

# Sheffield Hallam University

*Getting personal: investigating how living with universal credit affects emotions and identities*

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**Getting Personal: Investigating how Living with Universal  
Credit affects Emotions and Identities.**

**Sophia Constance Negus**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of  
Sheffield Hallam University  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**June 2021**

## Candidate Declaration

I hereby declare that:

1. I have not been enrolled for another award of the University, or other academic or professional organisation, whilst undertaking my research degree.
2. None of the material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award.
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4. The work undertaken towards the thesis has been conducted in accordance with the SHU Principles of Integrity in Research and the SHU Research Ethics Policy.
5. The word count of the thesis is 88, 320.

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## Abstract

This thesis investigates the impacts of Universal Credit (UC) on emotions, wellbeing, identities, and the 'self'. The findings are of growing importance as increasing numbers of people are receiving UC. Six million people now engage with a 'violent' system (Cooper and Whyte, 2017) which pushes people further from the labour market, society, health, and their 'self'.

UC introduced radical changes to British working-age social security, with aims to 'simplify' the system, reduce costs and fraud, and 'make work pay'. Since launching in 2013, there has been growing evidence on the negative impacts of UC, yet, little is known about the impact UC has on emotions, wellbeing, identities, and the 'self', a gap in knowledge this thesis addresses.

A geographically bound case-study was adopted using semi-structured interviews and participant-solicited diaries to investigate the diverse realities and impacts of UC. The analytical framework utilises several concepts and theories, drawing upon Elias (1994) as it is argued UC is a 'civilising offensive' (Powell, 2013), and Goffman (1997/2007) to explore the impacts on identities.

This thesis provides empirical contributions to knowledge surrounding the extent and severity of the impacts of UC on emotions and the 'self'. The research found that harm inflicted from UC carries serious consequences and the experiences indicate a systemic erosion of people, lives, and possibilities. The findings demonstrate how UC is experienced as dehumanizing and destabilising of emotions, wellbeing and the 'self'. It provides important insights into how people respond to UC and the significant resources spent on 'self-management' as individuals attempt to preserve their identities which are under threat from institutional scrutiny, stigma and increasing poverty. Therefore, this thesis provides an important contribution to knowledge surrounding the corrosive nature of UC.

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## List of Abbreviations

<b>CTC</b>	Child Tax Credit
<b>DP</b>	Direct Payment
<b>DWP</b>	Department for Work and Pensions
<b>ESA</b>	Employment and Support Allowance
<b>HB</b>	Housing Benefit
<b>IS</b>	Income Support
<b>JCP</b>	Job Centre Plus
<b>JSA</b>	Job Seeker's Allowance
<b>MIF</b>	Minimum Income Floor
<b>NSR</b>	New Social Risks
<b>RCT</b>	Randomized Control Trial
<b>UC</b>	Universal Credit
<b>WC</b>	Work Coach (or Job Coach)
<b>WCA</b>	Work Capability Assessment
<b>WTC</b>	Working Tax Credit

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

This thesis explores the impacts of living with Universal Credit (UC) on emotions, wellbeing, identities and the ‘self’. UC is a new distinctive form of working-age means-tested social security which has encompassed the largest reforms to the British welfare state since inception (Royston, 2012). UC replaced Income Support (IS), Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), Job Seeker’s Allowance (JSA), Housing Benefit (HB), Child Tax Credit (CTC) and Working Tax Credit (WTC). The *simplified* system “... aims to reduce poverty, by making work pay, and to help claimants and their families to become more independent” (DWP, 2017a:2).

At inception UC had no evidence for many of its new features such as direct payment (DP), in-work conditionality and a ‘digital by default’ approach, it was formed on misguided ideological foundations (Slater, 2012; Wiggan, 2012). Once fully rolled-out it was estimated seven million households would be receiving UC (Kennedy and Keen, 2018), yet this estimate was before the Covid-19 pandemic which created a huge impact on UC. The latest statistics show there are over six million people in the UK claiming UC including over two million individuals who are in-work (DWP, 2021a). Subsequently, growing numbers of people are experiencing UC and living with its impacts.

Existing research has focused on issues such as financial impacts (IFS, 2019a) DP (Hickman et al, 2017), food poverty (Reeves and Loopstra, 2020), conditionality and sanctioning (Wright et al, 2016; 2018) as well as gendered impacts (Andersen, 2019; Griffiths et al, 2020). Research has explored the impacts on mental health (Cheetham, Moffatt and Addison, 2019; Wickham et al, 2020) and design elements such as in-work conditionality (Wright and Dwyer, 2020) and UC’s apparent ‘simplicity’ (Summers and Young, 2020). All these contributions are important due to the considerable changes within UC, yet it is crucial to understand how such experiences impact emotions and the ‘self’, evidence of which is currently limited. The thesis addresses this gap in understanding and is centred on the following research questions:

## 1.2 Research questions

### **1. How do experiences of UC affect the emotions, wellbeing and the ‘self’ of those receiving it?**

1.1. What are the impacts of living with UC on emotions, wellbeing and the ‘self’?

1.2. How do experiences and emotions affect the ‘UC journey’?

- 1.3. How does individual 'resource' affect the responses and experiences of the impacts of UC?
2. **How are identities affected by living with UC?**
  - 2.1. How does identity management interact with experiences of UC?
  - 2.2. What techniques are used to avoid and negotiate the effects on identity of living with UC?
3. **How do responses to UC affect the 'self' and how is this negotiated?**
  - 3.1. How do individuals respond to the impacts on emotions, wellbeing and the 'self' of living with UC?
  - 3.2. What are the subsequent impacts of the responses to living with UC?

### 1.3 Research approach

The research employed a case-study methodology in an English coastal town. A qualitative approach was implemented using semi-structured and participant-solicited diaries with individuals claiming UC, which provided rich data about what living with UC was like and importantly how it felt. Fifteen people shared their experiences of UC, three of which kept diaries and five of which had a second interview. This perspective over time was useful to understand the impacts of UC, the changes and responses. The research aimed to speak to a range of individuals both in and out of work and explore the differences across and within these groups. Through the fieldwork it became increasingly obvious that these boundaries were blurred for individuals and there was no *universal* experience.

### 1.4 Terminology

Shildrick (2018) highlights the importance of terminology exploring issues of poverty and social security, using the term 'welfare' with quotations to reflect its stigmatized status. The use of language is also considered throughout this thesis as one part of disrupting the 'anti-welfare common-sense' (Jensen, 2014) is within words and how they are used (See Garrett, 2018). Moreover, in line with the social constructionist philosophical approach employed in the thesis one must understand that meanings are constantly (re)constructed and therefore this is reflected within the terminology adopted which itself is a powerful conveyor of meaning. For example, the term 'claimant' is rarely used and instead the phrase living with UC has been adopted. It is hoped this phrase broadens the focus of those accessing social security, adds a level of humanity – or *re-humanizes* –, illustrates that the experiences and impacts of UC spread throughout life

and across time, and how the invasive nature of UC design and delivery casts a long shadow.

## 1.5 Thesis Structure

The thesis is split into thirteen chapters. Chapter two provides the background and policy context of UC covering a brief historical overview of British social security, the developments of UC, its distinctive features, and a critical discussion of its design and delivery. Next, in chapter three the conceptual context is explored which develops the broader themes to aid our understanding of UC. The themes include neoliberalism, income inequality, the welfare state, deservingness, responsabilisation, conditionality and the ‘harms’ of social policy. This development of themes will provide the pieces to understand the broader background of UC and the experiences within it.

Chapter four reviews existing literature surrounding social security, (un)employment and poverty, focused on the impacts this has on emotions, wellbeing and the ‘self’. As there is limited evidence on this directly regarding UC, broader literature is examined. Whilst the chapter is separated into sections, for example ‘getting-by’ and the ‘impacts of (un)employment’ these topics are linked, and the cumulative experiences intensify the subsequent impacts. This fourth chapter will address the empirical background for the thesis and highlight the current gap in our understanding in the impacts of living with UC on emotions, wellbeing and the ‘self’.

The analytical framework is presented in chapter five which provides the tools to analyse living with UC. The framework is constructed over two concerns: understanding experiences of UC (and subsequent impact on emotions and bodies) and exploring its impacts on the ‘self’, whilst these are two separate concerns you cannot understand one without the other. To address the former UC is framed as a civilising offensive which captures the ideological and targeted ‘attack’ UC encompasses. The civilising offensive is useful to explore the behavioural dimensions of UC which are reflective of the ‘internalisation of external restraints’ (Elias, 1994). To further *operationalise* this ‘offensive’ the concepts of governmentality, rationality, bureaucracy and dehumanization are explored which increase our understanding of how a civilising offensive works on the ground. Next, to address the latter, concepts surrounding ‘identity work’ are discussed. First the concept of identity itself is explored, focused on its fluid and relational qualities. The discussion then moves to Goffman and the related concepts of ‘stigma power’ and

‘nothingness’. Together, this analytical framework allows us to look both *up* and *down* and across ontological and temporal lines.

Chapter six examines the how, what and why of the fieldwork which used a qualitative case-study methodology in a coastal town. The chapter discusses issues surrounding recruitment and sampling, qualitative longitudinal research, ethics, wellbeing and positionality, with reflections throughout.

Chapter seven introduces the findings chapters via Heather’s diary, this provides a snapshot of living with UC which intersects with the four empirical findings chapters. Chapter eight examines the ‘dehumanizing’ experiences of UC and argues UC is ‘violent’. It also explores the impacts of navigating UC and from the perceived uniformity within the design and delivery of UC, all of which undermined participants.

In chapter nine the impacts of UC on emotions and wellbeing are considered, building upon the experiences in chapter eight, new empirical data illustrates how UC is emotionally damaging. Evidence is also presented on the negative impacts on participants’ mental and physical wellbeing, with individuals using words such as ‘survival’ and ‘suicide’ when talking about their experiences of UC.

Chapter ten investigates how the ‘self’ is damaged and managed whilst living with UC particularly in relation to stigma. The chapter first explores experiences of ‘stigma power’ (Tyler, 2020) before moving on to consider how people respond to stigma, impacts on ‘self-worth’ and lastly the issue of deservingness. The latter is intrinsically linked to understandings and negotiations of stigma and is an important thread throughout this thesis.

Chapter eleven considers how people respond to UC and the consequences of this, with the repeated focus on the ‘self’. The chapter presents findings which show the importance individuals place on self-preservation and the potential costs of this, as people move further away from their ‘self’. Chapter twelve brings the findings section to a close and uses Bill’s diary to do this, mirroring chapter seven. Bill’s diary provides another snapshot of living with UC and the challenging nature of this experience as individuals are ‘chipped away’ at whilst attempting to navigate UC, ‘get-by’ and protect their emotions, wellbeing and ‘self’. The findings chapters provide new empirical insights into the impacts of living with UC which repeatedly undermines people who seek social security. Lastly, chapter thirteen concludes the thesis by highlighting the empirical contributions to knowledge and the implications for future research and policy.

## 2. Universal Credit: Policy and Context

### 2.1 Introduction

UC is the ‘flagship policy’ of the 2010-2015 Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government (Dwyer and Wright, 2014) and is a radically different form of social security using many untested policy ideas and introduced without an evidence base (see 2.3 for features). The chapter begins with a brief history of British social security to gain a broader context for UC. Next, the features of UC, many of which are distinct, and others intensified from the legacy system are examined. A discussion of the more specific origins of UC follows, outlining how the social security reforms were based on an ideological ‘story’ and political whims, rather than evidence. Lastly, a short section follows on the recent developments in social security as a response to Covid-19. UC is delivered differently in the devolved nations of Scotland and Northern Ireland and some of the issues discussed reflect the situation in England and Wales only. The different approach in devolved nations creates a ‘natural experiment’ regarding UC particularly for understanding the experiences, impacts and responses to it.

### 2.2 British Social Security System

This section considers past social security with a timeline and a discussion focusing on more recent changes. This is not to disregard the more historic changes; however it is not within the remit of this thesis, and the last thirty years illustrate the increasing spread and severity of conditionality which built on the neoliberal foundations first laid by Thatcher a decade earlier (Fletcher, 2015; Fletcher and Wright, 2017; Watts et al, 2014).

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF

# BRITISH SOCIAL SECURITY

**1834**

The Poor Law Amendment Act

**1911**

The National Insurance Act

**1944 - 1948**

The establishment of the Welfare State via: Education Act (1944), Family Allowance Act (1945), National Insurance Act (1946), Pensions (1947), National Health Service Act (1948) and the National Assistance Board (1948).

**1948 - 1970**

Coverage was expanded across the Welfare State during this apparent 'Golden Era' however coverage was not universal and social inequalities persisted.

**1970 - 1978**

During the 1970s there was increasing social, economic and political instability leading to the 'winter of discontent' in 1978-79.

**1979**

The election of the Thatcher led Conservative Government signified a Neoliberal and Neo-Conservative shift which saw the retraction of the Welfare State over the following 18 years.

**1982**

Social Security and Housing Benefit Act introduced a range of reforms which cut coverage for many households. Additionally, taxes were cut, pensions reformed, and council house tenants were given the right to buy their homes. Through-out the 1980s unemployment increased and concurrently social security became stricter.

**1996**

JSA was introduced and shows a clear cemented shift towards activation of unemployed citizens.

**1997**

New Labour enter Government, aligned with 'Third way' thinking, introduce a raft of reforms focusing on 'making work pay' and eliminating child poverty. From 1997 - 2008 New Labour governed in a time of economic stability.

**1998 - 2008**

In 1998, the National Minimum Wage Act was introduced alongside 'New Deal' programmes for out of work lone parents and disabled people. In 2003, WTC were introduced for low paid workers. Across the decade, New Labour increased and spread conditionality across social security, with the unemployed, lone parents and the disabled all targeted. The Great Recession in 2008 caused significant economic, political and social change.

**2010**

The Conservative - Liberal Coalition enter Government and start a decade of austerity with widespread cuts and 'streamlining' of services. The Government claimed austerity was needed to deal with the 'deficit' caused by the recession and the 'irresponsible' New Labour Government.

**2012**

The Welfare Reform Act was introduced which included the 'benefit cap', 'bedroom tax', a four year working age 'benefit freeze' and UC- a new form of means tested working age social security which would replace the Legacy system.

**2015**

The Conservatives win another election signalling a continuation of austerity and social security reforms.

*Figure 1 History of British Social Security developed from Adler (2016); Clarke, Langan and Williams (2001); Dwyer (2004); Fletcher and Wright (2017); Fraser (2009); Jordan (2017) and Whitworth (2013).*

The discussion will focus on 1996 onwards and the impacts of reforms in the last decade when ‘creeping conditionality’ (Dwyer, 2004) became ‘ubiquitous conditionality’ (Dwyer and Wright, 2014). In recent decades, there has been an intensification globally of workfare policies (see Peck, 2001), but it is not a new idea (see Fletcher 2015). The ‘essence’ of workfare is “...enforcing work whilst residualizing welfare” (Peck, 2001:10) which encapsulates a vast array of mandatory activation policies across the world to (re)connect social security recipients to the labour market and discourage ‘welfare’. Activation “relies on a blanket view of welfare subjects as naturally inactive and in need of activation – either because of their perceived incompetency or immorality” (Wright, 2016:236). In the UK this can be clearly seen with the introduction of JSA which had activation and conditionality at its core (Peck, 2001) as well as surveillance and responsabilisation (Fletcher and Wright, 2017). The concepts of conditionality (the requirements attached to social security receipt) and responsabilisation (citizens increasingly responsible for actions and risks) are discussed in chapter 3. These are notions which were extended further in the ‘New Deal’ programmes and creation of Job Centre Plus (JCP), both a sign of the ‘creeping conditionality’ of British social security (Dwyer, 2004). This ‘creeping conditionality’ continued in 2008 with the introduction of ESA and changes to IS which increased conditionality for lone parents and disabled groups (Wiggan, 2015). A stricter Work Capability Assessment (WCA) included within ESA meant increased conditionality for those deemed ‘fit for work’ either within ESA or via a transition to JSA and a similar recategorization occurred for lone parents (Fletcher and Wright, 2017).

The impact of the Coalition reforms was large; Beatty and Fothergill (2013) found an average reduction in Government spending of £470 for every working adult due to extensive social security cuts. However, there are geographical disparities as “...the most deprived local authorities across Britain are hit the hardest...A key effect of welfare reform will therefore be to widen the gaps in prosperity between the best and worst local economies across the country” (Beatty and Fothergill, 2013:19). Moreover, food poverty has increased in areas impacted most heavily by reforms (Loopstra et al, 2015) which is supported by findings from the Trussell Trust (2017). By 2015, 80 percent of social

security programmes active in 2010 had ended (Hill, 2013) illustrating the severity of Government ‘streamlining’. The austerity agenda continued under the Conservative Government<sup>1</sup> which saw a continuation of the ‘benefit freeze’ announced in 2015 for four years amongst other social security cuts with a proposed saving of £12 billion (Corlett, 2018). It is important to consider the austere backdrop in which UC manifested which has challenged life for many. Austerity impacted on UC in the strive for cost-cutting, efficiency and reducing social security entitlements. The IFS (2019a) reported on average people received less with UC compared to the legacy system with political decisions around the design of UC creating ‘winners’ and ‘losers’.

The reforms since the Great Recession (2007 – 2009)<sup>2</sup> have impacted disproportionately across certain localities (Beatty and Fothergill, 2016), families with children (CPAG, 2017) and already disadvantaged groups such as those in the lowest income deciles, women, disabled people, certain ethnicities, and lone parents (EHRC 2018a; 2018b). Notably, those on the higher income deciles generally saw their incomes protected from Conservative changes to tax and social security (Hood and Waters, 2017).

### 2.3 UC Design and Delivery

UC includes:

- One single DP paid and calculated monthly in arrears (based upon one month’s ‘assessment period’) to households including a standard allowance and other components for housing, (up to two) children, limited capacity to work, or care for a severely disabled person.
- Five-week wait (reduced from six in 2017) to first payment and advance allowance system.
- Debt recovery where 25 percent, reduced from 30 percent in April 2021 and 40 percent in 2019, of the standard allowance can be removed. Debts include advance repayments, overpayments, hardship and crisis loans and third-party deductions including council tax, utilities and rent<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> A majority Conservative Government was elected in 2015, a minority Conservative Government in 2017 and lastly a majority Conservative Government in 2019. This discussion does not include the latter Conservative administration.

<sup>2</sup> The Great recession was caused by a global financial crisis which led to the worst recession in the western world since the second world war. Governments faced increasing budget deficits and the policy focus became one of austerity (see Olafsson, Daly, Kangas and Palme, 2019). The impacts of the crisis were felt throughout the following decade in the UK with low earnings and productivity growth, public debt remaining at a high level and record cuts to Government expenditure (Cribb and Johnson, 2018).

<sup>3</sup>See here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/find-out-about-money-taken-off-your-universal-credit-payment>

- Increased rates and severity of sanctions which now extends to new groups.
- Assets over £6000 reduce UC entitlement and those with assets valued over £16000 are ineligible.
- A signed ‘claimant commitment’ is required for all who receive UC, which includes single and joint claims.
- ‘Digital by default’ approach means digital channels (internet and phone) dominate with claims being started and managed online.
- In-work conditionality.
- Taper rate at 63 percent for those in-work which reduces their UC income.
- The ‘minimum income floor’<sup>4</sup> (MIF) is applied to those deemed ‘gainfully self-employed’. If you earn over MIF your UC income is reduced at the 63 percent taper rate. If you earn less than the MIF, your UC entitlement is not increased.
- Work Coach (WC) caseloads now include a mixture of social security recipients and the WC *should* support individuals throughout their ‘journey’ in and out of work.

Key design and delivery features of UC are reflective of its aims of responsabilisation (see 3.6 for definition) and to reflect the world of work, notions which have been critiqued (Millar and Bennet, 2017; Wright and Dwyer, 2020). Some elements were used previously, particularly within JSA which had high levels of conditionality and sanctions (Fletcher, 2015). UC has intensified these and other elements such as the rate of debt collection which disproportionately impacts certain groups such as those with disabilities and low-income households (NAO, 2020). Graven (2021) notes how the collection of third-party debts creates a ‘self-fulfilling prophecy’ as budgets are reduced by the debt recovery which subsequently destabilises budgeting.

Individuals must apply for UC online - which 99 percent do (NAO, 2020) - verify their identity, provide evidence, and attend an interview at the JCP where a ‘claimant commitment’ is signed (DWP, 2018a). This personalised ‘claimant commitment’ is a contract between the individual and the Government which outlines their work-related obligations to receive UC and the consequences for non-compliance (Dwyer and Wright, 2014). The ‘claimant commitment’ ensures conditionality and responsabilisation are at the centre of working-age social security. Additionally, UC introduces the ‘joint claim’ for households which means that, for those in a couple, their partner must also sign the

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<sup>4</sup> This is calculated as National Minimum Wage X hours worked and written into the ‘claimant commitment’.

‘claimant commitment’ and the household receives a single payment. Therefore, the reach of the Government now extends into homes and relationships for a growing number of people. Bennett (2021) has explored the (mis)understandings inherent within the design and delivery of UC surrounding couples based on gendered perceptions linking to employment and household finances. These flawed understandings then must be negotiated by individuals, and households, and could impact domestic abuse (Women’s Aid, 2015; Work and Pensions Committee, 2018a).

There are four conditionality groups within UC: full ‘work-related requirements’ for jobseekers including the ‘main carer’ of children over 3 years; ‘work-preparation’ for those who cannot currently work due to health, disability or are the ‘main carer’ of a child aged 2 years; ‘work-focused interview’ for lead carer of child aged 1; and no ‘work-related requirements’ for the ‘main carer’ of a child under 1 and for people with disabilities or health conditions that prevent them from working (Entitledto, 2020).

Conditionality is supported by a multi-level system of sanctions – high, medium, low and lowest – which can remove up to 100% of the standard allowance. The lowest level applies if you fail to attend a work-focused interview and the sanction ends once this is attended. Low level sanctions can be incurred from not attending training or not complying with an action to obtain work or increase hours. The sanction lasts until the action is completed plus 7 days for a first ‘offence’, 14 days for a second and 28 days for a third (within a year). A medium level sanction applies if you do not comply with work-search requirements and ‘fail to take all reasonable actions’ or are not available to attend work or interviews. The first medium sanction lasts 28 days and the second 91 days. High level sanctions can be incurred from not applying for a job when informed to, refusing a job offer or leaving or reducing the hours you work. The sanction lasts 91 days for a first ‘offence’, 182 days for a second and 364 for any subsequent high-level sanction (DWP, 2021b).

The sanctions under UC have increased in severity, in terms of length and amount, and scope as they apply to new groups (Adler, 2018; Wright et al, 2020). Importantly, conditionality continues for people in-work receiving UC who are below the ‘conditionality threshold’ and expected to complete work-related activity (Wright et al, 2016). The ‘conditionality threshold’ (national minimum wage x 35) reflects the amount someone working 35 hours per week would earn who did not require social security (Watts et al, 2014). In-work conditionality involves the completion of work-related

activity in addition to their employed hours up to 35 hours per week. Failure to do this may result in a sanction as per their ‘claimant commitment’. Thus, “UC subjects low paid workers to double conditionality by adding job search conditions on top of employment conditions” (Wright and Dwyer, 2020:2).

The inclusion of conditionality for workers receiving social security is ‘unchartered territory’ and could affect 1.2 million individuals (Pennycook and Whittaker, 2012). Before UC, low paid workers received WTC which was paid directly via HMRC as a top up to their salary. The avoidance of the JCP and the overall design and promotion of WTC resulted in it being non-stigmatizing (Baumberg et al, 2012). Wright and Dwyer (2020) investigate experiences of in-work conditionality from a wider longitudinal qualitative study into welfare conditionality, they explore how ‘mismatches’ in policy create challenges for those in-work and engaging with UC. The ‘mismatches’ cover three issues: sanctions and employment opportunities, strict conditionality and flexible labour market, and the ‘making work pay’ versus realities of poverty. Underlying these ‘mismatches’ is an ideological amalgamation of two previously distinct policy assumptions, the unemployed and undeserving ‘unwilling worker’ and the employed deserving ‘willing worker’, the result is a misguided ‘coerced worker claimant’ model (Wright and Dwyer, 2020:15).

There is a growing sense of UC’s ‘cultural disconnect’ (Millar and Bennett, 2017) between policy and reality that appear in the (mis)understandings (Bennett, 2021) and ‘mismatches’ (Wright and Dwyer, 2020) which individuals living with UC must navigate. If we consider the ideologically informed inception of UC discussed in 2.4, then these paradoxes are unsurprising.

## 2.4 UC Evolution

The origins of UC are interwoven with the story of its creator, Iain Duncan Smith, whose ‘Easterhouse epiphany’ is well-documented (Slater, 2012) and led to the formation of the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), an *independent* think-tank. Two CSJ reports – Breakdown Britain (2006) and Dynamic Benefits (2009) – were instrumental in shaping the Conservatives’ *caring* approach to social issues (Pautz, 2013) characterizing Britain as ‘broken’. This enabled Duncan Smith’s vision to move from Easterhouse to Westminster with Dynamic Benefits (2009) providing the foundations for UC. Slater (2012) describes

the careful crafting and corroborating of the ‘Broken Britain’ story by the CSJ as a ‘manufacture of ignorance’. This describes how the ideological diagnosis of ‘Broken Britain’ became the dominant narrative focused on individuals with structural reform the only solution; Duncan Smith was offering diagnosis and cure. Crucially, neoliberal ideology (neoliberalism is discussed in 3.2) was the driver for UC, not evidence.

In May 2010, Duncan Smith was appointed Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in the new Coalition Government and was on a ‘mission’ to transform a social security system he perceived as problematic. Special advisors, Phillipa Stroud and Stephen Brien, were integral to the creation of the Dynamic Benefits report (Timmins, 2016) and became key within the implementation of UC. Lord Freud is another important player for UC and was referred to by Duncan Smith as his ‘excellent lieutenant’ and was Minister for Welfare Reform from 2010 – 2015. Duncan Smith became a central figure in the Coalition government’s social security reforms and with support from the CSJ produced his own vision for ‘welfare’ (Wiggan, 2012) and gave many passionate speeches (Garrett, 2015). In July 2010, the Government Green Paper *21<sup>st</sup> Century Welfare* was released followed by the *Universal Credit: welfare that works* White Paper in November 2010. Both documents were limited on details of *how* UC would work (Timmins, 2016), included a “...limited range of evidence...” and did not use “...findings from DWP-commissioned evaluations...” (Monaghan and Ingold, 2019:357).

Wiggan (2012) explores the discursive strategy within both policy documents arguing that the Government ideologically reframed debates surrounding social security. The ‘story’ became one of personal failings, ‘worklessness’ and ‘welfare dependency’ exacerbated by the existing *burdensome* legacy system, which required a neoliberal response (Wiggan, 2012). Despite the lack of evidence (Monaghan and Ingold, 2019) and policy detail (Timmins, 2016) UC was enacted within the broader Welfare Reform Bill of 2012 based upon an ideological ‘story’ of ‘welfare’ (Slater, 2012; Wiggan, 2012) in which social security recipients were both victim and villain.

The initial timetable planned for UC to be rolled-out in 2013 and completed in 2017 yet this was not to be for several reasons namely the scale of the project, the (mis)use of an ‘agile’ approach and a lack of leadership, communication, and policy details (NAO, 2013; Timmins, 2016). UC was developed during austerity which affected social security levels for citizens (2.2), and reduced DWP staff levels by around 30 percent (Timmins, 2016). Thus, during a period of extensive reform, the DWP were enacting and experiencing austerity, an issue which ‘constrained’ the DWP evidence process during the development

of UC (Monaghan and Ingold, 2019). Qualitative research with DWP policy makers involved with UC (Ingold and Monaghan, 2016) found the political agenda influenced the use of evidence at all stages and only that which fit with the *right* policy story and political agenda was successful; evidence which did not fit was filtered out. Ingold and Monaghan (2016) reported "...officials noted that their influence could be limited and considered Universal Credit to be driven by ideology, which not only framed the search for evidence but also constrained its use..." (2016:185). The filtration of evidence may remove uncertainties, but it also removes any contradiction of the dominant ideology, and only produces the 'story' Government wants to hear.

UC encountered many hurdles and "by 2013, the UC programme was on the brink of complete failure" (Work and Pensions Committee, 2018b:14) due to well-documented and costly IT and infrastructure issues (See NAO, 2013). Underpinning many of the problems was a systemic lack of detail and understanding of UC as there was no 'operational blueprint', which affected the DWP staff and the external contractors who were building the UC infrastructure without clear communication, direction and oversight (Timmins, 2016). This crisis led to a pause and much slower roll-out of UC, pushing back the original completion date of 2017. A 'twin-track approach' was adopted whilst the issues were resolved, creating a 'live service' using the first system and a 'full service' which would replace the 'live service' once the IT system had been developed. By May 2016, all JCPs were 'live' for new claims and then the 'full service' started to roll-out which completed in December 2018.

However, UC still needed to transition those accessing the legacy system which still has not happened. It was estimated in 2018 that the UC roll-out would be completed in December 2023 (NAO, 2018) and in February 2020 Will Quince MP announced a further delay to September 2024 (Hansard, 2020) with the Covid-19 pandemic causing further delays. Notably, the delayed 'managed migration' means that many individuals will 'naturally migrate' from the legacy system to UC due to a change in circumstance. A 'natural migration' does not include the transitional protection of their income which will come with a 'managed migration' therefore people could lose out.

