents prior to meeting (and share this with parents/guardians in the case of the young people).

Consent was discussed verbally with all participants and gained in writing the start of each interview. This included reminding all participants of their rights to withdraw from the study prior to commencing the interview or following the interview at any time by sending an email to the researcher and also not to answer any questions they felt uncomfortable with. An additional step regarding consent for the young people who took part was the requirement to provide a signed consent form from their parent or legal guardian prior to starting the interview (see Appendix B). This process itself made me reflect on issues of privacy. I was uncomfortable that the young person would have to reveal to their parent/guardian that they wanted to take part in an interview with me, and that this could have consequences following the interview with parents/other family members intruding in the privacy of the young person about the content of their talk with me. Within the debrief, I reminded the young people that they were under no obligation to tell anyone else (family, teachers etc.) about the content of our interview, unless they wanted to.

All interviews were recorded using the Easy Voice Recorder App on my mobile phone (with permission checked again with each individual participant just before the interview commenced). Using a mobile-based App for recording enabled the interview to remain informal, as I was able to have my mobile on the table during the interview, which may have felt less intrusive than a Dictaphone. Audio files were immediately uploaded to my university

account once the interview was completed and once upload had been confirmed the audio file was deleted from my phone. Gaining a clear audio recording is essential to aid with transcribing and subsequent interpretation (Wiggins, 2017). During discussion of the project's aims and the consent form, it was however made clear to participants that if they were not happy to consent to audio recording then the researcher would take detailed notes instead.

4.11.2 Ethics and Exploitation

I follow in the paths of feminist researchers who have paved the way for reflexive and dialogic approaches in research such as Punch (1998), actively considering the principles of trust, empathy and non-exploitative morality into my research ethics. However, I have to admit to finding myself more closely aligned with these principles when working with the young people who took part in my research project whereas I feel I had less of a connection with the non-exploitative aspect when I consider my interactions with the managers involved in my project. Perhaps this is due to my positionality during this research as being more as a championing role for the seemingly disadvantaged group or lower power group involved in my research (young people). I felt the greater power resided with my organisational participants and they therefore needed less 'looking after' regarding potential exploitation, but this is not necessarily the case, and raises the ethical dilemma of whether it is the right of all to be protected equally in research. Mason (1996) argues that it is common for researchers to take on different perspectives when researching with powerless or powerful social groups, arguing that the powerful are more than able to protect themselves whereas less powerful social groups demand our protection more as researchers. I disagree with this view partially through my own research experiences, as I observed that being a participant in the research process disrupts power relations partially, with the less powerful young people at times becoming empowered and the more powerful SME managers doubting their past actions or perspectives and becoming more vulnerable in the process.

4.11.3 Payment to Participants (Young People)

Young people participating in the study were offered £10 in Amazon vouchers as a thank you gesture at the end of the interview. Participants were informed of this payment prior to deciding to take part. In line with issues of power and time ingrained in the research process, I felt that a token of recognition of time and effort was necessary, rather than it being a tool for persuasion, although for some young people that may have been an influencer in their

participation. I am also mindful of issues that have come to my attention through greater exposure to critical research approaches in work and organisational psychology, for example, that we should be aware of the neoliberal context that research now takes place in and resist reducing everything to a straightforward transactional exchange (Bal & Doci, 2018). For example, participants may not have felt that £10 was enough for participating or that they would have preferred some other form of acknowledgement for their role in the research. This is something to reflect on for future research. For audit purposes the university required participants to complete a form to say that they had received the vouchers, where they had to provide their name and email address. This process did not sit comfortably with my promise of participant anonymity and confidentiality, but I balanced this with the need for reporting procedures and trust within the finance departments, and unfortunately, it was a necessary administrative procedure in order to obtain payments for participants. When discussing this with participants I made it clear that the voucher form would not be matched with individual transcripts and would only be kept in the finance department for audit purposes.

4.11.4 Anonymity, Confidentiality and Data Storage and Handling

Assurances of anonymity were provided to all participants and participants were informed in writing (via project information sheets) and verbally (at the start of the interview) that they would not be identifiable in any written work arising from their participation such as this thesis. The complexity of anonymity was made clear to me when I decided to include photographs of organisational artefacts from one of my SME participants i.e., by doing this, the organisation is potentially identifiable. As a result, I discussed this in detail over email with the SME manager involved and gained explicit permission to include the photographs (Appendix G). I immediately allocated pseudonyms to each participant as soon as I began transcribing their audio-recording. Participants' names are listed only in the consent forms (also matching up names to participant numbers) which are stored in a locked cabinet in my home office. Names of locations, organisations and individuals provided in participants' audio-recordings (or drawings) were immediately changed during transcription to be non-identifying. Audio-recordings were stored in the secure and private drive on my university storage system.

4.11.5 Risks to the Researcher

The primary risks to myself as the researcher involved in this research were those associated with carrying out interviews as a lone researcher in various locations. I minimised risk by

planning to hold the majority of interviews in public places (school/college/organisational premises or cafes). I had my mobile phone near to me at all times during interviews, as it was my recording device. For the interview that took place in a participant's home I texted my partner prior to entering into the participant's home and once I had completed the interview and left their home to let them know I was safe. I did not feel that this precaution was necessary when meeting participants in a public space, which 19 out of the 20 interviews were conducted in.

4.11.6 Participant Debriefing

At the end of the interview process, I thanked participants for taking part and reminded individuals about consent, confidentiality and anonymity as well as what would happen next in the writing up phase of the research. At the time of carrying out the interviews I had not planned such an in-depth discursive approach as I subsequently went on to undertake. This raises complex ethical issues around participants' expectations about what will be done with or to the 'data' they provide and what actually occurs during interpretation. Hammersley (2014) raises various issues pertaining to the ethics when interviewing for discourse analysis stating that if interviewers informed participants about the discursive nature of the project then they may become more self-conscious about the language they use. This is particularly true for a study such as this, employing critical discursive psychology, where what participants say is being evaluated just as much as how they say it. I therefore had to become comfortable with a level of 'deceit' towards participants (in retrospect), and align myself with Hammersley's (2014) position that on balance discourse analytic interviews do not result in harm to participants, even though they rely on adopting 'a strategy of deceit' (p.538). Taylor and Smith (2014) raise the counter-argument that participants taking part in studies subjected to quantitative analysis are not debriefed on the subsequent analytical methods, so why should qualitative research be held to different standards of informed consent? McMullen (2018) emphasises however the inherent tensions between relational ethics and CDP approaches, such as the extracts we choose to explore in greater depth and potential negative impact on participants who may read these. For example, a participant reading McMullen's CDP analysis (2018) of her account reported feeling embarrassed and judged negatively by the researcher. These were discomforts I grappled with, during interpretation and writing this thesis and whilst I have attempted to think through possible side effects to participants, and minimise harm, I acknowledge that participants may feel differently if they were to read my interpretations of

their accounts woven throughout this thesis. To minimise any potential harm to participants arising from difficult feelings arising directly following our conversations, I also provided participants with a take-home leaflet providing sources of support. This sheet also had my contact details on if participants wanted to add any information or ask any questions following the interview (none did) and if they wanted to attend a dissemination event I had originally planned or receive any condensed outputs from my thesis (none did) (see Appendix B and C).

The previous section focused on ethical considerations within the research project. The next section moves to describe in greater detail the procedural details for the encounters I had with participants.

4.12 Conversations and Drawings with Managers

Seven SME managers with hiring responsibilities and lived experience of working alongside young people coming into the organisation directly from school or college were interviewed and provided seven drawings for the study (one each). An information sheet was developed (Appendix C) to record background information of participants. This included details on age, gender, position, sector, tenure and number of young people in the workforce currently (see the end of this chapter for an overview of participants). Five participants chose to meet in their organisation, one chose a café and one chose to meet at their home office.

I asked managers to draw a picture at the beginning of the interview process (Appendix H). For the loose ‘script’ I used to introduce the drawing element of the conversation, please see Appendix I. Led by cues from participants, I discussed their production of the drawing as they were doing it or once they felt that it had come to a ‘finished’ state of sorts. The utility and value of visual methods as a means to talk about a topic or a phenomenon (process) as well as a way of looking overall at a topic (product) became noticeable during the interviews (Guillemin, 2004; McGrath et al., 2020). Following a discussion of the drawing, any remaining themes on the semi-structured interview schedule that had not arisen as a result of producing the drawing, were asked at the end.

4.13 Conversations and Drawings with Young People

Thirteen young people (aged between 16 and 19 years old) were interviewed and drew a total of 39 drawings for the study (three each). Each participant produced three drawings during the

semi-structured interviews: 1) hoped-for OPS (Appendix J); 2) feared-for OPS (Appendix K); and 3) support network map (Appendix L). The young people were either in their last year of compulsory schooling/study (in the FE College) or about to enter their final year of compulsory schooling (in the Sixth Form of the Secondary School). An information sheet was also developed (Appendix B) to record background information of age, gender, course, who they currently lived with (and their jobs) (see section on overview of participants at the end of this chapter).

I asked participants to draw a picture of their hoped-for OPS first (see Appendix M for loosely followed script to introduce the drawing element) followed by a discussion of this picture. I then asked participants to draw their feared-for OPS and we discussed this (again either during or post-production, dependent upon the individual's preferences). Following the drawings as part of our discussions I asked participants about expected reactions from significant others (family, teachers and friends) to both pictures. The final drawing I asked young people to produce was a support network as a means to show and talk through who was helping them prior to making the STWT. As with the previous drawings, we had conversations about participants' network drawings during production, at the end, or a combination of both. As with SME managers' conversations, any themes that were not naturally covered in the discussion that were on the interview schedule, were asked at the end of the discussion.

4.14 Transcription and Subsequent Interpretations

4.14.1 How I Followed the 'Recipe' for Transcription

Transcribing as a process has been described anecdotally by many researchers as a painful process (Shakestycoun, 2015). I would echo this sentiment, but note that transcription remains at the core for much qualitative research, particularly where interviews are used (Oliver, Serovich & Mason, 2005). At first when transcribing I railed against the time involved in the process. An experienced audio typist could be expected to transcribe one audio hour of interview in five hours (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). As a novice transcriber, one hour of audio took me approximately nine hours to transcribe, leading to at least 180 hours spent on transcription. However, transcribing my interviews ultimately immersed me more easily into the richness of the data collected for my research project and forced me to actively reflect on my role in the interview interaction (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997).

Transcribing involves making detailed decisions, minute by minute on how and what you transcribe, perhaps accounting for part of its ability to exhaust researchers. Transcription is not neutral as a process – how we decide what to leave in or out and what features we include, such as laughter, coughing and so on, are statements about what we count as ‘data’ and are therefore indicative and central to analytical approaches (Wetherell, Taylor & Yates, 2001). I transcribed all nineteen of the audio-recorded interviews. As mentioned previously for one of the interviews with one of the young people I did not have the recorder set correctly and so I wrote up a set of detailed notes following the interview instead. As a result I have not included excerpts from this participant (Melissa), but have included the drawings she produced. Due to time constraints and as a novice in this area, I did not produce transcripts in the detailed Jefferson notation system (Jefferson, 2004) but used a shortened or ‘light-touch’ version of the Jefferson system (2004), based on Potter and Wetherell (1987) and Budds (2013) recommendations, transcribing verbatim including pauses, interjections, laughter, non-verbal elements and so on. However, due to time constraints, I did not transcribe length of pauses exactly and instead record these as indiscernible or short pauses. One of the main benefits of the ‘light’ version is that it does not put up barriers of readability of excerpts or result in meanings being lost (Budds et al., 2017). For readability, I also decided only to add number lines to quotes and refer to lines in my interpretations (used in the findings chapters) when a quote was six lines or longer. A light version tends to be used by analysts pursuing a Foucauldian-inspired approach to discourse analysis (Hepburn & Potter, 2004) or CDP (Budds et al., 2014). A summary of my transcription notation is presented in Appendix N.

4.14.2 How I Adapted the ‘Recipe’

Continuing the ‘methodology as recipe’ analogy popular amongst qualitative methods writers, Potter (2004) states that ‘there is no single recipe for doing discourse analysis...nevertheless there are a number of ingredients which, when combined together, are likely to produce something satisfying’ (p.622). In line with critical discursive psychologists such as Parker (1992), I resist the temptation to provide a sanitised linear approach with clear defined ‘steps’ that I undertook within my discursive analysis. My approach has evolved and sharpened throughout the research project and has been guided also by intuition or moments of ‘imaginative insight’ (Maher, Hadfield, Hutchings & de Eyto, 2018) and reading about methods of discourse analysis as the project has progressed. I include the role of intuition openly as part of my analytical process in this chapter to add to the literature showcasing a

willingness to resist against what Janesick (2001) refers to as ‘McDonaldization’ of qualitative research methods which focus only on procedural techniques. I utilised intuition throughout the research process: in the design of the interview schedule; in developing relationships for access; in deciding which direction to take an interview; when to cease probing or probe further; gaining sparks of ideas reading and re-reading transcripts; and many more instances. I therefore aim for transparency in including what I prefer to refer to as more of a checklist that I looked for in my data when undertaking my discursive analysis and which other interested readers could pay attention to, should they be interested in pursuing a similar line of discursive psychological analysis with their data.

4.14.3 Familiarising Myself with Interview Transcripts and Drawings

Developing the interview transcripts by listening repeatedly to the audio-recordings of the interviews was the first key stage. Careful listening to the material you collect as part of a discourse project is essential (Potter, 2004). Grounding in the data is indeed crucial to any form of qualitative analysis (Willig, 2013) and represented one of the goals of ‘constant interaction’ and immersion with the material that is deemed essential for rigour as well as for the generation of creative insights in qualitative research (Maher et al., 2018).

4.14.4 Beginning Interpretations as a Form of ‘Coding’

After listening to the audio-recordings several times during transcription and reading through the transcripts as stories, without making any kind of judgements or coding notations or notes, I then began a process of ‘coding’. I used NVivo as a data management tool and did my initial coding on the transcripts within NVivo as part of finding an initial way-in to the data. Initial codes were descriptive (referring to what was being talked about/drawn in the transcript/picture) as well as interpretative (involving my own interpretations about possible meanings/uncertainties and puzzles within the text/images). In line with Potter and Wetherell's recommendations (1987) I used an inclusive approach at this stage, highlighting and coding all areas of interest, surprise, confusion or fascination. A large number of ‘codes’ were developed and stored in NVivo. Coding within a discursive analytic approach differs from those approaches such as grounded theory where coding is an intrinsic part of the analysis, and is more of a first step to facilitate the more lengthy stage of discursive analysis (Potter, 2004). This first stage of looking through the conversations was predominantly a useful filtering tool

to arise at the examples of discourse that would be interpreted in greater levels of detail as part of a CDP approach (Riley & Wiggins, 2019; Wiggins, 2017).

NVivo is an example of an excellent data management tool for organising large amounts of data (Potter & Hepburn, 2005). However, at the end of initially noting areas of discursive interest to me, I felt it was difficult to look across participants and see how individuals were constructing/adapting/internalising or resisting dominant Discourses, as well as seeing patterns across the types of discursive devices individuals used to talk about the STWT. I felt that NVivo had outgrown its utility at this stage and that I needed to switch to a more macro lens. I decided to integrate digital tools with more traditional methods at this next stage. I moved to using index cards and coloured pens as sorting tools and highlighting text on hard copy transcripts, cutting out parts of images and creating collages from participants' drawings (digitally using Adobe Photoshop), along with highlighting and annotating hard copy transcripts (see Appendix N). Research has shown that digital research tools can limit 'the more creative, interpretative, and reflective mode of cognition' (Maher et al., 2018, p.4). As I felt ready to move into deeper levels of interpretation, I felt that a shift of tools would support this. In practice, this shift was an iterative one between digital and traditional tools at various points throughout interpretation and writing up of the findings, often prompted by moments of 'stuckness' where I felt a different medium could support new ways of looking or insights.

In order to focus on a discursive analysis of my findings, I attempted to follow CDP guidelines (Budds, 2013; Budds et al., 2017; Budds et al., 2014) of a six point checklist of concepts to tune into (rather than slavishly adhere to), throughout the in-depth interpretation (Appendix N). As noted by Budds et al., (2017) the first four conceptual awareness points are similar to those offered by Willig (2013) in her guide to undertaking FDA, focusing on broad Discourses and how individuals are positioned by these. Points five and six are drawn more from a DP approach (Edwards & Potter, 1992) as they look in detail at discursive constructions and devices (Appendix N) used by participants and what these achieve in terms of positioning themselves and others, for example. These areas featured within the checklist are reported in an integrated (not step-wise) approach throughout my findings chapters. [Chapter 6](#) focuses on the constructions and interpretive repertoires of young people's, grouping all talk together about hoped-for and feared-for OPS and perspectives of self, family, teachers and friends. [Chapter 7](#) focuses on how young people position themselves and others as part of their

construction of notions of ‘support’ prior to the STWT. For the managers’ data, I organised managers’ positioning and discourse around young people in the STWT as ‘negative’ or ‘positive’ and then proceeded to interpret constructions and discursive devices used accordingly. [Chapter 8](#) focuses on contradictions within and across managers’ accounts of positioning young people in the STWT in apparently positive and negative ways, presenting this as discursive ‘othering’. [Chapter 9](#) focuses in further detail on othering, interpreting managers’ discourse as constructing the SME as a family via the paternalistic leadership discourse in managers’ talk about young people coming directly into the workplace from school.

4.15 Overview of Participants

The following tables (Table 5 and Table 6) present a brief overview of participants involved in my study (young people and SME managers).

4.15.1 Young People

Thirteen young people took part in the project (Table 5). All participants were between 16 and 19 years old. Eight females and five males took part. Seven participants were from Sixth Form in a secondary school (end of Year 12); and six were from a Further Education College. The secondary school Sixth Form was part of an academy located in South Yorkshire, England; the Further Education College in Derbyshire, England. Six of the participants were unsure of their plans following on from school/college; three wanted to pursue an apprenticeship; and four wanted to get a job directly. Twelve out of the 13 participants lived in the parental home, one lived with grandparents. Three participants were from lone parent households, six lived with parents and siblings, three with parents, and one with grandparents. Participants from the FE College were in their last year of study (studying A Levels, FE qualifications such as BTECs or Diplomas, or a mixture of both). Participants from the sixth form were just about to enter their last year of A Levels. Participants were assigned pseudonyms at the start of the transcription process to protect their anonymity.

4.15.2 SME Managers

Seven managers took part in the project, four males and three females (Table 6). Organisations were all SMES, with the majority classed as small businesses with less than 50 employees and the largest having 150 employees, although describing his day to day work in his smaller

section of the company as with less than 50 people. Three of the organisations worked in the field of IT, one in engineering manufacturing, one in recruitment, one in management consultancy and one in a charity. Five of the managers had been in post for up to 20 years, one for up to five years and one for up to two years. Participants were assigned pseudonyms at the start of the transcription process to protect their anonymity.

Name	Age	Gender	Place of Study	Plans after study	Type of study	Living With	Mum's Job
Amanda	19	female	FE College ⁴	Not sure	A levels	Mum, siblings	Not working outside home
Emily	17	female	Sixth Form ⁵	Not sure	Mix of A levels and FE qualifications	Mum, Dad, Siblings	Retail/Services
Helen	18	female	FE College	Apprenticeship	FE qualifications	Mum, Dad, Siblings	Retail/Services
Jane	17	female	Sixth Form	Not sure	A levels	Mum, Dad, Siblings	Retail/Services
Jennifer	16	female	Sixth Form	Getting a job	Mix of A levels and FE qualifications	Mum, Dad	Retail/Services
Melissa	17	female	Sixth Form	Apprenticeship	A levels	Mum, Dad, Siblings	Not working outside home
Olive	19	female	FE College	Getting a job	FE qualifications	Grandparents	Retired (Nan)
Sarah	17	female	FE College	Getting a job	A levels	Mum, Dad, Siblings	Manual
Andrew	16	male	Sixth Form	Not sure	A levels	Mum, Dad	Not working outside home
Ben	17	male	Sixth Form	Apprenticeship	A levels	Mum, Dad	Admin
Greg	18	male	FE College	Not sure	A levels	Mum, Dad, Siblings	Manual
Mike	18	male	FE College	Getting a job	A levels	Mum	Admin
Simon	17	male	Sixth Form	Not sure	Mix of A levels and FE qualifications	Mum	Professional/Managerial

Table 5. Overview of Young People Involved in the Study

⁴ The FE college was ranked by the IMD as 1 (located in one of the 5% most deprived areas in England)

⁵ The secondary school was ranked by the IMD as 3 (located in one of the 26% most deprived areas in England)

Name	Age	Gender	Size of Organisation	% of young people	Sector	Tenure	Owner/Manager
Brian	56-65	Male	11-25 employees	6-10%	Engineering	10-20 years	Manager
Harry	36-45	Male	<10 employees	41-45%	IT	10-20 years	Owner & Manager
Hayley	46-55	Female	26-50 employees	11-15%	IT	1-2 years	Manager
Julia	36-45	Female	11-25 employees	36-40%	Recruitment	10-20 years	Owner & Manager
Karen	46-55	Female	11-25 employees	21-25%	Consultancy	10-20 years	Owner & Manager
Robert	36-45	Male	26-50 employees	21-25%	IT	3-5 years	Manager
William	56-65	Male	51-150 employees	16-20%	Charity/NGO	10-20 years	Manager

Table 6. Overview of SME Managers Involved in the Study

As part of the overview of participants I also include a section briefly introducing the notion of ‘place’ within the current study as it relates to young people’s contexts, geographically and emotionally, via talk about young people’s attachments to their communities which features in my findings on ‘support’ (chapter 7).

4.15.3 *The Notion of Place*

The notion of ‘place’ and its importance within an occupational psychology/management research project is not always highlighted as a key element; with a tendency in research to see ‘place’ as the domain of ‘place professionals’, such as geographers or architects (Gieryn, 2000). Places in this thesis are defined not only geographically and socio-economically (e.g., via the Index of Multiple Deprivation (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2015)), but also socially and psychologically in terms of communities. Communities matter greatly for: shaping social practices; the narratives and discourses we are exposed to; role models and our expectations for ourselves based on dominant discourses from significant others within that community, such as family, friends and teachers (Gieryn, 2000). The role of places in any research with an element of social justice or equality concerns such as this thesis, is therefore crucial to acknowledge, as ‘places reflect and reinforce hierarchy by extending or denying life-chances to groups located in salutary or detrimental spots’ (Gieryn, 2000, p. 474).

Places are so much more than mere geography, linked to the ideas of reproducing inequalities, mirroring Bourdieu's work on social injustice and inequality and how social and cultural capital (formed in part from where we live and who we spend time with) are linked with economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). The literature states that while young people may no longer be strongly identifying with membership of a particular social class in the USA, for example, this does not mean that structural inequalities based on class and gender no longer continue to exert powerful influence in shaping young people's lives (Shu & Marini, 2008). McDonald, Pini, Bailey and Price's (2011) study of Australian high school students imagining their futures in work and family life, found that place and community clearly played a role in reproducing disadvantage, despite contradictory discourses on the part of the young people themselves claiming the opposite, highlighting how 'disadvantage is reproduced yet obscured by discourses of choice and individualisation' (McDonald et al., 2011, p.71).

4.15.4 Index of Multiple Deprivation

The most widely used measure in England for measuring the level of deprivation in an area is the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2015). The IMD is the UK Government's official measure of relative deprivation across small areas in England. An interactive website showing ranking by postcode can be found at <http://dclgapps.communities.gov.uk/imd/idmap.html>. The IMD brings together information from a number of differently weighted domains including areas such as income, education and skills, crime, health and housing. It enables comparison of the relative levels of deprivation between small areas in England. The IMD is included in Table 5 as providing additional context when considering the structural constraints and challenges that are in play for the young people in my study, based on where they go to school or college. The secondary school sixth form where participants were based was located in an area with an IMD ranking of three; located in one of the 26% most deprived areas in England. The Further Education College was located in an area with an IMD ranking of one; located in one of the 5% most deprived areas in England. These measures are of course subject to criticism, and recent work from Rae and Nyanzu (2019) emphasises that 'the level of inequality we find depends upon how we measure it' (p.6). I include the IMD ranking of the educational institutions of the young people who took part as an indicative contextual element, highlighting that participants were all studying in an area labelled by some measures as 'deprived' with associated implications

for dominant Discourses of influence. For example, aspiration-raising Discourses were found to be promoted by schools in ‘disadvantaged’ communities more often (Purcell, 2011).

4.16 Chapter Summary

This chapter has outlined my philosophical position as a moderate social constructionist, as well as my research influences and subjectivities, which have together informed and shaped my methodological choices. I have attempted to be open and reflective on my choices and decisions, in the spirit of reflexivity encouraged within qualitative research, particularly as reflexivity is inherent in a CDP approach to analysis.

I have attempted to include how my research design has mapped against quality criteria (Tracy, 2010), such as ‘rich rigour’, ‘sincerity’ and ‘ethics’. Findings chapters subsequently provide content on which criteria of ‘credibility’ and ‘resonance’ could be judged. I outlined my methodological journey as a novice discourse researcher, stopping off at FDA and DP approaches before resting upon CDP as my final destination. Research questions feature in this chapter, and subsequent chapters locate my findings in relation to these questions. This chapter has emphasised flexibility as a key asset of qualitative psychological research. Embracing this further, the next chapter presents a set of unintended findings developed from participant reactions to creative methods (drawings) in the research encounter. These findings aim to add greater contextual depth to the methodological approach outlined in this chapter, as well as offering insights of interest to researchers on benefits and potential drawbacks of utilising drawings within STWT research. Findings chapters are written in predominantly present tense, to add life and a feeling of immediacy to the narrative (almost as though the reader is alongside myself in both the interview and interpretation), combined with the more conventional scientific past tense used to signify ‘endings’ (Burrough-Boenisch, 2003), such as chapter summaries.

5. Findings: Participants' Reactions to Visual Methods

5.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter presents participants' (young people and SME managers) reactions when I asked them to draw pictures at the start of the semi-structured interview. In presenting this unanticipated set of research findings as the first of five findings chapters, I aim to add further depth to my methodology presented in the previous chapter. I argue that methods are not simply a means to an end, or to generate 'data', but an important part of how both participants and researchers engage with a project. This chapter aims to illuminate visual methods as legitimate ways of co-producing and making meaning alongside participants in critical discursive psychological approaches.

5.2 Introducing the Idea of Drawing to Participants

I reminded participants that they would be doing some drawings as part of my introduction to the research conversation. I had also pre-informed participants on the information sheet (Appendix B and C). Pre-empting negative comments or anxieties about producing drawings experienced by researchers (e.g., Clarke & Holt (2019); Guillemin (2004); Literat (2013)), I reassured participants that this was not about how 'good' they were at drawing. I emphasised a lack of judgement, colluding with participants at times over my lack of drawing skills to inspire confidence, and encouraging them to put down any marks on the paper, including doodles.

As children, we draw freely, usually without apparent negative evaluation or self-criticism. This openness to drawing our feelings and our worlds seems to disappear as we become increasingly self-conscious in our teenage years and beyond (Garner, 2008). Many people feel the productions of drawings is the pre-cursor to judgement from others and being asked to draw appears to commonly trigger negative reactions and resistance from participants, at least initially (Clarke & Holt, 2017). When the idea of drawing was introduced, nervous laughter was common, including from myself, as I was unsure whether visual methods would be well received or produce the rich data sought. Reflecting on participants' (and my) use of laughter within the transcripts when talking about using drawings, forms part of my findings. Laughter has a variety of uses in the research interview, including creating a positive and relaxed atmosphere, as well as mutuality, an important part of rapport building in any interview context

(Soilevuo Grønnerød, 2004). When we laughed together during preliminary talk about drawing during our time together, it appeared to reassure participants that it was going to be ok, reduce anxiety and reassure participants that no one would be judging their outputs on quality. However, the fact that their outputs would ultimately be ‘judged’, not on quality, but for content and meaning as part of interpretation, was not discussed with participants, although included in the research information sheet (Appendix B and C).

Reactions from young people and managers to the request to draw at the start of our research conversation are presented in the next section. Greater emphasis is placed on the reactions of managers, as a group with less exposure to this method (perhaps as drawing in general is an activity more commonly associated with children and young people).

5.3 Young People’s Reactions to Drawings

I frame the use of drawings in the research interview as ‘just a different way to talk about things really’. The absence of laughter from Jane (Excerpt 1), following my dismissal of any negative feelings (‘it’s nothing to be bothered about’), illustrates that when laughter is unreciprocated, it may be a sign of anxiety on the part of the participant. Jane needs more reassurance from myself in order to begin drawing.

Excerpt 1. Jane

Emma: So what we’re going to be doing is a few drawings today (.) so hopefully you read that (.) but it’s nothing to be bothered about (.) it’s not about how good anyone is at drawing at all <laughs> (.) it’s just a different way to talk about things really (.) ok (.)
Jane: (.) yeah (.)

My claim that ‘it’s just a different way to talk about things really’ stems from my interests in this as a discursive project, and the focus being how images can be used to generate talk in themselves or as a way of getting started talking about things that are complex, such as the STWT. Jane continues (Excerpt 2) with a global negative judgement about her skills in this area which I try to further counteract by using the term ‘doodles’ to indicate that rough drawings/scribbles are acceptable.

Excerpt 2. Jane

Jane: I’m no good at drawing (.)
Emma: don’t worry (.) any doodles=
Jane: = <laughs>

Emma: (.) anything is cool (.)
Jane: I'll do a range of pictures (.)

In order to get started on the task, she appears to calm her worries herself by saying that instead of putting pressure on herself to produce one 'good' drawing, she will do a series of pictures, somehow alleviating performance pressure. Before even putting pen to paper, Helen (Excerpt 3) asks for permission to forgive her basic drawing skills, which she represents by talking about stick figures.

Excerpt 3. Helen

Helen: You'll have to excuse the stick men <laughs>.

Mike (Excerpt 4) echoes similar fears to Helen of not being 'good enough' at drawing and only having a basic level of skills. He uses the term 'drawer' focusing on the process of drawing, instead of the perhaps more intimidating term of 'Artist'.

Excerpt 4. Mike

Mike: yeah (.) I'm not the best drawer so it's going to have to be stick figures (.)

Ben similarly judges his skills negatively (Excerpt 5), with me interrupting this self-criticism with reassurance, including laughter in an attempt again to lighten the mood and dispel any concerns about the drawing component.

Excerpt 5. Ben

Ben: my drawing skills are not very good (.)
Emma: don't worry <laughs>

Jennifer struggles with the idea of getting started producing the first drawing (Excerpt 6) because of her fears that the drawing would be ridiculed (whether by myself or herself was unclear) and she would feel infantilised.

Excerpt 6. Jennifer

Jennifer: It's going to look like a 5 year old drawing <laughs>

5.3.1 Summary of Findings: Young People's Reactions to Drawing

This section shows that young people's initial reactions to drawing pictures includes laughter, worry, negative judgements and critical attitudes about their drawing skills and abilities. These reactions are fairly short in duration and once the task is started, participants appear to put

initial negative reactions aside and enjoy the task. These reactions are only seen the first time the young people encounter the request to draw in the research interview, suggesting that creative or less conventional methods may require greater initial upfront work on the part of the researcher to encourage and support participation, but that once participants are reassured of no judgement, these processes do not need to be repeated.

5.4 Managers' Reactions to Drawing

5.4.1 *Negative Appraisals of Drawing Skills*

Similarly to the young people who participated in my research project, many of the managers negatively appraised their drawing abilities when asked to draw a picture at the start of the research conversation. Harry (Excerpt 7) employs several extreme case formulations in an attempt to strengthen his claim of having no drawing ability (my drawing's going to be terrible; my son's going to be so disappointed; Dad you're rubbish), yet saying these statements while laughing appears to soften their impact.

Excerpt 7. Harry

Harry: like I said my drawing's going to be terrible <laughs>. My son's going to be so disappointed (.) 'Dad you're rubbish' <laughs>

Robert (Excerpt 8) similarly appears to have a strong negative reaction when he appraises the drawing he produces at the start of the interview. Again using extreme case formulations with emotive language ('I think it needs throwing in the bin') to show an uneasiness with the product, using laughter also as a device to minimise discomfort.

Excerpt 8. Robert

Emma: And is there anything else you'd like to add to your drawing?

Robert: <exhales loudly> (.) I think it needs throwing in the bin <laughs>

The non-verbal utterances produced by Robert (loud exhalations of breath) I interpret as demonstrating both an unwillingness to continue, showing perhaps tiredness with the task, as well as negative judgements about the 'product'. This exhalation suggests he feels the task is difficult or tiring and also as a discursive warm-up to his negative statement of disappointment.

5.4.2 *Fun and Childlike Engagement*

Laughter was a common reaction from managers upon realising this would be a large part of the process. Julia sets up her initial reaction to drawing with a disclaimer, positioning herself as being ‘poor’ at drawing, perhaps reducing any threats to herself, by asking me to suspend judgement (Excerpt 9).

Excerpt 9. Julia

1. Julia: you’re not going to be judgemental on the quality of my drawing (.) cos it’s poor (.)
2. Emma: it’s not about that at all (.) cos I am right down there <laughs> try and make it as
3. detailed as possible though (.) what comes to your mind (.)
4. Julia: ok [text omitted] (drawing sounds of felt tips on paper) (sound of music and
5. chatting and eating in the background- cutlery banging, cups and saucers being put on
6. tables etc.) ...it’s nice to come and do some drawing <laughs>=
7. Emma: = yeah <laughs> not just for the kids these days (.)

Julia’s emotive language (‘it’s poor’), accordingly positions herself as having low power in the research encounter in this way (the researcher positioned as the ‘judge’, the researched positioned as the ‘victim’ under scrutiny). My response attempts to re-balance power and negate any sense of ‘category entitlement’ that I may have had in the researcher as judge role, by similarly being critical about my own drawing abilities (‘I am right down there’). I also use an extreme case formulation (‘it’s not about that at all’, line 2), to build my case to convince her to comply with my request to draw. I acknowledge that internally at this point my thoughts were often along the lines of, ‘please let these drawings be good enough to have scope for interpretation!’. This is perhaps shown in my subsequent directions to Julia regarding my perspective on ‘quality’ in the drawing (‘try and make it as detailed as possible though’, line 2). Again, the use of laughter is seen here as an active discursive device to re-balance power in the interview setting between researcher and participant as well as a device for calming and settling both myself and Julia as the interview begins. Julia’s statement (‘it’s nice to come and do some drawing’, line 6) shows how she shifts position upon starting the task, from one of not being keen to draw to claiming to enjoy the process. This finding illustrates how drawing is both a product and process (Clarke & Holt, 2019). When individuals shift focus to the process, as opposed to the product, their perceptions about engaging in the task of drawing appear to alter. Interestingly, when I present participants’ drawings at conferences, Julia’s drawing (Appendix H), draws high praise, apparently judged as a ‘good’ drawing, again prompting ethical reflections on how we talk to participants about not judging their drawings and yet judging will occur, just in different contexts. My statement at the end of the excerpt (‘yeah <laughs> not just for the kids these days’, line 7) attempts to align myself with Julia by showing

mutuality (we both have young children and had talked about this in the beginning of the interview), as well as agreeing with Julia that drawing is an enjoyable activity that children naturally partake in and which could be enjoyable for adults too.

Other participants such as Harry (Excerpt 10), talk in similarly judgemental terms about their drawing abilities but are open to the idea of producing a drawing ('but that's ok'). However, ethical considerations on whether participants are simply complying with the expected role of being a 'good' participant and doing what the researcher asks, must be considered.

Excerpt 10. Harry

Emma: you probably read in the thing that we're going to be doing a bit of drawing <laughs>=

Harry: = <laughing>.

Emma: I don't know whether that passed you by (.) <laughing> =

Harry: = It did pass me by <laughing> (.) but that's ok.

My use of rhetorical questioning attempts to minimise the importance of the drawing ('doing a bit of drawing <laughs>') and indicates to Harry that I am assuming he did not read the information sheet. Harry's laughter initially appears as somewhat of a shock or nervous reaction, and he did not appear to have read the research information (referred to as 'the thing' by me, again to minimise the power and importance of formalised research materials). Harry's mirroring response ('it did pass me by <laughing>') appears to acknowledge my assumption (based on his role as a busy small business owner), again increasing mutuality at the start of the interview. Harry's talk (Excerpt 11), shows a childlike engagement with the process, once the task begins.

Excerpt 11. Harry

1. Harry: oh I've just drawn on myself <laughs> (.) it's got it on both ends!

2. Emma: <laughs> they're double ended [talking about the felt tips]

3. Harry: why? Oh ok (.)

4. Emma: so that you can do detailed and big sweeping=

5. Harry: =or I can just do what my six year old does and put my whole hand on there

6. <laughs>

These findings suggest that when using visual methods such as drawings, it is important not to spend too much time talking about the method, but to commence the activity as soon as possible. Harry's exclamation about how the felt tips had colours on both sides ('it's got it on both ends!') and my continuation of this sense of fun through my response ('<laughs> they're double ended') shows how even talk about the materials used within creative methods support rapport building.

I could have chosen to respond with an utterance such as *hmm...here*, to shut down this avenue of talk, but I choose instead to open this up, believing that having fun and enjoyment with the method is an important part of the process itself. As with my hints to Julia (Excerpt 9), my response also sends a message to Harry regarding the level of detail I want in his drawing ('so that you can do detailed and big sweeping...'). Whilst on the surface my talk colludes in the fun part of the drawing process, my talk emphasises adding detail to the picture (in my researcher role of pursuing rich data). Harry's response to this implicit message is to re-introduce the fun (and reclaim the activity, and power, for himself perhaps), talking about colouring in his own hand instead of producing a drawing on the paper provided i.e., showing me he has the power if he wants to resist my requests to draw on the paper.

5.4.3 Resisting the Request to Draw

Brian's response (Excerpt 12) to the request to draw is to reject the premise of the request altogether. He is the only participant who does not take on the drawing activity in the traditional sense of attempting to draw a pictorial representation of a young person starting work in his organisation. Instead he dictates the terms of what he wants to produce, writing words on the page as a list.

Excerpt 12. Brian

Brian: I'm just going to use words I'm afraid (.) I'll link them together somehow at some point
(.)
Emma: <laughs>

His direct statement ('I'm just going to use words I'm afraid...') contains an apology which recognises his perception that this perhaps veers away from the original request. Brian's background as an engineer for many years meant that he spoke about how he felt more comfortable producing 'diagrams', as opposed to drawings, which he defines as being a different kind of creativity. His use of the hedging words ('somehow'; 'at some point') in his account appears to show his discomfort with drawings as a method. My laughter as response is a nervous reaction (my internal researcher voice saying 'oh no, I won't get a drawing as product out of this encounter'), but also acknowledgement of how he reclaims the power in the interview by resisting my request.

Robert's reactions (Excerpt 13) acknowledge the challenge of drawing a picture, using extreme case formulations ('it's really hard') to justify his reticence to begin drawing, softening this with the device of rhetorical questioning ('isn't it?').

Excerpt 13. Robert

Robert: it's really hard to depict in picture form isn't it? umm (.)
Emma: feel free to add any words or phrases that make it easier
Robert: yeah (.)

My response ('feel free to add any words or phrases that make it easier') gives permission for him to step outside of the traditional definition of what a drawing is comprised of i.e., allowing words on the page. On reflection, this is probably spoken out of fear of another participant (in addition to Brian) not producing a drawing which could be 'analysed'. However, these concerns have proved unnecessary, as this study strongly illustrates that irrespective of the 'type' of marks made on the page by participants, it is the *process of talking through these marks* which is the root benefit of using drawings within a critical discursive psychological approach, not necessarily the products themselves.

5.4.4 *Drawing and Talking Fit Together*

Brian (Excerpt 14) acknowledges the importance of his talk alongside his diagram ('by talking around it you've got a broader picture'). By employing the extreme case formulation (my artistic ineptitude) he adds strength to his claims that his approach is a 'better' way to approach the task, although his use of the hedging expression (hopefully) introduces an element of uncertainty to his account as to whether he has been able to put across in his talk what he wanted to compared to producing a more traditional 'drawing'.

Excerpt 14. Brian

Brian: (.) hopefully by talking around it you've got a broader picture than I with my artistic ineptitude can put on a piece of paper (.)

Hayley similarly describes the need to talk through her drawing (Excerpt 15). Acknowledging as I do throughout this thesis that drawing is a verb (a process), as well as a product, and develops into co-produced knowledge between researcher and participant. She repeats the word 'actually', as a device to emphasise the importance of her talk being linked actively to different elements in the drawing, emphasising her need for me as a researcher to both 'see' but more importantly 'understand' i.e., have a deeper grasp of her processes of meaning-making about

the STWT. Drawing on the evocative language of our senses (seeing, talking) her discursive devices appear to be attempting to persuade me of her need to be truly understood.

Excerpt 15. Hayley

Hayley: ok (.) it could be that you will not actually see or understand my drawings at all (.) if I don't actually probably talk them through with you.

5.4.5 Summary of Findings: Managers' Reactions to Drawing

Within this chapter I focus more on managers' reactions and engagement with the creative method used (drawings) as a group less associated with drawings in the research process (Clarke & Holt, 2019). Managers appear to need more support and encouragement (persuasion), to get started on the task of drawing than young people. Perhaps as this is not part of their everyday working life, doing a drawing appears as a 'disruptive' request to them. Managerial participants show similar initial reactions to the young people. That is they talk anxiously about not being any 'good' at drawing and sometimes laugh nervously, yet once they start the process they appear to enjoy it. One manager refuses to draw a 'picture', yet is happy to produce a 'diagram', perhaps showing the importance of choosing a range of words when introducing the idea of visual methods with participants not traditionally exposed to such methods. The flexibility and benefit to visual methods usage enables interpretation of any mark-making produced by participants (Garner, 2008), thereby making anything, including diagrams, words, pictures or doodles, all equally valid and interpretable outputs, particularly so when combined with the talk about producing the drawings.

5.5 Chapter Summary

The reactions presented in this chapter illuminate how using non-traditional research methods requires reflection on how ethics are relationally and continually negotiated in any research encounter (Clark & Clark, 2013). For example, how much encouragement do we give participants to engage in using a method which may be unfamiliar or uncomfortable to them before this becomes coercion? Some participants were open to 'having a go' at drawing and had a more open stance in general to the research interview as an active process, whereas others appeared more defensive in their resistance to using drawings. Both young people and managers talked about a certain level of apprehension and fear of judgement when first asked to produce a 'drawing', replicating other studies utilising drawings with individuals in business, for example (Clarke & Holt, 2017; Clarke & Holt, 2019). However, once underway, talk

became more positive and overall drawing was engaged with as a process, rather than product, and predominantly seen as a fun activity.

This chapter has presented interpretation of participants' reactions upon being asked to 'do some drawing'. The findings add weight to the argument that runs through this thesis about drawings as both process and product (Clarke & Holt, 2019). It is argued therefore that drawings make important contributions to end products of knowledge, as well as the processes of knowledge construction around a topic, such as the STWT. Discursive devices used by participants as part of talk about engaging in an unfamiliar method and examples of negotiations between myself and participants about compliance and/or resistance to creative research methods are provided. These findings also illustrate the utility of the visual to deepen the discursive within research, deepening talk generated as a result of thinking about and producing 'marks on the page' during a research encounter. The next chapter furthers the argument of drawings as a process and product, showing the thick descriptions resulting from using visual methods to talk about young people's construction of their occupational possible selves (Chalk et al., 1994) prior to the STWT.

6. Findings: Young People's Constructions of their Occupational Possible Selves (OPS)

6.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter represents the first findings chapter mapping onto a research question (1a), around the construction of young people's occupational possible selves (OPS). Findings present evidence for the main argument running throughout this thesis, that the STWT is a contested and liminal time and space where dominant norms, expectations and Discourses are reproduced and resisted (in varying ways and amounts) by actors within it. The theory of occupational possible selves (Chalk et al., 1994) (used as the underlying theoretical concept for this part of the study), is explained in detail in [Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework](#) along with the umbrella theory it sits under, possible selves theory (Markus & Nurius, 1986).

Interpretations are made using a critical discursive psychological approach to the hoped-for and feared-for OPS drawings (Appendices J & K) and associated talk from interviews with thirteen young people prior to making the STWT. This chapter presents my interpretations of participants' discourse⁶ (visual and verbal), structuring these into two main sections corresponding to the two drawings relevant to the research question: 1) hoped-for OPS; and 2) feared-for OPS. Interpretations are presented of the ways young people talk about their own reactions to their drawings, as well as expected reactions from family, teachers and friends. Within each of these sections on anticipated reactions, interpretations of macro Discourses being drawn upon and normalised, along with interpretations of micro discursive devices being used by the young people to reproduce or resist, are included. I include quotes from participants' transcripts in addition to extracts from their drawings, to signify how these findings are grounded both in words (verbalised discourses) and images (visual discourses).

The following research question guides both the production of data and the subsequent interpretations in the current chapter:

Research question 1a: How do young people prior to the STWT construct their future hoped-for and feared-for occupational possible selves?

⁶ I use 'Excerpt' to refer to individual quotes from young people throughout chapters 6 and 7 and 'Extract' for SME manager quotes in chapters 8 and 9. This is purely a pragmatic distinction to enable me to locate quotes from young people or managers accordingly.

6.2 Young People's Hoped-For Occupational Possible Selves

Figure 5 shows a collage I generated with elements from all participants' hoped-for OPS. These elements were chosen because they stood out to me as containing representations of dominant Discourses impacting on the way young people drew pictures of and talked about future OPS in our conversations.

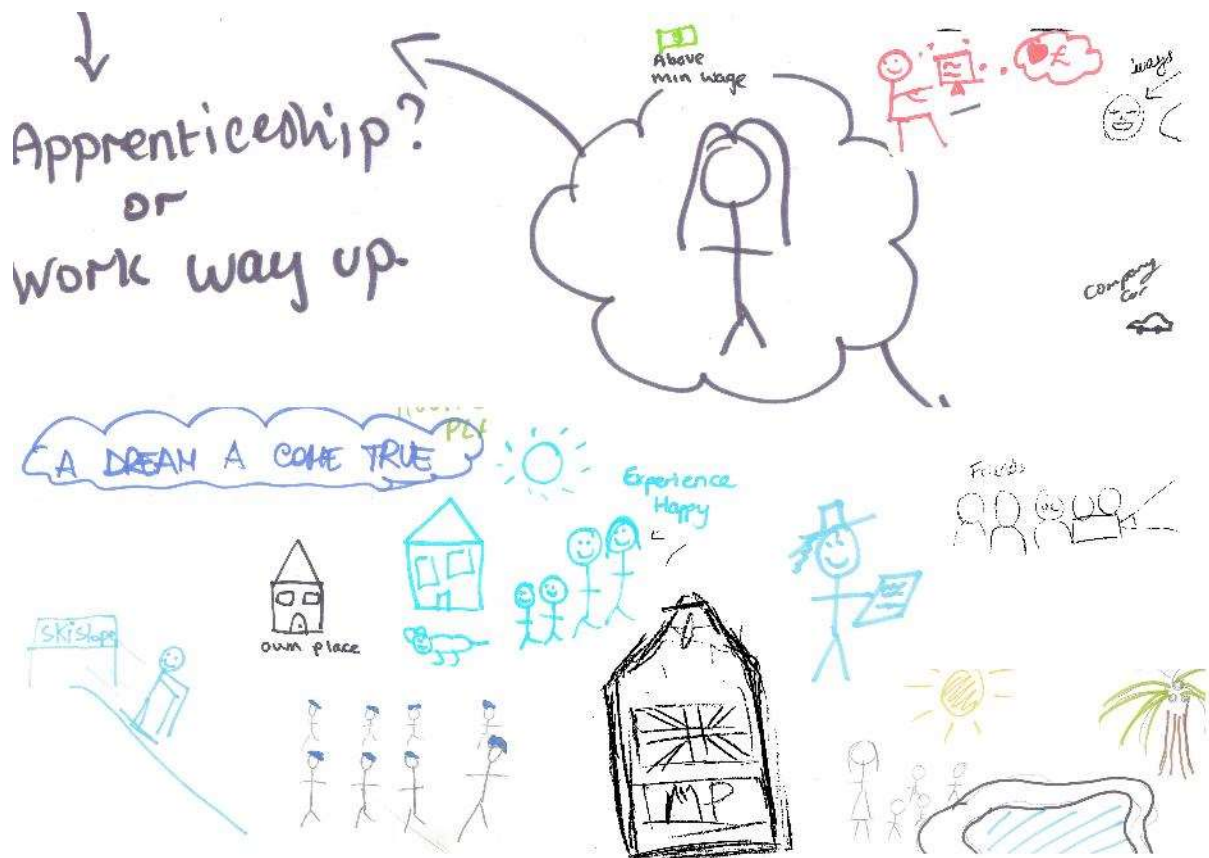


Figure 5. Collage of Elements from Participants' Hoped-For Occupational Possible Selves

6.2.1 Participants' Expressions of Hoped-for Occupational Possible Selves

Individuals drew pictures of tasks they hoped they would undertake in future jobs, in addition to adjunct benefits to be gained from being in their hoped-for career. For example, participants drew pictures of performing job-related tasks such as leading a group of people in the Army (the stick figures with berets); doing accounts whilst dreaming of the money being made (stick figure at a computer); or directing a film with friends (old fashioned video camera). Whilst some job-situated tasks were drawn, the majority of elements featured in participants' drawings related more to additional benefits that young people imagined would be associated with

achieving their hoped-for OPS. For example, some participants drew images of financial benefits, such as having a company car; renting or owning their own home or ‘own place’; earning money (in varying desired amounts). These suggest some internalised notions of dominant capitalist Discourses seeing work as a means to buy possessions which then act as indicators of status.

Participants also drew images related to the perceived social or emotional benefits they hoped for in their future career, such as:

- having a happy family in addition to renting or owning their own home
- being happy at work
- having friends at work
- being proud of where they worked
- having fun and adventure at work.

Some uncertainties about the future from participants also appeared on their hoped-for OPS drawings, despite a positive focus overall. For example, Helen, who was uncertain about the route to her future hoped-for OPS, added the words ‘apprenticeship?’ or ‘work way up’ to her drawing, to show confusion with the path to take to reach this hoped-for future.

After we discussed their own interpretations of their hoped-for OPS drawing, I asked each participant ‘what do you think family/teachers/friends would say if they saw this drawing? This prompted reflection and talk around others in the young people’s lives whose norms and expectations may have influenced participants’ expected future careers, for example. The next section organises findings showing interpretations of young people’s talk about anticipated reactions from four groups to their hoped-for OPS drawing: young people themselves; family; teachers; and friends.

6.3 Young People’s Interpretations of their Hoped-For OPS Drawings

Participants talk of positive and dream-like feelings when looking at their completed drawing. Olive (Excerpt 16) talks about her future hope of joining the military as a long-term goal, stating that her drawing encapsulates her long-held future career hopes.

Excerpt 16. Olive

Olive: Well, the picture (.) basically it's what I've wanted to do for a long time (.)

Similarly, Helen (Excerpt 17) emphasises that seeing her completed drawing immediately motivates her, linking positive thoughts of the future with goal achievement.

Excerpt 17. Helen

Helen: Cos like (.) that's my goal (.) that's what I want to get to (.) it is my dream job (.) I can just imagine like (.) I'm looking forward to it because it is my dream job so it's the sort of thing I want to do.

Her use of the words 'I want to get to' uses a journey metaphor, where the end goal is clearly mapped out and appears to mobilise dominant careers Discourse around 'dream jobs'. For Helen the act of creating the image of her hoped-for OPS also brought her back to her past memories as a child where she had begun to acquire her passion for working in design (Excerpt 18).

Excerpt 18. Helen

Helen: From a very little age (.) I've always liked design (.) and you know how you used to get the catalogues for home stuff (.) me and my sister used to cut out things and put rooms together and stuff (.) I've always had an eye for designing.

This perhaps illustrates how our desire to create coherent stories (identity narratives), connecting our past activities with our future career hopes, in terms of constructing future OPS is strong (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). Her account recreates a common activity for children, perhaps particularly associated with working class children, currently not living in homes which resemble the homeware catalogues but aspiring to do so in the future and creating these future hopes in collage form. Talking about her hoped-for OPS mobilises aspiration-raising and careers Discourses, rooted in individualistic Discourse.

Whilst she is able to talk me through her drawing, Helen finds it hard to transfer her thoughts and words into images on her drawing, tending to use words branching off a picture of herself in the middle (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Uncertainty and Excitement in Hoped-For Occupational Possible Self (Helen)

On her drawing, Helen’s use of punctuation such as question marks and exclamation marks, in addition to underlining her chosen job title, denotes uncertainty and excitement about her hoped-for OPS. For Helen, it seems that the end destination is clear, but guidance and support regarding the route is lacking. Helen talks about having no family or other people in her network with experience of working in design jobs, leading to gaps in her knowledge about pathways into this type of work. This suggests that social capital in young people’s networks shapes future choices and knowledge around pathways, illustrating the way that socio-economic constraints impact on young people’s future in concrete ways, such as the lack of role models for Helen in design jobs. This idea that ‘it’s hard to be what you can’t see’ (Wright Edelman, 2015) is explored further in [chapter 7](#).

Sarah (Figure 7) similarly hoped for a career in design and includes the words ‘a dream a come true’ as part of her drawing, placing a bubble around this capitalised phrase emphasising its salience for her.



Figure 7. A Dream A Come True (Sarah)

Sarah (as with Helen) includes words on her drawing a great deal, in order to add the detail that she appears to find hard to express in images alone. English was not Sarah's first language, so I had (wrongly) assumed that she would prefer to utilise images to represent her future hopes, particularly due to her love of art and drawing, which had contributed to her choosing a design career. Whilst Sarah talks about this future dream job as a long-term goal, she focuses on the uncertainty about her immediate future (her A Levels). She talks of uncertainty whether to do an apprenticeship or go to university to get for her hoped-for OPS. This lack of certainty about the pathway to a design career means that elements of the present are combined with future elements on her drawing, blurring the present worries with future hopes. In contrast to this, Mike draws quite detailed images (Figure 8) of his hoped-for OPS with minimal words, perhaps due to having the 'dream' of working in the Army since being a small child and therefore having a rich picture to reproduce for his hoped-for OPS.

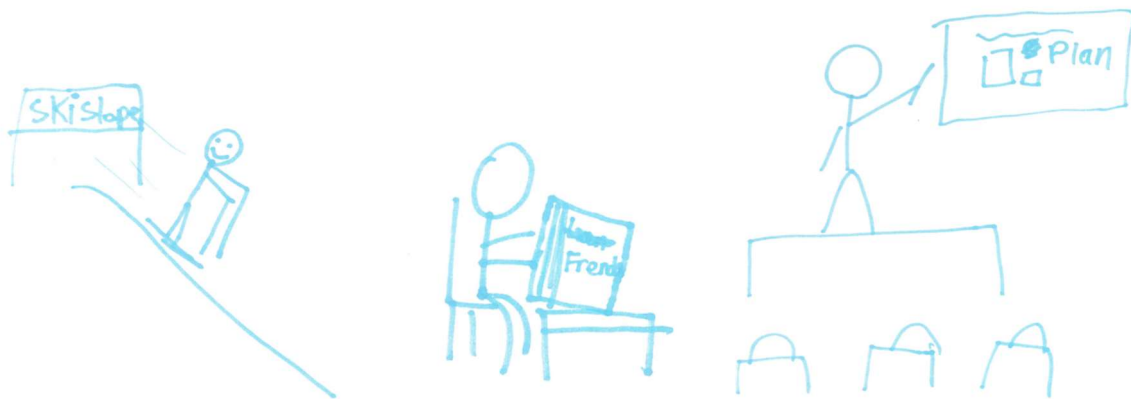


Figure 8. Elements from Mike's Drawing of Hoped-For Occupational Possible Self (Army Career)

Mike talks about already having had support from others (e.g., Army recruitment team) to specify the steps required to enter his hoped-for OPS (Army officer), again emphasising the importance of capital and networks (explored in [chapter 7](#)). Mike's drawing of his hoped-for OPS (Figure 8), revolves around the notion of having fun and adventure at work. He has a detailed view of the various 'fun' activities and tasks he would be engaging in when he joined the Army. His drawings focus on what many would see as the fringe benefits (or viewed through a sceptical lens, the persuasion tactics undertaken by the Army to entice young people into a military career) of a career in the military (such as skiing during training and learning a foreign language). Mike's hoped-for OPS does not include the primary activities that he would be undertaking in this job, such as being involved in a military deployment. Mike draws and

talks (Excerpt 19) instead about learning a new language (French) as one of the educational benefits of his hoped-for OPS. However, he also reflects on the accuracies of his drawing, stating that there are not ‘many tasks’ for the British military in France, so it would be unlikely he would learn this language. This illustrates that through talking and reflecting on his hoped-for OPS, he perhaps has awareness of a certain level of naivety, or uncertainty in terms of what the actual tasks might be in reality upon joining the Army.

Excerpt 19. Mike

Mike: they take you skiing (.) which is good (.) so I’m reading a French book [pointing at drawing]. It’s unlikely it’d be French (.) cos we don’t really have many tasks that they’re doing in France (.) but um that’s just an example

Where Mike draws a work task on his hoped-for OPS, he draws himself giving presentations on ‘the plan’ to others less senior to him, thinking of backstage activities such as planning; distancing the Army tasks and activities from those undertaken out in the field (Figure 8). Mike draws socially acceptable aspects of a military career, perhaps in an attempt to ‘convince’ me that joining the Army is a fun option. He talks throughout our conversation about having to convince family regarding his decision to join, and this may have influenced the type of persuasive images he chooses to present on his hoped-for OPS. His account again illustrates the coherence we seek in the narratives we create whilst constructing future identities (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). Mike constructs a positive vision of his future career, emphasising some aspects and downplaying others (or not including them at all). Mike talks about using the Army’s website a great deal as part of his career research that he had undertaken himself. The Army’s recruitment website (The British Army, 2019) itself viewed through a critical lens, uses neutral language deliberately to describe activities in a palatable way which Mike then reproduces in his hoped-for OPS drawing.

Sarah’s hoped-for OPS in comparison to Mike’s, appears vague, with the idea of working abroad in a ‘multicultural place’ similar to the UK, in a job where she is creative and learning from colleagues. In order to achieve this future dream job, Sarah talks in terms of seeking perfectionism throughout her current studies (‘I want to be perfect in maths’). During discussion of her hoped-for OPS drawing, talk around fear of failure in her A Levels appears to dominate her interpretation, suggesting difficulties in moving beyond the stress of the current time (A level exams) to think about a possible future.

Contrasting with some participants reproducing dominant careers Discourse around occupational ‘dreams’ when describing and drawing their hoped-for OPS, Amanda pushes back and uses the word ‘dream’ derogatively (Excerpt 20).

Excerpt 20. Amanda

Amanda: I think (.) obviously I have to put some work into it <laughs> (.) it’s not gonna like magically like show up to me (.) like a dream or something <laughs> that I really want to do this (.)

She states that working out what you want to do in your future is not something without effort, as is implied by the dream analogy; you have to work at it. Amanda talks using the journey metaphor, saying she is completely ‘lost’ about what to do next after school and sees it as hard work deciding what you wanted to do. She presents a realist view and states that working out your future career hopes is not some kind of ‘magic’, where you would be visited by a dream guiding you to your future career.

For Melissa (Figure 9), the hopes for her future career centre on what a future job could provide for her, in terms of personal, social and economic resources, as opposed to the tasks or activities she would be undertaking. Providing her with her ‘own place’, security and stability in the form of a ‘job guaranteed’ (not working on zero hour contracts which she currently had experience of) and working somewhere where people were ‘friendly’ (the two stick figures in the top left of her drawing) are essential elements for her. The matter of having a clear notion of what job or career was going to provide these, appears less important to her, perhaps suggesting that socio-economic constraints and structural challenges had shaped Melissa’s future notions of work in terms of ‘jobs’ that provide money (and thus security) in the immediate term, rather than ‘careers’ as a more middle-class notion, with associated ideas of personal/professional fulfilment or status, for example. Melissa’s vague hoped-for OPS drawing brings into focus again the question of whether young people are drawing hoped-for or ‘expected’ elements within their hoped-for OPS, along with questions around vague OPS linkages with young people from disadvantaged communities having limited exposure to a range of people in a range of jobs as well as a lower sense of personal control over their future possibilities in work than middle-class young people may have due to their greater exposure to individuals who identify as being in professional ‘careers’. For example, when Melissa includes hopes for her future of earning ‘above min wage’, this appears as a wish on her part rather than an assumption which may be more likely to be expected by a middle-class young person. The apparent lack

of recognition by Melissa that working in a job that is above minimum wage (presumably not by much, otherwise you would not expect the reference point of the minimum wage mentioned) is unlikely to be able to enable her to get her 'own place' perhaps emphasises her unawareness of how socio-economic constraints were likely to play out in this future hoped-for occupational possible self.

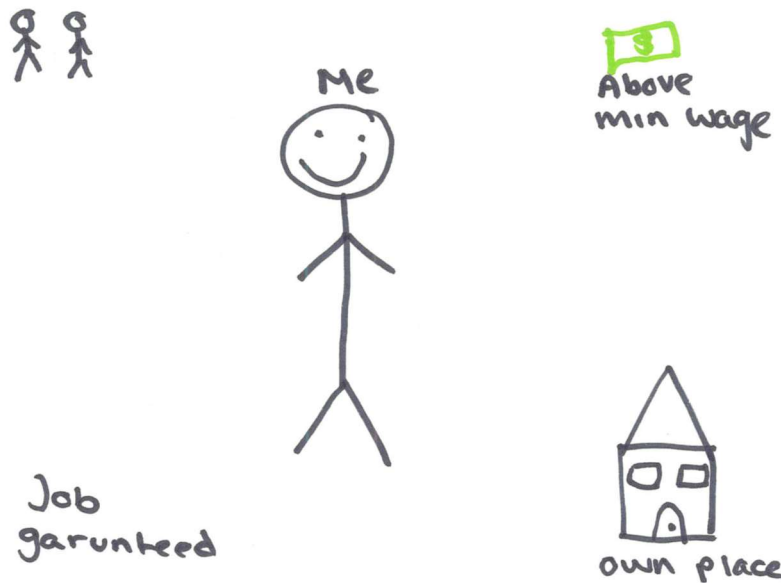


Figure 9. Melissa's Hoped-For Occupational Possible Self

6.3.1 Summary Reactions to Hoped-for OPS Drawings: Young People

Participants talk about having positive reactions to seeing their hoped-for OPS (HOPS) drawings and talk about achieving goals and long-term career ambitions appears wrapped up in these drawings. For some participants, the HOPS connects talk about their present with their past, such as activities they had engaged with as a child which connected with their HOPS. For those young people who are clear about their HOPS and planning to enter a mapped-out career (e.g., the Army) they present their HOPS as persuasive accounts to themselves about the positives of these careers e.g., adventure. For those young people with less clearly defined HOPS, the process of drawing their HOPS appears to mobilise uncertainty and anxious talk about pathways to careers or fear of failure. Participants who are unclear about their HOPS still react positively to their drawing, including positive instrumental benefits they hope for from work e.g. security, friends and independence (Melissa) or the ability to travel (Amanda). For

some participants who are unclear about their HOPS, they talk about recognising the effort that will be needed to flesh out their HOPS, resisting dominant careers Discourse around ‘dreams’.

6.4 Hoped-for OPS Drawings: Anticipated Reactions from Family

Sarah’s talk about expected family reactions to her hoped-for OPS drawing is that her parents would be ‘satisfied’ (Excerpt 21). She talks a great deal about their desire for her to be successful at work.