In February 2018, a Work and Pensions Committee (2018b) report into UC stated "In the eighth year of the programme, a full business case for UC has yet to be submitted. There remains considerable uncertainty about its costs and benefits, not least in its employment impact for claimants other than those in the simplest circumstances" (2018b:3). Shortly after, the first full business case for UC was submitted to the Treasury (DWP, 2018b)

outlining the benefits of UC with “...the £2bn total cost of investment against a social return to the economy of £34bn over ten years; and an increase of people in employment of 200k” (DWP, 2018b: 3). These claims were criticised by NAO (2018) as the employment benefit was unmeasurable and the economic benefits uncertain as it relied on increasing employment, increasing efficiency and reducing fraud and errors.

In 2020, the NAO reported the Government’s claims of employment benefits were still unproved, it was still unclear if UC would be cheaper to administer and fraud and errors had increased to a rate of 10.5 percent with one of the highest levels of overpayment recorded (NAO, 2020). To achieve a simplified social security system, a complex process has taken place, one which may get considerably more so when it is fully rolled-out and for which the benefits are still unsubstantiated.

To close this section, statistics from when the doctoral fieldwork took place (March 2019 – October 2019) are provided. Figures show in March 2019, 817,912 people were living with UC; 416, 532 were ‘searching for work’ and 104,453 ‘working with requirements’. By October 2019, 1,317,985 people were living with UC; 580,491 were ‘searching for work’ and 190,376 ‘working with requirements’ (DWP, 2019a). The graph below shows the numbers of households receiving UC in the fieldwork location compared with those households accessing the legacy system:

## Households on UC or legacy, constituency total

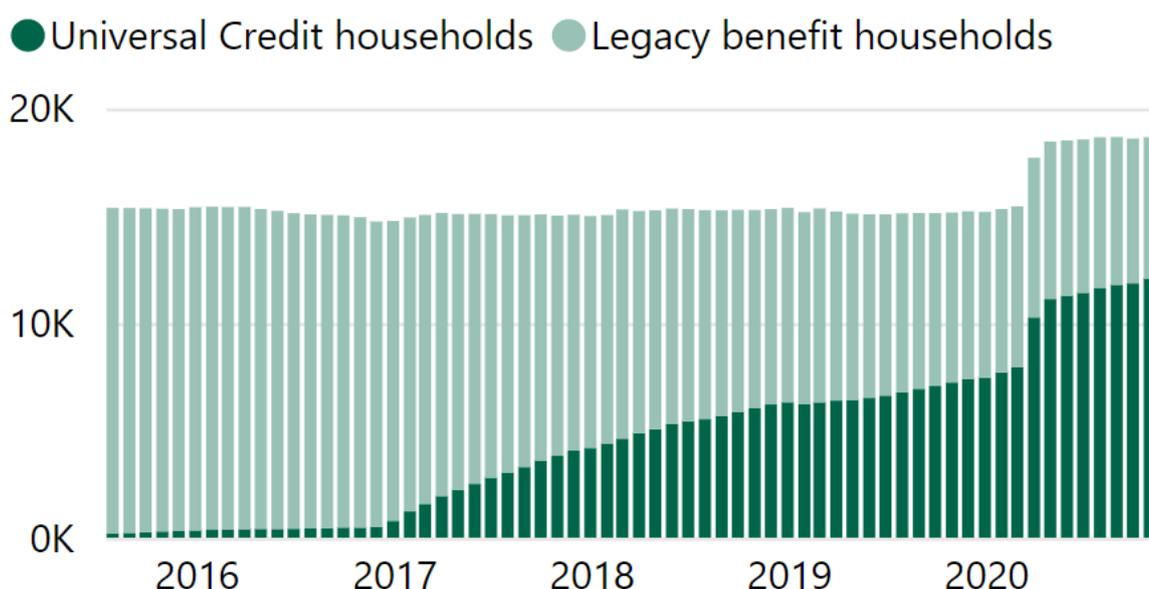


Figure 2 from <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/constituency-data-universal-credit-roll-out/>

## 2.5 Covid-19 and social security

In March 2020, four months after the fieldwork ended, the UK went into ‘lockdown’ in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and citizens were told to ‘stay at home’ subsequently an unprecedented Governmental response was needed to support and protect citizens, their livelihoods, and the economy. We entered this crisis after a decade of austerity with the lowest levels of social security payments since the creation of the welfare state (IPPR, 2019), with incomes for the poorest households no higher in 2018-19 than in 2001-2 (Brewer et al, 2020), and with increasing health inequalities and life expectancy stalling (Marmot et al, 2020). The situation is extremely changeable, and this uncertainty will continue for the next few years at least as the social, economic and political shocks continue to reverberate. Therefore, it is important to outline the responses so far.

The Government introduced two temporary schemes for workers and self-employment, now extended until September 2021 (HM Treasury, 2021), and changed existing social security namely UC. The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme sought to protect the incomes and jobs of workers by providing financial assistance to employers amounting to 80 percent of salaries. Employees were placed on a paid leave of absence, furlough, and the scheme provided a quick way for the Government to protect incomes (Millar and Whiteford, 2020). The Self-Employment Income Support Scheme provides a taxable grant of 80 percent of average trading profits covering a 3-month period.

UC and WTC were increased by £20 per week from April 2020 initially for a year, reversing 30 years of welfare retrenchment (Brewer and Gardiner, 2020). The uplift was not extended to the legacy system. Local Housing Allowance was increased to help cover housing costs and debt repayments under UC were temporarily stopped. Work-search requirements, WC meetings and WCA were paused and subsequently there was less sanctioning for non-compliance (Millar and Whiteford, 2020). The pandemic has led to a much bigger and broader group of people accessing social security. The impact of Covid-19 on social security is currently being investigated by a national ESRC funded project, Welfare at a Social Distance (WASD, 2021), and its early findings indicate the growing diversity within the UC cohort in terms of factors such as employment, education and financial security.

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions described the impact of Covid-19 on UC:

Since 16 March to the end of April, we have received over 1.8 million claims for Universal Credit...Overall, this is 6 times the volume that we would typically experience and in one week, we had a 10-fold increase. The rate for

Universal Credit claims appears to have stabilized at about 20, 000 to 25,000 per day which is double that of a standard week pre-COVID-19 (Thérèse Coffey, 4<sup>th</sup> May 2020).

Evidently, there has been a huge increase in demand for UC and this is for both people in and out of work. The DWP estimated that in April 2020, 30 percent of those living with UC were working and of those who entered UC during the crisis, 46 percent were employed in May 2020 and a further 12 percent furloughed (Brewer and Handscomb, 2020). The statistics illustrate the impact the pandemic is having on livelihoods, with a growing need for citizens' incomes to be supported.

The pandemic, and ensuing economic uncertainty, has and will continue to impact on social security. This means there is a greater need to understand the experiences and impacts of living with UC on emotions, wellbeing and the 'self', evidence which this thesis will provide.

## 2.6 Conclusion

UC was introduced without evidence, driven largely by ideology, implemented un-tested ideas and is the largest reform to the welfare state since inception. This chapter has provided insight into the background of UC (2.4) and how it fits within the history of British social security (2.2). It has discussed the design and delivery of UC (2.3) and outlined its unique features. Lastly, the chapter explored the impact of the pandemic on British social security (2.5) which has increased the numbers of people living with UC.

## 3. The Neoliberal ‘conditions’ of Social Security: development of themes

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter will develop the themes needed to investigate UC. It provides the pieces to understand the broader background in which living with UC is set and how it came to be. Whilst the empirical concerns of this thesis are on a micro level – understanding the impacts of UC on emotions and the ‘self’ – it would be remiss not to consider the wider context of these experiences. The design and delivery of UC which shapes experiences is linked to a range of themes which will be discussed. First, neoliberalism is explored, focusing on a definition provided by Wacquant (2012) who attempts to offer a new sociological conceptualisation. Second, income inequality in the UK is explored. Third, the definition and development of welfare states are considered. Fourth, the notion of deservingness is examined which relates to understandings and constructions of welfare states and neoliberalism which increasingly restricts deservingness. Fifth, responsabilisation is discussed in terms of definition and application. Sixth, the concept of conditionality is explored regarding its development, definition, use and relationship with sanctioning and surveillance. Lastly, ‘violent’ social policy is considered including its conceptual and empirical developments. The sections outlined are interlinked and are important factors to understand UC and experiences of those living with it.

### 3.2 Neoliberalism

The concept of neoliberalism, despite its widespread use across and outside academia, is difficult to define and as such is described as a ‘rascal concept’ (Peck and Theodore, 2012). Common features of neoliberalism include “...the extension of market relationships and reduction in state intervention, welfare state roll-back, and a renewed focus on individuals’ responsibility to maximise their freedoms and opportunities within competitive markets” (Stonehouse et al, 2015:394). Yet, whilst these features are helpful in terms of implementation it is important to consider neoliberalism theoretically as this ‘rascal concept’ thrives in the ‘tangled mess’ (Peck, 2010:15) it creates.

Wacquant (2012) critiques the ‘polarised’ conceptual debate surrounding neoliberalism as being dominated by ‘market rule’ (a narrow economic focused approach) versus

governmentality (a ‘messy’ Foucauldian inspired approach) and subsequently proposed a new *via media*<sup>5</sup>:

... from a ‘thin’ economic conception centred on the market to a ‘thick’ sociological conception centred on the state that specifies the institutional machinery involved in the establishment of market dominance and its operant impact on effective social membership (Wacquant, 2012: 71).

This ‘neoliberal state-crafting’ is operationalised with three interlinked theses which are developed in his other work (Wacquant, 2008; 2009):

- Neoliberalism is not an economic but a political project; it entails not the dismantling but the reengineering of the state (2012:71)
- Neoliberalism entails a rightward tilting of the bureaucratic field and spawns a Centaur State (2012:73)
- The growth of glorification of the penal wing of the state is an integral component of the neoliberal Leviathan (2012:74)

Wacquant (2012) outlines the development of ‘supervisory workfare’ which seeks to discipline as social security becomes increasingly punitive which is ‘meshed’ with ‘prisonfare’ in a ‘neoliberal leviathan’. In his attempts to understand ‘actually existing neoliberalism’ Wacquant provides a useful framework which illustrates the dynamic, political, deceptive and determined nature of neoliberalism based upon his ethnographic research. The first two theses are particularly useful as an illustration of the manifestation and maintenance of a ‘Centaur State’ which seeks to control society. The theorisation is challenged in terms of definition, particularly around the ‘institutional core’ and inclusion of ‘the penal wing’ (Collier, 2012; Hilgers, 2012; Theodore and Peck; 2012), use of existing literature on ‘market rule’ (Jessop, 2013) and governmentality (Collier, 2012), as well as issues of implementation and specificity (Hilgers, 2012; Theodore and Peck, 2012).

Hilgers (2012) argues that neoliberalism does not always appear as Wacquant theorizes, discussing the divergence between theoretical and practical understandings. Using examples from Africa, Hilgers (2012) illustrates the paradoxical role of the State which undermines Wacquant’s theorisation of neoliberalism’s ‘institutional core’. For example, Hilgers describes the historically low levels of social security in Africa with states often having contradictory relationships (both present/strong and absent/weak) and the

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<sup>5</sup> Latin term meaning the middle road.

variations of individual responsibility, diverging from Wacquant (2012). The example illuminated the different and unintended consequences of neoliberalism within African countries showing the importance of context (historically, culturally, socially and geographically). Notably, Hilgers reminds us “...neoliberal policies are anchored in bodies, representations and practices” (2012:91) thus once *internalised* neoliberalism is (re)enacted by individuals, *on the ground*, which impacts structurally. Another important intervention from Hilgers (2012) is over Wacquant’s third thesis. Hilgers does not disagree with the application within the specific western context where the research took place yet argues it “...is actually the epiphenomenon of a deeper reality: beneath its apparent apology of freedom, neoliberalism produces a specific state that reinforces control and coercion (2012:89)”. This expansion allows for other forms of state control such as the military or ‘privatisation’ of state coercion to be included and provides a broader framework to explore ‘neoliberal state-crafting’.

Building from Wacquant and Hilgers, Peck and Theodore (2012) provide a more methodological contribution exploring the spatiality of neoliberalism and the usefulness of ‘contextually embedded’ and ‘located’ cross-case theorisation, without which, any conceptualisation of neoliberalism is “...destined to remain incomplete in the absence of a more explicit theorisation of spatiality, variegation, and uneven geographical development (2012:183). This contribution provides an avenue to explore the differences within ‘Neoliberalisation’ and critiques the idea of an exemplar ‘institutional core’ as there is no singular blueprint for neoliberalism (Peck and Theodore, 2012) as suggested by Wacquant (2012). Moreover, Peck and Theodore (2012) explain that the dynamism and opportunism of ‘Neoliberalisation’ allows it to ‘fail forward’ and carve success from failings such as the ‘Great Recession’. This ‘fail forward’ notion is important as it links to the idea that ‘Neoliberalisation’ is never complete and allows its ‘failings’ to be used as a reason for further, often more extensive, state-craft such as the use of austerity and privatisation.

Collier (2012), focusing on the differences between the ‘market rule’ and Governmentality approaches, explores the usefulness of their intersection and if this would undermine studies of neoliberalism. Collier criticises the previous theorisations of neoliberalism, most pointedly by Wacquant, broadly around the usefulness of the ‘theoretical gymnastics’ and risks of inflation which would make the concept (again) insurmountable. Here, Collier is questioning whether the focus on conceptualising neoliberalism as a ‘big leviathan’ might reduce our methodological and critical tools as

the concept has absorbed far more than is possible for analysis. The inflation is an important critique as "... by assimilating it into a big Leviathan in which it assumes mystical proportion and magical power..." (Collier, 2012:192-193) neoliberalism becomes again elusive yet pervasive and challenges opportunities for critical integration. This again challenges Wacquant's assumption of an 'institutional core' in which neoliberalism manifests and maintains social control, which could become *too structuring* (Collier, 2012:189). More select criticism comes from Wacquant's narrow use of 'governmentality' which Collier argues misrepresents key parts of the theory, the paper in general encompasses a much more critical tone towards Wacquant and his summarisations which Hilgers (2012) and Peck and Theodore (2012) were sympathetic to.

Despite criticism, Wacquant provides an important, if partial, conceptualisation of neoliberalism. A useful benefit of the debate within *Social Anthropology* has been the dialogue between theorists, as the attempts to understand neoliberalism can be improved by collaboration, debate, and comparison (Collier, 2012; Peck and Theodore, 2012). To conclude this brief discussion of the 'rascal concept', some overlapping features of neoliberalism will be repeated. Neoliberalism is political and dynamic in nature which can 'fail forward', it is embedded in structure, but this is geographically, historically, culturally, and socially specific and it is embodied by citizens who can (re)enact, resist and reinforce neoliberal state-crafting.

### 3.3 Income Inequality

Income inequality levels in the UK are among the highest in Europe (OECD, 2018) and are estimated to increase to record levels within the next decade (Resolution Foundation, 2018). Statistics show in 2017 "...before direct taxes and cash benefits, the richest fifth (those in the top income quintile group) had an average original income 12 times larger than the poorest fifth..." (ONS, 2018:6). The figures highlight the vast difference between the incomes of the rich and poor in Britain.

JRF (2021) found 14.5 million people were in poverty in 2018/19, over 20 percent of the UK population, with the impacts of Covid-19 causing further uncertainty and challenges for those living on a low income. The JRF suggest "Poverty is when a person's resources are well below their minimum needs, including the need to take part in society" (JRF, 2017:7). The overall figure has changed very little over the last two decades, but the groups affected within it has. Individuals in low-paid part-time work, BAME groups, lone

parents and renters are all more likely to experience poverty and these factors can intersect (JRF, 2021).

In 2019 it is estimated 2.4 million people experienced destitution, an increase of 35 percent over two years (JRF, 2020). Destitution is “...the circumstances facing people who cannot afford to buy the absolute essentials that we all need to eat, stay warm and dry, and keep clean” (JRF, 2020:5). The severity of destitution has also increased with more individuals facing multiple issues. Notably, 50 percent of those experiencing destitution received UC or had applied to (JRF, 2020). The worsening levels of poverty in the UK were investigated and heavily critiqued by Philip Alston, the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, in a report in 2019. The Government’s austerity agenda has meant “The bottom line is that much of the glue that has held British society together since the Second World War has been deliberately removed and replaced with a harsh and uncaring ethos” (Alston, 2019:4).

The IFS (2019b) reported 58 percent of households in poverty had at least one adult in-work compared to 37 percent in 1994 which fits with Hick and Lanou’s (2018) definition of in-work poverty. Hick and Lanou (2018) found “...those in working poverty are three times more likely to become workless than non-poor working households...[and] of respondents living in workless households who find work, one-quarter will only go as far as to enter working poverty” (2018:19). The statistics show the difference poverty makes on employment experiences and the significant struggle to leave in-work poverty.

In-work poverty occurs across western countries, with varying economies and welfare states (Immervoll and Pearson, 2009; Marx, 2010) with some groups disproportionately affected: females, young people, low skilled, disabled and ethnic minorities (McKnight et al, 2016). Unlike the Government mantra, work does not always pay, especially in the current climate of rising living costs and austerity.

### 3.4 The Welfare State

Welfare states were a response to the risks arising from capitalist industrial society, and despite attacks since inception they continue (Kemp, 2010). Van der Veen describes the welfare state as:

...based on a notion of social solidarity that bridges social divisions between classes, solidarity that binds the fates of the lower and the middle classes, the poor and the rich, the young and the old and the sick and the healthy together in welfare programmes based on risk-sharing between high- and low-risk categories (Van der Veen, 2012:14).

Risk sharing is a key feature of the welfare state and underpins the social protection offered. The risks were perceived as social; as unintended structural consequences of industrial society and therefore a collective response was required, in the form of social protection (Alofs and Hoop, 2010). There are two dominant forms of social protection: social insurance and social assistance. Social insurance is based on shared social risks between groups which creates a system of solidarity between the high and low risk categories. Whereas social assistance is based on the notion that providing for those who are vulnerable or in need is a shared responsibility, these schemes are often means-tested (Van der Veen, 2012).

The global variations of welfare states are examined in the seminal work of Esping-Andersen (1990) which still holds influence over 25 years later (Deeming, 2017). Esping-Andersen (1990) outlined three regimes in response to capitalism which were liberal, conservative, and social-democratic. The work of Esping-Andersen offers a useful framework to examine welfare state variations and their individual responses to political, economic, and social challenges. Yet clearly countries evolve, and it is difficult to reduce a country to a single somewhat rigid category. Esping-Andersen is criticised for misclassification of countries, measurement issues, idealised and narrow forms not reflecting reality (Arts and Gelissen, 2002; Deeming, 2017; Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser, 2011). Further difficulties arise when considering the transition to a neoliberal society as "...welfare rights are not genuine rights...the once distinctive worlds of welfare may be collapsing or may have collapsed already" (Deeming, 2017:417-8) as illustrated by the rise of workfare (Peck, 2001) and conditionality (Dwyer, 2004).

The move to a post-industrial society presented new social risks (NSR) for aging welfare states (See Bonoli, 2005; Taylor-Gooby, 2004). As society is increasingly uncertain; unlike the predictability of the traditional life supported within industrial societies risks are no longer seen as social, the unintended consequences workers face due to capitalism, but as a choice. Due to this perceived choice within NSR, societies' response no longer necessitates collective action which challenges the foundations of a welfare state (Alofs and Hoop, 2010; Van der Veen, 2012).

The challenges of NSR to welfare states have been confounded by the Great Recession which led to increased economic and political uncertainty. The uncertainty makes dealing with NSR more difficult as welfare states come under increased scrutiny, yet such

pressure can lead to innovation (Hemerijck, 2013). The increasing uncertainty requires them to be adaptable, so they are not ‘frozen’ (Esping-Andersen, 1996) in the face of change. If the crisis brings about innovation, that is yet to be seen, as many welfare states are currently feeling the icy face of austerity. Furthermore, Lobao et al (2018) provide a more complex picture of the ‘shrinking state’ illustrating its variations geographically (at national and subnational level) and through time such as privatization and de-regulation policies throughout the 1980s and 1990s in the UK.

### 3.5 ‘Deservingness’

Discussions of (un)deservingness predate the welfare state (Shildrick et al, 2012) and have encountered a growing resurgence since the Thatcher led Conservative Government. After a brief hiatus during the ‘golden age’ of welfare capitalism, the (un)deservingness of social security was questioned for the unemployed in the 1980s; the following decade lone parents, the disabled and young people were added, and more recently those in-work (see 2.2 for social security timeline). This progression is reflected in the movement from ‘creeping conditionality’ (Dwyer, 2004) to ‘ubiquitous conditionality’ (Dwyer, 2016) hence, those accessing social security are deemed *undeserving* and require *intervention*. Therefore, engaging with social security is seen to signify a failing; economically, socially and morally. It is not simply a financial transaction, it is a marker of ‘Otherness’ (Said, 1985; Lister, 2004; Patrick, 2016). Notions of deservingness are interwoven within the walls of the welfare state, despite, or because of, the wooliness of its current infrastructure. Deservingness fundamentally shapes social security, our understandings of it and feelings towards it and is based upon the question ‘who should get what, and why?’ (Van Oorschot, 2000). UC has fundamentally shifted this question, reconfiguring deservingness for a large part of the working-age population who access social security particularly for low paid workers (Dwyer and Wright, 2014) but also all who encounter it.

Building on the ‘universal dimension of support’<sup>6</sup>, see Coughlin (1980), Van Oorschot (2000) suggested five dimensions of deservingness criteria: control (level of responsibility for current circumstances), need (those with greatest need are most deserving), identity (recipients closest to ‘us’ are most deserving), attitude (individuals who are civil, grateful and compliant are more deserving) and reciprocity (those who have

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<sup>6</sup> The ‘universal dimension of support’ found public support for welfare states worked on a scale with support strongest for the elderly, then those with health issues and with less support for families and less still for the unemployed and social assistance schemes (Van Oorschot, 2006:24).

or will contribute are more deserving). The dimensions identified by Van Oorschot (2000) describe the multifaceted, subjective and dynamic process of (un)deservingness. Moreover, it shows the complicated set of negotiations needed for individuals to be perceived as deserving, which could alter at any time due to its temporal, spatial, cultural and social nature. Developing this framework, Baumberg et al (2012) operationalised deservingness into: need (perceived as *a genuine need*) and reciprocity (control, responsibility and effort). The ‘universal dimension of support’ and deservingness criteria provide insights of how perceptions of deservingness have real impacts on social security policy and recipients.

Petersen et al (2011) explored how contextual information influences attitudes towards social security recipients and the relationship with political values. The deservingness heuristic is used to explain how people are prompted to make decisions about deservingness with limited information; it provides a spontaneous cognitive short cut. Interestingly, when the deservingness prompts are strong “...they alleviate the need to consult other lines of reasoning thereby crowding out political values from opinion formation” (Petersen et al, 2011:28). The research offers useful insights into the underlying psychological processes which facilitate attitudes towards social security. The deservingness heuristic shows how people can rely on the easiest cognitive solution, bypassing existing knowledge, to form opinions (Petersen et al, 2011). The deservingness heuristic has been criticised as even though it may be innate, the response to cues can be influenced by geographical, temporal and social factors plus individual circumstances (Laenen and Meuleman, 2017). Notably, the deservingness heuristic (Petersen et al, 2011) could offer a partial explanation of how stereotypes, deservingness and experiences of social security interact.

### 3.6 Responsibilisation

Peeters (2017) develops the conceptualisation of responsabilisation which it is argued is at risk of becoming a ‘catch-all phrase’, limiting its analytical usefulness. There are two types of responsabilisation discussed – ‘responsibilisation as a transfer from state to society’ and ‘responsibilisation as the construction of civility’ – the former has received much attention and so the focus is on the latter which has lacked critical engagement. This form of responsabilisation illuminates the more interventionist characteristics, for example the growth of ‘nudging’ citizens as discussed below and premised on the *belief* some citizens require intervention to be(come) responsible citizens. Thus, “This second form of responsabilisation can be defined as manufacturing attitudes and manipulating

choices to make citizens assume responsibility for self-care in accordance with governmental objectives” (Peeters, 2017:56). The concept is further developed by exploring three forms: ‘reciprocal governance’ (for example behavioural conditionality), ‘training and treatment’ (promotion of ‘self-care’) and ‘choice architecture’ (‘nudging’ citizens to make rational *choices*). The forms are all underpinned by a moralistic and interventionist narrative surrounding responsabilisation and understood within a Foucauldian conception of power (Peeters, 2017). The critical examination highlights “...The flipside of the neoliberal ‘governing from a distance’ is the piercing gaze of the engineers of human choice, attitude, and self-care. These engineers can be found on both the level of policymaking as on street-level” (Peeters, 2017:60). Therefore, the focus on ‘responsibilisation as a transfer’ obscures the more invasive and controlling elements of responsabilisation which aim to enforce neoliberal ‘civility’.

Responsibilisation is used across contemporary social policy (Stonehouse et al, 2015) reflective of ‘the trope of individual responsibility’ (Wacquant, 2012:27) intrinsic to neoliberalism. Responsibilisation influences all within society, as responsibility is diffused by the state to individuals who subsequently regulate themselves within the interests of the neoliberal state (Peeters, 2017). As Peeters (2013) notes “...citizens have their own responsibility in preventing social harms...[and]...the state’s role is enabling, persuading, enticing or nudging citizens to ‘take responsibility’ for their lives and their communities” (2013:584). The individual focus provides justification for the rolling back of the welfare state, as the need has become delegitimized with social security framed as a choice (Lea and Hallsworth, 2012) in which citizens must be nudged.

Nudge theory, or Libertarian Paternalism, is an idea developed by Thaler and Sunstein (2003) which suggests people can be nudged into certain behaviours. By the creation of an apparent freedom people will not feel coerced into making a choice. This notion has global reach to influence citizens to make the *right* choices (Curchin, 2017). Key to Nudge theory is the belief that the individual is to blame for bad choices, and this resonates with neoliberal ideas around individual responsibilities (Leggett, 2014). However, “...by providing nudges governments induce citizens to consume and invest in the ways they would if they were rational choice makers, thereby concealing the inherent self-destructiveness of a society governed by market logic” (Curchin, 2017:237). Thus, a nudge masks the damage neoliberalism causes and the potential irrationality of the action. Nudge theory has been criticized for ignoring structural explanations for choices (Leggett,

2014) which is important when it is used by Governments like the UK who created a 'nudge unit' (Curchin, 2017). The 'nudge unit' fits within a wider spectrum of government policies focused on behavioural explanations for social problems which involved a reconceptualization of social security recipients from passive to active with policies focused on self-help and behavioural conditionality (Dwyer and Wright, 2014, Wright, 2016). Hickman (2021) explores the behavioural science behind the use and consequences of DP within the design of UC for social housing tenants. The theory of COM-B<sup>7</sup> is used to explore the experiences from a national longitudinal study (Direct Payment Demonstration Projects) of rent underpayment. Hickman concludes "...for claimants on UC, a key element of which is DP, achieving higher payment rents and 'responsible behaviour' (from the perspective of government) will not be achieved by encouraging them to be more 'responsible' but by improving their financial situations (opportunity), thereby removing goal conflict and the pernicious choices they face" (2021:254). Therefore, it is not 'self-care' (Peeters, 2017) which is required but structural change, yet the former is much cheaper.

Responsibilisation is apparent in the development of activation policies (Bonvin, 2008) which aim to create active responsible citizens as "...acting responsibly coincides with getting people back to work as quickly as possible" (Bonvin, 2008:367). The spread of such ideas created a shift "...towards 'work first' activation delivered by a mixture of contractualism, managerialism and marketisation..." (Carter and Whitworth, 2015a:277). The transformation is reflective of the transition from a welfare state to 'workfare' such as America, Britain and Australia (McDonald and Marston, 2005; Wacquant, 2010). Peck (2001) explains "...workfare is not about creating jobs for people that don't have them; it is about creating workers for jobs that nobody wants...it is seeking to make 'docile bodies' for the new economy; flexible, self-reliant and self-disciplining" (2001:6).

### 3.7 Conditionality

Conditionality is not a new idea; it can be traced back to the early 20th century as to access social security for unemployment has always been conditional on being available to work (Reeves and Loopstra, 2017). Clasen and Clegg (2007) conceptualize conditionality within three categories. First, the 'condition of category' whereby social security is conditional on certain group membership. Second, 'conditions of circumstance'

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<sup>7</sup> Hickman (2021) explains "It presents behaviour (B) as a result of the interaction between the capabilities (C) of subjects, the opportunity (O) they have to enact behaviours, and their motivation (M)" (2021:236).

where social security is dependent on eligibility criteria of an individual's situation such as their financial need. Third, 'conditions of conduct' outlines the appropriate behaviour a recipient should exhibit to access social security, for example an unemployed person will be required to look for work. The categories outlined by Clasen and Clegg (2007) provide a useful framework to explore conditionality highlighting the complex processes of categorisation and how conditionality was a foundation of British social security. It demonstrates the flexibility within the conditionality framework regarding who it affects and how. The 'conditions of conduct' follows the same neoliberal logic that the individual is responsible for *bad* choices, a position supported by Mead (2014) and Murray (1990), as well as nudge theory.

Behavioural conditionality faced little political scrutiny (Fletcher and Wright, 2017), was promoted by both Conservative and New Labour governments (Slater, 2012; Wiggan, 2012) and the surrounding political rhetoric around 'worklessness' and 'welfare dependency' goes unchallenged (Macdonald, Shildrick and Furlong, 2014). Conditionality is promoted as the only remedy for the irresponsible citizen whose needs of social security have been delegitimized (Lea and Hallsworth, 2012) and therefore must modify their behaviour. 'Creeping conditionality' (Dwyer, 2004) since the mid-1990s has developed into 'ubiquitous conditionality' which has transformed social security and the relationship between citizen and state (Dwyer and Wright, 2014). Reeves and Loopstra (2017) argue 'ubiquitous conditionality' "...reconfigures citizenship by creating insecurity and anxiety as a means to motivate activity and change behaviour..." (2017:329). This anxiety and insecurity extend to low paid citizens as UC expands conditionality to this new group (Dwyer and Wright, 2014). These individuals may be portrayed as 'failed citizens' (Reeves and Loopstra, 2017) and 'potential skivers' (Carter and Whitworth, 2015b:151) who are not successfully fulfilling their *duty* of gaining a responsible level of income, hence are subject to behavioural conditionality. They face a level of scrutiny over their choices and behaviours which was previously avoided. It seems a logical step for neoliberalism to shift its gaze onto low paid workers who cannot access the desired amount of choice and freedom due to a lack of resources thus require a nudge, or something harder.

Non-compliance with behavioural conditions results in sanctions, which are designed to be used as (financial) deterrents<sup>8</sup> (Reeve, 2017). Research has shown sanctioning in Britain disproportionately affects the disabled, lone parents, young people and homeless populations (Adler, 2016, Reeve, 2017, Reeves and Loopstra, 2017, Watts et al, 2014). Sanctions are also disproportionate when compared to other types of fines such as civil or criminal (Adler, 2016). The underlying assumption for sanctions is that someone will choose to modify their behaviour as the rational choice to avoid the punishment. Yet, vulnerable populations may be unable to make the *rational* choice (if there is a choice available) or change their behaviour and therefore are increasingly sanctioned (Fletcher et al, 2016). Batty et al (2015) found homeless people were sanctioned for missing JCP appointments as it clashed with vital hospital appointments which for those individuals was the rational choice, but little understanding or consideration was given. If someone is sanctioned unnecessarily or inappropriately then the logic of sanctioning is flawed, and it is likely to further exclude these groups (Adler, 2016, Batty et al, 2015; Fletcher et al, 2016; Reeves and Loopstra, 2017). Moreover, concerns have been raised as to the wider impact of sanctions (NAO, 2016). Importantly, with UC the level, use and reach of sanctions is extended as “deep poverty and the increasing threat of destitution are used to discipline wide groups of unemployed and low-paid workers” (Fletcher and Wright, 2017:12).

Conditionality and sanctions are supported by surveillance which is the “focused, systematic and routine attention to personal details for purposes of influence, management, protection or direction” (Lyon, 2007:14). Within social security, surveillance is increasingly used to monitor individuals with tools that record and support the behavioural conditions implicit in the system. Influenced by Wacquant (2009) who suggested close supervision was key to American social security, Fletcher and Wright (2017) argue similar surveillance tools feature in British social security such as the ‘claimant commitment’, coercive self-help and online job-search – creating a ‘digital panopticon’. These tools are not just used for surveillance but to punish those who are non-compliant (Fletcher and Wright, 2017; Wacquant, 2009). Surveillance is not a passive tool; it is intrinsic to the management of social security recipients who despite

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<sup>8</sup> In an international review, Griggs and Evans (2010) explore the type, effect, impact and outcome of sanctions. It raised “...important questions about whether sanctions merely compound existing inequalities and create further barriers to work for some claimants” (Griggs and Evans, 2010:37) which would make them an inefficient tool for increasing employment.

being in a system of ‘self-help’ are never left completely unsupervised as they are perceived as ‘neoliberal deviants’ (Maki, 2011:52).

### 3.8 ‘Violent’ Social policy

Within social policy there has been a growing focus on ‘violence’ particularly in the context of austerity. This focus has brought theoretical attention to the role of the state in such violence (Cooper and Whyte, 2017; Wright et al, 2020) and the conditions in which it arises (Laurie and Shaw, 2018). This field draws on Galtung (1969) who developed understandings of violence to include the structural, explaining “The violence is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances” (1969:171). Thus, structural violence is indirect and dispersed across and within social structures constraining human potential, unlike previous conceptions of violence, which was limited to personal, intentional acts (Galtung, 1969). The conceptualisation of structural violence and inclusion of avoidable harms is important as it highlights the way violence can appear in seemingly mundane ways. As Galtung illustrates “...if people are starving when this is objectively avoidable, then violence is committed, regardless of whether there is a clear subject-action-object relation...” (1969:171). More recently, the concept has been used to explore experiences surrounding poverty and social security in New Zealand (Hodgetts et al, 2014), America (Whittle et al, 2015) and an English mining community (Roberts, 2009). Laurie and Shaw (2018) consider the conditions of violence investigating its embedded nature across geographies, temporalities, bodies and even realities. Conditions “...coalesce, sediment, strangle, explode, scar, fossilize, torment, bleed, and harry our worlds, both actual and virtual, visible and invisible. Conditions, in short, are in a state of continual unrest” (Laurie and Shaw, 2018:15). Investigating the conditions of violence provides insight into the dynamism of violence and *how* it causes a ‘truncated life’ (Laurie and Shaw, 2018).

Cooper and Whyte (2017) challenge Galtung’s focus on the impersonal with their term ‘institutional violence’ which allows for a directness in terms of the victim, who experiences physical and psychological harm, and the actor(s) engaging in the violent act such as street level bureaucrats. Institutional violence is:

...the ordinary and mundane violence that make up the lived experience of austerity; the lived experience of feeling humiliated, anxious and vilified. To talk about institutional violence means that we need to see violence not as ‘exceptional’ or ‘unusual’ events but ‘ordinary’ and ‘mundane’ processes that routinely and over time deteriorate our mental and physical health (Cooper and Whyte, 2017:23-24).

This concept is used to explore austerity over the last decade with a range of issues covered such as workfare (Burnett and Whyte, 2017), suicide (O'hara, 2017) and Grenfell (Cooper and Whyte, 2018). The critical focus within the edited chapters of Cooper and Whyte (2017) highlights the severity, size and longevity of harmful experiences due to the Government's austerity agenda which has led to the violence being "...as natural as the air around us" (Galtung, 1969:173). Grover (2019) argues 'violent proletarianisation' led to 'social murder' during austerity and provides secondary examples from suicide and destitution. The 'violent proletarianisation' shortens, and at times ends, lives via 'diswelfares' as it seeks to force the commodification of labour. The deadly nature of austerity is also raised by Mills (2018) who explores 'austerity suicide' using analysis of 30 media articles to illustrate how 'austerity kills'. Whilst Grover (2019) and Mills (2018) use secondary analysis and both make important critical contributions to the violent nature of austerity and its *avoidable* consequences.

Pemberton (2016) develops the social harm approach and provides details on definition, measurements and preventions against the harms caused by capitalism. By using a cross-national analysis demonstrates how harms such as suicide, child poverty and social isolation are connected, and preventable. Hence Pemberton (2016) argues "...the forms that capitalist societies take have a significant impact on rates of harm" (2016: 152).

Wright et al (2020) suggest that in instances where harms are less obvious ('non-lethal' and 'non-physical') and difficult to substantiate, the concept of 'social harm' is more useful as it allows for experiences of 'suffering' (actual and symbolic) to be included. The paper explored experiences of unemployment support arguing the JCP had become a site of symbolic and material suffering. The introduction of the stringent work-search requirements and Universal Jobmatch extended this to 'self-facilitate social abuse' orchestrated by the Government under threat of sanctioning. Wright et al (2020) provide important insights into a dimension of 'suffering' experienced by 'social abuse' which encapsulates the *essence* of the quieter forms of violence. The theorisation of the JCP as a place of 'suffering' provides an interesting and important spatial dynamic as we can see how physical infrastructure takes on meaning.

The notion of 'suffering' is explored by Frost and Hoggett (2008) who argue "...social suffering draws attention to the lived experience of inhabiting social structures of oppression: and the pain that arises from this" (2008: 441). The complex and embodied nature of 'social suffering' is discussed via the notions of loss and hurt (including stigma) highlighting the psycho-social nature of this symbolic 'suffering'. Frost and Hoggett

(2008) suggest a potential response can cause ‘double suffering’ which inflicts further damage to the individual. The responses include enactment, embodiment or projection, and consequently the harm is reinforced. This deepens our understandings of ‘suffering’ which is a response to, but also causes harm and can reinforce, the individualistic narrative towards those who are ‘suffering’. The focus on ‘suffering’ aims to “...illuminate the ugliness of social injustice and to illustrate just how deeply it affects human experience” (Frost and Hoggett, 2008:455).

Discussion so far has focused on the conceptualisation, ‘conditions’ and experiences of violent social policy yet it is still unclear as to *how* such processes work on the ground. Redman and Fletcher (2021) explore this issue with frontline staff working in employment services such as JCP and apply the theoretical lens of Bauman (1989). The research found staff were encouraged to enact harms particularly around the intensified sanctioning regime post 2010. The staff discussed targets for sanctions and off-flows (those who stop receiving social security) which coupled with increasing stigma towards social security recipients, led to dehumanization. This caused the use of psychologically violent practices to ensure targets were met, with increasing distance and moral indifference between staff and social security recipients.

The issue of stigma, raised by Redman and Fletcher (2021), is important as it provides the background for the ‘suffering’ inflicted by the state to become ‘natural’ and ensures societal ‘silence’ surrounding this ‘slow’ violence. As Tyler (2013) argues “...these ‘wasted humans’ are transformed into national abjects who are employed to legitimize neoliberal forms of governmentality by effecting insecurity within the body politic” (2013:47). Tyler (2013) explores the concept of social abjection, which inflicts symbolic and material violence, across a range of topics with an underlying focus on how abjection is employed from *above* and experienced *below*. Notably, the *resistance* to abjection is used to unpick this ‘revolting concept’ and illuminate how it is utilised by the state to control.

The growing literature on ‘violent’ social policy highlights the diverse yet omnipresent experiences of violence which incurs enduring material and symbolic damage. Arguably, this focus provides a way to ‘look up’ at the structural forces in action and legitimize the lived experiences of violence.

### 3.9 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed a range of intersecting issues from the shadowy and often misunderstood concepts of neoliberalism and responsabilisation, the inherent question within welfare states of *who deserves*, to conditionality in which the latter issues manifest in attempts to *control* and *mould* ‘failed citizens’ (Reeves and Loopstra, 2017). Lastly, the ‘violence’ of social policy was explored which provides a way to see how the concepts already discussed are experienced and impact on individuals engaging in systems of social security. The conceptual context in this chapter provides the background needed to explore the literature on contemporary experiences of social security and subsequently UC itself. UC did not come out of nowhere and for us to critically engage with UC sociologically we must explore the conceptual threads.

## 4. Social security and the ‘self’: literature review

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter explores existing literature surrounding how social security, poverty and (un)employment impact the ‘self’, wellbeing and emotions. As there is limited research regarding UC specifically on this topic, the review draws upon wider research. The chapter is structured with a narrow focus to begin with, discussing literature on the impacts on emotions (4.3), wellbeing (4.2) and identities – particularly stigma (4.4, 4.5, 4.6). Then a shift to a broader examination of literature surrounding experiences of social security (4.7), ‘getting by’ (4.9) and ‘poor work’ (4.8). This broader focus provides further context for the experiences, impacts and responses of living with UC.

### 4.2 Wellbeing and (un)employment

The detrimental impact of UC on mental health has been explored quantitatively (Wickham et al, 2020) and qualitatively (Cheetham, Moffatt and Addison et al, 2019). Wickham et al’s (2020) longitudinal research found the introduction of UC increased ‘psychological distress’ for 63,674 unemployed individuals and for a third of this group this distress was at the medical diagnostic level for depression. The authors conclude “...the potential for psychological impact are substantial owing to the nature of policy implementation, which is on a national scale” (Wickham et al, 2020:162). The research shows the severe impact UC can have on unemployed people, which has wider impacts for support services such as the NHS. There was no impact on physical health reported or increased rates of employment (Wickham et al, 2020).

Cheetham, Moffatt and Addison et al (2019) provide a small case-study from Northeast England which explored the experiences of UC for people with disabilities, long-term health conditions and complex lives. The research found UC had negative impacts mentally, physically, socially and financially. Design features of UC, the five-week wait, ‘digital by default’ and debt recollection were especially challenging for individuals with some pushed to suicidal thoughts. Both studies provide valuable insights into the detrimental impacts UC has on mental health for the unemployed (Wickham et al, 2020) and vulnerable people (Cheetham, Moffatt and Addison et al, 2019) which supports Dwyer et al (2020) who found negative impacts on wellbeing for individuals accessing the legacy system and UC. However, little is known about such impacts on the broader

range of individuals living with UC, those in-work or those without existing mental or physical health conditions; a gap in understanding this thesis addresses.

Insecure work and a vulnerability to unemployment can result in individuals entering the 'low pay no pay' cycle identified by Shildrick et al (2012) during qualitative research into recurrent poverty. The cycle "...refers to a longitudinal pattern of employment instability and movement between low-paid jobs and unemployment, usually accompanied by claiming of welfare benefits" (Shildrick et al, 2012:18). The 'churning' between employment and social security does little to help individuals out of poverty as people were 'trapped' within this cycle, constantly in or near poverty (Shildrick et al, 2012).

The 'low pay no pay' cycle not only causes widespread poverty, but also impacts on health and wellbeing. Shildrick et al (2012) found work could have a negative impact on the emotional and psychological wellbeing of individuals. Instances were reported of worsening mental health due to insecure and 'poor work' as well as a reduction in physical health. The relationship between (un)employment and wellbeing is complicated as:

...first, ill health could limit labour market engagement; second, poor-quality jobs could generate or add to ill health (which in turn limited labour market engagement); third, unemployment could also lead to ill health; and fourth, if we understand these impacts processually, as they were lived by the individuals in our study, we can surmise that cycling between unemployment and poor-quality jobs over time is likely to have a cumulative, negative impact on well-being (Shildrick et al, 2012: 164-5).

The impacts on long-term wellbeing could limit the opportunities to exit and further cement the cyclical hold which shaped the experiences of those involved in Shildrick et al's (2012) research. The main fieldwork was carried out in 2008-9 with earlier fieldwork over the decade prior also being used, therefore carried out prior to austerity. Consequently, the experiences of the 'low pay no pay' cycle may now be more extreme as research from Pemberton et al (2016a) shows with increasing conditionality within social security, reducing public services and the rising cost of living.

The impacts of 'poor work' (see 4.8 for definition) are not limited to practical issues such as pay and conditions, they can also impact on emotions and wellbeing as Shildrick et al (2012) note. Whilst Jahoda (1982) describes the innate human needs met by employment, she suggests possible frustrations felt by some workers due to "...the negative quality of their experiences in employment" (Jahoda, 1982:87) which could lead to a reduction in

psychological wellbeing. Similarly, in summarising qualitative research exploring work, place and identity, Crisp (2010) explains:

This research also highlighted that work could have a negative impact upon financial and emotional well-being through combinations of low pay, long and unsocial hours and job insecurity. Such employment can also generate stress and tensions for the individuals directly concerned and other household members (2010:50).

The impacts of ‘poor work’ can extend across social networks and damage relationships which could make the conditions and consequences of ‘poor work’ harder to manage. Experiences of (un)employment have a spatial dynamic as Crisp et al (2018) found: “Concerns about the quality and quantity of work led to a pervasive sense of labour market insecurity that shapes perceptions of viable commutes to work” (2018:2). This research explored the impacts of transport and infrastructure within low-income neighbourhoods and found it ‘constrained’ employment opportunities.

Employment offers non-financial benefits such as a purpose, self-esteem, self-confidence, increased social engagement and a sense of ‘making a difference’ (Crisp, 2010) and such benefits are extended to ‘poor work’ (Shildrick et al, 2012). Likewise voluntary work can bring rewards such as increased self-respect (Penny and Finnegan, 2019). The emotional and social benefits reflect the functions of work outlined by Jahoda (1972) based upon a detailed study of the effects of unemployment in an Austrian village, Mariantal in the 1930s.

### 4.3 Emotions and unemployment

Only Wright et al (2016;2018) have provided findings on emotional impacts within the context of UC and this mostly focused on sanctions, therefore little is known about the experiences and impacts of UC more broadly. Existing literature (Chase and Walker, 2012; Patrick, 2017; Stewart and Wright, 2018; Wright et al, 2016; Wright, 2016) reported feelings of anger, dehumanization, stress, powerlessness and shame whilst engaging with the British social security system. Such feelings resonate with the ‘violence’ of social policy (3.8) which causes ‘suffering’ (Frost and Hoggett, 2008).

Peterie et al (2019a) suggests anger, as opposed to shame, is a form of emotional resistance used by the unemployed which rejects the ‘feeling rules’ that commonly apply when experiencing ‘activation’. Based upon Australian qualitative research Peterie et al (2019a) found individuals spent much energy on emotional compliance, a hidden labour

of unemployment. The emotions of shame and anger were directly linked to dominant narratives surrounding 'welfare' with shame linked to "... with personal explanations for unemployment, anger was associated with structural explanations of joblessness. Expressions of anger thus involved pushing back against the basic assumptions that underpin activation" (Peterie et al, 2019a:808). Hence, emotions can be used to send a message to society and oneself. It highlights the micro-level resistance and compliance which takes place and may be often overlooked or misinterpreted.

Scheff (2003) describes shame as a 'master emotion' and in a detailed exploration of the taboo, origins, definitions and uses of shame, outlines the importance of shame in society and provides a conceptual definition:

I define Shame as the large family of emotions that includes many cognates and variants, most notably embarrassment, guilt, humiliation, and related feelings such as shyness that originate in threats to the social bond. This definition integrates self (emotional reactions) and society (the social bond) (Scheff, 2003:255).

The definition includes many emotions as shame is often referred to indirectly (Chase and Walker, 2012; Scheff, 2003) and gives a clear link between individual feelings of shame and society via 'threats to the social bond' allowing for wider discussions around the use and abuse of shame in everyday life. Usefully, Scheff (2003) explores the work of Elias (1994) in relation to how shame was used for behavioural change and social control as part of the civilising process, which can be extended to a civilising offensive (see 5.2). Shame makes visible a connection between the individual and the 'state' as it transgresses the public and private spheres when internalised by individuals, makes them responsible for their own 'shame' and *encourages* them to behave differently to avoid future shame. It is a key feature in the 'internalisation of social restraints' as these become individually enforced (Elias, 1994).

Shame appears throughout daily life linked to social networks (Chase and Walker, 2015), poverty (Jo, 2012), encounters with bureaucracy (Chase and Walker, 2012) and UC sanctions (Wright et al, 2016; 2018). Chase and Bantebya-Kyomuhendo (2015) show how shame from poverty is a global phenomenon and use research from seven countries to demonstrate this. The research illustrates the pervasiveness of poverty-related shame and how when "...reinforced by stigmatizing policies, has the potential to perpetuate poverty through its erosion of human agency as a result of lowered self-esteem and reduced social capital" (2015:299). Therefore, the harms from shame should not be overlooked.

The emotional impacts highlight the lack of adequate support with the focus instead on conditionality compliance (Dwyer, 2018). A JRF report (2018) described how negotiating social security was a stressful experience, exasperated by the destitution it often caused with "...a strong theme of destitution undermining people's confidence, leaving them dispirited, disheartened or resigned" (JRF, 2018:45). The feelings 'dispirited, disheartened and resigned' resonate with Jahoda's (1972; 1982) assertions on the emotional and social effects of unemployment. Such feelings and the reduced emotional and psychological well-being are worsened by a system of conditionality which provides little support and undermines existing support mechanisms. The impacts of unemployment on emotions and the 'self' are not limited to the individual as they extend to social relations. Rao (2017) explored the impacts of male unemployment on their wives and found the women used emotional labour during this time to support their husbands which could come at a cost to themselves.

Jahoda (1972; 1982) has been influential on sociological explorations of unemployment, exploring its emotional psycho-social impacts. Jahoda (1972) surmised unemployment was characterised by a lack (deprivation) of the benefits of paid employment as discussed in the previous paragraph. The Marienthal residents experienced four responses to unemployment characterised by "...those unemployed whose morale was unbroken, the resigned, those in despair and the apathetic" (Jahoda, 1982:21). The categorisation relates to the emotional and social responses to unemployment and corresponds with later findings, especially powerlessness (Stewart and Wright, 2018; Wright et al, 2016). Despite its influence Jahoda (1972;1982) has faced criticism particularly around the uncritical acceptance of the personal and social value of paid work which subsequently stunts research and policy responses (Cole, 2007). Boland and Griffin (2015) challenge Jahoda's theorisation of unemployment as deprivation of paid work as it fails to consider similar experiences (retirement or redundancy). Hence, it neglects the *experience* of unemployment itself, the ways this is shaped by policy thereby historically, geographically and contextually specific, and the political pertinence of this debate which resonates with Cole (2007).

Boland and Griffin (2015) adopt the concept of 'liminality' to explore experiences of unemployment which refers to a "...suspension of existing statuses, norms and beliefs...structures and routines which can initially be unnerving or exciting, but eventually can become tedious" (Boland and Griffin, 2015:39). 'Liminality' for the unemployed features the 'Sisyphean task' of job-seeking and is reinforced by the failure

and silence surrounding this activity, all of which is emotionally damaging. Boland and Griffin found:

what emerges from our interviews is that unemployment is also liminal in that it demands constant self-reflection, searching and performing in an attempt to prove to employers that one is an ideal candidate, and to prove to welfare officers that one is actively seeking work. To the former one must appear an incipient success, to the latter, a worthy failure (2015:44).

Thus, experiences of 'liminality' are complex, dynamic and subjective which unemployed individuals must negotiate within their 'suspended' reality. Additionally, Boland and Griffin (2015) highlight the dualism between employers and WCs and the emotional labour this requires. The *performance* also extends to aesthetics as being 'work-ready' means not only acting but looking a certain way. Van den Berg and Arts (2019) explored this issue with Dutch WCs and found "...it is through smelling, seeing and feeling that the assessment of deservingness and work-readiness is made" (Van den Berg and Arts, 2019: 308). The qualitative research found the *wrong* aesthetics could lead to a sanction and the aesthetic labour, bound by conditionality, was not just for future employers but acted as *proof* to the WC of an individual's work ethic (Van den Berg and Arts, 2019). The research highlights the extra labour required of unemployed individuals who require 'activation' which intersects with morality, poverty, identities and bodies illustrating the embodied nature of this experience. Also, it further responsabilises structural inequalities reducing them to how we dress and not how we are oppressed.

#### 4.4 'Benefit Stigma'

Along with the emotional impacts, individuals living on a low income accessing social security must protect their identities. Pinker (1970) argues the stigma surrounding social security is violent and key to understanding 'welfare' systems. Pinker explains "Stigmatisation is a highly sophisticated form of violence insofar as it is rarely associated with physical threats or attack. It can best be compared to those forms of psychological torture in which the victim is broken psychologically and physically but left to all outward appearances unmarked" (1970:17).

The stigma surrounding social security is apparent in such stereotypes as 'scroungers' which have become widespread in the media and political rhetoric (Garthwaite, 2011; Patrick, 2016; Shildrick, 2018), with negative media coverage intensifying since the Great Recession (Baumberg et al, 2012). The coverage is part of the 'neoliberal doxa' (Jensen,

2014) surrounding 'welfare' which aims to delegitimize access to social security and is found in media such as 'poverty porn' or the 'benefit brood' (Jensen and Tyler, 2015). Scrambler (2018) argues stigma has been 'weaponized' as "...stigma (norms marking an ontological deficit, non-conformance or shame) has been redefined as deviance (norms marking a moral deficit, non-compliance or blame)" (2018:777). Scrambler uses the example of disabled people to trace this weaponization, a notion which chimes with Tyler's (2020) conceptualisation of 'stigma power' (see 5.6).

Stigma feeds into the experiences of working-age social security recipients with 33 percent of individuals experiencing some form of stigma (Baumberg, 2016). The concept of 'benefit stigma' has been developed by Baumberg et al (2012) into three stigma categories: personal, social and institutional (or 'claims' stigma). The categorisation illustrates the ways stigma is manifested and how it affects individuals, with personal stigma being personal feelings of shame; social stigma the feeling of other people's judgements; and institutional stigma being that which is felt within the process of claiming. Baumberg et al (2012) found personal stigma was reported by a small minority; social stigma was more common and institutional stigma was widespread. The research highlights the complex nature of 'benefit stigma' in the way it is created, sustained and the consequences it has. Formby (2017) explored the experiences of unemployed graduates and the JCP and found 'benefit stigma' coupled with their graduate status intensified the experience.

'Benefit stigma' led to feelings of shame, embarrassment, and a decrease in self-worth, with concerns raised about the impact of stigma on the 'non-take up' of social security (Baumberg et al, 2012). Although stigma may not be the only reason, the research has shown a link, and those who are entitled to assistance may face hardship unnecessarily. 'Non-take up' is important to consider in relation to social security reforms as the increasing conditionality has already been found to cause people to exit the system (Stewart and Wright, 2018) which may increase further with the extension of in-work conditionality. Prior to UC, low paid workers received WTC which elicited minimal stigma as it was seen as a top-up of low wages (Baumberg et al, 2012). WTC was designed to provide "...support for all, and more help for those who need it most, when they need it most" (HM Treasury, 2003:89) producing a universal approach which was aided by the delivery, paid in a similar way to a wage. By avoiding the JCP (Baumberg et al, 2012),

WTC recipients escaped possible institutional stigma. Wright et al (2016) describes the loss of status for low paid workers now engaging with UC.

Using longitudinal qualitative research, Patrick (2016) found unemployed individuals experienced all three forms of 'benefit stigma', with institutional stigma most common, then personal stigma and lastly social stigma. Personal stigma is particularly damaging to the 'self' as it indicates an acceptance of the *undeserving* 'scrounger' stereotype. In a small number of instances, social security recipients would resist 'benefit stigma' by challenging this stereotype or by promoting the deservingness of all those who access social security. Another response discussed by Patrick (2016) is deflection via 'Othering'. Edward Said (1985) coined the term 'Othering' in relation to Orientalism which was later developed within the context of poverty by Lister (2004) to describe "...how the 'non-poor' treat 'the poor' as different. It is a dualistic process of differentiation and demarcation that draws a line between 'us' and 'them', which establishes, maintains and justifies social distance" (Lister, 2015:142). 'Othering' has many results: defining identities both 'us and them', producing stereotypes and stigma, classifying and influencing politics, social institutions and citizenship, a source of power and a warning (Lister, 2004). Patrick (2016) applied this concept to experiences of 'benefit stigma' as 'Othering' was used to protect identities from the 'Othering' participants had encountered. The 'Othering' was operated on a scale of (un)deservingness with the 'Other' reflective of what individuals were not, for example disabled people mentioned 'benefit frauds'. The 'Othering' of immigrants was common (Patrick, 2016) which is reflective of broader considerations of deservingness (See Van Oorschoot, 2001; 2006).

The insights provided into the experiences of and responses to 'benefit stigma' are useful in considering the ways in which identities are negotiated within the context of 'welfare'. Patrick (2016) highlights how such defensive strategies ultimately reinforce the *undeserving* narrative on which they are based, legitimize reforms and intensify 'us' and 'them' divisions. Similarly, Pemberton et al (2016b) found this stigmatizing narrative shaped the experiences of people living in poverty who used 'Othering' and distancing as stigma management which created "...an environment of intolerance, misunderstanding and hostility" (2016b: 31).

The severity and spread of sanctions (Reeve, 2017) could create more opportunities for social stigma, as well as other stigmas, to occur as people struggle to 'get-by' and manage

their spoiled identity. The *undeserving* narrative which creates ‘benefit stigma’ may cause individuals to question their own need of social security and act as a barrier to assistance, as Pinker (1970) considered. Tyler (2020) argues ‘benefit stigma’ has been used to legitimize austerity measures via the ‘stigma machine’ which promotes the image of the *undeserving* ‘benefit claimant’. Therefore, stigma can be harnessed and used within political projects (see 5.6 for discussion of ‘stigma power’).

#### 4.5 Responding to ‘benefit stigma’

The issue of deservingness underpins ‘benefit stigma’ and subsequently identity management. The *undeserving* ‘other’ appears frequently in participant testimonies within research exploring areas including poverty, employment and social security (Batty and Flint, 2010; Crisp, 2010; Chase and Walker, 2012; Shildrick et al, 2012; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013; Patrick, 2017; Pemberton et al, 2016a; 2016b). Despite this prominence, the physical *undeserving* ‘other’ is difficult to find as “the ‘work-shy underclass’ was a phantom that could not be pinned down in the practice of fieldwork” (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013: 291). Macdonald, Shildrick and Furlong (2014) tried unsuccessfully to find three-generational ‘worklessness’ families terming the activity as ‘Yeti hunting’ and arguing ‘intergenerational worklessness’ is a ‘Zombie argument’; something based on little, or no, evidence but will not stop, consequently it continues to influence social policy and society.