Excerpt 21. Sarah

Sarah: Well I think my parents are satisfied (.) because they just want to see me successful

Similar to Mike, Sarah’s talk focuses on the need to legitimise her career choice, and that parents are a key audience within these legitimisation activities. Her choice of the word ‘satisfied’, compared to a word such as ‘pleased’ or ‘proud’ implies she perceives that her parents have high demands for her future in work, and dampens Sarah’s claims in respect to her future hoped-for career. To have a professional career is merely an expectation for her parents, not necessarily Sarah’s want. The word ‘success’ and associated ideas feature in several participants’ narratives around their hoped-for OPS. This varies in its meaning to the individual, due to being such an individualised concept, yet appears strongly influenced by wider dominant Discourses from family, educational and media. Olive’s talk about success brings in the notion of pride (Excerpt 22) and wanting family members to be proud of her hoped-for OPS (Army career).

Excerpt 22. Olive

Olive: I want to do something with my life and this is just showing (.) if I get into this job it’s showing that I’m going to be proud and I’m making my family proud.

Olive had experienced a challenging upbringing and had recently moved to live with grandparents. She talks of wanting to make grandparents proud and also prove to her parents that she was going to ‘do something with my life’; stating that they believed she would not have any future work success. In reclaiming her future as a space for herself, entitled and empowered to define her own notions of success, Olive talks about countering a number of negative assumptions from her parents. Olive talks about how her grandparents are already proud of her (Excerpt 23). Due to past family difficulties (‘I’ve been through enough crap

already’) that had negatively influenced her previous educational achievements, Olive talks about her grandparents wanting a better future for her (‘they think I deserve better).

Excerpt 23. Olive

Olive: my grandparents are proud of me, they want me to do what I want (.) do what I want to do because they said I’ve been through enough crap already (.) sorry for my language =

Emma: =it’s alright

Olive: =but I’ve been through enough crap already (.) and they think I deserve better

The idea of pride and believing that your family would be proud if they saw the hoped-for OPS drawing also appears in Jane’s talk (Excerpt 24). The important aspect for Jane is having a ‘target’ to aim for rather than not knowing what to do, which she describes friends as being in at this stage of uncertainty prior to the STWT.

Excerpt 24. Jane

1.Jane: I think she’d be proud of me because I’ve got an aim and target that I want to get

2.to (.) so I know I want to go into finance no matter what (.) so having that now means I

3.can work towards it (.) I’m not worrying about I don’t know what to do or

4.anything (.) um (.) my Grandma and Grandad they’d love it as well because (.) my

5. Grandma and Grandad always love (.) think like office jobs (.) are a good job (.) cos you

6. get good money...

Jane introduces talk of a ‘proper job’ (typified as an office job as voiced by Jane’s grandparents). The normative assumptions and expectations that young people are exposed to (and whether they internalise/reproduce elements of these Discourses or resist them) through their family appear clear here. The argument that a ‘good job’ is an office job, where you could make ‘good money’ is made by Jane whose hoped-for OPS is an office job in finance.

Mike (Excerpt 25) anticipates that his parents would react positively to his drawing due to its absence of less socially-acceptable military tasks (‘blow stuff up’).

Excerpt 25. Mike

Mike: um (.) I think (.) I think my parents would be quite happy that that’s why I’m joining cos they probably think I just want to (.) blow stuff up <laughs> which isn’t the reason (.)

Jennifer (Excerpt 26) also jokes that her parents would be frightened of her hoped-for OPS drawing and be worried that she draws herself out in the field as an army medic, instead of their preference for her to be on a base which they had determined to be safer. Jennifer talks about how her parents had struggled initially to accept her choice of future career (echoing Mike’s experiences of negotiating his hoped-for OPS with parents), but had now accepted it.

Our shared laughter in response to her stark presentation of the realities of army life ('less likely to get shot') perhaps illustrates shared concern of the risks involved in Jennifer's hoped-for OPS.

Excerpt 26. Jennifer

Jennifer: my parents want me to be in the medical cos it's on a base and less likely to get shot
(.) <laughs>
Emma: <laughs>

Talk around parents not always being supportive of participant's hoped-for OPS also appears in Greg's description (Excerpt 27) of the anticipated negative reactions of his mum towards his hoped-for OPS (musician).

Excerpt 27. Greg

Greg: well Mum would say (.) something along the lines of (.) there's no chance of being another Ed Sheeran sort of thing <laughs> (.)
Emma: right=
Greg: =and I'm like (.) no (.) I don't want to be another Ed Sheeran, I want to be my (.) the first kind of person sort of thing (.) um (.)

Greg talks about his family and his mum in particular as belittling his hoped-for OPS, stating that there is 'no chance' of him becoming a great success as a musician. Using the example of Ed Sheeran (male singer/songwriter who gained worldwide success making music from his bedroom); Greg shows his awareness that there may be a low chance of this scale of success for himself as for most musicians. He pushes back against constraining familial Discourse, stating that he wants to pursue his own individualised dreams of success and define this on his own terms ('I want to be my...the first kind of person sort of thing'). This builds on talk by Sarah (Excerpt 21) and Olive (Excerpt 23), around resisting familial notions of success and challenging these by building their own definitions. Greg includes additional familial judgement from his grandad (Excerpt 28), appearing to support his mum's belief that being a musician is not a 'proper' job. It is something that should be a hobby, with a professional job ('Accountant') as the prime focus in order to be truly successful. Greg challenges and resists his family's notion of a 'good job' in his account, whereas Jane adopts them within her hoped-for OPS (Excerpt 24).

Excerpt 28. Greg

Greg: he [grandad] said oh (.) 'accountant by day, musician by night' (.) right (.)

Ben's definitions of success appear wrapped up in aspiration-raising Discourse around 'working hard' (Excerpt 29). Ben anticipates that his parents' reactions to his hoped-for OPS drawing would emphasise that he would need to 'work hard' to achieve this. Ben appears to have internalised the 'work hard' meritocratic Discourse, common in educational settings, where individual agency is highly focused upon. Ben's family appear to emphasise this talk with him and Ben reproduces it, adding that he needs to 'put the effort in'

Excerpt 29. Ben

1. Ben: that I need to work hard to get there
2. Emma: right (.)
3. Ben: and (.)
4. Emma: what do you think they mean by that?
5. Ben: it's not just going to happen (.) I do actually have to put the effort in (.) outside of
6. school (.) in school (.) make sure that I work so that I can get to [large firm name] (.)
7. Emma: uh huh
8. Ben: (.) and get to where I want to be in the future (.)

6.4.1 *Summary Reactions to Hoped-for OPS Drawings: Family*

Positive reactions are expected from family to participants' HOPS, such as pride and success. The HOPS appears to re-inforce familial notions of 'success' e.g. through Sarah's drawing of a 'professional' and expectations of parental satisfaction in this career outcome. Participants also anticipate negative reactions from family to their HOPS, bringing in ideas of challenge and tension between what young people and family members want/expect for their HOPS. The anticipated family reactions suggest that young people expect conflict with family to arise out of ideas of what constitutes a 'proper' job. Participants also talk about expecting that their HOPS would be used as a threat by families, a way of reminding them that 'hard work' is required to achieve your HOPS (reproducing the individualisation and meritocratic Discourses where hard work is emphasised above all else).

6.5 Hoped-for OPS Drawings: Anticipated Reactions from Teachers

Participants talk about expecting positive judgements from teachers and other professionals within the school or college environment about their hoped-for OPS drawings. Helen (Excerpt 30) talks of the happiness she believes that her college teachers would feel if they saw her drawing, due to the clarity she has for her future career path in design.

Excerpt 30. Helen

Helen: um (.) I think they'd be happy (.) <laughing> cos a lot of people in my class don't tend (.) like a lot of them don't really have aspirations or don't really know what they're doing (.)

but I think I'm one of the people in the class who do know what they're doing so I think they'd be quite pleased that I've got my head straight <laughs> and I've got an idea of where I want to go.

However, the teacher's happiness Helen suggests is contingent on her having a clear 'idea of where I want to go', being goal focused and having 'aspirations', again alluding to the normalisation of aspiration-raising Discourse discussed earlier in the chapter, and throughout this thesis as a whole. Helen compares herself favourably with other students in her class who she judges to lack 'aspirations' or 'don't really know what they're doing'. Again this perhaps suggests Helen normalises and reproduces aspects of the dominant Discourse of individualisation, with its demands to 'know what you are doing' at all times and have a clear sense of 'project you'. The negative judgement placed on young people who are unsure or unclear of their future career trajectory, appears in Helen's talk and she distances herself clearly from this 'lot'.

Ben (Excerpt 31) repeats talk reproducing 'hard work' elements of the aspiration-raising Discourse, perceiving that not only his family (see section above), but also his teachers would emphasise that he needed to work hard to achieve his hoped-for OPS.

Excerpt 31. Ben

Ben: she said I've got the potential too (.) I've just got to work hard at it (.)

Emma: uh huh (.) and what do they mean when they say 'work hard'?

Ben: that it doesn't (.) like you can't just expect it to happen (.)

He talks about having discussions with one of his teachers and uses reported speech to strengthen his argument that he can achieve his hoped-for OPS ('she said I've got the potential too'). Ben's account places emphasis on the need for action and agency, appearing to draw from individualisation Discourse where Ben's occupational future is within his control and will happen as a result of hard work ('just got to work hard'; 'you can't just expect it to happen').

Greg (Excerpt 32) states it as fact ('I know'), that his maths teacher would be disapproving of his hoped-for OPS (musician). Greg had previously decided that he would pursue a career as an accountant and talks about how this change of future career (to musician) means he feels he is letting some of his teachers down ('disappointed'). Although his laughter suggests that he is pushing back against any sense of blame or disappointment from not going on expected routes.

Excerpt 32. Greg

Greg: um (.) I know my Maths teacher would be disappointed <laughs>

He talks about how teachers feel disappointment if you do not ‘choose’ their topic as your future career, almost as though teachers’ main interests are converting future young people to enter their taught subjects. Andrew (Excerpt 33) repeats this claim that teachers are only happy if you follow ‘their subject’ for your future career, suggesting feelings of pride in those that did, and disappointment or betrayal by those that did not.

Excerpt 33. Andrew

Andrew: I think they’d be pleased (.) two of them anyway (.) you know (.) it being their subjects

For example, he says that only two of his teachers would be pleased with his hoped-for OPS as it was based in their areas. The anticipated reactions of others (family and teachers) are talked about by participants as sources of pressure at times, as young people attempt to navigate the decisions and emotions around the STWT. Jane (Excerpt 34) similarly talks of a sense of positive reinforcement anticipated from certain teachers. This suggests that as well as having to navigate the expectations and judgements from family around their hoped-for OPS, young people also have to navigate those of teachers.

Excerpt 34. Jane

Jane: my accounts teacher, I think she’d love it

Emma: yeah

Jane: because I’m going into accounts (.)

Amanda (Excerpt 35) talks of a judgemental attitude expected from teachers at college about her unclear future plans, although she states that it depends on the individual teacher. She reflects on meanings of success as dependent upon individual teachers’ views, whether it is about being happy or well-paid in work, for example.

Excerpt 35. Amanda

1. Amanda: it depends on the teacher really... obviously some teachers are very Uni forward

2. like (.) apply to uni. (.) blah blah blah (.) but then there’s other teachers that are like (.) do

3. what .makes you happy and do what you think is comfortable (.) cos obviously everyone

4. has different ideas of what success is (.)

5. Emma: hmm (.)

6. Amanda: some think if you’re happy and stable and stuff (.) but then some people if

7. you’ve got a high paying job and you went to Uni and you have a degree and stuff like

8. that (.)

9. Emma: hmm (.)

10. Amanda: (.) so it really just depends on your teacher.

She talks about some teachers constantly pushing the dominant aspiration-raising Discourse ('Uni forward') as the only future option, whereas others are more open to different options. She reports teachers speech as 'apply to uni..blah blah blah' suggesting that she interprets teachers pushing university unthinkingly and that it is repeated almost as a script to students in her FE college (as the dominant and preferred path, particularly for 'bright' girls). Amanda presents two contrasting and extreme examples of future choices (go to university or do what makes you happy). Amanda (Excerpt 36) talks about dominant messages from family and friends backing up her teachers that university is the best choice in the STWT, illustrating the normative path of university to work as still standing firm.

Excerpt 36. Amanda

Amanda: um (.) <laughs> I think (.) my family is definitely like (.) you need to go to uni and get like a degree and stuff (.)

For example, she reports family speech as reinforcing teachers, 'you need to go to uni', as an argument that there is no alternative for her and she has no choice in the matter. Despite talking about having less power and agency in determining her decisions of whether to go to university or not, Amanda negotiates and resists this apparent forced future choice by stating that she 'couldn't be bothered to apply' to university and missed the closing date for university applications (Excerpt 37).

Excerpt 37. Amanda

Amanda: I wasn't sure whether I was going to uni or not anyway and then I couldn't be bothered to apply <laughs> so then I didn't (.) and then (.) um (.) my mum and friends and stuff asked me (.) 'then what do you want to do then?' (.) um (.) and I was like (.) I don't know (.)

Amanda appears to demonstrate passive resistance and re-assert her power and agency over the situation by not applying on time. Her refusal to internalise the dominant aspiration-raising Discourse escalated the demands and questions from family and friends about what she would be doing instead. It appears that the more her teachers, mum (she was in a lone parent household) and friends pressured her to decide upon her future career, the more apathetic and uncertain she had become. This suggests that Amanda had found an unexpected source of power and agency in ambivalent resistance i.e., the power to do nothing about her future occupational or educational choices.

6.5.1 *Summary Reactions to Hoped-for OPS Drawings: Teachers*

As with family members, participants predominantly expected positive reactions from teachers to their HOPS. Some participants suggest that teachers' happiness is contingent on you choosing a career in their subject and that they would be proud if the young person did this but feel betrayed if they did not. Judgemental reactions are expected from teachers towards those young people without clearly defined HOPS, suggesting a sense of being blamed for not having clear career goals (a clear 'project you') for the future. The 'work hard' Discourse is also expected from teachers, similarly to family reactions upon seeing a young person's HOPS, that young people need to 'work hard' to achieve this and not just 'expect it to happen'. Dominant Discourse around university as the 'best' path is also talked about by some participants around discussions on their HOPS (e.g., Amanda). Showing an ambivalent approach, such as 'not bothering' to apply to university or missing application deadlines, is a way that young people resist teachers' shaping of their future paths towards university rather than their preference of directly going on to work following school. This suggests some teachers have normalised these dominant educational Discourses and reproduce these in the messages they give to young people, maintaining the status quo of university as the 'best' path.

6.6 Hoped-For OPS Drawings: Anticipated Reactions from Friends

As with anticipating positive reactions from teachers to hoped-for OPS drawings, participants predominantly anticipate positive judgements from friends. Mike (Excerpt 38) furthers his claim of the positives of a military career, by stating that his friends think it is 'cool'.

Excerpt 38. Mike

Mike: well my friends (.) they think it's really cool (.) they're like (.) a few of them are like annoyed that I'm going to be off (.) and not going to be able to see them for months and months (.) but I'll be (.) I'll text them and stuff <laughs>

Again Mike focuses on the aspects such as skiing when he talks of his hoped-for career with his friends and suggests that they are 'annoyed' because he is 'going to be off'. The implication in his account is that he will be travelling the world enjoying himself, while they will be at home. He jokingly suggests that he will keep in touch with friends but it will be sporadic via text messages, again attempting to strengthen his argument that he will be too busy having fun to keep in detailed contact ('I'll text them and stuff <laughs>').

Emily (Excerpt 39) similarly argues that her friends are aware of her hoped-for OPS (interior designer) and she legitimises her future career choice by providing supporting information gathered from friends to show she has the competences required for her hoped-for OPS e.g., leadership and organisation skills.

Excerpt 39. Emily

Emily: yeah they all know I want to be an interior designer and think I'd be good at it because like I'm (.) I'm not bossy (.) but I'm a bit of a leader (.) because I'm quite (.) I'm the oldest of the group so (.) they think I'd be good at it (.) cos I'm quite organised as well (.) cos if I don't have my folder and I don't have me dividers (.) I can't cope (.) so (.) yeah (.) they'd probably agree and say that I could do it (.) which I think I can do it (.)

Her long-term goal was to have her own business and she talks about her organised behaviour with her schoolwork ('if I don't have my folder and I don't have me dividers'), suggesting these are useful for running your own business. Emily includes talk that shows her awareness of gendered Discourses around leadership via her desire not to be associated with the term 'bossy'. The impact of gendered Discourses on OPS is discussed at the end of this chapter.

Andrew's talk (Excerpt 40) includes the hedge ('I guess'), that his friends would agree with his uncertainty as to whether he was aiming too high in his hoped-for OPS (film director).

Excerpt 40. Andrew

1. Andrew: yeah (.) I guess they agree with me on (.) um like that not really being [pointing
2. to film director drawing] (.) maybe going too far (.) I don't think it's (.) although it's (.)
3. one friend who I do most of this stuff with (.)
4. Emma: uh huh
5. Andrew: they're interested in going down the same route so yeah they're quite supportive
6. of that (.) we like to do it together so (.)

He talks of 'maybe going too far', suggesting that friends are keen to keep ambitions in check. However, a friend with similar future career hopes is positioned as more supportive than other friends, illustrating the benefits for young people of having individuals in their networks with similar hopes. Andrew's hoped-for OPS (Figure 10) is marked by a line diagonally across the middle, to denote that his future hoped-for OPS is split between two careers: one he felt was unrealistic (but desired) and the other more realistic to hope for (involving more a sense of 'settling').



Figure 10. Andrew's Split Hoped-For Occupational Possible Self

6.6.1 Summary Reactions to Hoped-for OPS Drawings: Friends

Participants expect positive reactions from friends to their HOPS, although for some this appears tinged with expectations of jealousy, for example, thinking that their HOPS is ‘cool’ and being jealous of the adventures involved (Mike). This is perhaps due to the shaping of HOPS to impress friends and others, for example, emphasising positive sides of adventure and travel in an army career, for example. Uncertainty about whether friends may judge that you are aiming too high with your HOPS is mentioned, suggesting that young people sometimes walk a difficult line with how they express their future career hopes to friends.

This section has presented the talk and drawings from conversations with young people around their hoped-for OPS (HOPS). It highlights how young people are having to navigate the space prior to making the STWT full of expectations and judgements from a myriad of others (presented here as family, teachers and friends, in addition to their own expectations and judgements) around their hoped-for OPS. Young people talk about having to persuade and influence others about their hoped-for OPS, at the same time as being persuaded and influenced by others as to what their hoped-for OPS should or could be. Dominant Discourses of influence interpreted from the young people’s talk about their hoped-for OPS included aspiration-raising, meritocratic and careers Discourses. These appear underpinned by individualisation Discourses in general where young people talked about the need to both be clear about their hoped-for OPS and to achieve it by ‘working hard’ and by themselves. Participants with clear hoped-for OPS appeared to find the drawing of these more enjoyable than those who did not. Participants who were uncertain of their hoped-for OPS appeared to find it harder to add detail, yet talking about their uncertainties around their hoped-for OPS enabled useful reflection around elements they would hope for in work. Talking about HOPS (whether clear or vague) appears to support young people in their reflection on influences and expectations of others (shining a light on internalising and resisting dominant paths and Discourses) and the pressures they face to shape their hoped-for OPS into something that significant others (family, teachers and friends) will approve of.

Whilst each individual's visual representation of their HOPS was unique, their talk around hoped-for occupational futures contained some commonalities across participants. The young people in my study talked about a sense of hope and optimism about the STWT overall, albeit tinged with apprehension about the uncertainty of what lay ahead. This perception of the STWT has similarly been found by those exploring the university to work transition, such as Arnett (2007). Young people in my study also talked about notions and ideas of 'success' (success aligned with hopes and failure aligned with fears) and how this would be viewed by others. A 'work hard' Discourse featured heavily within and across transcripts, appearing to draw from Discourses around meritocracy, aspiration-raising and realizing potential, common in our neoliberal educational contexts (Harrison, 2018; Harrison & Waller, 2018) and also ascribed to familial contexts from the young people i.e., from parents or grandparents. For example, young people talked about the need to be 'more than', or 'the best', in order to get their hoped-for job. They also talked in terms of needing to 'fulfil potential' in order to achieve happiness in the future. Linked with this were examples of internalised Discourses of individualisation, common again in the modern neoliberal educational setting where young people are constantly exposed to messages that their future is 'all down to you' or the need for a 'growth mindset' (for example, flyers featuring this phrase were on every cafeteria table in the FE college of this study). Reflections on structural constraints and barriers in operation are rarely considered within these Discourses (Handley, 2018).

The next section of this chapter moves on to present findings from conversations with young people around their feared-for OPS, once again presenting interpretations of talk and drawings ordered according to who is (or is imagined to be) reacting to the drawings: young people themselves; family; teachers; and friends.

6.7 Young People's Feared-For Occupational Possible Selves

Figure 11 comprises a collage I created from key elements taken from all participants' drawings of their feared-for OPS. Comparing this collage with the collage of hoped-for OPS (Figure 5), the drawings produced for feared-for OPS tended to have a greater sense of richness and detail (added predominantly by words added onto the drawings bringing the feelings portrayed by the images to life) compared to those in the hoped-for OPS. Stick figures are also greatly used by participants to illustrate themselves (and others) in their feared-for futures, suggesting

important relational elements to feared-for OPS e.g., angry customers, sad family or judgemental friends.

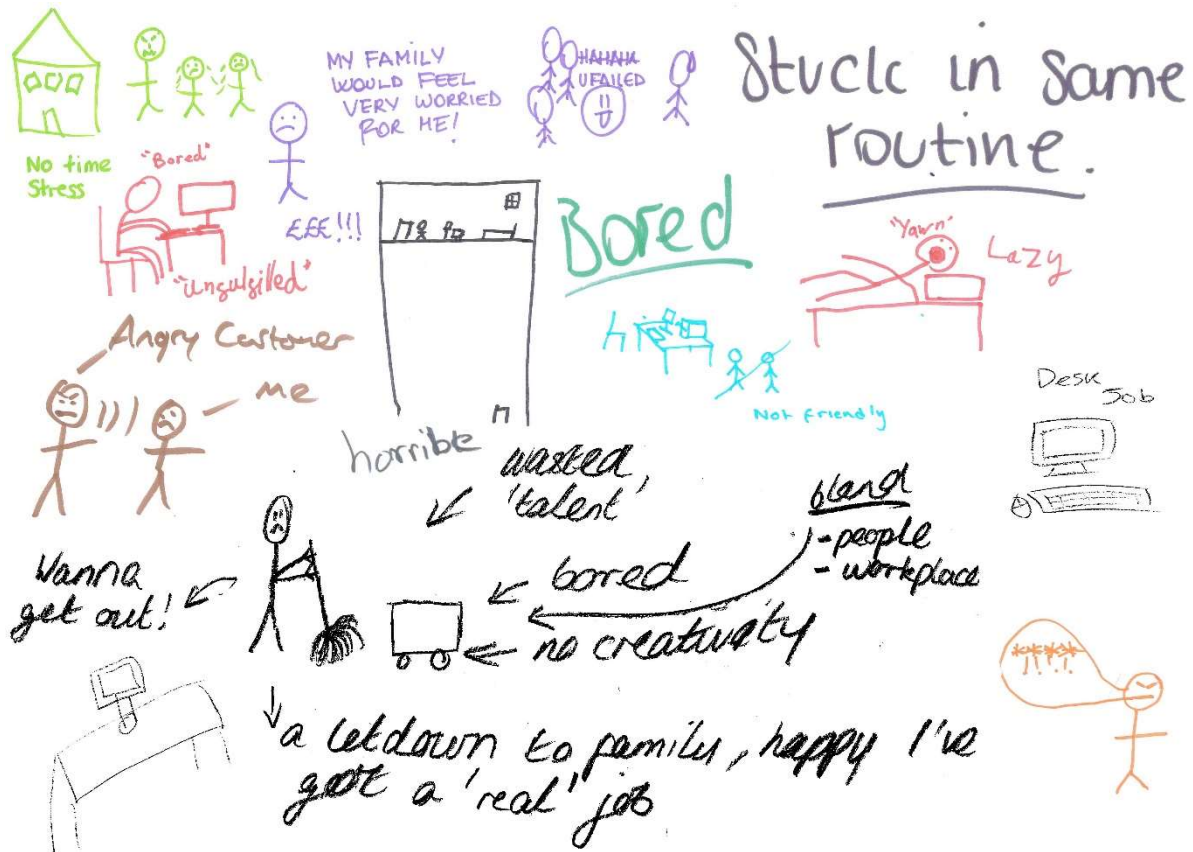


Figure 11. Collage from Participants' Feared-For Occupational Possible Selves

6.7.1 Across Cases: Participants' Expressions of Feared-for Occupational Possible Selves

The stick figures in Figure 11 feature sad or angry facial expressions, with many having no facial expression whatsoever, denoting an absence of feeling, due perhaps to boredom or depression. Whilst some of the stick figures represent the young person themselves, others represent customers, family or friends, all with angry, sad or mocking facial expressions, suggesting others feature more prominently in young people's feared-for OPS than in their hoped-for OPS. Boredom features in several participants' feared-for OPS drawings – either by writing the word 'bored' or by writing other words with associated meanings such as 'yawn' or 'lazy', along with related words linked to feelings of being trapped, such as being 'stuck in same routine'. The drawing of a desk to denote a common fear of a 'desk job' which appears

to personify various elements of boredom, repetition, lack of creativity and feelings of being trapped ('wanna get out!'), featured prominently in several participants' drawings and conversations about their feared-for OPS.

6.8 Young People's Interpretations of their Feared-For OPS Drawings

Participants include other people more often in their feared-for OPS drawings, usually the cause of unhappiness, boredom or fear. For example, Emily draws an image of a stick person with an angry expression (neither sad nor happy) with a speech bubble with '****!!!' talking about fearing being powerless and subject to angry customers verbally abusing her at work (Figure 12). Emily's feared-for OPS drawing is working in the same restaurant where she currently worked part-time.



Figure 12. Emily's Sense of Erasing her Feared-For Occupational Possible Self

This future is so repellent to her that following completion of the drawing, she asks for permission to deface it ('am I allowed to squiggle it all') (Excerpt 41).

Excerpt 41. Emily

Emily: Am I allowed to squiggle it all like 'agghh...agghh' (making loud 'agghh' noises and scribbling lines through picture)

Emma: yeah yeah <laughs> whatever you like (.) it's your picture (.)

Emily: <laughs> (.)

Scribbling lines haphazardly all over her drawing, she shows the strength of feelings she has about not wanting this to become reality. It appears almost cathartic during the interview for Emily to wipe this future self out; metaphorically erasing any possibility of this becoming a future reality for her. She raises her volume of voice saying ‘agghh...agghh’ (Excerpt 41), again showing powerful dislike of what this drawing represents. She appears to gain a sense of emotional release afterwards, illustrated by our shared laughter. Emily asking for permission from me to do this to her drawing perhaps shows her acknowledgement of a lower power status in the research interview process, where she did not feel she had total ownership over her own creations. Despite my attempts to minimise any power differentials, this act reminded me just how embedded issues of power and ownership are within interviews and co-production methods (for more reflections on this see [Chapter 4 Methodology](#)).

She talks about experiencing this behaviour from customers in her current part-time job (Excerpt 42), and is anxious not to enter a role in the service industry because she views this as part of the job. Her use of the phrase ‘kicking off’ denotes an almost physically aggressive environment in the workplace, combined with profuse swearing, ‘effing and jeffing’.

Excerpt 42. Emily

Emily: kicking off like (.) effing and jeffing like (.)

The fear of having to deal with angry customers and emotional labour demands within retail industries also features in Simon’s drawing (Figure 13), where he labels the two figures as ‘angry customer’ and ‘me’; again denoting a feeling of abandonment at work and having to deal with difficult customers alone. Simon similarly draws and talks about judging himself harshly in his drawing of his feared-for OPS (Figure 13).



Figure 13. Simon's Feared-For Occupational Possible Self

When asked to draw the worst possible outcome for him once he had finished his A levels and gone to work, Simon immediately writes the word 'retail' in large capital letters across the page. He talks of how a career in retail represents the worst outcome for him, due to his fear of 'difficult social situations' and dealing with 'angry customers'. Simon includes a global statement, presenting the argument that he does not feel he is equipped with the skills for a career in retail ('I'm just generally no good with people'). He talks of feeling stress and pressure when interacting with strangers (Excerpt 43), which would be an expected everyday activity in a retail job.

Excerpt 43. Simon

Simon: I'm just generally no good with people (.) in general (.) I'm just not (.) good at interacting with people (.) especially people I don't know (.)

Simon adds again a global statement, persuading me that retail dominates the work options for young people his age ('a lot of kids my age') and claiming that it is the only option for young people ('only job available'; 'there's no other options'), highlighting his awareness of the socio-economic constraints placed on young people in his community. He presents a stark future for his feared-for OPS of being trapped with no alternatives (Excerpt 44). The majority of young people I spoke to had a part-time job (evenings or weekends) and therefore had exposure to the realities of work in low-paid service type industries, feeding into rich pictures

of feared-for OPS, which may have been lacking in young people from more privileged backgrounds who may not need to work at the same time as doing A levels, for example.

Excerpt 44. Simon

Simon: a lot of kids my age especially have to work in retail cos it's the only job available (.) so maybe it's the fact that there's no other options (.) so it seems worse

The feelings expressed from participants were that they would have to deal with aggressive behaviour by themselves, without any colleagues or managerial support. Friends and family also feature more prominently in participants' drawings of their feared-for OPS; whereas in drawings of hoped-for OPS the focus appears more on the young person themselves.

Sarah illustrates a sense of an overall feeling of depression in her feared-for OPS drawing (Figure 14).

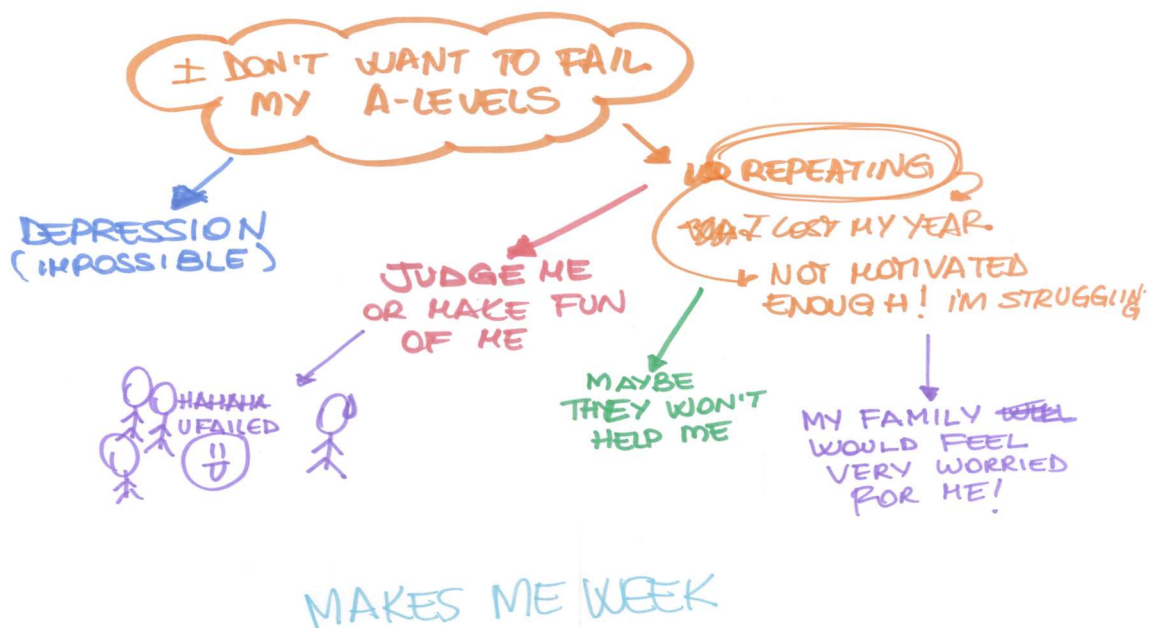


Figure 14. Sarah's Feared-For Occupational Possible Self

Sarah includes the word 'impossible' underneath the word 'depression'. All her words are capitalised as though for emphasis. She (Excerpt 45) talks about 'depression' being 'impossible' talks of herself in a contrasting position to this as a 'happy person' and even talk about the possibility of getting depressed if her A levels did not work out ('could be possible') distresses her.

Excerpt 45. Sarah

- 1.Emma (.) the worst possible thing that could happen next year for work (.)
- 2.Sarah: um (.) maybe depression (.)
- 3.Emma: so a feeling of sadness or worry?
- 4.Sarah: yes (.) this is impossible I think (.)
- 5.Emma: that you would become depressed or (.)
- 6.Sarah: yeah because I'm a very happy person so (.) it's a little bit difficult for me (.) I
- 7.mean (.) I'm not influenced by sad things (.) if it happens it's fine I don't care about it
- 8.Emma: uh huh (.)
- 9.Sarah: (.) I try to do my best so (.) yeah (.) but I think maybe (.) could be possible (.)

In her drawing, Sarah's focus is on the immediate fear of failing her A Levels, which could lead to reducing future career options, rather than a feared-for future career. Sarah draws and talks about blaming herself for failing due to a lack of motivation, and seeing others (friends, family and teachers) judge and mock her negatively as a result. Again, the individualisation Discourse is visible in Sarah's drawing where she includes notions of the pressure of success or failure all being down to her e.g., 'not motivated enough'. She states that even thinking about failure, makes her feel 'weak'(Excerpt 46) and includes this almost as a heading for her drawing in its entirety 'makes me weak' (Figure 14).

Excerpt 46. Sarah

Sarah: When I think about those things for a moment I feel very (.) I mean (.) weak

In Melissa's drawing of her feared-for OPS (Figure 15), she presents the opposites to those benefits she saw work bringing in her hoped-for OPS (Figure 5).



Figure 15. Melissa's Feared-For Occupational Possible Self For example, she states that it would bring 'no money' (contrasting with her hoped-for OPS as bringing 'above minimum wage'). Melissa's drawing also features the theme of the dull desk job. Several participants talked and drew pictures representing 'boring' desk jobs as part of their feared-for work futures. The desk in Melissa's picture appears deliberately bare. Constraints on time feature in Melissa's feared-for OPS: having to wake up early and having a long commute, illustrating her perceptions of having a lack of time for herself as a key negative feature.

6.8.1 Summary Reactions to Feared-for OPS Drawings: Young People

Participants' reactions to their own feared-for OPS (FOPS) centre around fear and anxiety if this came true. Participants talk about being fearful of having to work somewhere that does not care about you, fear of dealing with angry and difficult people at work and of having to settle and take what is available, instead of what you want. For some participants, their reactions to their FOPS are strong and visceral. For example, Emily seeks to physically erase her FOPS by scribbling over the drawing.

6.9 Feared-for OPS Drawings: Anticipated Reactions from Family

Jennifer (Excerpt 47) laughs at the thought of her family seeing the picture of her feared-for OPS (an office job), saying her parents would react with incredulity at the thought.

Excerpt 47. Jennifer

Jennifer: <laughs> (.) they'd say not a chance!

Her laughter at the start of this talk shows the strength of feeling for Jennifer that this outcome is laughable i.e., inconceivable, perhaps due to her certainty of entering her hoped-for OPS in the military. Olive's anticipated parental reactions (Excerpt 48) contrast starkly with Jennifer's regarding parental perspectives on feared-for OPS.

Excerpt 48. Olive

Olive: um (.) well (.) my family would just be like (.) oh you know (.) 'I knew you wouldn't get far' (.) yada..yada..ya (.)

Olive's anticipated reactions from her parents to her feared-for OPS drawing (working full-time in a fast food chain where she worked part-time at the moment) are that her parents would accept this as evidence of Olive not being capable of anything more in work, with associated

negative judgements around her abilities ('I knew you wouldn't get far'). Her use of 'yada..yada(.)ya' at the end of this phrase denotes that Olive feels it is a tired argument presented by her parents that she is not going to achieve her hoped-for OPS (military career) and reduces some of the impact from the negative statement preceding it. She talks of how she perceives that her parents have low aspirations and expectations of her. Olive had mentioned her challenging upbringing with her parents and that she now lived with supportive grandparents. My initial probe upon completing the feared-for OPS drawing had been to ask how family would react. Interestingly, Olive defaults to talk about negative parental expectations, but then moves on to contrast this with what her grandparents would say ('they'd be telling me to find another job') suggesting that she believes her grandparents think more of Olive's capabilities, but that she conforms to dominant expectations of 'family' as consisting firstly of parents (Excerpt 49).

Excerpt 49. Olive

Olive: um (.) they'd be telling me to find another job (.)

Ben (Excerpt 50) talks about disappointing his parents and himself if his feared-for OPS became a reality. The key take-home message expected from Ben's family was that of 'effort' and 'hard work' (see previous section for more on this aspiration-raising Discourse). As long as his parents perceive sufficient effort on Ben's part then they are happy, irrespective of the future work outcome. Ben appears to reproduce meritocratic Discourses where anything can be achieved if you 'try hard enough'.

Excerpt 50. Ben

Ben: like if it was because I didn't put effort in and I'd failed because I'd not tried (.) then they'd be disappointed really (.) and I know I'd be disappointed in myself (.)

Emma: uh huh=

Ben: =for not trying harder to get to that one [pointing at drawing of hoped-for self]

Ben: (.) as long as I've tried my hardest then they're happy (.)

Greg adds to notions of 'letting down family' commonly talked about and drawn by participants. Greg's drawing of his feared-for OPS (Figure 16) features himself in the same career as his Mum (a cleaner) and includes the words 'letdown to family', although including contrasting statements that they would be 'happy I got a 'real' job' (as opposed to the career of musician which Greg included as his hoped-for OPS).

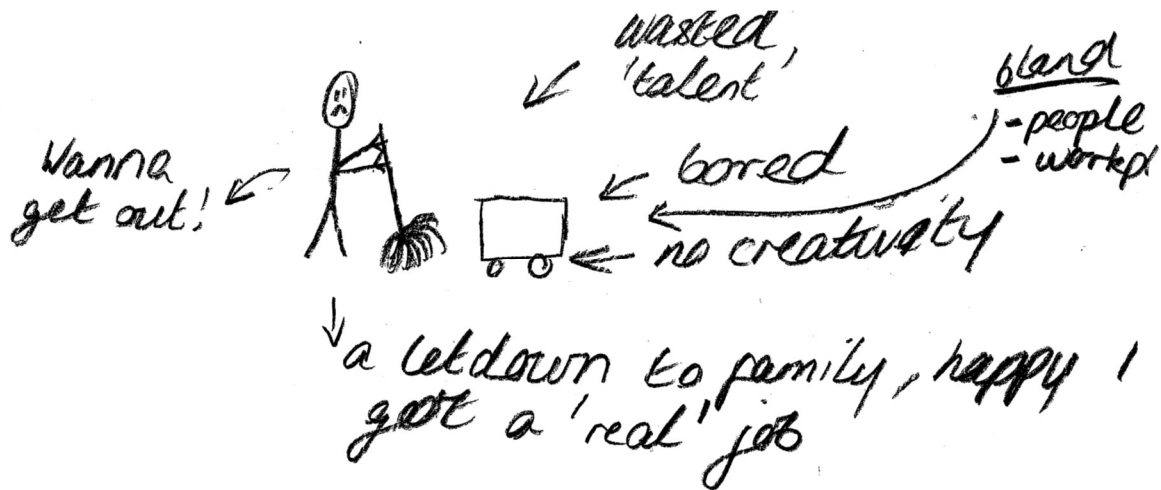


Figure 16. Greg's Feared-For Occupational Possible Self

When I explore what his mum would say if she saw this drawing, his reaction (Excerpt 51) illustrates that she would be aware of the low regard he held for her manual/services job, and she would react defensively. He uses reported speech of his mum to bring her voice, almost in a nagging tone ('well if I didn't have a cleaning job') suggesting that he acknowledges that his mum's job paid the bills but that he wants more than these instrumental benefits for his future in work. His use of the phrase 'this, that and the other' minimises the various financial commitments of his mum, suggesting that he himself perhaps is not aware of everything that his mum has to pay for at home and also at the same time continues the theme of his mum complaining about how hard it is to support a family financially.

Excerpt 51. Greg

Greg: well she'd be like (.) um (.) she'd be like, 'well if I didn't have a cleaning job, no-one would pay for the mortgage, this, that and the other' (.)

Greg talks about other members of the family mocking and judging him (Excerpt 52) for his feared-for OPS. This suggests that his dad, as partner to his mum who is a cleaner, himself has little regard for this as an occupation and that it is almost a shameful job to be ridiculed. Greg's exposure to his mum's experiences in a low-paid manual job as a cleaner appears to make him aware of the classed expectations around 'suitable' jobs for individuals according to their class and by choosing a musician career he is trying to break free of such socio-economic constraints for his occupational possible future self. There may also be some elements of gendered expectations around occupational choices for men and women taking place here from Greg's dad i.e., cleaning is 'women's work'.

Excerpt 52. Greg

Greg: dad would probably take the mick, like 'ha, cleaner' <laughs>.

Mike similarly draws elements from his mum's job (office job) as part of his feared-for OPS.



Figure 17. Element from Mike's Feared-for Occupational Possible Self

Mike talks (Excerpt 53) about his mum reacting differently from Greg's mum, and instead of defending her job, would agree with his negative appraisal of it ('it's rubbish'). He uses his mum's reported speech to show that his mum wants different work opportunities for Mike ('good for you for not wanting to do that'). Throughout our conversation Mike talks about how he had to convince his parents about the benefits of an army career. Again his inclusion of talk appearing to originate directly from his mum ('she'd be like') suggests that he is furthering his argument that he has persuaded them that being in the Army is a good choice.

Excerpt 53. Mike

Mike: I think my mum would probably agree with me (.) she'd be like 'yeah I've got a desk job, it's rubbish (.) good for you for not wanting to do that' (.)

In Jane's talk (Excerpt 54) about anticipated reactions from family to her feared-for OPS, Jane emphasises that due to her close relationship with her mum, her mum would completely understand the meaning behind the aeroplane and hotel ('my mum would know') on Jane's drawing (Figure 18).



Figure 18. Jane's Feared-For Occupational Possible Self

Jane uses emotive language to show the intensity of feelings about a job that would necessitate being away from home ('I'd hate it'). She uses a global statement ('I never want to move') suggesting the strength of feeling she has about remaining close geographically to family.

Excerpt 54. Jane

Jane: my mum would know (.) my mum would know that I'd hate it (.) she knows I never want to move (.)

Geographical and emotional closeness to her family (including siblings and grandparents who lived in the same community) are extremely important to Jane, and she emphasises throughout her talk that no future career or educational opportunity would threaten this by requiring her to move away. Further discussion on the influence of close communities, family and in particular the role of mums, prior to the STWT takes place in the next chapter on support ([Chapter 7](#)).

6.9.1 Summary Reactions to Feared-for OPS (FOPS) Drawings: Family

Participants' expected reactions from family to their FOPS includes incredulity. That is, belief that their family would believe that this FOPS was an impossibility, suggesting they perceive strong support from family. Jane for example anticipates that her mum would understand the meaning of the imagery she included in her FOPS, such as a plane, depicting that Jane did not want to travel with work and be away from home. Young people feeling that their family members would recognise, understand and support their reasons for including the elements they did in their FOPS appears important as an indicator of relationship closeness. One participant who did not have strong parental support (Olive) was the exception to this and talks about her parents as expecting her FOPS (working in a fast-food chain) as they had no belief

in her ability to achieve anything more from work. Participants talk about feeling that they would be letting their family down if their FOPS became a reality, and this is again linked with talk about 'hard work'. For example, if you do not work hard enough, this could be your future reality in work. Negative judgements are talked about from some participants e.g., Greg anticipating mocking attitudes from his dad for his FOPS (a cleaner). Some participants draw FOPS as the same job role that one of their parents, suggesting that exposure to negative talk from family members about work can influence young people's FOPS.

6.10 Feared-For OPS Drawings: Anticipated Reactions from Teachers

Sarah draws a fear of abandonment from teachers as part of her feared-for OPS (Figure 19), although including the hedging word 'maybe' showing she is not completely certain of all teachers reactions, but that some may not help her if she failed her A levels.

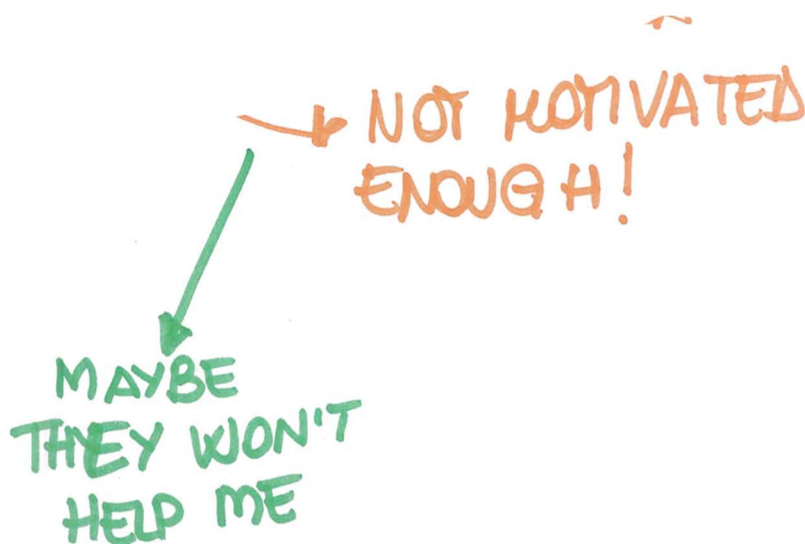


Figure 19. Sarah's Anxiety of Teachers' Abandonment

Sarah draws her teachers abandoning her if she failed her A Levels because they would judge that it is her fault, she is not motivated enough. This suggests that Sarah is drawing upon individualisation Discourse in her picture i.e., that failure is due to her lacking self-motivation, as opposed to any other factors. Sarah talks (Excerpt 55) about how the process of drawing her feared-for OPS causes some distress and discomfort ('I don't like thinking about these things'). She suggests that negative talk (or thinking) are disruptive to the positive state of mind she

needs for studying and so she resists negative framing instead choosing to reproduce dominant aspiration-raising Discourse of self belief ('yeah I can do it').

Excerpt 55. Sarah

Sarah: because when I study I start to think about things and then (.) I'm not in mood to study any more so (.) so I don't like thinking about these things (.) I prefer to go 'yeah I can do it' (.) so yeah (.)

Echoing the belief that teachers have a set of spoken (and unspoken) expectations for young people regarding their OPS, Emily states (Excerpt 56) that teachers would feel she had let herself down if she ended up in her feared-for OPS (working in a restaurant). She uses resource-based talk ('they'd probably think I were worth a lot more') conflating a young person's value with their occupational status.

Excerpt 56. Emily

Emily: I'm not being big-headed (.) but they'd probably think I were worth a lot more than working in a restaurant (.) yeah (.)

Similarly, Ben talks in resource terms (Excerpt 57) about letting himself and teachers down if he ended up in his feared-for OPS.

Excerpt 57. Ben

Ben: I think some people think it's like I've not (.) used my full potential (.) cos I know people do say that I am bright and (.) I could go places (.) and I think it would just be (.) they'd say it was a bit of a waste of potential really (.)

He appears to again draw from aspiration-raising Discourse when he talks about teachers' reactions and that this is judged against the level of 'potential' teachers ascribe to individuals. He says that teachers would be disappointed as his feared-for OPS would represent not using 'my full potential' and a 'waste of potential'. Repeating the word potential suggests he has internalised notions of aspiration-raising i.e., people need to always be striving to reach full potential, although this may be ambiguous. He reports the speech of teachers labelling him as clever ('people do say that I am bright') and this is linked with a journey metaphor that he 'could go places' i.e., if you are clever you can get out of this place and move to another almost.

The contrast of being a 'waste of potential' compared to 'going places', Ben presents as the polar options, with potential squandered if he ended up in his feared-for OPS (working in a coffee chain). Although his response was to me questioning him as to what his teachers would

say if we showed them his drawing, it is unclear from his quote who he refers to as ‘some people’ and could be referring to wider societal norms or family expectations placed upon ‘bright’ individuals. Again, the pressure assigned to young people at school or college from being labelled ‘bright’ by teachers is evident here. You need to make good use of your ‘brightness’ otherwise achieving anything less than the required level in teachers’ eyes is a ‘waste’, with associations of shame and disappointment. This talk turns young people themselves into resources, where the pressure is greatly felt by young people prior to the STWT to maximise use of ‘resources’, otherwise there is wastage.

Amanda (Excerpt 58) talks of awareness of teachers’ bias and expectations for students as distributed accordingly to achievement.

Excerpt 58. Amanda

Amanda: I don’t know (.) it’s just like (.) everyone has different abilities and stuff (.) so I think (.) teachers for like some (.) teachers might expect yeah this is what they’re gonna do all their life (.) but then for other students they’re gonna be like (.) oh but that’s a bit boring for you <laughs>

She says teachers would see her feared-for OPS (desk job) as a ‘bit boring’ for her, implying herself to be ‘above’ the required skills and abilities necessary for this type of job. She laughs at the end of her comment to illustrate her awareness that her teachers appraise her abilities more highly than others, for whom teachers would not see a desk job as ‘boring’ due to it being congruent with what teachers had defined as their more limited abilities.

6.10.1 Summary Reactions to Feared-for OPS Drawings: Teachers

Some participants report that teachers would react to their FOPS by blaming the young people for ending up in their FOPS as a result of not working hard enough or not being motivated and focused enough to achieve their HOPS. Young people talk of feeling that they would be letting teachers down, as with family members. An additional element to this includes talk about teachers reactions being disappointment in the young person, that they had let themselves down also i.e. not made the most of their opportunities and resources (drawing from aspiration-raising and meritocratic Discourses). For some participants, the fear and anxiety prompted by letting teachers down if the FOPS was to come true appears strongly, resulting in talk of depression (e.g., Sarah) and fear of being labelled a ‘failure’.

6.11 Feared-For OPS Drawings: Anticipated Reactions from Friends

Sarah repeats her fear that others would judge her negatively if she failed her A Levels, including friends (Excerpt 59). She draws friends on her feared-for OPS as part of these negative judgements and differs from the majority of other participants who believe that friends would primarily be supportive, whatever the future outcomes in work may be.

Excerpt 59. Sarah

Sarah: yeah maybe my friends can judge me (.) (continues drawing sounds of felt tips on paper)
(.) judge me or make fun of me

Sarah's drawing (Figure 20) features her friends with no facial expressions, seemingly making them even more ominous.



Figure 20. Sarah's Fear of Mocking Attitudes from Friends

She draws a bigger shaped face with a tongue sticking out, showing a mocking judgement expected from friends if she were to fail her A Levels, as opposed to feelings of support that could be expected to come from friends at challenging times. In comparison, Jennifer (Excerpt 60) states that she would expect a supportive reaction from friends upon seeing her feared-for OPS (desk job), acknowledging the fact that it would not be suited to her personality and interests.

Excerpt 60. Jennifer

Jennifer: it's not what she'd want to do (.)

Helen's talk (Excerpt 61) of her feared-for OPS (being unemployed or in a desk job) involves reflections on her college friends and how she fears the idea of disappointing them by not living up to high expectations. Similarly to Sarah, Helen talks about how she has been 'labelled' as the 'brains' (by friends) with associated expectations and pressures to live up to as a result ('I just kind of don't want to let them down').

Excerpt 61. Helen

Helen: I think like all my college friends have also thought like (.) they've all labelled me as like the brains of the class (.) cos I'm always getting all these good grades and stuff (.) I dunno (.) I just kind of don't want to let them down in a way (.)

Andrew (Excerpt 62) connects notions of wellbeing and work in his talk about his friends' anticipated reaction to his feared-for OPS (desk job). When I ask why neither himself nor his friends would want a desk job, Andrew uses emotive language evoking the 'death by desk job' analogy, saying that 'it's a bit morbid'. He claims that a desk job results in negative mental health and wellbeing and that his friends would not want this for him ('nobody wants to go down a path that's realistically making people unhappy').

Excerpt 62. Andrew

1. Andrew: because it's a bit morbid (.)
2. Emma: right (.) about (.)
3. Andrew: (.) it'll make you sort of unhappy (.) or when (.) you've got kids these days
4. with (.) there's a surge in sort of mental health (.) or people talking about it at least (.)
5. and when you sort of compare it to people doing this sort of thing (.) it's quite similar (.)
6. Emma: right (.)
7. Andrew: (.) nobody wants to go down a path that's realistically making people unhappy

Andrew appears to distance himself from his talk about mental health by referring to 'kids', implying that he is talking about people other than himself. He uses metaphors from natural events to evoke a sense that the talk about young people's mental health has risen substantially ('a surge'), akin to a huge wave, suggesting that this has been a sudden occurrence amongst young people. He goes on to question the reality of this, as to whether this is just talk ('or people talking about it at least'). He concludes by stating that 'people doing this sort of thing' i.e., working in a job where they are unhappy, inevitably results in mental health issues.

6.11.1 Summary Reactions to Feared-for OPS Drawings: Friends

Most participants expect supportive reactions from friends to their FOPS, as with their HOPS. For some participants however, fears of negative judgement and humiliation or shame from friends is anticipated. Again participants talk about not wanting to let friends down (similar to talk about family and teachers), as some participants feel they are labelled as a high achiever or 'bright' by friends and not wanting to deviate from these expectations. Some participants also link their FOPS with negative mental health and friends' reactions would be based worries about their wellbeing.

6.11.2 Overall Summary of Young People's Construction of HOPS and FOPS

Participants appeared to more strongly connect to drawings of their FOPS than their HOPS, including greater detail and increased talk about what they did not want to feature in the futures in work. Talk and drawings focused on negative feelings and reactions to their FOPS, including fear, anxiety and depression. Worries focused on having to settle for jobs that they were not happy in, did not find meaningful and had to work with difficult people or customers. As with HOPS drawings, some participants had unclear FOPS which included a series of elements they did not want to gain out of their work futures whereas other participants drew a picture of a particular job or career as their FOPS. In the main, participants talked of family members showing support for their occupational hopes for the future by imagining their reactions to their FOPS as incredulous. However for participants with low levels of parental support (e.g., Olive) low levels of parental expectations meant that anticipated reactions to their FOPS would be indicative of not believing the young person was capable of more. Participants spoke about not wanting to let people down (themselves, family, teachers and friends) if the FOPS was to become a reality and talked about the pressure to succeed (and therefore avoid the FOPS) as down to them individually. Participants drew from dominant educational Discourses (as with HOPS) around hard work, meritocracy and individualisation when drawing and talking about their FOPS, emphasising that their future work outcomes were all up to them individually to take charge of.

Findings relating to the salary expectations of young people involved in the current study expressed via OPS drawings ran counter to those routinely mocked in the media, where high salary expectations are seen as part of young people's unrealistic expectations of work, within stereotyped references to 'millennials' (Jacobs, 2013). For example, several participants talked

about or drew pictures linked to ‘hoping’ for the minimum wage or someone no longer worried about having to pay for the weekly shop, in terms of financial hopes from work, perhaps illustrating how socio-economic constraints experienced in working class communities (such as worry about having enough money for food or being paid less than the minimum wage, in these examples) can shape young people’s talk around their future hopes in work. Young people in this study did not talk about aspirations of unrealistically high salaries. Indeed, some participants instead talked of the worry that they associated with higher-earning occupations. For example, worries surrounding having less time with family members as a result of earning a high salary with associated high expectations of time and energy to be devoted to work.

Gendered Discourses within talk around hoped-for OPS were also found in the ways young people constructed their future work identities. For example, Emily wanted to be seen as a leader in her future career but appeared keenly aware of the risk in being outcast if she was seen as ‘bossy’. The word ‘bossy’ viewed as a criticism when used to describe a woman’s behaviour. Jane similarly featured future constraints aligned with dominant Discourse around expected gendered roles when she drew a picture of herself as stressed out with her kids because of working long hours. The ways in which young women discursively and socially construct the concept of leadership, internalising these constraining gendered Discourses whilst still at school, may then permeate into continued gendered leadership perceptions in the transition into the workplace (Boucher, 1997). Striving-type of language drawing from aspiration-raising Discourse in young women’s talk about future hopes, such as ‘push yourself to be good...be better’ (Jane), is discussed in the next chapter. Aspiration-raising Discourse has been found particularly prevalent in Academy schools such as Jane’s (Purcell, 2011) and identified within talk of girls described as ‘achieving’ within working class communities in general (Mann, 1998).

6.12 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the time prior to the STWT as a time and space where young people actively reflect on their hoped-for and feared-for OPS. Talking about how others perceived their OPS illuminated one part of the contested space of the STWT. That is, young people are having to negotiate and navigate how they construct their OPS, not only considering their own expectations, hopes and worries, but also those of a number of others (family, teachers and friends). Findings presented suggest that young people’s hopes and worries are heavily

influenced by dominant Discourses common in neoliberal educational contexts, such as aspiration-raising, meritocratic and careers Discourses. These dominant Discourses emphasise individualisation and individual agency; ‘it is all up to me’ whether I get to where I want to be in the future (or end up where I do not want to be). It is all about whether the young person has worked hard enough, whether or not they achieve their desired OPS, irrespective of any structural challenges or socio-economic constraints they may be up against.

For participants with a clear hoped-for OPS, the process of drawing this appeared easier and more enjoyable than for those young people who felt more uncertain of their hoped-for OPS. For this group of young people, the process of drawing uncertain hoped-for OPS appeared more challenging, disruptive and required a greater level of (at times uncomfortable) reflection on their part, although resulted in richer and more detailed content at times than the hoped-for OPS, suggesting that our fears may be more richly realised than our hopes in terms of occupational futures.

Whilst the specific ways young people drew or talked about hoped-for and feared-for OPS was individualised, there were some commonalities. For example, notions of success and the interpretation of future success by significant others, features in talk across participants. Reproduction of educational Discourses, in particular linked to aspiration-raising e.g., working hard and realising potential, also featured prominently. Notions of agency were seen across all participants’ drawings and transcripts, along with Discourses of individualisation common i.e., ‘it’s all up to me’, perhaps reflecting the neoliberal educational contexts of these young people’s lives. Resistance and pushing back against dominant pathways and Discourses was also seen from some participants in ambivalent ways (e.g., indirectly resisting by missing university application deadlines). Examples of active resistance talk pushing back against dominant Discourses are presented in the next chapter.

This chapter has focused on presenting findings for research question 1a of how young people construct their hoped-for and feared-for OPS. The anticipated reactions of others have been included in this chapter, showing how imagined others (along with young people themselves) construct and constrain OPS. I found that asking young people about anticipated reactions of imagined others was a useful questioning approach in order to bring in Discourses of influence and how young people may feel positioned by others prior to the STWT. The next chapter

moves on to focus on positioning prior to the STWT in more detail, presenting findings on the role of others prior to the STWT, looking at how young people from the 'missing middle' position others within their support networks and construct notions of 'support' as a result.

7. Findings: Young People's Construction of 'Support'

7.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter focuses on my interpretations of the third and final drawing that the young people produced within our interviews: the support network drawing. Extracts from support network drawings (Appendix L), along with extracts from associated talk are again used to illustrate how participants construct notions of support prior to the STWT. This chapter continues to frame the shaping and construction of future work identities (OPS) as an active and discursive process. Young people construct, represent, talk about, and perform, their possible future work identities drawing from macro Discourses actively discussed in the previous chapter (e.g., individualisation Discourses), made available to them in their contexts and through their communities. Furthering my argument on discourse and occupational identity exploration prior to the STWT as interlinked, in this chapter I explore how participants position 'others' within their drawings and talk, prior to the STWT and how they define 'support' as a result.

The previous chapter focused on exploring the ways that young people constructed or re-constructed future identities in work using the theoretical lens of OPS (Chalk et al., 1994). This chapter continues this exploration of young people's narrative identity work (Watson, 2008) turning our analytical gaze now to the ways that during the process of crafting and shaping current and future narrative identities, young people look to (and talk about) 'others' for support. The social interaction component within narrative identity work is a crucial component of study. This chapter brings in Watson's (2008) recommendation that when researching identities, we need to 'look at the ways in which people, in doing identity work, are both making connections 'outwards' to social others as well as 'inwards' towards the self.' (p.140).

The substantive focus in this chapter, is on the second of my research questions aimed at young participants in my study. Research question 1b asks: *How do young people construct the notion of support prior to the STWT?* This question focuses on how young people talk about (and draw) their support network; who supports them; and how young people position these supporters prior to the STWT.

7.2 The Importance of Others in Young People's Occupational Decision-Making

In line with a constructionist viewpoint, the very idea and meaning of 'work' is seen as culturally and socially situated and co-constructed for each individual, according to a multitude of factors such as gender, class, race and age. 'Others' are therefore expected to play a crucial role in the STWT. How others in our support network view the notion of 'work' influences our own understandings of the meanings and values attached to it. 'Others' can shape young people's future identities by accepting or rejecting possible future occupational selves, for example, or by promoting dominant or alternative Discourses surrounding OPS. The notion of invisible power (Oosterom & Scott-Villiers, 2016), first introduced in [Chapter 1: Introduction](#), becomes integral here. For example, whose version of reality dominates young people's experiences prior to the STWT? Which dominant Discourses and norms are young people exposed to and drawing from as they negotiate and navigate their way through decision-making prior to the STWT? In this contested space, OPS are actively negotiated (accepted, resisted or challenged) by young people in conjunction with their significant others. Ansell, Hajdu, van Blerk and Robson (2014) acknowledge this relational context in which young people make decisions about their future occupations or livelihoods, with young people thinking of 'others' both in the present and projected into the future.

'In making decisions about their own lives, young people almost always consider (consciously or otherwise) the views, needs and potential contributions of others, now and in the future.'
(Ansell et al., 2014, p.390).

Figure 21 shows my visual representation of the categories of others that participants included in both drawings and talk of their support networks. Sources of support are grouped according to category and presented in ranked order according to the importance placed on each by the young people in their drawings and talk. Whilst these are presented as sources of 'support', within this it is acknowledged that sources could also be potential constraints or inhibitors of power and influence for young people prior to the STWT. As part of teasing out young people's notions of 'support' prior to the STWT, the positive and negative constructions of who is in their 'support networks' is presented in greater detail in the remainder of this chapter.

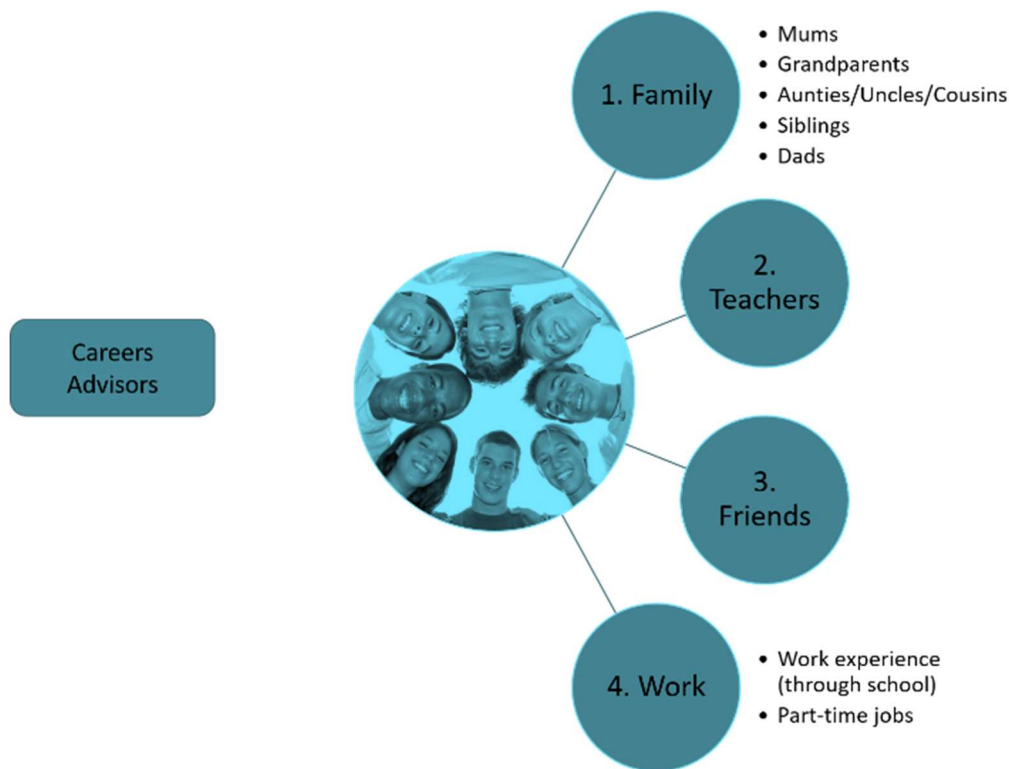


Figure 21. Participants' Categorisation of Sources of 'Support' Prior to the STWT

Figure 21 is a static representation of support and does not enable expression of support as something much more fluid and contested, which is presented in the detailed interpretations of individual's talk contained in this chapter. The image does show that family support is talked about most, followed by teachers, friends and work contacts. The image also attempts to show how careers advisors are positioned as 'outsiders', excluded from notions of support prior to the STWT.