The phantom ‘other’ appears in different guises to different people reflecting their own characteristics and experiences, but always driven by notions of deservingness. For the employed, the ‘other’ may be characterised by *undeserving* ‘welfare’ receipt and a lack of ‘work ethic’ (Batty and Flint, 2010; Chase and Walker, 2012; Pemberton et al, 2016b). Employment signifies agency and provides a ‘moral trump’ to those living on low incomes as Chase and Walker (2012) explain “... people who were working but still hard up saw themselves as having a strong ‘work ethic’ and a track record of previous work. This gave them a moral trump and enabled them to distance themselves from those they considered to be ‘happy’ not working or ‘not bothered about’ claiming benefits” (2012:249). The creation of a social hierarchy shows the complex process of ‘Othering’; used to create distance from socially unacceptable attributes as a method to protect identities. This is supported by research (Batty and Flint, 2010; Crisp, 2010; Chase and Walker, 2012; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013; Ray et al, 2010) which found

employment mitigated some effects of a poverty status, as this was contrasted with an undeserving 'other'.

The 'other' is more complex for social security recipients due to their own problematic status, yet it is used to validate their own deservingness as evidenced in existing research (Chase and Walker, 2012; Pemberton et al, 2016b; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013). Low paid workers living with UC now embrace this "... shift from 'contributor' to 'shirker', as participants are forced to wrestle with the identities that they might have once constructed and applied to the 'other'. However, these participants may now apply this label to themselves to further compound feelings of failure that accompanied their initial loss of status" (Pemberton et al, 2016b:32). Hence, UC creates new demands and dilemmas for the identities of low paid workers who face a blurring of boundaries between 'us and them'.

The multifaceted categorisation of 'us and them' (Chase and Walker, 2012) illustrates the complex negotiations which take place to protect identities and how the phantom is used as a reflection; showing what people are not. Interestingly, 'them' is not always an *undeserving* 'underclass', it can result from looking upwards and identifying the vast distance between elites and the realities of poverty (Chase and Walker, 2012). The solidarity of 'us' is strengthened by identifying 'them', enabling a start to 'getting organised' (Lister, 2004). However, the *undeserving* 'them' acts as a divisionary device, separating 'us' through the creation of suspicion and judgement (Chase and Walker, 2012). The formation of 'us and them' sustains the focus on the individual and their potential failings, not on what shapes the structure and narratives. Simply, the dominance of an *undeserving* 'other' means time is spent looking down and sideways towards a 'phantom' and not standing back and looking up.

Peterie et al (2019b) also found unemployed individuals in Australia used divisionary narratives to protect their identities from stigma by 'disassociation'. Moreover, in response to stigma unemployed people withdrew from social networks which whilst seen to save emotional energy could reduce wellbeing. Individuals avoided asking for help from friends and family to protect against stigma. Here, we can see the negotiations between 'suffering' (Frost and Hoggett, 2008) and how the 'self' warrants protection over other needs. Interestingly, Peterie et al (2019b) notes the cumulative effects of stigmas

such as the combination of unemployment and mental health stigma which requires more resources to manage.

Crisp (2010) found the employment status of residents in low-income neighbourhoods had become connected with judgements surrounding the appearance, morality and character of the individual as "...discussions of worklessness are laced with moral judgements and a symbolism that extends beyond the mere categorisation of the number of residents out of work" (Crisp, 2010:38). Therefore, employment offers more than simply a job, it can instigate membership into the 'hard working majority' who are increasingly distanced, materially and symbolically, from 'failed citizens' (Reeves and Loopstra, 2017). Yet, employment does not always offer the same protection and benefits. Selenko et al (2017) explored the relationship between insecure work and social identity; identity constructed via group memberships. The analysis showed how job insecurity created detachment from the employed group, a reduced sense of belonging, feelings of marginalization and loss of control. It highlights how insecure employment effect's identity and is likely to be a growing issue due to the increasingly flexible labour market and UC promotion of temporary (insecure) employment. Such workers may have a weaker attachment to 'us' creating a risk to their 'self'.

#### 4.6 Living with poverty and stigma

The work ethic affects perceptions of *legitimate* income as monies not from employment face scrutiny. Batty and Flint (2013) found during qualitative research with working-class households that individuals distanced themselves from those receiving social security, who were cast as lazy failures, as it was a source of illegitimate income. Summers (2018) explores how social security money is used and understood by recipients and found this process was not simply financial but inherently laden with meaning. Expenditure on 'treats' was scrutinised and often individuals denied themselves as 'treats' were for 'others'; this denial illustrates how social security can influence understandings of money and what it *should* be used for. Children were the exception which is supported by wider literature (Chase and Walker, 2012; Flint, 2010; Hamilton, 2012). Shildrick and Macdonald (2013) explain the food children eat can come under scrutiny with parents who provide healthy 'quality food' seen as managing and respectful compared to a stigmatized other, who is not. Therefore, 'getting-by' intersects with stigma and notions of 'respectability'.

Summers (2018) found income from employment came with pride and less scrutiny and this formed part of a social hierarchy of monies which individuals had to negotiate. Thus, money is far more than physical and how it is (mis)used elicits wider meaning surrounding identities and morality. The ability to 'get-by' also impacts the 'self'. Shildrick and MacDonald (2013) explored how 'poor people' spoke about poverty and the findings highlight how individuals deny their poverty and discuss poverty in Britain in terms of Others' personal inadequacies:

When 'the poor' were identified these were the 'undeserving poor', defined by their inability to manage and maintain family respectability, particularly in respect of household consumption...In other words poverty became this perceived lack of respectability and inability to manage, a moral failure worthy of blame. In this sense, informants perceived nothing other than 'the undeserving poor'. There was no 'deserving poor' in their equation because they denied that 'poverty' applied to them and it only existed as moral and personal failure (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013:293).

The findings illustrate the complex process of negotiating a 'poverty status' which is bound in economic, political, social and moral elements. Seemingly, it indicates the presence of the 'neoliberal self' (McGuigan, 2014) as it is only the poor who are undeserving that are visible, who have failed to be enterprising and consequently are 'flawed consumers' (Bauman, 2005). Hence, poverty is perceived as a moral and ontological failing which is discursively reinforced in daily life subsequently the causal structural and social inequalities are silenced by attempts to protect the 'self' against attack.

As Shildrick and MacDonald (2013) note, poverty itself is stigmatizing and individuals attempt to hide their poverty to protect against stigma and shame (Chase and Walker, 2012; Hamilton; 2012; Jo; 2012). Poverty can also cause individuals to enter stigmatizing situations such as using a food bank (Garthwaite, 2016; Purdam et al, 2016) or asking friends and family for support (Chase and Walker, 2012; Fletcher et al, 2016; Flint, 2010; Pemberton et al, 2016a). Hamilton (2012) found in research with low-income families, that consumption was used to alleviate stigma surrounding poverty. The strategy saw families buying branded items to signify their *respectability* and this required (and restricted) budgeting. For these families, being a 'good' parent connected to their children's consumption of branded items and was seen to protect their children from the harms of stigma. Yet, the brands consumed by low-income families were *tainted* by

'chav' discourses and so "In a cruel irony, the consumption choices that are driven by a desire to mask poverty instead only serve to further stigmatize" (Hamilton, 2012:85). This created a cycle of material and symbolic suffering which continually damaged the self-worth and identities of those living on low incomes.

The discussion will now consider other forms of identity management. Whelan (2020) investigates the impression management of social security recipients in Ireland and found presentation as a 'good claimant' was an important strategy when engaging with 'welfare administrators'. Other forms of impression management included concealment and emphasising positives (such as work ethic), both of which are context dependent. Being a 'good claimant' involves 'disguised compliance' which is "...the 'stage management' of information, actions, and materials to give an impression of 'full compliance'" (Whelan, 2020:12). This strategy was about 'surviving' with social security which has been stripped away and is now characterised by fear and 'scarcity' (Whelan, 2020).

Snow and Anderson (1987) explore the identity 'work' and 'talk' among American homeless individuals who attempted to 'salvage' their identities and self-worth. The research found identity needs were on par with other innate human needs which illustrates the importance of 'identity work' and an individual's ability to construct *meaning* in their daily lives. So, "...the attempt to carve out and maintain a sense of meaning and self-worth seems especially critical for survival, perhaps because it is the thread that enables those situated on the margins or at the bottom to retain a sense of self and thus their humanity" (Snow and Anderson, 1987:1365). Therefore, identity management is essential for *survival* and provides a 'thread' connecting marginalised individuals to their 'humanity' and society.

Hoolachan (2020) investigated drug-use and identity management within a group of young homeless people adopting a symbolic interactionist approach. The research found, despite multiple sources of stigma, individuals had not internalised the 'discredited' identity as strategies of resistance were used as protection such as 'distancing'. Moreover, potentially stigmatized identities were redefined such as around using cannabis and this type of identity become 'celebrated'. This identity was defined against the 'junkie' who used heroin and characterised an extreme and stigmatized 'other'. The research illustrates how stigma can be used to *positively* form identities, but the stigma still persists as does the need for 'identity work'.

Drawing on research with homeless women, Casey, Goudie and Reeve (2008) explore how public space is negotiated and used to resist stigmatized homeless identities. Individuals resisted by presenting a 'respectable' self within public spaces which hid their homeless status and 'dis-identified' with homeless people experiencing greater stigma such as drug users. The findings show the physical nature of identity management with the homeless women making sure they *presented* themselves in a certain way to access public spaces and resist the stigma associated with homelessness.

Skeggs' (1997) seminal research investigating the intersections of class and gender noted how "clothing is used...as a vocabulary which conveys moral quality" (Skeggs, 1997:85) thus imbued with symbolic capital. This research provides further evidence to the importance of physicality, or aesthetics, within identity management and how this intersects with issues of inequality and consumption. Skeggs (1997) uses a feminist Bourdieusian framework to ethnographically explore the lives of working-class women and address the 'retreat from class' (1997: 6).

Bourdieu (2000) provided seminal work on the embodied experiences of class and developed a conceptual triad which included capital. He conceptualised four intersecting capitals: economic, cultural (distinctive embodied, objective and institutionalised assets) social (relationships) and symbolic (result of legitimization of three other capitals). For Bourdieu:

The question is always who (or what) is anchored into which more or less dominant positions because of which species and amounts of capital... the big picture has to do with (symbolic) struggle, ongoing oppression, (potential) resistance, and perpetual change (Paulle et al, 2012: 75).

These are questions which Skeggs (1997) explores as the working-class women utilise their capital to navigate, and *resist*, the 'symbolic struggle' they encounter throughout their daily lives. For example, Skeggs (1997:110) explains how working-class women use glamour as an 'escape route' that offers an *acceptable* way for women to show sexuality whilst being respectable. Respectability is a mark of differentiation for the middle-class and held against the working class who are portrayed as deficient and pathologized. Glamour allows working class women to 'pass' and act and appear feminine, desirable and importantly "...cloaking themselves in respectability" (Skeggs, 1997:160). Building on this, Lawler (2005) describes the 'disgust' levied at the working-class by the middle-class as a means to *distinguish* and establish middle classness as

*normal*. Lawler argues “...it is important to challenge and to go on challenging the assumption that middle-class dispositions, tastes and bodies are, by definition, the ‘right’ ones” (2005:443). This focus on the promoted *naturalness* of middle-classness and its extension to aesthetics is important and has implications for findings (Van den Berg and Arts, 2019) surrounding ‘activation’, unemployment and aesthetic labour.

#### 4.7 Experiences of social security

There was little evidence on the effectiveness of social security policies using behavioural conditionality in the UK (Dwyer and Wright, 2014; Watts et al, 2014) when UC was introduced. A five-year study<sup>9</sup>, the Welcond Project, explored the use of welfare conditionality in the UK, the qualitative longitudinal research focused on investigating the *effectiveness* and *ethicality* of conditionality speaking to policymakers, practitioners and recipients. The study produced insights across a range of conditionality settings and helpfully spoke to individuals claiming UC over three waves of interviews. The research (Wright et al, 2016; 2018) found both individuals in and out of work held negative views of conditionality with the work-search requirements often inappropriate and did not lead to meaningful employment. In-work conditionality creates “...a mismatch between the rigid expectations of in-work UC conditionality and contemporary workplace practices” (Wright et al, 2016:10). After three waves, the research saw little impact on employment transitions with similar numbers cycling between (un)employment, thus, illustrating the ‘transitory’ nature of paid employment (Wright et al, 2018).

This raises questions over the use(fulness) of in-work conditionality, as discussed in chapter two, it is an untested idea and there is little research on it. Wright et al (2018; 2016) found participant’s UC requirements often clashed with work and other commitments with people commenting on how ‘unfair’, ‘illogical’ and ‘ineffective’ in-work conditionality was. The DWP (2018c) conducted a national Randomized Control Trial (RCT) investigating the effectiveness of different levels of in-work conditionality. The RCT tested three levels of support: Frequent (fortnightly WC meetings), Moderate (Eight-weekly WC meetings) and Minimal (two telephone calls one at the start and a second eight weeks later). The results showed a small impact between the support level and increases in earnings, with the more intense support raising earnings slightly more. However, “...the external evaluation did not detect a statistically significant difference in

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<sup>9</sup> The project ran from 2013 – 2018. See: <http://www.welfareconditionality.ac.uk/>

(self-reported) earnings growth at wave two between the treatment groups” (DWP, 2018c:6).

Moreover, a subsequent Cost Benefit Analysis of the trial (DWP, 2019b) found a small level of ‘value for money’ yet notes that this is not reflective of the ‘light touch’ in-work conditionality support now being used and estimates the benefits would be lower. The RCT (DWP, 2018c) found a WC relationship which was positive and motivational linked to in-work progression and note “...participants saw the main barriers to progression as the lack of available full-time jobs, their own health issues and their lack of skills or qualifications” (2018c:7). These findings are again self-evident and link to the much broader structural issues which shape individual lives and (un)employment. In contrast to the DWP (2018c) research Wright and Dwyer (2020) found “...both claimants and work coaches become engaged in an absurd bureaucratic ritual where jobs are applied for and boxes ticked, but meaningful outcomes were rare” (2020:10). Despite attempts to mirror employment, the rigid approach of UC regarding conditionality creates friction with the flexibilities required to participate in the contemporary labour market. This leaves workers ‘coerced’, at risk of sanction, engaging in ‘cruel’ and pointless work-searches, and still living in poverty, all of which had serious consequences for low paid workers living with UC (Wright and Dwyer, 2020).

The JCP was described by one in-work participant as a ‘sanctions centre’ (Wright and Dwyer, 2020) reflective of the increasing punitiveness of social security (Fletcher and Wright, 2017; Reeve, 2017; Wacquant, 2009). Wright et al (2020) found the JCP to be a place of ‘intimidation’ and ‘suffering’ with unemployed individuals feeling “...humiliated, angry, despairing, and resentful” (Wright et al, 2020: 284). The research described the 35 hour per week work-search requirements as a ‘treadwheel’ which punishes the unemployed who must engage with ‘fruitless’ and ‘relentless’ work-search activities under the fear of a sanction. Moreover, the use of the Universal Jobmatch site coupled with intense conditionality amalgamated into ‘self-facilitated social abuse’; this ‘humiliating’ punishment acts as a warning (Wright et al, 2020) to the rest of society as to what happens to ‘failed citizens’ (Reeves and Loopstra, 2017).

Sanctioning within UC was found to create ‘counterproductive conditionality’ and could challenge attempts to enter employment, this was echoed in findings with unemployed people receiving JSA (Wright and Stewart, 2016). Importantly, Stewart and Wright (2018) found the *threat* of a sanction caused ‘hypervigilance’ such as attending

appointments early or other forms of ‘counterproductive conditionality’ which undermined meaningful attempts to enter employment.

As Dwyer (2018) concludes, “Benefit sanctions do little to enhance people’s motivation to prepare for, seek, or enter paid work. They routinely trigger profoundly negative personal, financial, health and behavioural outcomes and push some people away from collectivised welfare provisions” (2018: 1). The notion that individuals require ‘motivation’ ignores research (Macdonald, Shildrick and Furlong, 2014; Reeve, 2017; Shildrick et al, 2012) demonstrating unemployed individuals want to work, yet the dominant narrative persists that individuals must be ‘helped and hassled’ (Mead, 2014) into the labour market. Consequently, the "...myths surrounding welfare remain potent and impact on people's attitudes to those having recourse to income protection" (Garrett, 2015: 403).

The findings from the Welcond Project surrounding the harmful nature of sanctions (Dwyer, 2018; Stewart and Wright, 2018; Wright et al, 2016; 2018) are supported by wider research (Adler, 2018; Griggs and Evans, 2010; Watts et al, 2014). Sanctions create feelings of fear, stress, depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts (Dwyer, 2018; Wright et al, 2016) and even those without a sanction are fearful (Pemberton et al, 2016a). Sanctioning can push individuals further from the labour market and support, as the “...main effect of imposing sanctions is to eject claimants from the benefit system and to further distance them from the world of work” (Adler, 2016: 219). Concerningly, UC increases the scope and severity of sanctions. The NAO (2016) reported “Studies show people who receive sanctions are more likely to get work, but the effect can be short-lived, lead to lower wages and increase the number of people moving off benefits into inactivity” (2016: 9). By increasing the movement of people into low paid insecure work, sanctions could increase numbers living with UC, who are unlikely to move into a better job (Wright et al, 2018).

Sanctions have disproportionately affected certain groups: young people (Crisp and Powell, 2017; Watts et al, 2014), the homeless (Batty et al, 2015), lone parents and the disabled (Adler, 2016; EHRC, 2018a; Reeves and Loopstra, 2017). All are likely to require more support to navigate conditionality and deal with the adversity it brings yet are more likely and less equipped to experience sanctioning. Thus, what is required “Within conditional welfare interventions, [are] personalised packages of support, rather than punitive sanctions...to initiate and sustain positive behaviour change” (Dwyer,

2018:10). There is limited evidence of such support and with the digital nature of UC it is often ‘DIY’ and experiences within the JCP dependent on the WC (Wright et al, 2018).

Summers and Young (2020) explore UC’s ‘administrative simplicity’ surrounding the monthly lump sum payment and found it challenged and undermined social security recipients which was ‘hidden’ under claims of simplicity. The findings originate from two pieces of fieldwork, one based upon the legacy system and the other UC, which provides an interesting dynamic between policies and lived experiences. Summers and Young conclude the “...(inevitable) complexities in the social security system are further shifted out of sight and onto the shoulders of claimants themselves” (2020:182). This argument, based upon the financial elements of UC, could be extended to the wider experiences of responsabilisation, digitalisation and ‘simplification’ such as those living with UC having to manage their own UC journey online.

Integral to the conditionality and sanctioning system is the ‘claimant commitment’, introduced with UC and used more recently within JSA, it is a contract between the citizen and Government to receive social security. Dwyer (2020) notes the ‘claimant commitment’ is “...presented as a personalized and negotiated contract drawn up between benefit recipient and work coach. However, official guidance clearly states that claimants ‘need to accept’ their Claimant Commitment” (2020: 201, 202). Therefore, despite the illusion of a *choice* and attempts to mirror an employment contract (Millar and Bennet, 2017), the power imbalance is clear as the *irresponsible* do not get options. Concerns have been raised about unachievable commitments which impact certain individuals – lone parents, disabled people and ethnic minorities – who are being ‘set up to fail’ (Reeve and Loopstra, 2017). The ‘claimant commitment’ illuminates the intersections between conditionality, sanctions and responsabilisation inherent within UC, its appearance as paperwork, a visible form of bureaucracy (Graeber, 2012), masks its punitiveness and potential ‘violence’.

The ‘claimant commitment’ is managed online by those living with UC via the online journal, another form of responsabilisation which is problematic due to its digital nature. This digitalization chimes with several Government agendas: post Great Recession ‘efficiency savings’, to bring services ‘up to date’, and responsabilisation. However, those who access social security are more likely to be digitally excluded. Individuals living in social housing, a deprived area, aged over fifty-five, unemployed, with ill-health or

disabilities, and in a lower social class, are more likely to be digitally excluded (Yates et al, 2015). The ‘efficiency savings’ moves Government costs to the individual who now requires the internet and a suitable device to access social security which some cannot afford (Wright et al, 2018). This movement is a clear example of the responsabilisation of citizens (see 3.6) to manage their own access to Government services. It makes IT skills a prerequisite to social security (Wright et al, 2016) which will disadvantage certain groups such as those with disabilities, low literacy, or language levels. (Dwyer and Wright, 2014; Fletcher and Wright, 2017). The use and promotion of the personalised online journey to access social security enables blame to be placed on individuals who cannot negotiate such a system and ultimately places more pressure on the most excluded and in need of support.

The Universal Jobmatch service (now ‘Find a job’) is a Government job listing website, which Stewart and Wright (2018) found to be deficient with participants concerned it was a surveillance tool, as WCs could monitor the activity. Fletcher and Wright (2017: 338) describe Universal Jobmatch as a ‘digital panopticon’, a disciplinary tool of surveillance used to substantiate sanctioning. It shows how the punitive reach extends into the homes of individuals engaging with UC as “...Universal Jobmatch was a panopticon without walls. Universal Jobmatch was often accessed via smartphone, an ever-present pocket watchtower” (Wright et al, 2020:287). The use of Foucauldian theory illustrates the invasive but mundane nature of this disciplinary power.

This extension into the homes of individuals living with UC is also apparent in the joint claim feature which requires the partner, of those in couples, to sign the ‘claimant commitment’ extending conditionality and responsabilisation. This new feature is currently being investigated in a longitudinal qualitative study<sup>10</sup> which focuses on how couples (with children) manage work, care and money. Early findings (Griffiths et al, 2020) have countered the homogeneous conception of couples within UC and shown some of the challenges couples face particularly surrounding money, gendered implications and how this is negotiated. Andersen (2019) found the joint claim had a negative impact on women’s rights with their social security linked to their partner’s (in)action. There are broader issues for women as UC by design is flawed with inherent misconceptions surrounding women, particularly mothers, as it is premised on a

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<sup>10</sup> See: <https://www.bath.ac.uk/projects/couples-balancing-work-money-and-care-exploring-the-shifting-landscape-under-universal-credit/>

masculine *ideal*. Therefore, it disregards the unpaid caring and domestic labour of mothers (Andersen, 2019). This leads Bennett (2021) to conclude “This lack of attention to gender roles, relationships and inequalities is papering over some fundamental flaws in the design of Universal Credit, as well as contributing to its failure to achieve its own objectives” (2021:14).

Andersen (2019) notes the importance of WC ‘discretion’ for women with children who can reduce the work-related requirements for individuals but found a lack of value and understanding from the WC which led to inappropriate levels of conditionality. The ‘discretion’ of frontline JCP staff is important particularly for more vulnerable individuals and regarding sanctioning (Fletcher, 2011) which as described earlier disproportionately affects certain groups. The WC plays an important role as Lipsky (2010) explains “...the decisions of street-level bureaucrats, the routines they establish, and the devices they invent to cope with uncertainties and work pressures, effectively become the public policies they carry out” (2010, p. xiii). The comments from Lipsky (2010) highlight the subjectivities within policy delivery and the potential power of street-level bureaucrats, such as the WC. However, the picture is complex as ultimately street-level bureaucrats “...are more the subjects than the architects of the political and organizational environment within which they work” (Brodkin, 2012: 948). Therefore, the ‘discretion’ of the WC must be within this context, particularly for UC which features a dense bureaucratic structure inherently political and ideological in nature.

Crossley (2016) explores the impact of austerity on street level bureaucracy, using the example of the Troubled Families Programme he illustrates how the state is increasingly intervening in the homes of marginalised citizens. This argument is also reflective of the increasing presence of UC within homes in terms of the online journal, which is used to communicate with the WC, the Universal Jobmatch and the joint claim. A WC can now appear in the homes of those living with UC whilst sat at a distant desk and this distance is even greater for the communications with the UC call-centre as this relationship is never played out face to face. Importantly, austerity has reduced DWP staffing, and staff face increasing caseloads with appointments lasting 8 – 10 minutes (Work and Pensions Committee, 2016). As of February 2020, WCs managed approximately 125 individuals (NAO, 2020) with between ten and twenty interviews daily (Work and Pensions Committee, 2016) and this caseload will increase. Alongside the WC, individuals are assigned a Case Manager who is accessed via the call-centre. Case Managers had average caseloads of 573 as of February 2020 with growing concern from the DWP about the

sustainability of this support (NAO, 2020). The increasing pressures for UC staff may challenge their ‘discretion’, which as Andersen (2019) explains is of greater importance now due to the *individualised* ‘claimant commitment’ and subsequent conditionality.

The gendered misconceptions intersect with issues surrounding in-work conditionality, as women are more likely to be working part-time and have childcare responsibilities (Bennett, 2021). Andersen (2019) found women were fearful of a sanction due to the impact this would have on their children. Thus, due to a lack of recognition over their labour (Andersen, 2019; Patrick, 2012) mothers could be at increasing risk of a sanction and this may impact lone parents more seriously. Johnsen and Blenkinsopp (2018) found the conditionality requirements placed upon lone parents were inflexible and at times interfered with participants' childcare arrangements. Their qualitative longitudinal research discovered “...insufficient account is taken of many lone parents’ caring responsibilities by Jobcentre advisers when ‘claimant commitments’ are developed. The flexibilities applicable to lone parents are, in the views of service providers, poorly understood and too rarely implemented” (Johnsen and Blenkinsopp, 2018:4). The inflexibility results in a lack of understanding for lone parents, which may have negative impacts for individuals and their families. Lone parents often reported a lack of support to re-engage with the labour market and inappropriate training (Johnsen and Blenkinsopp, 2018) which mirrors comments made by jobseekers (Stewart and Wright, 2018).

Lone parents in employment can also face conflicts between work and family commitments. The hours of work will reduce the time they can spend with their children (Johnsen and Blenkinsopp, 2018). Andersen (2019:439) found mothers felt engaging in work-related requirements caused ‘neglect’ of their child. Lone parents entering work to try and ‘get out’ of poverty may unintentionally limit the opportunities for their children to ‘get out’ as spending less time with their children could result in lower educational attainment (Lister, 2004).

Lone parents, or any working family, rely on a range of support for childcare from family or friends, after-school clubs or costly formal childcare arrangements (Vincent et al, 2010). Parents must juggle their roles as parent and worker, which coincides with issues of gender, class and neoliberal expectations. Hence, individuals feel and could be labelled a *bad parent* as “...mother breadwinners are required by the economy but not desired by the moral order” (Vincent et al, 2010:134). The management of roles is pressurised by the increasingly flexible and insecure labour market, which many workers enter - especially those with dependent children. The RSA (2018) identified seven portraits of

modern work using survey data splitting precarious workers into two groups: the chronically precarious and acutely precarious. It is the acutely precarious who have entered the flexible labour market (such as zero-hour contract or gig economy) and 66 percent of these workers fit work around childcare. Yet, these workers do not have job security but low and volatile incomes (RSA, 2018). The insecurities felt by these individuals necessitates a safety net; to offer protection to workers and their families. However, the gendered implications of UC do not currently provide this (Andersen, 2019; Bennett, 2021).

Findings from the DWP (2017b) highlight for all families, a ‘better off’ calculation regarding employment is not simply a financial question but relates to issues of time, care and stability. Parents consider whether the monetary increase is worth the cost of less time with their families, and this was particularly so for those already in-work who in receipt of UC could be required to engage in conditionality. This finding seems obvious and points to the flaws which have been discussed with the design and delivery of UC for women and families. It echoes Bennett (2021) who after discussing the activation of lone mothers’ notes “For that security, we need to be able to put trust in others and in social institutions. This shelter, the protective safety net of the welfare state, is becoming increasingly hard to maintain in the face of the dominant work-based definitions of self-responsibility” (2021:96). Therefore, UC will only be *successful* within wider structural changes around labour, care and the role the of the state.

#### 4.8 ‘Poor work’

Work offers important benefits to individuals, communities (Crisp, 2010; Jahoda, 1972, 1982; Ray et al, 2010) and society (Vincent et al, 2010). Pettinger (2019) asks ‘what is wrong with work’ and provides three intersected questions to explore this issue surrounding the organisation, connections and functions of work. The questions render visible issues relating to work which were hidden by ‘capitalocentric’ thought such as ‘hidden work’ like care duties. In exploring historical and global examples, Pettinger (2019) demonstrates how ‘poor work’ is not a new phenomenon despite its common appearance as a neoliberal problem.

Shildrick et al (2012) notes how ‘poor work’ dominated the experiences of working-class participants characterised by low pay, low skill and insecurity. It was often demanding, dull and over unsociable hours, it is *poor* in its pay, quality, opportunities and protections. Standing (2011) conceptualises precarious workers as a ‘class in the making’

experiencing insecure work and thus cannot form a work-based identity and thus, forgo the benefits this brings. The notion of precarity is useful as it shows the increasing growth of insecure work and its dangers. Yet, the notion of ‘poor work’ seems to encapsulate a more affective dimension and offers more flexibility regarding the intersections between experiences of work and poverty.