7.2.1 Positioning of Others

I use the definition of Davies and Harre (1990) of 'interactive positioning' whereby what one individual says positions another, as well as exploring the ways young people may position themselves ('reflexive positioning'). Positioning is strongly seen in this context as a discursive process and in the context of this study relates to young people's narrative identity work (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). Positioning, identity and Discourse are all linked (Davies & Harre, 1990; Wetherell, 1998). Looking at how young people position others through a critical discursive psychological lens (little d and big D combined), adds to the picture of the ways young people construct their future work identities (OPS).

Figure 22 shows how the young people positioned various ‘others’ within their support networks (and those who were positioned outside of networks, such as careers advisors). Talk about work contacts was minimal, and not included in this chapter. Participants’ talk about ‘others’ within support networks was interpreted and grouped into positions or categories young people appeared to ascribe to ‘others’.

1. Family	2. Teachers	3. Friends	4. Careers Advisors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mums <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-creators • Careers Advisors • Downers/Users • Worriers • Grandparents <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Careers Advisors • Inspirers • Motivators • Siblings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Careers Advisors • Experts • Dads <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Judges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Careers Advisors • Experts • Friends • Higher Education Advocates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helpers • Distractors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For Those in the Know • For Those Not in the Know • Higher Education Advocates

Figure 22. Interpreted Positions Assigned by Young People to Others in Support Network

7.3 Positioning of Family Members in Support Networks

Family is extremely important to the young people in my study; and thinking about young people’s occupational futures are viewed as important matters for family consideration, support and input. This section of the chapter details how participants’ accounts (both verbally and visually) feature family members as an integral part of their support network (both by giving or withholding support), as they perform narrative identity work. This section starts by presenting how young people talked about family as a category group overall, prior to the STWT. I then present the positions that I interpret young people as ascribing to various family

members (mums, grandparents, siblings and dads), through participants' talk and drawings, in their support networks prior to the STWT.

7.3.1 Family as Central to Young People's Support Networks

All participants feature family members on their support network maps. Amanda's support network (Figure 23), for example, depicts how fundamental family is to Amanda's notion of support prior to the STWT.

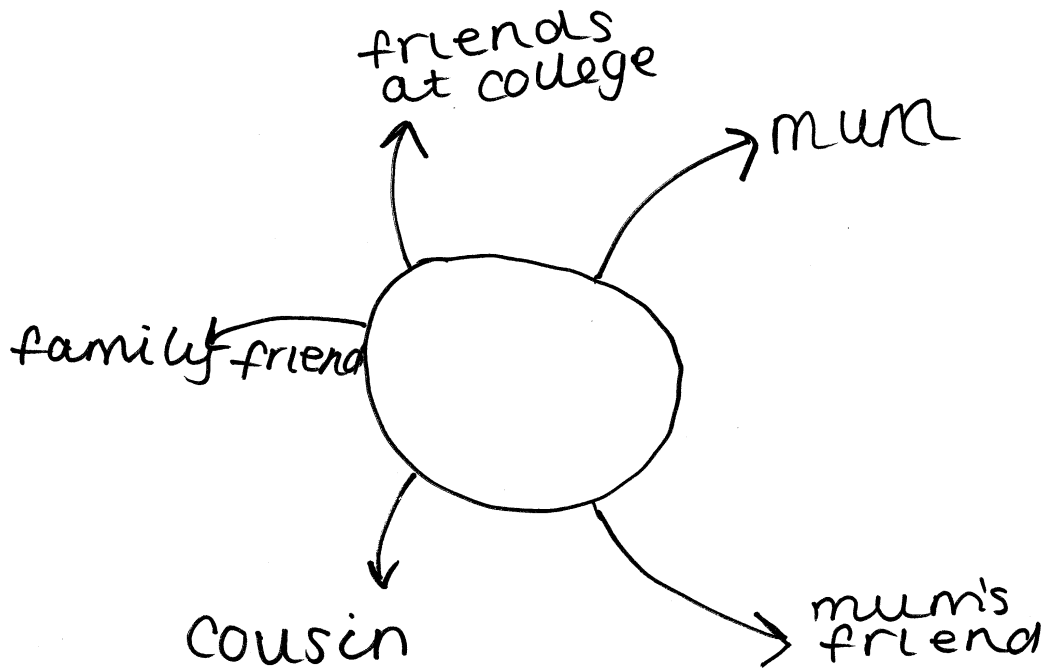


Figure 23. Amanda's Support Network Showing Centrality of Family

The central circle represents herself, with arrows branching off to show key supporters. Her mum is the first person she adds on the relational map that consists of all family-type connections, apart from 'friends at college'. Amanda was in a lone parent family and talks about a strong bond between herself and her mum throughout our conversation. Amanda's extended family (grandparents, aunts/uncles and cousins) also feature strongly in her account, as a key part in her short-term plan for the future (living abroad with them and having a temporary job). Amanda states that 'mum's friend' was considered family, akin to the concept common in many working class families and communities of having 'Aunties/Uncles' who are called this in name due to a sense of family-type closeness but are not blood relatives

(Christiansen, 2007). Amanda (Excerpt 63) speaks about her mum's friend (the honorary Aunty) being more like a friend and someone that she is able to talk to as an adult.

Excerpt 63. Amanda

Amanda: like she's not so much of a role model to me (.) I see her more as like a friend (.) just because I'm sort of an adult when I talk to her (.)

Her use of the hedging term 'sort of' suggests that Amanda is uncertain of her status ('sort of an adult') and the associated power within her conversations with this person seem to be flattened, with Amanda perceiving greater equality of power between herself and her mum's friend than between herself and her mum.

This talk of being 'sort of an adult' is perhaps illustrative of the liminal state or in-between stage (neither youth nor adult) referred to by Turner (1985) and explored in depth in [Chapter 2: Context](#). Amanda talks of being unclear of her future career path at the time of the interview and her account brings to mind the notions of being 'betwixt and between' commonly experienced by young people as they move through youth to adulthood (Rapport & Overing, 2000). She expresses feeling more of an equal with her mum's friend, as she did not see her in the elevated status position of 'role model' but 'friend' (with notions of equality embedded within), despite having a high regard for her and recognising her as 'influential'.

Amanda (Excerpt 64) talks about valuing the support from outside her direct family network, stating that it helps to hear supportive statements from others, outside of family, suggesting these may have greater meaning or validation.

Excerpt 64. Amanda

Amanda: I think it's also nice to hear it from someone that's not your mum

Some participants describe the multiple roles that their family members play as a vital part of their support network in this time before the STWT. Jane's drawing (Figure 24) includes a multitude of different forms of support that she identifies her parents providing prior to the STWT. The notion of family appears extremely important to Jane (both current family and future hoped-for family).

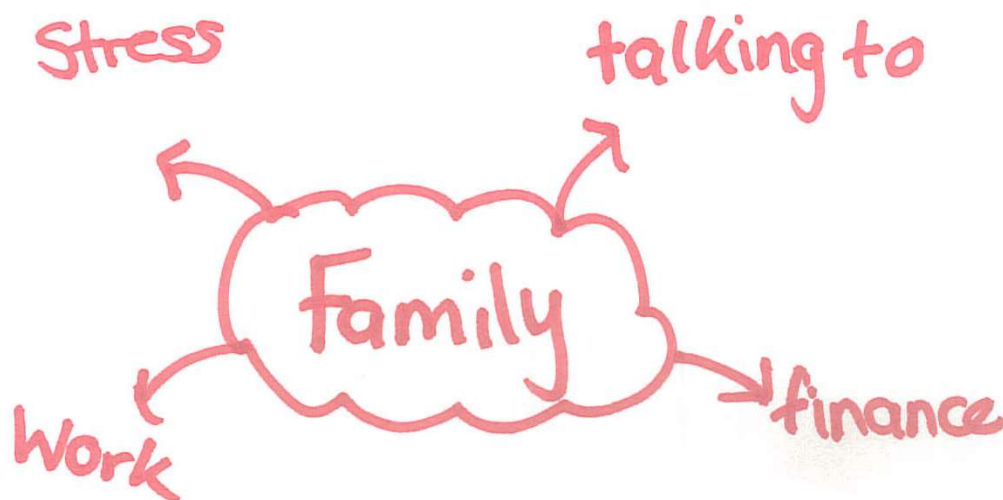


Figure 24. Elements of Family Support from Jane's Relational Map

Jane (Excerpt 65) emphasises in her talk the benefits from having her parents to talk to about 'the stress aspect and where I want to be', implying that the STWT is a stressful time to go through. This suggests that for Jane part of the stress she experiences is in deciding on her future pathway ('where I want to be'). For Jane, notions of place and remaining close geographically to family are talked about throughout and therefore the issue of 'where' she wants to be appears a key part of the uncertainties of the STWT to Jane. She highlights the practical and financial support on her drawing and talks confidently in global terms that 'they're always helping me out', denoting a strong sense of overall support from her parents.

Excerpt 65. Jane

Jane: so having someone to talk to about the stress aspect and where I want to be (.) the finance
(.) they're always helping me out (.)

Jane's talk emphasises the value of emotional capital as wrapped up within notions of 'support' prior to the STWT for young people (Borlagdan, 2015; Bourdieu, 1986).

Whilst there are many different forms of family, it remains as the set of people that connects young people to society as a whole, economically, socially and politically in Western contexts. The family continues to be the primary place of both socialisation and education for children and young people (Trask, 2015). Particularly in the case of increasing the agency and choice of young women, families are crucial sites which empower or constrain, open-up or limit future

possibilities (Trask, 2015). The previous section has provided an overview of the centrality of family prior to the STWT in general. The next section moves on to interpret the various ‘others’ in the category of ‘family’. Talk about ‘family’, starts with immediate family, such as parents. Whilst many participants discuss parents as key members of their family, the primary focus within this talk about parents is dominated by talk about one parent, ‘mum’. I interpret young people’s talk about their mums as positioning mums in several ways (see Figure 22).

7.3.2 *Mums Positioned as Co-Creators: a ‘Partner in Crime’*

Helen positions her mum as a co-conspirator or co-creator in the sometimes challenging process of navigating the STWT (Excerpt 66).

Excerpt 66. Helen

Helen: (.) she’s kind of like my partner in crime at this (.)

She frames the process of looking for future work and apprenticeship opportunities as a shared and co-created experience, in which her mum has a starring role. Helen talks about a sense of fun in the process, having her mum alongside her as her best friend or significant other (‘my partner’), whilst acknowledging that she perceives this as a difficult or potentially negative time (the ‘crime’ is the STWT). The notion of working on future identities as a shared or joint experience (with mums) is highlighted further by Emily. Emily’s addition of two exclamation marks by the word ‘Mum!!’ on her support network (Figure 25), visually illustrates relationship intensity.

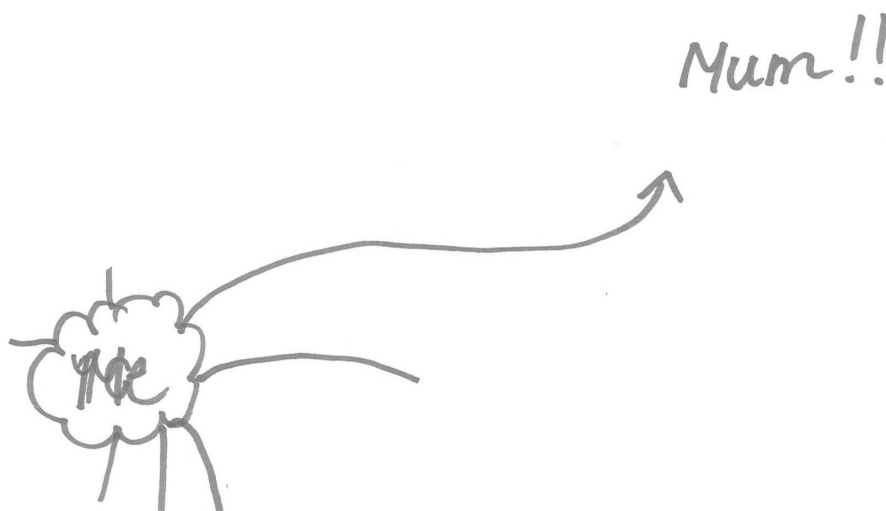


Figure 25. Emily's Support Network Highlighting Mum's Importance

Emily (Excerpt 67) emphasises how crucial her mum is in providing support to her, primarily through talking together (emphasising notions of co-production prior to the STWT). Emily connects talking as a global form of support ('for everything') and a sense of her mum being the only one who is truly supportive and talking in stark terms of being alone in the STWT if her mum did not help ('if she didn't help then I don't know who would').

Excerpt 67. Emily

Emily: my mum (.)

Emma: you've put two exclamation marks (.)

Emily: (.) I talk to my mum about everything (.) so if she didn't help then I don't know who would (.) because she's my main support (.) for everything (.)

The importance of 'talking' to mum as an immense source of support in itself is emphasised. The concepts of support, talk and help are used interchangeably by Emily in her account; suggesting that for Emily these are all an integral part of what 'support' means. Talking and communicating, particularly with mums is highlighted by several other participants as part of the general notion of 'support'. Jane similarly emphasises this notion of closeness to mum, embodied again by talking together during this time before the STWT. Her talk (Excerpt 68) includes reference to a shared gender-identity ('female and female') as Jane's explanation of the primary reason for this closeness.

Excerpt 68. Jane

1.Jane: yeah I've always been close to my mum (.) more than my dad (.) I think that's cos

2. it's female and female (.)

3.Emma: just talking (.)

4.Jane: (.) yeah so when it comes to about lady things (.) and relationships (.) I always

5.spoke.to my mum and my sister (.) my brother not so much (.) cos with him being 30 he's

6.always never really been there when I've been there (.)

For Jane, closeness appears tied up in the belief that she can talk about topics that are more intimate (or more traditionally viewed as 'women's talk' perhaps) with her mum or sister, rather than with her dad or brother ('lady things...and relationships'). Making time to talk is viewed by Jane and many participants as an important signifier of a close bond between young people and their mums, and being supportive.

Jane (Excerpt 69) continues to unpick temporal notions of support.

Excerpt 69. Jane

Jane: I love going home and spending time with mum and dad (.) cos they all finish at the same time so we're all in at the same time (.)

Emma: right (.)

Jane: (.) I'd love to have that for my kids (.)

She says 'we're all in at the same time...' and talks about this being central to her feeling of being supported by parents and also something she wants to reproduce in the future for her own children ('I'd love to have that for my kids'). For Jane, thinking about family support appears to encourage future-focused talk and reflections on how she would like to provide support to her hoped-for future family. In addition to an emotional sense of closeness, Jane (Excerpt 70) emphasises the importance of geographical closeness with family, both now and in her hoped-for future.

Excerpt 70. Jane

Jane: I'd like not to live like close close (.) but close enough that I could visit them once a week or see them (.) and spend time with them (.)

Jane's desire to remain close geographically to her parents (and grandparents) in the future in order to retain the sense of emotional closeness meant that she talked about resisting dominant pathways, such as declining to go on the Linacre programme (aimed at encouraging state school children to apply for Oxford or Cambridge universities) because it would have meant moving away. She distinguishes between wanting a certain amount of distance ('not like close close'), but near enough to be able to see family once a week. Jane links spending time together with family as an important factor in being close emotionally and is keen not to give this up in the future.

Ben (Excerpt 71) similarly talks about not wanting to move away from home yet.

Excerpt 71. Ben

Ben: I just (.) I don't think at the minute I'm cape (.) like (.) I can cook things and stuff like that but it's more washing and (.) stuff (.)

Emma: domestic side of things (.)

Ben: yeah (.) I still do need my mum to help me with things (.)

He talks about not feeling able to cope with independence from his mum quite yet; a close relationship, yet lacking the fun/partnership element that others talk of. He appears to be about to say that he did not think he was 'capable', but cuts his speech off to focus instead on what he can do ('cook things and stuff like that'). He identifies certain domestic tasks ('washing

and(.) stuff(.)) as too complex, and did not feel able to do these things without his mum's support yet. For Ben, the domestic and personal support provided by his mum seems interconnected with his sense of overall dependence on her ('I still do need my mum to help me with things').

7.3.3 Mums Positioned as Careers Advisors

Several participants spoke of the core dual role (emotional and practical) that their mums played prior to the STWT. This was clearly visualised by Andrew (Figure 26), in his support network map as he separated support into being either emotional ('listening') or practical ('helps to look'). This appears to position mums as careers advisors, albeit ones with notions of in-built emotional support also, more akin to counselling forms of support perhaps.

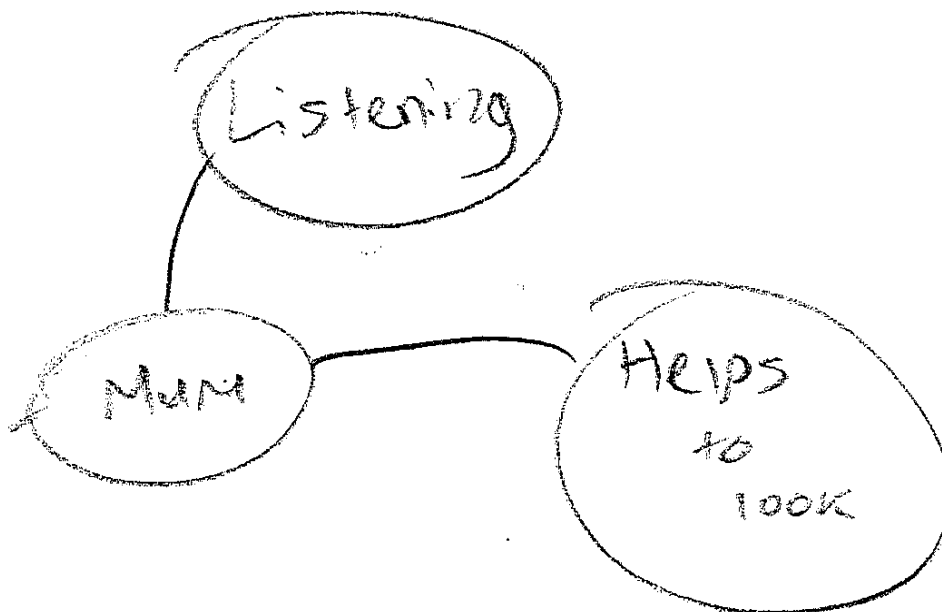


Figure 26. Andrew's Visual Depiction of Mum's Emotional and Practical Support

Andrew writes 'helps to look' about how his mum helped him practically to look for Apprenticeships on websites, and how she provides emotional support by 'listening'. Helen (Excerpt 72) supports this idea of mums being a source of both emotional and practical support, suggesting that both are equally to young people prior to the STWT. In her talk however, Helen focuses more on the practical support ('finding me the jobs') suggesting that for her the practical support is perhaps more highly valued.

Excerpt 72. Helen

Helen: My mum's also very good emotional (.) um (.) practical (.) with like finding me the jobs and stuff and giving me practical advice about what to do.

Simon positions his mum as a listener, and values this form of support over being told what to do, indicating listening as essential for adopting the role of surrogate careers advisor.

Excerpt 73. Simon

Simon: um (.) she doesn't really tell me anything (.) she just listens (.)

7.3.4 Summary of Positive Positioning of Mums' as Co-Creators and Career Advisors

Communication is seen as an essential part of co-creation undertaken with mums prior to the STWT. Within this communication there appears a gendered dimension of how talk (as one part of communication) is framed. Young male and female participants constructed the meaning of 'talk' or communication in different ways. Female participants include the word 'talk' more often on their drawings and in their accounts, and seem to frame 'talk' as an active communication process which has high value at challenging times such as the STWT, between themselves and others. Male participants use the word 'listens' more often on drawings and in accounts, constructing talk as more of a one-way process, appearing to value others' role within 'talk' as one of providing a sounding board. Mums are seen as having an active role in support prior to the STWT and the value of having a close relationship with mum is emphasised.

Participants also talk about mums providing practical help. Helen for example talks about her mum having 'good connections' and helping Helen to find various work experience roles related to her hoped-for OPS. This emphasises how some participants are able to leverage support from mums as proxy agents (Bandura, 2002), helping young people to increase social capital, by increasing who they had in their networks for work experience, for example. These examples highlight the potential power of mums in young people's support networks to act as proxy agents as well as sources of emotional and social capital for young people prior to the STWT. Participants also talk about mums as careers advisors due to them having a close relationship with their son/daughter and understanding in detail their hopes and worries in relation to work. Young people talk about the dual importance of activities (the doing) along

with emotional support (the being there), commonly constructing notions of support as formed of both ‘doing’ and ‘being’ forms of providing positive support.

This section has presented the positive positioning of mums as co-creators and careers advisors. The next section continues to present the nuanced and complex notion of support from mums that developed through my research conversations, presenting positioning of mums as ‘downers/users’ and ‘worriers’ (again the names of these positions is developed as a result of my interpretations of young people’s talk and drawings around support).

7.3.5 Mums Positioned as Downers/Users

For some participants, reflecting on the role of their mum prior to the STWT appears more nuanced and complex than others who presented mums in a totally positive light. These participants present both positive and negative aspects within notions of ‘support’. Greg (Excerpt 74) talks about his mum wanting him to take the ‘safe route’ for his future (work as an Accountant), positioning her role as restrictive and lacking the sense of exploration and excitement that he seeks from his future hoped-for OPS (musician). His talk connects ‘safe’ and ‘easy’ as hopes of his mum versus contrasting hopes for himself as being more about exploration.

Excerpt 74. Greg

Greg: I always think that (.) to be honest my mum likes the safe route in some sense (.) and it’s the easiest thing (.) whereas I’m like, no, I want to explore sort of thing (.)

Some participants directly talk about a strong desire to want different jobs to their mums in the future, partly influenced by having negative exposure to the meaning of work through the ways their mums spoke about their jobs at home. Greg (Excerpt 75), for example, talks about his mum ‘always moaning’ about work and uses this global statement to show that the job itself was undesirable. Again he uses global language ‘nothing great comes out of it’ contrasting this with his own future hopes of ‘greatness’ somehow in his hoped-for OPS perhaps.

Excerpt 75. Greg

Greg: every time she comes back she’s always moaning (.)’oh this happened today (.) ah (.)’ it sounds like nothing great comes out of it, so it’s like (.) no (.) don’t want to be a cleaner (.) no chance (.) <laughs>

Simon (Excerpt 76) also talks about how his mum frames work negatively. His laughter could be interpreted as due to discomfort with the idea of his mum not being happy, but also perhaps as an indication of his cynicism about work in general. Simon talks throughout his interview about not expecting to enjoy work, perhaps reproducing constructions of work from his mum.

Excerpt 76. Simon

Simon: yeah she always talks about how she doesn't like it (.) <laughs>

Olive's visual representation (Figure 27) demonstrates the total lack of support she perceives from her parents prior to the STWT. She crosses out the word 'parents', emphasising her strength of feeling and removing them as supporters regarding her choice to go into an Army career.

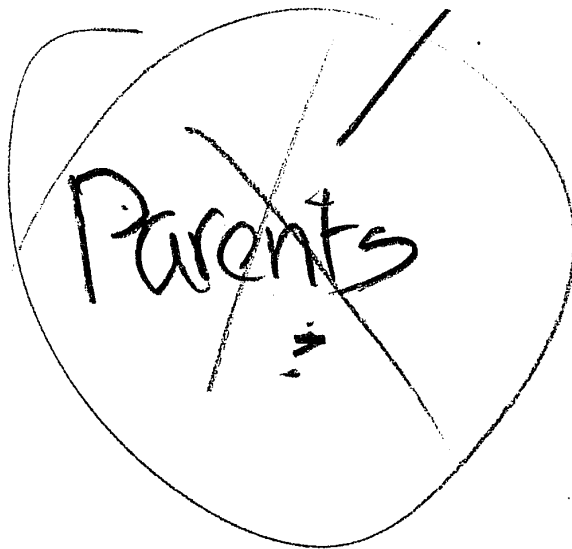


Figure 27. Olive's Visual Expression of Lack of Parental Support

Olive talked throughout the interview about the challenging upbringing she had experienced, culminating in being 'kicked out' of the family home aged 17 to go and live with her grandparents. Her notion of support appears binary, perhaps as a result of these extreme experiences. It is all or nothing. On her support network map she split the page into two sections marked 'yes' and 'no', to illustrate who she felt provides and withholds support. Including her parents and then crossing them out suggests that Olive is highly aware of the dominant norms for young people regarding who *should* provide support, and that she is different because of

lacking this source of support prior to the STWT. Olive talks about feeling manipulated by her parents (Excerpt 77) who view the STWT as a means to obtain money from her, which she wants to avoid. She says her mum had spent Olive's money from work in the past on alcohol, and Olive wants to create distance with this in her future of work. Olive's repetition of the word 'care' shows her construction of how 'caring' about the young person should be a key feature of parent-child relationships (according to dominant societal norms and expectations) but that her parents define this as caring for them instead, by paying for rent and alcohol.

Excerpt 77. Olive

Olive: (.) cos they don't care (.) all they care about is me going back home and earning money again to help them pay rent and stuff and I'm not doing that (.) they can easily buy it themselves, but my mum just usually spends my money on alcohol (.) I'm not getting involved.

Olive distances herself from this negative relationship, stating 'I'm not getting involved', seemingly cutting them out of notions of support in her STWT.

7.3.6 *Mums Positioned as Worriers*

Conflicting expectations or hopes between mums and their children is echoed by Mike (Excerpt 78) in his account of his mum's lack of support for his hoped-for OPS (Army officer). He states that it is the norm, the expected role of his mum ('she's a mother') to worry about his personal safety and that this is the root of her lack of support for his career choice. Mike's use of the word 'mother' rather than using 'mum', seems to elevate the term to a grander or more global phenomenon of what Mike felt it meant to be a mother, in general, distancing this from himself, rather than just locating this as something Mike's mum felt personally due to being *his* mum.

Excerpt 78. Mike

Mike: she's a mother (.) she's going to worry (.) she doesn't want me to get hurt somewhere

Simon (Excerpt 79) similarly acknowledges awareness of his mum having conflicting feelings about his future plans following the STWT to move abroad (he talked about having got engaged to someone who lived abroad). Simon's mum was a solo parent and he talks in terms of recognising the physical loss of him at home as difficult ('she doesn't want to be on her own'). Simon's account features repetitions of words linked with being alone and positions himself in the role of supporter for his mum, through being there physically. Simon positions the dilemma about future career plans (he was unsure between university or work) as mirrored by his mum's dilemma; between wanting what is 'best' for him and for him to be happy (leaving). Simon

uses reported speech for his mum ('she'd say 'do whatever you feel's best') appearing to put Simon in a difficult position, torn between pleasing his mum or himself.

Excerpt 79. Simon

- 1.Simon: she obviously doesn't want me to (.) well she does want me to go, cos she knows
- 2.it will make me happy (.) but she also doesn't want to be on her own (.) cos it's just me
- 3.and her (.) so after I go, she'll be there on her own (.) so obviously it'd be difficult for her
- 4.Emma: hmm
- 5.Simon: but she'd say 'do whatever you feel's best'
- 6.Emma: (.) right

7.3.7 Summary of Negative Positioning of Mums' as Downers/Users and Worriers

Some participants position mums as downers i.e., bringing them down in the way they talk about their own experiences in work (negatively) or by constraining the young person's future hoped-for OPS, for example, by suggesting it is not a possible outcome. The more extreme positioning of 'users' is interpreted from one participant (Olive) who had experienced more extreme and challenging relationship with her mum, which she talked of as feeling used by her mum, for example to gain money from work. Mums are also positioned as worriers by participants, sometimes normalised as a reaction common to all mums, drawing from dominant Discourses around motherhood, connecting 'Motherhood' and anxiety (Przeworski, 2012).

In summary, this section of the chapter has shown how mums play a dominant role in young people's support networks, yet one which is complex and nuanced, consisting of both positive and negative elements within young people's construction of support. The next section continues to explore the ways in which young people have to navigate the complex emotional demands of others in their support networks prior to the STWT, by presenting how young people position the group of family members highlighted as most important after mums: grandparents.

7.3.8 Grandparents Positioned as Inspirers, Motivators and Careers Advisors

Several participants highlight the important role of grandparents within their support network and talk positively about grandparents as providing support in the form of inspiration, motivation and aspiration. Greg (Excerpt 80), for example, talks about how he views his grandad as an inspiration due to him working his way up to a senior position, achieving success financially ('earning quite a bit of dough'). Greg's talk appears to present his grandad's story as something he identifies with for his hoped-for OPS.

Excerpt 80. Greg

Greg: I've always seen him as quite an inspirational person (.) cos he's (.) he (.) um (.) went into work when he was young (.) sixteen (.) and he stayed at that company ever since (.)he started right at the bottom and I mean like literally (.) [text omitted]he was earning quite a bit of dough then <laughs>

Participants highlight the value of having grandparents living close by (echoing geographical and emotional closeness talked in the previous section on mums), as part of a crucial intergenerational and extended family support network. Emily (Excerpt 81), for example, talks about a sense of emotional closeness and support from seeing her nan every week due to this geographical closeness.

Excerpt 81. Emily

Emily: she's just around the corner (.) but I see her like every week (.) um (.) and she talks about her husband (.) he used to work in mines and everything (.) and she just tells me (.) well if I don't do anything and don't fulfil what I want to do (.) then I won't really be happy

Emily describes how her nan provides not only her own sources of motivation and inspiration, but also those of her grandad's, through stories of his experiences as a miner. Emily's presentation of her nan's support is via direct advice ('she just tells me') suggesting that this is a different type of communication than with mums. Emily appears to draw on aspiration-raising Discourse when she talks about how her nan says if she did not 'fulfil what I want to do', she would not achieve happiness in the future. Emily's account appears to contain a warning from her nan that if she does not work hard she will not be happy. Again, this suggests that young people are exposed to various sources reproducing dominant aspiration-raising Discourses, not only from immediate family and teachers but also from extended family.

Jane (Excerpt 82) similarly talks about visiting her grandparents regularly and of the importance of having a 'connection' with family, suggesting that this connection might be lost if she moved away. Jane's talk appears to position geographical closeness as a marker for emotional closeness, so that she uses the word 'see', linking this to one of her essential senses, to show the importance of seeing and being together.

Excerpt 82. Jane

Jane: they (.) live up the road (.) so I always make sure I see them (.) cos I think it's really important to have that connection with your family (.)

Emma: hmm (.)

Jane: (.) and that's why I wouldn't like to move away (.)

Jane (Excerpt 83) also talks about her grandparents as a motivational form of support in positive terms, adding that they motivate her to ‘push yourself’ and ‘stand out’ from others, not simply be in an ‘average job’.

Excerpt 83. Jane

Jane: just saying to me ‘you should push yourself to get good (.) be better’ and to have not just like an average job (.) to do something that makes you stand out (.)

Again, these words all appear to draw from aspiration-raising Discourses, suggesting that these are normalised within the immediate and extended family members of the young people in my study.

Ben talks of the value he places on having people in his support networks who ask ‘how it’s going’ i.e., expressing genuine interest in Ben’s wellbeing and future hopes for work (Excerpt 84). Again, this brings back the importance of ‘talk’ or communication as something young people described as an essential aspect of support others provide prior to the STWT. Ben recognises his grandad’s success (‘he did well’) which appears to make him a source of inspiration (similar to Greg’s talk about his grandad).

Excerpt 84. Ben

Ben: he did well and (.) he always asks me what I’m doing
Emma: uh huh
Ben: (.) how it’s going (.) what I want to do (.) and things like that (.)

Olive’s construction of grandparents’ support and role in the support network differs from other participants, defining their support in more fundamental ways (Excerpt 85). She emphasises firstly the practical support and safety her grandparents provide by giving her somewhere to live (‘a roof over my head, somewhere to sleep’), employing the use of emotive and visually evocative language to emphasise what the alternative would be for her without them (‘so I’m not on the streets’). Olive also states how her grandparents also provide emotional support with helping her to look to her future, employing journey metaphors (‘go forward’; ‘not be stuck in the past’). The practical and emotional support mirrors the dual support other participants describe their mums providing (described in the previous section).

Excerpt 85. Olive

Olive: right now, they give me a roof over my head, somewhere to sleep so I’m not on the streets (.) [text omitted] so they’re a massive help (.) they want me to go forward in my life and not be stuck in the past as I have been for years (.)

7.3.9 Summary of Grandparents' Positive Positioning as Inspirers, Motivators and Careers Advisors

Grandparents are positioned positively by all participants on their support network drawings and in their talk. As with constructions around support where communication is key, talk about the ways grandparents provide participants with support, focuses on communication. Listening to the young people, to their hopes and fears around the STWT appears a key source of support for young people as well as grandparents providing inspiration (through re-telling their own stories of career success, for example). Most participants lived closely to grandparents and had regular contact as a result, with one participant living with her grandparents (Olive). Grandparents therefore appear integral and strong family members with influence over participants. Participants talk about utilising grandparents as careers advisors by talking through their career ideas and hopes with them as well as taking on board suggestions for careers/jobs from them.

The next section moves on to present the ways young people position the group of family members seen as most important after mums and grandparents: siblings. Siblings are positioned as careers advisors and role models.

7.3.10 Siblings Positioned as Careers Advisors and Role Models

Helen's account (Excerpt 86) highlights the value she sees in having older siblings from whom she could 'learn from their experiences' in career terms, positioning them as careers advisors. She talks about the 'wisdom' from having older siblings and sees this intra-family knowledge-sharing as an asset, seeing their past experience as a resource to be utilised. This suggests that Helen perceives it is easier for her to make future career decisions and also that siblings model future OPS.

Excerpt 86. Helen

Helen: all the problems my brother and sister face (.) I learn from their experiences as well (.) because they're older (.) they experience it before me, so they can pass down their wisdom (.)

For participants without siblings, such as Mike (Excerpt 87), this absence is highlighted as a challenge in the STWT.

Excerpt 87. Mike

1. Mike: it's some sort of trend of my generation I think (.) I'm not quite sure why (.) I think
2. it's cos (.) maybe a lot of it's (.) a lot of only child in my generation (.) so you're less
3. reliant on other people like brothers and sisters (.) so maybe there's a bit less of a social
4. element almost (.) and (.) I'm not quite sure why (.) but it is something that I've noticed
5. (.) people struggle to ask (.) or I definitely do (.) maybe I'm putting my opinion (.) my
6. feelings on other people but I feel at least I struggle asking for help.

He identifies as being part of a greater group of young people without siblings ('only child generation') and his talk positions himself as less reliant on others partly because of having no siblings to rely on. He appears to present this as a scientific fact and draws from negative stereotypical Discourse around 'only children' which is pervasive across cultures; positioning children without siblings as more socially awkward and self-centred (Möttus, Indus & Allik, 2008). Mike's account however moves from viewing the ability to ask for help as a globally difficult thing for all young people of his 'generation' (especially only children), to talk about this as more of a personal matter, distinct to him. His use of global terms at the beginning ('my generation', 'people', 'other') changes to more personal pronouns ('I'm', 'my', 'I') by the end of the account, showing perhaps reflection during talk about whether this was a global phenomenon or distinct to him. Mike uses emotive words to end his argument that proposes that it is due to being an only child in general that makes it hard to ask for help to move specifically about his difficulties ('at least I struggle asking for help').

7.3.11 Summary of Siblings Positioning as Careers Advisors and Role Models

Siblings are not negatively positioned in our conversations, with no talk alluding to sibling rivalry or resistance in terms of future OPS, and all participants talk of having close and positive relationships with siblings in terms of support for future careers. Participants without siblings (e.g., Mike) highlight this as having a negative impact on them in terms of support provided prior to the STWT. Siblings are positioned as careers advisors by providing advice and guidance to their younger siblings based on their personal experiences of work to date. As well as providing careers advice, they have a dual role of being a role model to younger siblings, sometimes by showing siblings what *not* to do for their futures in work.

The final section on positioning of family members focuses on the group of people participants talk about the least in their support networks prior to the STWT: dads, who are negatively positioned as judges.

7.3.12 Dads Positioned as Judges

The majority of participants (9 out of 13) live in households with their dad or step-dad present. In contrast to the dominance of mums' role and talk about mums within support networks, accounts relating to dads' roles are limited in participants' accounts and network maps. Where there is expanded talk about dads, it tends to be negatively framed. On participants' support network drawings, some participants feature 'mum and dad' on the map, but then go on only to talk explicitly about their mum's role within the context of support with decision-making during this transitional time. This lack of reference explicitly to the role and functions of dads within their support networks may suggest that the young people package dad up as being included within the concept of 'mum', so when they talk about 'mum' they are referring to both parents, but my interpretation is not this. When young people talk about 'mum and dad' in their support network, Dad appears more of a peripheral role – the add-on to support, perhaps in his role as being supportive to mum and then indirectly supportive to the young person via mum.

Simon (Excerpt 88) appears to position his dad (who he did not live with) in sharp contrast to his mum in terms of the type of judgement (framed negatively) he perceives about his hoped-for OPS (he was uncertain about his future career choices).

Excerpt 88. Simon

Simon: (.) from my dad very much (.) um (.) yeah (.) a lot (.) but from my mum (.) no.

He emphasises the quantity of negative judgement he perceives from his dad ('very much', 'a lot') compared to a straightforward 'no', or absence of negative judgement regarding his future career choices from his mum, placing the two in sharp contrast as a result. Continuing his positioning of mum versus dad (Excerpt 89) ('my dad on the other hand...'), Simon talks as if his dad would 'probably just encourage me to go to university', whereas he is unsure about this being the best option for himself at this stage. Simon includes the fact his dad did not go to university, as evidence for how his dad views university as the 'best' option. His account appears to emphasise again the importance of physical closeness and making time within young people's notions of support expected from close family members and that if this is absent then so is any expected influence ('I don't see him that much anyway...so that's fine').

Excerpt 89. Simon

Simon: my dad on the other hand (.) he'd probably just encourage me to go to university all the way cos he didn't go to university (.) um (.) I don't see him that much anyway (.) so that's fine (.)

Simon continues to emphasise his dad's role as negligible ('basically nothing') in his support network, reducing his role to a functional one where there is limited communication between father and son (Excerpt 90). His account appears to show dissatisfaction with their communication and is dismissive about the level of support received ('that's it...a ten minute phone call...talk to you again in like three months'). Once again emphasising that making time to provide support is a crucial facet of support itself identified by young people in my study.

Excerpt 90. Simon

- 1.Emma: but your dad (.) what's his role then in the sort of network?
- 2.Simon: basically nothing (.)
- 3.Emma: right (.) so he's not listening to what your plans are (.) or are you not talking to him?
- 4.Simon: I talk to him a few times a year and even then it's just a basic conversation of
- 5.'how are you' and that's it (.) ten minute phone call (.) talk to you again in like three
- 6.months (.) and that's it (.)

Mike (Excerpt 91) similarly talks of judgement and a lack of support at this time from his dad (who he lived with) for his choice of future career (Army officer). Perhaps to protect himself (or as a means of resistance to the invisible power felt by his dad's rejection of his hoped-for OPS), Mike frames this as a global rejection of characteristics of the military on his dad's part ('anti-authority'), rather than making it a more personal rejection of Mike himself (similar to his framing of his mum's rejection of his HOPS as 'mother's worry').

Excerpt 91. Mike

Mike: my dad's just very anti-authority anything (.)

Talk indicating a sense of distance (physical and emotional) between fathers and sons (including those living together) continues with Andrew (Excerpt 92). He speaks for example about his Step-Dad working from home in abstract terms ('doing stuff'), and feeling no sense of connection or appeal to the type of work his step-dad did and what Andrew wanted to do in the future (media career). He positions himself as being physically 'apart' from his Step-Dad ('I walk past'), and not feeling engaged with him through his work.

Excerpt 92. Andrew

Andrew: I see him like (.) I walk past his table (.) doing stuff (.) it really doesn't appeal to me (.)

Emily laughs when she talks about her dad's role in her support network, and asserts that he is physically in her life ('I do live with my dad'), although this is expressed in an amused and good-natured way, rather than a negative cynical tone (Excerpt 93). She similarly describes a sense of distance from her dad and how she did not feel her dad would understand what she was going through prior to the STWT. Emily talks of perceiving both a lack of empathy and interest (and perhaps negative judgement as a result) from her dad about her future occupational hopes (design career).

Excerpt 93. Emily

Emily: no (.) he (.) <laughs> no (.) I do live with my dad (.) but he's not (.) necessarily the one to talk to (.) when it comes to stuff like this (.) cos I don't feel like he'd understand anyway (.) I don't think he'd get what I want to do (.) because he's just not interested

7.3.13 Summary of Dads Positioning as Judges

Dads are positioned as judges by young people in their talk about the role of dads' within support networks. Dads appear side-lined within young people's networks, categorizing dad's support as unhelpful or absent or else seen as wrapped up within the support provided by mum. When dads are spoken about directly by participants, feelings of negative judgement or a lack of understanding about what participants want, in terms of support, prior to the STWT are suggested. Where dads did not live with participants, talk focuses on the lack of time available to talk about participants' feelings about the STWT, suggesting that support required by young people prior to the STWT is time-intensive and not easily digested into smaller condensed time blocks which may be the reality for parents not living with the young person full-time.

The next category young people talk about within support networks are teachers. My interpretations of how young people position teachers both positively (as experts, careers advisors and friends) and negatively (as HE advocates) are presented in the following section.

7.4 Positioning of Teachers in Support Networks

Young people talk about teacher support as the second most important source of support after family (see Figure 22). Teachers perhaps represent sources again of invisible power within the contested space of the STWT, acting as agents reproducing dominant Discourses around education, work and careers. Participants describe teachers providing both practical and

emotional support (similar to mums' support). Whilst some participants include past teachers in their notions of teacher support, most participants ground teacher support as from those in their current educational environment (sixth form or FE college). The various positive and negative positions I interpret young people assigning to careers advisors are presented in the next section.

7.4.1 Teachers Positioned as Experts, Careers Advisors and Friends

Sarah talks about teachers (mostly from college but she refers to past teachers also) helping her, using metaphors around 'building' to illustrate a concrete sense of support and helping her 'plan' for the future (Excerpt 94).

Excerpt 94. Sarah

Sarah: my teachers helped me a lot with this (.) how to build my plan

She draws and talks in global terms about support from teachers, stating that teachers help her work out what is 'ideal' for her. Whilst Sarah positions this positively, equally this could be interpreted as teachers holding too much power over Sarah's future, pertaining to 'know what's best' for Sarah, rather than prioritising Sarah's own wants and needs.

Helen emphasises the emotional support her teachers provide, linking this with their provision of support for her mental wellbeing (Excerpt 95). She talks about 'getting stressed' and identifying which teachers are helpful for different kinds of issues faced. Helen appears to categorise teachers as practical or emotional support (again echoing the dual form of support which mums provide). Some teachers are therefore consulted for the more emotional or stress-based personal and emotional support, when the pressure of college is too much, whereas others are consulted over more practical task-based questions. Using teachers' names within her account suggests a closeness of relationship between Helen and her teachers, whereas other participants did not appear to have such strong relationships with teachers to draw upon for support prior to the STWT.

Excerpt 95. Helen

Helen: Jane (.) she's very good for emotional help (.) like if I ever have a problem emotionally with my work for example, if I'm getting stressed (.) I'll go to Jane or Karen (.) and then with my work (.) Jenny's very good for that, like if I just have any questions about work or anything, she will go through it with us (.) um (.)

Similarly to Sarah, Helen positions teachers as experts, because of their knowledge of future careers open to her (Excerpt 96). She uses the word ‘wisdom’, echoing her earlier use of this word about learning from her siblings about careers. She appears to categorise support as helpful or unhelpful, deeming teachers to be ‘more helpful’ because it is more useful to her, whereas ‘friendship sort of support’ was slightly less ‘helpful’.

Excerpt 96. Helen

Helen: with my friends it’s more of like a friendship sort of support and with my teachers it’s like a (.) like they’ve got a lot more wisdom on the subject (.) so it’s a bit more helpful (.)

Olive (Excerpt 97) talks about asking for support from teachers and some students’ reluctance to ask teachers for help and support out of the fear of looking stupid (‘like an idiot’). She talks in the third person, as though she is giving advice to others through her talk with me. For example, she says ‘teachers won’t laugh at you’, she appears to want to reassure others and perhaps distance herself from this possible humiliation, talking perhaps to herself and reassuring herself at the same time. She talks about finding it difficult in the past to ask for help, and appears ardent in her desire to get the message across to ‘others’ about the utility in approaching teachers for support and help (‘no reason for you to be scared’). She includes a tentative statement (‘like I don’t know if this is right’) showing that she is uncertain whether teachers really would provide help and support, but that she knows that this is the expected role of teachers (helping). Her talk appears to further the positioning of teachers as ‘experts’ to be ‘approachable experts’ or friendly experts.

Excerpt 97. Olive

Olive: if I need help I’ll go and ask but some students never ask because they don’t want to sound (.) don’t want to look like an idiot (.) like I don’t know if this is right (.) teachers won’t laugh at you (.) they’re there to help you, (.) that’s it really. There’s no reason for you to be scared to go and talk to a teacher.

Andrew adds the phrase ‘some teachers’ on his support network map (Figure 28), keen to differentiate between teachers who are supportive and those who are not, repeating notions from the previous chapter that teachers’ support and reactions to their OPS prior to the STWT appear contingent, rather than unconditional.

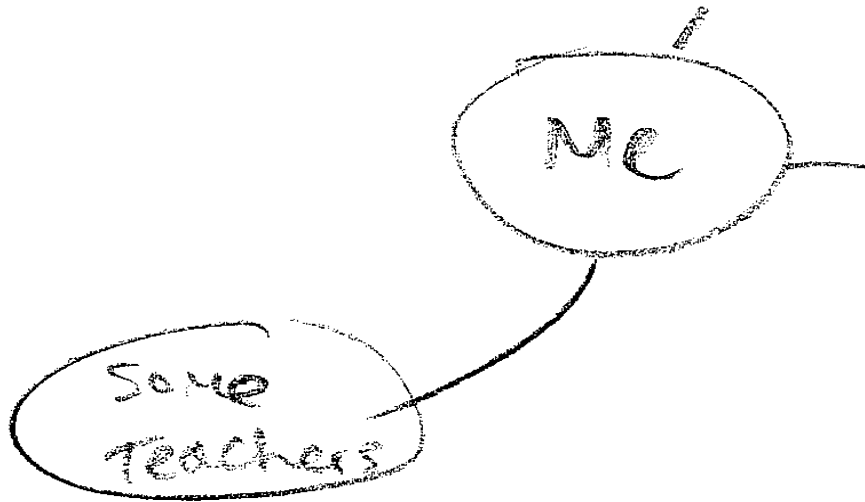


Figure 28. Andrew's Emphasis of Partial Support from Teachers

Jane's support network drawing (Figure 29) focuses on the practical support that teachers provide, such as helping to consider the differences between going to university or straight into a job/apprenticeship. Jane frames the kind of support provided as being quite generic, and not tailored to her individual needs or uncertainties. For example, she talks of receiving emails in general from teachers about going to university, not aimed specifically at her and emphasises teachers' support is mainly practical and focuses on university and jobs (not apprenticeships of interest to Jane).

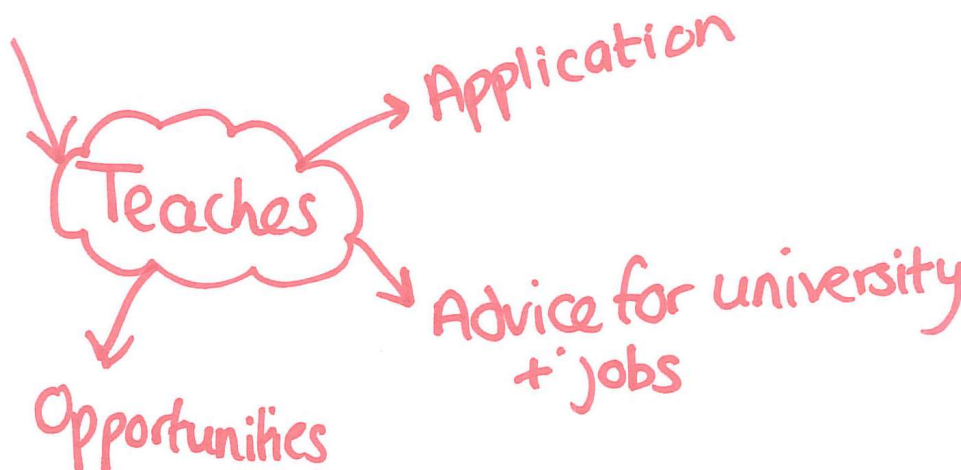


Figure 29. Jane's Illustration of Teachers' Practical Support with Future Planning

In contrast to her drawing of practical support, much of Jane's talk around the support from teachers (Excerpt 98) links more to a sense of emotional support, about discussions of the future and a shared vision of their familial futures in particular ('about having children').

Excerpt 98. Jane

Jane: yeah so about having children (.) when I want children (.) when I want to get married (.)
cos my teacher she's getting married so she's been showing us dresses and venues (.) so we've
been talking about our ideal weddings <laughs>

Emma: <laughs>

Jane talks about how her and her friends enjoy thinking about their own hopes for having a family in the future and getting married (imagining future hoped-for selves outside of the occupational realm), through focusing on the teacher's own wedding planning activities. She says that the teacher had shared and talked openly of her plans about 'dresses and venues', signifying friendship from the teacher, going beyond the traditional more distant role of teacher/pupil. Jane appears to draw a great deal of happiness from these conversations as they had enabled her to focus on a part of her future which she felt more certain about (getting married and wanting children). We both laugh at the end of this extract, showing my attempts to share in Jane's sense of fun and happiness at engaging in this type of talk about future families and weddings with her teacher. I have to acknowledge that for me in part, the laughter arose from feeling a sense of discomfort that this was a topic of conversation between teachers and young women in school. Of course my position as a woman (albeit with working class background) who has chosen not to get married, and had children later in life following a career, means that my discomfort is partly due to the way this conversation perhaps makes me question the legitimacy of my (and anyone else's) choices both now and in the past.

7.4.2 *Teachers Positioned as HE Advocates*

Whilst many of the participants include teachers in their support network map, when they indicate the kinds of support offered by teachers, there is a sense of frustration that teachers continue to promote a dominant STWT educational Discourse of 'if you're bright you should go to university'. Some participants, such as Helen (Excerpt 99), speak about feeling uneasy with the pressure some teachers place to go to university instead of pursuing an apprenticeship or going straight into employment. Her talk positions teachers strongly as 'HE advocates', pushing individuals into this dominant path following the STWT.

Excerpt 99. Helen

Helen: I've told them how I want to do apprenticeship and they're always checking up on me (.) like seeing how that's going (.) if I'm doing ok with that but (.) like I don't know if it's a thing with the College but Karen pushed about doing university (.) and um (.) I've had to tell her quite a few times that's not something I want to do, cos I think that links the place to where I don't want to be in (.) because I don't want to go to university

Helen emphasises how she has 'told them' (teachers) her wishes but still perceives some teachers 'pushing' university as a more suitable option for her than apprenticeships. She talks about a teacher in particular, 'checking up' on her, a feeling of being monitored for any change of decision and trying to convince her to change her mind away from apprenticeship towards university. Helen shows how she has had to be insistent and use forceful language to demonstrate her certainty that university is not the path for her ('I've had to tell her quite a few times', 'I don't want',). Her change of pronoun from the beginning to the end of the excerpt ('them' changed to 'her'), appears to locate the debate between herself and one particular teacher (Karen). Interestingly, Karen is the teacher Helen refers to when talking about going to see certain teachers for personal or emotional support if she feels stressed, yet in this quote Karen's insistence on pushing the dominant discourse of 'go to university', appears to be a contributing factor to Helen's stress. She presents the suggestion that there are unspoken or more political reasons for teachers at college promoting the university route (Excerpt 100). She talks of a 'sneaky suspicion', the alliteration seemingly lessening the impact of the statement and also highlighting it is not something talked about on the surface around college, but that she perceives there are some sort of arrangements in place whereby the college benefits from sending more people to university. She describes university as a 'waste of time' for her career and speaks strongly about university as 'definitely' not for her.

Excerpt 100. Helen

Helen: I always had like (.) a sneaky suspicion it's something to do with how the university links with the college so the more people they get to go to university that (.) =
Emma: =right (.)=
Helen: =but university definitely isn't the thing I want to do, because to me it is a waste of time in my career.

Ben speaks similarly of dominant expectations from teachers at his school sixth form that most people would be going to university (Excerpt 101). He talks about 'they' (teachers within school), not considering the apprenticeship route because of university being the expected future choice for most young people.

Excerpt 101. Ben

Ben: because most people go to uni and (.) they don't really think about the apprenticeship route (.)

Jennifer similarly speaks of teachers' expectation that everyone would go to university after school and her talk links to feelings of being disregarded ('I've had no-one sit me down'). She talks about peers who are going to university as receiving all the help ('they've got a lot of support'). This suggests that young people who do not align themselves with the dominant norms and expectations (such as the young people in my study) may end up feeling isolated and marginalised.

Excerpt 102. Jennifer

Jennifer: they've got a lot of support with UCAS and applications and going to uni open days (.) but I've had no-one sit me down and say (.) this is (.) what do you want to do (.)

Jane appears to support Helen's assertions that there is some sort of symbiotic relationship (or deal) between schools/colleges and universities. She brings in examples of prestigious and high status universities in the UK (Oxford and Cambridge) to lend credibility to her argument, suggesting that people think those who go to university are more intelligent than those who do not.

Excerpt 103. Jane

Jane: I think it's again going back to status (.) so having a degree at oxford or Cambridge makes people feel 'oh wow..you must be really smart' (.) um (.) and also I think it would look really good for the school having that as well (.)

She suggests that having pupils apply for high status universities would 'look really good for the school' (providing reflected glory for teachers and the school). She continues to present the pressure felt from teachers about going to university and that she had been 'expected' (removing her sense of agency and power from the decision-making process) to apply for a programme specifically aimed at encouraging pupils from comprehensive schools to apply to Oxford or Cambridge, because of achieving good grades (Excerpt 104).

Excerpt 104. Jane

Jane: I think cos I'm getting good grades I'm expected to do it (.) but I just didn't like the thought of going to Oxford and Cambridge and moving down to London (.) that would stress me out a lot <laughs>

Throughout our conversation, Jane emphasises not wanting to move away from her family. She groups these universities as being far away geographically ('moving down to London') and jokes that even the thought of moving away had distressed her enough, so that she did not apply. Jane's resistance to the dominant norms and expectations (if you are bright you should go to Cambridge or Oxford university), again illustrates the complex negotiations taking place prior to the STWT for young people between themselves and others, such as teachers and family. This also continues to suggest that if pushed too far, young people may choose to re-instate their sense of agency and power in making decisions about their future by resisting dominant expectations or Discourses actively (like Jane) or ambivalently (like Amanda, see previous chapter).

7.4.3 Summary of Positioning of Teachers in Support Networks

Teachers are positioned by participants positively as careers advisors, experts and friends and negatively as HE advocates. Teachers are seen to provide practical as well as emotional support and advice to young people prior to the STWT and are seen as experts in their field to go to for advice (providing this in line with the teacher's topic). Teachers are positioned as friends by some participants, talking about teachers providing personal support prior to the STWT. Teachers are however positioned negatively by many participants talking about pressures placed on them by teachers reproducing dominant Discourses to follow the normative path of going to university following school, rather than on to work or apprenticeship. This appears particularly the case for the young people in my study who talk about being labelled by teachers as 'bright', suggesting that this label can place unwanted pressures and demands upon young people.

The next section moves on to present the final group of supporters included in young people's drawings and talk: friends.

7.5 Positioning of Friends in Support Networks

7.5.1 Friends Positioned as Helpers (Motivators, Stress Relievers and Cheerleaders)

Helen talks about the support friends provide for her mental health and wellbeing prior to the STWT, acknowledged by many as an anxious and stressful time for young people (Domene & Arim, 2016). She includes a specific example when she had been involved in a group task and had lost her confidence due to making negative comparisons regarding the standard of her work

and ideas against others. Helen states that the experience had ‘knocked’ her confidence in herself and that friends ‘helped me go through it’.

Excerpt 105. Helen

Helen: well if I’m stressed about my work then they’ll just talk it through with me (.) we did a group crit once and everyone was (.) for the [project title] everyone was saying about the ideas they were doing and it kind of knocked my confidence a bit because everyone else’s ideas sounded amazing (.) and I didn’t (.) I lost confidence with my work (.) but then (.) Sarah and Helen [friends] helped me go through it (.)

The importance of having friends (and similarly family, presented in the first section of this chapter) that young people can talk to about any feelings of stress and anxiety prior to the STWT is emphasised as crucial to notions of ‘support’. Olive similarly talks about the value of having friends to provide motivation and support, in her case to keep positive (Excerpt 106). As with Helen, she makes the distinction between the support that friends gave not necessarily being ‘helpful’, if viewed from purely a transactional or utility perspective, perhaps because peers are unlikely to have the experience and knowledge about future career paths available and so on. She clearly states that despite not necessarily being helpful, friends are still ‘supportive’. Having someone who is in your corner, or on your side (a friend) as you go through a challenging part of your life (such as the STWT) is seen as support enough, and a source of comfort (‘nice to know’).

Excerpt 106. Olive

Olive: my friend tells me just to do what your gut says (.) basically just giving me like quotes and stuff just to help me along (.) it might not be helpful, helpful but it’s nice to know that they’re supportive.

When talking about the support she gains from friends in her network, as with her support from teachers, Jane’s talk positions herself as having a strong ideal for a future family (Excerpt 107). When I ask if she talks to friends about the future in work, her answer re-frames the topic to be about family in the first instance, and work, or the future associated with work (such as going to university), second. Her talk throughout is about a strong family base and attachment and her desire to recreate this in the future. The dominant Discourse for Jane is the importance of having a family in the future which she presents as a taken for granted assumption (‘we talk about like family obviously’). She emphasises how her friends all have different opinions and relates this, for example, to the idea of moving away; a key topic for Jane linked to the STWT.

Excerpt 107. Jane

Emma: so do you talk to your friends about future in work and (.)

Jane: yeah (.) we talk about like family obviously (.) we're like wanting to have a family and how we want our houses when we're older (.) [talk omitted] some do want to move away (.) [talk omitted] (.) some of my friends want to move to universities that are down London (.) things like that (.) we all have different opinions (.)

7.5.2 *Friends Positioned as Distractors*

In contrast to female participants who include friends' support prior to the STWT as talking about feelings, stress and expectations, some of the male participants frame the support they receive from friends as contrasting with this i.e., support gained by *not* talking about the future. Ben for example (Excerpt 108) speaks about not wanting to talk with his friends about future careers, seeing them provide support by engaging in an activity totally removed from the school context, such as playing rugby. He talks of the value of finding support from not having to think about the future and be physically engaged in something that in turn helped him to relax. Excerpt 108. Ben

Ben: um (.) friends and the rugby club are a bit more just like to (.) relax and (.) it's just time where I can go, do something and not think about school really

Mike also describes how he and his friends do not talk about the future (Excerpt 109). As presented in the previous chapter, when Mike talks about his future career in the army, he positions himself in a career he wants others to see as 'cool' and exciting.

Excerpt 109. Mike

Mike: I don't really talk about it with my friends that much (.) the deepest I've got with a conversation with my friends is like 'oh yeah that's cool'

In contrast to Ben and Mike, Greg frames the reason for not talking to friends about future plans as being emotionally-driven (Excerpt 110). He talks about finding it 'upsetting' to discuss the future with his friends because of what it represents i.e., breaking up their friendship group and the associated uncertainties that this would bring along with it. Again this suggests that notions of emotional closeness are linked with geographical closeness for participants, seen here in talk about friends and previously in the section on family support.

Excerpt 110. Greg

1. Greg: um (.) I don't (.) we don't usually talk about that (.) cos it's usually like...I don't
2. know (.) I feel like it's kind of an upsetting thing (.) cos it's like (.) [talk omitted]
3. Emma: why does it feel upsetting?
4. Greg: cos it's like (.) we're all going to different places

5.Emma: right

6.Greg: and it's like (.) 'no (.) we won't see you again for a long time' (.) like (.) so (.) um

7.5.3 *Summary of Young People's Positioning of Friends in Support Networks*

Participants position friends positively as helpers and distractors (sources of light relief from the challenges presented prior to the STWT). There appears a gender distinction in the way friends are positioned. Male participants frame friends more as positive distractors (ways to stop them feeling anxious about the STWT) and female participants frame friends more as helpers (helping them to talk about, plan elements or get motivated about the STWT). Participants view friends as having a key role to play in the provision of emotional support prior to the STWT and indeed the potential dissolution of friendship groups within support networks as a result of the STWT (where individuals move away for work or university) is deemed upsetting.

None of the participants include careers advisors on their support network drawings. After participants had talked me through their network drawings (talking about family, teachers and friends), I therefore ask directly if they had accessed support from careers professionals during their time at school or college. The following section of interpretations on the positioning of careers advisors by young people in my study is drawn from these discussions.

7.6 Positioning of Careers Advisors as Outside of Support Networks

Participants' accounts appear to illustrate tensions and uncertainties around the purpose and value of having careers advisors within schools and colleges. Participants' accounts include the apparently contradictory notion that careers advisors are of no use if you are *clear* about your future; and of no use if you are *unclear*. Who can solve this paradox of the proposed purpose remains unclear. The purpose and value of having access to careers professionals appears unclear and confusing to participants. The idea of utilising careers professionals to explore potential future OPS is not mentioned by participants, and exploration in general is not legitimised as an appropriate usage of careers professionals' time.

This section begins by presenting young people's talk around positioning careers advisors purpose as supporting people who know what they want to do for their future in work, and moves to contrast this with interpretations of talk of their purpose being to support those who

are unclear about their future. The section ends by presenting talk on the final positioning of careers advisors as HE advocates.

7.6.1 Careers Advisors Positioned as For Those in the Know

Before deciding to pursue a career in the Army, Olive says that she had ‘no idea’ what she wanted to do for a future career and yet seeing a careers professional at college would be ‘wasting their time’ (Excerpt 111).

Excerpt 111. Olive

Olive: at the point where I wanted to contact them I had no idea what I was going to do so I didn't see the point of going just to go (.) ‘yeah I don't know what I want to do’ (.) it just feels like I was wasting their time (.)

This notion of time and wasting time (both the young person's and/or the careers advisor's) when faced with uncertainty of future options, is common across participants. Careers advisors appear as symbols of invisible power to young people, perhaps seen as representatives of the educational institutions, as opposed to advocates for the young people's futures. Participants express the notion that it is not a valid use of career professionals' time (resources) to support young people as they navigate their way through uncertainty about their future OPS or exploration of potential careers and ideas. Olive talks of the tension between wanting to get in touch with a careers professional at the college in the past, but due to her uncertainty about her future career at the time, she had rejected the idea as a pointless exercise. This suggests a lack of consideration or awareness of the use of the potential to utilise career professionals' time for the exploration of possibilities or potential future careers.

Amanda uses the metaphor of being ‘blind’, depicting complete absence of knowledge about what she wanted to do in her future career. Her account includes words such as ‘time’ and ‘waste’, again drawing in talk about individuals as resources (seen in the previous chapter). Going to a careers professional without clarity of your future career path is viewed as futile. Amanda talks about her future career as dependent on her choosing something by herself (sole agency), and she did not see it as a co-construction exercise (‘they can't like choose for me’). This suggests Amanda's ideas of her hoped-for OPS are around choice, appearing to draw from dominant individualisation Discourse, where it is simply a matter of individual choice what career you go into and not subject to constraining (structural) factors or inequalities. Mirroring Olive's beliefs, Amanda describes it as unhelpful and not a good use of time (whether this is

Amanda's or a careers professional's time, is unclear) to see a careers advisor, due to her lack of knowledge around her hoped-for OPS.

Excerpt 112. Amanda

Amanda: I can't just go at them like blindly (.) 'I don't know what I want to do' kind of <laughs>

Emma:right=

Amanda: =they can't like choose for me (.) [omitted section] but I don't think it's gonna be overly very helpful because I really just don't know what I want to do.

7.6.2 *Careers Advisors Positioned as For Those Not in the Know*

Mike acknowledges his challenges around asking for help in general (see section on siblings positioning) and argues that his lack of usage of career professionals' time at college is because he has a clear career path (Army career). Again the notion of time and not wanting to take up time which could be used by others is mentioned in Mike's account (Excerpt 113). Whilst Olive links careers advisors' time as best used in the support of those with a clear future path (Excerpt 111), Mike's account connects the best use of time as being for those young people who did not have a clear future mapped out.

Excerpt 113. Mike

Mike: I think one of the reasons is again the whole 'oh I don't feel like asking for help' but the other reason is I think I've got my sort of career path and all that sort of stuff sort of figured out so maybe other people that don't, need to use those more than me (.) and I don't want to be taking up the time if people need it more than me (.)

Participants' talk of not wanting to intrude on career professionals' time at school or college requires greater unpicking. Is this because young people somehow ascribe higher level of status of career professionals due to them being 'outside' of the teacher role and therefore unfamiliar to the young people in these contexts? Where does the notion of one person's time being more valuable than another's come from? Perhaps young people perceive themselves as less powerful actors within school and college environments than teachers or careers professionals, and therefore having less rights to access the time of others? The belief that everyone else's time is somehow more valuable than theirs appears across participants' accounts. A lack of confidence and belief that they have the right to utilise careers advisors' time in whatever way they need, to support them during their career uncertainty or certainty, comes through strongly in participants' accounts.

7.6.3 *Careers Advisors Positioned as HE Advocates*

When discussing the purpose of careers advisors in schools, participants commonly express the belief that there is a bias towards advising people to continue on to university, as opposed to go on apprenticeships or into work directly. In this way, careers advisors act as promoters of the dominant Discourses, norms and expectations for young people in the STWT. Jennifer (Excerpt 114) talks about greater support from careers advisors for those going on ‘to do more academic things’, that is, go to university, with other options being seen as second choices. Again, this shows how those young people not pursuing this dominant path for the STWT feel marginalised and unsupported by careers advisors (and teachers as discussed previously in this chapter where teachers are similarly positioned as HE advocates).

Excerpt 114. Jennifer

Jennifer: I think it’s definitely more towards people going on to do more academic things (.) there’s definitely bias towards them (.)

Jane (Excerpt 115) talks of wanting to introduce a sense of balance in the types of futures talked about in school, by bringing in people to talk about apprenticeships as well as universities. Her talk quantifies the number of people coming in to represent the dominant future path from universities (‘a lot’). She uses hedging language to offer tentative suggestions as to how careers advice could be improved for young people such as her choosing not to go to university (‘maybe if we had couple of people’). Jane acknowledges that she is taking a path which is not the norm (‘it is a bit different’), yet she appears to draw from aspiration-raising Discourse by including notions such as wanting careers advisors to help her stand out from other apprenticeship applicants (‘what sets us apart’), much like talk around applying to university perhaps. Jane talks about the need to redress the balance of time afforded to presenting the different choices available to young people upon leaving school, reducing the marginalisation of those following non-university routes and supporting those who are uncertain about following the expected (and dominant) path of going to university after school.

Excerpt 115. Jane

Jane: we have like a lot of people coming in from universities to do talks so maybe if we had couple of people coming in from apprenticeships to do talks and taking us through how you apply (.) cos it is a bit different (.) also like what we can get from it and what sets us apart...

7.6.4 *Summary of Positioning of Careers Advisors by Young People*

Careers advisors are totally absent from young people's support network drawings yet participants have clear opinions, perceptions and expectations of careers advisors' roles prior to the STWT. Careers advisors are positioned as 'for those in the know', 'for those not in the know' and as 'HE advocates'. The tensions and contradictions within young people's accounts of notions around the appropriate usage and purpose of career professionals' time are clear. Participants position career professionals in opposition to their own position in terms of future career clarity as being:

- only for people who are not clear about their future career (positioned by those young people who were clear of their future career)
- only for people who are clear about their future career (positioned in this way by those young people who were not clear about their future career).

Young people appear to classify themselves in a lower status to career professionals and therefore less entitled and unsure about accessing and utilising time with them. The uncertainty over the role and purpose of careers advisors in school and college settings appears to lead some participants to taking on the role of career advisor themselves or co-opting family members to take on this role, as an example of proxy-agency, highlighted by Bandura (2002). Careers advisors are represented as reproducing dominant Discourses around university being the best option following school, particularly for participants described as 'bright'. Participants suggest they are marginalised as a result of the lack of support or advice from careers advisors around their desire to follow the non-dominant path from school i.e., going straight into work or apprenticeships.

7.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented my interpretations of how young people construct the idea of 'support' developed from the support network drawings and associated conversations with participants. The suggestions developed throughout this chapter are that young people look keenly to 'others' for advice, support and comfort prior to the STWT and are highly aware of who supports them and how they do this prior to the STWT. This support (positioned both positively and negatively by young people) in turn shapes (constructs and constrains), their occupational possible selves as they talk about their hopes and worries around the STWT with others.

Young people talked about and included three main groups of influencers ('insiders') in their pre-STWT networks: family; teachers; and friends. Communicating with others (whilst participants' meanings of 'talk' was individualised and appeared gendered), was emphasised as a key source of support by most participants. A group of actors was also talked about as 'outsiders': careers advisors. The positioning of these various actors illustrated a range of tensions, along with nuanced notions of what 'support' looks like for young people, particularly those from the 'missing middle' in working class communities prior to the STWT.

The two chapters of findings presented thus far (chapters six and seven), have focused on how young people discursively construct hoped-for and feared-for OPS prior to the STWT and who influences and supports them through this. The chapters have presented how young people's future hopes and fears around work appears shaped in two fundamental ways. Firstly, by the Discourses (resources made available to individuals) and associated positions made available to them through the influence of others (family, teachers, friends and careers advisors). Within this I have attempted to acknowledge the socio-economic constraining elements within these Discourses made available to this group of young people living and going to school in working class communities. Secondly, these findings suggest that young people also adopt a more agentic role, choosing which parts of dominant Discourses to take on (reproduce), resist, or adapt, as they build their future OPS. Findings show how young people shape and co-construct their OPS in the macro Discourses they draw upon and the micro level discourse they use to adopt or resist these. How young people position others in their support network also provides indication of what participants value within the notion of 'support' prior to the STWT, particularly in relation to who they include (family, teachers and friends) and exclude (careers advisors).

The next two finding chapters move on to present my interpretations from conversations and drawings with small business manager participants, further illuminating the many and varied ways in which young people's work identities are constructed and constrained by those influencing the contested space of the STWT.

8. Findings: SME Managers ‘Othering’ Young People in the STWT

8.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter turns the focus to another of the key actors in the STWT: employers, and specifically the individual managers that young people encounter within the recruitment and induction processes in their first job following compulsory schooling in an SME setting. The findings in this and the following chapter ([Chapter 9](#)) relate to my research question focused on SME managers: *Research Question 2. How do SME managers construct young people in the STWT?*

In this chapter I move on to include managers’ constructions of young people in the STWT (from seven SME managers, see Table 6 for overview). STWT research calls for a greater focus on all characters involved in the STWT, not only continuing with what has been a dominant focus to date on young people’s perceptions and experiences, but also including employers (Kyndt et al., 2017). Bringing in SME managers’ talk about young people coming directly to the workplace from school or college, adds a richer relational aspect to the findings developed so far within this thesis around the dominant Discourses, norms and expectations young people are influenced by, reproduce, or resist, prior to the STWT.

This chapter is divided into two main sections. The first includes talk and drawings exemplifying what could be described as ‘positive’ othering (seeing the other as different, in a fascinating way), whereas the second contrasts this with talk and drawing exemplifying negative othering (seeing the other as different, in a harmful, reductive way). In the first section I re-introduce the construct of othering generally (see [Chapter 3](#), for greater detail), presenting examples of my interpretations of how managers other young people through the discursive devices they use when talking and drawing a ‘typical’ young person starting work straight from school. I move on to illustrate positive othering that SME managers show in their talk via two discursive themes (named using participants’ own words): ‘trying to pull out trees’; and ‘they can carry it through’. In the second section I provide examples of how managers talk commonly reduces young people to a stereotypically ‘less than’ category, a common feature of othering in narrative identity work (Jensen, 2011). For example, ‘Pushing Water Uphill’ focuses on managers’ talk around young people’s work ethics and ‘They Fall Flat on their Backs’ explores managers’ talk about young people’s readiness for starting work. The section continues with

‘not another one’ exploring talk about young people as energy-drains and ends with ‘they need to pace themselves’, exploring talk around young people as impatient for change. In this chapter, the tensions and contradictions between managers’ discursive constructions of young people are presented. These contradictions and apparent tensions are apparent both within and across individual conversations with SME managers.

8.2. ‘Trying to Pull Out Trees’: Young People as Energy-Bringers

Julia (Extract 1) repeats the word ‘energy’ to strengthen her claims that young people bring energy to the workplace when they start work straight from school.

Extract 1. Julia

Julia: but yeah I suppose they bring energy don’t they? They bring energy, enthusiasm and um
(.)<laughs> especially for me (.) I’m not even that old (.)

She links energy with enthusiasm and appears to be looking to produce a three part argument, known for their ability to connect with listeners as highly persuasive rhetorical devices (Goodman, 2017). For example, ‘they bring energy, enthusiasm and um (.) (laughs)’, to add strength to her argument regarding the positive elements young people bring to the workplace. Her usage of the device ‘don’t they?’ attempts to persuade me that this is a factual statement. That is, it is the natural way of things that young people bring energy and enthusiasm when they first start work. Her laughter appears to acknowledge that the three part discursive device (and therefore the associated argument’s strength), has fallen slightly flat, due to her inability to state a third part to the list. Julia then brings in contrasting elements, contrasting youth (energy) with her age and implied lack of energy. She uses the disclaimer of ‘I’m not even that old (.)’, as a device to reject her own positioning that she had set up in her account of being different (old) to the young people starting work with energy and enthusiasm, perhaps not wanting to associate herself with the implied lack of energy and enthusiasm she ascribes to young people.

Karen (Extract 2) talks about energy in a more resource-based way.

Extract 2. Karen

Karen: And I think that the physical energy with the mental energy is great in that they can take on a lot (.)

She speaks about young people's energy in two ways ('physical energy' and 'mental energy'). She develops her argument to state that the positive aspect of young people having both types of energy meant that you could demand a great deal of them ('they can take on a lot..'). The implication again being that contrasting this with older workers, you can demand more of younger workers because in effect, they can take it. The argument Karen presents could be seen as exploitative i.e., you can pile high demands on young workers because they have the energy to 'take it'. Exploitative discourse expressed by SME managers in my study is further explored in the next chapter under the umbrella of paternalistic leadership discourse (PLD) (Aycan et al., 2013).

Robert uses script formulations ('yeah they bring obviously a youthful energy') as a discursive device to establish his account as 'normative' (Extract 3).

Extract 3. Robert.

Robert: yeah they bring obviously a youthful energy (.)

Robert is stating that this is simply fact - just the way things are 'obviously'. His account attempts to persuade me that there is a natural order of things at work, drawing almost from a deterministic Discourse, associating youth with energy i.e., the young bring energy, drive and enthusiasm to the workplace; the implication being, although it is not stated by Robert, that the old do not. Robert's drawing (Figure 30) includes visual symbols he associated with positive energy and dynamism (excitement like popping a champagne bottle, music, cool shades and trendy coffee shop coffees).

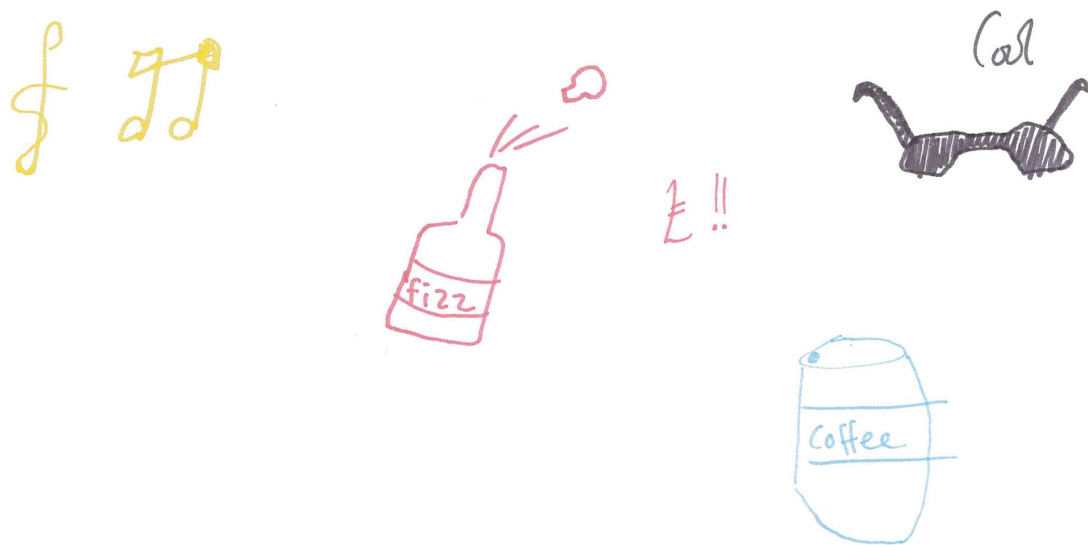


Figure 30. Robert's Elements of Coolness in Drawing of Young People

His drawing centres on a particular young man that he had personally recruited and worked alongside directly from FE college. He presents the contrasting position of how these symbols of ‘coolness’ he assigns to the young man, he himself feels increasingly distant from. He talks about the young man introducing new music to the shared playlist in the office for example and giving Robert fashion tips and advice. Robert’s drawing features ‘othering’ as he talks almost jealously (or perhaps lamentingly), that young people have these symbols of ‘coolness’ that he is more distant from, and working with young people reminds him of this. For example, he mentions about how when he was first starting work he would have been unable to afford to buy frequent coffees, but the young person brings a coffee into work every day.

Harry (Extract 4) frames his argument as ‘a weird one’ (line 1). Using this disclaimer means that Harry is able to bring a sense of distance from his subsequent statement that young people bring this contagious energy, repeating the positioning of young people as natural energy-bringers, echoed by other participants.

Extract 4. Harry

1. Harry: it’s a weird one, I suppose (.) it kind of gives you a feeling when you hire
2. youngsters (.) um (.) that energy as well=
3. Emma: =right.
4. Harry: Especially (.) you know I’m mid 40s now I mean I started hiring them 10

- 5.years ago shall we say but even then I feel we had more energy with youngsters in the
- 6.workplace=
- 7.Emma: =right. Like a physical feeling or mental?
- 8.Harry: yeah like a physical (.) mentally as well and it kind of spurred you on I think
- 9.that way (drawing sounds of felt tips on paper) (.) um (.)

Harry talks about how even when he identified as being ‘young’ himself ‘10 years ago’ (line 4), he had still felt the energy contagion from having younger people in his organisation. Again, my approval or affirmation of this statement (‘right’, line 3), along with my probe for him to describe the type of energy further, appears to give him permission to continue his argument that young people bring in this energy which you are powerless to resist against at work. He talks about the energy young people bring to the workplace as motivational (‘it kind of spurred you on’, line 8). This further develops the analogy of energy contagion, that young people are a force or a mechanism to be used to keep energy levels going at work, perhaps as a way of keeping at bay the ‘jaded’ or ‘embittered’ phase that Hayley talks about applying to more experienced (and older) employees (Extract 9). This also echoes notions of ‘emotional contagion’ (Barsade, 2006) whereby moods and emotions spread throughout a team of people.

Brian (Extract 5) tells a story of a particular young woman he had recruited who stood out for him as an exceptional worker (an exception to the ‘others’ Brian spoke about more disparagingly). He starts with an extreme case formulation in the excerpt (‘she had an amazing impact on the place’, line 1) attempting to establish his perception as an established organisational fact. Brian’s account uses strong emotive metaphors regarding the power of this particular young person to transform a workplace with her energy and can-do attitude (‘she was willing’, line 3).

Extract 5. Brian.

- 1.Brian: she had an amazing impact on the place because she came to work and she was
- 2.like (.) trying to pull out trees (.) and (.) she was not here to do a job, she was here to do
- 3.the job as well as she possibly could (.) you know she was willing =
- 4.Emma: = I’ve never heard that expression before (.) pull up trees (<laughs> (.) what does
- 5.that mean?
- 6.Brian: haven’t you? (.) it means like someone who just wants to (.) do anything (.)
- 7.just let’s get on with it and do anything we possibly can(.) it’s usually where I’ve heard it
- 8.(.) it’s for someone who’s energetic and enthusiastic and wants to be getting lots done.
- 9.Um(.) so and that rubs off on other people(.) so young people who come in and are
- 10.enthusiastic, it can rub off on other people.

He uses a dynamic and visually powerful metaphor evoking nature, (‘she came to work and she was like...trying to pull out trees...’, lines 1-2). This rhetorical device and its extreme

nature lends strength to Brian's account that this young person is exceptional in their desire to get things done at work. He proceeds to add depth and further strength to his claims by saying 'she was not here to do a job, she was here to do the job as well as she possibly could' (lines 2-3). This particular young woman is not simply doing the minimum required for the job (his talk implies this is the case for other young people by making her an exception), but that she goes above and beyond an employer's expectations. Brian talks, as other managers did, about the contagious nature of this energy. In this case, he implies contagion by talking metaphorically about how enthusiasm in young people 'can rub off on other people' (line 10).

My probe (lines 4 - 5) for Brian to clarify this particular metaphor, contains two motives: 1) genuine curiosity about understanding the meaning of a phrase I had not met before; and 2) my impulse as a qualitative researcher to be highly attuned during interviews, and research encounters in general, to times when you are consciously aware of 'gems' arising in the research process. These gems are often things people say that you know will bring research findings to life due to their rhetorical richness. Gems are described as a 'relatively rare utterance that is especially resonant and offers potent analytic leverage to a study' (Smith, 2011, p.6). The hope is that gems also help researchers get to the core of a phenomenon, in this case, managers' perceptions of young people in the STWT. There is a recognition that the researcher may need to dig deeper behind the meaning of certain gems. Smith (2011), for example, outlined a spectrum of gems: shining ones (little need for analyst to 'dig' deep into meaning); suggestive ones (there is something there for attention but the researcher needs to 'dig' a little to uncover); and secret ones (there is a hint of something there but a great deal of 'digging' is required to uncover the meaning).

Brian's subsequent response 'haven't you?' (line 6), again could be interpreted as a power move on his part, perhaps wanting to illustrate my lack of life experience or not belonging to the same group as Brian in terms of class, gender or status (he was a white, middle-class, older, male CEO), emphasising my 'otherness' from him. He proceeds to unpack the metaphor using devices such as repetition and synonyms for bringing energy and productivity to the workplace, ('someone who's energetic and enthusiastic and wants to be getting lots done', lines 8-9), using this as a three part list to add strength to his claims of the validity of using such a powerful metaphor. Building further on the contagion discourse of young people as bringing and spreading energy throughout an organisation, Brian uses a physically evocative metaphor of

‘rubs off’, repeating this term twice and completing the account with a statement that appears to be persuading the audience of this being a normative statement. If you bring in young people to your organisation, their very presence will engender enthusiasm in all others in the workplace (‘young people who come in and are enthusiastic, it can rub off on other people’, line 10).

At the end of William’s interview he reflects on whether there are any additional elements he wants to add to his drawing of a young person entering work directly from school for the first time (Extract 6). Whilst William begins by focusing and reflecting on the negative aspects he had drawn (Figure 31) and talks about when recruiting a young person straight from school (‘well I mean I put a few of the negative things on there...’, (line 1). He appears uneasy that the majority of his talk and drawing focuses on the negative aspects of working alongside young people, and claims his negative focus as a fact of human nature (‘it’s a lot easier to find negative things’, line 3) rather than taking personal responsibility for taking a negative focus. He appears keen to redress this perceived imbalance by asking me to add⁷ ‘sunshine radiating’ around the picture to visually depict the warmth and positivity he wanted to portray of having young people in the workplace.

Extract 6. William

William: well I mean I put a few of the negative things on there (.) I think I would put around the edge of the picture, loads of sunshine and rays and stuff, because on the whole that’s you know (.) it’s a lot easier to find negative things than to find um (.) sometimes find good things (.) it goes back to that thing I was saying earlier so (.) I actually think lots of sunshine radiating from having young people in the organisation.

⁷ William’s interview was conducted over skype and he emailed me a scan of his drawing which I was able to edit according to his requests.

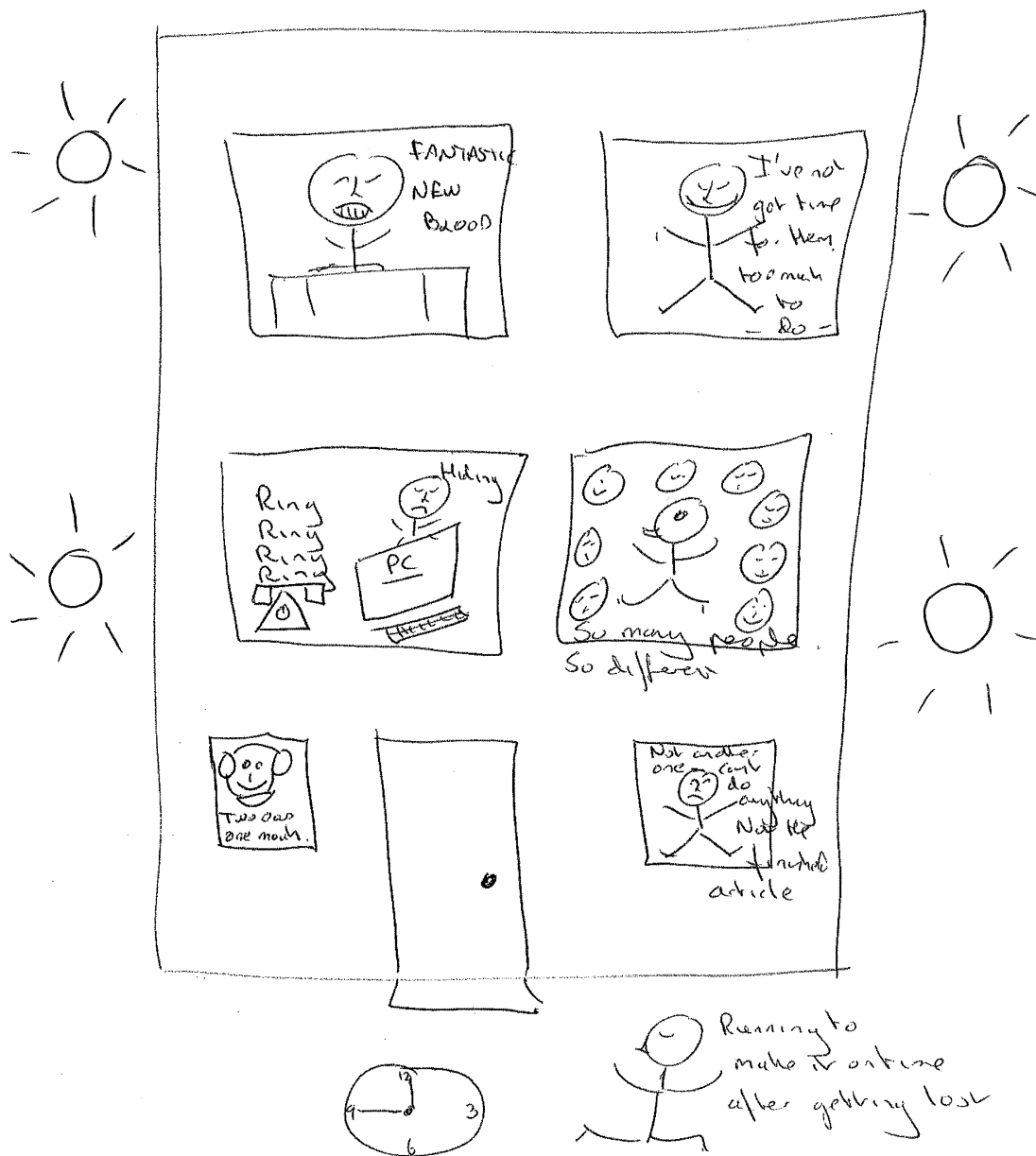


Figure 31. William's Drawing Depicting Tensions in Staff Perceptions of Young People

William's talk suggests he wants to add an overall sense of positivity and energy onto his drawing regarding recruiting and working alongside young people directly from school ('I think I would put around the edge of the picture, loads of sunshine and rays and stuff', lines 1-2). He uses the metaphor of 'sunshine and rays and stuff' (line 2), as an emotive discursive device to evocatively connect with the audience an overall feeling of positivity and warmth about working with young people. Again, using a contagion metaphor that the mere physical presence of young people in an organisation brings energy, warmth and bright positivity.

He appears to feel uneasy that his talk during the interview has focused too much on the negative aspects of working with young people ('because on the whole that's you know...it's a lot easier to find negative things than to find um...sometimes find good things..', lines 3-4). His drawing, for example, features images representing young people in various negative ways such as being unprepared and disorganised (being late after getting lost), and lacking work skills (hiding from the phone ringing). William talked of being a youth worker previously (an advocate role for young people) and his talk towards the end, is perhaps reflective of a desire to persuade himself and others that he is still on the 'side' of young people.

Summary: Young People as Energy-Bringers

Participants talk positively about the energy young people bring to the workplace (physical and mental) coming directly from school or college. Managers' talk claims this as a natural order of things i.e., young workers have energy, older ones do not. At times, talk about energy and energy contagion tips over into exploitative talk, suggesting that sometimes the natural energy of young people coming into the workplace may be taken advantage of by managers.

8.3. 'They Can Carry It Through': Young People as Innovators

William (Extract 7) includes a three part list to add strength to his argument about the positive things related to change, energy and innovation that young people bring to work ('enthusiasm, drive, new ideas'). As with Julia (Extract 8), William's talk positions young people as different to himself (an older worker), repeating the word 'different' ('different direction', 'different perspective'), to emphasise this 'otherness' of young people. William concludes with the remark 'that's been good', to emphasise and persuade the audience that he is positive about difference and sees it as a positive thing.

Extract 7. William

William: well we're talking about enthusiasm, drive, new ideas (.) um (.) the ability to see things from a different direction (.) from a different perspective (.) to come up with ideas that we may never have thought about so (.) that's been good.

Julia (Extract 8) contrasts young people in work with more experienced people in extreme terms ('lots of people', line 1) who have 'been there twenty years'. This discursive device conveys the message that the people in question are older, due to their length of tenure, without the need to use the word 'old' which could perhaps open Julia up to accusations of age discrimination.

Extract 8. Julia

Julia: whereas there's lots of people who've been there twenty years and 'this is the way we do things, we always do it like this' (.) the young people are not afraid to say 'well I've done this and I've done it different' (.) so yes it's kind of agile (.) it makes things ever-changing (.) developing (.) so let's say dynamism=

Emma: =yeah yeah (.)

Her pronoun usage again positions herself as being 'outside' from those people who engage in staid behaviour and are less open to change ('this is the way we do things, we always do it like this', lines 1-2). Her use of these phrases as though they are reported speech lends credibility to her argument that this is how older or more experienced workers position themselves against younger less experienced workers. Her pronoun usage of the reported speech of young people interestingly switches to I ('well I've done this and I've done it different', line 3), again a highly persuasive rhetorical device perhaps to illustrate which group she identifies with more (the young), and emphasising the individual agency which she ascribes to young people starting work for the first time. Her account develops the positioning further of young people as innovators, by introducing several synonyms for change and innovation as her argument develops ('agile', 'ever-changing', 'developing', 'dynamism', lines 3-4). This repetitious device strengthens the persuasive element of her account, emphasising the positive aspects of working alongside young people, by choosing strong and active adjectives.

Hayley (Extract 9) talks about the change and innovation young people bring to work via repetition of the word 'freshness' or 'fresh' (line 3; line 6).

Extract 9. Hayley

1.Emma: so what do you think young people bring to your organisation? How would

2.you describe what they bring?

3.Hayley: um (.) freshness and ideas (.) because (.) I never realised this (.) that as you get

4.older, you've seen it all (.) [text omitted] but you do get a little bit kind of jaded=

5.Emma: =hmm

6.Hayley: =and somebody new and fresh coming in and they're so enthusiastic (.)

7.they've got so many ideas (.) they can carry it through (.) and I'm here embittered and

8.have seen it all <laughs>

This metaphor of 'freshness' traditionally linked with youth and young people (and energy, presented in the previous theme), conjures up the unspoken comparison of 'stale' older workers perhaps. The freshness metaphor is developed further by Hayley who contrasts herself as 'jaded' (line 4) (and less 'fresh' by implication) whereas when a young person with less work

experience enters her organisation they are ‘new and fresh’ (line 6). My utterance (‘hmm’, line 5) after Hayley’s use of the word ‘jaded’ appears to convey agreement with this being a normative and factual statement she simply reports. This is just ‘the way things are’. The more experience you have of work, the more cynical and jaded you become of having the agency to change ‘the way things are’. She moves on to link this newness and freshness with enthusiasm, again contrasting this positive talk with a negative presentation of greater experience bringing negative adjectives such as ‘jaded’ (line 4) and strengthening the concept to talk in more extreme terms about being ‘embittered’ (line 7). Hayley’s use of emotive words brings an emotional dimension to her account and by contrasting the two extremes of someone with a great deal of work experience (‘jaded’, ‘embittered’, ‘seen it all’) and a young person with very little work experience (‘fresh’, ‘enthusiastic’ and ‘so many ideas’) the argument builds its strength. Her use of these extreme case formulations such as her claim to ‘have seen it all’ (line 4), attempts to legitimise her position as someone who has a great deal of knowledge and experience (an ‘expert’ afforded entitlement to comment) and in a position to comment and contrast younger and older people in the workplace. Hayley talks about young people’s freshness as ‘contagious’, again drawing comparisons with energy contagion and emotional contagion (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2002), discussed in the previous section.

Continuing the theme of contagion around young people’s influence on the workplace, Karen employs extremes (‘I definitely think’), to emphasise her positioning of young people as ‘refreshing’ and a way of questioning the status quo, ‘about things you’ve taken for granted’.

Extract 10. Karen.

Karen: it’s very contagious (.) when they ask you more questions about things you’ve taken for granted. So I definitely think it’s really refreshing (.)

Mirroring Hayley’s use of the word, Karen repeatedly uses the word ‘refreshing’, which she includes throughout her interview and drawing. I probe further about Karen’s use of language to describe young people as ‘refreshing’, asking her to explain what she means by this word (Extract 11).

Extract 11. Karen

- 1.Emma: so you keep mentioning the word refreshing. What does that mean to you that
- 2.it’s refreshing?
- 3.Karen: it means that they can bring another perspective. They ask you questions that

- 4.makes you think twice because you have taken it for granted (.)=
- 5.Emma: =uh uh
- 6.Karen: They ask questions for different cultures you have been working with that you
- 7.have never thought about that you been taking for granted. So I think their questioning, is
- 8.really refreshing=
- 9.Emma: =mmm
- 10.Karen: (.) because it makes you even question yourself about different things that
- 11.they're asking.

Karen responds by strengthening her claim that her account is factual or objective by stating it as an objective fact ('it means'), not attaching a personal pronoun to the statement (almost as a recognised dictionary definition). Framing her explanation in this way is a discursive attempt to increase objectivity and strength of her claims that she is producing a normative account. It is just the way things are; young people are 'refreshing'. Her repetition of words to describe young people links also to concepts around questions ('make you think twice' line 4; 'ask questions' line 6; 'questioning', line 8; 'question yourself' line 10). For Karen, questioning yourself and others is refreshing and something she talks about young people bringing to the organisation; looking at everything and everyone from a new perspective. She talks about how young people's questioning approach results in her questioning herself about her approach, an unintended consequence of young people's questioning perhaps being reflexivity. Her use of the word 'even' here appears to suggest that this is quite a surprising turn of events, to question yourself as the manager at work, but that she enjoys this push to be more reflective in herself from young people's presence in the workplace.

William's talk (Extract 12) about how young people challenge the status quo at work features a powerful three part list, used as a persuasive rhetorical discursive device to provide a sense of completeness and add strength to his argument (Wiggins, 2017). He emphasises the positive challenging force and associated change that young people bring to an organisation: 'they will question what we do'; 'they will challenge what we do'; 'they will come up with ideas'. Again, bringing questioning as a key element of the innovation young people bring to work.

Extract 12. William.

William: They will question what we do in a very good way, they will challenge what we do in a very good way and they will come up with ideas to age-old problems that we would never have thought of. So those things are vital to what we do.

His talk introduces the notion that some people may view questioning as a potentially negative concept, the implication being that sometimes people can question things in a bad way. He

qualifies his personal meaning, by saying ‘in a very good way’ and repeating this phrase again in response to introducing the term ‘challenge’. His account positions himself as viewing questioning and challenging through a positive lens, due to the output of these processes as positive overall and making extreme claims in his talk (‘never have thought of’, ‘vital’,) to emphasise the strength he ascribes to young people’s qualities regarding bringing new ideas and challenge into the organisation.

Harry talks about young people as innovators and challengers to the status quo (Extract 13). Similarly to Karen and William, he emphasises the perceived value of bringing in young people who will question the way things are done in your organisation. This suggests that at times the SME managers position young people almost as outsider consultants who will have a more objective view of your organisational culture and practices and be in a position to identify things that workers who are more ‘institutionalised’ may be unable to ‘see’.

Extract 13. Harry.

1. Harry: So we need someone who can change and be flexible. Almost see things that we
2.(.) for somebody like me you know (.) an old fuddy-duddy <laughs> for me I could be
3.sitting on my desk where I can’t see some things where the youngsters will see. So they
4.might come in with fresh ideas and go ‘ooh why are you doing it this way? Or that way?’.
5.For me (.) I’ve always had this personal attitude of (.) I’ve always had this saying of ‘only
6.the paranoid survive’ so (.) that’s how I feel all the time in terms of I think you’ve always
7.got to be on your toes, you can’t rest on your laurels’.

The use of talk that draws in the senses (‘I can’t see some things where the youngsters will see’, line 3) is a powerful way of connecting with his audience, giving a normative power to his account as it is as basic as our senses. Harry’s use of an extreme case formulation, by way of presenting his ‘saying’ (again giving a sense of wisdom as this is ascribed to folklore, for example), of ‘only the paranoid survive’ (lines 5-6), positions himself as suspicious of others drives and motives, including in the workplace. His talk continues to emphasise paranoia almost, using again highly extreme case formulations (‘that’s how I feel all the time in terms of I think you’ve always got to be on your toes, you can’t rest on your laurels’, lines 6-7). He uses a combination of physical metaphors or analogies to emphasise his argument and persuade that in business you must constantly be moving, developing and innovating. Harry appears to suggest that bringing in young people is one way to ensure this.

Harry continues to position himself as open to the innovation and challenge to the status quo that he views young people as bringing to an organisation (Extract 14). Again he employs

extreme case formulation ('I think I'm the type that would always give opportunities not only to people but also ideas', lines 1 -2), aligning himself to a category of people identified in positive terms as those who welcome new ideas or innovative people ('the type').

Extract 14. Harry.

Harry: I think I'm the type that would always give opportunities not only to people but also ideas as well. So I think if somebody's got a better idea or better way of doing something, I will give them that opportunity. I'm not one of those people that (.) 'I know best, I'm the boss' (.) you know.

Harry's account appears to be attempting to build his credibility and persuade me of his openness and meritocratic approach, where everyone's idea is viewed on merit alone, regardless if it is a different approach to his own. He attempts to persuade me that he does not misuse his position of power as the owner and director of the company by disregarding others' ideas and approaches. He appears to be seeking to reject any potential negative claims that he would not take on an idea simply because it had been put forward by someone who was young and inexperienced at work. His talk therefore seeks to convince me that he does not identify with traditional hierarchical positioning aligned with being 'the boss' ('I'm not one of those people that...' 'I know best, I'm the boss' ...you know' (lines 3-4).

Brian's talk about what young people bring to the workplace uses a disclaimer ('I'm really not ageist...', line 1), showing both a sense of anticipation and an attempt to reject any potentially negative claims regarding his discriminating against a group of people on the basis of a shared characteristic. Wetherell and Potter (1992) illustrated empirically similar ways that people attempt to avoid being labelled as discriminatory (as racists specifically), through the use of rhetorical devices such as disclaimers as 'I'm not racist but...'.

Extract 15. Brian.

Brian: I'm really not ageist (.) well (.) they bring a young person's attitude to life into a workplace so I think it's important you have a range of ages in a workplace because they bring you know (.) I want the old guy that's going to say 'whoa..hang on <laughs>, don't let's get carried away here' but I also want the young one saying 'come on why can't we do this or do that?' but I don't think it's specific to young people.

He presents contrasting discourse to emphasise the differences between young and old people at work within the same section of talk. He says 'I want the old guy' (line 3) and then contrasts this with 'but I also want the young one' (line 4). He appears to assign a gender with age and experience ('old guy'), perhaps conflating age and experience in the workplace with being

male, whereas when talking about young people he uses a non-gender specific pronoun ('young one'). His depersonalised language appears more extreme for his talk about young people ('one'), compared to older people ('guy'). 'Guy' conjures up an image of a person, albeit male. He uses an extreme example and the device of reported speech to lend factuality to his account that what young people and old people bring to the workplace are two totally different and extreme positions ('I want the old guy that's going to say 'whoa..hang on (laughs), don't lets get carried away here' but I also want the young one saying 'come on why can't we do this or do that?' (lines 6-8). His account appears to pit youth and inexperience against age and experience at work; persuading me as the audience that he is open to challenging the status quo at work if required, but a sort of 'bounded' challenge, tempered or dampened down by workers with age and experience.

Brian's positioning of young people as innovators continues with a statement that positions his stance as a 'gross generalisation', seemingly as a device to distance himself from the emerging statement (a disclaimer) as he had previously (Extract 15). He immediately counters this claim saying 'but I think it's a true generalisation' (line 1). This apparent contradiction, a statement being both 'true' and at the same time a 'generalisation', appears to be Brian's attempt to utilise this discursive device as a function to normalise the account. Again, this is just taken for granted knowledge, or common sense, regarding the differences between older and younger workers i.e., young people are more innovative than older workers.

Extract 16. Brian.

Brian: it's a gross generalisation, but I think it's a true generalisation (.) you know (.) if you take 50 young people and 50 late middle-aged people, you're more likely to be able to get the young people to do something different and move things forward than the late, middle-aged people (.)

Emma: uh-huh

Brian quantifies his account, talking in experimental language terms akin to sample size, again as a device to lend credibility and factuality to his account ('if you take 50 young people and 50 late middle-aged', line 2), building the account's strength of persuasion by talking in scientific terms of statistically significant terms of probability. His discursive claim that young people are more innovative than older people in the workplace appears to draw from generational Discourse where innovation is thought to decline with age, a supposed 'fact' that is disputed empirically (Pritchard & Whiting, 2014).

The extract from Hayley's drawing (Figure 32) is the starting point for Hayley's talk around the ways that recruiting young people directly from school can innovate or challenge the organisational status quo in unexpected ways.



Figure 32. Elements from Hayley's Drawing: Challenging Cultures

She tells the story (Extract 17) of a specific example where her organisation had recruited a young woman straight from school into an administrative role in her organisation (IT sector). She talks of her organisation as a male-dominated, predominantly white organisation ('we are male and pale' (line 3), claiming this is in line with the IT industry in general. Hayley's drawing includes a table in the staff canteen, with three chairs at a table, one chair is empty and the young woman was on the edge of the conversation of two males. She highlights characteristics about the two people having a conversation over lunch which she believes are important signifiers regarding the content of their conversation, adding words to her drawing (male; +25 years). Hayley talks about how the type of conversation (she claims inappropriate for a young woman to be subject to) represents their culture at the time of recruiting the young woman.

Extract 17. Hayley.

- 1.Hayley: it makes me feel um (.) that there's a lot more work that I have to do to make our
- 2.office a diverse culture (.) not just for young people (.) but for every single person coming
- 3.into the workplace (.) I.T. is male, pale (.) sometimes it can be stale (.) we're not stale but
- 4.we are male and pale (.) and the lack of diversity and the unconscious bias that we have
- 5.running through the organisation (.) and I suffer unconscious bias myself (.) because we
- 6.all do (.)
- 7.Emma: hmm
- 8.Hayley: = doesn't make (.) doesn't allow me to anticipate what the issues are going to
- 9.be=
- 10.Emma: =hmm=

11.Hayley: = for somebody who is so much younger than myself (.) somebody who's got
12.more in common with my daughter than with myself and (.) I never thought about the
13.conversation in the lunchtime kitchen (.) it never occurred to me until I sat through it
14.and listened with a different ear cos I do occasionally sit down for lunch and they're all
15.talking and it washes over me (.) but it wasn't until I listened with a sixteen year old
16.girl's ear that I kind of thought 'ooh no (.) I wouldn't be comfortable there'.

Hayley's talk throughout this story reveals perhaps uncomfortable truths regarding the organisational culture in her workplace, which she appears to hold herself personally accountable for changing in future ('there's a lot more work that I have to do'). She talks about 'unconscious bias' in the organisation and personally, repeating this as almost 'scientific' language to lend legitimacy to her account. This type of language is perhaps more palatable to organisations than words based on discrimination, such as racist, sexist or ageist. It also brings in the opportunity for quick fixes, where workers can be sent on a training course to eliminate their 'unconscious bias' (which Hayley talked about all managers attending). However, such training courses have been proven to be ineffective in improving diversity and inclusion in the workplace (CIPD, 2019). At the end of our conversation, I ask where the young woman has her lunch now, and Hayley answers, 'at her desk'. This example shows how young people can disrupt the way an organisation views itself and its culture on a surface level in unexpected ways. However, it also emphasises that not all aspects of change in an organisation (such as increasing diversity, as was Hayley's desire by recruiting the young woman), can be brought about by the mere presence and contagion of young people alone, and that structural and societal changes are also required.

Summary: Young People as Innovators

Managers talk about young people bringing change by questioning and challenging the ways things are done in the organisation (organisational habitus). Participants use metaphors of 'freshness' when talking about what young people bring to work, contrasting this with more 'jaded' experienced workers, for example. Young people are seen to challenge the organisational status quo in unexpected ways as well as challenging (but not always having the power to change it) the culture within an organisation.

8.4 'Pushing Water Uphill': Young People's Work Ethics

The term 'work ethic' occurs frequently in my conversations with managers. Sometimes this is introduced by the manager as a way of talking about young people and comparing them less favourably to older workers. At other times I introduce it in my probes, perhaps as provocation, perhaps as gem-digging (see earlier). Harry talks about work ethic as an essential component to being what he classifies as a 'gem' (line 2), using metaphorical language as a device to persuade the audience that young people who are good workers are rare jewels.

Extract 18. Harry.

1. Harry: So we look out (.) again this is from learning from my mistake from hiring
2. people where you find the kind of gems as I call it who a, do have that work ethic (.)
3. which again from youngsters is difficult to find (.)
4. Emma: and what does work ethic mean to you?
5. Harry: (.) yeah (.) so work ethic to me means you know (.) you're going to get your
6. hands dirty (.) sometimes yeah you're going to do things unsupervised (.) you're going to
7. (.) you know (.) run (.) as soon as you've been given a task you sort of go about it (.) in
8. the best way possible without having to constantly go 'how do you do this, how do you
9. do that' (.) you know (.) think on your feet is I suppose another thing. And I find a lot of
10. youngsters don't have that ability (.)

He states 'that work ethic (.) which again from youngsters is difficult to find (.)' (lines 2 - 3), attempting to present this statement as fact. In my probe, I focus on exploring the meaning or discursive construction of 'work ethic', digging deeper into this research 'gem'. Talking about work ethic, Harry links the idea of loyalty as a central component. Harry uses an extreme case formulation ('nobody's got that loyalty anymore') to convince the audience it is simply an objective fact, no-one is loyal to their organisation anymore. He emphasises that this is particularly the case where young people are concerned ('especially youngsters').

Extract 19. Harry.

Harry: nobody's got that loyalty anymore, especially youngsters [text omitted]

His tone appears to be lamenting a time gone by where employees are loyal to their organisation and remain with the organisation for the organisation's benefit. By saying 'especially youngsters', Harry's talk directly casts young people in a negative position (devoid of loyalty), drawing from paternalistic leadership Discourse, where loyalty is demanded as key within the organisation (see next chapter). He also appears to draw from negative generational discourse of millennials, using the word 'youngsters', where young people in particular are described as selfish in their career behaviours and choices and lacking a strong work ethic.

Elements from my conversation with Julia shows a continuation of my digging further into young people's work ethics (Extract 20). My probe (line 1) is an attempt to get Julia talking about how she constructs the meaning of the term 'work ethic' when talking about young people entering work for the first time straight from school or FE college.

Extract 20. Julia.

- 1.Emma: you mentioned work ethic (.) what (.) it's interesting cos a lot of people talk about
- 2.a work ethic when they talk about young people(.) what do you mean by 'work ethic'?
- 3.Julia: so (.) work ethic (.) is someone who takes pride in what they do (.) um (.) I think
- 4.it's that whole skill-will matrix isn't it? If somebody has the skill and they're not doing it
- 5.it's because they've not got the will cos it's not something they're motivated by (.)
- 6.whereas if somebody's got the will (.) both (.) all the kids I've had have got the will and
- 7.they want (.) the skills (.) well you can teach someone the skills (.) so if somebody comes
- 8.with the right attitude and the right motivation (.) you can 'put the meat on the bones' so
- 9.to speak=
- 10.Emma: =yeah (.)
- 11.Julia: If you get somebody come where (.) they've not really got any motivation and
- 12.it's pushing water uphill (.) there's almost no point=
- 13.Emma: =yeah (.)

I use a script formulation to normalise my enquiry ('a lot of people talk about a work ethic when they talk about young people', lines 1-2), providing a basis for Julia to feel 'normal' amongst the category of managers I had spoken to and perhaps applying pressure to Julia to discuss this with me (gem-digging, again). Julia links the discourse of work ethic with someone who experiences positive emotions through their work and 'takes pride in what they do' (line 3). She then uses managerial jargon, referring to the 'skill-will matrix' (line 4) to objectify her argument that this is the way things are with young people; it is simply a case of whether they have the skills and/or the will to perform well at work. She uses the metaphor 'you can 'put the meat on the bones' so to speak=' (lines 8-9), to indicate that as long as someone has the 'will', the motivation or intention to do well at work, then it is possible for a manager to train them in any type of skills required. This metaphor introduces an image of the young person at work starting work straight from school as a skeleton, needing to be built up or nourished/fed by the organisation. That is, when young people start work they have a skeletal knowledge or ability, and it is the job of managers and organisations to flesh out the young people, to continue the metaphor further.

She goes on to present contrasting discourse, using a metaphor to emphasise the difference she perceives between working with young people who do or do not have the 'will' to succeed at work. She finishes her account of work ethic persuading me of the detriment to an organisation

of recruiting a young person without a strong work ethic ('If you get somebody come where (.) they've not really got any motivation and it's pushing water uphill (.) there's almost no point=', lines 11 -12). The metaphor of 'pushing water uphill' implies a pointless activity, presenting the persuasive argument that if a young person has no motivation then it is pointless to try and work with them, although she uses the word 'almost' as a hedge here, implying there is always a point in trying. This discourse makes the employer blameless in terms of motivating employees, or more specifically, young people coming into the workplace directly from school. Young people are depicted as either having the motivation or not from the moment they enter, and employers are not seen as part of (or being required to) contribute to employee motivation levels.

As with Harry and Julia, I probe the personal meaning of work ethic with Brian in order to unpack his construction of the concept concerning young people and the STWT (Extract 21). In my probe I present two contrasting discursive devices, giving Brian the option of presenting his discourse as distant from himself (the company's definition of work ethic) versus close to himself (his personal definition).

Extract 21. Brian.

- 1.Emma: what does work ethic mean to you? Or what did it mean to the company?
- 2.Brian: to me it means (.) you've come here to work (.) you've got a job to do. We don't
- 3.expect you to be a slave and we want you to enjoy your work, because you'll always do it
- 4.better if you enjoy it, but just because we've got an informal atmosphere and a friendly
- 5.nature (.) doesn't mean that you can (.) sorry to use the phrase on recording (.) you can't
- 6.take the piss (.) and some people did in the past (.)

Brian chooses to present his personal definition of work ethic ('to me it means (.)', line 2). He presents a normative account of work ethic ('you've come here to work (.) you've got a job to do', line 2), persuading the audience that this is what anyone would say with regards to work ethic, even though he begins by presenting it as personal opinion. His account moves on to talk in more organisational terms ('We don't expect you to be a slave and we want you to enjoy your work, because you'll always do it better if you enjoy it', lines 2 – 4). His usage of the word 'slave', a highly emotive term associated with abuse of power, and perhaps traditionally associated with young people from the term 'slave labour' or as a synonym for 'child labour'. He presents this extreme image in an attempt to disclaim that this was his expectation from young people. He says 'we want you to enjoy your work, because you'll always do it better if you enjoy it', (lines 3 – 4), appearing to legitimise the popular claim that a 'happy worker is a

productive worker’, a hypothesis on which empirical research remains ambiguous (Cropanzano & Wright, 2001).

Brian ends his construction of the meaning of work ethic and young people by saying ‘just because we’ve got an informal atmosphere and a friendly nature (.) doesn’t mean that you can (.), sorry to use the phrase on recording (.) you can’t take the piss (.) and some people did in the past (.)’ (lines 4-6). This statement uses language of threat towards young people who might dare to ‘take advantage’ of an informal work atmosphere and push the boundaries of what Brian perceives acceptable in terms of the amount of work undertaken by young people at work. Again, these discursive devices position Brian as powerful (the judge), determining what is deemed ‘acceptable behaviour’ and what is not. His profanity ‘you can’t take the piss’ (line 6) could again be construed as a power move within the interview context (presumably to shock me as the interviewer). It could also be viewed in terms of Brian’s attitudes towards young people in general, again presenting himself as the person in the position of power to judge what is defined as ‘taking the piss’ (whilst also perhaps presenting himself as not being afraid to criticise young people by holding them to account for their behaviour). This term is frequently used to refer to people who are seen to be taking liberties without due concern for the consequences of their behaviour, another construct associated with negative generational Discourse around ‘millennials’ selfishly pursuing their own agendas without due consideration for others (Jacobs, 2013; Sinek, 2016).

8.4.1 Summary: Young People’s Work Ethics

Talk about work ethics appears linked with concepts such as loyalty and motivation, suggesting that managers include various elements within talk around the ‘work ethics’ of young people entering work straight from school. For example, managers talk about some young people not having motivation or interest in work and if this is missing, there is no point trying to develop them. Work ethics is talked about as something you either have or do not; not something which is developed over time. Managers’ talk suggests a belief that young people with ‘work ethics’ are a rare find (the ‘gems’) in the young people coming from school to work directly.

8.5 'They Fall Flat on Their Backs': Young People's Work-Readiness

Similar to pursuing young people's work ethic as a 'gem' within conversations, I also pursue work-readiness (another criticism and blaming discourse levelled at young people entering the workplace today).

Reference to 'millennials' and reproducing negative associations from this dominant negative generational Discourse dominates my conversation with Harry and continues in Extract 22. Harry repeats the word 'youngsters' (line 1) and introduces another disclaimer, 'I hate the word millenniums but' (lines 1 -2), as a discursive device to distance himself from the negative discourse he was aware of that was linked to the term 'millennials' (Extract 22).

Extract 22. Harry.

Harry: it's 'oh yeah I can do this, I can do that' and I think youngsters (.) and I hate the word millenniums but (.) it is the case (.) there is a lot of that with the younger generation where they feel like 'yeah I can do that' and 'I can do this' and then when you do give them the work, they fall flat on their backs with it. I find that a lot.

He continues to construct his argument in generational terms, introducing a synonym for millennials ('younger generation', line 2), and continuing to categorise young people as 'others' by using 'they', 'them' 'they' as he develops his argument that young people are essentially all talk but no substance or ability; attempting to assert superiority. He uses reported speech as a device to evoke the sense of the young people he had worked with ('oh yeah I can do this, I can do that', line 1). This is also perhaps an attempt to increase the objectivity of his account, emphasising that this is not merely his perception of young people's over-confidence or arrogance (again traits aligned with Discourse of millennials), but that this is really what young people say/how young people behave at work. Within this extract he repeats the phrase again to emphasise his argument and persuade me that this sums up the essence of young people at work (an over-confident approach), which is then knocked down in his final statement of the extract where he says 'when you do give them the work, they fall flat on their backs with it.' (lines 4-5). His usage of a metaphor evoking physical weakness, again brings in the power relationship between managers and younger workers, seen throughout several of the managers' interviews for this study. He finishes the extract with a global and quantified statement, to emphasise that this is not just a one-off experience but 'I find that a lot' (line 4) i.e., this is generalizable knowledge.

Julia's initial non-verbal reaction to being asked about how well college prepared young people prior to starting work, signals an uncertainty how to frame her response (Extract 23). My phrase 'be as honest as you like (.)' (line 5) is an attempt to give permission for honesty (assumed on my part because I interpret the non-verbal behaviour of sucking teeth to indicate negative views), whilst also acknowledging her prerogative as interview participant to not reveal her true thoughts about a topic ('as you like').

Extract 23. Julia.

- 1.Emma: and what do you think about the level of preparation that young people have?
- 2.So if you think about the young people who've come to you on apprenticeships or from
- 3.college, how prepared do you think the college helps them or makes them for work?
- 4.Julia: mmm <sucks teeth noise>
- 5.Emma: be as honest as you like (.)
- 6.Julia: I'm not being honest but I'm not being um (.) my brother is a teacher, both my
- 7.parents were teachers (.) and me and my brother have had many arguments about this
- 8.(laughs) because he would say it's not the role of academia to prepare people for the
- 9.world of work, that's not what it is (.) it's to teach people to learn and to open their minds
- 10.and engage in the love of learning and that (.) and I understand that and I do think that

Julia repeats the word 'honest', using it as a disclaimer to start her response ('I'm not being honest but I'm not being um (.)', line 6), suggesting that whilst she is not being fully honest, she is not totally withholding the truth either. She goes on to talk about her brother and parents as teachers ('my brother is a teacher, both my parents were teachers', lines 6-7), bringing in the category entitlements associated with this profession being knowledgeable and therefore having knowledge entitlements about the field of preparation for work, from an educational perspective. She presents her argument as a well-rehearsed one, giving her some weight in that she knows what she is talking about as she has had to defend her stance on various occasions ('me and my brother have had many arguments about this (laughs)', lines 7-8). She uses the reported speech of her brother (the teacher), as saying that education is not about preparing young people for work but about teaching a love of learning. She uses these grand statements taking the argument to the extreme as a way of adding strength to her claim that education is not preparing young people for work, because it is set up in such an extreme way (to open minds and engage in love of learning), that appears diametrically opposed to the world of work.

Similarly to Julia's initial response when asked about young people's level of preparation prior to starting work, Robert shows his wariness of talking about this subject by taking a large intake of breath prior to building his response (Extract 24). These types of non-verbal utterances can

show the physical labour at times of constructing our stories and the way in which we present these to others, such as researchers.

Extract 24. Robert.

1.Emma: what do you think about young people in general making the move from
2.education to work these days in your experience (.) um (.) what do you think about how
3.prepared they are for work?
4.Robert: <intake of breath> Um (.) depending on where they're coming from I think (.)
5.you know (.) somebody from an apprenticeship is generally 16,17,18 and um (.) you
6.know (.) the only work, employment history or experience they would have had would
7.have been (.) I don't know (.) bit of bar work or Saturday job in a shop or something like
8.that but very often it's nothing (.) you know I think the younger people of today are (.)
9.unprepared to probably work every Saturday in their teenage years just to earn twenty
10.quid...you know (.) twenty quid is nothing to them these days and I think they (.) they
11.don't see the value in spending all day working for so little (.) you know, they're glued
12.to their phones (.) you know (.) they want everything now (clicks fingers) quickly and
13.that's related to the industry I (.) that we work in here (.) so we see it you know (.)
14.everyone's on their phones and tablets (.) <intake of breath> they want everything fast
15.(.) um (.) but um (.) in terms of how prepared they are (.) I think largely unprepared if
16.they're coming in without having gone to university I think.

Robert constructs his account based on a chronological approach to age and preparation, talking about young people starting an apprenticeship who were between 16 and 18 years old, with limited work experience ('bit of bar work or Saturday job in a shop or something like that but very often it's nothing' (line 7 -8). He continues to construct an image of a young person with limited or no work experience, developing the discourse into a script formulation about how young people are not prepared to work hard as a normative statement ('the younger people of today are (.) unprepared to probably work every Saturday in their teenage years just to earn twenty quid...you know (.)' (lines 8-10). He repeats 'twenty quid, as indicative of low wages offered to young people, and uses these low wages as a way of criticising young people for being too entitled and having unrealistic expectations from work (drawing again from negative generational Discourse) ('twenty quid is nothing to them these days', line 10). He develops his argument that this is just the way young people are 'these days', adding 'they don't see the value in spending all day working for so little (.)' (line 11). The word 'value' appears to have double meaning for Robert. Whilst acknowledging there is little financial value or reward for young people in working part-time in a bar job or a shop on Saturday, he also appears to use the word lamentingly i.e., young people do not see the non-monetary value to be gained from getting work experience.

Robert attempts to persuade me that young people are not prepared to put hard work into things, by evoking a visual image of a young person. He states that ‘they’re glued to their phones (.) you know (.) they want everything now (clicks fingers) quickly and that’s related to the industry I (.) that we work in here (.) so we see it you know (.) everyone’s on their phones and tablets (.) <intake of breath> they want everything fast (.) um (.)’ (lines 12-15). This image of young people being ‘glued’ to their mobile phones is a strong one, with negative undertones. Evoking this imagery is a powerful discursive device to get us ‘on side’ with Robert and to collude against young people due to his presentation of this being a negative and unhealthy dependency. Again, to add strength to his rhetoric and persuade us further of his argument, Robert employs a non-verbal sign to add richness to the image of the young person as lazy and disconnected from human interaction (via their relationships with their phones), clicking his fingers as he says ‘they want everything now’ (line 12). This clicking of fingers along with this statement implies not only the pace of life that young people expect, but also a sense of rudeness and entitlement akin to an unappreciative diner demanding the waiter. He attempts to persuade me that his account is factual by bringing in talk about senses (‘we see it you know’, line 14). Robert talks as though scientific observations have taken place. He and his colleagues observe this type of behaviour in the young people who have come to work for them and therefore this is generalizable to all young people. At the end of his account of persuading the audience about how young people are not prepared to work ‘these days’, he appears to bring himself back to the topic of the question of preparation from education to work and says ‘but um (.) in terms of how prepared they are (.) I think largely unprepared if they’re coming in without having gone to university I think’ (lines 15-16). His account therefore could be contrasting younger workers who have not been to university with those who have, elevating young people who have been to university as more prepared for work.

8.5.1 Summary: Young People’s Work-Readiness

Managers’ talk appears to reproduce negative generational Discourse around millennials, in terms of whether young people are ‘ready’ for work following the STWT. For example, managers talk about young people being over-confident and arrogant, as well as not being able to deliver on this i.e., they cannot ‘walk the talk’ and end up failing as a result (‘fall flat on their backs’). Managers reproduce often-heard arguments that education does not prepare young people for work, as well as young people having unrealistic expectations of work. Young people are positioned as being impatient and wanting everything instantly, whereas the

implication of being in the workplace is you have to know your place in the hierarchy of power and wait patiently for 'your turn'.

8.6 'Not Another One': Young People as Energy-Drains

Elements of William's drawing (Figure 33) feature drawings of stick figures in windows within a tower block, representing staff in his organisation. In the figure on the left, a smiling face contrasts the direct and negative statement ('I've not got time for them, too much to do'). Staff are complaining about not having the time to help young people but at the same time William talks of needing to recruit and train young people to keep running their third sector organisation. William's images denote the perception of young people as needing a great deal of time (equated with energy) when they first start work, leading to the notion of young people as energy-drains.

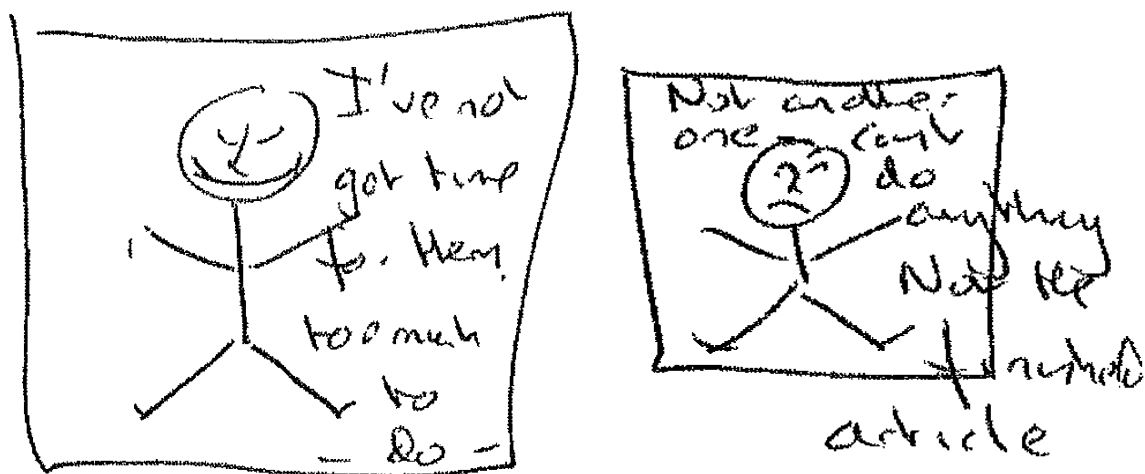


Figure 33. Elements from William's Drawing: Young People as Energy-Takers

In the stick figure on the right hand side of Figure 33, William draws an unhappy face with the phrase 'Not another one-can't do anything. Not the finished article'. 'Not another one' is a strong example of negative othering, reducing young people to a less-than homogenous mass, similar to Robert's talk of 'young numpties'. William talks about young people as draining energy, as if they are helpless infants ('can't do anything'). For example, William talks about having to train young people to answer the phone in the office because they are not used to talking on landlines. His choice of the phrase 'not another one' – dehumanises the young people starting work and evokes the idea that there is an endless stream of generic and unprepared young people coming into the organisation. William's drawing suggests that staff within his

organisation see all young people as interchangeable, rather than seeing them as individuals – a key facet of ‘othering’. They are just energy-takers, instead of the ‘finished article’ expected. William presents this as an organisational picture, distancing himself and making it harder to see where William’s personal perceptions lie within these depictions of young people coming straight from school to work.