McDowell (2003) explored the transition from school to employment for young working-class ‘lads’ who engaged in ‘poor’ service-sector work. The ‘lads’ believed their current situation was due to personal ‘failures’ and could be changed by individual effort. McDowell (2003) concluded “They failed to recognize the ways in which the institutions of school and the labour market construct working-class young people, and often boys in particular, as lacking the attributes of social and cultural capital that are valued in supposedly meritocratic societies, directing them to the worst jobs in a restructured economy” (2003:843). This illuminates how ‘poor work’ can become individualised and consequently reinforces the structural inequalities faced by such workers. In a later study (McDowell and Bonner-Thompson, 2020) this individualisation persisted yet the situation and opportunities for young men had worsened due to austerity and labour market changes. The research focused on seaside towns which “...may on the surface look pleasant and their reputation as places for pleasure and relaxation are an essential part of their attraction for visitors. But beneath the surface of these images, economic decline, austerity policies and social problems have circumscribed the opportunities for local working class...” (McDowell and Bonner-Thompson, 2020:928-929).

#### 4.9 ‘Getting-by’

Poverty requires significant effort to cope or ‘get-by’ (Lister, 2004). The subtle and concealed nature of ‘getting-by’ is often overlooked, therefore agency also goes unseen. As Lister (2004) explains “the cloak of invisibility surrounding getting-by tends to be lifted only when it breaks down and the situation becomes classified as a ‘problem’” (2004:130). Once labelled a ‘problem’, blame quickly follows and in a neoliberal age, the individual is responsible (Wacquant, 2012). Subsequently, notions of idleness and financial recklessness often appear to describe those living in poverty despite research showing otherwise (Flint, 2010).

Budgeting is important for ‘getting-by’ (Daly, 2017; Lister, 2004). Qualitative research (Daly, 2017) offers interesting insights into how money, or lack of, permeates the lives of low-income families and shows the complex negotiations within household budgeting

of bills and expenditure, with money often ‘earmarked’ by need and urgency. Managing money is more than financial as Daly found “...paying rent or mortgage on time was associated with security. It evoked a sense of safety that was both physical and existential” (Daly, 2017: 454). Budgeting is linked to morality and social judgements (Daly, 2017; Shildrick and Macdonald, 2013). Daly (2017) notes “people prided themselves especially on their budgeting ability and the skills they saw themselves using and developing in relation to food and the management of family life in circumstances of low income” (2017:460). This demonstrates how ‘getting-by’ becomes a space for self-development which Flint (2010) also found. The internalisation of one’s ability to ‘get-by’ can increase and reduce self-esteem depending on the success of budgeting (Flint, 2010). Daly (2017) and Flint (2010) show how ‘getting-by’ is personal not just physical and this personal aspect can obscure the structural factors. Therefore, struggles to ‘get-by’ are blamed on the individual for not budgeting properly, despite the agency asserted (Lister, 2004). This internal responsabilisation further delegitimizes the need for ‘welfare’ recast as a problem of individual risks (Lea and Hallsworth, 2012).

To ‘get-by’ also takes time and energy such as going to a multitude of shops to save money or shop once items have been discounted (Daly, 2017; Flint; 2010 Patrick, 2017; Shildrick et al, 2012). Individuals in poverty live on strict budgets and save for much needed items (Shildrick et al, 2012), they buy from catalogues (Pemberton et al, 2016a), on credit or ‘rent to own’ appliances (Shildrick et al, 2012) which are all expensive ways to buy. The use of credit is avoided by those on low incomes who fear entering debt. Individuals go without everyday appliances (washing machines etc.) until they can afford to buy what is needed without the use of credit (Flint, 2010).

Pemberton et al (2016a) explore experiences of austerity and highlight the increasing pressure on households with “...a feeling that they were living constrained lives that prevented them from realizing their potential – that they were ‘existing not living’...” (Pemberton et al, 2016a:1166). The ‘constrained lives’ are made more difficult by the reduction in local services, as those in need now turn to charities. Even after careful budgeting many have no money left for savings (JRF, 2015), are unable to plan, and vulnerable to unexpected expenditures, which could lead to debt (Flint, 2010; Pemberton et al, 2016a; Shildrick et al, 2012). The notion of ‘existing not living’ highlights the broad deep-rooted effects of living in poverty, worsened by austerity.

Coinciding with austerity is the growth in the use of resilience within social policy which shifts focus from structural inequalities onto personal behaviours and actions. Hickman

(2018) conceptually considers resilience using qualitative data from low-income families in Northern Ireland. The experiences of (economic) resilience were overwhelmingly negative with individuals struggling economically and being resilient incurring costs to relationships and health. Participants spoke positively about the characteristics used for resilience (for example ‘ingenuity’ and ‘selflessness’) but for most “...being resilient was not about ‘bouncing-back’, ‘flourishing’ and ‘thriving’ in the face of adversity – it was about enduring, surviving and ‘getting-by’” (Hickman, 2018:420-421).

Conditionality limits the time and energy available to ‘get-by’, increasing pressure on individuals with time spent fulfilling ‘counter-productive’ conditionality requirements (Stewart and Wright, 2018) which reduces time for money saving measures (Daly, 2017; Flint, 2010). Boland and Griffin (2015) argue time for the unemployed becomes burdensome. Despite research (Flint, 2010; Pemberton et al, 2016a; Shildrick et al, 2012) showing how hard people in poverty work, this regulation of time reflects the idea that “poor people’s time is regarded as valueless” (Toynbee, 2003:34). They are cast as ‘neoliberal deviants’ (Maki, 2011) lacking the required ‘work ethic’ and subsequently are flawed consumers (Bauman, 2005). Therefore, the promoted neoliberal luxuries of freedom and choice are removed, and their time, money and behaviour regulated.

Low paid workers will now face similar regulation of their time and behaviour via conditionality. However, those in-work trying to ‘get-by’ face the new pressures of ‘getting out’, further reducing their time and energy to do the former. Lister (2004) identified ‘getting out’ as an example of agency for people in poverty; describing the use of employment or education to exit poverty. In a sense, conditionality is a state supported form of ‘getting out’ but with an individualistic focus it ignores wider issues, as “individuals exercise their strategic agency in negotiating these routes but the routes themselves are forged by structural and cultural factors, which can assist or obstruct the exercise of that agency” (Lister, 2004: 145). It is likely the ‘mismatches’ (Wright and Dwyer, 2020) surrounding UC and low paid workers (see 2.3) will hinder attempts to ‘get out’ as well as ‘get-by’.

Mullainathan and Shafir (2013) argue poverty, or ‘scarcity’, can affect decision making, which holds important implications for ‘getting-by’ (Lister, 2004). ‘Scarcity’ provides an interesting explanation of how poverty interacts with cognition and why choices are made or avoided by those experiencing poverty. The ‘scarcity mindset’ is engrossing as “the mind orients automatically, powerfully, toward unfulfilled needs...It changes how we think. It imposes itself on our minds” (Mullainathan and Shafir, 2013: 7). It can alter

decision making and subsequently behaviours for example the 'bandwidth tax' of the present reduces the ability to focus on the future which causes an increased focus on the short-term (Mullainathan and Shafir, 2013). Thus, a 'scarcity mindset' hinders engagement with conditionality and the consequences of this could intensify the experience of 'scarcity'. Whilst critiquing Mead (2014), Curchin (2017) argues "Policy aimed at attempting to induce superhuman vigilance among people living in poverty appears misguided when seen in this light" (2017:242).

The 'scarcity mindset' could be challenged by research (Daly, 2017; Flint, 2010) which highlights the skill and rationale behind low-income budgeting as the individuals are often living 'constrained lives'. Moreover, Hickman et al (2017) describe the rational motivations behind what might seem irrational actions. Despite the challenges, 'scarcity' offers an interesting avenue for the cognitive effects of poverty adding a further layer to 'getting-by' and the subsequent pride and self-regulation this entails (Daly, 2017; Flint, 2010; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013). Furthermore, if poverty alters thinking via the 'scarcity mindset' (Mullainathan and Shafir, 2013) a social security system which increases the chance of 'scarcity' will reinforce this mindset and create more barriers to exiting poverty. Curchin (2017) argues for more generous social security systems as "The findings by behavioural scientists who study poverty suggest that there are circumstances in which humans are unlikely to flourish no matter how motivated they are" (2017:245). These sentiments chime with existing research (Reeve, 2017; Wright et al, 2016) that individuals want to work but conditions, circumstance and resources limit this desire.

Family and friends form social networks which provide support (economic, social and emotional) to help those on low incomes 'get-by' (Lister, 2015) although austerity and widespread financial difficulties undermines this (Pemberton et al, 2016a) and some may not have networks to rely on (Fletcher et al, 2016). Economic support can be in the form of borrowing money (Fletcher et al, 2016; Pemberton et al, 2016a) or in-kind (Chase and Walker, 2012; Flint, 2010; Wright and Stewart, 2016). Using support can place pressure on individuals if they feel unable to reciprocate (Lister, 2015; Wright and Stewart, 2016) or cause feelings of shame and inadequacy (Chase and Walker, 2012), as "...the reciprocal nature of support received and provided was an important justification for individuals in being willing to accept assistance" (Flint, 2010:12). This demonstrates the complex internal negotiations in accepting support even from friends and family. Social networks can become a barrier as assistance to 'get-by' can diminish attempts to 'get out' due to the support the network provides which would be lost (Lister, 2015). For low paid

workers aiming to progress in-work, childcare is essential to success, especially for lone parents (Ray et al, 2010) which has important implications for UC (See Andersen, 2019).

Unemployed individuals may create their own barriers within social networks as individuals become socially withdrawn because of shame and self-doubt (Jahoda, 1972; Peterie et al, 2019b). Similar findings (Chase and Walker, 2012; JRF, 2018; Ray et al, 2010; Wright et al, 2016) show social exclusion due to shame and lack of finances, therefore "...The stress of poverty is thus compounded by social isolation" (Lister, 2015:149). In difficult times, when social support is most required, individuals can become increasingly excluded, making 'getting-by' harder.

To 'get-by' individuals may work informally or in 'fiddly work', which is a survival strategy for those living on a low income from social security (Fletcher, 2010; MacDonald, 1994). Both studies show how informal work is used to present work ethic and Fletcher (2010) explores how it also aids 'self' management for working-class males reinforcing the non-financial benefits of work (Crisp, 2010; Jahoda, 1972; 1982). Lister (2004) points out 'unreported work, within the limits set by need rather than greed, can take on a certain legitimacy and is often condoned in deprived areas' (2004:139).

#### 4.10 Conclusion

The chapter has investigated a range of literature surrounding the experiences and impacts of social security, poverty and (un)employment. The focus of the chapter derived from the research questions (1.2), with the impacts on emotions, wellbeing and identity of most importance for this evidence review. There is very limited research on the impact of UC on wellbeing (4.2), emotions (4.3) and identities. Subsequently wider literature from other social security systems were drawn upon. There is growing evidence on the experiences of UC (4.7) which has focused on certain elements such as the experiences of women (Andersen, 2019). The chapter also explored broader issues surrounding 'getting by' (4.9) and 'poor work' (4.8) both of which are important for understanding the impacts of living with UC.

## 5. Analytical Framework

### 5.1 Introduction

The analytical framework is formed of two distinct, yet interlinked, parts. This is because to critically explore the experiences, impacts and responses to living with UC one must also have analytical tools to understand UC itself – we must look both *up* and *down*. The first section frames UC as a civilising offensive which seeks to *transform* perceived ‘neoliberal deviants’ (Maki, 2011) via conditionality, surveillance and increasing poverty. The concept of the civilising offensive and its place within the longer civilising process (Elias, 1994) is discussed. The chapter considers applications of the civilising offensive and its potential to ‘decivilize’. This theory provides the scaffolding for the framework, it offers a way to intersect structure and agency and investigate social change and control within *uncivilised* neoliberal bodies. To delve deeper into UC and understand the tools of a civilising offensive the concepts of governmentality, rationality, bureaucracy and dehumanization are discussed. The concepts themselves are overlapping and chime with many attributes of the civilising process. They are useful as the nuts and bolts of this framework and broaden analytical capabilities in exploring this contemporary civilising offensive and the range of ‘external restraints’ at its disposal.

The second section focuses on identities and how they are managed when damaged. As the civilising offensive seeks to change ‘personalities’ via the ‘internalisation of external restraints’ (Elias, 1994; Powell, 2013) it is important to consider how this is experienced and responded to via identity management. First, the concept of identity itself is explored concentrating on its social (aligning with Eliason theory) and dynamic nature. Next, ‘stigma power’ is discussed which, building on Goffman (1963/1997), highlights how stigma is used to control and reinforce inequalities (Tyler, 2020). Lastly, social death and the ‘sociology of nothing’ are considered which are helpful to aid an understanding of the impact of a civilising offensive on the ‘self’. Social death, or ‘self-mortification’, is used by Goffman (1961/2007) in his ethnography of a ‘mental hospital’ which he conceptualises as a ‘total institution’. This concept itself is useful and partially relates to themes raised by Elias (1994) and explains *how* ‘self-mortification’ occurs. Scott (2018;2019;2020) has developed concepts of ‘nothingness’ that focus attention on ‘unmarked’ experiences (where *nothing* happened) and argues these experiences are used and negotiated within identity management. The concept of ‘nothingness’ helps to explore encounters with social death and how this is experienced and negotiated by individuals both negatively and positively. This second section places importance on

identities, which cross material and symbolic lines, and will help explore what happens when ‘external restraints’ are, or attempt to be, internalised.

## 5.2 ‘Civilising’ neoliberal bodies

The ideological core of UC seeks to induce behavioural and cultural change based upon unsubstantiated notions of ‘dependency’ and ‘worklessness’, it seeks to transform the perceived neoliberal *uncivilised*. The ‘Civilising Process’ was developed by Elias (1994), and based upon a detailed historical investigation it describes:

...the gradual internalisation of external, social restraints (e.g. use of violence, or threat of violence, monopolised by the state) in the moulding of self-discipline. As a result people have greater control over their impulses which is built into the personality structure of individuals, and are better able to act in a more rational and calculated fashion (Powell, 2013: 2).

Elias (1994) illustrates the slow transformation of society through individuals (their bodies and ‘personalities’) and social networks (‘figurations’). Through this transformation, the ‘internalisation of external restraints’, societies are increasingly pacified and centrally state managed which grows trade and economic dominance. Elias (1994) highlights the relationship between these external factors and the ‘personalities’ of individuals with both transformations *reliant* on each other. The notion of ‘personalities’ allows us to consider the experiences and impacts of living with UC on an emotional level. For example, Elias (1994) explains how embarrassment and shame in appearing uncivilised creates increased vigilance of oneself and others. The civilising process is unplanned and never finished as questions of *civility* are never fully met. The notions of self-discipline and rationality resonate with the responsabilisation and behavioural conditionality inherent within UC. The internalisation is important as it allows the ‘social restraints’ to become natural; the expected or normal behaviour and the opposite treated with ‘disgust’ (Tyler, 2013). Consequently, those who deviate are abnormal and in need of correction.

A civilising process can also be ‘decivilizing’ due to its cyclical unplanned nature which occurs when the process is ‘reversed’. When this occurs the balance between internal and external restraints changes and these have been used to explain instances of violence (Mennell, 1990). Fletcher (1995) explores the definition and characteristics of ‘decivilizing’ as this is an area Elias did not theoretically develop. The ‘decivilizing’ characteristic is investigated by Law and Mooney (2012) in their discussion of the treatment of working-class youth in Scotland. They argue “...the nationally autonomous institutions of Scottish state and civil society- criminal justice system, policy-making

networks, government, and media producers- rely on the antisocial underclass figure of the Ned to formalize the civilizing process and to correct and modify informal urban subcultures...” (Law and Mooney, 2012:121). Hence, we can see from this contemporary example how institutions such as the media and Government can together create a ‘decivilizing’ process which is then used to legitimize interventions within this *problem* group. Inglis (2020) uses theories of ‘decivilizing’ to investigate Brexit and explains how “...very short-term de-civilizing offensives can help to create somewhat longer-term de-civilizing spurts, which may in turn to lead to much longer-term de-civilizing processes” (2020:65). Illustrating how ‘decivilizing’ acts can perpetuate and provide further means for intervention. Such acts can also occur between groups with high levels of inter-dependence and power imbalance, diverging from Elias (Inglis, 2020).

Rodger (2012) argues the civilising process lacks consideration of ‘decivilizing’ processes and neoliberal economics, using Wacquant’s (2009) concept of ‘advanced marginality’ to address this. Yet, Rodger (2012: 100 - 104) also suggests Wacquant is aided by Elias (1994) in illuminating how ‘mentalities’ (emotions and the ‘self’) are shaped by ‘advanced marginality’. Additionally, Law and Mooney (2012) and Inglis (2020) provide examples of how Eliasian inspired theory is used to explain contemporary phenomena within a neoliberal context. Further critique of Eliasian theory includes the contradictory conceptualisation of ‘control’ and its long-term perspective which creates a non-engagement with the present (Dunne, 2009). The latter critique has been questioned by Powell (2013) as contemporary literature on civilising offensives often focuses on the present.

The civilising offensive builds on Elias (1994) and was first used by De Rooy in 1979. It describes a focused attack on an uncivilised population by a dominant group often driven by moral and ideological concerns (Powell, 2013). The ideological, focused and planned nature of a civilising offensive makes it useful to explore UC, itself driven by ideology and seeks to ‘transform’ individuals (and their ‘personalities’).

The origins, developments and applications of the civilising offensive are discussed by Powell (2013) who notes “...recent offensives on populations on the margins of society, invariably distinguished in discourse from the ‘civilised’ majority in the upper strata, but also from the ‘respectable classes’ within their own social class” (Powell, 2013:11). Hence, the civilising offensive creates divisions across society and leads to the fracturing of groups as questions of civility arise. This fracturing resonates with ‘them and us’

dichotomies (Chase and Walker, 2012) as Van Ginkel (2015) concluded “...the civilising offensive was to a large extent launched not from *without*, but from *within*” (2015:9).

The civilising offensive has been explored in a range of contexts such as: British gypsies (Powell, 2007), the Australian indigenous population (van Krieken, 1999), Thatcher and the British working-class (Clement, 2015) and Rotterdam’s ‘urban poor’ (Van Ginkel, 2015). All groups were perceived as problematic, even dangerous, and in need of transformation (or regulation). Van Krieken (1999) explains how civilising offensives are violent, a form of ‘barbarism’, as the civilising process has not removed violence but ‘rearranged’ it towards and within state control. Thus, “The state monopolization of violence in fact involved the *exercise* of that violence on groups seen to lie outside the prevailing standards of civilization...” (Van Krieken, 1999:309). Therefore, we can see how the violence within social policy (discussed in 3.8) is reflective of this process. Clement (2015) argues “...even those ‘hard-working families’, characterised by government as ‘the strivers – in whose name they claim to be implementing these cuts to prevent today’s equivalent of the Victorian’s ‘dangerous classes’ growing fat at their expense – are feeling the impact of this civilising offense” (2015:2). The comments highlight the new focus on low-paid workers who now encounter conditionality when accessing social security as their *civility* is now in question. Fletcher (2019) explores the activation practices upon the ‘precariat’ in the JCP and considers whether this is a ‘civilising offensive’, concluding this cannot be as it is not a deliberate attempt and is ‘decivilizing’. Yet Mennell (2015) cautiously suggests a civilising offensive may be ‘decivilizing’, and akin to the civilising process the balance of internal and external restraints could shift. But also highlights the complexities of identification and situation of potential ‘decivilizing’ offensives within the longer civilising process.

The application of the civilising (or decivilizing) offensive to various phenomena illustrates its usefulness for Eliasian analysis within a contemporary context. The theory is also helpful for investigating UC’s aim of behavioural change as the civilising process (Elias, 1994) and subsequently the civilising offensive, focuses on changing ‘personalities’ (or behaviours) and also emotional control. As a planned and targeted action, it is important to consider the tools which might be used to control and change the behaviours of the *uncivilised*. This *operationalisation* of the concept will now be considered discussing governmentality, rationality, bureaucracy and dehumanization.

### 5.3 Governmentality

Foucault's (1979) concept of governmentality is useful to explore as it allows us to trace the power which flows within transactions, between groups and within individuals. This helps us to understand how bodies are *disciplined* and surveyed under the aim of behavioural transformation – a central tenet of UC.

Lemke (2007) explains, “Foucault defines government as conduct, or, more precisely, as ‘the conduct of conduct’ and thus as a term which ranges from ‘governing the self’ to ‘governing others’” (2007: 3). Foucault's use of the term ‘conduct’ is interesting in describing governmentality, as this term is used by Clasen and Clegg (2007) in their categorisation of behavioural conditionality and in many ways reflects the diffusion of governance in contemporary society. The concept of ‘governmentality’ highlights the importance of relationships between and within the state and the citizens. Governmentality illuminates the intricate dealings and details of governance and exposes the true scope and scale of the state, which can be seen in the rapid growth of responsabilisation globally and more specifically the conditionality and surveillance within UC (see 3.7). Tyler (2013) argues “...stigmatization operates as a form of governance which legitimizes the reproduction and entrenchment of inequalities and injustices” (2013: 212) which is considered later in 5.6.

It is important to include discussions of power as it is key to the application and possible resistance or negotiation of forms of governmentality. Foucault (1982) unpicks the concept of power discussing why and how it should be studied, how it is exercised and its nature. The complex, active, social and diverse nature of power is clear yet seeing and defining power is not so. Foucault notes “Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free” (1982:790) demonstrating the important dynamic it shares with freedom. Interestingly, both Elias and Foucault “...see the dynamics of power as lying more within the fabric of everyday life” (Van Krieken, 1990:361) and broadly share a focus on the regulation of individuals and subsequently societies. Yet, there are differences within their theorisations such as the focus and conceptualisations of ‘external restraints’ and Elias's concern with the changing nature of figurations or Foucault's focus on discipline (See Van Krieken, 1990). Foucault's conceptualisation of power offers insight into the punitiveness of social control which is important for understanding UC as a ‘civilising offensive’.

Foucault was also concerned with different types of power from 'biopower' which is "...a power to foster life or *disallow* it to the point of death" (Foucault, 1976/2020:261). It appears in two forms, one centred on *disciplining* to create 'docile bodies' and focused on "...the body as a machine" (Foucault, 1976/2020:261). Second, and which came later, focused on *regulating bodies* and subsequently populations as "...the body imbued with the mechanics of life..." (Foucault, 1976/2020:262) which intersected with economics as it provided healthy bodies for capitalism, and judiciary as laws enshrined and policed the 'rights' of bodies. The earlier form of disciplinary power was developed further by Foucault (1975/2020) as he explains how the body is a vessel for power - political and economic. Thus, "a soul inhabits him and brings him to existence, which is itself a factor in the mastery that power exercises over the body...the soul is the prison of the body" (1975:2020/177). Disciplinary power uses tools of 'examination' to survey the bodies and souls it seeks to change and control. In this relationship, the disciplinary power is hidden whilst the bodies are visible 'objects'. Hence, power is enacted via a distant and discreet, yet dominating, 'panopticon' whose shadowy omnipresent structures result in self-regulation (Foucault, 1975/2020).

#### 5.4 Rationality, Bureaucracy and Dehumanization

Both Elias (1994) and Foucault (1979) discuss the increasingly rational nature of society "...reinforcing Max Weber's 'iron cage' metaphor for rationalized and bureaucratized subjectivity, and adding new colour and dimension to his picture of increasingly self-disciplined individuals with the ever more complex routines of modern society built into the very core of their being" (Van Krieken, 1990:355). Ritzer's (2002) theory of McDonaldisation, a contemporary application of Weber (2005), further unpicks rationality within a globalised world. Ritzer (1998) suggests the 'iron cage' is being built slowly across society as "...various organizations and institutions are following the McDonald's model and each is, as a result adding a bar to the emerging cage" (Ritzer, 1998:4). Ritzer (2002) suggested the McDonaldization of society is characterised by efficiency, predictability, calculability, control, and substitution of non-human technology which led to irrationality. The characteristics are reflective of many design and delivery features within UC which is based upon efficiency, calculability, control, predictability and has increased non-human technology via its 'digital by default' approach. All of these features have created irrationalities as "...rational systems are unreasonable systems that deny the humanity, the human reason, of the people who work

within them or are served by them” (Ritzer, 2013: 123), for example the use of sanctions (see 3.7).

Rationality can be harmful as Bauman (1989) illustrates in his seminal text exploring the ‘social mechanisms’ which led to the Holocaust. The increasingly rationalised and bureaucratized society, characteristic of modernity, created the conditions in which the genocide became the *logical solution*. Bauman (1989) provides key insights into the intersections of morality, bureaucracy and technology as individuals become increasingly distanced from their actions creating a ‘moral sleeping pill’ (1989: 26). The forensic and sociologically engaged analysis illustrates how the Holocaust is an extreme example of modern bureaucracy and seeks to explore the ‘social mechanisms’ which allowed such events to occur. Bauman describes modern culture as a ‘garden culture’ which must be ‘designed’ and ‘weeded’:

All visions of society-as-garden define parts of the social habitat as human weeds. Like all other weeds, they must be segregated, contained, prevented from spreading, removed and kept outside the societies’ boundaries; if all these means prove insufficient, they must be killed (Bauman, 1989: 92).

Redman and Fletcher (2021) utilised Bauman’s ideas surrounding bureaucracy and propaganda (an important factor influencing the social conditions in Nazi Germany) to explore the ways in which workers in the public employment services engaged in harmful acts towards unemployed individuals. The findings illustrated how stigma fuelled the ‘violent bureaucracy’ “...as staff could efface the humanity of their caseloads and remove them from moral obligation” (Redman and Fletcher, 2021: 14).

Dehumanization arises in the work of Bauman (1989) as well as within experiences of social security particularly when engaging with bureaucracy (Chase and Walker, 2012; Patrick, 2017; Peterie et al, 2019a; Redman and Fletcher, 2021). It is helpful to further unpick the concept of dehumanization. Haslam (2006) defines dehumanization as the denial of human characteristics and outlines two types of dehumanization (mechanical and animalistic) which relate to the removal of different forms of humanness. Animalistic dehumanization relates to the denial of unique humanness to those seen as ‘animal-like’ “...lacking in refinement, civility, moral sensibility and higher cognition” (Haslam, 2006: 257) who are treated with ‘disgust’. If animalistic dehumanization compares humans to animals, mechanical compares humans to machines. Mechanical dehumanization denies individuals human nature or ‘depth’ to those “...lacking in emotionality, warmth, cognitive openness, individual agency...” (Haslam, 2006:258) who are treated with ‘coldness’. Importantly, individuals may experience both forms of dehumanization

concurrently and can occur subtly throughout daily life such as through stereotypes. The definitions provided by Haslam (2006) allow for a deeper understanding of the experiences and impacts of dehumanization and how this intersects with wider issues such as stigma and bureaucracy.

### 5.5 Identity

Identity, like life itself, is complex, dynamic and contradictory – it is a site of struggle and longed for resolution. This section will explore the question of identity and how it is (un)made in and by contemporary society.

Bauman (1988) described the insecure and incompletable nature of identity suggesting “Everyone has to ask himself [sic] the question ‘who am I’, ‘how should I live’, ‘who do I want to become’ – and at the end of the day, be prepared to accept responsibility for the answer...” (1988: 62). The questions raise challenges for individuals who seek to find answers within the fluidity and uncertainty of postmodernity. Bauman (1996) outlined four strategies for *managing* identities which are each distinct yet overlapping reminiscent of the fragmentation and ‘recycling’ of postmodern life: the ‘stroller’, ‘vagabond’, ‘tourist’ and ‘player’. All four are characterized by some form of journey, the ‘stroller’ by consumption, the ‘vagabond’ wanders nomadically, the ‘tourist’ travels from home for excitement and new experiences, and the ‘player’ travels through games and competition. These typologies encapsulate contemporary identities, a shift from the ‘pilgrim’ of modernity who sought solid, orderly and forward-planning identity formation. The four strategies are epitomized by their names and are all practices once marginalised in modernity which have now come to dominate postmodern lifestyles. Notably, the ‘stroller’, ‘vagabond’, ‘tourist’ and ‘player’ only provide partial identities as competition is impossible (Bauman, 1996). The typologies go some way to answer Bauman’s (1988) original question and offer interesting insights into how identities can be constructed and consumed. However, the focus on the individualised notion and practice of identity neglects its relational and structural elements. The latter is perhaps neglected due to the postmodern assertion of a fluid and fragmented society in which meta-narratives and structures are obsolete.

Hall (1996) provides a different perspective, acknowledging the conceptual and operational challenges of identity but argues for a reconceptualization; the concern moves from identity to identification. The process of identification relates to the processes of recognition between individuals or groups for example of a ‘shared characteristic’. This

complex process works across the discursive and psychoanalytical fields and is ongoing. Hall (1996) explains "...since as a process it operates across difference, it entails discursive work, the binding and marking of symbolic boundaries, the production of 'frontier effects'. It requires what is left outside, its constitutive outside, to consolidate the process" (1996: 3). This illustrates the important social dynamic within the process and how such 'symbolic boundaries' are (re)constructed within. Building on this, Hall (1996) argues identity is only constructed "...through the relation to the Other..." (1996: 4) as "...identities can function as points of identification and attachment only *because* of their capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render 'outside', adjected. Every identity has at its 'margin', an excess, something more" (1996: 5). Hall (1996) offers an important, and influential, intervention into debates surrounding identity with his article providing a detailed theoretical account of his assertions above. The shift in focus to how identities work *through* difference is insightful as it allows space for how identity work is situated culturally, historically and structurally. Moreover, it illustrates how the 'Other' is an essential part of identity construction and how this further reinforces the exclusionary 'symbolic boundaries'.