Julia also talks about the high level of energy required (in the form of patience predominantly) when recruiting young people directly from school or on work experience (Extract 25). She talks about how it is easier to be enthusiastic yourself when you are doing something for the first time at work e.g., recruiting an apprentice, but harder to maintain this as time goes on (‘part of the skill is maintaining that enthusiasm and input into every person’).

Extract 25. Julia.

1. Julia: takes a lot of patience, especially when you’re a (.) when you’re doing the
2. same thing again and again (.) so the first time we have a work experience person or an
3. apprenticeship, you know, you go through everything (.) you yourself are really keen and
4. you want to put on a good impression and I think part of the skill is maintaining that
5. enthusiasm and input into every person=
6. Emma: =right
7. Julia: (.) even if it’s ten down the line, cos it’s their first time=
8. Emma: =right
9. Julia: (.) even if it might be your tenth.

Julia uses contrasting discourse to strengthen the persuasiveness of her account that you need to give every young person coming in the same level of energy and enthusiasm, even if this is the ‘tenth’. She uses quantification to emphasise that this is something that happens a lot and repeats the number ten/tenth to emphasise how often she herself is going through the recruitment and induction process with young people at work. This also has the effect of de-humanising the young people she talks about by reducing them to numbers.

Karen also emphasises the need to be patient with young people starting work from school or college for the first time, repeating words such as ‘explain things again and again’ to add strength to her argument that young people do not understand things the first time you tell them.

Extract 26. Karen.

- Karen: we need to be very patient to explain things again and again to understand what we mean=
Emma: =Uh-hmm.

Karen: (.) so you are very excited with somebody but you need to be patient because of course your workload increases when somebody new arrives.

Karen talks about the need to explain things multiple times ('again and again') suggesting young workers in the STWT are like children (see the next chapter for further discussion on the metaphor of SMEs as families). Her account moves on to present contrasting emotions, pitting excitement against patience ('so you are very excited with somebody but you need to be patient', line 3). Similarly to William's account where he talks about other staff's dehumanised attitudes to working alongside young people coming straight into the organisation from school, Karen depersonalises young people ('somebody', line 3). She concludes her argument about why you need to be patient when young people arrive at work by including the extreme claim 'of course your workload increases when somebody new arrives', (lines 3-4). Karen presents this as a factual claim, and from her perspective in a small business, she talks about whenever a new person started (young or old) workload increasing because of the need to talk them through processes and procedures.

Brian continues the idea of young people as being highly time and support (energy) intensive, for small businesses in particular. His account introduces the idea of balance when taking on young people straight from school in a small business ('it's a fine balance', line 1).

Extract 27. Brian.

Brian: It's a fine balance because if you pour too much support then as a small business you end up not able to justify taking them on <laughs> and you know (.) that was a consideration (.) from a young person (.) are we able to look after them properly and I think we couldn't have taken on many more young people than we did as a proportion of the workforce (.)

He moves on to develop balance into a metaphor of weighing scales almost, using visually strong language ('if you pour too much support', line 1) seeing the young person as an empty vessel into which the small business pours resources (time and energy). His account develops the argument further saying that the natural conclusion of requiring excessive amounts of resource from a small business perspective is that small businesses may be unable to recruit young people in the future. Brian's usage of resource-based discourse and making the links between the resources required (support) as well as drawing from familial discourse of providing care ('are we able to look after them properly', line 3) echoes Julia and Karen's talk of the 'small business as family' (explored further in the next chapter). He concludes by saying that he could not have done much more for young people than he did in his workplace ('I think

we couldn't have taken on many more young people than we did', line 4). This suggests he is attempting to justify to me (and himself) that he had played his part, almost as a notion akin to corporate social responsibility supporting young people in work. The term 'taken on' here could have connotations of burden to it. That is, young people are a burden and therefore you can only recruit so many at any one time to minimise the negative effects on the workplace, particularly in small businesses.

8.6.1 *Summary: Young People as Energy-Drains*

Managers talk about young people coming directly to work from school in extreme terms as essentially helpless, lacking in skills and not able to 'do anything'. Managers claim they need high levels of energy and patience in order to cope with the demands of recruiting and training young people straight from school or FE college, and these resource-demands are talked of as a balancing act for small businesses.

8.7 'They Need to Pace Themselves': Young People as Impatient for Change

Contrasting talk of young people as innovators described earlier on in this chapter, this section presents talk from SME managers around perceptions that young people sometimes expect change or innovation at work to happen too quickly. Karen (Extract 28), for example, describes young people as 'quite demanding' as a result of the amount they are able to learn, appearing to present a seemingly negative trait (demanding) out of a positive one (ability to learn so many things).

Extract 28. Karen.

Karen: they are quite demanding in that they (.) you know in how much they can learn. I think sometimes they're not so patient. I think that has to do with maturity and age. I think many things I can see (.) they need to pace themselves and understand better about (.) within learning, about patience.

Her usage of emotive words and repetition of these (multiple repetitions of 'I think') is perhaps an attempt to lend objectivity to her account, almost a biological or cognitive discourse of patience linked to aging. Her saying 'I think many things', appears an attempt to show wisdom gained from the perspective of a business owner recruiting many young people over the years. Her argument is that it is natural for young people to be impatient; patience only develops with age. She argues (perhaps patronisingly or paternalistically) for the need for young people to slow themselves down regarding expectations around change happening in the workplace

(‘they need to pace themselves’) using exercise analogy of perhaps work as a marathon and if you go too quickly too soon, you will run out of energy (or perhaps enthusiasm).

Robert presents young people as impatient by starting his account with a recognised derogatory phrase, drawing from negative generational Discourse, traditionally used by older people to lament everything that is ‘wrong’ with young people (‘the kids of today’, line 1).

Extract 29. Robert.

1. Robert: I say ‘the kids of today’, but you know (.) the younger generation coming
2. through, want everything now, want everything fast, don’t want to wait for things, you
3. know (.) haven’t got much patience (.) so (.) rightly or wrongly (.) you know (.) a lot of
4. these things (.) days gone by I’m sure you had to earn them and really work towards
5. getting a position where you’d get that sort of benefit, but um (.) we’ve just got to sort of
6. have it really because if we don’t do it, our competitors will and we won’t get the best
7. candidates=
8. Emma: =mmm

Robert’s tone and framing this as reported speech attempts to convey his awareness that this is a way of negatively positioning young people and one which he does not want to associate with. He goes on to say ‘but you know’ (line 1), involving me directly and wanting to get me ‘on side’, perhaps anticipating potential negative reactions of apparent bias against young people and rejecting associated notions of being someone who is prejudiced in any way. He refers to ‘the younger generation’ (line 1), an extreme case formulation to strengthen his argument that this is just the way young people are now (Robert himself was under 40 years of age). He uses phrases to connote impatience in a three part list to emphasise the strength of his argument about young people’s impatience when they start work (‘want everything now, want everything fast, don’t want to wait for things’, line 2). Robert appears to draw from dominant negative generational Discourse on young people having an ‘unearned sense of entitlement’ (Pritchard & Whiting, 2014, p.1621) and wanting everything too quickly without putting the effort in at work. His talk attempts to convince me of his objectivity about this apparent lack of patience he ascribes to young people (‘rightly or wrongly...’, line 3), simply presenting this again as the way things are. His account moves to present contrasting discourse of how things used to be (the implication being when he was young and started work) compared to how things are now for young people starting work, in terms of the benefits (perks) that are expected. He uses highly persuasive language, arguing that as an organisation they have no choice, they are effectively being held to ransom by young people demanding ‘benefits’ as entitlements or rights, rather than being prepared to work for them (‘we’ve just got to sort of have it really

because if we don't do it, our competitors will and we won't get the best candidates', lines 5-7). This echoes Karen's description of young people as 'demanding' (Extract 28) and Julia and Brian's similar descriptions, in small businesses. However, whereas Karen, Julia and Brian talk more in terms of demands on time and patience, Robert talks more in terms of demanding 'things'.

Harry talks in generalised terms about young people ('they') starting work ('they don't learn from their mistakes and they do have this attitude', lines 2-3). He talks in the language of seeking to blame educational systems or family upbringing approaches for creating young people who are impatient, entitled and over-confident ('whether it's ingrained from establishments or from parenting', line 3).

Extract 30. Harry.

1. Harry: again it's (.) down to the individual of course (.) in my experience more often
2. it's that you'll find that they don't learn from their mistakes and they do have this
3. attitude, whether it's ingrained from establishments or from parenting whatever (.) they
4. do have this attitude of 'yeah I can do that no problem' but they don't see the mistakes
5. they're making even though it's been highlighted to them. And again whether it's this
6. generation are doing things really quickly (snaps fingers) you know (.) mobile users that
7. kind of thing (.) like press button, press button (says it quickly and mimics pressing
8. buttons on phone) you know that having the impatience (.) going from a to b in a timely
9. manner (.) it's like 'oh yeah, I can run' when they haven't walked yet

Harry employs a number of powerful physical and auditory devices during this segment of speech such as clicking his fingers (replicating Robert's behaviour) when he says, 'this generation are doing things really quickly (snaps fingers)' (lines 7-8). He mimics pressing buttons quickly on a mobile phone, to add power to his argument of young people as impatient and demanding. These physical actions are derisory in their nature, as we associate clicking of fingers with being rude and demanding in cafes, for example. He echoes Karen's marathon analogy of young people not setting an appropriate pace when they first start work, ('it's like 'oh yeah, I can run' when they haven't walked yet', lines 9-10).

8.7.1 *Summary: Young People as Impatient for Change*

Managers talk about young people as demanding and impatient when starting work directly from school. Again this talk appears to normalise and reproduce negative generational Discourse of millennials, talking of entitlement and young people doing (and expecting) things too quickly, yet lacking the skills or abilities to achieve good outcomes at work. Managers

present contrasting talk of how they themselves were more patient when they first started work, and that benefits should be earned at work, whereas young people starting work today are impatient and expect benefits (perks) immediately.

8.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter has shown the ways SME managers other young people who come directly to work from school through interpretations of their talk and drawings. Examples of ‘positive’ othering where young people were talked about as energy-bringers and innovators were contrasted with ‘negative’ othering where young people were talked about as lacking work ethics, work readiness, impatience and being overall ‘drains’ on a small business’ resources of time and energy. This chapter has contrasted the tensions present within seemingly positive othering (young people as fascinatingly different), contrasting with critical and negative talk (young people as ‘less than’). This chapter also revealed discomfort and reflection from some of the managers who did appear to be aware of the tensions and contradictions within their own accounts about young people in the STWT.

Examples of everyday discursive discrimination were shown in the way managers ‘othered’ young people through their talk and drawings around the STWT. Managers regularly used depersonalised, patronising, and at times derogatory, language when talking about young people starting work straight from school or college such as ‘*youngsters*’, ‘*kids*’ ‘*them*’, ‘*chappie*’, ‘*youngsters these days*’ ‘*the current crop*’ and ‘*young numpties*’. Several managers used de-personalisation as a device in their talk about young people, to increase distance and as a discursive device which enabled the ‘othering’ of young people as a homogenous mass. Managers appear to reproduce dominant negative generational Discourses of millennials when talking about young people. The findings presented in this chapter suggest that negative generational Discourse around ‘millennials’ has perhaps become an acceptable form of ‘othering’ in small businesses (reducing young people to ‘less than’ others), suggesting normalisation of this dominant negative Discourse amongst the SME managers I interviewed.

Within this findings chapter, the notion of small businesses as ‘family’ developed in the ways SME managers talked about both their own approaches to running a business and their relationships with young people coming into the workplace for the first time. The next findings chapter develops this ‘family’ metaphor further, presenting interpretations of SME manager

participants' talk and drawings, through the lens of paternalistic leadership discourse (Salminen-Karlsson, 2015).

9. Findings: SME Managers' Talk Framed as Paternalistic Leadership Discourse

9.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter represents the final findings chapter within this thesis and is organised into two sections. In the first, I present interpretations using the lens of paternalistic leadership discourse (PLD) (see Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework). A multimodal approach is adopted for the section presenting findings as PLD: interpreting pictures; talk; and photographs of organisational artefacts. I organise talk and drawings produced from conversations with managerial participants according to the two types of paternalistic leadership recognised in research: benevolent and exploitative (Pellegrini & Scandura, 2008). Within this I include my interpretations of how managers use of PLD is illustrative of the imbalance of power between SME managers and young people coming into the workplace directly from school or FE College for the first time. I will again talk about how PLD exemplifies discursively some of the invisible power (Oosterom & Scott-Villiers, 2016) held by employers as dominant actors within the contested space of the STWT.

The second section of the chapter shifts focus from a verbal PLD to a symbolic PLD, presenting photographs of organisational artefacts taken at one of the SME workplaces involved in my study (Appendix O). This section presents examples of visible symbols and artefacts the manager presents as part of their 'youth-friendly' culture. I interpret these photographs, continuing to apply a CDP approach, including photographs as 'Discourse', where photographs are critically interpreted through my role as both the producer and viewer/interpreter of these images. Photographs as Discourse are interpreted no differently to spoken (and subsequently written via transcription) text or participants' drawings in my approach. As Malherbe, Suffla, Seedat, and Bawa (2016, p.591) say, 'it is the viewer who attaches interpretative discursive meanings to visual images' and in this section I present my own subjective interpretations. Organisational artefacts act as signals to those in the workplace (including myself as a visiting researcher) and are linked with sense-making processes (Rafaeli & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2004). Within this chapter I explore how a number of artefacts appear to have been chosen to represent societal or cultural normative notions of 'youth' or being 'youth-friendly' in a work context and present my interpretations accordingly. In particular, the symbolism of the artefacts I have chosen to present and interpret within this chapter represent the ways such artefacts communicate rich messages with those exposed to them, forming part of an organisational

identity or ‘who are we?’ (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991); and also ‘who we (*managers*) think you (*young people*) are’.

9.2 Paternalistic Leadership Approaches

This chapter applies the lens of paternalistic leadership to interpret talk and drawings from my research conversations with SME managerial participants. For a more detailed overview of paternalistic leadership as it is applied in the context of my research, see Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework. Paternalistic leaders’ desire is to build a family atmosphere at work, have close and loyal relationships with employees, whilst also maintaining their status and authority as the leader in control (Aycan, 2006). One recognised way to go about creating these family-type environments with the associated behaviours and expectations (of leaders and followers), is through Discourse and discursive devices (both the macro PLD and the language-in-use by employees and leaders) (Fleming, 2005). Leaders are engaging in identity work (Watson, 2008) positioning themselves as paternalistic leaders through their talk, such as being the nurturing leader, presented in this chapter, for example. Both forms of PLD are exemplified in this chapter: benevolent and exploitative (Pellegrini & Scandura, 2008). These two sides to displays of paternalism in the SME workplace, convey the tensions and contradictions shown in SME managers’ talk about their approaches and attitudes relating to young people entering the workplace directly following the STWT (seen also in the previous chapter on ‘othering’).

9.3 Benevolent Paternalistic Leadership Discourse

This section presents examples within SME managers’ talk and drawings of benevolent paternalistic leadership discourse (PLD), framed as talk around nurturing young people. This draws from Aycan's (2006) definitions of paternalism where leaders attempt to create a family atmosphere in the workplace and seek individualised relationships with their employees.

9.3.1 *Talk about Nurturing Young People*

Hayley repeats the word ‘delight’ as she talks about her enjoyment of nurturing young people coming into the workplace (Extract 31), strengthening the rhetorical power by using this word to both express and evoke a high level of happiness.

Extract 31. Hayley

1. Hayley: the delight is when you (.) the delight I feel when anybody I train, just gets it and
2. does something that just clicks (.) so the delight is when you bring somebody in and
3. you've got somebody that's really really shy and doesn't seem to want to kind of mix or
4. something like that and you give them a task and they just get it and then you go 'wow (.)
5. that is amazing, that's fantastic' and you see the pride just swell (.) it makes them bigger
6. it makes them stand up straight (.) they see themselves in that wonderful piece of work (.)
7. so that's the delight (.) when you train somebody and they get it (.) they see the
8. connection and the value that they're adding and they feel that pride, so that's the delight

She includes generalisations of recruiting young people who are lacking in confidence ('really really shy', line 3) and her belief that she is part of their transformation to being a confident worker. She talks about the 'delight' she feels working alongside young people who she is able to train into successful performers at work. Again Hayley uses PLD when she talks about the reactions of the young person from receiving praise from Hayley for a job well done ('wow (.) that is amazing, that's fantastic' and you see the pride just swell (.) it makes them bigger it makes them stand up straight (.), lines 5-6). Using the phrase 'it makes them bigger it makes them stand up straight', draws again perhaps from PLD, where the individual in the higher position of power believes their praise to be a source of physical happiness in the person in the lower power position. That is, being given praise by someone in power results in a physical transformation from a low-power posture (stooped over, minimising one's physical space taken up) to a higher-power position (standing straight and occupying a greater amount of physical space). Hayley includes economic or 'human resources' discourse (talking about training young people in order for them to 'add value') where 'resources are passive objects to be utilized by superior agents' (Inkson, 2008, p.270). Her talk throughout this extract is reminiscent of a proud parent seeing their child 'grow-up' and is a strong example of PLD where leaders are senior members of the 'family' nurturing and growing their employees.

Julia (Extract 32) presents nurturing talk in the form of PLD as a 'fair but firm' approach at work, echoing the important aspect of paternalistic leadership approaches noted by Salminen-Karlsson (2015), that the leader must always feel in control in the relationship.

Extract 32. Julia.

1. Julia: you need a team around that person that is prepared to give the level of patience
2. and time and share their knowledge and experience with people and keep bringing it back
3. to 'do you remember when we talked about why we needed to do this?' A bit like a
4. teacher role isn't it? And the first kind of three to six months I think you're kind of (.)
5. transition from quite a lot of stroking and coaching (.) I think it's unrealistic to just chuck
6. them in and just expect (.)

Julia's talk shows benevolent PLD in that she links patience and time with sharing of knowledge and experience, to persuade the audience that she cares enough to give the high energy needed when recruiting and working alongside young people. She uses reported speech of herself or colleagues talking to an imagined young person in what could be construed as a patronising or parental tone one might take with a child ('do you remember when we talked about why we needed to do this?', line 3). This could be interpreted as surface nurturing talk, but could also tip over into infantilising young people at work. She moves on to set parallels with the teacher and pupil relationship (drawing from another imbalanced power relationship akin to boss and employee), where teachers are having to make the links between different sets of information for pupils in school. Her use of the rhetorical question 'isn't it?' at the end of this appears to be a move for legitimacy in her argument, checking for agreement with her analogy. She checks to see if she has persuaded me that this is 'how it is' and her actions are to construct this statement as a normative one. That is, it is just a fact that young people who start work are the same as children in school needing the support and knowledge-imparting that teachers perform. She uses emotive and physically evocative language ('transition from quite a lot of stroking and coaching...', line 5), talking about young people's STWT where the work environment needs to continue to develop the nurturing environment of school or home for the young person. The implication being that there was some unspoken agreement, of a 'safe' space for young people starting work, until the harsh reality of a real work environment could be revealed after a suitable period of time ('three to six months'). Again, while her talk is about adopting a nurturing approach with young people in the STWT, it appears conditional i.e., you have three to six months of nurture but then you had to adapt like everyone else.

Whilst talking about her perceptions of 'what young people need' when they start work directly from school, Julia draws a heart with the word 'patience' by the side, as well as a clock to depict time (Figure 34).

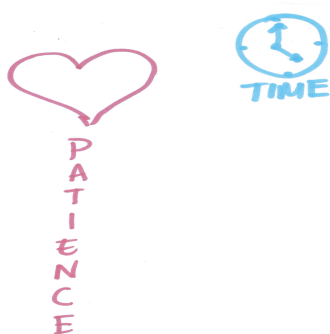


Figure 34. Elements from Julia's Drawing: Giving Loving Patience and Time

Linking together time and patience, she strengthens her argument that young people need a type of loving kindness. Having close relationships on an individual basis is a dimension of paternalistic leadership along with the reproduction of a family environment at work (Aycan, 2006). Julia emphasises the time investment that young people who are starting work require. In her account, she talks as though she is a senior family member and the young people coming into her organisation are junior family members. Julia uses the metaphor of business as family throughout her interview. She evokes the idea of being the matriarch (common within PLD where leaders act as senior family members with the associated status hierarchy this affords) (Aycan et al., 2013).

Harry (Extract 33) presents talk aiming to persuade me that there is a great deal of ‘satisfaction’ gained from nurturing or developing young people to their full potential at work.

Extract 33. Harry.

Harry: There is still the satisfaction if, and a big if, if you can find the right individual, there is a huge satisfaction from that. So the odd ones that we have found that are the good individuals, you know, they’ve been great, in terms of again, seeing them nurture and mature into that person, that individual that not only they wanted themselves but also from a business point of view (.) um (.)

He emphasises the contingent nature of satisfaction when working with young people however. It depends on what ‘sort’ of young person it was, the level of satisfaction gained. He says, ‘There is still the satisfaction if, and a big if, if you can find the right individual’ (line 1). By increasing the importance of the conditional nature of his argument (‘big if’), he uses his talk to emphasise how difficult he believes it is, to find ‘the right individual’ (line 1) when recruiting young people. He contrasts extreme discourses, contrasting ‘good individuals’ as part of the minority of young people ‘the odd ones’ (lines 2 – 3). He talks positively about how he enjoys developing the ‘good’ young people at work, who are seen as exceptions. He uses emotive language and evoking a sensual experience ‘seeing them nurture and mature into that person’ (lines 3 -4). Again this developmental talk is common in paternalistic leadership approaches where the leader acts as a senior family member, developing the ‘child’. He uses language that evoke a sense of transformation for the young person ‘that individual that not only they wanted themselves but also from a business point of view (.)’(lines 4-5’), moving his talk from a personal description to draw from human resources Discourse (Inkson, 2008), similar to Hayley’s earlier approach.

9.3.2 *Summary: Benevolent Paternalistic Leadership Discourse from SME Managers*

Managers' talk includes the delight and pride they gain from seeing young people develop at work. Whilst this is talked about positively, at times it tips towards controlling or exploitative talk. For example, managers talk of nurturing young people sometimes appears infantilising towards young people and also conditional. The amount of time spent nurturing is talked about as contingent on being the 'right' young people i.e., it is not worth nurturing all young people in the workplace. Managers talk about trying to re-create close family-type relationships, bringing in notions such as managers needing to provide loving patience and time for young people, for example, where the needs of the young person appear central. At times, managers talk, whilst positioned here under the category of benevolent PLD, appears to cross over into a more exploitative type of PLD, suggesting that there are not always clear dividing lines between these two categories within everyday language in use.

9.4 Exploitative Paternalistic Leadership Discourse

This section presents examples from SME managers' talk and drawings interpreted as exploitative PLD, including talk about young people 'learning lessons'; and the SME managers being 'sweet and bitter' through their experiences with young people in the STWT. 'Sweet and bitter' as a heading is taken from paternalistic leadership literature, where a leader adopts a disciplinarian approach at the same time as appearing nurturing (Aycan, 2006).

9.4.1 *Learning Lessons*

Hayley (*Extract 34*) continues to carry through her contrasting metaphor of freshness versus old ways (presented in the previous chapter) in her account about the positive things young people bring to an organisation when they come to work straight from school or college.

Extract 34. Hayley

Hayley: it sweeps away the old and brings in something (.) and it's like (.) 'we can do this' and sometimes you think (.) actually you probably can't but you know what have a go and you'll probably get three quarters of the way there (.) and that's the most important thing anyway (.) or actually I'm pretty certain you're going to fail at that but let's watch you fail (.) quickly (.) and let's see if there's a lesson in that (.)

Her account includes metaphorical language ('sweeps away the old', line 1) to argue that young people bring in a sense of freshness, and could be a way to 'clear up' a workplace which has become old or stale. Her account also includes positioning young people as family members,

and positioning herself as a surrogate parent, common in paternalistic leadership approaches (Aycañ et al., 2013). When she says ‘Let’s see if there’s a lesson in that...’ (line 5) this appears to be drawing from a paternalistic approach where everything is branded as a learning opportunity. Due to Hayley’s talk positioning herself as a senior family figure (matriarch) in the organisation, she demonstrates exploitative PLD in the inherent power imbalance in her statement: ‘let’s watch you fail...quickly...and let’s see if there’s a lesson in that...’ (line 5). Hayley’s talk aligns with examples of paternalistic leadership in terms of feeling responsible for employees, as if they are her own children, as well as closely monitoring progress and development (Aycañ, 2006). Hayley talks about providing a safe space (the family environment essential to paternalistic leadership approaches) for young people coming into the company to make mistakes, believing that there are important lessons gained from making your own mistakes and learning experientially.

Her discursive devices position Hayley as a senior family member in the organisation (‘I’m pretty certain’, line 4), someone who has experienced many young people come in full of fresh ideas and approaches and doubtful in her mind that they will succeed fully (‘you’ll probably get three quarters of the way there’, lines 3-4). Her talk denotes aspects of nurturing at the same time as being disciplinarian (common on paternalistic leadership measures) (Aycañ, 2006). She talks about young people needing to ‘fail quickly’ (line 5), so they did not keep making the same mistakes. Hayley’s emotive discourse and using distancing devices (talking as a collective) make the account more persuasive (‘let’s see’, ‘let’s watch’, lines 5-6) as an attempt to establish a sense of objectivity and thus legitimacy. Hayley’s account could be interpreted as a patronising discourse (‘you know what have a go’, line 3; ‘I’m pretty certain you’re going to fail’, lines 4-5,) othering in the same way that managerial discourse was presented in the previous chapter, reducing young people to being less-than the dominant group of managers.

Robert acknowledges the paternalistic nature of work (‘I worked with some good mentors when I first started’, line 1) talking about paying this forward to the young people coming to start work at his organisation (*Extract 35*).

Extract 35. Robert.

Robert: I worked with some good mentors when I first started after I left university so I think I guess subconsciously to a degree I probably wanted to do the same thing for other people. So I think it sort of suits my personality a little bit as well (.) I quite enjoy that side of it um (.) got a few life experiences to sort of throw at them, so yeah I think it works here naturally, yeah I do.

His phrase ‘I think I guess subconsciously to a degree’ (line 2) contains a great deal of hedging and uncertainty in introducing the topic of motivation for wanting to coach or develop young people at work. By using ‘subconsciously’, his talk suggests that it is beyond his personal control to some extent, he is driven by something internally, and this brings in a sense of powerful persuasion. His talk aims to persuade me that he has recognised an objective quality in himself (‘my personality’) and a natural fit (‘I think it sort of suits my personality a little bit as well (.)’), line 3). However, it is uncertain from this extract what he means by being a ‘good mentor’ as he goes on to say, ‘got a few life experiences to sort of throw at them’ (line 4). This metaphor is almost threatening or slightly frightening. The image of life experiences being physically or mentally thrown at someone, particularly someone who is young and new to work, almost as a challenge to their assumed naivety. His talk is ambiguous as to whether these life experiences are positive or negative, but the choice of the word ‘throw’ brings in negative connotations due to its one-sidedness (and again high power to low power position), as opposed to choosing a word such as ‘share’ which may have evoked a more collaborative image. This talk appears to suggest that young people coming directly into work from school need toughening up (throwing life experiences at them), again showing how the need for young people to learn lessons in the family environment of work is presented via PLD.

Managers’ talk about ‘learning lessons’ mirrors the ways parents may talk about their children needing to see life as a series of experiences to be learned from, in the hope or belief perhaps that if this lesson is learned then the behaviour (which was judged unacceptable or unwanted) will not be repeated, or will be changed once the learning has taken place. Managers position themselves via this type of PLD as the senior family members (matriarchs/patriarchs) who are in control of shaping the learning opportunities for young people. Learning lessons in this way is suggested as one way of disciplining young people coming into the workplace. The next section moves on to provide further examples of disciplinary talk as a form of exploitative PLD.

9.4.2 *Being ‘Sweet and Bitter’: ‘We Don’t Do It Again’*

The dual contrast between sweet and bitter in this theme’s title introduces examples of where managers talk about their experiences working with young people directly from school revealing disciplinary elements (i.e., they are angry or bitter but perhaps putting a nurturing veneer on it). Julia (*Extract 36*) tells a story where Yvonne, a young worker, had made a mistake in a mailshot which had made the organisation look foolish and how following Julia’s

calm reaction to dealing with the mistake, Yvonne had written a thank you card and placed it on Julia's car.

Extract 36. Julia.

1. Julia: when I popped in I said to her 'that's perfect Yvonne (.) cos we all make mistakes
2. (.) the important thing is that we learn from it and we don't do it again' and then when I
3. left that night she put a little card on my windscreen just saying 'thank you for letting me
4. know it's ok to make a mistake' and I thought yeah (.) honestly I was like 'oohh' <mimes
5. being close to tears> because that is (.) that's the perfect environment
6. Emma: hmm
7. Julia: that you're free to take a risk or make a mistake and you know you won't get (.)
8. for it (.) but if she does that again <laughs>
9. Emma: <laughs>
10. Julia: (.) after that (.) but she won't now because (.)

This extract brings up interesting invisible power-based issues again between managers and young people. Why did Yvonne put the thank-you card on the car and not on Julia's desk or hand it directly to Julia? Did Yvonne feel in a less powerful position (she was young, she had made a mistake) and therefore safer to place this card (which could be construed as a reifying or placating gesture) in an external space such as the car? Julia's emotions are heightened during the re-telling of this story ('honestly I was like 'oohh' <mimes being close to tears>', lines 4-5) making it an extremely persuasive narrative of her caring a great deal about her staff. Julia talks of an emotional connection with some of the young people she worked with as a result of developing them personally and professionally at work. Showing emotional reactions in relationships with employees is a key feature of the individualised relationships expected within a paternalistic leadership approach (Aycan, 2006). Consequently when her employees give her positive feedback and show loyalty, (again expected in paternalistic leadership approaches) (Aycan, 2006), it evokes a sense of family closeness almost. The phrase 'the important thing is that we learn from it and we don't do it again' (line 2), reminds us of passive-aggressive talk from a disappointed parent, demanding improvement in the child's behaviour with a sense of implied threat.

Julia uses an extreme case formulation, claiming legitimacy that she has created 'the perfect environment' (line 5), where 'you're free to take a risk or make a mistake and you know you won't get (.) for it' (line 7). She pauses and omits a word after 'you won't get (.) for it'. The implication being that the missing word would be a negative consequence here, such as 'in trouble' or 'reprimanded'. However, Julia moves on to contrast this statement with a threat to workers repeating mistakes '(.) but if she does that again (laughs)' (line 8), albeit with the use

of laughter to lower the aggressive threat content, whilst still infantilising in its nature. This contrasting discourse suggests that Julia retains the higher power position in the organisation and implies that she would tolerate mistakes, but her reactions would be harsher if mistakes were repeated. My laughter as response (line 9) perhaps shows collusion with those in power (the boss) in the power dynamics narrated in her story of the relationship between bosses and workers. Julia concludes with the moral of the story, that Yvonne has learned her lesson and will not repeat the mistake again ('but she won't now because (.)', line 10), again omitting the final word and pausing instead to leave the power in words left unspoken. The implication being, Yvonne will not repeat that mistake again because Julia had taught her, ergo Yvonne learned her 'lesson'. The word 'because' has power here as a final statement, in a similar way we may say to our children when they are questioning us, 'just because'. 'Because' within talk appears to have a sense of finality (the last word in an argument, so to speak), demonstrates our power, as well as removing any potential for negotiation.

The unequal power relations between young people coming directly into the workplace and managers are clear in this example, along with how this power is played out within PLD where managers present themselves to young people as nice and nurturing (yet angry and uncaring) at the same time. The next example of PLD also considers power in the relationship between young people and managers at work, providing an example of a manager talking about perceiving himself as less powerful due to recruiting and working alongside young people.

9.4.3 Being 'Sweet and Bitter': 'I still have hope'

At the end of our research conversation, Harry adopts a more reflective tone about the personal impact he perceives from recruiting and working alongside young people for his business. Harry had talked in his interview when the tape was turned off (providing verbal consent for me to refer to this in my research) about having some extremely negative experiences of working alongside young people. For example, one young person had stolen money from him and he spoke to me about the negative impact of these experiences on his health and wellbeing.

In *Extract 37*, Harry uses extreme physical imagery to denote the powerful (negative) impact that young people had on him personally within the business ('despite being punched (laughs) slapped (.)', line 1).

Extract 37. Harry.

Harry: despite being punched <laughs> slapped (.)
Emma: you have hope still (.)
Harry: I still have hope (. um (. and it's down to me also to filter a bit more as much as I can
(.) the right ones (. and if you find the ones it is very rewarding.

This choice of words with aggressive and physically violent or abusive connotations persuades the audience of the intensity of Harry's experiences. By using these words he puts himself in the unexpected lower power position (victim) relative to young people (abuser) as a legitimacy-seeking move. His use of laughter (line 1), could be interpreted as a way to minimise his threat to self, from talking with such vivid language, or implying that he is 'big enough' to take this sort of abuse perhaps. My statement following his words defining himself as a passive victim of aggression is an extreme contrast to his. 'You have hope still (.)', line 2. The word 'hope' perhaps continuing talk used by some victims who may believe in the possibility of change on the part of their abusers. Harry repeats my word 'hope', in his final sentence regarding whether he still wanted to recruit young people, despite a number of negative experiences. 'I still have hope (. um (. and it's down to me also to filter a bit more as much as I can (. the right ones (. and if you find the ones it is very rewarding.' (lines 3 – 4). This closing statement brings the power and responsibility back to Harry, after initially presenting himself as the victim to be blamed for his experiences ('it's down to me', line 3). Again he uses de-personalised language about young people and his need to 'filter' out 'the right ones', presenting the dialectic argument that there are 'right' and 'wrong' young people. He reinforces his argument that he is still hopeful about recruiting young people by closing the extract with 'it is very rewarding', (line 4), appearing to want to convince me (and himself perhaps), that it is still worthwhile recruiting young people into his organisation.

9.4.4 Summary: Exploitative Paternalistic Leadership Discourse from SME Managers

This section provides examples from managers' talk about young people they had recruited and worked with directly from school interpreted with a lens of PLD (both benevolent and exploitative). Managers' talk is framed at times as nurturing and developing at work (benevolent PLD). Managers also talk about young people needing to learn their lesson, not repeat silly mistakes and how they feel disappointed at times by young people, but still have hope for the future (exploitative PLD).

9.4.5 *Summary of Benevolent and Exploitative Paternalistic Leadership Discourse (PLD)*

Paternalistic leadership is seen by many in research as an outdated leadership approach, overly manipulative and too authoritative to succeed in Western contexts (Pellegrini & Scandura, 2006). However, PLD appears an apt label to apply to the ways SME managers drew pictures of and talked about young people coming into the workplace directly from school. Young people come into the workplace as the junior family members with SME managers playing the role of senior family members (matriarchs or patriarchs), approaching the recruitment and development of young people in the workplace paternally. Paternalism as an approach to leadership has been seen as a naturally occurring style adopted in family businesses (Heidrich, Chandler & Nemeth, 2018). My findings suggest that paternalistic leadership approaches and associated Discourse may also be found in small businesses due to their mirroring of family businesses often e.g. smaller sizes and emulating many aspects of a family business, such as the importance of the personality and values of the founder member. Small businesses (defined as those with less than 50 employees), may draw from this Discourse as a way to develop strong commitment to the business from all involved, emanating from the founder of the business (the patriarch/matriarch), where ‘the discourse of paternalism is thought to unfailingly elicit commitment, identification and consent among employees’ (Fleming, 2005, p.1471).

The next section adds to the multimodal approach adopted across this thesis, presenting interpretations of organisational artefacts (via photographs) as signifiers of a paternalistic approach to young people in the workplace.

9.5 *Organisational Artefacts as Visible Symbols of Paternalistic Leadership Discourse*

The artefacts are what we see when we enter a workplace or an educational space i.e., the surface level of an organisation (Schein, 1990). They are the things that may catch our attention as researchers coming into a space with ‘outsider’ eyes and yet we may not notice when we have been working or studying in a place for a long time. As part of my multimodal approach to both critical discursive psychology (Riley & Wiggins, 2019; Wiggins & Potter, 2008) and the lens of PLD, I include my interpretations of photographs taken of organisational artefacts from one of the SME participants (Robert) within this section of the chapter. The artefacts in this particular organisation I found so arresting that I asked permission from the manager to take several photographs for inclusion (and critique) in my thesis. This adds a final material element to show how what is presented to others (e.g., artefacts), can add an additional layer

of richness to qualitative interpretations to a phenomenon such as the STWT. My interpretations of the photographs taken from Robert's workplace add further depth to the presentation of SME perceptions from conversations and drawings of what managers believe young people want (or demand) materially from the workplace.

Robert showed me round the office where he worked as a manager for a small IT company and gave me permission to take photographs of the office environment and subsequently critique them in this thesis (Appendix G). Prior to, during, and following the interview, we discussed several of the artefacts included in this section as conscious attempts on the organisation's part to appeal to the young people they wanted to recruit and retain. Robert had a visible sense of pride in the physical environment he had a pivotal role in creating, along with other managers, and believed it was successful in connecting with young people i.e., communicating their brand as a youth-friendly employer and an organisation which prided itself on its young mindset or culture. The final section of this chapter presents my interpretation of a number of these photographs representing the visible symbols (or what made a visual impact on me when I entered this particular SME, for example), as organisational artefacts of culture (Schein, 1990). I present these interpretations within this chapter bringing in a multimodal component to paternalistic leadership discourse, as I view these artefacts as feeding into, (and perhaps arising out of) this Discourse, and one way in which managers contribute to identity work through reproducing dominant social and cultural norms around 'young people at work'.

Our research conversation took place in a small meeting room, and artefacts are placed on the table between us by Robert (Photograph 1).



Photograph 1. Google Branding

I interpret the presence of these artefacts as legitimising moves by Robert to associate his organisation with that of a well-known high tech company such as Google, branded with its innovation, creativity and youth accordingly. In using these products everyday (water bottle and notebook), Robert shows he is happy to be associated with the values of the Google brand,

for example. In the common area for staff there is a small table for lunch (Photograph 2).



Photograph 2. Table Football and Lunch Area

The inclusion of brightly coloured chairs (all different colours) could be construed as an attempt to inject youthfulness as opposed to a stuffy staff common room where all chairs are matching and branded in organisational corporate colours, for example. Behind the table, there is a small table football game, a symbol associated with bars and cafes aimed at a younger audience perhaps. Table football is also prominently featured in photographs accompanying articles discussing the ‘perks’ of working at IT companies such as Google, for example (Yang, 2017). Whilst the spaces featured on photographs of Google offices are much larger than Robert’s company spaces, it is interesting that these artefacts are considered important or valued enough to take up floor space in a relatively small office space such as Robert’s in contrast to far bigger offices at Google, for example.

Around the corner from the lunch area and next to the more formal board room sits a large upright fridge referred to as the ‘drinks fridge’ (Photograph 3).



Photograph 3. The Drinks Fridge

Staff are invited to help themselves to something from the fridge, as part of Friday ‘beers after work’ with an emphasis on alcohol consumption. The rules appear unspoken that staff are expected not to simply help themselves to drinks at any time, but are for designated times authorised by the managers. The placing of alcohol within the workplace brings around interesting questions regarding the messages an organisation is promoting by promoting alcohol use in this way. For example, should organisations be encouraging alcohol consumption during work, promoting alcohol as the only or best way to relax or celebrate after a busy day/week at work? Are they excluding some workers by promoting alcohol, such as those who do not drink through religious choice or cannot drink due to health conditions? The organised presentation of the drinks within the fridge (all fronted with logos clearly showing) reminds me of retail presentation and I wonder whose role it was in the company to ensure that the fridge was well stocked and presented in this way? The drinks in the fridge are major brands and a mixture of alcoholic and non-alcoholic (Diet Coke, Budweiser). Appropriations are made within the fridge, presumably by employees. A caterpillar cake (by Sainsbury’s, not particularly classed as a high class brand and traditionally associated with children’s birthday parties); an orange; and on the bottom of the fridge tucked away as an attempt not to disturb the neat presentation within the fridge is clearly someone’s lunch in a Tupperware box. These

adaptations strike me as mundane and yet quietly powerful ways that employees find to disrupt organisational artefacts and appropriate their usage in non-intended ways, perhaps reducing some of their intended effects. This echoes the resistance to dominant norms and ideologies shown by some of the young people in the study, such as Jane (showing active resistance talk) and Amanda (showing ambivalent resistance via behaviours), resisting the pressure to go to university (see [Chapter 6](#) and [7](#)).

The Wii station (Photograph 4) is also available for staff to engage with during lunch breaks at work.



Photograph 4. The Wii Area

The implication being that people working in IT use IT as a way to wind down from work, and again bringing in the notion of attempting to emulate companies such as Google, that provide arcade computer games in rest areas for employees to ‘have fun’ without needing to leave the office environment. Other IT SMEs I visited talked about having NERF guns (plastic guns usually marketed at children, which fire foam pellets) under their desks which would be brought out at certain times as examples of ‘fun’ elements within a workplace aimed at young people.



Photograph 5. Banksy-Style Stormtrooper

Photograph 5 shows one of the graphics featured on one of the office walls. Employees' desks are clustered underneath a series of different graphics, such as this of a Stormtrooper from the Star Wars films. The graphic has a banksy-esque nature and is perhaps used to evoke the inherent 'coolness' and 'youth' that is associated with iconic Banksy street art stencils (Shepherd, 2019). The added interpretation here being that as this is a copy of a graphic, rather than a one-off artwork, it comes without the hefty price tag that would be expected from an actual Banksy, presumably out of reach of most small businesses. The cultural reference of this photograph evokes in me a feeling of discipline, threat and violence (the Stormtrooper is masked, so you do not see a face, and points a gun towards you from the wall). Interestingly, in the photograph you can see that an employee has put their umbrella underneath the image. A pink umbrella, quite childlike in its styling appeared to counteract the impact of the graphic and perhaps shows that for the employees working underneath this six foot graphic on a daily basis, its power to shock has been removed due to its everydayness. This image is perhaps more impactful on visitors to the company, more used to seeing images of bland and non-descript art

on the wall or perhaps photographs of senior management in more traditional workplaces, rather than iconic movie images.

9.5.1 Summary of Organisational Artefacts as Visual Paternalistic Leadership Discourse

The photographs of organisational artefacts interpreted within this chapter suggests that SME managers in this small IT organisation have attempted to create a ‘fun family’ (paternalistic) atmosphere, with areas for nurturing, relaxation and enjoyment (e.g., Wii; table football), combined with elements evoking discipline (e.g., Stormtrooper graphic). The power represented within these organisational artefacts is amplified by the rules for usage. For example, managers make it clear to workers that the drinks fridge is only to be accessed with permission and that the games are only to be played with on designated breaks. Therefore employees, usually young people, remain in the lower power position in terms of accessing these supposed ‘perks’ within the workplace. Employees however assert their power and agency (similar to the ways young participants do when they resist dominant Discourses and expectations of going to university by ‘forgetting’ to apply), resisting the supposed use and power of the artefacts e.g., by placing packed lunches in the drinks fridge or pink umbrellas under the imposing image of the Stormtrooper (placed over the desks as though it was a disciplinary function, keeping order amongst employees).

9.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter has further developed my critical discursive psychological approach to interpreting how SME managers talk about young people coming to work directly from school or FE College. The argument that SME managers ‘other’ young people through various discursive devices (chapter 8) is illuminated here via a specific lens, paternalistic leadership Discourse. Managers talked about their businesses as families, positioning themselves as senior family members with higher power and status relative to young workers positioned as their children.

This chapter has also introduced interpretations of photographs of organisational artefacts, adding to my multimodal research approach and further applying the lens of paternalistic leadership discourse. Visual symbols (organisational artefacts) in the (‘youth-friendly’) SME workplace are interpreted as ways of expressing organisational culture and at the same time reproducing dominant societal norms and negative generational stereotypes around young people in the workplace. The chapter further develops the argument that the SME employers

in this study both construct and constrain young people's work identities in the STWT via Discourse in various ways (talk, drawings and artefacts in the workplace).

This chapter represents the last of the two findings chapters presenting my interpretations on how SME managers discursively construct (and constrain) young people's work identities in the STWT (chapters eight and nine). The next chapter ([Chapter 10: Discussion](#)) integrates a discussion integrating all five findings chapters, emphasising insights garnered and resulting contributions from these findings.

10. Discussion

10.1 Chapter Introduction

The chapter discusses insights developed from my research findings, and how they contribute to relevant theory, methodology, substantive knowledge and practice. The integrated discussion of findings highlights how the STWT is a contested relational space, where the future work identities of young people are constructed and constrained by various actors (young people, family, friends, teachers, careers advisors and employers); along with the associated dominant Discourses and habitus of the two main ‘fields/arenas’ (Bourdieu, 1998) of education and work.

The chapter begins with a summary of the main contribution of the thesis, moving on to revisit project aims and research questions, discussing research insights in detail (according to the two participant groups) and closing with a discussion on limitations, future research suggestions and ideas for practical applications/interventions grounded in findings.

10.2 Major Contribution of the Thesis

The primary contribution this thesis makes is to illustrate that young people had normalised dominant educational Discourses of individualisation (‘it’s all up to me’), meritocracy (‘work hard to get there’) and aspiration-raising (‘be the best’) that dominate schools, particularly in disadvantaged communities. These Discourses influenced their constructions of their hopes and fears around their future occupational possible selves. The neoliberal educational contexts that the young people in my study were subject to, influenced their production (and reproduction) of certain Discourses aligned with these contexts. Participants were perhaps more likely to have internalised such Discourses through greater exposure to them as a result of studying in areas defined as ‘disadvantaged’, targeted more strongly by policies and Discourse around ‘aspiration-raising’ (Harrison, 2018; Purcell, 2011). This study illustrates that when Discourses of individualisation are normalised in this way, young people are not empowered to look outside of themselves to see potential inequalities in the structural elements of the STWT. Instead of young people being supported by teachers or family to challenge structural inequalities in educational and labour market contexts, young people in my study appeared to inscribe any struggle in the STWT as theirs alone i.e., ‘*I need to work hard to get there*’, making this time a lonely one for many with a lack of focus on structural or socio-economic constraints

and barriers and on one of individual failings instead. The primary contribution of this thesis is therefore to illustrate the pernicious nature of such individualisation Discourses within disadvantaged communities in the UK, and how these compound pressures placed upon young people, leading to blaming the victim of societal inequalities rather than the structures that may lead young people from disadvantaged communities not to participate in HE, for example (Clycq et al., 2014; Sindic, 2015; Harrison, 2018; Harrison & Waller, 2018). The perpetuation of such Discourses along with other negative generational Discourses by SME managers in this study further emphasises the barriers facing young people, particularly those from disadvantaged communities who may not feel they belong at university and therefore decide to go directly into work to face further pejorative talk from those in power in the workplace.

Findings within this thesis further our understanding of the ways that everyday constraints experienced by young people in my study, such as a lack of access to individuals modelling a wide range of jobs, lower social and cultural capital such as access to networks or having family members who have previously been to university, can perpetuate inequalities which could lead to further economic disadvantages experienced by this group of young people in the future as a result.

10.3 Revisiting Research Aims and Questions

This project aimed to add to recent critical research viewing the STWT as a socially constructed relational process (Bessant et al., 2020; Wyn et al., 2017). The aims of this thesis (first introduced in [Chapter 1](#)) have thus been to critically explore and present:

- the dominant Discourses young people prior to the STWT may be exposed to and how these may be normalised, re-produced or resisted in everyday talk (and drawings) about occupational possible selves (OPS) & support networks;
- the dominant Discourses SME managers recruiting young people straight from school may be exposed to and how these may be normalised, re-produced or resisted in everyday talk (and drawings) about working with young people straight from school;
- how young people from the ‘missing middle’ (under-represented in STWT research), construct their future work identities (via OPS) prior to the STWT;
- who is important to young people as they construct their OPS and how young people from the missing middle construct ‘support’ prior to the STWT as a result;

- how small business managers (again under-represented in STWT research) construct notions of ‘young people from the missing middle’ and how they shape the STWT;
- how visual methods contribute to OPS research and STWT research more broadly.

The research focused on two populations of interest:

- 1) Young people from the ‘missing middle’ i.e., deciding to go straight to work following the end of compulsory schooling; and
- 2) SME managers recruiting young people directly from schools or FE Colleges.

The research questions used to focus and frame explorations with these two groups are used to present a summary of the key findings in the next section.

10.4 Summary of Key Findings

Findings from the project overall echo the ‘classification struggles’ spoken of by Bourdieu (O’Neill, 2019), inextricably linked with power relations, as how we relate to (and talk to/about) others is often wrapped up in the way we classify them. Whilst young people spoke about perceiving pressure and stress during the time prior to the STWT from those around them, they classified the STWT as a positive one overall, anticipating the workplace to be a positive and exciting place to enter. Essentially they had a sense of hope and positivity about making the transition to work. These findings differ from studies with young people post-STWT (working or unemployed) in the UK, such as Hendry and Kloep, (2010), for example, who found young people lacked optimism about their futures. SME employers presented both positive and negative positioning of young people, tending towards more controlling and negative Discourses. Young people coming directly from school to work tended to be positioned as potential sources of challenge overall and classified as ‘less than’ through managerial discursive practices. When brought together, as within this research project, perspectives of a future STWT (via young people) and past STWT (via managers), reveal the STWT as a contested relational process, shaped via a number of dominant Discourses and discursive practices from both arenas (education and work) with the potential to reproduce inequalities.

10.4.1 RQ1a. How do young people construct their future hoped-for and feared-for occupational possible selves prior to the STWT?

Young people who participated presented a wide range of hoped-for (e.g., designer, musician, film director, accountant, and army officer) and feared-for (e.g., cleaner, retail assistant, restaurant worker, desk-based) OPS. For those who talked more about their hoped-for OPS being their ‘expected’ career (e.g., Army officer), this was usually the result of knowing someone in these jobs in their networks. Participants appeared to find the process of constructing and talking about their feared-for OPS easier, generating richer talk than their hoped-for OPS.

For those who were unclear of their future job/career, the process of imagining, drawing and talking through hoped-for and feared-for OPS appeared to help them begin to think about elements they would like to gain from (or avoid in) work, showing that drawing pictures of hoped-for and feared-for OPS has application as a career counselling tool (discussed further in [practical applications](#)). Participants showed that they were highly aware of a range of anticipated reactions from others (family, teachers and friends) to their drawings of their hoped and feared-for OPS. Young people appeared to draw from (normalise and reproduce) dominant educational Discourses to construct their hoped and feared-for OPS, including aspiration-raising, meritocratic and careers Discourses (individualisation Discourses). Young people also showed resistance to dominant Discourses and pathways through the STWT, such as the dominant path of university following school, by showing both ambivalent talk and behaviour, and direct resistance talk.

10.4.2 RQ1b. How do young people construct the notion of support prior to the STWT?

I interpreted young people as positioning individuals within two overall groups on their support networks: insiders; and outsiders. Those positioned ‘inside’ the support network included family, teachers and friends. Those ‘outside’ were careers advisors. Participants included others (family, teachers and to a lesser extent, friends), who they then went on to talk about as constraining or challenging them (in terms of hoped-for OPS), prior to the STWT; showing a complex construction of the notion of ‘support’ for young people prior to the STWT. Overall, participants’ drawings and talk emphasized the importance of being able to identify at least one person who was a strong supporter prior to the STWT. For most participants, their ‘one good adult’ (Dooley & Fitzgerald, 2012), was mum. Young people talked about their need to look

to social others (particularly mum) for advice, support, comfort and reassurance. This need appeared to be met through communication: talking or being listened to, again primarily by mum. Inequalities were seen in young people's constructions of support networks and how these influenced opportunities relevant to the STWT, such as accessing work placements. Young people's notions of the value placed on close emotional support was strongly linked with a sense of geographical closeness to family and friends, with talk focused on resisting dominant aspiration-raising Discourses associated with mobility, where young people are expected to move out in order to move on. Young people appeared to reproduce dominant individualisation Discourses of meritocracy and aspiration-raising when talking about family and teacher support. Young people also showed active resistance to these dominant Discourses at times by pushing back, for example against teachers' messages about university being the 'best' pathway to work.

10.4.3 RQ2. How do SME managers construct young people making the STWT?

Managers 'othered' young people positively (as energy bringers and innovators) and negatively (as lacking in work ethic, work readiness, energy drains and impatient) in the ways they talked about and drew pictures of young people coming into the SME workplace directly from school/college. Managers constructed young people in a variety of negative positions, reducing them to a 'less than' category through everyday discursive practices and dominant negative generational Discourse drawn upon, such as 'millennials'. Managers tended to construct the SME workplace as a 'family', positioning themselves as senior family members and young people entering the workplace from school/college as their children. This was interpreted as paternalistic leadership discourse and talk about young people was accordingly labelled as either benevolent or exploitative within this framework. Examples of benevolent paternalistic leadership Discourse included talk about nurturing young people at work. Examples of exploitative leadership Discourse included the need for young people to learn their lesson, not repeat mistakes and give hope to managers. Findings from photographs of organisational artefacts from one SME participant's premises showed how managers attempted to re-create a fun family environment aimed at recruiting and retaining young people in the workplace. These included signs of benevolence (nurturing) and exploitation (discipline). Everyday ways of resisting the invisible power of such artefacts was seen by employees in the ways they interacted with such artefacts.

Contributions arising from research findings are organised according to whether they focus on young people or SME managers, and are presented in the next section.

10.5 Research Insights Developed from Conversations with Young People

This section focuses on insights developed from conversations and drawings with young people involved in the project.

10.5.1 Young People Normalising and Reproducing Dominant Educational Discourses

Critical discursive psychological approaches in STWT research appear rare. It has been utilised to explore areas in career transition research, such as athletes' transitions and identities (Cosh et al., 2013) but is absent from research focused on young people from the 'missing middle' prior to the STWT. Utilising a critical discursive psychological approach in this thesis shines a light on a number of discursive practices and resources (dominant Discourses) young people draw upon prior to the STWT as they make the decision not to go to university but to go straight to work or apprenticeship.

The individualisation Discourse emphasises how we need to manage every aspect of ourselves, by ourselves, so that the self 'becomes a do-it-yourself (DIY) project' (Beck, 1992, p.135). Even for major transitions, such as the STWT, young people in my study appeared to believe that they should also be able to manage this by themselves. The worry and fear induced by attempting to face challenging life transitions alone appeared to result in a sense of powerlessness by some of the young people, where they talked about not knowing what to do for 'the best'. Findings contribute to knowledge about the ways young people navigate the STWT, suggesting that the Discourses young people are exposed to or inscribe prior to the STWT, are key to whether young people (from the 'missing middle') will reach out for help or attempt to 'go it alone'; which could lead to the reproduction of social inequalities (Borlagdan, 2015).

10.5.2 Young People Normalising and Reproducing Dominant Careers Discourse

Participants normalised and reproduced elements from dominant careers Discourse, for example talk about 'dreams' with regards to hoped-for OPS and work in general. One participant talked about resisting 'dream' talk, adopting a realist perspective rejecting the notion of jobs appearing 'like a dream or something' (Amanda). Findings suggest that the

perpetuation of notions of ‘dream jobs’, as a metaphor rife within careers Discourse, appears to have been so taken for granted that we do not appear to question anymore whether such a term is helpful when discussing future careers. The word ‘dream’ itself appears to draw from the individualisation Discourse, where it is all about *my* dream and not a shared hope or vision for the future. These findings therefore contribute to literature critiquing the careers Discourse for its over-emphasis on agency, as well as contributing examples of how young people may resist this Discourse (see later on in this section).

10.5.3 Teachers Normalising and Reproducing Dominant Educational Discourses

My findings showed teachers were positioned by young people as HE advocates. In this way, teachers were agents of invisible power, embedding dominant norms and expectations for young people, and having power to shape future OPS within the contested and negotiated space of the STWT. Young people talked about having to be insistent and use forceful language to demonstrate their certainty to some teachers, who normalised and reproduced dominant educational Discourses, that university was not the path they wanted to take. These findings contribute to literature focused on aspiration-raising Discourse, showing the prevalence of this in schools/colleges in disadvantaged communities in particular (Purcell, 2011). Aspiration-raising Discourse has been an approach taken up enthusiastically by educational establishments and has been particularly focused on those areas considered to be deprived communities (prescribed by those promoting this dominant Discourse as lacking in educational aspirations) (Harrison, 2018). My findings suggest that by promoting this Discourse, teachers maintain the status quo, reinforcing the dominant path of school to university (perhaps as a result of inscribing dominant Discourses themselves). My findings offer useful discursive perspectives of how ascribing labels such as ‘bright’ (with associated expectations of what ‘bright’ people do i.e., they go to university), on young people (especially on young women it appears) by teachers, may result in unnecessary burdens of pressure, which could negatively impact on young people’s mental health and wellbeing.

10.5.4 Young People’s Resistance Talk: Resisting Dominant Educational Discourses

My findings showed examples within young people’s talk about how young people themselves appear to be pushing back against dominant Discourse and pathways, particularly in terms of the ‘university is best’ Discourse, previously highlighted as being reproduced by teachers. Resistance was seen in how young people emphasised their resistance to dominant Discourses

from teachers about ‘uni is best’, talking about repeatedly and directly telling teachers they did not want this path for example. Resistance was also seen in ambivalent talk (‘I couldn’t be bothered to apply to uni’), which nevertheless re-instated power and agency to the young person over their individual futures. For example, several female participants spoke of resisting dominant expectations for them as ‘bright’ girls from teachers and family respectively, to go to university, by missing application deadlines or simply not applying. Resistance can be conceptualised as refusal (e.g., Dick, 2008) and I would similarly argue that these participants reclaimed their power and agency through these seemingly passive-resistant acts; challenging the dominant Discourses promoted from their family and teachers. My findings therefore add to those in the literature framing young people’s ambivalent talk as resistance. For example, similar findings emerged from ethnographic longitudinal research by Alexander et al., (2020) on work transitions that showed that young people are socialised by school to expect ordered and linear transitions (as did my study), but the reality is far messier. Adopting ambivalent attitudes was one way young people used to cope, resist and take back agency and power, e.g., by adopting the phrase FISH (‘Fuck It Shit Happens’) resisting the more neoliberally-laced phrase YOLO (‘You Only Live Once’) when talking about career paths taken since school/university (Alexander et al., 2020).

10.5.5 Young People’s Resistance Talk: Resisting Mobility Discourses

Young people talked about a number of benefits from remaining close to immediate and extended family, such as helping with future childcare needs as well as general support. Living close to your family following the STWT is linked with shame and failure in dominant Discourses (Hamlett, 2018). Participants in my study resisted these notions and Discourses, again reclaiming power and agency by talking about not moving away as a positive, purposeful choice that would lead to greater happiness in the long run. They appeared to push back against the dominant mobility Discourse linked to aspiration which suggests that in order to get on you have to get out (Purcell, 2011). Findings again contribute to our knowledge regarding the ways young people prior to the STWT resist dominant ideologies such as those that link achievement and aspiration with geographical mobility.

This sub-section has shown how adopting a critical discursive psychological approach to the ‘data’ has enabled several contributions to furthering our knowledge of the ways that dominant Discourses are re-produced or resisted by young people from the ‘missing middle’ and those

around them prior to the STWT. The next section moves on to look at contributions my study makes to the theory of occupational possible selves, which formed the structure of my conversations with young people.

10.5.6 Extending Occupational Possible Selves (OPS) Theory: Using Drawings

Utilising visual methods (drawings) to explore young people from the ‘missing middle’s’ OPS contributes to the theory, extending its usage away from the domination of questionnaire and survey type studies (Packard & Conway, 2006) and towards richer data gathering that pictures provide. The rich findings developed within this study relating to young people’s OPS make a methodological contribution, showing that drawings as a tool within OPS theory may help young people to reflect (and talk about with others) past, current and future identities as they correspond to future OPS. For future studies wishing to explore OPS and generate richer text for subsequent analysis, this study shows that drawings are an excellent way to provide this, by way of the rich data produced. The study additionally contributes to our knowledge of the way drawings enable talk about ‘others’ to be brought into research interviews more easily and richly. By asking young people ‘what would your family/teachers/friends say if they saw this drawing?’, talk about anticipated reactions of others was more richly imagined than if it had been a purely talk-based interview. This again provides a methodological contribution to OPS theory, illustrating that where researchers wish to gather talk about ‘imagined others’ reactions to an individual’s OPS, drawings provide an easy mechanism for this.

10.5.7 Adding to Knowledge on ‘Thin’ versus ‘Thick’ OPS

Participants who felt more confused and uncertain about their futures in work appeared to express (draw and talk about) their futures in more cautious or thinner, and less detailed terms, than young people on prescribed career paths, such as military careers. These findings add to our knowledge on how young people from disadvantaged or marginalised communities may tend to express possible selves more thinly and in less detail than those from more privileged backgrounds, with the potential to limit occupational choices and pathways taken (Fryberg & Markus, 2003; Van Breda, 2010). Findings from my project demonstrating the thin hoped-for OPS produced by young people from the ‘missing middle’ (without a clearly defined career path), appear to echo findings from an intervention study set up to support students from a disadvantaged community in South Africa. This showed that thin OPS were generated initially,

but through an individualised careers intervention programme, young people were able to produce richer hoped-for OPS by the end (Van Breda, 2010).

10.5.8 Extending Occupational Possible Selves (OPS) Theory: Importance of 'Expected' OPS

My findings suggest that the young people in my study who had clear ideas of their future career, instead of drawing a 'hoped-for' OPS, possibly drew an 'expected' OPS, whereas those without a clear future career drew more vague hopes in their hoped-for OPS. These findings extend OPS theory by adding to our knowledge regarding the value of exploring the expected OPS (that we expect as realistic). For example, in a careers counselling context, this could reveal other constraints acting on young people's futures, such as women expecting (or being expected by others), to go into occupations traditionally associated with their gender, such as nursing (Chalk et al., 2005). Findings suggest that an element I overlooked as part of OPS theory, the 'expected' self, could be a useful concept to bring into research and practice using OPS drawings. This research therefore contributes to the literature on OPS by suggesting that all three formulations of OPS (expected, hoped and feared), have value to support young people in reflecting and talking about careers prior to the STWT. My findings add to the literature that suggests that it is hard for young people to develop detailed OPS if they are not exposed to a wide range of careers through social and family networks (Archer & Moote, 2016). As the activist Wright Edelman (2015) succinctly states, 'It's hard to be what you can't see'. The need for young people to have access to a wide range of potential OPS to draw upon, and the support from careers professionals required to flesh these out, appears vital to achieve the dual aim of broadening young people's expected occupational possible futures, as well as limiting the social reproduction of work-based inequalities for young people in the STWT.

10.5.9 Young People Co-opting Supportive Others as 'Proxy Agents'

Findings from this study further contribute to research exploring notions of relational support for young people prior to the STWT, adding the under-represented voices of young people from the 'missing middle' specifically. Overall findings from young people from the 'missing middle' contribute to the call for greater research into transitions from compulsory school to work made by Brzinsky-Fay, for example (2014). Insights are offered that extend substantive knowledge about who young people include and exclude from notions of support prior to the STWT and how they position them, shaping our understandings of relational support prior to the STWT as a result. Findings therefore expand our knowledge on the relational aspects of

support prior to the STWT for young people from the ‘missing middle’. The findings specifically contribute to our knowledge on how young people (from the ‘missing middle’) leverage proxy agency (Bandura, 2002), not knowingly researched for this group in the STWT to date. The findings show how young people value, leverage and appropriate support from different groups of ‘others’ in their networks in the time prior to the STWT. The primary group of proxy agents in my study were mums, with teachers sometimes utilised in this way. Careers advisors, who could be expected to be efficient at proxy agency e.g., finding work experience or having work contacts, were not talked about in this way, suggesting that young people required a close relationship with the proxy agent in order for any support to be leveraged. This adds to careers research suggesting that strong relationships underpin careers talk e.g., Arnold & Cohen (2008) and emphasising the importance for careers practitioners and teachers to include proxy agents such as family members, within careers work undertaken with young people prior to the STWT.

10.5.10 Family as Primary Influencers within Support Networks

Consistently across all participants, family members were the first group of people that young people spoke about as being the most essential and useful members of their support networks prior to the STWT. This finding adds to research exploring the roles of others who attempt to facilitate talk about careers, in that what is valued most by individuals is ‘real relationships’, which are close and supportive (Arnold & Cohen, 2008). Findings contribute to our knowledge of the role that family members play for young people from the ‘missing middle’ prior to the STWT, adding substantive knowledge to survey findings, such as ‘one good adult’, which emphasises the importance for young people to identify at least one positive supporter in their networks to act as a buffer against stress and anxiety (Dooley & Fitzgerald, 2012). The one good adult most often talked about by young people in my study was mum. My findings emphasise that the matriarchal influence in the STWT is strong for young people from the ‘missing middle’, including Olive who whilst describing a negative relationship with her mum, described strong matriarchal influence and bond with her gran instead. My findings contribute to furthering our knowledge that ‘one good adult’ is particularly important for young people in disadvantaged communities at times of great change such as the STWT. This suggests a need for practitioners to work more closely with young people to identify where this is missing and provide support needed accordingly.

Findings from this study contribute to the call to further explore relational and family influences prior to the STWT (Blustein et al., 1997). A nuanced picture of family support emerges from the findings, where young people frame this in both positive and negative terms, showing how (via discourse) young people construct the notion of ‘support’ itself as multi-faceted (emotional and practical). The role of family members (not limited to parents) was central to the way that participants talked about who was helping them prior to the STWT. Findings emphasised that for young people in the ‘missing middle’, extended family members such grandparents play an important role in young people’s decision-making processes. Findings also contribute to knowledge of how constructed notions of ‘communication’, discussed as an integral part of family support, may be gendered. For example, young women in my study tended to describe this more in terms of two way conversations and active talk, whereas young men focused on seeing communication as having someone who was a good sounding board, or a good listener.

10.5.11 Geographically Closeness to Family and Friends Relates to Emotional Closeness

Several participants talked about not wanting to move far away from home for work, highlighting this as a key part within their decision of not to go to university. Findings suggest a sense of connectedness with social groups (including family and friends within this) that young people had grown up with. This contributes to research knowledge on social ties and these were noted as a strong influence on young people’s future occupational decisions in my study, as has been found to be particularly the case within working class families and communities (Boucher, 1997). This suggests that my findings support the idea that there are ‘classed attachments to place’ (Farrugia, 2019) as the majority of participants could be described as working class in my study (using the ONS (2019) definition that mums, as the primary influencers, were predominantly not educated to degree level). The strength of support being linked to staying close geographically supports the notion of ‘working class localism’, where young people from the least affluent backgrounds are more likely to have strong local and community ties, and not to consider leaving home as essential (or desirable) to future education or career success (Christie & Munro, 2003). This in itself contributes to research on resistance, showing how young people in my study actively resisted this aspect of dominant aspiration-raising Discourse demanding they move out in order to move on after school.

10.5.12 Careers Advisors Positioned as ‘Outsiders’ From Young People’s Support Networks

Careers advisors were positioned as being completely outside of young people’s notions of who supports them prior to the STWT. Young people involved in the current study talked about not receiving balanced and impartial information about future choices, from either teachers or careers advisors. Those who were definite about their preference to go directly to work or apprenticeship, following their completion of compulsory schooling, perceived themselves to be marginalized by teachers and careers advisors as a result of rejecting the dominant and expected path to work i.e., go to university then work. These findings connect to a wider context across the UK, relating to the continued dominance of university as the destination promoted to young people in school and FE colleges. For example, a Youth Employment UK survey (2019) reported that students are twice as likely to have been spoken to about universities than apprenticeships, for example. All the young people in the current study talked about confusion and ambivalence with reference to careers advice they had (or had not) been exposed to. The lack of specialised career advice available, along with the contradictions and tensions within careers guidance provision across schools and colleges in England has been well documented in other studies (Archer & Moote, 2016; Colley, Lewin & Chadderton, 2010). Archer & Moote (2016), for example, reported that fewer than two-thirds of pupils in Year 11 (15/16 year olds) in England had received careers advice and it was not reaching those with greatest need to utilise careers advice to combat structural challenges/constraints, such as girls, working class, lower attaining and ethnic minority pupils. Findings from my study therefore contribute to careers literature advocating the need to find ways to bring careers professionals ‘inside’ support networks of young people, particularly those from the ‘missing middle’.

10.6 Research Insights Developed from Conversations with SME Managers

10.6.1 SME Managers ‘Othering’ Young People Coming Directly into Work from School/College

As noted in the previous section on insights developed from conversations with young people, a critical discursive psychological perspective appears rarely applied to the STWT and I have not been able to locate other research exploring the experiences of SME managers in recruiting young people directly from school/college. The following contributions illuminating discursive practices and resources drawn upon by SME managers to position young people in the workplace, are therefore novel to the field. Adopting a critical discursive psychological

approach has enabled exploration of how managers claim aspects of ‘how young people are at work’ as truth or fact, revealing the inherent power and classification struggles (Bessant et al., 2020) between SME managers and young people from the ‘missing middle’ in the STWT.

Findings offer further insights on discursive othering at work, applying this to a novel setting of an SME workplace, thus contributing to the call to develop knowledge of an under-researched group in STWT research (e.g., Kyndt et al., 2017). Managers othered young people in positive (i.e., young people are so different and fascinating) and negative (i.e., young people are hopeless) ways in their talk and drawings. This predominantly negative positioning of young people entering work directly from school/college was shown in the everyday discursive discriminatory language used by SME managers. These findings contribute to the literature on othering, showing how these discursive practices are utilised by SME managers as a way to maintain the balance of power, normalising the discourse of young people in the STWT as being, in the main, ‘young numpties’ (Robert) and reducing them to a ‘less than’ category. These findings also add to the literature on power and discourse and more specifically on the imbalance of power between employers and potential employees, showing how unequal power relations are discursively produced and re-produced (Fotiadou, 2018).

Discourse of difference, or ‘othering’ discourse, is traditionally associated with discrimination. Managers were keen to present discourse which at a surface level avoided any potential claims of discrimination e.g., ‘I’m really not ageist’. Rhetorical devices such as these types of disclaimers used by managers illustrate the value to be gained by viewing the STWT (and associated actors) with a critical discursive lens, and shows how othering young people as an inferior group appeared commonplace and acceptable across the SME participants involved in this study. Discourse and discursive processes can easily be enablers of everyday discriminatory practices that, if left unchecked and viewed un-critically, ‘expresses and reproduces underlying prejudices about Others in the social and political context.’ (Van Dijk, 2015, p.476). Applying a critical discursive psychological perspective has contributed to research exploring discourse and discrimination in the workplace towards young people. In particular, it has shined a light on everyday discrimination towards young people coming into the workplace directly from school, wrapped up in the ways managers talk about experiences with and expectations of young people in the STWT.

10.6.2 SME Managers Normalising and Reproducing Dominant Negative Generational Discourse

Findings within this study from SME managers' drawings and talk about young people entering their workplace directly from school/FE college, focused on the overall cautious and constraining approach adopted by managerial participants towards young people entering work directly from school. Interpretations of discursive othering in this thesis illustrate contradictions and tensions in SME managers' constructions of young people in the STWT, bringing both positive and negative aspects into the workplace from a small business perspective. Findings showed that negative generational Discourse, drawing predominantly from Discourse about 'millennials' was pervasive and had seemingly become an acceptable form of othering amongst SME managerial participants. Claims made by SME managers about young people's work identities or 'how young people are', and the discursive devices they used to argue for the facticity of such claims, may all be seen as ways for those in power to legitimize holding onto the organisational resources (jobs, money, power). My findings contribute to research exploring power in the workplace and how those in power may be resistant to handing this over to new entrants (in this case young people entering work for the first time since school), resulting in, and reproducing the contested space of the STWT.

Pritchard and Whiting's (2014) research on the discursive construction of generations in a work context states that 'the homogenization of a generation is thus used to stigmatize or valorize an age group and to justify and legitimate its differential treatment in the labour market' (p. 1620). Positioning young people as 'others' and using talk or discourse referring to generational constructs such as 'millennials', as several of the managers in my study did, casually introduces othering, reproducing and re-inforcing harmful 'discursively entrenching stereotypes' (Pritchard & Whiting, 2014, p. 1621). My research contributes knowledge as to how this type of casual discursive discrimination via 'othering' can occur in the SME workplace towards young people from the 'missing middle'.

Some managers appeared to reflect on how they had been influenced by (or inscribed) dominant Discourses, such as the negative framing of millennials in the workplace and expressed discomfort when faced with the realities of such negative framing e.g., by reflecting on the drawing they produced. For example, this contrast was emphasised by William's drawing (Appendix H) where at the end of the conversation he asked me to add rays of sunshine

around what was essentially a very negative picture of the typical young person coming to work straight from school/FE college. This finding contributes to interview methods literature, showing how sometimes research interviews in themselves can be miniature sites of intervention, if self-reflection and discussion is facilitated by the process, aided here by drawings. This also shows how drawings can potentially act as tools to aid critical thinking and reflection in themselves (see [practical applications section](#)).

10.6.3 Paternalistic Leadership Discourse: A Novel Contribution to the STWT Literature

Small business managers appeared to position themselves akin to senior family members for young people entering the workplace directly from school. A novel perspective developed through adopting a critical discursive approach and paying attention to the ‘workplace as family’ metaphor that appeared to run throughout managerial accounts, has been my framing of SME managers ‘othering’ young people as paternalistic leadership discourse (PLD), drawing from constructs identified in research on paternalistic leadership approaches (Aycan, 2006; Aycan et al., 2013). Findings add a critical discursive element by illustrating *how* a paternalistic leadership approach is adopted by SME managers around young people at work, illuminating the discursive practices (verbal, visual, material) drawn upon. Examples of paternalistic leadership discourse (from talk, drawings and organisational artefacts) from SME managers provides novel insights suggesting this is a Discourse which ultimately reproduces power inequalities for young people entering the SME workplace straight from school.

Findings contribute to the literature on paternalistic leadership by showing that both benevolent and exploitative forms of paternalistic leadership discourse were seen in managers’ drawings, talk and organisational artefacts. Findings add novel critical discursive (and multi-modal) elements to a framework of paternalistic leadership, such as that developed by Aycan (2006). For example, SME managers talked of being ‘proud’ of young people who worked for them, whilst also being patronizing towards (infantilising), and a harsh critic (disciplining) of young people’s behaviours at other times. Talk also focused on family notions commonplace in paternalistic leadership SME environments of expectations and managers being ‘let down’ or disappointed by the young people who had come to work for them.

10.6.4 The STWT as a Relational Process

This project contributes novel insights to the importance of viewing the STWT itself as a relational process. For example, the ways that SME managers relate to young people coming into the workplace directly from school has impact on the construction and constraints of young people's work identities, as well as on the work 'arena' young people hope to enter. The focus on STWT research, particularly when looking at the 'missing middle' is, perhaps understandably, on the young people themselves, with those who they will be making the transition towards, (employers), often side-lined or excluded from such research. This project has attempted to bring the two perspectives into one space to contribute novel perspectives in viewing the STWT as a contested, relational process where neither perspective is privileged and both are explored critically in terms of discursive resources and practices which contribute to how the STWT is approached (from both sides). Including SME voices at the same time as young people's, has revealed a greater richness and complexity to the sense of the STWT as a contested space of struggle between how young people leaving school position 'work' and how workers/managers position 'young people'. This research responds to the call by Bessant et al., (2020) to bring a Bourdieusian-inspired relational perspective to youth transition research. In doing so I have applied a critical discursive psychological approach to illustrate elements of the phenomenon of the STWT as a process where through macro (big D Discourse) and micro (little d discourse), 'hierarchical social positions can be reproduced or challenged' (Wyn et al., 2017, p.496). In adopting a relational approach, I have attempted to move away from traditional individualised and cognitivist theoretical approaches more commonly adopted in occupational psychology, reflecting on how power and inequalities may be reinforced or reproduced by individuals involved in the STWT (Stead & Perry, 2012).

10.7 Methodological Contributions from Adopting Visual Methods

The STWT research field is dominated by hypothesis testing (Brzinsky-Fay, 2014). General findings from adopting visual methods within this study contribute to broadening methods used with STWT research and also to the literature on the value of bringing multimodal methods within qualitative research in psychology in general (e.g., Boden, Larkin & Iyer, 2018), as well as to occupational psychology specifically (Bal et al., 2019). This research attempts to acknowledge the multimodal way we live our lives and relate to each other (via verbal and visual means, for example), brings added resonance to research into the STWT. Two types of

visual methods were used within the study: drawings; and photographs (of organisational artefacts).

10.7.1 Adding to Research Knowledge of Drawings as Noun and Verb in Research Settings

Contributions across both groups of participants in this study emphasise and replicate findings from other researchers using drawings which highlight their value as both noun and verb, within a research setting, where the process of reflecting upon and constructing the drawing was as meaningful as the product itself (McGrath et al., 2020). My research therefore adds to the wide body of literature on visual methods in psychology emphasising drawings as part of the research process and products of research in themselves (e.g., Bagnoli, 2009; Guillemin, 2004; McGrath et al., 2020). The process of ‘doing’ drawings within the interview and subsequently having them in front of us whilst we chatted, appeared to serve several functions for both sets of participants: it increased the conversational flow; provided a useful structure to the interview process; and enabled young people and managers to raise and talk about difficult and potentially sensitive issues around the STWT, that they may otherwise not have discussed using words alone. These findings therefore contribute to knowledge within visual methods of the process-benefits.

10.7.2 Adding to Research Knowledge on how Drawings Generate Fruitful Talk

I found that the process of creating drawings and discussing the different elements contained within them, enabled greater depth of discussion (with both sets of participants), than may have been possible with interview questions alone. Certainly, with some of the quieter participants, the drawings helped to provide a structure to our conversations and appeared to bring greater confidence for individuals to actively participate. All participants appeared to engage more reflexively with the topic than if they had been providing answers to more standardized interview questions. Within this project’s critical discursive psychological approach, the subsequent ‘text’ generated in conversations, as a result of creating the drawings, has facilitated rich and deep interpretation. Drawings also appeared to re-calibrate the power difference between me (in the role of researcher) and participants, and provided a useful feeling of ‘distance’ from any uncomfortable feelings brought about by discussing emotive topics such as the STWT or recruiting young people directly from school. On a pragmatic note, using visual methods has helped me to remember research encounters more vividly than would be possible purely through written transcripts alone. These findings contribute to existing knowledge on

the additional benefits of using creative methods for both participants and researcher (in terms of rich information to interpret, as well as facilitating the process of recollecting rich encounters).

10.7.3 Contributing Knowledge to Potential Gendered Approaches to Drawing

Female managers approached the task as an active and dynamic process, adding constantly to their picture as we talked about different topics related to the STWT. In contrast male managers were more output-oriented, using the drawing as a starting point for discussion. These findings contribute knowledge to the different ways that drawings are approached, emphasising that whilst ways into drawing may be different for different groups, such as men and women, this does not matter overall, as visual methods are flexible enough to accommodate a wide range of engagement types, from a wide range of participants (Reavey, 2011).

10.7.4 Multimodal Contributions to paternalistic leadership discourse (PLD)

Photographs of organisational artefacts (from one SME premises; Appendix O), were used within this study to highlight the presence of PLD to add a multimodal dimension (in addition to managers' drawings and verbal discourse). My interpretations of these artefacts brings novel contributions to research on paternalistic leadership, showing how everyday symbols and artefacts deliberately placed in the work environment by SME managers may perpetuate this Discourse.

Organisational artefacts in the workplace appeared to reflect and reproduce cultural norms about young people (specifically in I.T. which was the focus of the workplace featured in the photographs), their identities, and expectations of the workplace. I interpret these images as yet further examples of PLD, expressed via organisational artefacts. These centred around notions of employees working and playing together (as a family), the 'cool' factor expected of items targeted at young people, as well as expectations around how young people preferred to socialise (with alcohol) and relax (playing Wii or table football, for example). Interpretations of artefacts bring new insights to the ways that employees engage in everyday forms of resisting or neutralising these visual messages (and dominant Discourses as a result). For example, by putting their packed lunch in the fridge the 'cool' factor of a fridge full of branded drinks had perhaps been eroded slightly. Similarly by placing a pink umbrella underneath it, the graphic

of the Stormtrooper had had its inherent masculinity and/or aggression neutralised or put into contrast, at the very least.

10.7.5 Summary of Contributions/Insights

The contributions presented here, reinforce our knowledge of the STWT as a liminal and contested space and time, where work expectations (and identities) of young people and SME managers appear to discursively collide. The rich qualitative findings contribute to our knowledge of how young people navigate and negotiate the complexities of a liminal (in-between) time, through discursive practices and resources (adopting and appropriating certain Discourses; rejecting or resisting others). It also contributes to knowledge how SME managers' discursive practices (verbal, visual and material, via organisational artefacts) may constrain and limit the work identities available to young people going straight to work from school.

10.8 Limitations and Future Research Suggestions

A number of limitations are identified within the current research project and are outlined here along with suggestions for future research which could address these issues.

10.8.1 Difficulty and Complexity of Relating Young People and Employers' Findings

A struggle throughout this project has been attempting to reconcile and relate the two participant groups of young people from the 'missing middle' and SME managers. Whilst the aim of bringing lived experiences and talk from these two groups together in one project and thesis was to form a relational approach missing from STWT research, the reality has been that the experiences of the two are so different that they are difficult to combine or relate to one another. The difficulty was compounded by my approach to collecting data from these two groups without them having any connection to each other. Future studies may be able to address this limitation by interviewing SME managers who had recruited a young person directly from school or FE college and at the same time interviewing the same young person who had recently gone through this experience. Alternatively, interviewing young people prior to the transition and then following this up with an interview post-transition with the young person's employer, may have meant that experiences joined up more and discourses could be explored for their differences when talking about a supposedly shared experience. However, this research approach would have likely been too time-consuming in terms of recruitment of participants as well as the time required for data collection for the time constraints within a PhD project.

Other drawbacks of a matched approach of a young person and the employer they worked for may have meant that both young people and the employers may have found it harder to talk about their experiences as freely as they were able to having no connection to one another.

10.8.2 Longitudinal Approach

Drawings produced by the young people regarding their future OPS and their pre-STWT support networks related to their ideas and perceptions at one particular moment in time, during our research conversation. This approach, whilst useful at providing a snapshot of OPS and support networks of young people, is a potential limitation of the current study as it does not enable exploration of how OPS may develop in richness and detail over time, as young people move nearer to the time of making the transition to work, for example. This could be ameliorated by including a longitudinal approach to exploring young people's OPS via drawings in the future. For example, young people could be asked to draw pictures and engage in talk about them at age 16, immediately prior to the STWT; during the STWT; and post-STWT. It would be interesting for the young people themselves to be able to reflect on their past imaginings of future OPS, as well as reflecting on what aspects of future work identities had become a reality (if any), and what had not. This could lead to richer data development on how young people's OPS are shaped and constructed over time, particularly as they pass through the liminal state of moving between the roles of youth and adulthood; student and worker. OPS drawings could also be linked to times when young people have participated in careers advice sessions or work experience programmes, for example, in order to explore potential impact on OPS of these types of practical interventions in school/college. Similarly, asking young people to map out their support networks throughout the STWT (pre, during and post), could reveal greater awareness of young people's construction of support, recognise 'gaps' in support and whether support changes at different stages of the STWT.

10.8.3 Varying Timings between Drawings and Interviews

A potential limitation of the current approach to using drawings within interview contexts relates to the fact that there was no time gap between most individuals (both young people and SME managers) creating the drawings and subsequently talking through them. One managerial participant (William) did have a time gap between producing the drawing and our interview as we had the interview via Skype and he completed and emailed over the drawing to me the day before. Interestingly William's interview did appear to contain critical reflective talk about his drawing, suggesting that time delay may increase the amount of critical reflection engaged in.

Some researchers suggest that immediate verbalisation of images can lead to words dominating the interpretation, as opposed to potentially more visually-based insights if there was a period of time for reflection left in between production and talk about the drawing (Clarke & Holt, 2019). However, other researchers value the power of immediate reactions from individuals to images (Vince & Warren, 2012). It would nevertheless be an interesting methodological adaptation to introduce a period of time for personal reflection (and talking to others outside the interview context about drawings produced) prior to the research conversation taking place.

10.8.4 Including the Notion of 'Expected' Occupational Possible Selves

The current study focused on the extremes within OPS i.e., future hoped-for and feared-for OPS. This polarising of the OPS may have resulted in less nuanced findings around young people's future occupational imaginings than if I had also included 'expected' OPS. Including all three OPS in future research is therefore recommended when exploring the OPS of young people from the missing middle as this would enable more nuanced exploration of the constraints in particular on young people in disadvantaged communities that may impact on an individual's future expectations of work. This would also serve a dual purpose of attempting to move away from dominant careers Discourse connecting jobs with 'dreams' of hopes and more into the everyday realities of jobs and careers.

10.8.5 Using Naturalistic Data

The debate between preference for interviews or naturally occurring data for discursive approaches is hotly contested (Nikander, 2012) and views on whether my reliance on conversations (interviews) is a limitation, may depend on your stance within this debate. There could be potential in future research to use naturally occurring data from sessions with careers advisors, teachers etc. where future careers with young people may be discussed. However, for the current doctoral project, time constraints prevented this type of more lengthy access approach as a possibility.

10.8.6 Including Significant Others Directly via the Rich Pictures (Bell, Berg & Morse, 2016) Method

This study did not talk *directly* to significant others within young people's support networks, but instead talked about them with participants. It would therefore be useful in follow-up studies to directly gain others' perspectives directly on OPS. One possible approach to achieve

this, could be gathering together a number of significant others (young person, teacher, family, friend) and utilising a rich picture method. Rich pictures are described as visual narratives bringing together multiple perspectives and interpretations with potential for deep interpretation (Bell, Berg & Morse, 2016). In Rich Pictures, a group (similar to a focus group) draws a picture/maps out an issue together e.g., support for young people prior to the STWT. The talk during co-production can be recorded and then interpreted, as in the current study. Rich Pictures have previously been integrated with OPS research by Bowen (2016), who looked at individuals in their first job post-university, to explore concepts of being ‘professional’, suggesting that the method integrates well with possible selves theoretical approaches.

10.8.7 Exploration of Paternalistic Leadership Discourse in Different Organisational Contexts

This thesis presents the unique interpretation that SME managers in the study utilised what can be termed as paternalistic leadership discourse in their talk about young people in the workplace. Future research could build upon these findings by exploring whether similar discourse is observed by managers who talk about recruiting and working with young people in larger companies in the UK for example, or whether it is a feature unique to the treatment of young people in SME contexts only. Similarly research could explore whether this type of discourse is prevalent when talking about young people from the ‘missing middle’ or applies to young graduates transitioning into work also.

10.9 Practical Interventions/Applications

As mentioned in chapter four (methodology), the transformational elements for participants in the current study were limited. As a reaction to this, the following practical interventions and applications are suggested. These applications arise directly from the findings presented within this thesis, with interventions grouped according to whether they are aimed at young people themselves prior to the STWT, those in supporting roles (e.g., teachers, family members, careers advisors) or employers (specifically targeted at SME managers). This section of applications finishes by including a recommendation for policymakers to bring together the worlds of work and school more closely by encouraging psychology practitioners involved in these domains to cross-over into the other i.e., educational psychologists working more in work

contexts in the STWT and occupational psychologists working more in school contexts to support young people through the STWT.

10.9.1 Support for Young People throughout the STWT

Findings in this thesis have shown the immense value young people place on support (from a range of sources) both practically and emotionally prior to the STWT. There is a need however to develop targeted interventions focused on ‘support’ at all stages of the STWT and not simply relying on family support as a given, which some young people talked about in this study. Young people need support to prepare for the transition, during and after, not all of which can be met by familial resources (Anderson, Jacobs, Schramm & Splittgerber, 2000). Research has for example shown that young people also need support in the period post-transition to help establish themselves and this has been found to directly link with reducing the risk of future unemployment (Dorsett & Lucchino, 2015). Workplace support (sometimes labelled as ‘onboarding’) when starting a new job appears present for larger companies who tend to have large human resources sections to manage this process e.g., PwC (2019), but lacking in SMEs such as those included within this study, perhaps due to time and resource constraints. A potential practical application of the findings from this study could be to provide a toolkit/training for SME managers to support them in providing onboarding support for young people coming into their first job, with specific elements regarding support for those individuals transitioning directly from school or FE College. This would ideally work alongside interventions promoting SME managers to reflect critically on their reproduction of dominant Discourses, mentioned previously when recruiting and working alongside young people in their teams.

10.9.2 Using Occupational Possible Selves Drawings as a Method for Reflective Career Development Support

Whereas research to date on possible selves in a work context tends to focus on using hoped-for possible selves to motivate (e.g., Strauss and Parker, 2018), my findings suggest that including drawings and conversations around feared-for OPS has benefits to the individual and should not be avoided. Career support interventions could therefore be set up which encourage individuals to draw and reflect on hoped-for, feared-for and expected OPS, particularly at times of transition such as the STWT, university to work transition or other work-based changes such as promotions to new roles. Understanding how young people imagine and talk about their

projected futures in work could lead to better support (from educational institutions, organisations, parents and other supporters) for young people to understand how they are constructing their future possible selves. For example, young people could be encouraged to reflect upon whether they are being constrained by internalised discourses e.g., gendered occupational discourses about what jobs are available or viewed as for young women or men (Chalk et al., 2005). If young people are self-limiting, or anxious about their future potential, those supporting young people's transitions require the skills and abilities to co-produce (and critique) the production of such knowledge (which would be generated in the three forms of OPS), alongside young people, in order to be able to provide better quality guidance. This intervention would therefore be well-matched to take place alongside the development of greater criticality around discourse use by practitioners.

10.9.3 Greater Involvement of Family in STWT Support Programmes

This study has emphasised the benefits from acknowledging that the STWT is a relational time and process with a myriad of actors with different stakes and influence. Families, for example, are routinely involved in the STWT by schools and FE colleges (e.g., open evenings to talk about applying to university), where the planned transition is the dominant path of going from school to university. Family and parental involvement appears low for more direct STWT, where the young person is choosing to go directly into employment or apprenticeship following compulsory schooling. To normalise the non-dominant path of making a direct move from school to work, schools and colleges could therefore work together in partnership with teachers, families, careers advisors and employers/apprenticeship providers, to run similar open evenings for discussion about non-normative pathways to work. Family members were found to be primary influencers in my study (similarly found in several other studies such as Blustein et al., 2002; McDonald et al., 2011; Ng and Feldman, 2007). Supporting the supporters i.e., family members (primary influencers), by providing information about pathways and routes to work/apprenticeship, in the same way that schools and colleges do for university, would appear one way to attempt to level the playing field. This could reduce the marginalisation felt by young people who are part of an education system in the UK that continues to place the majority of resources onto helping those young people (and their families) choosing the dominant path from school to university.

10.9.4 Critical Discourse Interventions Aimed at Careers Advisors/Teachers/SME Managers

Critiquing the language in use around careers Discourse means looking at the ways we talk to young people in particular about their futures in work and consciously realising when those in positions of power (e.g., teachers, careers advisors and managers) have inscribed various unhelpful Discourses. For example, slipping into dominant careers Discourse, talking about ‘your dream job’, we risk obscuring, or hiding away from the reality of the labour market as being far from ‘dream-like’ for many young people these days (Chesters & Cuervo, 2019; Hardgrove, Rootham & McDowell, 2015). When young people talk using these terms such as ‘dream job’, we need to be confident to explore their meanings and origins and support young people to flesh out such ‘dreams’ in relation to their futures in work, as well as supporting them to resist or challenge dominant Discourses where possible.

Careers advisors, for example, are trained to help young people to ‘adjust and adapt’, as opposed to recognising structural constraints and limitations to future career choices and plans. They may therefore be at risk of perpetuating structural inequalities in the labour market accordingly (Stead & Perry, 2012). Careers researchers suggest that not recognising structural factors does a disservice to the young people seeking support or advice from career professionals, pointing to the need for greater training for career practitioners in ‘social justice practice’, rather than simply social justice rhetoric (Ali, Liu, Mahmood & Arguello, 2008; Bosley, Arnold & Cohen, 2007; Metz & Guichard, 2009).

Interventions aimed at supporting health practitioners, for example, to reflect and adopt more collaborative and inclusive language working with people with long-term health conditions, such as Diabetes, have begun to take shape (NHS England, 2018). There has been a move to de-naturalise health professionals’ Discourse, questioning the taken-for-granted health terminology and recognising the power of words. Fotiadou (2018) similarly calls for the de-naturalisation of careers services Discourse (in Higher Education), challenging the taken-for-granted usage of potentially damaging terms such as ‘employability’, criticised for reducing state responsibility and again over-emphasising individual agency and responsibility in precarious labour markets. Yet the practical interventions to achieve these aims are missing from papers such as Fotiadou (2018) critiquing the Discourse. I would suggest possible interventions following approaches summarised from educational contexts to increase criticality in student communities e.g., Reynolds (1999) to ‘promote critical conversations

within learning communities' (Brookfield, 1994, p.204). Providing training/workshop interventions would also link with longstanding calls for careers practitioners in particular to be trained in social justice practice, as part of building greater critical reflection on the ways that drawing from certain careers Discourses may be perpetuating social inequalities (Ali et al., 2008; Metz & Guichard, 2009). Such training may be linked to ways to increase the credibility careers practitioners may have when working with young people, showing awareness of constraints, as well as greater acknowledgement of the socially constructed nature of careers as opposed to aiming for supposed impartiality (Bosley et al., 2007). Critical reflection groups (using Action Learning principles e.g., (Revans, 2016), could be set up to support each other in the reflection and development of criticality around dominant or restrictive Discourses impacting upon young people and other groups.

10.9.5 Implications for Policy: Bringing Educational Psychology to Work and Occupational Psychology to School

There is scope for professionals in both 'arenas' of education and work to be brought closer together, for the benefit of young people (and their family) in the STWT. For example, occupational psychologists could work more in schools and FE colleges, helping young people reflect on their future OPS, or providing career counselling support interventions informed by evidence. Similarly, I argue that educational psychologists as part of their new remit to work with an expanded age range of young people (from 16 – 24 years old), could be brought into the workplace, continuing to provide much-needed support and guidance during the STWT (Parry, 2020).

10.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter has discussed the principal insights (contributions) developed out of the research project findings from conversations and drawings with young people and SME managers. Limitations (along with future research suggestions), ideas for practical application and interventions, based on my research findings, were presented. The next and final chapter of this thesis aims to leave the reader with some sense of an ending (resisting the positivistic terminology of 'conclusion'), drawing together my final thoughts as the research journey approaches its end.

11. Final Thoughts

This chapter ends the research journey by laying out my final thoughts and reflections, rather than a set of neat and tidy conclusions from my research. This chapter completes the journey presented throughout this thesis in the spirit of a social constructionist approach to research, where no one truth is claimed as the ending and at the same time acknowledging that everything (even writing a thesis), must come to an end sometime. This chapter contains final reflections on my approach (to the research project overall and to the writing of this thesis); a section emphasising my learning about the power of language through undertaking this project; and finally ending with a call for recognition of the value of approaches to STWT research which prioritises resonance and ‘humanifying’ across the research process as a whole.

11.1 Reflections on My Approach

At the start of this thesis ([Chapter 1](#)), I outlined my researcher stance as part-way between a ‘voice’ (where space for unheard voices in research is given) and ‘activist’ (revealing and challenging dominant ideologies). However, at times during the interviews with SME managers I felt passive, akin more to the ‘ventriloquist’ position (no apparent underlying political ideology) (Fine, 1992). At several times during conversations with SME managers I felt compromised by not speaking out or holding managers to account for talking negatively or prejudicially about young people. Perhaps paradoxically, I also felt disloyal to the managerial participants (during both research interviews and during interpretation stages and writing up), some of whom I knew quite well due to work connections from my time working in an SME. I knew that I would be presenting examples of their talk with a critical lens, which could present them negatively. This is perhaps patronising on my part and needlessly worrying about protecting people that may not need or want my protection, and reminded me that the researcher’s role is not to act as a saviour for participants (Råheim et al., 2016). I acknowledge that I did not enter into this research project as an action research intervention, for example, to provide a forum for debate about the STWT, but as a means to gather the data from which to explore and unpick the discursive constructions of young people in the STWT (by young people themselves and SME managers). I therefore accept that transformational elements that could have emerged had I adopted a more active research design, are limited in my project, and could instead be achieved through work following on from this thesis i.e., in interventions such as those outlined towards the end of the previous chapter. Increasing my criticality throughout

this project has forced me to confront the ways that as a practicing occupational psychologist, I myself may have been complicit in oppressing others in the workplace, through acceptance of ideologies and reproduction of dominant Discourses around individualisation, for example. This critical reflection on practice is difficult, yet is deemed a necessary part for practitioners defining themselves as critical psychologists to build the courage to encourage individuals we support in the future not only to adjust to work, but to challenge and resist potentially harmful and unhelpful Discourses where possible (Prilleltensky & Stead, 2012).

The thick descriptions presented across the findings chapters in this thesis are an intrinsic benefit to adopting qualitative methods. I have attempted to resist (although at times as an apprentice researcher, on reflection perhaps not strongly enough), the pressures placed on qualitative researchers to fashion qualitative research (in management/occupational psychology fields particularly), so that there is a ‘quantitative restyling’ (Cornelissen, 2017). This restyling attempts to adjust the presentation of qualitative methods and findings to be adjusted more to the palate of quantitative researchers, for example by adopting a factor analysis type of approach, or using highly quantified qualitative methods, such as the Gioia methodology (Cornelissen, 2017; Gioia et al., 2013). Throughout the project (including writing up this as a qualitative piece of work), I have reflected on differences between my attempts to adopt a ‘big Q’ approach (fully embracing a qualitative philosophy as well as qualitative ways of doing things in the research), rather than ‘little q’ (where research questions originate in a quantitative paradigm) (Kidder & Fine, 1987). I am unsure if pure big Q research is truly possible within the constraints of a doctoral thesis, (or perhaps on reflection this is due more to my own personal constraints within the undertaking of a PhD). This project has challenged me at various stages on what kind of researcher I am or could be. At times I have been helper, listener, colluder, intervener, challenger, judge and interpreter. I feel however that I am emerging at the end of this research journey as more of an ‘adventurer’, rather than a ‘recipe follower’ (Willig, 2001), which was my aim in developing myself as a qualitative researcher throughout this PhD.

11.2 The Productive Power of Language

‘Sometimes words hang around longer than people, even when you don’t want them to.’
(Rauf, 2018)

This quote from the novel, *The Boy in the Back of the Class* (Rauf, 2018), resonated with me when I read it with my daughter and I find it chimes well with both the purpose and findings from my research presented in this thesis. A core message throughout this thesis is the maxim ‘language matters’. The words we unthinkingly use, or else actively choose and how we say them: it matters and they ‘hang around’. They are produced and re-produced by ourselves and others, shaping possible identities and re-producing inequalities, dominant norms and ideologies.

The words our participants use can ‘hang around’ and stay with us as qualitative researchers, long after a project has finished. Phrases heard within research conversations can stay forever etched in our minds, encapsulating the topic of investigation in unexpected ways. For me, one of the young people stopped at one point during our conversation and simply said, ‘what would you do?’ This stayed with me, as it appeared as a genuine cry for help, encapsulating the uncertainty and helplessness experienced by young people as they are bombarded by aspiration-raising and individualisation Discourses about making the ‘right’ career choices before the STWT. This quote also grounds me in the importance of remembering our active role as qualitative researchers and the need to reflect and revisit our ethical stance continually. Just as there were examples of such vulnerable moments within my conversations with participants, there were funny instances also. For example ‘effing and jeffing’, as a description of a future feared-for OPS working around customers who are swearing all the time; and arresting instances, such as the phrase ‘young numpties’, used by one of the SME managers. The excitement of taking a critical discursive approach in a research project is that it encourages (and perhaps demands), that you unpick macro and micro Discourses, making what may appear ‘ordinary’ ways of talking about future careers or young people on the surface, into something Foucauld described as ‘problematic, difficult, dangerous’ (Miller, 1993, p.235). Illuminating the power of such discourses to shape our worlds is like removing a blindfold and starting to see phenomena such as the STWT in a different light.

11.3 Resonance and Humanifying STWT Research

Cunliffe (Cunliffe, 2018b) encourages us to look for resonant narratives and aim to present these as threads throughout our written work, noting elements that stand out or surprise us, and above all approaching qualitative research as a craftsperson not a technician. In the spirit of this approach, I have aimed to produce a thesis that presents these moments of resonance as

‘findings’ i.e., things that stood out as interesting or illuminating from the conversations (and drawings) I had with young people and SME managers. I have approached this thesis at times outside some of the constraints of academic writing in the work and occupational psychology discipline, (where neat and generalizable truths are the preferred norm), to a more subjective and interpretive style, perhaps more personal in nature. At times some PhD colleagues and academics have made me doubt my right to include my voice in academic writing in this way, illustrating how dominant Discourses of what constitutes a PhD thesis are reproduced and resisted in the arena of doctoral education. Yet in the spirit of being open and transparent as a qualitative researcher committed to ethical reflection, I have attempted to maintain my approach, in the process aiming to ‘humanify’ my writing, as well as my approach.

Through injecting these personal and emotional elements (my voice) throughout this thesis, I hope that some of my writing will resonate with others interested in exploring the human complexities of the time prior to making the move from compulsory education to work for the first time. I saw myself in both groups of participants in my study. In the young people, uncertain about future choices and pressured to go to university from working class communities and also in the SME manager dismissive about young people’s unrealistic expectations from their first job. This contested STWT space represents my own lived experience, as well as that of participants therefore.

Throughout this thesis I have attempted to bring the human element of research to the forefront; acknowledging how I have actively shaped this research through who I am, what I am interested in and my core values. This ‘humanifying’ (Cunliffe, 2018b) has been a freeing process for me, rejecting the straightjacket of academic writing where possible and yet reflecting myself when I slip back into these old ways of attempting to present an objective truth (e.g., through using scientific language), to make my research more ‘serious’. Adopting a critical discursive psychological approach to this project has led me to engage in deeper levels of reflexive practice; questioning what I may have previously viewed as taken for granted assumptions and also more keenly seeing how we are all responsible for constructing our (and others’) worlds and experiences. This leads me to a final written thought (recognising that thoughts will continue to whirl on, long after this thesis is submitted), that there are various voices actively shaping the meaning of a liminal and contested space such as the STWT. As researchers we need to listen carefully to these voices, critically examine their truth claims and recognise

dominant Discourses of influence as well as the actions that these voices are attempting to achieve through what and how they 'say' it. In this way we can hope to see beyond the neat and tidy presentation of the STWT as a linear, one-off unidirectional movement from school to work for a homogenised young person into an amorphous organisation, and more as a negotiated dance (back and forth at times), between young people and a myriad of others (family, teachers, friends, careers advisors and employers).

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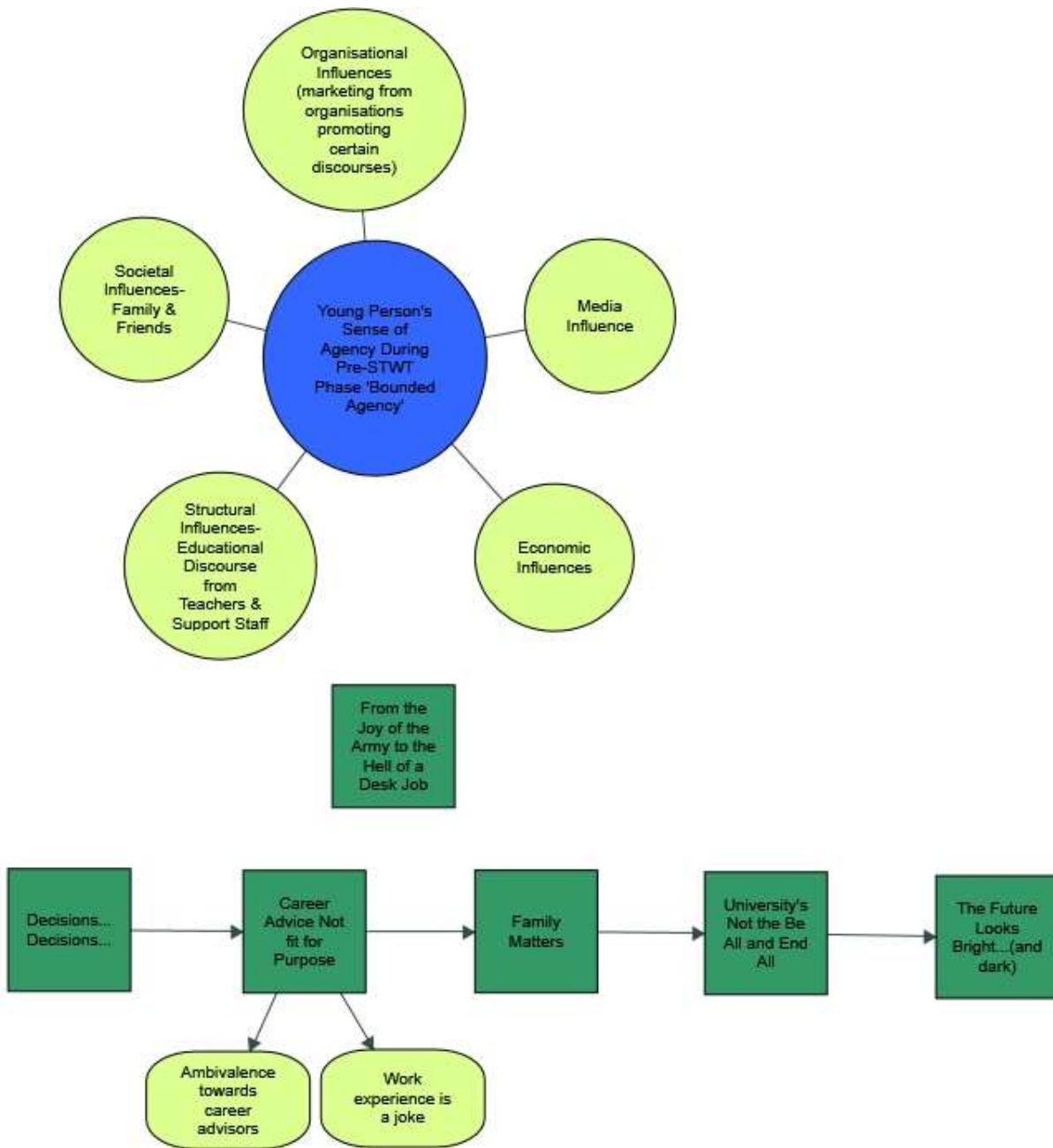
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13. Appendices

Appendix A. Concept Maps/Mini Conceptual Frameworks and Ideas



This mini framework of young people's bounded agency, is an example of how I use mapping diagrams, to clarify the ideas I am developing from the data.

Appendix B. Participant Pack (Young People)

Participant Information Sheet (School/College Students) 17.1.2018

Research Project Title: Young People's Pre-Transition Education to Employment Experiences in the UK: Demand and Supply Side Perspectives

You are being invited to participate in this PhD research project. Before you decide to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask the Researcher (Emma Parry) or their Supervisor (Dr Angela Carter) if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information (contact information below).

This research is part of Emma's PhD project and aims to better understand the transitions of young people (aged 17-24 years) to work, from two perspectives: students (in FE) and employers.

Why have I been approached?

You have been chosen because Emma is interested in talking to you to get your perspective as a student in your final year of study before planning the move into employment.

Do I have to take part?

If you decide to take part in the project you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form) and you can still withdraw at any time without it having any impact on you. You do not have to give a reason.

What will my involvement be?

You will be invited to take part in one interview/discussion with the Researcher, Emma Parry. Interviews will last approximately 60 minutes and you will be asked about your feelings and experiences before you make the move from education to employment. Emma will also ask you to draw pictures of your future hopes and fears as you prepare to enter employment.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

Apart from taking some of your time, there should be no disadvantages or risk to taking part in this research. As a student, talking about your feelings about future employment may bring up some uncomfortable feelings for you. If this should happen, Emma can refer you to professionals within the College or community who can support you through this. Please remember you can stop the interview at any time and withdraw from the project or refuse to answer any questions you are not happy with. Emma will deal with your feelings sensitively and is an experienced interviewer who will try her best to put you at ease throughout.

What are the possible benefits of getting involved?

Hopefully this work will contribute towards informing policy and practice of employers and educational organisations to better support students before they make the move into work and encouraging organisations to consider more youth-friendly practices. The interview will also be an opportunity for you to reflect on your personal and/or future career development.

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All the information that we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be identified in any reports or publications.

Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?

With your permission, the interview will be recorded. If you do not want to be recorded Emma will ask your permission to take notes instead. The audio recordings of your interview will be transcribed and used only for analysis and for illustration in conference presentations and lectures. You will not be identifiable. No other use will be made of your recordings without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings. Recordings will be stored on devices which are password protected, with passwords only known to the researcher. Recordings will be destroyed once Emma has finalised her PhD.

What if something goes wrong?

Any complaints about your treatment will be dealt with sensitively and thoroughly. In the first instance, any complaint about your involvement in this research should be sent to the Management School's Research Manager (see contact details at the end of this sheet).

What will happen to the results of the research project?

The results will be written up for Emma's PhD thesis. Emma will also develop practical guides on supporting young people's transitions from education to employment, for organisations and individuals from the results. If you would like to receive these guides/summary report of the research, please make sure you let Emma know you are interested. Emma is also happy to meet with you again on an individual basis following her analysis to discuss the themes/topics she summarised from your interview.

Who is organising and funding the research?

This research is being organised as part of Emma's PhD research project and is not being funded by any external body.

Who has ethically reviewed the research project?

This project has been ethically approved via Sheffield University Management School's ethics review procedure. The University's Research Ethics Committee monitors the application and delivery of the University's Ethics Review Procedure across the University.

Contact for further information

Researcher: Emma Parry. E.parry@sheffield.ac.uk. 07981017387

Supervisor: Dr Angela Carter. A.carter@sheffield.ac.uk. 0114 222 3250

Research Manager (to contact in case of any complaints about this research): 0114 2223215

You will be given a copy of this information sheet and a signed consent form to keep.

Thank you for your interest in this project.

The following paragraph was added into all participant information sheets and consent forms in line with new GDPR requirements that came into force during my period of undertaking interviews. This paragraph was sent to the university Ethics committee and improved for inclusion:

Additional Information Related to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

New data protection legislation came into effect across the EU, including the UK on 25 May 2018; this means that we need to provide you with some further information relating to how your personal information will be used and managed within this research project.

The University of Sheffield will act as the Data Controller for this study. This means that the University is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly.

In order to collect and use your personal information as part of this research project, we must have a basis in law to do so. The basis that we are using is that the research is 'a task in the public interest'.

Participant Consent Form

Title of Research Project: Young People’s Pre-Transition Education to Employment Experiences in the UK:
Demand and Supply Side Perspectives

Name of Researcher: **Emma Parry, Sheffield University Management School**

Participant Identification Number for this project:

Please put your initials in each box by each of the 5 statements to give consent.

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 17.1.18 explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.	
I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential. I give permission for members of the research team (Emma Parry & Supervisors Dr A Carter, Dr M Patterson, Prof R Finn) to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.	
I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research.	
I agree to my interview being recorded (audio).	
I agree to take part in the above research project.	

Name of Participant Date Signature
(or legal representative)

Emma Parry: Researcher Date Signature
To be signed and dated in presence of the participant

Copies:
Once this has been signed by all parties the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form, the information sheet and any other written information provided to the participants. A copy of the signed and dated consent form will be placed in the project’s main record which is kept in a secure location.

Researcher: Emma Parry e.parry@sheffield.ac.uk or 07981017387
Supervisors: Dr Angela Carter and Dr Malcolm Patterson: 0114 2223232
Research Manager (to contact in case of any complaints): 0114 2223215

Parental Consent Form

Parents or guardians of children under 18 years of age must complete and sign this form before your child can take part in this research project.

Title of Research Project: **Young People’s Education to Employment Transition Experiences in the UK**

Name of Researcher: **Emma Parry, Sheffield University Management School**

Participant Identification Number for this project:

Please put your initials in each box by each of the 5 statements to give consent.

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 17.1.18 explaining the above research project and both I and my child have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project	
I understand that participation is voluntary and that my child is free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should my child not wish to answer any particular question or questions, they are free to decline.	
I understand that my child’s responses will be kept strictly confidential. I give permission for members of the research team (Emma Parry & Supervisors Dr A Carter, Dr M Patterson, Prof R Finn) to have access to anonymised responses. I understand that their name will not be linked with the research materials, and my child will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.	
I agree for the data collected from my child to be used in future research.	
I agree to the interview with my child being recorded (audio).	
I give my permission for my child to take part in the above research project.	

Name of Parent/Guardian Date Signature

Emma Parry: Researcher Date Signature

Copies:

Once this has been signed by all parties the parent/guardian will receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form, the information sheet and any other written information provided to the participants. A copy of the signed and dated consent form will be placed in the project’s main record which is kept in a secure location.

Researcher: Emma Parry e.parry@sheffield.ac.uk or 07981 017387

Supervisors: Dr Angela Carter and Dr Malcolm Patterson: 0114 2223232

Research Manager (to contact in case of any complaints): 0114 2223215

Information Sheet for Students Following Interview

Hopefully you enjoyed taking part in the interview with Emma. If however the interview has brought up feelings that you are struggling with, here are some places you can go for support:

Information about making an appointment with your GP.

<http://www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/AboutNHSservices/doctors/Pages/NHSGPs.aspx>

Counselling and Student Support Services

Here is a useful NHS information sheet on recognising mental health problems aimed at students :

<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/studenthealth/Pages/Mentalhealth.aspx>

Finally...

- If you have any questions following taking part in the interview about Emma's research, please get in touch.
- If you would like Emma to meet with you again to discuss the themes/topics she summarised from your interview, please let Emma know and she will get back in touch with you in the future.

Project Final Dissemination/Celebration Event

Emma would like to invite all participants to a small event at the end of her project (Autumn 2019) to share the findings from her project with a wider group of organisations and individuals who are interested in young people's transitions from education to employment. If you would like to be on the mailing list for this event, please let Emma know by sending her an email. At the event Emma will be happy to give participants the chance to talk about their experiences (either of being involved in the current research project or of being a young person from FE about to make the move from education to work). If this is something you would like to take part in, Emma would love to hear from you!

Thanks again for your time and participation.

Emma Parry. E.parry@sheffield.ac.uk

07981 017387

Amazon Gift Voucher – Receipt for Finance Department

Name:

Address:

Email Address:

I confirm receipt of £10 Amazon Gift Voucher as a prize organised by Sheffield University Management School.

Appendix C. Participant Pack (Employers)

Participant Information Sheet (Employers) 25.1.2018

Research Project Title: Young People's Pre-Transition Education to Employment Experiences in the UK: Demand and Supply Side Perspectives

You are being invited to participate in this PhD research project. Before you decide to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask the Researcher (Emma Parry) or their Supervisor (Dr Angela Carter) if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information (contact information below). This research is part of Emma's PhD project and aims to better understand the transitions of young people (aged 17-24 years) to work, from two perspectives: students (in FE) and employers.

Why have I been approached?

You have been chosen because you currently belong to one of the groups Emma is interested in talking to, to get your perspectives on young people's transitions from education to employment.

Do I have to take part?

If you decide to take part in the project you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form) and you can still withdraw at any time without it having any impact on you. You do not have to give a reason. Even if you decide to take part in the interview you can decline to answer certain questions with no consequences.

What will my involvement be?

You will be invited to take part in one interview/discussion with the Researcher, Emma Parry. Interviews will last approximately 60 minutes and you will be asked about your perspectives and experiences of young people moving into employment directly from education. Emma will also ask you to provide information on the number of people in different age brackets in your organisation. You will also get the chance to do some drawing!

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

Apart from taking some of your time, there should be no disadvantages or risk to taking part in this research. Taking part in any interview process can sometimes result in difficult feelings or emotions coming up. Should this arise Emma will deal with your feelings sensitively and is an experienced interviewer who will try her best to put you at ease throughout.

What are the possible benefits of getting involved?

Hopefully this work will contribute towards informing policy and practice to better support young people before they make the move into work from education and encouraging organisations to consider or reflect on their youth-friendly practices.

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All the information that we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be identified (either individually or as a particular organisation) in any reports or publications.

Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?

With your permission, the interview will be recorded. If you do not want to be recorded Emma will ask your permission to take notes instead. The audio recordings of your interview will be transcribed and used only for analysis and for illustration in conference presentations and lectures. You will not be identifiable. No other use

will be made of your recordings without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings. Recordings will be stored on devices which are password protected, with passwords only known to the researcher. Recordings will be destroyed once Emma has finalised her PhD.

What if something goes wrong?

Any complaints about your treatment will be dealt with sensitively and thoroughly. In the first instance, any complaint about your involvement in this research should be sent to the Management School's Research Manager (see contact details at the end of this sheet).

What will happen to the results of the research project?

The results will be written up for Emma's PhD thesis. Emma will also develop practical guides on supporting young people's transitions from education to employment, for organisations and individuals from the results. If you would like to receive these guides/summary report of the research, please make sure you let Emma know you are interested. Emma is also happy to meet with you again on an individual basis following her analysis to discuss the themes/topics she summarised from your interview.

Who is organising and funding the research?

This research is being organised as part of Emma's PhD research project and is not being funded by any external body.

Who has ethically reviewed the research project?

This project has been ethically approved via Sheffield University Management School's ethics review procedure. The University's Research Ethics Committee monitors the application and delivery of the University's Ethics Review Procedure across the University.

Participant Consent Form

Title of Research Project: Young People’s Pre-Transition Education to Employment Experiences in the UK:
Demand and Supply Side Perspectives

Name of Researcher: Emma Parry, Sheffield University Management School

Participant Identification Number for this project:

Please put your initials in each box by each of the 5 statements to give consent.

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 17.1.18 explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.	
I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential. I give permission for members of the research team (Emma Parry & Supervisors Dr A Carter, Dr M Patterson, Prof R Finn) to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.	
I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research	
I agree to my interview being recorded (audio).	
I agree to take part in the above research project.	

Name of Participant Date Signature
(or legal representative)

Emma Parry: Researcher Date Signature
To be signed and dated in presence of the participant

Copies:
Once this has been signed by all parties the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form, the information sheet and any other written information provided to the participants. A copy of the signed and dated consent form will be placed in the project’s main record which is kept in a secure location.

Researcher: Emma Parry e.parry@sheffield.ac.uk or 07981017387
Supervisors: Dr Angela Carter and Dr Malcolm Patterson: 0114 2223232
Research Manager (to contact in case of any complaints): 0114 2223215

Information Sheet Following Interview

Hopefully you enjoyed taking part in the interview with Emma. If however the interview has brought up feelings that you are struggling with, here are some places you can go for support:

Information about making an appointment with your GP.

<http://www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/AboutNHSServices/doctors/Pages/NHSGPs.aspx>

<https://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/> has useful information on recognising mental health problems at work and how to take care of yourself and your staff's mental health at work.

If you have any questions following taking part in the interview about Emma's research, please get in touch.

If you would like Emma to meet with you again to discuss the themes/topics she summarised from your interview, please let Emma know and she will get back in touch with you in the future.

Project Final Dissemination/Celebration Event

Emma would like to invite all participants to a small event at the end of her project to share the findings from her project with a wider group of organisations and individuals who are interested in young people's transitions from education to employment. If you would like to be on the mailing list for this event, please let Emma know by sending her an email. At the event Emma will be happy to give participants the chance to talk about their experiences (either of being involved in the current research project or of being an organisation with experiences to share on recruiting and developing young people at work).

If this is something you would like to take part in, Emma would love to hear from you!

Thanks again for your time and participation.

Emma Parry. E.parry@sheffield.ac.uk

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Appendix D. Reflexive Diary Extracts

24/09/2018, 11:51

Started off today by putting all the interview transcript files into Nvivo as files and have allocated them also as cases - under a folder called 'people'. I don't understand how to make the associated transcription file appear under the cases folder - and if I need to make this happen for analysis purposes? Will try and find this out but unfortunately my internet is down today and whilst this has been useful to stop procrastinating and start the analysis process, it means I can't look up things about Nvivo using online help as I go along! I wish there was someone in my department who was an Nvivo whizz who would just sit with me for an hour to give me top tips on this sort of 'getting started' stuff as I have attended the uni courses but didn't find them that helpful.

I had a go at running a few queries on the data to get me started and enjoyed seeing the results of the word frequency queries. I ran a word frequency query on the young people's transcripts and separately on the orgs transcripts (the word clouds are saved in research project/analysis/overall visualisations of data. It was fun to see the most commonly used words - but must remember that my words as interviewer are also currently included in this as I haven't separated them out as Interviewer/Participant lines yet - do I need to do this - not sure?

As ever when learning/re-learning new software, there are more questions than answers but I already feel that it is useful to have my interview data in Nvivo so that it is all collated in one place. Need to add the drawings next!

03/10/2018 11:29

Aiming to start looking at one of my organisational participants today. I need to decide what I am actually going to call the people I spoke to for my research (informants, participants, respondents, interviewees?) So many choices that all seem to have certain values going along with them. I feel most comfortable with 'participants' as I feel that it was something they 'took part in' actively, and it was co-constructed between us both as my questions and reflections helped them build on their drawings and talk about these in the interview. I need to find an academic paper where the same argument/perspective is used!

13/12/2018 14:16

I have had a big change of coding practice. It just wasn't coming together for me to be able to see across cases how the codes were being repeated/echoed by other participants etc. so I decided to go back to the traditional method of highlighting the paper transcripts and coding on the page and then putting those codes on index cards. As soon as I started doing this process I felt I was getting to know the data and the issues and discourses developing out the data as a result. Using the index cards also helped me to funnel down the themes into succinct and hopefully separate concepts. Today I have inputted these themes as codes and sub-nodes into Nvivo as YP Nodes_V2 and have just printed out a codebook so that I can see how this feels reading it. I feel that going through on paper has forced me to be a bit more concise- you can't highlight everything! Whereas on the computer coding, I feel this is exactly what I was doing - coding everything. Perhaps this was useful for a

first sweep but this second sweep of going back to the individual young people cases has definitely been useful and felt more fruitful and coherent. I just hope my supervisors agree next Weds when we have a meeting!

15/02/2019 11:02

Haven't entered my thoughts in here for a while as I have been using paper and pen again - can't seem to keep all my thoughts etc. for this thesis in one place! I have made a new coding folder to keep quotes that I am using in my findings chapters as a code. I thought this could be useful for viva prep and also might include in Appendices. I could for example include all quotes used in the findings chapters together to give readers an easy way of seeing all quotes together e.g., seeing all hoped-for possible selves quotes together (without any interpretation). However, this means I will need to make sure this coding is kept up to date and if I delete any quotes from my chapters I will need to delete them from my coding also!! Another thing to try and keep on top of as part of the editing process! Currently working on producing my second young people's findings chapter - linked to who supports young people and how they support them through decision-making pre-transition.

Appendix E. Information Power in the Study

	Managers	Young People
Number of semi-structured interviews carried out	7	13
Average length of interview	1 hour	1 hour
Location of interviews	1 Skype 1 Community Centre 1 Café 1 Manager's Home 3 Manager's office	Sixth form (small private room within school premises) FE College (in cafeteria)
Number of interviews transcribed verbatim by the researcher	7	12 (1 remained as detailed notes due to me forgetting to turn the audio recorder on)
Drawings produced during interviews	7 drawings (1 per manager) of Young Person Starting Work - 1 manager produced their drawing prior to the interview on skype and emailed it to me for discussion	39 (3 drawings per person): -Future Hoped-for Possible (Occupational) Self -Future Feared-For Possible (Occupational) Self -Support Network Map
Researcher Reflections/Field Notes	Written down prior to and following each interview encounter	Written down prior to and following each interview encounter
Photographs of Places of Work/Study	Photographs taken of some of the workplaces (with permission of manager being interviewed)	-Photographs taken of FE college public spaces (without explicit permission of the College) -No photographs taken on school premises

Appendix F. Field Notes

Participant 08 2/7/18

> She hadn't replied to any of my emails so wasn't sure she was going to turn up but I asked the school contact if they knew where participant was/ had she rec'd the message about meeting me and they just went & got her out of class! Before they went I said 'it doesn't matter if she doesn't want to take part anymore but I'm here if she does'. She came along & said she wanted to take part but hadn't got her parental consent signed so I got her to do consent form & the ask parents to sign it & bring into school later this week.

> Sometimes I really felt she didn't understand what I was getting at & I was worried didn't want her to feel like she was getting it 'wrong' so I probably engaged in more explaining/ discussion than usual. She had lots to say about uni being the wrong way - interesting how this narrative is coming out more now - how do uni students feel I wonder? Do we all just justify our own decisions as the most sensible options no matter what for our self outcome?

Appendix G. Ethics Documentation



Downloaded: 29/01/2018
Approved: 25/01/2018

Emma Parry
Registration number: 150119351
Management School
Programme: PhD

Dear Emma

PROJECT TITLE: Young People's Pre-Transition Education to Employment Experiences in the UK: Demand and Supply Side Perspectives
APPLICATION: Reference Number 016366

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 25/01/2018 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

- University research ethics application form 016366 (dated 19/01/2018).
- Participant information sheet 1035493 version 4 (17/01/2018).
- Participant information sheet 1035492 version 4 (17/01/2018).
- Participant consent form 1035494 version 3 (17/01/2018).

If during the course of the project you need to [deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation](#) please inform me since written approval will be required.

Yours sincerely

Lucy Bartrick
Ethics Administrator
Management School

Email permission from Robert to include photographs from his SME premises:

Hope you and the family are well and enjoying the school holidays! Our two are off to Grandma's in Wales for next week and are really looking forward to a beach week.

I am writing up my PhD thesis at the moment - it's a long project doing a PhD and seems to be taking forever, but I am hoping to finish by September. I just wanted to send you an email to double check that I have your permission to include the photographs I took when I came to interview you at your office a while ago.

The photos I took were just of some of the things around the office that symbolise a young organisational culture and I would like to include them in my thesis with your permission and talk and reflect on their meanings as symbols within organisational cultures. I am attaching the photos here so that you can see there are no people from your company in them. I will not be using your name or your company's name in the thesis, everything will be anonymised.

I would like your permission to:

- include some of the photographs in my thesis
- include some of the photographs in presentations about my research
- include some of the photographs in future papers in journals about my research


Please could you get back to me by email to let me know if you give your consent for me to include the photographs in my writing/presentations about my research?