More recently, Bauman (2009) has also advocated for the potential of identification and his comments draw heavily on Hall's (1996) earlier assertions surrounding *difference* and identity. Bauman is critical of the notion that communities can exist as despite the desperation of the 'lonely identity builder' these opportunities are illusionary as "Identity sprouts on the graveyards of communities, but flourishes thanks to its promise to resurrect the dead" (Bauman, 2009: 26). The comment encapsulates the contradictory, and cunning, nature of identity construction.

Both Bauman (1988; 1996; 2009) and Hall (1996) provide useful theoretical accounts of identity and its formation in uncertain times with the former approach focused on the individual and the latter *difference*. Yet, there is little detail on operationalisation and how identity construction is negotiated within the backdrop of structural inequalities.

Lawler (2014) emphasizes identity is a process based upon relationships between identities and is inherently *social* in nature, in terms of perceptions of and from others and how such questions are negotiated daily. The essentialised conception of identity is unpicked to consider the social production of identities which links to societal dichotomies of a good/bad or normal/abnormal identity that maintain social inequalities. Identities are constructed against an 'Other' (as Hall, 1996 suggested) within these dichotomies, for example middle-classness is formed from not being working-class, a

figure of 'disgust'. This relationship is reinforced by the 'threat' the 'Other' identity brings to *us*; here we can see how identities are socially produced. By drawing on Elias (1994), Lawler (2014) highlights how the inside/outside division of identities is not innate but socially constructed and such a focus obscures the important social nature of identities.

Identity construction is also political in the way it works across inequalities and power, for example how certain identities are promoted above and against others. Subsequently, an individual's identity management is problematized masking the structural causes and inequalities (Lawler, 2014). It is not only about *who we are not* but how this is understood, negotiated and the wider impacts of this. Despite the 'slipperiness' of identity, Lawler (2014) argues for critical sociological engagement and questions the dominant conception of identities as divided (inner and outer) arguing this binary is simplistic. Lawler concludes:

... 'identity' can suggest a coherence that covers over the cracks and fissures in our lives and our personhoods, obscuring the multiplicity of identities we must do in and through our lives. The achievement of identity is creative work, and, if we are plagued by a sense of not quite getting it right, that is because it is a project that can never once and for all be got right (2013: 2014:182).

The continual project of 'identity work' is one which is a necessity and can provoke a sense of insecurity and safety simultaneously as individuals attempt to 'suture' (Hall, 1996) their identities. The construction of identities is a distraction from the uncertainty of life as we attempt to make sense of our 'self' rather than reality. Importantly, despite the introspection, identities reflect our social world, how we understand it and interact with it. Therefore, as Lawler (2014) and Hall (1996) suggest identities can sustain social inequalities and are inherently powerful sites of social control.

## 5.6 'Stigma Power'

Stigma, or the 'threat' of it, can cause damage to identities and highlights their social nature. The influential theory originated from Goffman (1963/1997) who explains stigma is a process in which identities are 'discredited' and is a process of social categorization. This categorization is developed into three groups: physical, 'blemishes of character' such as addiction, and 'tribal' such as ethnicity or religion. The stigmatized are seen as 'non-human' due to their 'tainted' identity and are aware of this 'discreditation'. Hence, the 'tainted' hold the same beliefs that constrain them and face exclusion from society (Goffman, 1963/1997). Goffman has faced criticism as his "...conception of stigma is

inherently white, gendered, and heteronormative” (Whelan, 2020: 4) and “...uses norms to obfuscate and naturalise existing arrangements of power” (Tyler, 2018: 756). Additionally, the lack of empirical research, micro focus, and disregard of forms of ‘resistance’ have been critiqued (Tyler, 2018; Whelan, 2020).

The concept of stigma has been developed within certain contexts such as ‘benefit stigma’ (see 4.4) and analytically for example Scrambler (2018) proposes a ‘weaponizing’ of stigma. Tyler (2020) develops the concept of ‘stigma power’ which builds upon earlier work exploring processes of and resistance to ‘social abjection’ (Tyler, 2013). Helpfully, Tyler (2020) provides a “...reconceptualising [of] stigma as a form of power that is written on the body and gets under the skin” (2020:9). The idea that stigma ‘gets under the skin’ is important as it shows how it is hidden, carried, injures the ‘self’ in the long-term and may reappear in unexpected situations. Hence, the *threat* of stigma can be as powerful as stigma itself.

Link and Phelan (2014) explain “At its essence the stigma-power concept proposes that stigmatizers have strong motivations to keep people down, in or away and that they best achieve these aims through stigma processes that are indirect, broadly effective, and hidden in taken-for-granted cultural circumstances” (2014:2). The idea that ‘stigma power’ is used to ‘keep people down, in or away’ is useful as it further develops understandings of how stigma is used and responded to. ‘Keeping people down’ relates to exploitation, ‘keeping people in’ links to the boundaries of social expectations and ‘keeping people away’ relates to the removal of those who deviate originating with dangers over disease (Link and Phelan, 2014). The motivations show the dynamism of ‘stigma power’ and how easily it could be molded for neoliberal *civilities*. Link and Phelan (2014) quantitatively explored instances of ‘stigma power’ with American psychiatric patients. They found “...the stigmatized are pushed toward enacting the aims of stigmatizers because they want to avoid being associated with existing and generally negative societal conceptions and because they are exposed to daily indignities that remind them of their different and less desirable standing in the social order” (Link and Phelan, 2014:14). The ‘daily indignities’ highlight the mundane nature of stigma, yet this is its power.

Tyler (2020) develops a range of concepts to supplement ‘stigma power’ throughout the chapters of her book which illustrate the range of circumstances in which stigma occurs. ‘Stigma-optics’ have legitimized austerity and play out across society such as in the

media, politics, social policy and transform how poverty and social security is ‘seen’ (Tyler, 2020:196). Stigma not only gets ‘under the skin’ of individuals but of society itself. Hence, this conceptualization of ‘stigma power’ highlights how it can be used by those in power to enact an ideological offensive on perceived *uncivilized* groups (Van Krieken, 1999; Powell 2013; 2007; Clement, 2015).

### 5.7 Social death and ‘nothingness’

Social death, or ‘self-mortification’, is explored by Goffman (1961/2007) through his work on total institutions which draws on ethnographic research in an American *asylum*. Goffman outlines five types of institutions: a place to care for those who are ‘harmless’ such as a care-home, a place to care for those who are a risk to society such as a ‘mental hospital’, a place to house *threats* to society with little regard for the individual such as a prison, a place based solely on work such as an army barrack or boarding school, and places of *retreat* such as a monastery. Such places share common characteristics, yet none are unique to or shared by all total institutions but what is important for Goffman is the ‘intensity’ of the institutional features. Briefly, the characteristics include: an increasingly blurred line between (places of) ‘sleep’, ‘work’ and ‘play’, increased bureaucracy and surveillance which allows a small number of staff to manage large groups, the staff within the institution are increasingly distanced from ‘inmates’ and control the communication and information, the ‘work-payment’ structure and family relations deviate with the outside world (Goffman, 1961/2007). Within total institutions such characteristics are intensified and this experience damages the self and can lead to a ‘self-mortification’ or social death.

Goffman explained mortification occurred with “...a series of abasements, degradations, humiliations, and profanations of self. His self is systematically, if often unintentionally, mortified” (Goffman, 1961/2007:14). The experience of institutionalisation in various ways causes mortification such as the removal of roles, status and identity and “...forcing them to become a non-person” (Králová, 2015:238). This ‘self-mortification’ can occur in both quiet and extreme ways as individuals encounter a range of experiences which are corrosive to their ‘self’. Even “the process of entrance typically brings other kinds of loss and mortification as well” (Goffman, 1961/2007:16) thus this symbolic process can begin simply on admittance. Goffman (1961/2007) describes ‘admission procedures’ as ‘trimming’ with individuals “...shaped and coded into an object that can be fed into the administrative machinery of the establishment, to be worked on smoothly by routine operations” (1961/2007:16). Hence, we can see how individuals are moulded to assist

bureaucracy and the staff with little consideration for said person as they are seen as ‘non-human’. The ‘admission procedures’ can cause ‘contaminative exposure’ (Goffman, 1961/2007) of concealed facts about oneself, which you would rather keep hidden but are forced to disclose:

On the outside, the individual can hold objects of self-feeling—such as his body, his immediate actions, his thoughts, and some of his possessions—clear of contact with alien and contaminating things. But in total institutions these territories of the self are violated; the boundary that the individual places between his being and the environment is invaded and the embodiments of self profaned (Goffman, 1961/2007:23).

What has been described is just one element of ‘self-mortification’, a process which continues whilst individuals are within total institutions. For example, individuals are ‘stripped’ of their physical appearance, *in how they wish to present themselves to the outside world*, as they do not have access to their ‘identity kit’ which includes items like cosmetics and clothes (Goffman, 1961/2007). This loss of control over one’s appearance is not just physical but also a symbolic denial of one’s identity.

What is important is how the self can be damaged to the level of a ‘social death’, a loss of identity, which Goffman explores within total institutions, but such intense experiences can arguably occur in other areas of life. Králová (2015) investigates the different conceptualisations and applications of ‘social death’. After a brief exploration of definitions, Králová systematically reviews literature surrounding ‘social death’ as *loss of social identity*, *loss of social connectedness* and *losses associated with the body’s disintegration*. The article illustrates a range of instances of ‘social death’ most of which are closely related to physical conditions or death such as dementia, suicide, genocide or addiction. After exploring three conceptualisations of social identity loss as ‘social death’, Králová (2015) summarises “the ‘non-person’...suggests a loss of social identity and of social integration, triggered by a person’s inadequacy in the eyes of others. Here the person’s characteristics go hand in hand with their low socio-economic status, leading to social exclusion” (2015:239). Thus, experiences of ‘social death’ can be extended and are linked to wider structural inequalities and exclusion. Goffman (1961/2007) provides an extreme example within his work on ‘total institutions’ whose ‘social characteristics’ are also apparent to a lesser extent in the *outside world*. ‘Self-mortification’ via ‘humiliation’ can occur throughout life, yet this needs to occur with intensity to inflict damage. If we consider, for example, the increasingly ‘violence’ of social policy (see 3.8), increasing poverty (see 3.3) and experiences of ‘benefit stigma’ (see 4.4) we can see how

cumulatively these experiences could cause ‘self-mortification’. Indeed, it is an aim of UC to *transform* and so something must be lost in this process.

Scott (2018), in a Goffmanesque fashion, focuses on the everyday but her focus is on what is not there, and how this absence is used and impacts on identities. By switching the focus to ‘nothingness’ Scott explores the power within these sites of (in)action and describes two ways these negative social phenomena can occur: *acts of commission*, we choose not to do something – active, and *acts of omission*, we ‘fail to act’ – passive (Scott, 2018:5). As ‘unmarked’ Scott suggests acts of nothingness, perceived as mundane, are overlooked by sociology and argues for ‘reverse-making’ which looks at what is surrounding the ‘marked’ social phenomena. But more than looking at ‘nothingness’ Scott argues we should look at the reflexive actors within them:

How are the meanings of nothing defined and negotiated in relational encounters? How do we experience the things we do not do, and what stories do we tell (or not tell) about them? (Scott, 2018:6).

In shifting our focus to the ‘unmarked’ we begin to see a different reality, one which acknowledges there is something in ‘nothingness’ that needs analytical attention. In overlooking ‘nothingness’ opportunities were missed to understand identities and the impact of ‘unmarked’ experiences, which have their own powerful meanings.

Scott (2018) moves on to consider the dimensions of ‘nothingness’ of which she describes four: non-identities, non-actions, non-presence and silence, which are discussed in relation to acts of *commission* and *omission*. A range of examples are discussed from ‘ex-identities’ (an identity is defined by a previous identity), ‘decisions not to’ (turning down a job opportunity), ‘not-something’ (the absence of something which once existed) and ‘not-saying’ (falling to speak). Scott (2018) proposes more examples and explores the positive and negative impacts of such actions, highlighting the depth and dynamic nature of ‘nothing’.

Scott (2019) builds on the theorisation of ‘nothingness’ using qualitative research to further understandings of this ‘unmarked’ phenomena as participants reflected on things they had not done or become. The *lost opportunities* within participant narratives are explored as acts “...of unbecoming, whereby an actor moves further away from, not toward, a potential role identity” (Scott, 2019:164). Individuals create identities against what they are not, resonating with Hall (1996), which has become stigmatized yet this avoidance of a potential identity can be damaging in retrospection. As individuals are

“...haunted by the no-body whom she had not become, the shadow of her social self” (Scott, 2019:165). The notion of ‘haunting’ illustrates the long shadow ‘nothingness’ can cast over future identities and how despite its absence still affects identity management. Other themes such as emptiness, silence and invisibility are considered in which Scott (2019) further develops the analysis of ‘nothing’ and concludes:

Yet these phantom forms—no-things, no-bodies, non-events, and lost experiences—have their own, latent agency that operates behind the scenes. Through the indirect effects of traces, ripples, shadows, and shells, we can infer the prior existence of a ghost in the machine. Someone had to make nothing happen, and that agent is (part of) me (Scott, 2019: 175).

This illuminates the agency within ‘nothing’ in how it is experienced, understood and responded to at the time and retrospectively which can bring both closure and pain.

Scott (2020) further develops the ‘sociology of nothing’ by considering how people relate and react to ‘nothingness’, drawing on phenomenology. What has previously been outlined (Scott, 2018;2019) are the *objects* of ‘nothingness’ – the noema – and the focus now is on the underlying process – the noesis (Scott, 2020: 5) – how do people understand and perceive negative phenomena? Scott (2020) suggests three types of ‘negative noesis’ in response:

*Negative intentionality* concerns how people adopt motivational feelings and attitudes towards negative social phenomena. *Negative embodiment* describes the material grounding of negational social acts as agentic capacity, or modes of being-in-the-world. *Negative temporality* considers how people make biographical sense of their un-lived experiences and use them to tell stories of self-identity (Scott, 2020: 6).

The three types of ‘negative noesis’ explored by Scott (2020) highlight the complexities within this process as individuals grapple with their identities but due to the perceived ‘nothingness’ this work and agency goes unseen. Throughout the theorisation Scott (2018; 2019; 2020) shows how the ‘marked’ phenomena is mirrored with the ‘unmarked’ and the analysis sheds light on ways of *seeing* this shadow world in which our identities are always connected. Importantly, the theory has shown how identities are affected by temporality in acts of retrospection therefore instances of ‘nothingness’ now could ‘ripple’ into our futures. This idea is extended within the discussion of ‘reverse biographical identity work’ which explains how people tell stories to make sense of ‘nothingness’ within our own self-understanding. *Negative responsibility assumption* occurs “...when actors recognise their social nothingness and take ownership of its

meaning” (Scott, 2020: 13). Thus, in responding to ‘nothingness’ individuals are able to (re)integrate this experience into the narrative of their ‘self’.

Looking at ‘nothingness’ has shown it is actually ‘something’, in the way it is experienced, understood, impacts and is responded to by individuals which Scott (2018;2019; 2020) shows in this developmental theoretical work. This work is useful as it turns our attention to often neglected instances in which it seems *nothing* has happened. Life for those living on a low income and/or engaging with social security, to some, is characterised by a sort of ‘nothingness’ and perhaps this theoretical work will provide a way to refresh the way these experiences are seen and understood. There are also clear links to Goffman (1961/2007; 1963/1997) in relation to his work on stigma, ‘non-human’ status and potentially social death. The ‘sociology of nothing’ may shed light on processes and responses to social death, understood as a loss of an (potential) identity, which play out in contemporary neoliberal society.

## 5.8 Conclusion

This chapter has considered the analytical framework adopted to explore the experiences, impacts and responses to living with UC. The framework is twofold, the first section considers UC as a civilising offensive (5.2) – a focused attack towards social security recipients driven by ideology. The concepts of governmentality (5.3), bureaucracy, rationality and dehumanization (5.4) extend our understandings of how a civilising offensive may be enacted and experienced *on the ground*. This helps us understand the experiences of UC and impacts on emotions and bodies. The second section of the analytical framework focuses on the impacts of the civilising offensive on the ‘self’ drawing on a Goffmanesque perspective. The concept of ‘stigma power’ (5.6), its uses and responses are outlined and illuminate how stigma reinforces structural inequalities, which is important when exploring experiences of social security. ‘Social death’ (5.7) can occur when the ‘self’ is damaged for example after ‘institutionalisation’. Similarly, acts of ‘nothingness’ can damage the self (5.7) and require ‘identity work’. This second section (5.6, 5.7) provides the analytical tools to investigate how UC impacts identities, how this is responded too and the subsequent consequences. The dualism in the analytical framework enables us to investigate the experiences of UC, the impacts on the ‘self’ and how these intersect.

## 6. Methodology: Investigating Experiences of Living with Universal Credit

### 6.1 Introduction

Carter and Little (2007) discuss three key elements of qualitative research; epistemology, methodology and method, which together *produce* and *justify* knowledge. Epistemology is the ‘justification of knowledge’, methodology is the ‘justification of method’ and method is the ‘research action’ (Carter and Little, 2007: 1317). This chapter adopts this framework to consider the questions of what, how, who and why surrounding the fieldwork investigating experiences of living with UC. The research questions (see 1.2) are integral to this process, as a driver and derivative (Carter and Little, 2007), a driver as the research questions shape choices particularly of method and a derivative as how we understand knowledge creation will influence the knowledge we seek to understand and create.

The research aims to investigate the experiences, impacts and responses of living with UC with a focus on the ‘self’. This chapter will discuss epistemological issues, methodological choices, method including what (data collection and analysis) and who (sampling and recruitment), ethical concerns, reflexivity and positionality, and the limitations of the research.

### 6.2 Epistemology

Social constructionism is the adopted epistemological stance which stresses the socially, culturally and historically imbued meanings within social interactions that create knowledge, and social realities (Crotty, 1998). The nature of social constructionism and its interest in everyday interactions (Andrews, 2012) match the aims of this research. Whilst there is no agreed definition of social constructionism Burr (2015) outlines a set of common characteristics: a critical nature, historically and culturally specific knowledge is constructed by social interaction and is linked to social action (and power). Berger and Luckmann (1966) developed the social constructionist approach positing everyday reality “...is a world that originates in their thoughts and actions, and is maintained as real by these” (1966:33). Thus, a social constructionist epistemology provides a ‘justification of knowledge’ for researching the everyday experiences and impacts of UC which illuminates the social construction of reality via interaction within a historical and cultural context whilst importantly questioning the actions and assumptions which shape our understandings. For example, the social construction of

‘benefit claimants’ is historically and culturally specific, constructed and sustained by social interactions and subsequently leads to social action such as welfare reform and increasing conditionality, with real experiences of ‘welfare’ notably excluded.

The adoption of social constructionism in this thesis places importance on how participants understand their experiences and accepting the relativity of realities as they are continuously (re)constructed. As this research is concerned with emotions and identities social constructionism allows us to delve deeply, respect the realities, experiences and *truths* presented and understand their contextually specific, fluid and interactive nature.

### 6.3 Methodology

The research used a case study methodology which provided a context specific framework (Schwandt and Gates, 2017) with a flexibility in research action adopting a qualitative approach. Flyvbjerg (2006) usefully explores five misunderstandings of case studies surrounding: the knowledge created, generalizability, methodological use, bias and summarization of the case study. The methodology is useful when “a ‘how’ or ‘why’ question is being asked about a contemporary set of events, over which a researcher has little or no control” (Yin, 2014:14). This provides a *logic* suitable for the shifting and sensitive area of UC. In terms of definition, a case study methodology “...explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information...” (Cresswell et al, 2007:245).

The research involved multiple ‘cases’ (15 people) from one location, an English seaside town, and used interviews (6.4) and participant diaries (6.5) creating rich data. Normally, case studies are ‘place’ and ‘time’ bound (Cresswell et al, 2007) which allows for detailed context specific research. The fieldwork was bound by time, as is the nature of doctoral research, with fieldwork taking place with those living with UC between March and October 2019. The temporal boundness is interesting as the data collection was limited to those months yet within our conversations details were discussed of past events and future opportunities. The fluidity within analysis and writing means the events can transcend the temporal boundaries within the mind of the researcher and continue to construct new meanings.

Earlier in January and February 2019, several stakeholders in the area were interviewed who were identified due to the support their organisations offered those accessing UC.

This included a welfare rights charity, a Credit Union, a computer club and later, after multiple attempts, a foodbank (the largest in the area but one of many). The purpose of the stakeholder interviews was twofold: firstly, to gain insights into the impacts of UC locally, understand the scope of support and the impacts UC had on the organisations themselves; secondly, to build connections with the aim to assist with recruitment.

The decision to research in one location was to allow for detailed understandings of living with UC within a specific context: geographically, culturally and historically. The location was one of four narrowed down by statistical criteria:

- Over 1,000 workers claiming UC
- UC in full-service for over 1 year
- Higher than average UC completion level<sup>11</sup>
- High level of WTC claims

On reflection, the most important characteristic was UC being in full-service for over a year due to several reasons, some of which are related to the other selection criteria. Firstly, the longer UC has been in full-service, the higher the rate of claims. Importantly, this will be for new claims and people who ‘naturally migrate’ from the legacy system. Secondly, it increases the numbers in-work accessing UC, for example those who are unemployed move into work, ‘naturally migrate’ or are self-employed. Thirdly, the effects of UC are set in for the area with individuals living with UC for a longer period, for example increasing hardship (as commented on by stakeholders). Fourthly, people’s experiences of UC have changed with the UC policy adjustments, for example the ‘5 week wait’, the UC advance level, and changes regarding staff as they become accustomed to UC delivery.

Additionally, a broader examination took place using local level statistics such as average wage, employment level and the Index of Multiple Deprivation. All areas identified were in the top 10 percent most deprived neighbourhoods in England. The selected location had an average weekly wage of £476.20 (full-time) compared to the national average of £552.70 and a regional average of £596.80 (NOMIS, 2017).

The case-study area went into full-service in December 2016 and was one of the earliest areas to transition. In December 2018 over 8,000 people were receiving UC, according to

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<sup>11</sup> The UC completion level refers to the process of moving from the legacy system to UC, this is available at constituency level: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/constituency-data-universal-credit-roll-out/>

Government statistics at JCP level<sup>12</sup>. Once the next stage of ‘managed migration’ to UC is completed, over 15,000 people will be accessing UC (around 16 percent of the town’s population)<sup>13</sup>. The town has high levels of deprivation, with some of the most deprived wards in the country (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2019), and has been more adversely affected by recent welfare reforms than other English towns (Beatty and Fothergill, 2016).

Whilst the statistical criteria were key, other considerations took place regarding practicalities such as travel as the researcher did not live in any of the four areas identified. The chosen location was my hometown which was a source of much reflection due to conflicted feelings about the place and my positionality. Wiederhold (2014) discusses the opportunities and challenges of being a ‘researcher at home’, the former being an increased knowledge and access to the field, ability to build rapport and recognition within the community. The latter includes confronting pre-existing assumptions about the place and overcoming the ‘familiarity’ which reduces the details participants give due to assumed knowledge. Whilst Wiederhold (2014) is reflecting on research in a rural American town and this fieldwork occurred in a large English coastal town, there are connections with the ‘researcher at home’ experiences. Researching at home was advantageous by knowing and understanding the place and its history, in terms of building rapport with individuals and the ease of our conversations. Additionally, it made me feel comfortable whilst ‘hanging around’ during recruitment - for example, the JCP is at the end of the street I grew up on. It also helped, I feel, when speaking to stakeholders as I had a personal connection to the town. The key challenge was reflecting on my mixed feelings and understandings of the town, which are deeply rooted in my own history. ‘Researching at home’ provides some *insider* knowledge yet understandings of a place are personal, therefore perceptions of the town varied between participants and myself. A more detailed discussion on reflexivity and positionality occurs later (6.9).

#### 6.4 Method: ‘Inter-viewing’

To investigate the experiences of living with UC, semi-structured interviews and participant diaries were used. In total 20 interviews took place with those receiving UC (15 first interviews and 5 second) and 3 diaries were completed (2 were unreturned). This section will discuss interviews and with participant diaries examined in 6.5.

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<sup>12</sup> See <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/universal-credit-statistics>.

<sup>13</sup> The statistics were collected prior to Covid-19 which has significantly impacted UC levels, as of December 2020, 16919 people were claiming UC in the town. See figure 2 on page 24 for graph.

The interview "...is an inter-view, where knowledge is constructed in the inter-action between the interviewer and interviewee" (Brinkman and Kvale, 2014: 4). This definition highlights the interactive nature of the interview where knowledge is constructed via social interaction. Yet whilst a partner in the process, the power structures are evident due to the guided nature of the conversation (Kvale, 2007). An important consideration whilst interviewing was to allow individuals the space to talk, often about things not on the topic-guide, as generally this opportunity was lacking due to their social isolation. Additionally, the interview wanted to feel as different as possible from other conversations surrounding UC such as those at the JCP. It was also an acknowledgement of the partnership between us. The flexibility took our conversations to unforeseen areas creating unexpected insights into the impacts of living with UC. In this sense, I was a *traveller* in the interview who in "...'wandering together with', walks along with the local inhabitants, asks questions and encourages them to tell their own stories of their lived world" (Kvale, 2007:10). This conception of the interview (Brinkman and Kvale, 2014) and interviewer (Kvale, 2007) illustrates the importance of the interaction and action within the interview process. The sense of 'wandering together with' is apt for the nature of our interviews due to the breadth of topics, depth of data and the temporal fluidity.

Most interviews took place in a small room of a third sector organisation in the town centre. The room had space for two chairs and a small table and provided a private and quiet space for our conversations. I gained access to the room after the third interview. The three previous interviews were carried out in public spaces (coffee shops and at a computer club) which did not offer as much privacy or quiet. This was problematic for transcription, the *flow* of the conversation, and a lack of privacy for the sensitive nature of some topics. I met the participants outside the building, as a key-fob was required to enter, and would always be outside at least 5 minutes before our meeting. Prior to the interview I had not met seven of the individuals and had only been in touch by phone, which made for some slightly awkward moments whilst waiting as I tried to work out who I was looking for as people walked by. After saying our 'hellos', we would walk into the building and enter the little room for the interview. The information sheet, consent form and incentive were completed prior to the interview and I explained the details of the project, giving time for any questions that followed. The topic guide (see appendix 7) started with a section on personal attributes and generally we would begin there, although sometimes individuals began speaking about something else such as a particular experience around UC and the conversation would flow from there. The flexibility within

semi-structured interviews was useful in this situation as it provided the fluidity for the interview.

The topic guide covered areas around the initial UC claim, experiences in the JCP, money, work, leisure, and more general thoughts on UC. All first interviews were finished by asking their thoughts on a Government statement about UC and its aims, which was useful to bring the interview to a close. The abstract nature of the question provided a form of distance between the rest of the interview and a way of reflection. Due to the content of the interview, it was important to think about how to 'close' in a considered way. Once the interview had ended and the Dictaphone turned off, the participant and I would continue chatting, normally about what our plans were for the rest of the day. I felt it was important to spend this time after the interview 'winding down', so that our encounter did not end abruptly. I would pack up my bag and walk them out of the building, say goodbye and head back into the bustle of town.

After the first interview, individuals with conditionality requirements were asked if they would like to keep a diary and we spoke in more detail if they were interested. If not, they were asked if they would like to have a second interview so that we could catch up and see if and how things had changed. In total, five agreed to keep a diary and a further two opted for a second interview. All those who kept diaries also agreed to a second interview. For the five second interviews, individual topic guides (see appendices 8 – 12) were prepared based upon our first conversation although all started with asking how individuals had been. The second interview provided an opportunity to continue our conversation, picking up on things and gaining more details on their life and experiences of living with UC. For those who had kept a diary, it enabled a space to speak about what had been written and my understandings of it, a more detailed discussion of which follows in 6.5. The two second interviews without a diary took place roughly two months after the first and offered an opportunity for updates, reflection and clarification. Following up with a second interview was key to understanding how things had developed over time, whether positively or negatively. I also found increased openness within our conversation which led to more sensitive discussions.

As Batty (2020) discusses, interviews involving sensitive topics can blur into therapy, which was apparent in this doctoral research, with some participants commenting on the therapeutic nature of the experience such as Isabel who reflected 'it's an interview and therapy' or Heather who described me as 'a very nice therapist'. The therapeutic blurring created a level of intimacy which brings challenges for the interview(er) (Batty, 2020) yet

it was important for people to be able to speak openly about their experiences and people often commented and thanked me at the end of the interview for being able to ‘express themselves’. As a ‘novice’ learning the ‘craft’ of interviewing (Brinkman and Kvale, 2014), knowing how to deal with such situations during and after the interview was difficult. I generally gave freedom and, if required, would gently steer back to the topic but often this was unneeded as our conversation naturally returned as we ‘wandered together’. A result of this is the detailed data constructed in our interviews. However, the interviews and subsequent transcription and analysis were at times emotionally draining (Dickson-Swift et al, 2007) as Batty (2020) notes “...These feelings inevitably resurfaced during the analysis stage of the research where I found myself reliving some of the emotions and having to find solace deep within myself to manage them” (2020:795).