Many thanks in advance
Emma

Emma Parry
Chartered Occupational Psychologist
Doctoral Researcher

Institute of Work Psychology,
Sheffield University Management School,
Conduit Road, Sheffield S10 1FL

e.parry@sheffield.ac.uk
https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/management/doctoral_researchers/emma_parry
www.linkedin.com/in/emma-parry-sheffield

 **photos for thesis.zip**
7873K

To: Emma M Parry <e.parry@sheffield.ac.uk>

5 April 21

Hi Emma,

great to hear from you and glad all is well. Yes, absolutely no problem at all - feel free to use them as you need. :-)

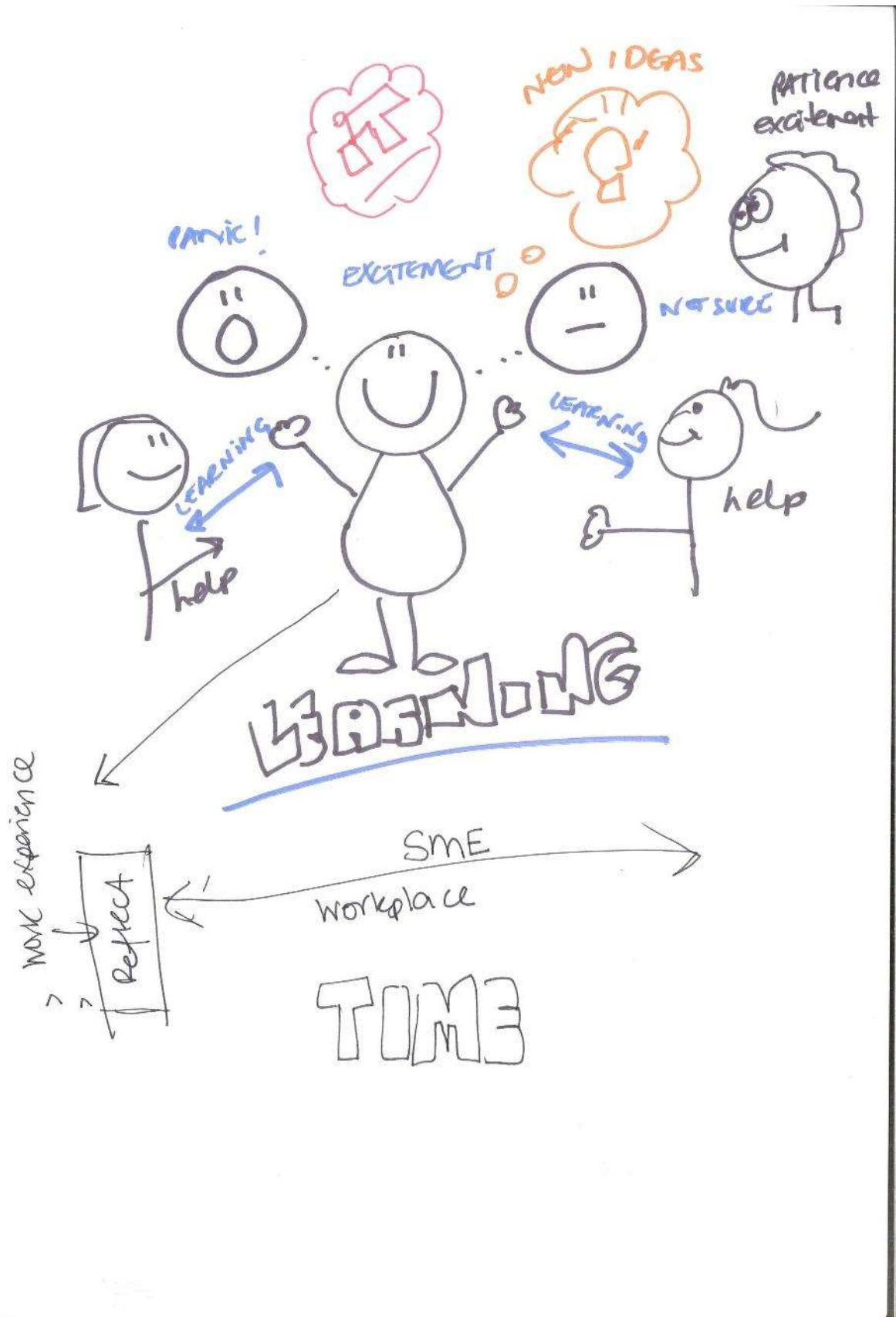
We're all well thanks, off to Wales next week too by coincidence. Looking forward to a week off work!

Hope to see you soon, say hi to Dave and the kids and good luck with the PhD.

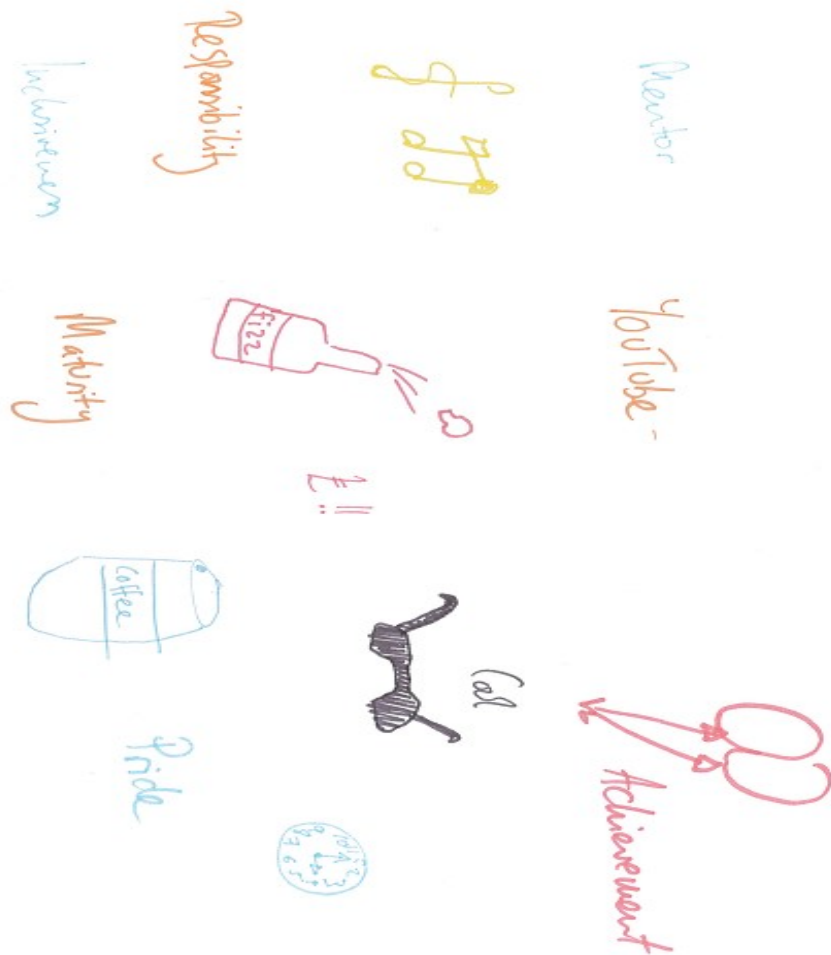
Julia

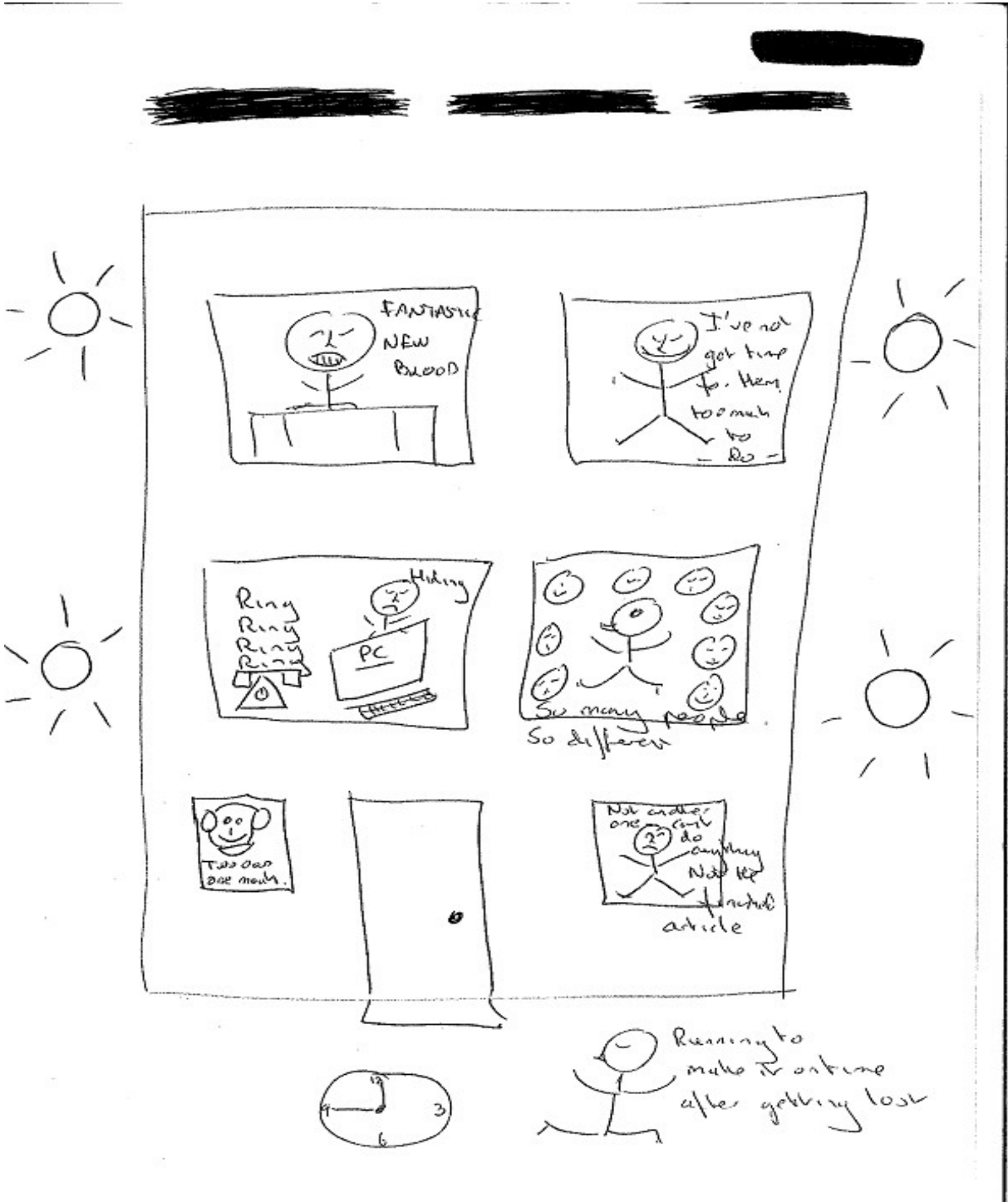


Karen

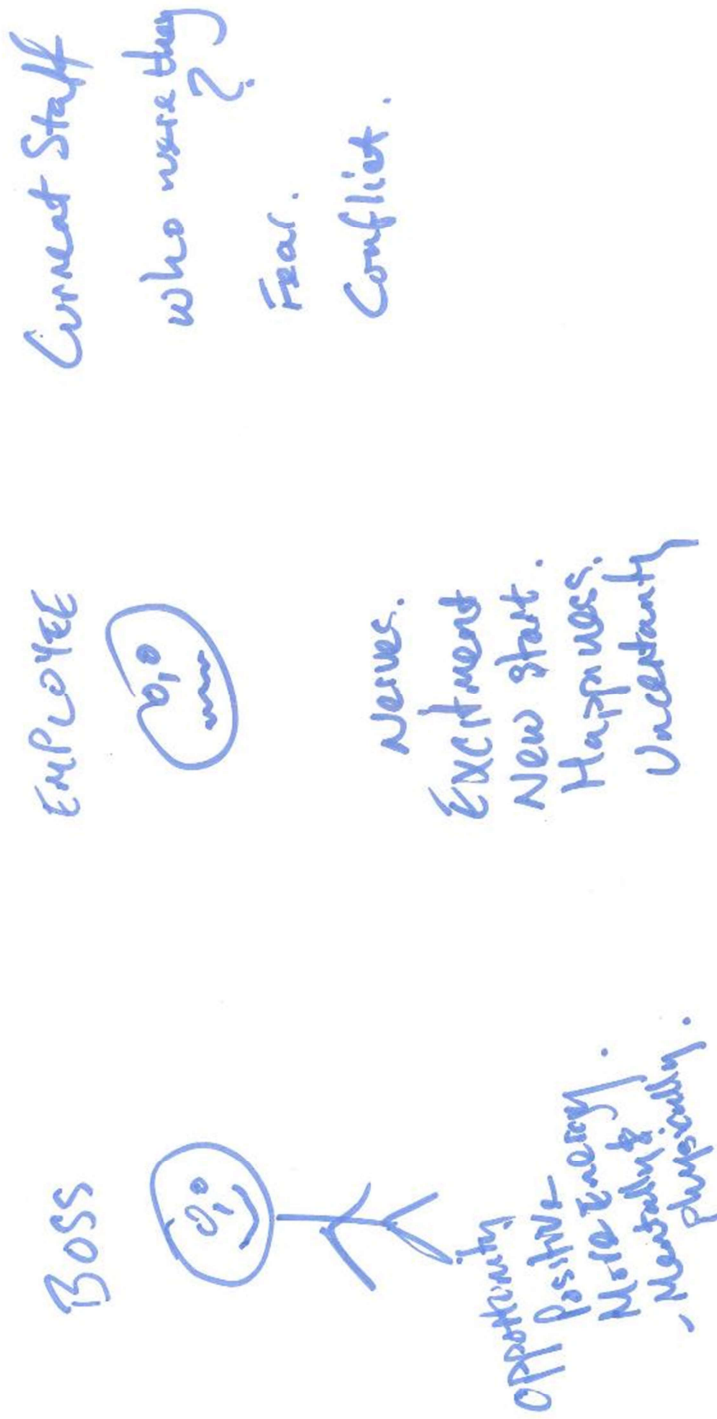


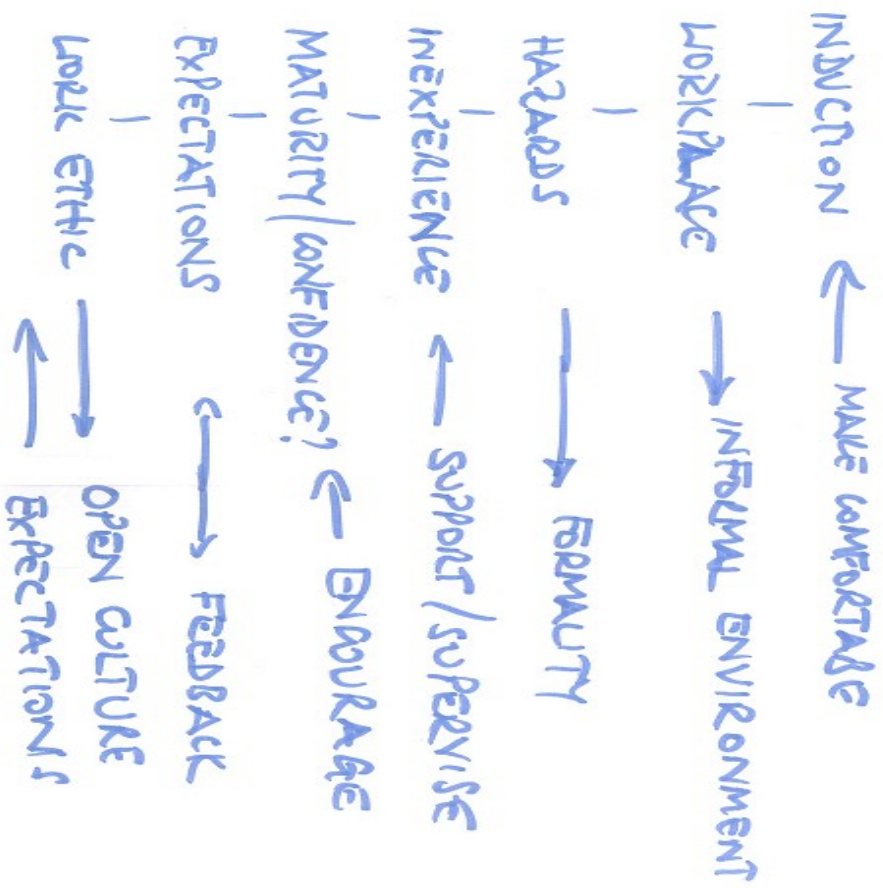
Robert





long term - Nurturing their skillsets.
Job satisfaction.
Happiness & well being.







Appendix I. Questions/Topics for Discussion with Managers

Questions for Managers

Information for vignette

participant no:

Age:

Gender:

Size of organisation:

Number of YP in organisation currently (% of workforce):

sector/type:

Tenure:

DRAWING OF YOUNG PERSON ENTERING WORK FOR FIRST TIME

I'd firstly like you to think back and remember a time when you have taken on a young person to work in your organisation directly from education (FE, school or uni) and remember what it was like for you and your colleagues. Have a think as well about what it might have been like from the young person's perspective on their first day/first few weeks at work.

I would like you to draw a picture that shows me what that was like for everyone involved: (someone between 17 and 24 years old) who was coming to work for you as their first job since leaving education. Try and make the picture as detailed as possible, thinking about how everyone was feeling at the time, what people were doing. You can add words/phrases if you like. Help yourself to any colours.

(If you've never recruited a young person directly from education, please could you draw me a picture of what you imagine this would be like if you did take someone on? How would they feel/what would they be doing in their first few weeks/how would you/your colleagues feel?)

How does it make you feel when you look at the picture you've just drawn? Were you thinking about a specific experience or more generally?
--

How do you feel about young people coming to work from you directly from FE or school? What experiences have you had of young people working for you? (positive and negative; any differences between your experiences generally between young men and women?)

If you don't have experience of this, would you like to be able to encourage more young people into your workforce/organisation?

What do you think about young people making the move from education to work these days? (level of preparation of young people, expectations, aspirations etc)

What recruitment methods do you use to actively attract young people into your organisation?
Do you have a specific recruitment strategy aimed at young people?

If you don't currently try and attract young people are you still managing to get young people applying?

What development methods do you use for the development of young people in your organisation?

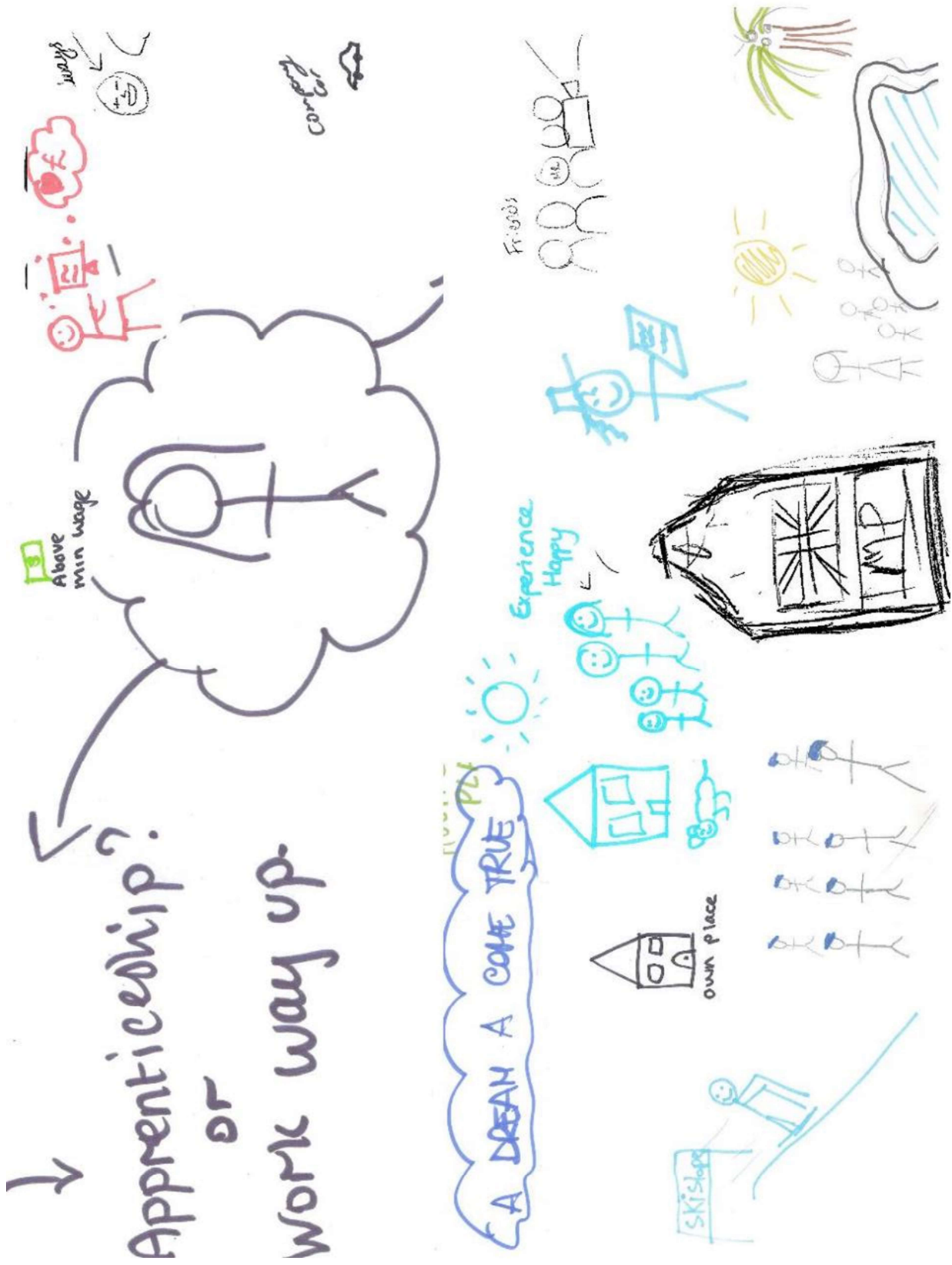
How do you feel about young people in your organisation? What do they bring to an organisation?

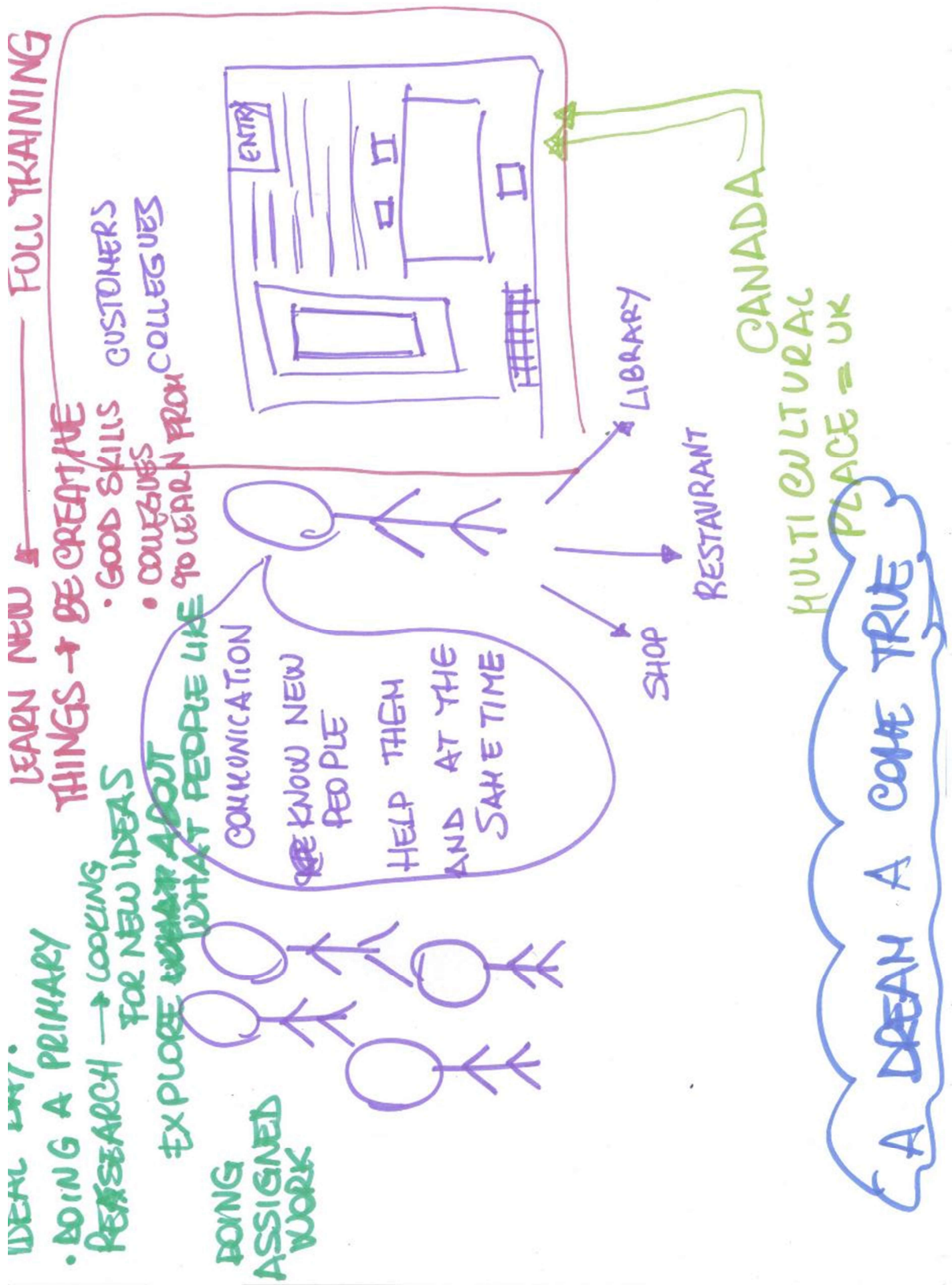
Do you think there's anything you could do better in your organisation to make yourself more 'youth-friendly'?

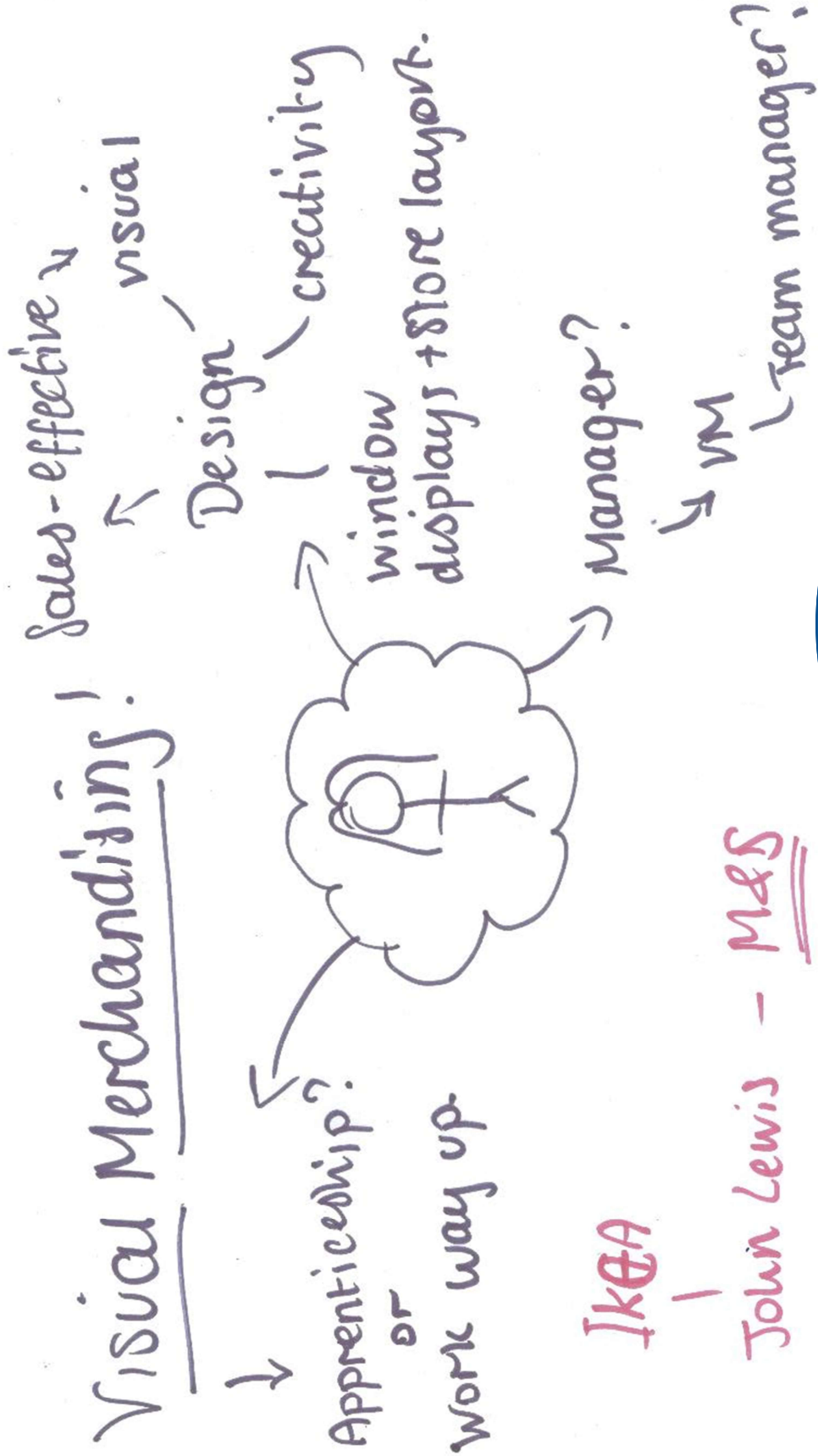
What would you say to an organisation that doesn't have many young people in their organisation?

What 3 words would you use to describe your experiences with Young People at work?

Thank you; confidentiality/anonymity; follow-up & final event reminder

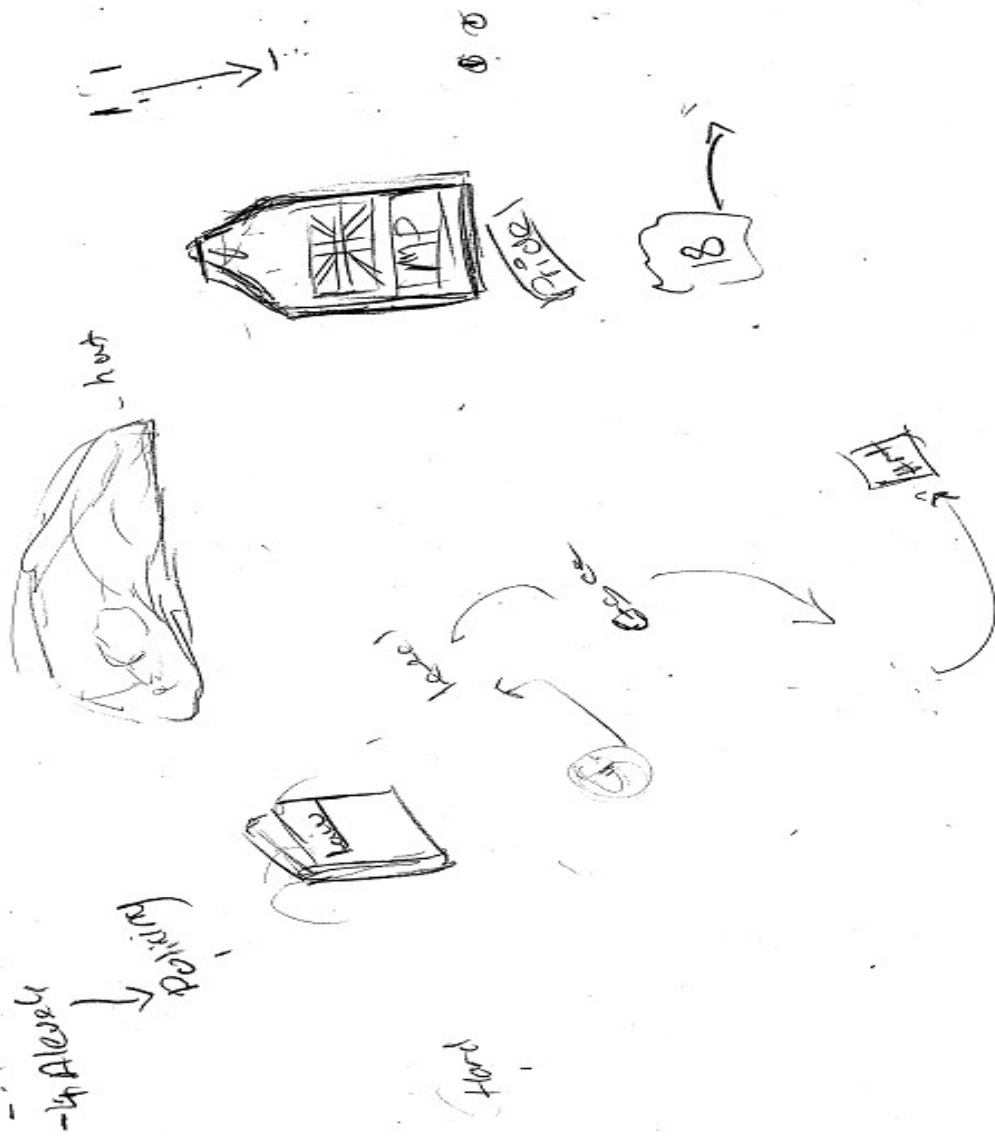






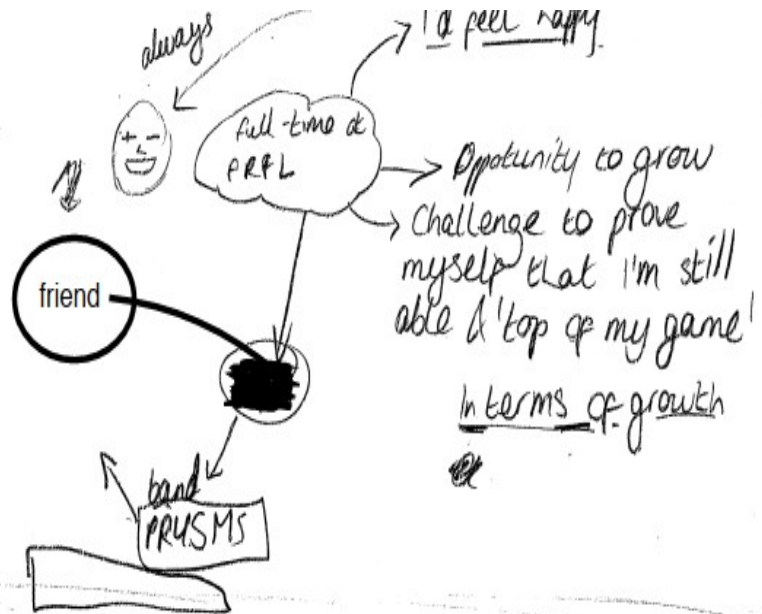
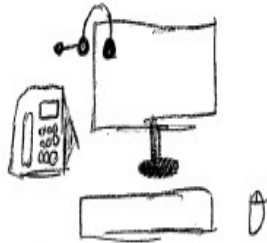
Work
experi
ence
shop
name

Olive - HOPS



1. Work

3 full sales team

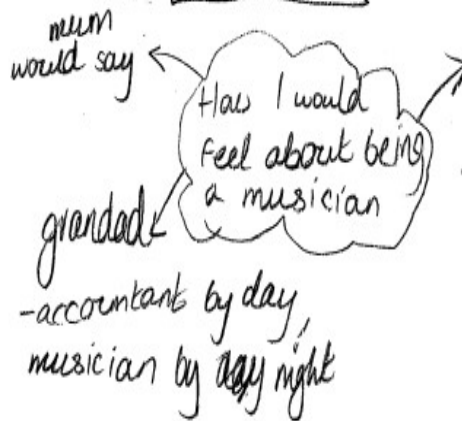


In terms of growth

2. Music



↑ since 13
↓
done it over since



~~EDUCATION~~
EDUCATION

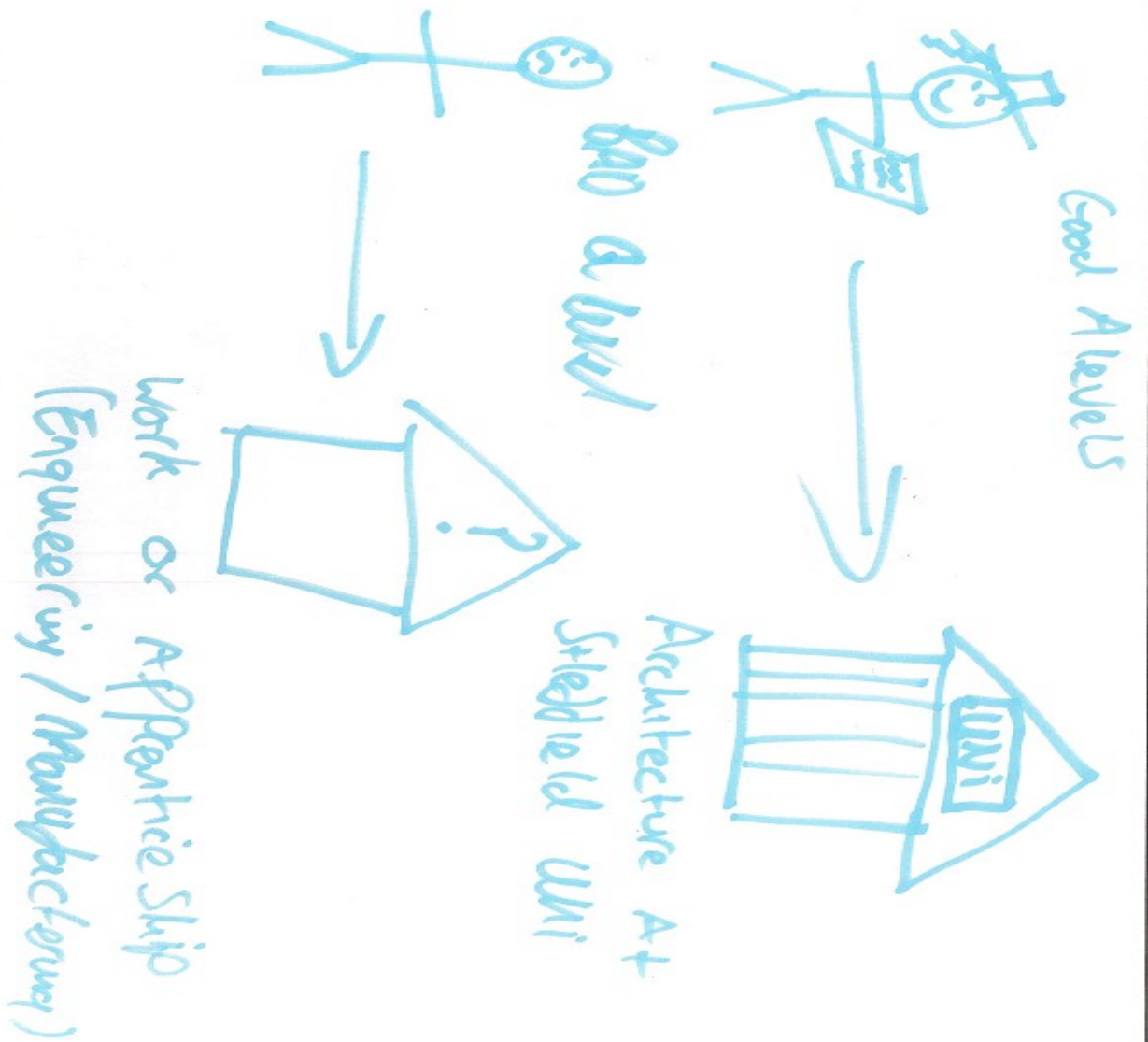
when doing music course

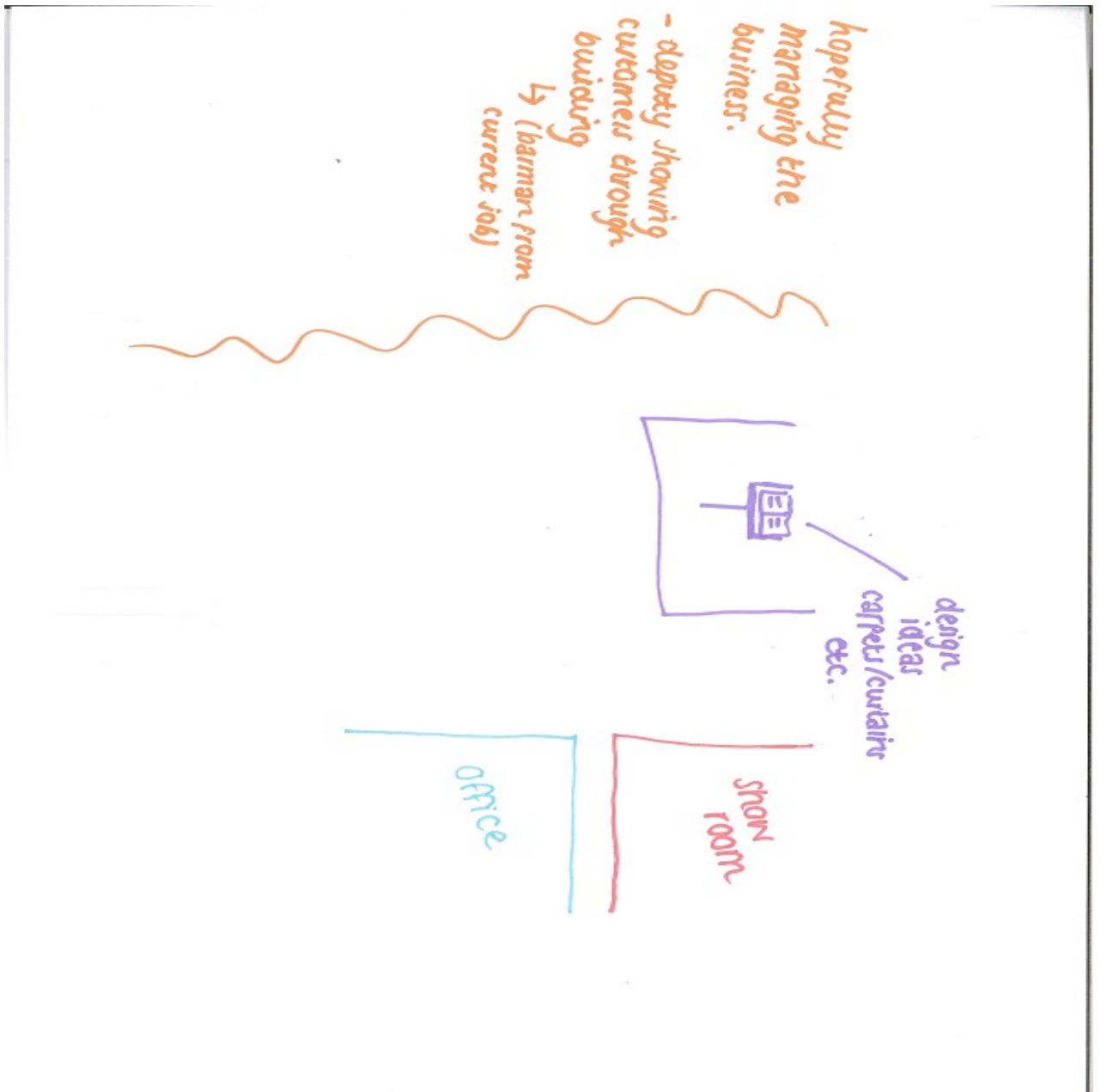
- 3/4 EP's by the time I finish
- Work on songwriting

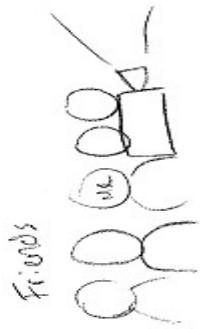
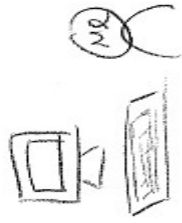


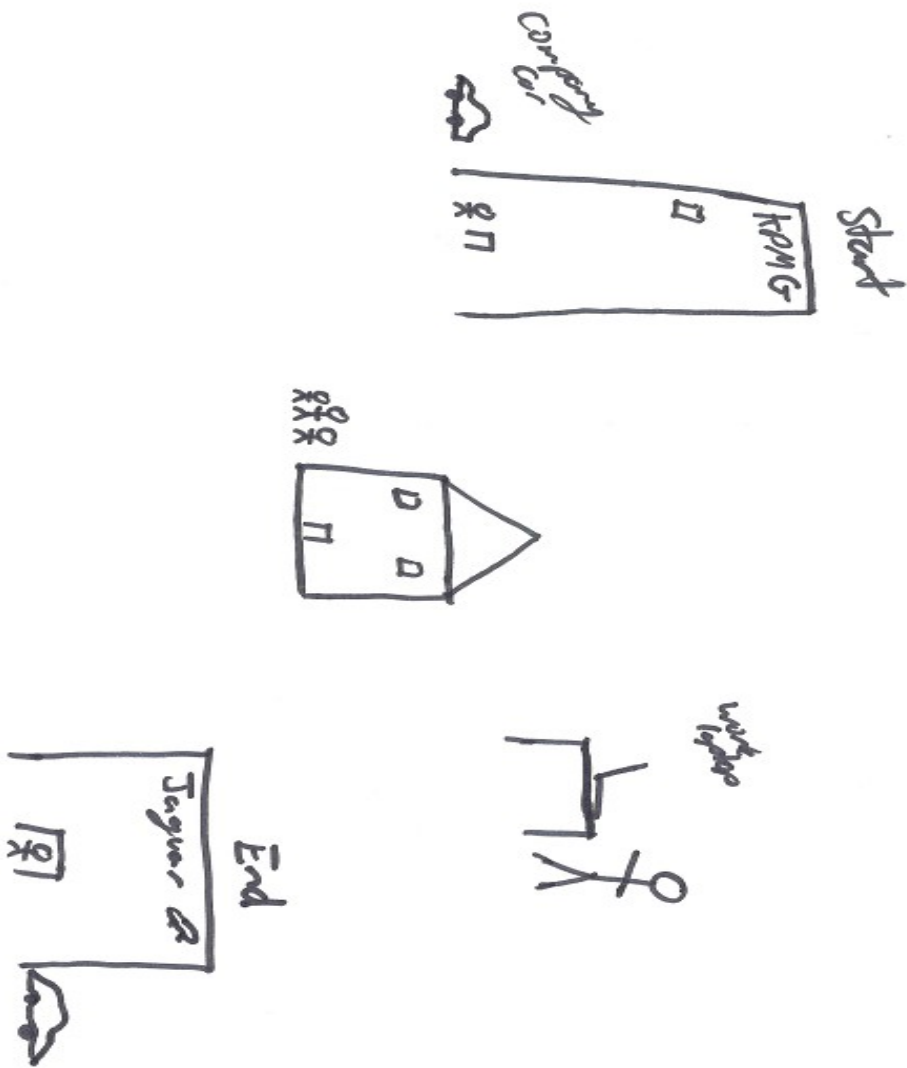
Mike- HOPS

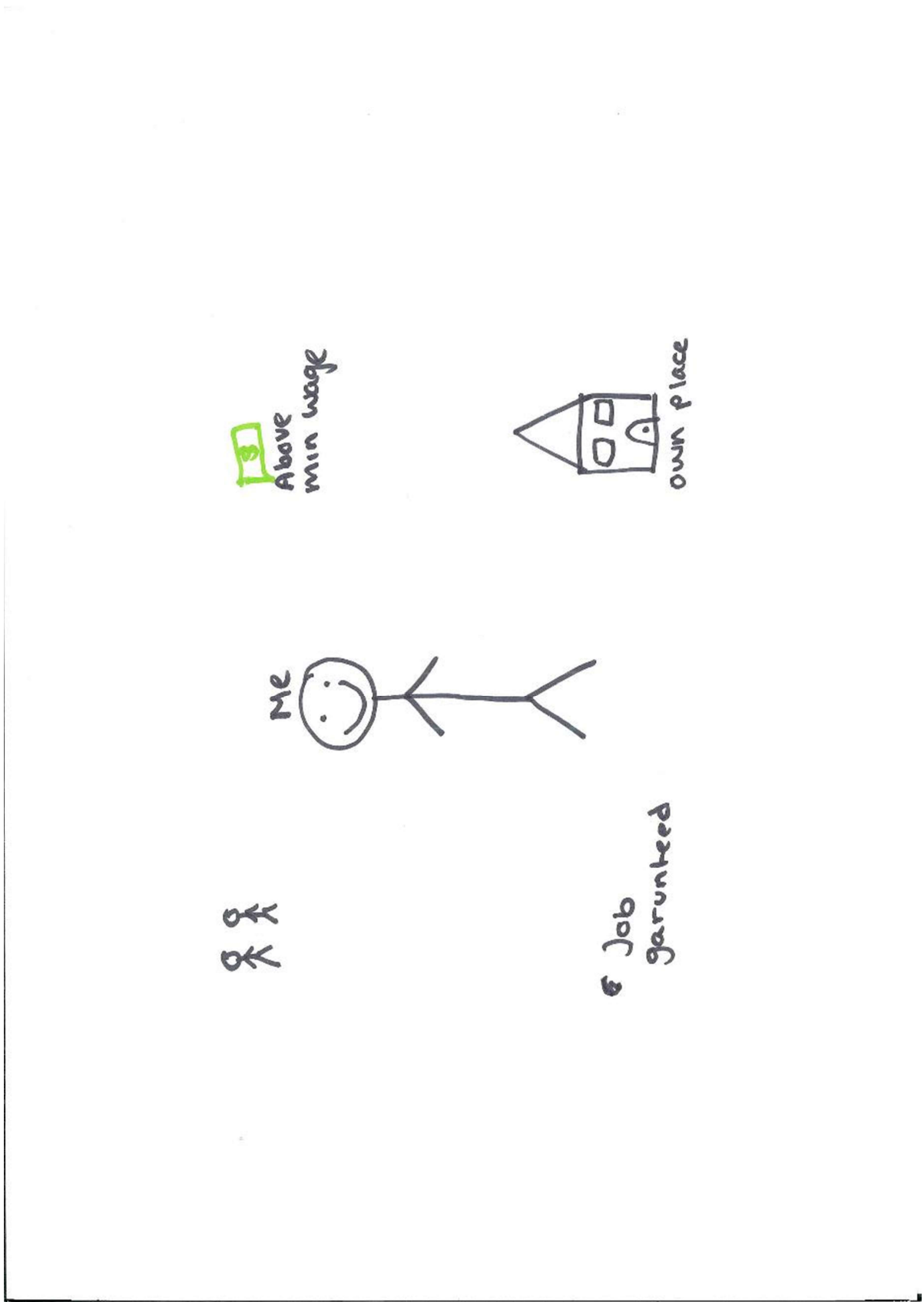




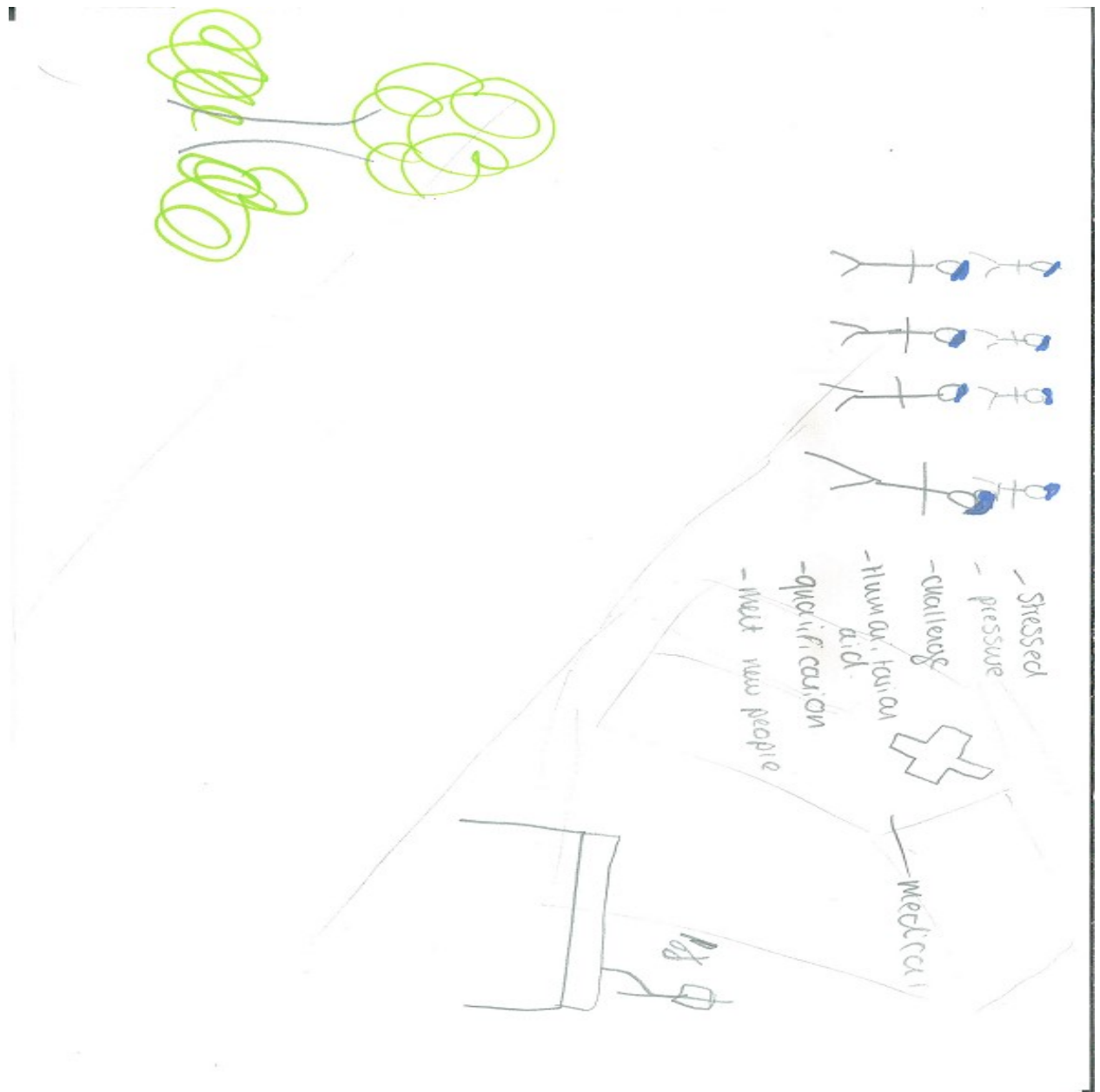


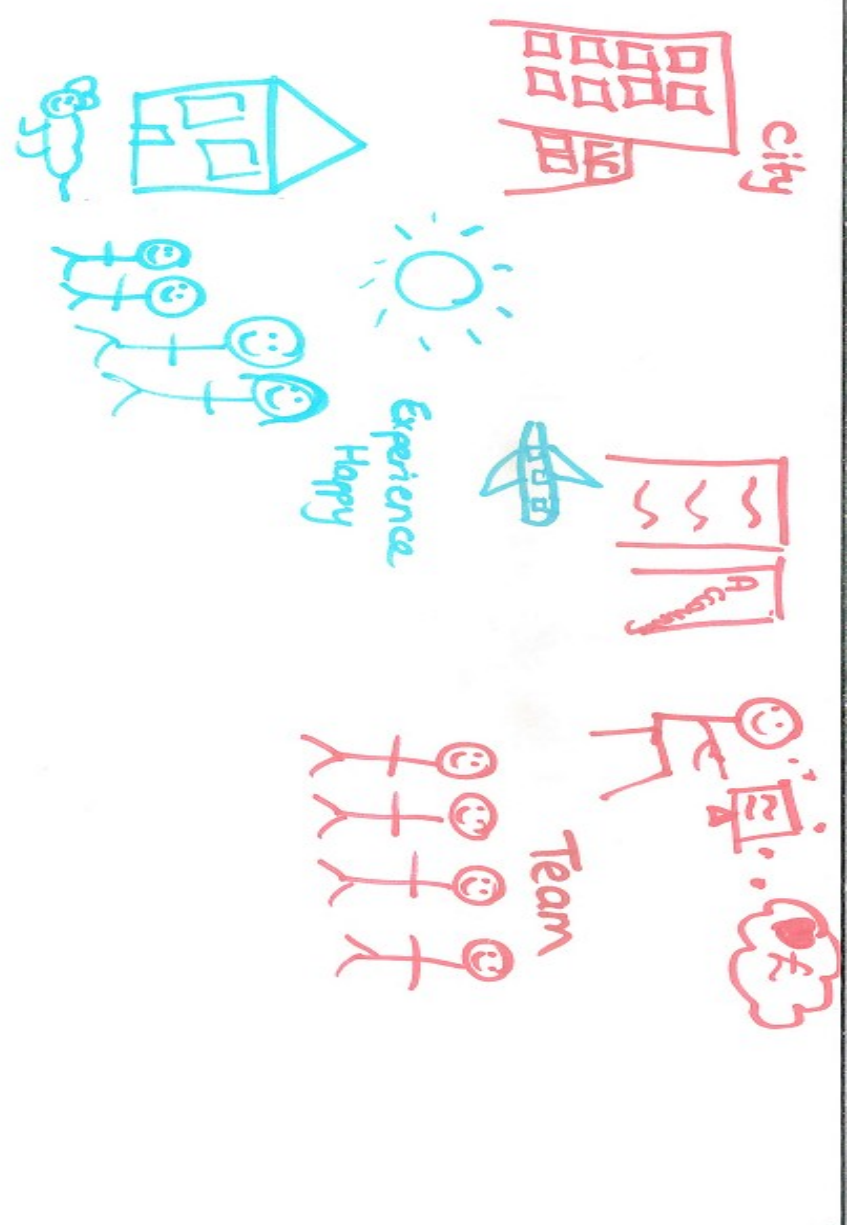






Jennifer- HOPS





Appendix K. Young People's Feared-for OPS Drawings

Sarah- FOPS



Unemployed.

X-Desk Job

- Sales advisor.
- Not the right career.

X Merit grade

Distinction

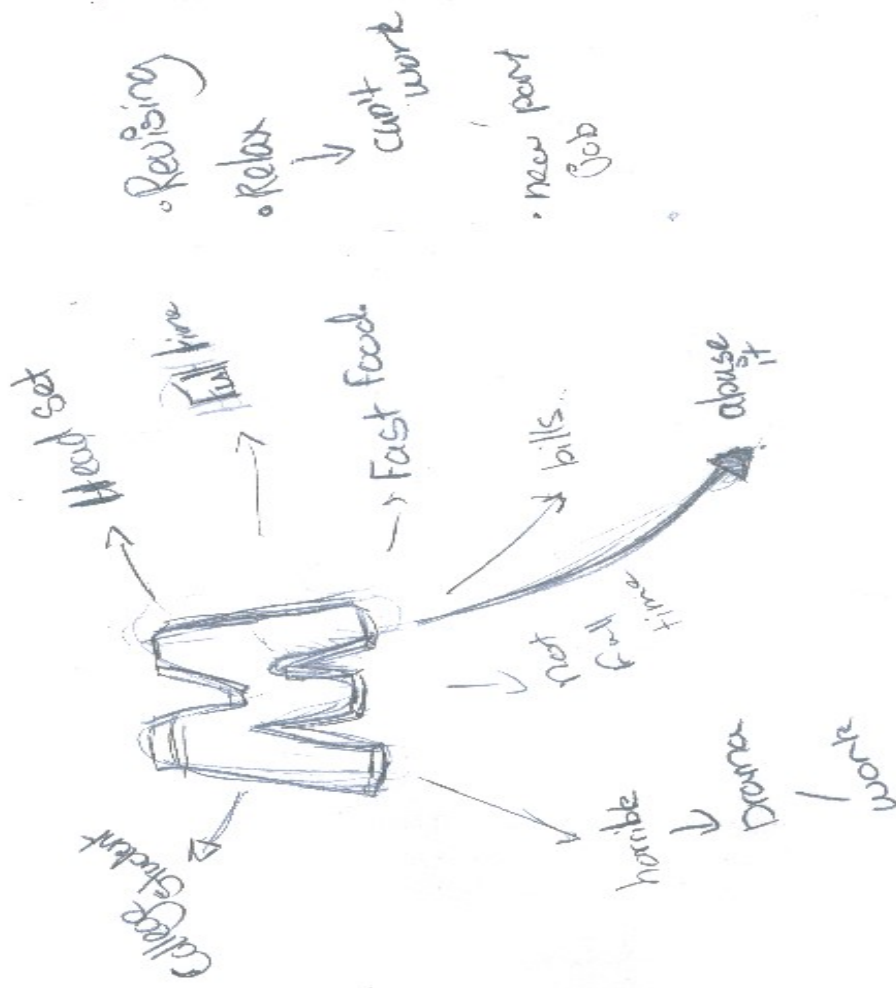
~~create~~
→ ~~good~~ grades on all subjects.

Bored ↑

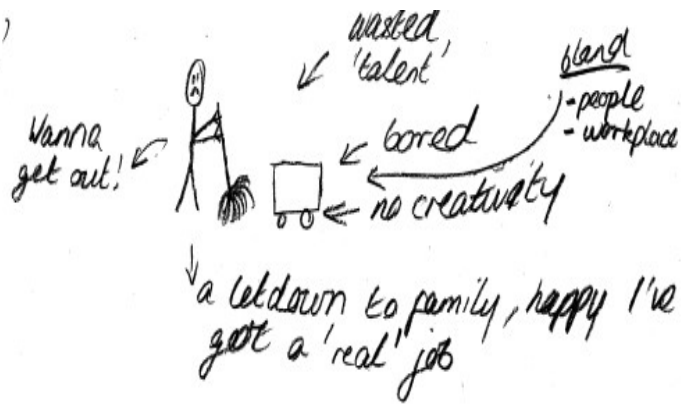
Stuck in same Routine.

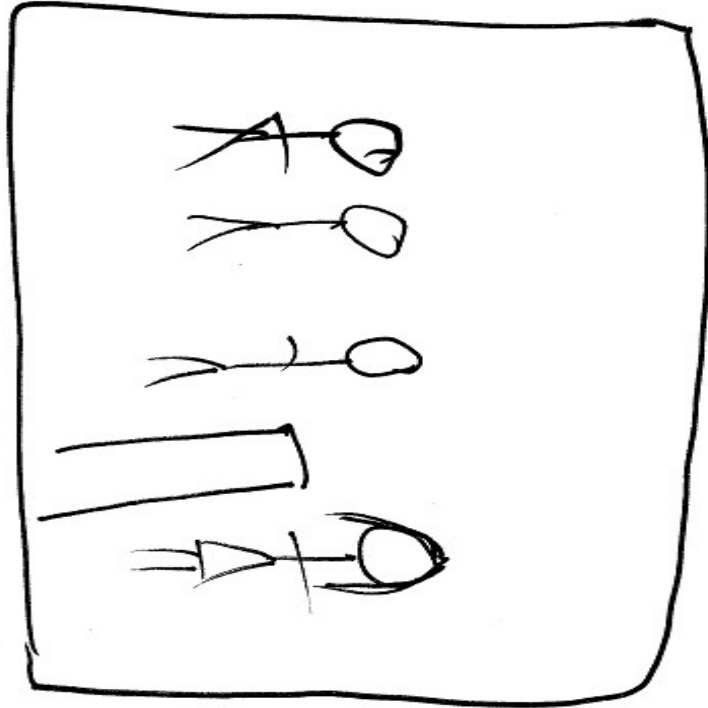
↓ Something new, exciting everyday.

↔ New People



1. Cleaning - NO CHANCE!

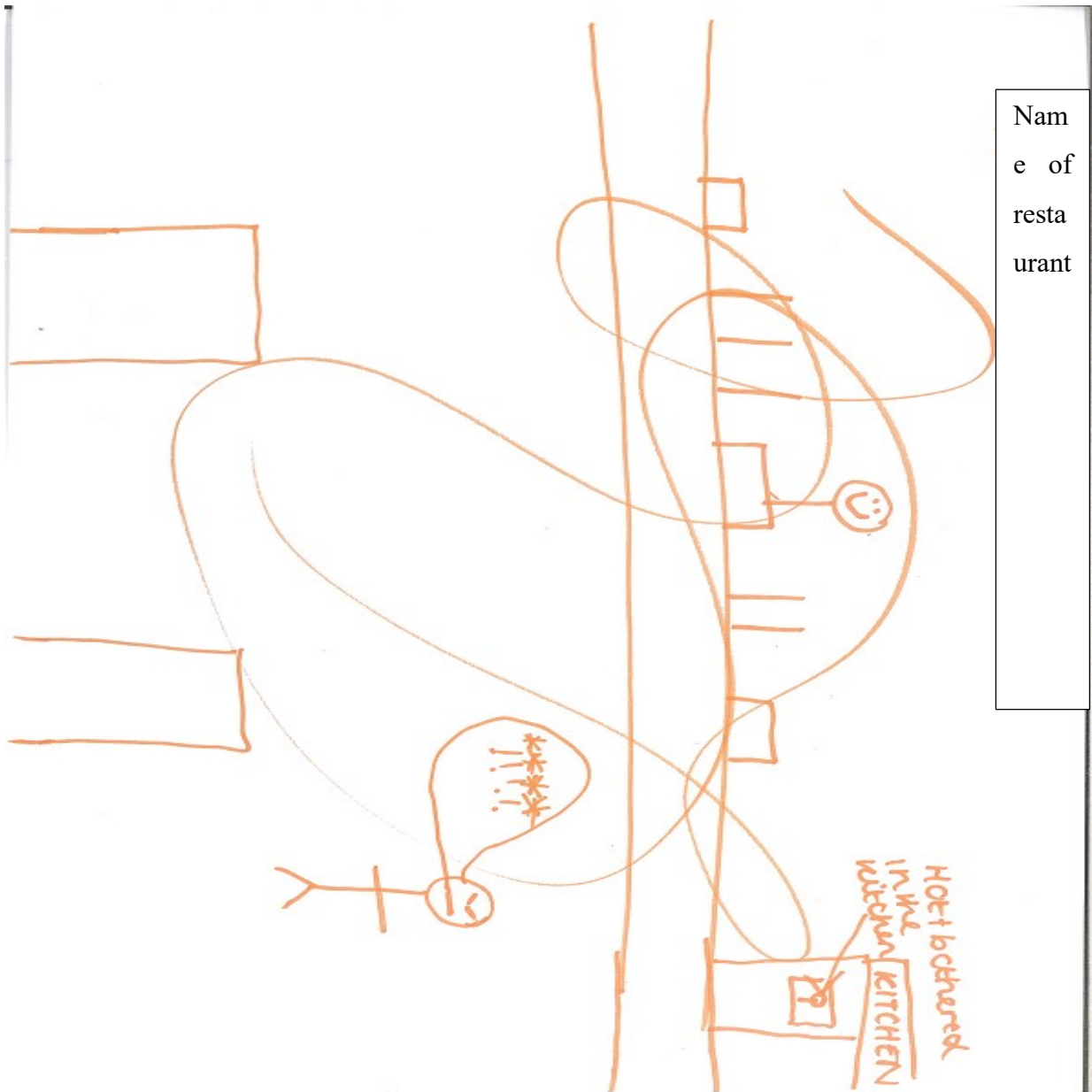






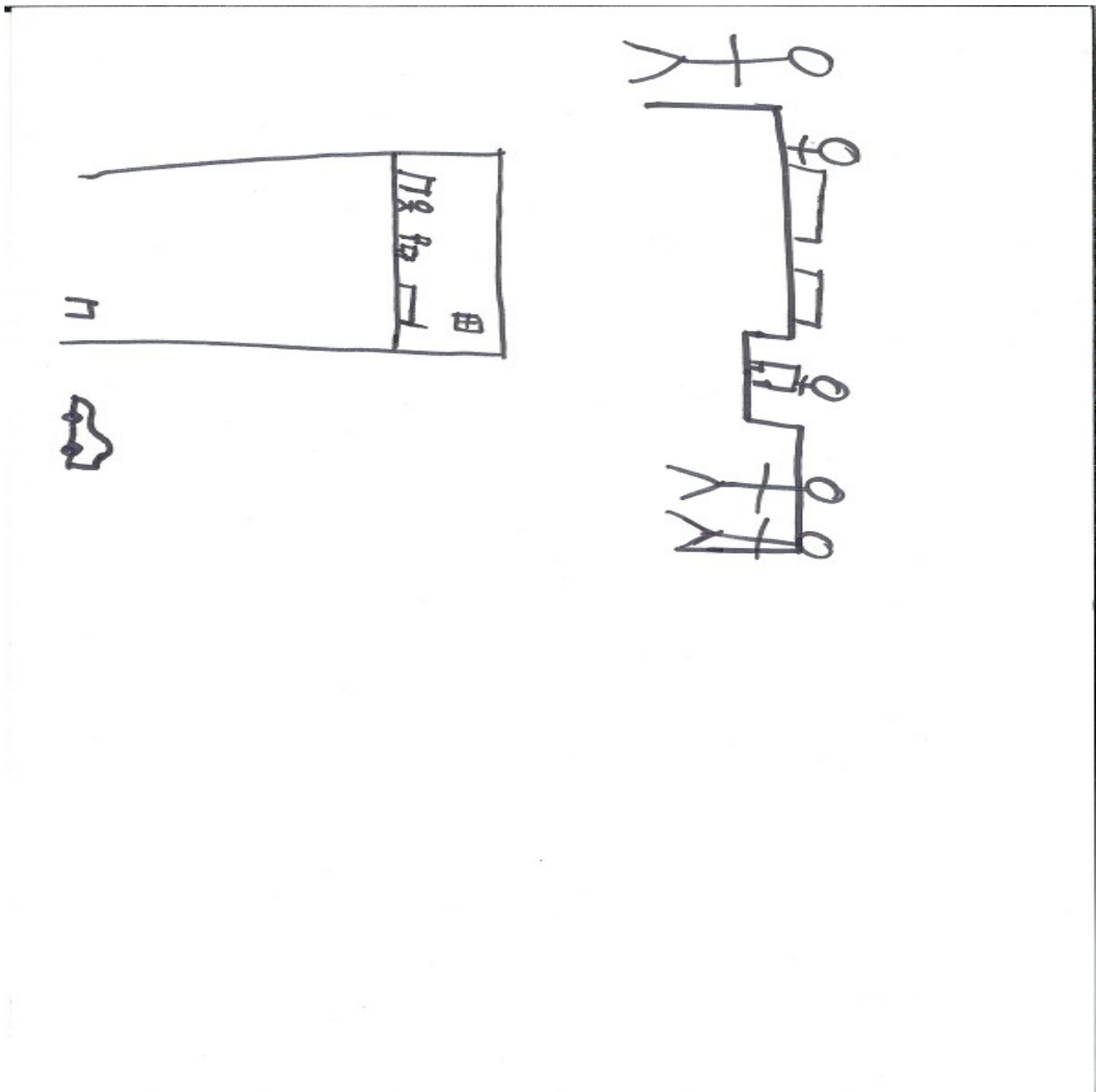


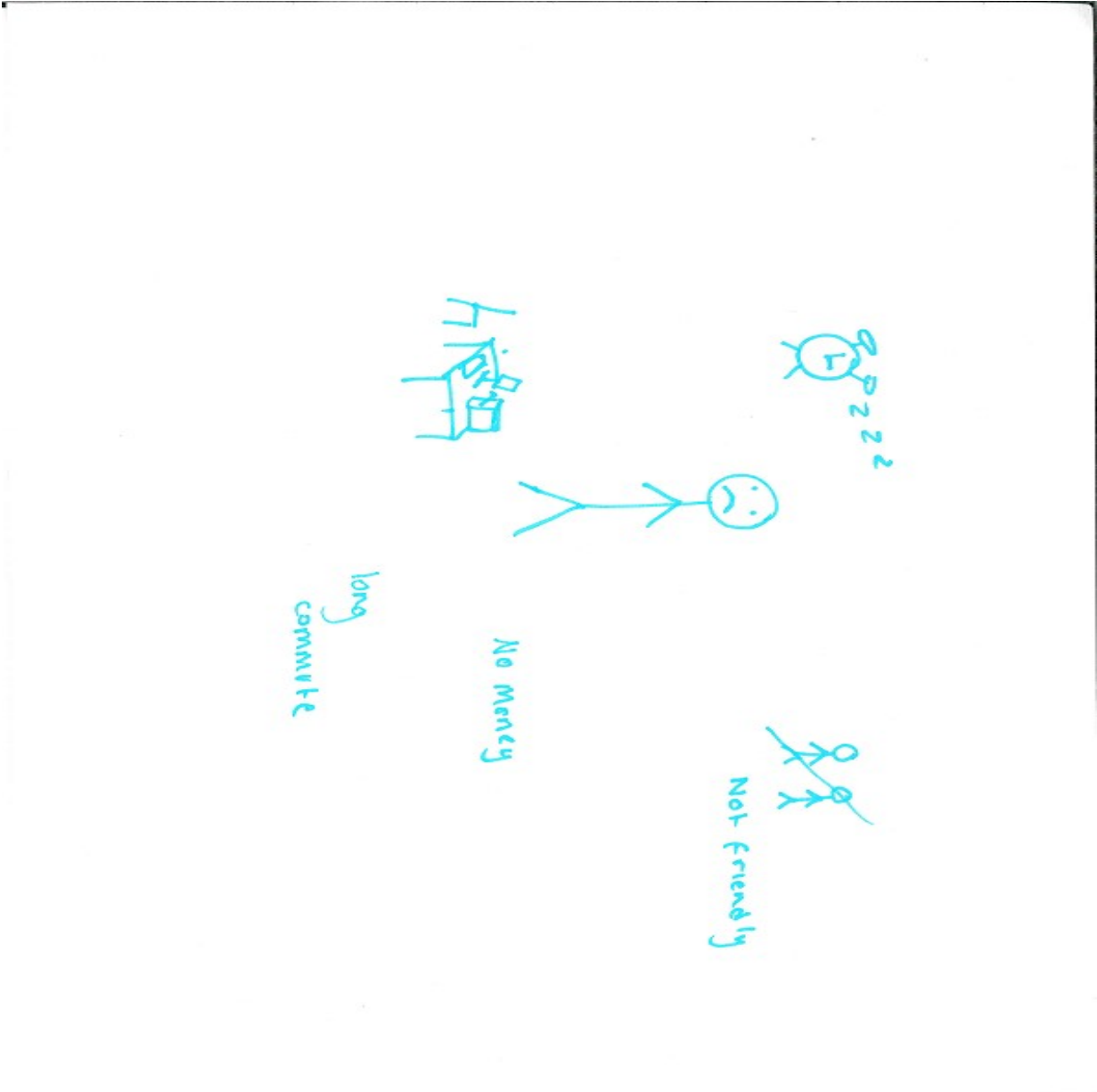
Emily - FOPS



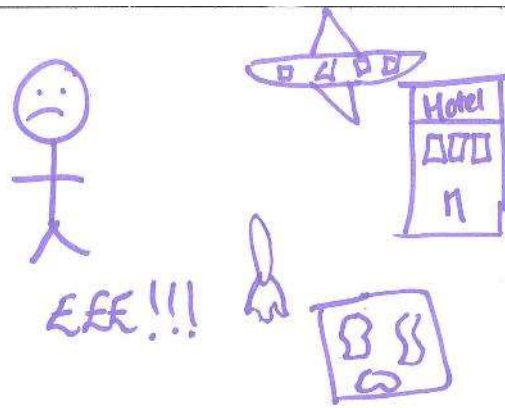
Desk
Job









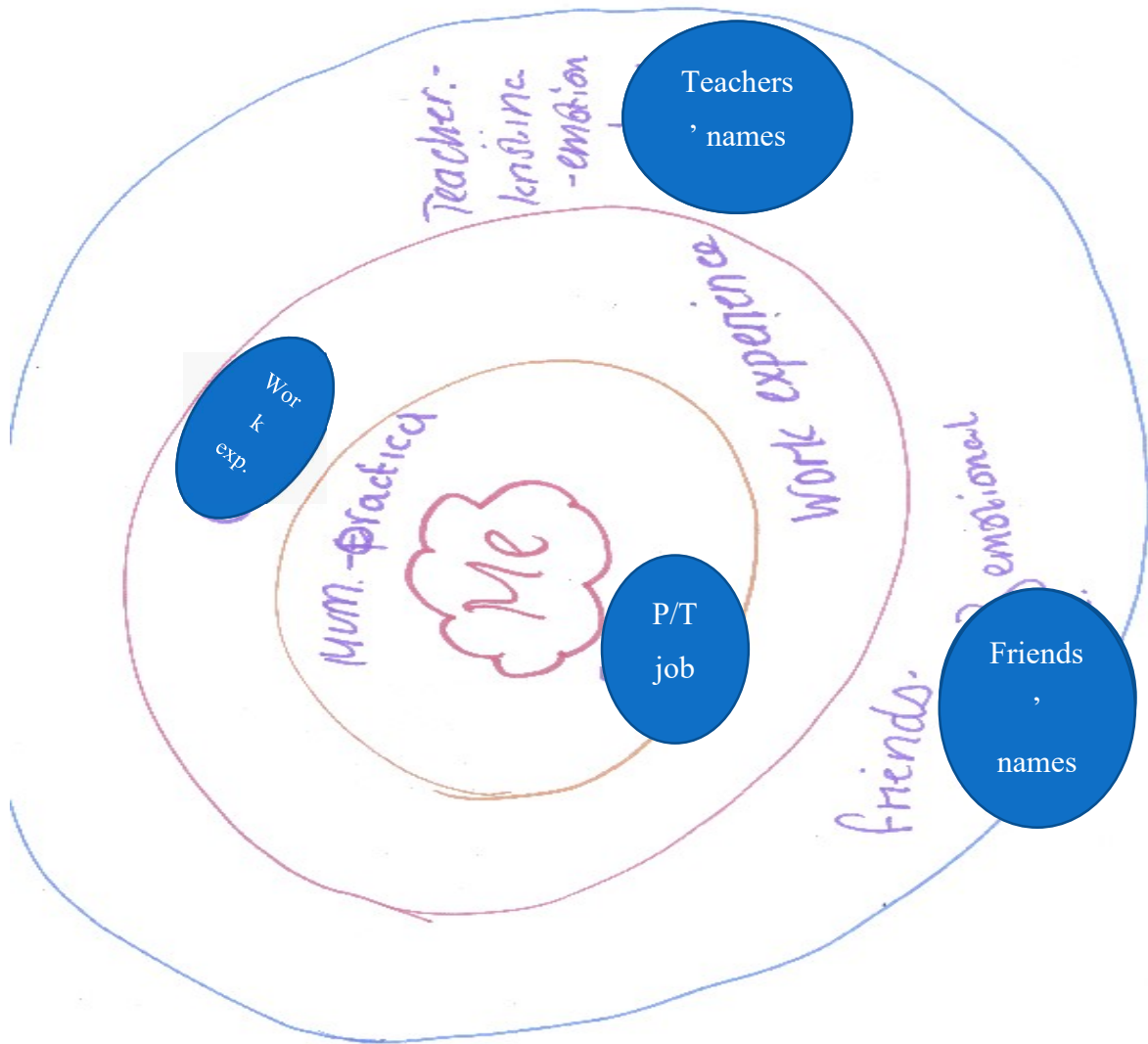


Appendix L. Young People's Support Network Drawings

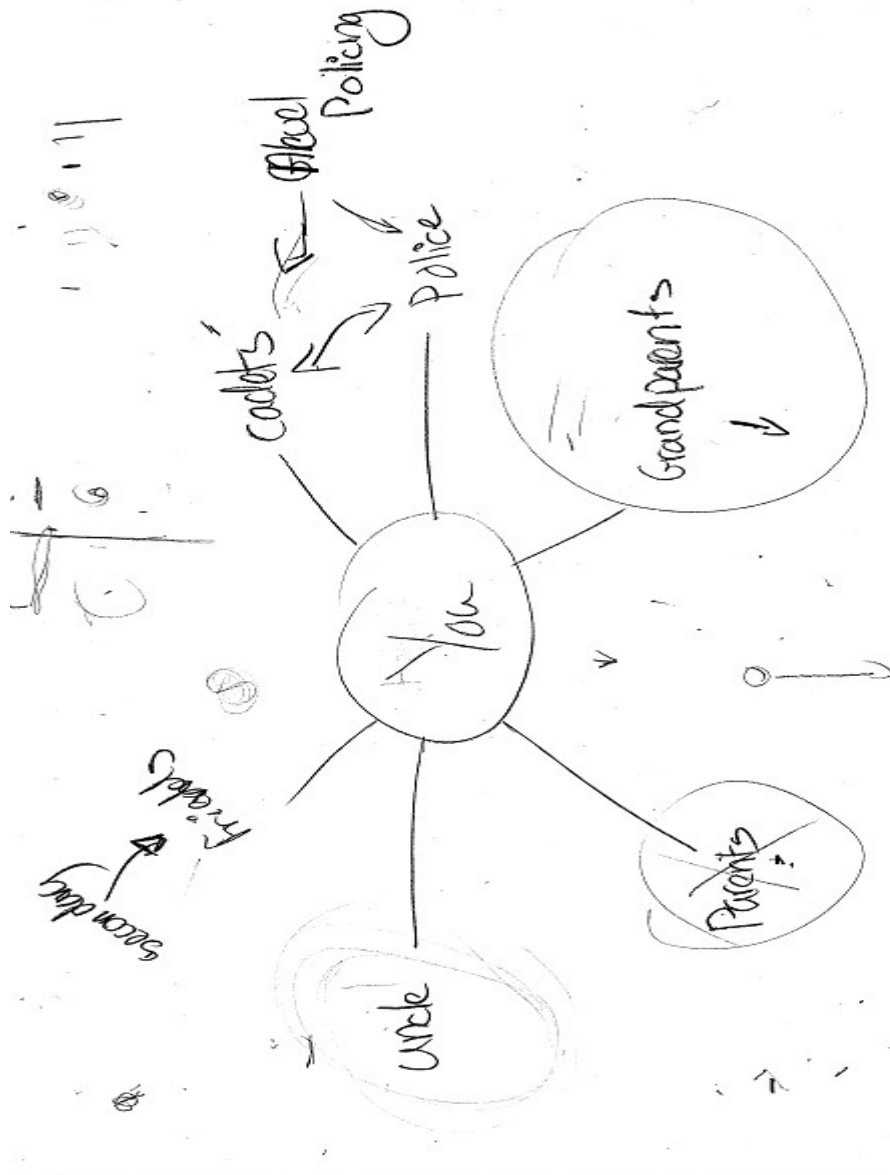
Sarah – Support Network



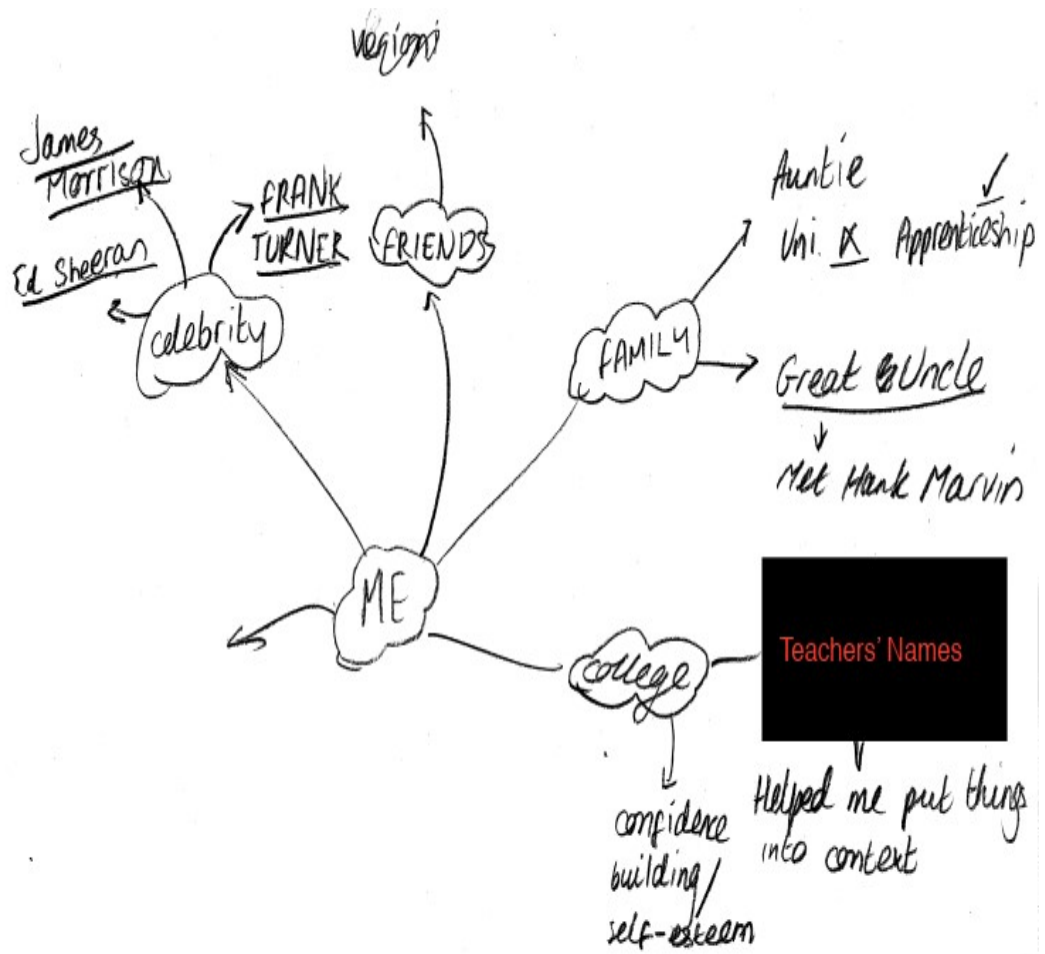
Helen- Support Network

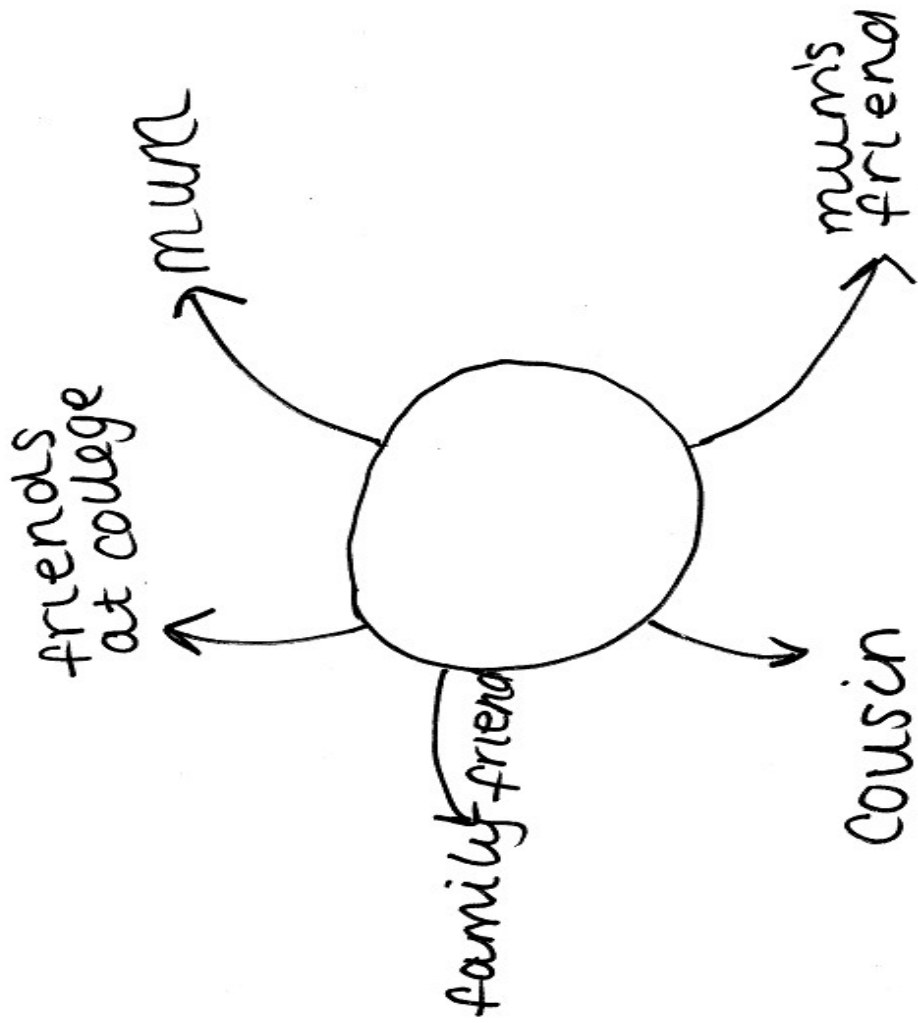


Olive- Support Network

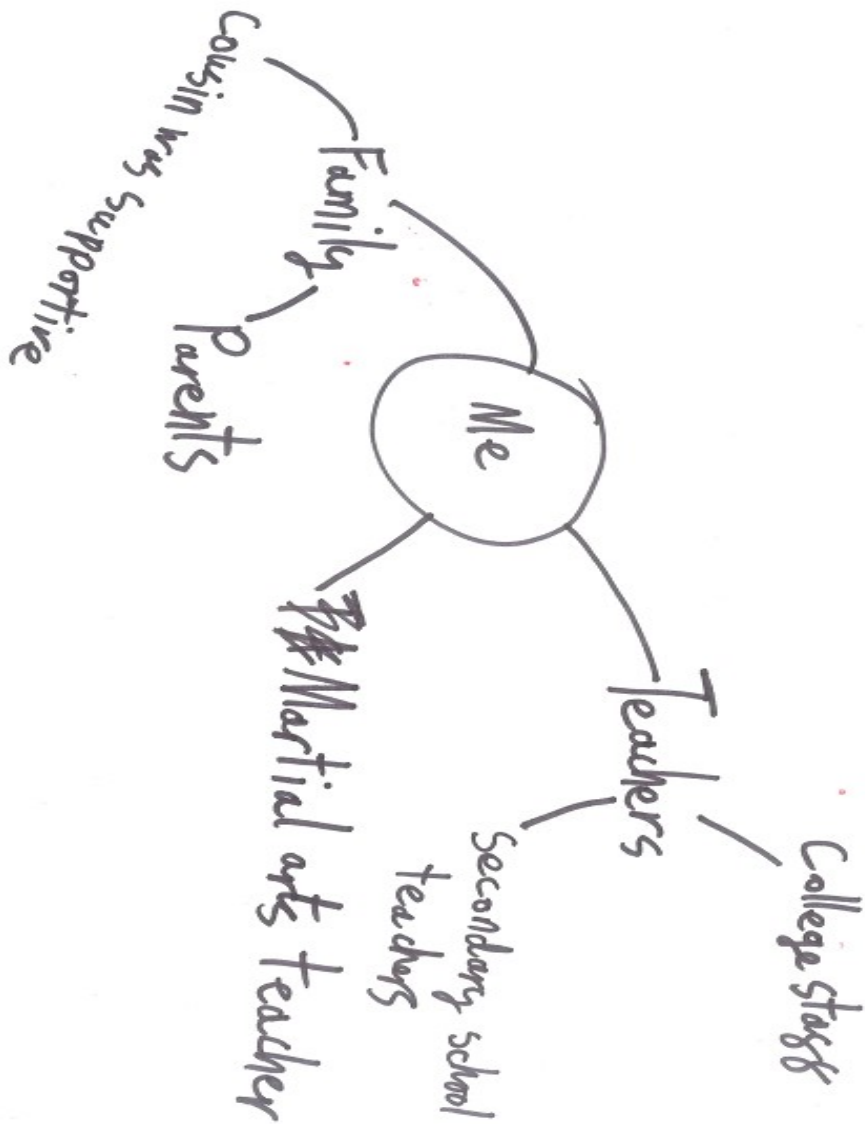


Greg – Support Network

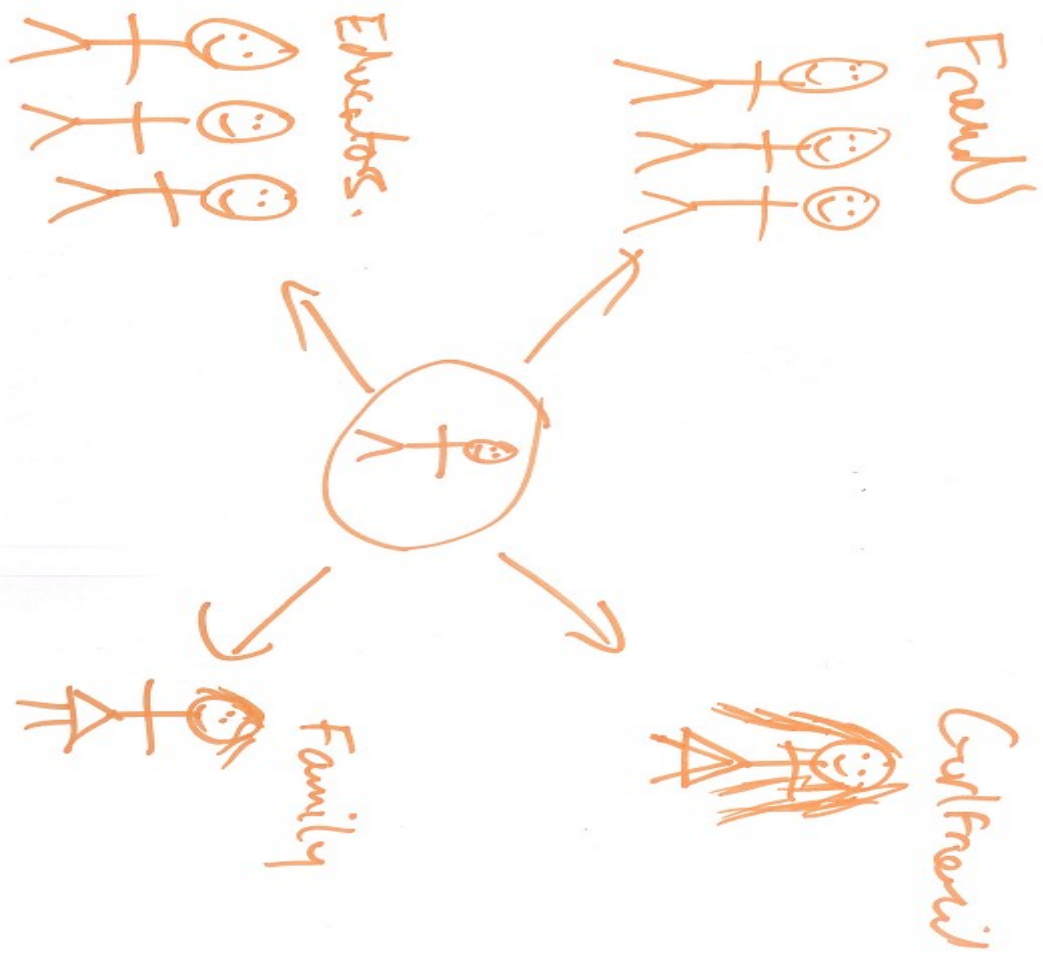




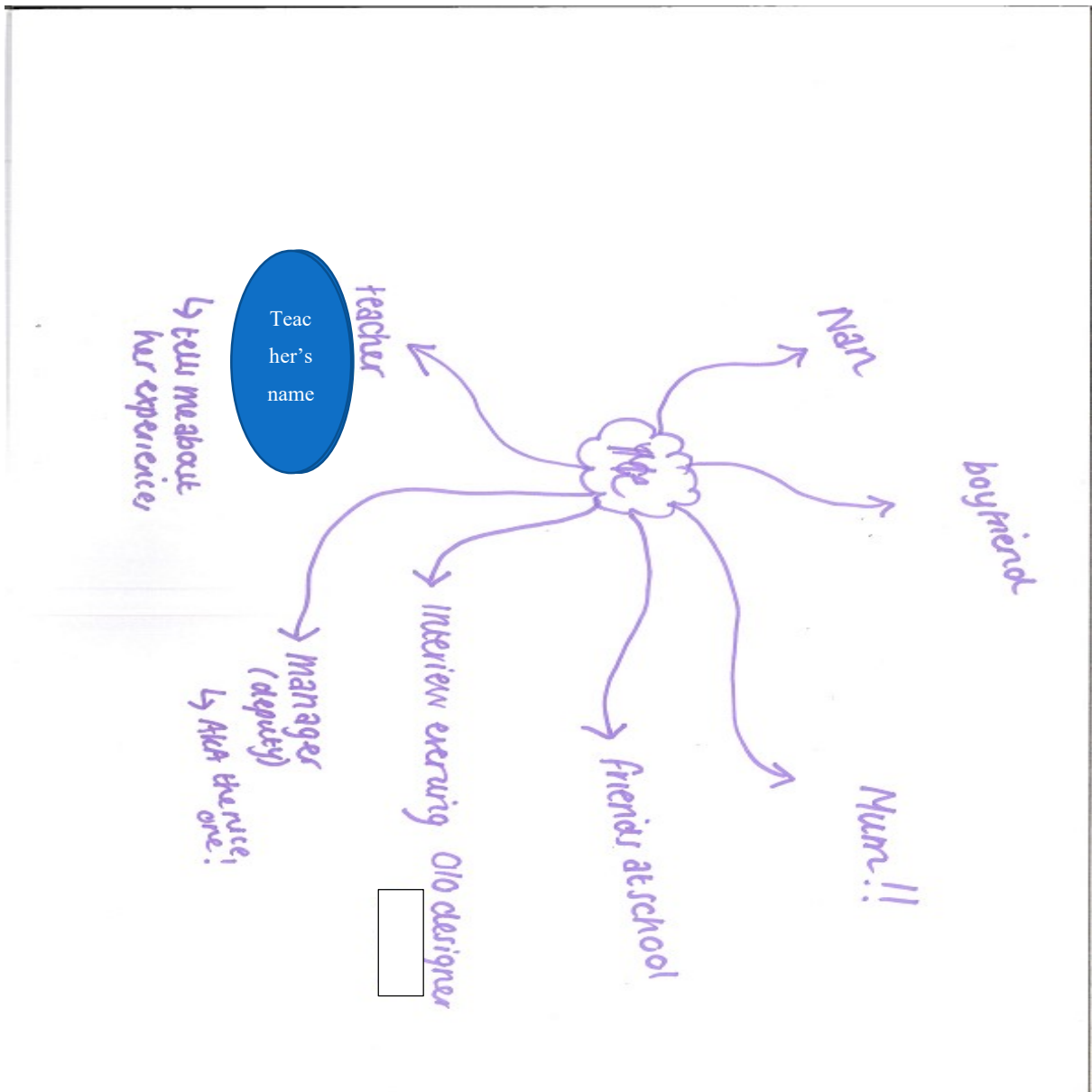
Mike – Support Network

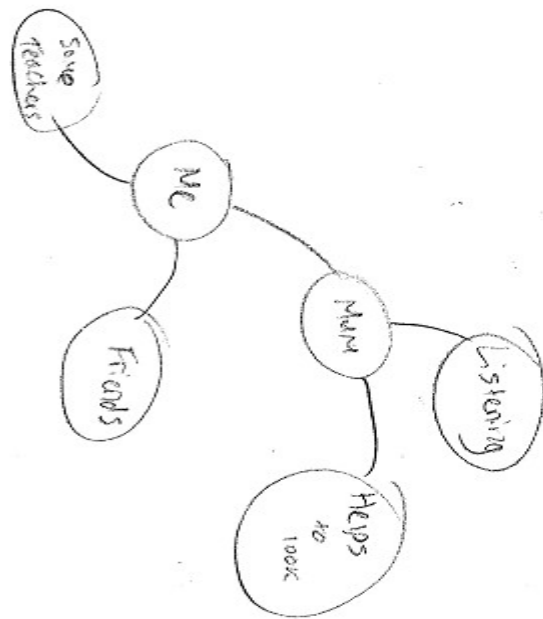


Simon – Support Network

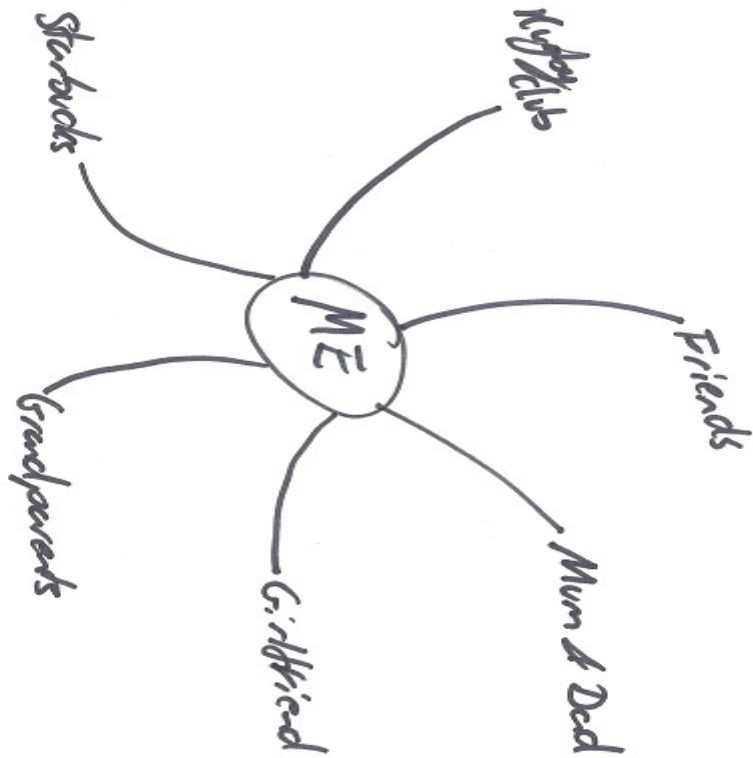


Emily – Support Network

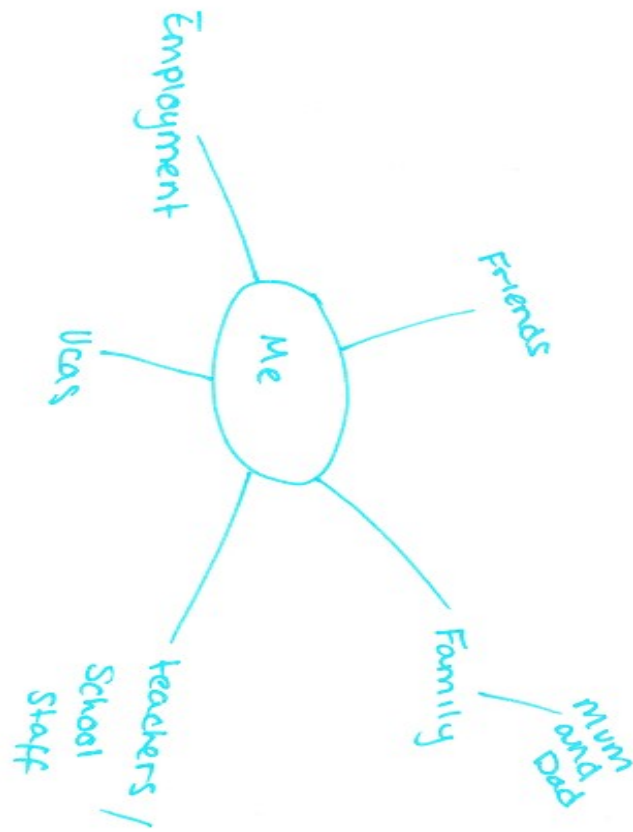




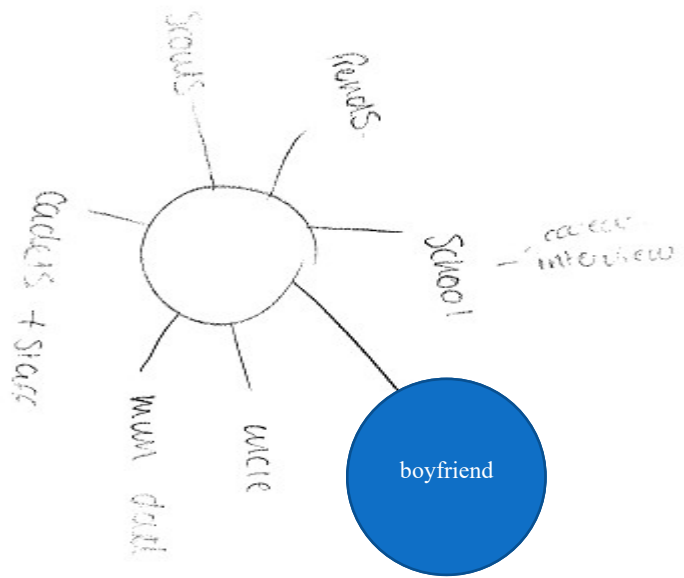
Ben – Support Network

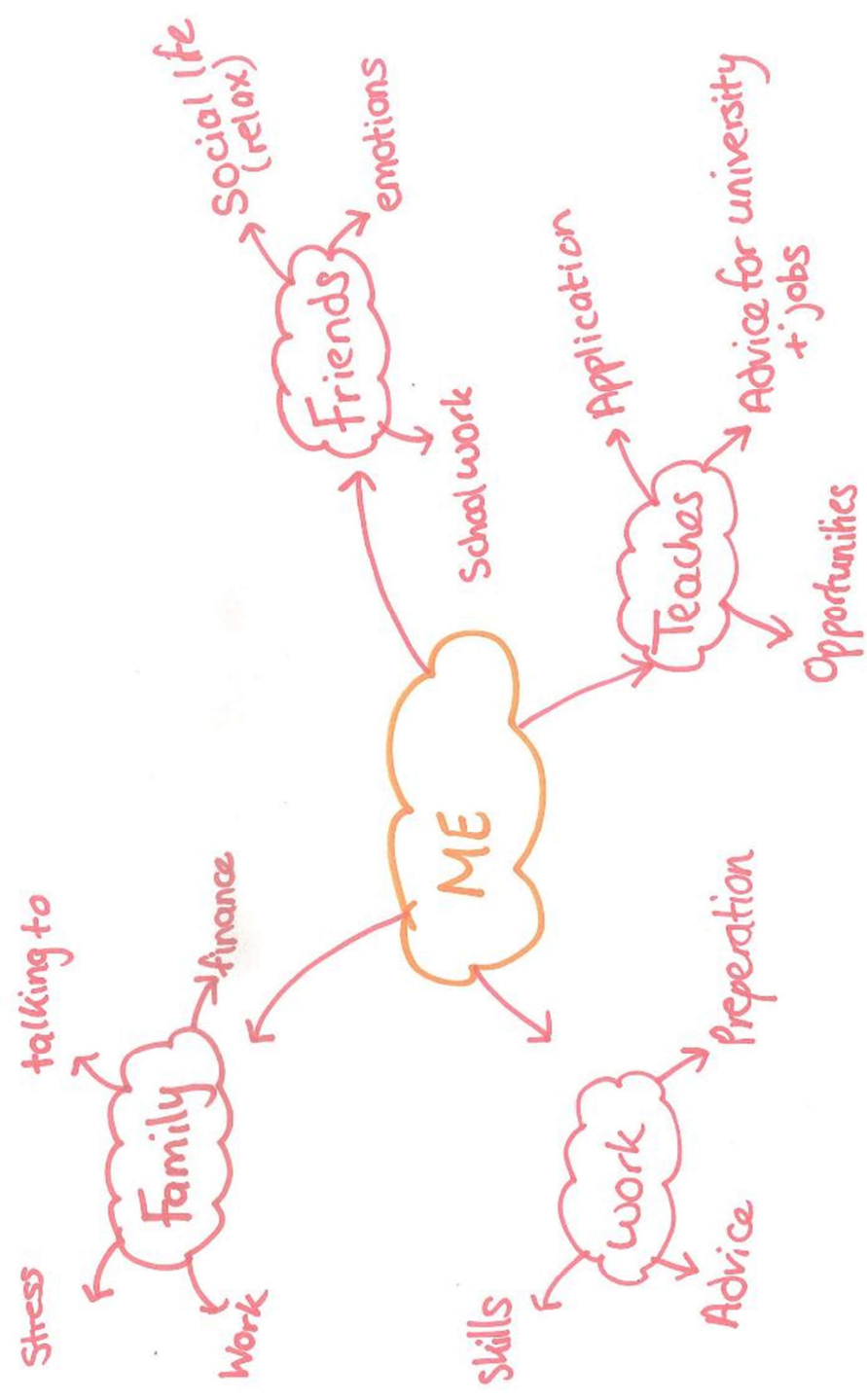


Melissa – Support Network



Jennifer- Support Network





Appendix M. Questions/Topics for Discussion with Young People

Questions for FE students

Thank you for coming etc.

Review information form and go through consent form (including parental consent form if under 18)

Start tape recorder (with permission)

Biography/Information for Vignette

Participant ID Number:
Date:
Pseudonym for study (YP to choose or researcher to assign):
Course:
Age:
Gender:
Ethnicity (how does YP describe themselves?):
Who do you live with at the moment?
Do your parents/people you live with work? What are their jobs?
Postcode :
Planning to work next year/after finishing college?:

DRAWING 1

Each of us has some image or picture of what we will be like and what we want to avoid being like in the future. Think about next year -- imagine what you'll be like, and what you'll be doing next year for work/for a job. Can you draw a picture on this piece of paper that shows what you hope to be next year? You can include things from in and out of work that you hope your life will like this time next year. Try and make it as detailed as you can think about where you'll be, what you might be doing on a typical day, who else might be there with you. You can add words/phrases onto the picture if that helps too. Help yourself to any colours you want.

How does it make you feel when you look at the picture you've just drawn?

Are you doing something at the moment to help you on your journey to become that person in the picture you've just drawn? (E.g., are you setting goals for yourself; are you asking for help from people around you to become that person in the picture?)

What do you think other people would say if you showed them this picture about your future hopes? your family? friends? College teachers? Why?

Do you want to add anything onto the picture before we move on?

DRAWING 2

As well as expectations or hopes for ourselves we have for the future, we all have ideas of what we don't want to turn out like; what we don't want to do or want to avoid becoming. First, think for a minute about what you don't want to be like next year in terms of work or jobs/careers- things you are worried about or want to avoid becoming once you have finished College. Can you draw a picture on this paper that shows what you don't want to be/where you don't want to be in terms of jobs/careers next year? Like before, try and make it as detailed as you can about this vision of the future you really don't want to happen- think about where you'll be, what you might be doing on a typical day, who else might be there with you. You can add words/phrases if you want too. Use any colours you want.

How does it make you feel when you look at the picture you've just drawn?

Are you doing anything at the moment that might help you to avoid this happening next year?

What do you think other people would say if you showed them this picture about what you might be worried about becoming next year? Your family? Friends? College teachers? Why?

Do you want to add anything onto the picture before we move on?

I am interested in finding out your story about what your journey has been like in your final year of College and as you begin to think about your next steps into work.

DRAWING OUR NETWORK

Sometimes it can help us to map out a network of people or groups or organisations that help us or have helped us to make the move from being at college to being in work. When you think about your network can you draw who has helped you/helps you now to think about or plan your future in work? Draw a circle in the middle that says 'me' and add circles for all the other people/organisations. The more important they have been to helping/advising/supporting you, the bigger the circle you give them around their name.

Who at College (teachers, career advisors etc) has helped you prepare for your next steps into work? How?

How have your family or friends helped you to get ready to make the move from being at College to being in the workplace?

Have you had any opportunities/chances for work experience or to try out what different jobs are like while you've been at College? (Have these opportunities come from people at college or friends/family finding them?) How did these go?

What stands out for you as being the most useful thing that's happened to you this year about preparing to get a job next year? (Has someone been especially helpful getting you to start thinking about your next steps in work? Is there something that's been a turning point for you in how you feel about going into work next year?)

How do you feel about not being a 'student' anymore and being a 'worker'? Does it change anything for you?

How do you think it's different for young people going into work from university compared to College? (Do you think they get more help than you have had- from uni, friends, family etc?)

Thank you & Amazon voucher - signature for voucher

Reminder about confidentiality/anonymity

Reminder about having the chance to go through my analysis of this conversation if they want & scanned copies of drawings. Reminder of final event if they want to take part

Appendix N. CDP Checklist, Discursive Device Examples and Transcript Notation

1	<i>Identifying Discursive Constructions</i> – the discursive meanings of the STWT from the perspectives of young people and managers. Highlighting all instances where narrative identity work was referred to.
2	<i>Interpretative Repertoires</i> – Different ways that participants constructed possible selves or young people in the STWT. Getting to recognise the ‘discursive terrain’ (Edley, 2001) that makes up narrative identity work in the STWT from young people and managers’ accounts.
3	<i>Subject Positions</i> – Seeing the different ways individuals positioned themselves and others in the STWT. The way the global media positions young people as ‘millennials’ who are entitled and selfish, for example. Considering the implications positions mean for individuals’ subjectivity.
4	<i>Practice</i> – What do the different positions mean for practice – the things people can or should do as a result of their position. For example, educational discourse positions going to university as the ideal route in the UK, implying that those who decide to pursue other routes to employment are taking a more risky route.
5	<i>Constructions</i> – What is achieved by the discourse? What is the talk doing for the speaker?
6	<i>Discursive Accomplishments</i> – What are the discursive devices (see below) used by participants to construct their accounts of the STWT, do narrative identity work, occupy or resist certain positions? How does using these discursive devices help them to get certain things ‘done’ in their discourse? Terms used for each discursive device were taken from Budds, (2013) and Wiggins (2017) approaches to CDP.

Name and function of device	Example (from extracts in chapter 7 to enable easier cross-referencing for the reader)
Pronoun use and footing shifts <i>When people use different pronouns to indicate identification with the topic and when these shift as part of an individual attempting to manage different identities or trying to position the speaker as presenting ‘the facts’</i>	Julia (Chapter 7, extract 19) ‘whereas there’s lots of people who’ve been there twenty years and ‘this is the way we do things, we always do it like this’(.) the young people are not afraid to say ‘well I’ve done this and I’ve done it different’ (.)’
Hedging <i>Tentative talk – attempting to manage accountability for what the speaker is saying</i>	Robert (Chapter 7, extract 30) ‘so (.) rightly or wrongly (.) you know (.)’
Minimisation <i>Downplaying, managing accountability</i>	Robert (Chapter 7, extract 30) ‘we’ve just got to sort of have it really’
Reported speech <i>Attempting to increase factuality as well as minimising stake, managing accountability</i>	Harry (Chapter 7, extract 6) it’s ‘oh yeah I can do this, I can do that’
Script formulations <i>Normalising behaviours, presenting a behaviour as if it regularly happens, attempting to increase facticity</i>	Emma (Chapter 7, extract 4) ‘a lot of people talk about a work ethic when they talk about young people’
Lists and contrasts	Julia (Chapter 7, extract 9)

<p><i>Lists: Particularly the three part list, used for rhetorical emphasis</i></p> <p><i>Contrasts: attempting to emphasise distinctions between objects</i></p>	<p>‘they bring energy, enthusiasm and um (.)<laughs>’</p> <p>‘especially for me (.) I’m not even that old (.)’</p>
<p>Extreme case formulations</p> <p><i>Usage of semantically extreme words/phrases, managing stake and claim</i></p>	<p>Brian (Chapter 7, extract 13)</p> <p>‘she had an amazing impact on the place’</p>
<p>Category entitlements</p> <p><i>Managing identities to gain support for claims</i></p>	<p>Julia (Chapter 7, extract 7)</p> <p>‘my brother is a teacher, both my parents were teachers’</p>
<p>Disclaimers</p> <p><i>Trying to reject any potentially negative claims that might be made against them following the disclaimer – justifying the speaker’s stance on an issue</i></p>	<p>Brian (Chapter 7, extract 23)</p> <p>‘I’m really not ageist’</p>
<p>Affect displays</p> <p><i>Signs of showing and evoking emotion (verbally and non-verbally)</i></p>	<p>Harry (Chapter 7, extract 31)</p> <p>‘this generation are doing things really quickly (snaps fingers)’</p>
<p>Stake inoculation</p> <p><i>Attempting to defend against possible claims that the speaker might have a stake in what they are saying</i></p>	<p>Robert (Chapter 7, extract 8)</p> <p>‘that’s related to the industry I (.) that we work in here (.) so we see it you know (.)’</p>
<p>Metaphors</p> <p><i>Making comparisons for rhetorical effect, often visual.</i></p>	<p>Brian (Chapter 7, extract 13)</p> <p>‘She was like (.) trying to pull out trees (.)’</p>

Standard Verbatim Notation Used

Transcription Notation	Example
<p>...</p> <p>Used to denote short pause (not timed)</p>	<p>Ben: the thing that they need...to get the apprenticeships</p>
<p><></p> <p>Brackets used to show when the end of a speaker’s utterance and start of next speaker’s utterance without presence of an audible gap</p>	<p>Ben: I want to try and plan to get an apprenticeship with KPMG...<Emma: uh huh> cos</p>
<p><></p> <p>Brackets used to contain other non verbal utterances such as laughter</p>	<p>Amanda: um..<laughs> I think...</p>

CDP Notation for in-depth quotes

Transcription Notation	Example
<p>(.)</p> <p>A full stop in brackets shows untimed pauses too short in duration to measure</p>	<p>so (.) work ethic (.) is someone</p>
<p>=</p>	<p>Julia: so to speak= Emma: =yeah (.)</p>

At the end of one speaker's utterance and start of next speaker's utterance where there is no discernible break	
<> Brackets used to provide non verbal information transcribed e.g., laughter, sucking teeth, sighs etc.	Julia: mmm <sucks teeth noise> Robert: <intake of breath> Um (.)
() Round brackets used to contain other sounds recorded from the interview e.g., sound of felt tips on paper	(drawing sounds of felt tips on paper) um (.)
[] Square brackets used to contain other contextual information e.g., where text was omitted for inclusion, where identifying information was spoken about or other contextual information such as pointing at a specific part of a drawing	Andrew [points to film director image]
Lines are numbered for quotes of more than 6 lines and referred to by their line in the interpretation within the text	

Young People

CONTRAST WITH 'LADY'
 MISCOURSE ON X.T.V. NOT GOING TO BE FUN!

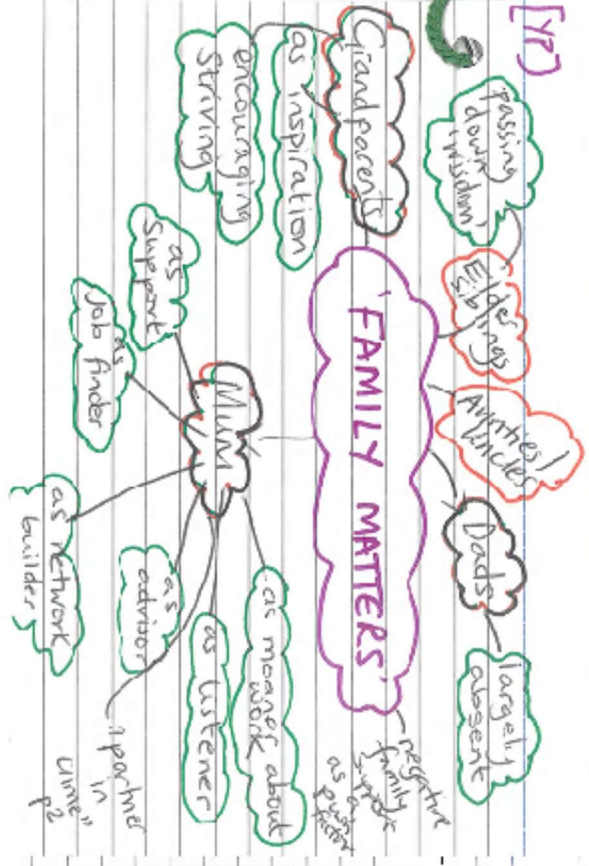
ambivalence
 hope for future
 work self will going to happen without it

'WORK HARD, ~~STAY~~'

Working hard at School/College
 family will be proud as long as I work hard
 Teachers push the 'work hard' discourse
~~working future work to be fun + exciting~~

[YP]

'FAMILY MATTERS'



[YP]

'AMBIVALENCE TOWARDS CAREER ADVISORS'



Key themes: } close family is most important thing
 Jane's talk } school pushes uni
 Jane talk } my family haven't done uni before
 } Mum
 } Grandparents to strive
 } too much money = stress + fear
 } Doesn't have enough info to make decision
 } Uni is high status (but experience has higher status)
 } Uni makes you leave home

Transcription
 Participant 22
 Interview date:
 Location: school premises – small interview room.
 I: Interviewer, Emma Parry
 P: Participant

I: let's hope that works this time...<laughs> so what we're going to be doing is a few drawings today...so hopefully you read that...but it's nothing to be bothered about...it's not about how good anyone is at drawing at all <laughs>..it's just a different way to talk about things really ok...<P: yeah> so we all have these images or ideas in our heads about who we'd like to be in the future and who we want to avoid being...<P: yeah> so what I want you to do first is think about...um...what job or career you want to be doing once you finish school...when you finish your A levels and when you're in that job...and draw me a picture of what that job looks like <P: ok> so try and make it as detailed as possible...think who else might be there around you doing this job...what would you be doing in this job...where would it be maybe...<P: yeah> how you might be feeling or what you might be thinking while you're doing the job...and other things outside of work you hope the job would bring for you...if you want you can add words, phrases as well...go mad with the colours <P: laughs> as many as you like that's fine ok...and then we'll have a chat about the picture once you've finished...

P: I'm no good at drawing...

I: don't worry...any doodles...<P: laughs> anything is cool...

P: I'll do like a range of pictures...

I: yeah whatever helps us talk about what this job is...what you hope to get out of it...this ideal job for you...

P: <drawing sounds on paper for 2 minutes>

I: yeah? Right...ok...let's have a look at this picture together...<P: laughs>...so how does it make you feel when you look at the picture for starters...

P: um happy and at the minute realistic but not 100 percent realistic...

I: so talk me through what you've drawn here...

P: so the red's my work that I want to be doing...so I want to be working in a city...in an office...with a team...be doing accounts <I: right> one job that I love.. that'll also give me good money..then this is my life outside of work...so I want a happy family...a dog...and then I want to get a good experience in life which is happy and obviously get on holiday if I can...holiday with a good house...

I: these are the things outside of work that you hope...

Future
 hoped for
 self -
 job,
 love & a
 family
 holidays -
 important to
 family times.

be first to go to uni - seems worried about that & parents convincing her for apprenticeship route

P: um...I'd be the first one to go to university...if I was to go to university...so my mum...my mum and dad say probably apprenticeship would be best cos speaking to parents on...speaking to my teachers on parents evening...they said there is more opportunity and experience from apprentices...cos you've got that experience when it comes to going into the real world...

Employers want experience

I: work experience...

P: yeah...whereas people at university's just studying...so you don't have that experience...but my mum and dad always say...they'd back me up no matter what choice I wanted...so whether it was uni or apprenticeship...they'd help me out...<I: hmm> cos they're like a bit old...they don't really know the university and apprenticeships which are now...cos they didn't have that opportunity...<I: things change...> so my mum has been searching and looking at if I've got a booklet, she's looked into it as well...just for that extra support so she can get her head round it a bit more...

I: yeah yeah...it's tricky...there's a lot to take in isn't there?

P: yeah

I: so cos they didn't get the chance to go to university you said...

P: yeah it wasn't really something everybody did when they were younger...

I: right...so are they keen that you take that chance then or...

Mum

P: she'd love me to get to university...but as long as I'm happy and I'm doing the thing I want to do...she's...my mum and dad are happy...

I: right...so you feel they're behind you whatever path you choose...

P: yeah...there's no...

I: so what do you think other people would say if we showed them this picture? What do you think your mum and dad would say if we showed them this picture about what you hope for work?

Mum - Grandparents office jobs - good jobs

P: I think she'd be proud of me because I've got an aim and target that I want to get to...so I know I want to go into accounts no matter what...so having that now means I can work towards it... I'm not worrying about I don't know what to do or anything...um...my grandma and grandad they'd love it as well because...my grandma and grandad always love...think like office jobs...are a good job...cos you get good money...but as long as it's a job I love and enjoy...I don't want a job where I'm getting a bit bored with stress or anything...so..

I: so what jobs did your grandma and grandad do when they were young?

I: hmm...cos that's the thing isn't it...sometimes people think accounts it's you're on your own...doing numbers...<P: yeah> how do you feel about that?

P: yeah...um...speaking to some of the apprenticeships...they do say there is a good team aspect around it...even if I'm sat on my own at a computer doing my own work...but there's somebody across from me that I can just keep having a chat with...I'd be fine with that...cos I do like working independently and as a team...

I: so just having that team to dip in and out of..

P: yeah somebody you can just communicate to a bit...

I: you mentioned about stress...as long as the stress wasn't there...what do you mean by that?

P: um... I don't really want a job where I'm working away or a job where I'm...

I: away from...

*doesn't
want
a
job
with
travel*

P: home...so like going away for three or four days...like leaving family...I don't really like that aspect...um...but having a job where you can go home and not necessarily be up till 12 at night on the computer trying to figure something out or getting yourself worried about it...I just want a job where I can go to work...do the job...come home and just relax a little bit...

I: switch off...<P: yeah> so do you think you'll be living at home while you're doing your apprenticeship?

*Uni
makes
you
leave*

P: I'm looking into that more because I don't really want to move away...but if I found a university that I fell in love with and a course or an apprenticeship that I wanted to do...and my only choice was to move away, I'd be quite happy to...mum and dad would be as well...

I: so is there anything else you want to add before we move on...<P: no that's it...> about what you hope for that? You know you put 'city'...why is that important to be working in a city?

P: I don't really know...I just love sort of being...working in a city environment...like an office...

I: in a big city...do you mean like London or...

P: just a city centre anywhere really...somewhere that's like easy to get to...not having to get to remote places...cos I can't drive at the minute so...

I: good transport links...

P: yeah I like something where I've got an answer or a target...something that I know I need to get to...whereas if you say to me...go off and do this on your own...I don't like it cos I don't have anything to follow...

I: structure's not there sort of thing...

P: I don't like them not being structured...

I: uh huh...and this travelling...what is it about that that really doesn't appeal to you? Cos a lot of people like the idea of you know travelling with work and things...

close family is more important than self

P: yeah...just seeing...like...family...friends and family...that have got people that they don't see...like my mum's working away, my dad's working away...so I don't feel like they have that closeness with their mum and dad because they're not always around...

I: so you've seen that in your friends' families...people who are always away with work...

P: yeah and also... I've never really been abroad in my childhood...we usually go in a caravan in the UK...so I'm not a big fan of travelling cos I've never really done it...I'd always go travelling I just don't like the thought of being in a different hotel every week or not having the relaxation of your own home...<I: hmm> so I feel like you're always at work...

I: right...so it's kind of having...it's not security...

P: yeah...it's a bit like...not routine like...

I: being in your own space and things like that...ok...and what's this one in the green <pointing to drawing 2>

P: um...having a stressful job...

I: so is this home? Right ok...

Stress makes you a bad mother

P: yeah...so having a stressful job means me being moody or like angry towards my children and family and making me be a bit sour...I just don't want that...a bad environment...

I: have you seen that in friends or family...

P: I haven't seen it... but I think of it like that...so...

I: where do you think that comes from in your mind...that impression?

close family is everything

P: um...just like missing family...so...my mum and dad work at home but like some of my friends...their mum and dad'll go away to like China or Japan...and they'll miss them cos they'll go for like months or whatever it may be...and not have any communication...just like a 5 minute facetime in the afternoon or something...I'd think like...without my mum and dad at home I'd really miss them cos I love going home and spending time with mum and

Appendix O. Photographs of Organisational Artefacts from SME Workplace