The interviews lasted between 45 and 150 minutes and were digitally recorded, with the consent of the participant, which I later transcribed verbatim; word for word including emotional expressions (laughter, sighs and pauses) and repetitions. This was done to capture the detail of the conversation yet as Poland (2001) reminds us “...data are (re)constructed in the process of transcription as a result of multiple decisions that reflect both theoretical and ostensibly pragmatic considerations” (Poland, 2001:630). Therefore, the transcription is a further (re)construction of the situation and subsequent knowledge. All transcriptions were carried out close to the interview, generally within the preceding days so that the events were fresh in mind which was particularly helpful when words were unclear in the recording.

### 6.5 Method: Participant diaries

Participant diaries were adopted as a secondary method to explore the everyday experiences, impacts and feelings of living with UC. Participant diaries allow “...time and space to reflect, rather than the immediate question-and-answer format of interviews or focus groups, participants can divulge more nuanced understandings of everyday subjectivities, emotions, and events” (Filep et al, 2018:453). Thus, it provides detailed insights shaped and written by the participant and mitigates some of the power imbalance within the research process. Additionally, it allows for more emotional data to be disclosed due to the closeness to the event and being written at home away from the researcher, as would occur in an interview (Spowart and Nairn, 2013). As this research was concerned with the everyday life of participants, the diary offered a space to capture this as well as offering a space for reflection.

The diaries feature throughout the thematic findings chapters (8 – 11) alongside interview data and are the focus of chapters 7 and 12 which include extended diary extracts. The inclusion of the extended extracts provides a unique insight into the impacts of UC over time as we follow Heather (chapter 7) and Bill (chapter 12) in their own words. In chapter 7, diary extracts from when Heather began her UC ‘journey’ in 2017 are alongside a letter from her recent experiences at the time of interview (2019). The extracts from Heather demonstrate the continual and cumulative impacts of living with UC. The extract from Bill’s diary in chapter 12 covers a one-week period which highlight the complexities of trying to navigate UC and the damaging impacts this has for Bill. The focus on Heather and Bill within these two chapters provide a detailed and contextualised picture of UC which complement the thematically organised chapters. Moreover, it allows for the findings chapters to begin and end in the words of experience.

When designing the research, considerations were made regarding diary-keeping around practical and ethical issues. Firstly, there are several types of diary (audio, visual and written – which can be on paper or digital). The first two were ruled out because of the potential digital exclusion of the participants. Likewise, concern arose with the digital diary and this method was felt to be too similar to the UC online journal; the research did not want to replicate this. The paper diary was selected as the most appropriate form and attempts were made to ensure it *felt* different and could be an enjoyable, creative experience for those involved (See figure 4). For this reason, a diary pack (figure 3) included a note pad, pens, pencils and glue-dots so people could stick things into the diary.

Within the pack also came a guidance sheet (appendix 6) which reminded of the voluntary nature, not to include their name in the diary (for reasons of anonymity) and to keep the diary in a safe place. The guidance also included some questions people could think about whilst writing, but it was made clear these were suggestions only and it was their diary to write in. Individuals were asked to keep the diary for a two-week period, I did not contact participants with reminders during the time as others have done (Day and Thatcher, 2009; Jacelon and Imperio, 2005) as I felt this would have been invasive. Two individuals did not return their diaries and left the research due to personal circumstances; Zara moved away and Isabel became unwell. The participant diary method faces challenges with non-completion which are documented (Day and Thatcher, 2009; Spowart and Nairn, 2013) because of the personal commitment required (Filep et al, 2018). Once the diaries had been completed, participants got in touch and we arranged to meet so I could collect them.

The collection in person felt most appropriate in terms of keeping the diary safe (as there is a risk with postage) and meant we could have a quick chat about how things were going. The option was given to all who had written diaries for it to be returned to them as it was *theirs*, but no-one wanted this, perhaps because despite the cathartic nature of the diary writing process the diary itself was difficult to re-visit (Spowart and Nairn, 2013). As Heather commented in our second interview “It’s like reading a book. It is someone’s life. And it’s mine and I’m thinking oh my god!”.

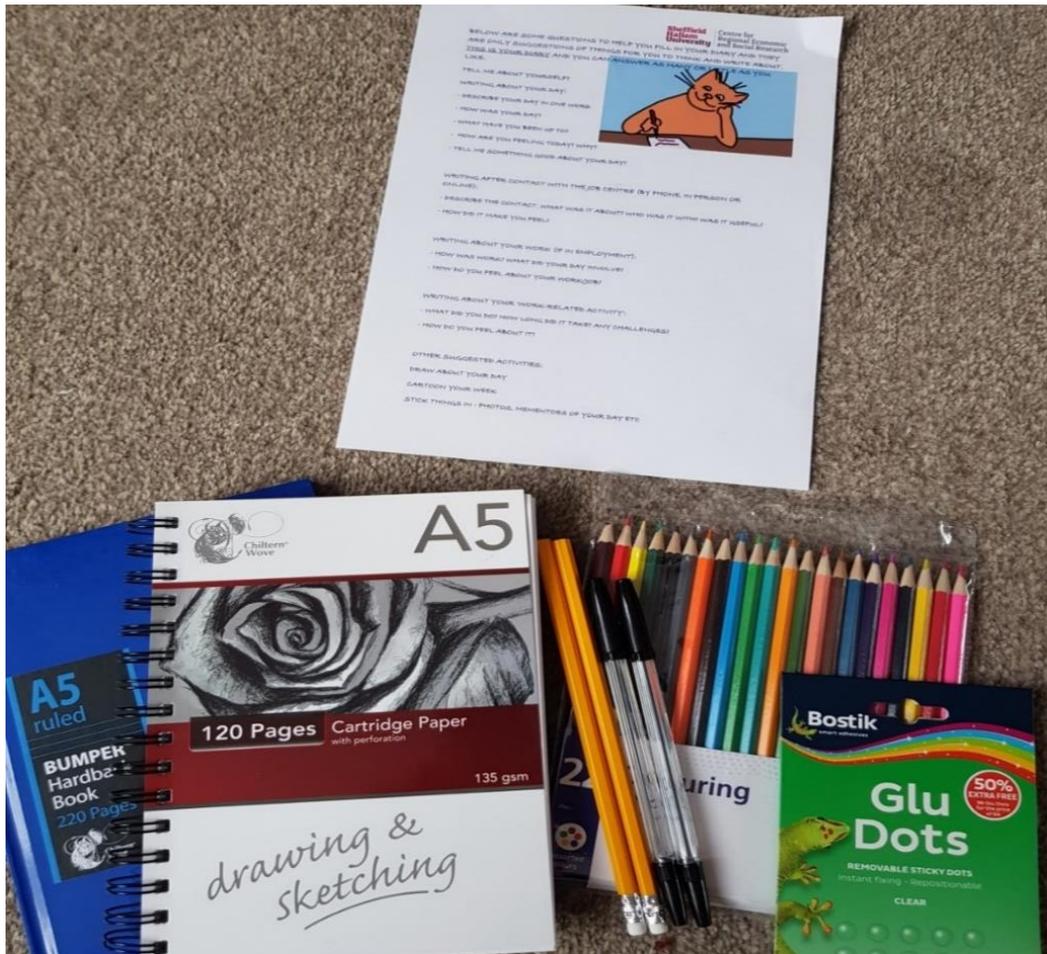


Figure 3 Example diary pack

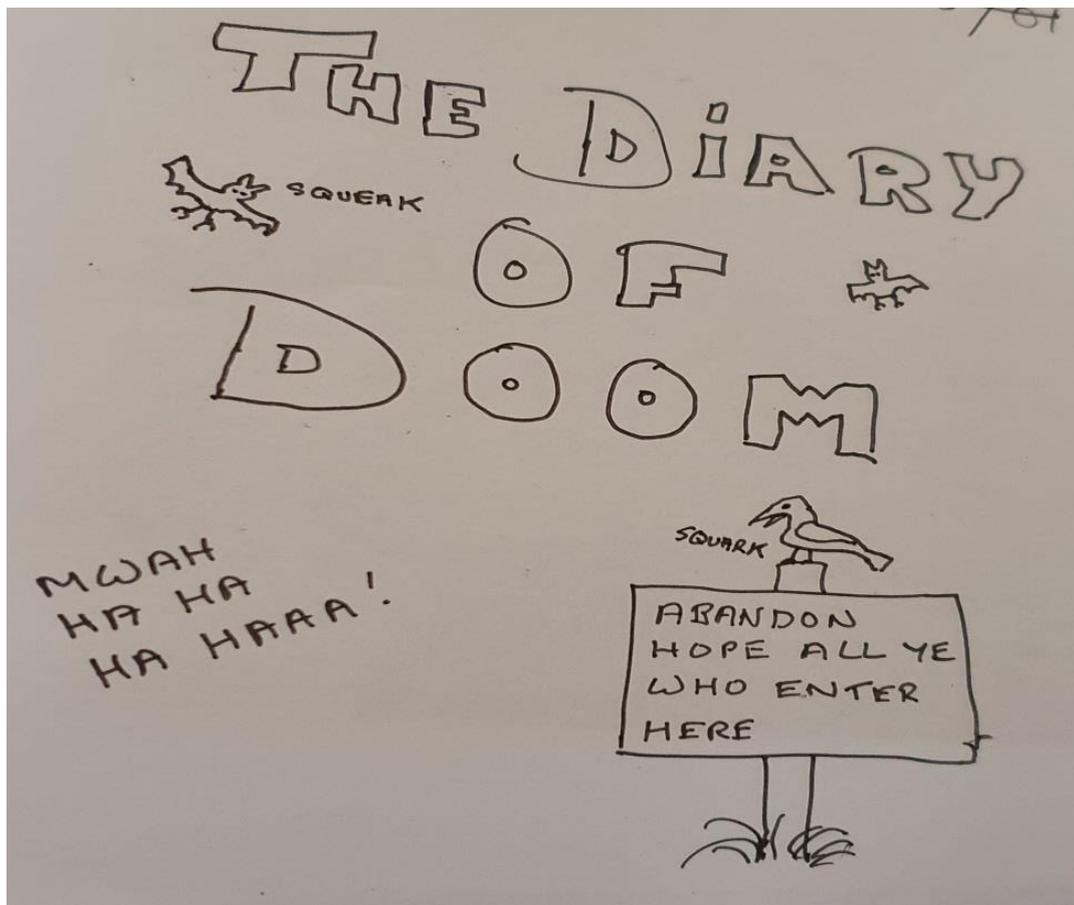


Figure 4 Cover of Bill's Diary

The diaries featured in the findings chapters (7-12) are from Heather and Bill and both were written during challenging times. Whilst both spoke of the therapeutic nature of diary keeping, it could also be painful. Both had instances when they did not write in their diaries because of this, and when speaking about it in the second interview Bill explained “I don’t even wanna think about this anymore, let alone write it down”. The example raises an important ethical issue around the diary method, as whilst the distance is beneficial in terms of increased disclosure, the researcher cannot intervene as they would during an interview if it was clear it should be paused or stopped. However, in both cases the individuals did temporarily stop the diary as per the guidance but still this situation and the potential harm caused highlights the difficulties with this method.

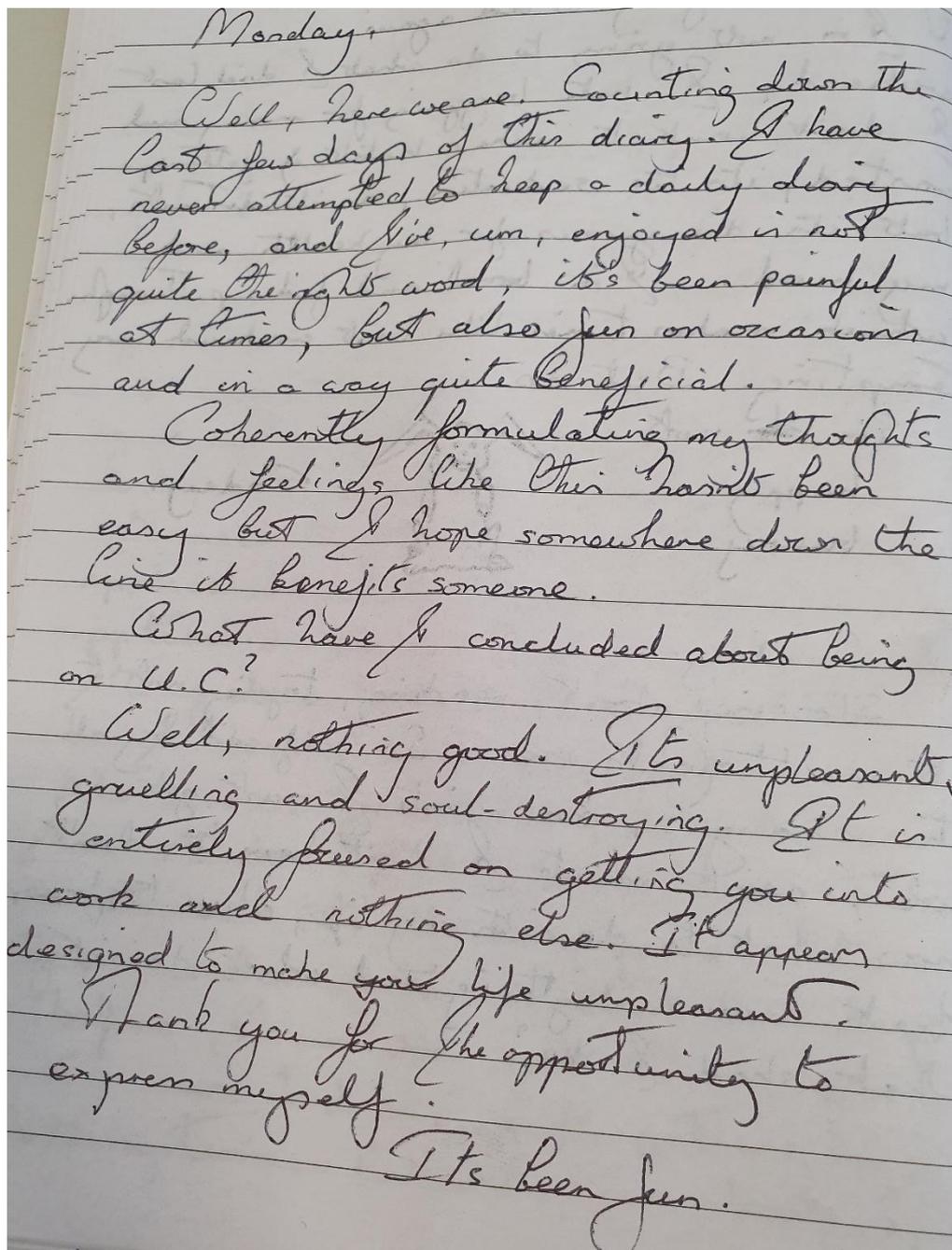


Figure 5 Bill's Diary page 36

The presentation of the diaries in the thesis also had to be considered, and as you can see, the decision was taken to photograph the pages to leave them as unconstructed by the researcher as possible as “the text is presented as it would be expressed, with the participant’s own highlighting, emphasis and punctuation” (Spowart and Nairn, 2013:335). Some portions of the diary have not been included and other photographs cropped for reasons of space and focus, so there has been some (re)construction. It should be noted one diary (Julie’s) is not included in the thesis, although it was useful in developing the topic guide for her second interview it was digital (her choice) and more

literal. Whilst Julie's diary provided insights into her day the excerpts were brief which perhaps reflects her circumstances as a working single parent, she had less time to engage with the diary. Bill and Heather were both older and not working, they also both described themselves as creative in different ways: Bill liked to write fiction and Heather was an 'artist', so it is likely this impacted their engagement with the diary. The exclusion of Julie's diary was not a purposeful choice, but the data produced did not align with the wider themes of the research, in the same way as much interview data is excluded from a final research output.

The presence of the researcher within the diary process is interesting. Spowart and Nairn (2013) suggest the distance is a benefit, although it is questionable how much distance there really is. Both Heather and Julie wrote directly to me in their diaries, Bill on the other hand wrote his diary "...like nobody was ever going to read it". When asked about this Heather and Julie responded:

...if I was keeping a journal which I never have done for myself... I don't think I would of [have] elaborated or written down what I would of done... Cos I think if you are writing down your own thoughts or feelings or things that are going on, you're not. You are just putting down bullet points basically... but that's not a story, is it? You know, why have you had a shitty day? I'm not going to write it down cos I've lived it. I don't want to do it again. You know so yeah I was writing you a story (Heather).

Yeah I guess it was like I was talking to you in a way, yeah and I was thinking if I was just writing my diary for me would I still be putting the same things in? (Julie)

The role of the researcher within participant diary keeping is more complicated than Spowart and Nairn (2013) suggest and one that requires consideration when adopting such methods. Heather's diary included a great level of detail about events, and what had led to them, as well as contextual information about family, friends, personal history and feelings towards these. When I read Heather's diary it was like she was narrating it to me in a sort of soliloquy. I described my feelings to Heather in our second interview to which she happily responded that she wanted it to be like the book by Brian Blessed "...where he says, you know the actor, 'when you are reading this book imagine me sitting on a stool in front of you reading it to you and you must read it like that with a big booming voice'". Hence, the distance is also in question from the position of the researcher as I felt immersed in the experiences the diaries entailed. This helped with building the relationship between myself and the participants, with their honest and intimate diaries allowing a greater level of trust and rapport. Yet, the immersive nature of the diaries was challenging emotionally due to the sensitive topics covered.

This was particularly so as unlike an interview which is in a neutral space, the diaries were read and analysed at home where I was unprepared for some disclosures. Hence, whilst the diaries allow for more emotional data, this brings its own challenges. For example, one diary included a description of historical trauma which was unexpected and reading it in a ‘non-research’ space seemed more upsetting as I was unguarded. It is unlikely this experience would have been disclosed in an interview and I think it was written about as the anniversary of the event fell during the diary. Also, due to the temporal nature you are being taken on a journey which is unfiltered by the diary and you are increasingly drawn in, more so because the diaries were read many times.

A ‘diary interview’ is important for clarification, increases the rigour of the method (Filep et al, 2018) and is used in other studies (Day and Thatcher, 2009; Jacelon and Imperio, 2005; Spowart and Nairn, 2013). All those who completed a diary had an interview with the topic guide developed from their diary. This was an essential part of the data collection to gather more understanding about the diary and build on the discussion. It was particularly helpful to check my *reading* of the diary and for individuals to reflect on that time and what had been written. Using the diaries to form the topic guide, I feel, allowed the conversation to be less driven by the researcher. The diary interview typically took place two weeks after the diary had been collected to allow time for reading, initial analysis of the diary and subsequent development of a topic guide. The diary interview was brought forward for Heather due to her personal circumstances as when we met to exchange the diary, she explained she had no money for the rest of the month and asked if we could bring forward the interview (so she could buy food with the voucher). I agreed and spent the week immersed in the diary and the development of the topic guide whilst brooding over my actions – had I done enough for Heather?

The diaries and interviews were analysed thematically in line with Braun and Clarke (2006). All 23 pieces of data (15 first interviews, 5 second and 3 diaries) were organised and coded via NVivo, including pictures of the diaries, which was useful to have all the data available in one place. The coding and analysis of the data took approximately three months, although the first stage (familiarization with data) had truly begun during transcription – many months before. In the initial coding, 222 codes were created, a large number but reflective of the detailed and multilevel coding that had taken place as codes were generated at a practical as well as emotional and at times conceptual level. As Braun and Clarke (2006) note, data can be coded multiple times and following an inductive approach it is best to code as you do not know fully where the data and analysis will lead.

The result of the following thematic analysis stages of coding (Braun and Clarke, 2006) generated six key themes surrounding the experiences, impacts and responses of living with UC. Notably, “Themes are analytic outputs developed through and from the creative labour of our coding. They reflect considerable analytic ‘work,’ and are actively created by the researcher at the intersection of data, analytic process and subjectivity” (Braun and Clarke, 2019: 594). The use of thematic analysis provided a flexible and methodical approach for data analysis of the interviews and diaries. Importantly, the analytical thinking continued during the writing stage, reflective of the fluid process of analysis. Whilst the initial coding took much time, on reflection, it was time well spent and invaluable to the knowledge of the data, subsequent creation of themes and writing of the findings.

### 6.6 Exploring UC over time

The experiences, impacts and responses to living with UC develop and change over time and so a longitudinal approach was required. Qualitative longitudinal research (QLR) ‘walks alongside’ people (Neale, 2016) and can show how they adapt to situations over time (Millar, 2007). Additionally, as Dwyer and Patrick (2021) note QLR “...is also valuable to explore how experiences of welfare conditionality impact on how individuals think about their past, navigate their present, and plan for and imagine their futures” (2021: 67). Thus, QLR allows the researcher to move through time with the participant which was crucial to answer the research questions.

There are varying ways qualitative research can be longitudinal (See Corden and Millar, 2007), the importance being the focus on temporality within the research – methodologically and analytically (Thomson, Plumridge and Holland, 2003). The temporal focus within this thesis is concerned with the past, present, and future, and the use of semi-structured interviews (6.4) and participant diaries (6.5) provided the tools to investigate UC through time. The first interviews covered past events such as work histories, previous experiences of social security and more personal memories which were participant led. Present experiences and potential futures were discussed to explore how UC impacted participants. This temporal flexibility was important to understand how living with UC impacted the emotions and identities of participants. The diaries provided detailed insights into participants’ present realities, as they were written over a two-week period. Yet, within the pages were details about the past and desires for the future which intersected with their current realities. The second interviews (with five participants) provided an opportunity to explore how their lives had changed and revisit issues from

the first interview. By following participants over time, greater understandings of the impacts of UC were gathered and how these manifested throughout daily life. It also provided an opportunity to explore how experiences of UC changed over time, the impacts of this and subsequently how people responded. Living with UC was experienced by participants as a continual challenge (in varying ways), with crisis points for some such as the initial UC claim period, and the longitudinal perspective allowed for this erosion over time to be seen.

There are challenges with QLR ethically, in terms of data analysis and the time and emotional demands on researcher and participant (Dwyer and Patrick, 2021; Neale, 2016). The ‘temporal gaze’ can also be problematic as our view of time, and time itself, shifts (Neale, 2016). The participant diaries provide an interesting example of the shifting ‘temporal gaze’. The diaries were written in ‘real-time’ by participants, read by the researcher as *historical* in the sense the events had passed, and the diary (and surrounding events) were revisited in the second interview. Thus, we can see the complexities and fluidity of time in the use of participant diaries. Yet, it is within this shifting ‘temporal gaze’ that we can gain deeper insights into the realities of participants.

### 6.7 Sampling: the *ideal* to the real

Prior to fieldwork, three groups were identified for a purposeful sampling strategy which would make up my *ideal* sample:

- Unemployed in receipt of UC
- Employed individuals, who had been out of work, in receipt of UC
- Employed individuals, who had migrated from WTC, in receipt of UC

On reflection, this categorisation and conceptualisation seems naïve and one which had overly simplified the reality. Some of the challenges are related to recruitment, which are discussed later, and this section focuses on sampling. But first, I would like to state my original rationale and thought behind the *ideal* sample.

Previous research had identified receiving ‘welfare’ as stigmatizing on various levels (Baumberg et al, 2012; Patrick, 2017) based upon the legacy system (see 4.4). It was noted that WTC was the least stigmatizing and the other main forms of working age social security (JSA, ESA and IS) faced multiple stigmatizations. Seemingly, stigma worked on a scale: workers were less stigmatized for claiming social security than those out of work.

This was tangled up with issues around deservingness and the work ethic, both of which are utilised by society when talking about ‘welfare’.

Thus, it seemed important to explore how different individuals experienced and felt about UC and the impacts it had in their lives. To do this, the three groups were outlined, who would engage and experience UC differently. It is also noteworthy that UC spreads conditionality to new groups and this itself could lead to feelings of stigma. Therefore, the employed within the sample were split into those who had been unemployed (receiving UC) and moved into work and those who had ‘naturally migrated’ to UC whilst in-work. Having outlined the *ideal* sample and my thinking behind it, I will now move on to discuss my actual sample.

I advertised (see appendix 1) to speak to people receiving UC who were unemployed, in-work, or self-employed. Fifteen individuals living with UC were involved in the research, at the first interview four individuals were in-work, although nine had experience of work whilst claiming UC. The fluid nature of work for many I spoke to quickly became apparent resonating with Shildrick et al (2012).

Eight individuals started UC as a ‘new claimant’ and seven ‘naturally migrated’ from the legacy system: 3 from ESA, 2 from JSA, 1 from HB and 1 from WTC/CTC (her partner received JSA). If someone ‘naturally migrates’ to UC they are not offered the transitional protection which will be offered under ‘managed migration’ consequently people are immediately worse off. Individuals can migrate to UC for any change in circumstances including a change in household (relationship breakdown) like Karl, moving like Julie, or being ill which was the case for Heather. These changes are often uncontrollable and can mean joining UC at an already difficult, and potentially unstable, time.

All those who began UC out of work, were seen as ‘fit for work’ first off, even those who had migrated from the ESA support group. For example, Karl was classified ‘fit for work’ despite having a degenerative condition. Isabel was ‘fit for work’ despite being in what she described as a ‘catatonic state’ from severe depression, and she was later moved to the ‘preparing for work’ group. For Bill, it took eighteen months to move into the correct group (no work requirements) as at first, he was repeatedly told by his WC he could not be moved. Pam, who is on a joint claim with her husband, described how they did not know about the disability element or carers allowance and again were placed, incorrectly, in the ‘fit for work’ group. Therefore, UC *mistakenly* categorises individuals which

impacts their experiences and definitions which subsequently affects research(ers) exploring this area.

For those in-work, a range of experiences were had. Ryan ‘naturally migrated’ whilst self-employed and was deemed ‘gainfully self-employed’, but he did not meet the MIF and received no money from UC for the first few months. Due to this he gave up his self-employment, was unemployed for several months until gaining a part-time job and still receives a small amount of UC. Natalie began UC a month before her self-employment, so technically was unemployed but not treated as such due to the impending employment. After moving from UC into full-time work, Gavin was told to keep his UC claim open; he had been in and out of work over the last couple of years. Lastly, Tina had first tried to claim UC when her hours were cut and was wrongly advised she was not able to, after spending 10 months struggling on her 15 hours per week income and with the help of a friend, she successfully started a UC claim. At first, she had requirements to look for extra work but after a couple of months these were removed due to health conditions. As you can see the experiences of UC for those in-work are diverse and often complicated.

I raise these issues here as how people see themselves and how UC categorises and constructs them are significant for sampling, especially when you are looking for certain groups. Despite its claim to ‘simplify the benefit system’, UC *on the ground* seems to do the opposite.

Under the legacy system, generally, if you wanted to speak to unemployed working age individuals you would advertise for JSA, if you wanted to speak to those with health conditions you might advertise for ESA, if you wanted to speak to people in-work you would look for those receiving WTC. There were clear markers for people and people could also identify with them. In my sample are people who identify as unemployed (or are forced to) who I had not considered such as in the examples above. This does not necessarily take anything away from the research but highlights the complexity of UC and how it is experienced.

Even those within the ‘in work’ category illustrate the diversity of circumstance and experience of UC. I found it interesting how those working did not always see themselves as ‘UC claimants’ and it was more akin to WTC, a supplement to their income. This was one reason recruitment of those in-work was tricky. However, it may be the case that individuals did not feel as ‘claimants’ as they were not engaging with conditionality which is, at some point, going to be rolled-out to those in-work. Then people might feel

differently if they are forced to confront their perceived *inadequacies* (Patrick, 2017; Shildrick, 2018; Tyler, 2013). So, the sample does not look like the *ideal* one I set out looking for, but it provides its own depth and diversity and has shown things I did not know I was looking for.

A table (appendix 14) provides a simplistic overview of participant characteristics and experiences. The table covers general information, particular experiences and factors which affect living with UC, such as the entry point. The level of people renting privately is representative of the local area, which has a higher-than-average proportion of private rental stock. Interestingly, those within Housing Association properties were all women who were, or had, raised families in these homes. Moreover, each described a situation where they were unable to pay the rent due to UC and the Housing Association had assisted with this so they could pay off the arrears slowly. Education levels were predominately secondary level (GCSEs), notably five had degrees in varying disciplines: medicine, social sciences, and the arts. This level of education goes against common stereotypes of *who* accesses social security as those without the qualifications and skills to gain employment. It also offers a point of reflection given the continual growth of claims to UC during the pandemic (see 2.5).

The UC activity refers to the work-related activity group individuals were in at our first interview. For some there was movement after this and, importantly often movement before, which is reflected in most people having ‘transitioned’ within UC. It felt important to include the claim length in the information about those living with UC to illustrate the varied amount of time people had been engaging with UC, the shortest being 1 month and the longest 34 months. The longevity of the experiences provided a new level of insight into the impacts of UC over time, which could be as damaging as the initial phase of living with UC. The inclusion of experiences with work and UC highlights the fluid nature of employment experiences for this cohort which is discussed in more detail in the findings. Those working at the time of interview did not have any requirements to increase their hours or find extra work, although one had experienced this previously and another had a vague statement in their ‘claimant commitment’ of the ‘wish’ to find extra employment. Lastly, data on UC deductions is included as it was extremely detrimental and destabilising to the nearly two thirds affected by it. All but two spoke of financial concerns and most had or were in food poverty.

## 6.8 Recruitment

At the start of fieldwork, I contacted several organisations who I had identified as key stakeholders with varying levels of success. I received a quick response from a welfare rights organisation and a Credit Union which provided helpful local context. After a few months, I successfully engaged the local Trussell Trust foodbank and an interview followed providing valuable insight into the current and historical impacts of UC within the town as well as discussions about the future ‘managed migration’ in relation to food poverty. Five months into the fieldwork, after multiple attempts using different avenues, I was put in touch with someone in the local JCP and was given a tour<sup>14</sup> and informal chat, unfortunately this was not recorded as this was not allowed on DWP property. Despite numerous attempts, Citizens Advice and two housing associations did not respond. The contact and inputs I gained were extremely useful in shaping my understanding at a local level of the larger impacts UC has had, particularly since it went into full service in December 2016.

A second reason for contacting the stakeholders was to gain access to those living with UC for the next stage of fieldwork. Of those I spoke to, only the welfare rights organisation offered to help by advertising the project to clients they were supporting, however with no success. Most clients had physical and/or mental health issues and were being supported to challenge some aspect of UC often leading to a tribunal, I think potentially engaging with the research at this time seemed too much. After these initial contacts, I widened contact with stakeholders (for the purpose of recruitment) to a variety of organisations, groups and community centres. Overall, 47 different places were contacted often more than once and with leaflets left about the research in most of these locations. In total, I handed out to places or individuals approximately 900 leaflets. At first recruitment was slow, a computer club actively recruited two individuals for the research.

I spent two afternoons leafletting outside a primary school, as this was a method used by another researcher investigating in-work experiences of UC. However, despite chatting and getting interest from individuals no interviews emerged from this. The next two participants interviewed were signposted from a stakeholder working around food poverty. After this, all but one participant was recruited via a leaflet either from a location

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<sup>14</sup> An insightful and strange experience; the encounter came across as UC being ‘sold’ to me and occurred after two days of long and emotional interviews with people living with UC. The tour was jarring in comparison – as if I were confronting the Centaur (Wacquant, 2010) head on.

around the town, on social media or in person. I spent many days over the summer outside the local JCP handing out leaflets to individuals who were passing and trying to strike up conversation. I had to quickly make clear to people that I was independent from the JCP and try if possible, to organise an interview there and then. Alice explained why people may not speak to me outside the JCP:

It's probably why outside the benefits office people are just walking straight past you! Like if anyone was ever like 'oh yeah don't talk to her', like I was trepidatious because I thought that could this get trickled back? I think people do worry, they don't want to rock the boat cos it's such a tenuous link they don't want to sever it... They don't want to do anything to rock the boat, they don't want to bite the hand that feeds (Alice).

The quote illustrates the fear surrounding UC and JCP as well as the fragility of the situation as people do not want to 'bite the hand that feeds' (see chapter 9 for impacts on emotions and wellbeing). Even when I organised meetings with individuals outside the JCP, there was no guarantee they would come, and several people did not. Over time it became clear that whilst for me the research is extremely important and plays centre stage, to others it is not, particularly so with the complicated lives people living with UC negotiate.

Promoting the research on social media was useful particularly if done via organisations that were trusted within the community, with one posting leading to three interviews. In addition to the flyering and promotion around the town, I wrote a piece for a local online paper which unfortunately did not lead to any interviews (although someone did contact me from a different area, but this was outside the remit of the case study).

It was important to use a range of methods for recruitment particularly in trying to advertise to those working and receiving UC, who generally do not use the same support services as those who are unemployed (in this way social media was handy) or may not visit the JCP often.

Recruitment was challenging and made worse by not being in the town all the time, as momentum was lost. However, after spending most of the summer months there, things started to come together. After each interview, I asked the individual if they knew anyone who would be interested to give them my details, but this did not lead anywhere. Most of the methods I used for recruitment were recommended or tried and tested methods such as using stakeholders to access individuals or 'hanging around'. In the end, recruitment slowly increased, and the time in between gave opportunities for doing the second interviews and development of the individual topic guides.

Out of the fifteen involved in the research, five were recruited via stakeholders and ten via leaflets (either directly from me at JCP or by picking one up at the various places I had left them).

On a practical note, I updated the leaflets after the first couple months of fieldwork to simplify them by changing the wording and stripping back the information. I think this helped as people could quickly see what the research was, who I wanted to speak to, the incentive<sup>15</sup> and how to contact me. Many people said the incentive was the first and main reason for coming to the interview but by the end some explained how they had enjoyed speaking about their experiences. To be honest, I think people liked having someone listen to them (without conditions of time) as often people were lonely and so enjoyed the company. This may be why most interviews were lengthy, but I felt it was important to give people the space to talk and going forward I hope to provide their experiences a platform to be heard.

A further point occurring from the use of leafletting was that most participants were self-selecting in that they had to contact me to be involved in the research. Relatedly, some of the most harrowing stories surrounding UC were told by those who did not get in touch for an interview describing their experiences during our brief exchange whilst I was leafletting. One stakeholder advised that recruitment would be difficult because people were so disengaged that they would not want to do this; I think in many ways she was right.

Sampling and recruitment are key to any piece of research however often the challenges they bring go unseen. When I read a good article or hear about an interesting piece of research, this side of things seems overlooked – or perhaps it happens so often it is mundane. Yet to a ‘novice’ (Brinkman and Kvale, 2014), these two issues shaped nine months of fieldwork and following year of analysis and writing. People told me how hard recruitment would be and it was even harder than I had envisaged. It was the practical difficulties coupled with the personal challenges of keeping up momentum and positivity. It was balancing the *ideal* sample I had planned for with the real sample I had and realising what I was doing, and had, was okay and heading in the right direction.

Through this range of recruitment, I stumbled upon a diverse and complex sample of individuals all with their own stories to tell about their journeys with UC and the impacts

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<sup>15</sup> Individuals were given a £10 voucher as a ‘thank you’ for their time at first interview, for the diary and for second interview.

this has had. Perhaps my mistake early on was categorising individuals as UC does which obscures the messiness of reality. My sample does not include a group of individuals as outlined in my *ideal* sample who migrated from WTC to UC – perhaps after the ‘managed migration’ this might be possible. It does include a mixture of individuals who ‘naturally migrated’ from the legacy system and their experiences shine a light on the dogmatic nature of UC. All who claim enter the same JCP doors which characterise you as ‘fit for work’ unless proven otherwise. The burden of proof is constantly placed on the ‘claimant’ and seemingly continually challenged by UC, however that discussion is for another time (see 8.3 and 8.4). The reason I raised this point, is that all those interviewed who were unemployed were deemed ‘fit for work’, even when this was unrealistic, and so the sample includes those experiences I had overlooked or not considered. The sample is full of individuals living between the lines of policy, society and sometimes the ‘self’ and that is where this story lies.

## 6.9 Ethics

The ethics of research is a central consideration of fieldwork with deliberations occurring before, during and after entering the field. Working with marginalised groups and discussing sensitive topics further complicates and reinforces the need for ethical reflection. Guillemin and Gillam (2004) develop ethical concerns into two dimensions: ‘Procedural Ethics’ and ‘ethics in practice’ (or ‘*microethics*’) and discuss how reflexivity can be utilised to handle ‘ethically important moments’. As such “...it is a sensitizing notion that can enable ethical practice to occur in the complexity and richness of social research” (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004:278). Procedural ethics refers to the formal process surrounding ethical approval, for example this research received ethical approval from Sheffield Hallam University Research Ethics Committee (Ethic Review ID: ER11233009). The procedural ethics may seem disconnected from the realities of fieldwork, but they provide a ‘checklist’ for researchers to ensure potential risks are mitigated and provide a framework in those more challenging situations. The notion of ‘ethics in practice’ captures the ethical situations which occur *on the ground* during fieldwork (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004). Such situations are unexpected and often complex.

The research anonymised participants, stakeholders, and the town itself, the latter choice taken to further protect the identities of those involved in the research due to the sensitive nature of experiences and potential harm (if revealed) – particularly with the use of

participant diaries. I asked all participants if they would like to choose their own pseudonym, only one did with the rest happy for me to assign a name. This was a strange process and I tried to give them a name which felt *right* although this again highlights a further (re)construction by the researcher. The confidential nature of the research was made clear to those involved and linked to this was confirming I was not connected to the JCP, and a few individuals made comments around this. The information sheet and consent form (see appendices 2 - 5) included all this information, as well as the voluntary nature of the research, details of withdrawal and how the data would be used and securely stored. Informed consent was gained at each stage of the research, first interview, diaries (if kept) and second interview. The documents for the diaries were adapted to reflect the method and potential risks as well as consent for copies of the diaries to be made and used in research outputs. It was made clear that if extracts of the diary could not be anonymised, they would not be used. To anonymise parts of the diaries, words have been hidden. The time spent developing the procedural ethics via the avenues discussed meant as a ‘novice’ (Brinkman and Kvale, 2014) I was provided with ethical scaffolding for the fieldwork.

Many of the ‘ethically important moments’ in which ‘ethics in practice’ arose (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004) related to discussions of sensitive topics and the potential harm to participants. When instances occurred where people became upset or uncomfortable, which I could hear in their tone of voice or visibly see, I would ask if they wanted to pause, stop, or move on (a strategy within the procedural ethics of the research). Yet, in all but one instance where we moved on, individuals wanted to continue and discuss the impacts of living with UC perhaps reflective of the potential catharsis from interviews (Dickson-Swift et al, 2007). During and after the interviews I mulled over such instances, wondering if I had done the *right* thing. Whilst there were potential harms in the situation, the participant deserves autonomy and in ‘wandering together with’ they require my respect and trust of the paths we tread. As Shaw et al (2020) argue “...we think that ethical, emotional and psychological risk is a normal part of doing research with human participants, who voluntarily and openly disclose information about their lives” (2020:289). Importantly, this risk must be navigated by the researcher and participant.

As already touched upon, the sensitive nature of interviews not only impacts on the participant but also the researcher (Batty, 2020; Dickson-Swift et al, 2009; 2007; Shaw et al, 2020). As an exploratory piece of research looking at the experiences, impacts and responses to UC at the start of the fieldwork I was unaware of the direction the research

would take in terms of its emotional dimension. Having read widely in the first year of the doctoral research, I was aware of the emotional aspects of poverty and unemployment but was unprepared for the depth of emotional experiences of those living with UC. The subject of the research was sensitive and the content of interviews personal, sometimes connected to the topic or related to other issues surrounding family, health or ‘untold stories’ (Dickson-Swift et al, 2007). Despite feeling emotional at times during the interviews, I tried not to openly show this, which other researchers have spoken about (Dickson-Swift et al, 2009). I think this was in part due to self-preservation, appropriateness and I did not want individuals to feel pitied, which has negative connotations regarding judgement and power. After interviews, I would walk home along the seafront which provided time to reflect and recover as well as calm from the adrenaline experienced during the interview.

There are other elements to the interview which can affect researchers emotionally via their ‘emotional labour’ during fieldwork such as building rapport, the relationship between participant and researcher, and leaving the field (Batty, 2020; Dickson-Swift et al, 2009). The ‘emotional labour’ of research must be negotiated throughout fieldwork and even after you have left the field; during the time spent transcribing and analysing the data my mind often returned to participants and how they might be doing now. The rapport building with participants was aided by researching in my hometown as it gave a common context we shared, that said, efforts still went in to build rapport and engage with individuals on a human level. I aimed for our conversations to have breadth, depth and respect and provide a space to discuss an area of their lives which is often shielded from others or perceived with scrutiny.

### 6.10 Positionality and Reflexivity

As knowledge is socially constructed via social interaction, in this case between the participants and I, it is important to discuss the issues of reflexivity and positionality. Reflexivity “...is a tool for researchers to become more sensitive to ‘silence’ in the research process” (Liamputtong, 2007:11) and entails self-examination of social, economic, political, and cultural structures which affect the researcher and subsequently the research. This links to positionality, the researcher’s identities or position within the research connected to gender, class, ‘race’, age, sexuality and so on, all notions which link to power. Importantly, this process, like our identities, is fluid and changeable due to the underlying social construction and affects the research process throughout. The need

to situate knowledge brings a renewed focus on the ‘messiness’ of research (Rose, 1997) and to consider that this ‘messiness’ reflects the complexities of life and humanity.

Rose (1997) details the problematic nature of ‘transparent reflexivity’, which strives for the ‘unknowable’, due to the inherent uncertainties within identities and context arguing “...there is no clear landscape of social positions to be charted by an all-seeing analyst; neither is there a conscious agent, whether researcher or researched, simply waiting to be reflected in a research project. Instead, researcher, researched and research make each other...” (Rose, 1997:316). Rose (1997) makes us think about the how and why of reflexivity and to consider this and the ambiguities of reality and knowledge when we engage in reflexive practices. Liamputtong (2007) also discusses issues of reflexivity regarding sensitive research suggesting “...if readers are to truly understand the participants’ stories, the readers need to know about the stories and positions of the researchers” (2007:22). In this way, accepting the shifting and constructed nature of reality, it feels important to address the ‘silence’ surrounding myself as the researcher and how this might have affected the research process.

As discussed earlier, whilst there were some shared understandings of place between participants and myself, there were differences which illuminated my *outsider* status, namely I am not, nor have I ever accessed social security and I am not living in poverty. I did prior to starting my PhD spend a year unemployed and ‘got by’ living off savings, with family and doing odd jobs so I do have some understandings of this experience. My decision not to claim social security was due to a sense of shame and failure, an experience which shaped my interest in the research. I have also experienced ‘poor work’ spending five years employed in a call-centre. The work was fast-paced, mundane, low-paid and in a pressurised environment. Importantly, ‘poor work’ is subjective and for some this employment would not be defined as such.

There were also differences in education. Whilst several individuals had undergraduate degrees none had postgraduate qualifications. Personally, education has been a route to escape the town and so it was strange returning for the purpose of education. I know my education has afforded me opportunities that many others do not have and returning home, this feeling was further reinforced. My access to education was supported by policies at the time, namely the Education Maintenance Allowance and later bursaries for university with my family receiving WTC. I now wonder whether, if I had been a young person five years later, I would have had access to the same opportunities notably, my

educational experiences particularly having the opportunity to do a funded PhD which has given me access to new realities in sharp contrast to those at home. In one way being a ‘researcher at home’ made me feel an *insider* yet returning home also illuminated my feelings as an *outsider*, a conflict which cannot be resolved.

In some situations, the fluidity of my identity as the researcher was noticeable, for example sometimes I felt individuals treated me as a ‘daughter’ in the way they spoke to me and perhaps the level of honesty in the conversation. All these situations involved participants over fifty, so together this relationship was constructed. This is likely influenced in the way I described myself to them as a student which probably made me seem younger than I was. In my presentation as a ‘student’, I was perhaps taken to be less *official* and the research more informal as individuals often commented on my studies towards the end of our conversations.

### 6.11 Limitations of the research

Fieldwork was a learning curve. There are things I would do differently if undertaking the research again. In hindsight, I would enter the field earlier as this might have eased the challenges of recruitment as I would have had more time. Yet this choice is related to the resources available to a doctoral researcher which include time and financial constraints. If there had been more time, repeat interviews would have offered greater insight into the impacts of living with UC, the changes over time and how these are negotiated. A larger sample would also have aided this. Similarly, the sample could have been *improved* with more people employed and receiving UC; those in-work were particularly challenging to recruit. By speaking to people in-work, particularly those engaging with conditionality requirements, new insights could have been drawn. This was difficult partly due to the delayed ‘managed migration’ of UC which would have moved those receiving WTC into UC and also those working receiving UC did not *see* themselves as ‘claimants’ as discussed in the finding’s chapters (10, 11). Thus, there were definitional issues with the sampling.

The research is *limited* due to its small-scale, yet it offers a detailed qualitative exploration of the impacts of living with UC. The choice to focus the research in one location is another limitation, as the locality is unique thus not reflective of other areas. However, as discussed in 6.3, the area was selected after consideration of its suitability in terms of statistical characteristics and practical concerns. Moreover, the difficulties discussed regarding recruitment highlight the importance of spending time in one area and I am

unsure, without extra resources, if another fieldwork location would have been possible. Likewise, opting to research at home is a potential limitation as undoubtedly my emotional connection and perceptions affected the research, although this is in both a positive and negative way. Arguably it is impossible not to affect the research in some way whether at home or away.

The use of diaries was invaluable to the study but only three were completed and this is a potential limitation. Due to the resource-heavy nature of the method on the participant, it was challenging in terms of numbers and retention. This could have been aided by using a larger incentive, but again this was restricted by the resources of a doctoral project. Additionally, more of the individuals could have been asked if they would like to keep a diary as only those with conditionality requirements were asked to do so. This choice was made as the research wanted to explore the impacts and experiences of UC within daily life and conditionality is key to this, however from the findings there is a growing sense that whilst conditionality plays a key role, other factors such as poverty and isolation do also. Moreover, engagement with conditionality is subjective to the individual, for example Isabel who was 'preparing for work' saw her engagement in certain activities such as training and voluntary projects as key and recorded these in her diary but this was not necessarily instructed from the WC. Thus, the lines are unclear, which can be seen again in those who are deemed 'fit for work' despite serious health conditions like Karl.

During the nine months of fieldwork, my skills as a researcher developed considerably as well as my confidence in those skills especially regarding interviews. I have often wondered if I had spoken to the first two participants later whether the interview would have gone differently. I may have probed more or spoken less and let the silence linger. This question is unanswerable, yet it illustrates a limitation regarding my own capabilities as a researcher.

## 6.12 Conclusion

To conclude, a case-study based in an English coastal town was used to qualitatively investigate the impacts of living with UC on emotions, wellbeing and identities. Semi-structured interviews (6.4) and participant-solicited diaries (6.5) provided rich data from the fifteen participants living with UC. The challenges within sampling (6.7) and recruitment (6.8) were overcome and resulted in a diverse range of participants in terms of their experiences of UC. The procedural ethics and microethics (6.9) were a central concern due to the sensitivities surrounding the research topic and the participants

themselves. Positionality and reflexivity were explored (6.10) to address the ‘silence’ of the researcher within the research. Lastly, the limitations of the research were considered (6.11) mainly surrounding the constraints of doctoral research.

## 7. Living with Universal Credit: An introduction to the findings chapters

### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter is the first of six findings chapters which explore the experiences, impacts and responses to living with UC centring on emotions, wellbeing and the ‘self’. This chapter introduces the key themes of the empirical chapters (8,9,10 and 11). The findings section begins and ends with a spotlight on a participant’s diary: Heather in chapter 7 and Bill in chapter 12. The experiences within the diaries (7.3 and 12.3) provide an overview of the findings in their entirety and allows for the empirical chapters and subsequent discussion to begin and end with the voice of experience. The introduction is focused on Heather’s diary which offers an important snapshot of the intensity and longevity of the difficulties arising from living with UC.

The chapters present new findings investigating impacts of UC on:

- Emotions
- Mental and physical well-being
- ‘Self’

Importantly, the impacts relate, reinforce, and trigger practical impacts which link to money, housing, poverty, time, travel and so on. The findings investigate how accessing social security is a more than physical act with practical experiences and impacts having consequences emotionally, mentally, physically and for the ‘self’. They will explore feelings towards the experiences, impacts and responses surrounding UC linking with wider issues surrounding poverty, family, health and (un)employment. Importantly, the cyclical relationship between impacts and the ensuing consequences of this will be investigated. The aim is to examine the complexities of this process and how this is affected by the design and delivery of UC; ultimately people are undermined.

Feelings are not felt in seclusion; often people felt several feelings towards a situation with individual reasons, resources, and histories all of which can affect a UC journey. A commonality in experience was the negative emotional impact and hard work throughout, which made it more difficult for people to successfully navigate UC, ‘get-by’ and live. The double-sided strain ensures the emotional impacts, as well as the practical, are evident in every area of life. This research was undertaken from a sociological perspective and the words feelings and emotions are used interchangeably, other perspectives such as psychology or medicine may apply such terms differently. Terms such as anxiety have

several meanings for example you can feel anxious but having anxiety (in the medical sense) is something different. Many individuals spoke of feeling anxious (chapter 9) and several spoke of the mental health issue anxiety (9.2) – the way the terms are used in this thesis are participant lead. Therefore, the term when used in the section on mental health relates to those who used it medically. This clarity over terminology is important as the research(er) did not want to apply its own meaning to such words.

The second findings chapter (8) shows how participants experienced dehumanization whilst living with UC and the impacts this has on emotions, the ‘self’ and engagement with UC and daily life. Next, the navigation of UC is discussed which must be *driven* by those claiming but is hindered by the irrationalities of bureaucracy and lack of humanity. The notion of *uniformity* within UC is then explored which is a key feature affecting both design and delivery and based upon misguided ideological notions of *who* a ‘benefit claimant’ is (Slater, 2012; Wiggan, 2012). The impact in relation to journeys with UC and the challenges which arise from perceived *uniformity* is also discussed. This first chapter aims to provide a context of how UC is experienced as dehumanizing (Haslam, 2006) which informs the experiences, impacts and responses of the remaining empirical chapters.

The third findings chapter (9) focuses on the impacts of living with UC in terms of emotions and wellbeing. First, the impacts on mental and physical health are discussed which have serious consequences with thirteen individuals speaking of worsening mental health since starting UC. The causes of physical health related to the increasing poverty individuals experienced and this impacted on mental health but was also affected by engaging with UC itself. Second, the emotionally destabilising nature of UC is explored linked to wider impacts particularly surrounding poverty, which became more challenging due to emotional destabilisation. Third, feelings of being ‘worn down’ are investigated and the negative impacts this had, for example it made it harder for people to successfully engage with UC. Fourth, shame is discussed which Scheff (2003) describes as the ‘master emotion’ and was apparent in the lives of those living with UC. Shame if internalised caused participant’s considerable harm.

The fourth findings chapter (10) explores managing the ‘self’ whilst living with UC, looking at the experiences, impacts and responses to identity management. Unlike the legacy system or its global counterparts, an individual’s reason or perceived deservingness to access UC is unclear and generally hidden, thereby increasing the potential for stigma. Notably, work offers a ‘moral trump’ (Chase and Walker, 2012: 249)

signifying agency and work ethic ideals but now UC has marked this card. The first sections explore issues of stigma (Goffman, 1997; Tyler, 2020) and ‘benefit stigma’ (Baumberg et al, 2012; Patrick, 2016) in particular, and how UC by design and delivery has changed this. Next, the misunderstandings surrounding UC are discussed which illustrate a disconnect between reality and rhetoric which individuals engage with, which impacts on their own understandings and identities. The chapter moves to consider how those living with UC experience and navigate stigma and the other impacts to the ‘self’ through living with UC. Underpinning the stigma attached to ‘welfare’ are perceptions of deservingness (Van Oorschot, 2000; 2006) which are discussed throughout and are the focus of the last section.

The fifth findings chapter (11) considers the individual responses to UC and how these impact on the ‘self’, with a focus on the (un)intentional secondary consequences which move people further away from the aims of UC, the labour market, society and sometimes their ‘self’. Importantly, actions and inaction (Scott, 2018; 2019; 2020) ripple across physical, ontological, and temporal lines and so perceived small and mundane acts take on poignancy. Whilst the ripples may still be reverberating, it is important to acknowledge the individual feelings towards these actions which are real and powerful. The findings presented explore the different sacrifices made from living with UC which is often a practical response with impacts emotionally and on the ‘self’. The ‘risks’ individuals take because of living with UC will be explored which have physical and emotional consequences. Acts of resistance are then discussed, which focus on micro-acts and how this intersects with emotions and the ‘self’. The consideration of sacrifices, risks and resistance explore how people negotiate living with UC, mitigate practical impacts, and the consequent damage and preservation of the ‘self’. Lastly, more *adaptive* responses and being a ‘good claimant’ are considered. Throughout, the chapter will consider the experiences in relation to the ‘self’ and the underlying question of (un)deservingness. Importantly, the chapter brings into question the *transformational* aspirations of UC – for who, to what and where?

The final findings chapter (12) is centred around Bill’s diary, which ties together many of the themes discussed in the previous empirical chapters. The diary details Bill’s experiences over a week and this temporality provides a unique insight into the experiences and impacts of living with UC as Bill attempts to navigate the ‘violent’ bureaucracy.

## 7.2 Heather: Pen portrait

Heather is fifty-one years old and lives alone in a privately rented one bedroomed flat. She is a vegetarian, and her favourite meal is a curry. Heather has a daughter and grandson who live around two hours away and she makes this trip by train nearly every month for a weekend. She enjoys playing games with her grandson and has recently taught him Rummy. She is a keen rambler and spends her free time walking the local beaches and countryside.

Heather described herself as an ‘artist’ and makes things from items she finds on the beach or is given for free. Her favourite job was working in an arts supply shop as she got on well with the manager, who she is still friends with, and got art supplies cheaply. Heather’s employment history is a mixture of retail, construction to a bingo caller. When she was younger, Heather wanted to be a camerawoman.

Heather enjoys bargain hunting and regularly goes to boot sales and charity shops with her friends. When we met, she showed me her latest bargain (a large straw fedora) and a pretty teal necklace she had made.

### 7.3 Experiencing UC: Heather's Diary

5/9/17 Day surgery at the [redacted] Hospital. I had been diagnosed with Diverticular disease + had a colonoscopy + 2 polyps removed. My Mum is battling bowel + thyroid cancer. I also have an underactive thyroid, so I was very worried. My poor bottom was in extreme pain for 4 days straight. Dawn, my work coach, had asked me to call her at the Jobcentre to let her know how I had got on. I thought she was just being friendly. I called her at 4:40pm. She said "That's your third period of sickness in a rolling year. Tomorrow you have to make a claim for Universal Credit on a secure computer." I did not have a computer.

6/9 I had to walk up 2 steep hills/roads to my friend, Andy. He helped me make the U.C. claim using his computer. JSA payment of £146.20: last money until 12th October.

7/9 A text told me I had an appointment at the Jobcentre, today. Still in incredible pain I had to walk there (35 minutes each way). I was there for 4½ hours + saw 2 people + had to produce alot of documents + bank details + in interrogation! I also made a phone call from there, requesting the U.C. advance payment. The maximum I was allowed was £343. I was urged by the lady in the advance payment office not to claim this as £28.59p would automatically be taken from my U.C. each month for 12 months to repay the advance. I said I needed to think about it. I went to my letting agency + asked if they would be willing to wait until my first U.C. payment would arrive: about 6 weeks of not paying any rent. They said a definite No. I called back + had to ask for the £343 advance payment. At £85 per week rent, that covered 4 weeks rent. I had no other money coming in + no savings. I have been out of work since October 2014 + claiming JSA, Housing Benefit + Council Tax Benefit. Not able to save any money on just £73.10p a week. The Universal Credit Diet began. I had to ration the

food I had at home. I ate a small brunch and half a pitta in the evening. I lost 2 stone 3 lbs in 6 weeks until my first U.C. payment arrived on 12/10/17. My friends gave me food, my daughter gave me some money: £50 I think. Mostly my Dad helped me. He gave me £30 a month from his pension; he was 79 then. I made sure the rent was paid, TV licence + water bills were paid. I rationed electricity + didn't shower every day to save money on gas. I also frequented department stores + public loos to "borrow" toilet roll. I never shoplifted or stole. I just starved. I cried alot + my family just thought I was on a diet - that's what I told them. I was very depressed.

12/9 My new work coach, Barney, said I should go to the C.A.B + get a slip to take to the food bank at [redacted] Church, opposite the [redacted]. He kindly gave me a banana from his lunch.

13/9 I walked just over 1 hour to the FB. I was given a trolley load of tins + dried food (I am a strict vegetarian for almost 35 years). They also gave me a voucher for gas + elec + £20 cash. They said to get a taxi home. I walked. 20 quid = food !!!

22/10 Dad: £30 from his Pension.

12/10/17 My first U.C. payment. Nothing backdated to the start of my claim. Next payment on 12/11, 12/12 etc. I would have been in debt to my agency of £510 + with no way of paying them the arrears. I am pleased I used the advance payment to stop being evicted. I am pleased (eventually) I lost weight, but not a good, healthy way to do that. Barney joked "Some people would pay for that!" Not funny. I starved. I am a calm, non-violent person, but I would have happily slapped him. But I didn't.

I am also repaying working Tax credits of £1,200. I informed HMRC when I changed jobs, hours went down + back up. I was overpaid by them! Hit with a big repayment bill when I was made redundant from my last job. I swear I will never ever apply for working Tax credit again. I repay £15 a month + this increases every year.

I have struggled alot with stress, being frugal, rationing food & prioritising rent & bills above all else. A wonderful food Bank, [redacted] opened up in town & I attended & ate well. lovely people again. After 6 months I was told my time was up. My circumstances hadn't changed but I had to leave. Feeling ill, I went to my G.P & was diagnosed with malnutrition & lactic acidosis where my body was breaking down my leg muscles (that's where the pains were) to fuel me as I wasn't able to eat properly. This causes a build up of lactic acid, causing pain & constant muscle twitching that woke me & kept me awake. Dad, again from his Pension, gave me money to buy vitamin pills & Osteo Care tablets & vitamins C, D & K combination. 2 months after the first blood test, I have a re-test on 24th June to see how I have improved. [redacted] who is now in charge of [redacted] food Bank immediately reinstated me when I chance met her in Poundland & told her of my situation. An Angel! I spend alot of time job searching. In one recent week I had an interview with John Lewis Partnership & ASDA. I sadly didn't get either job. But life & the daily struggle to survive goes on.

[redacted]

20/6/19

Figure 6 Heather's letter and diary extracts

UC has been difficult for Heather physically, emotionally, and mentally and she is only now talking about the initial 'UC diet' period (9.3 for physical impacts). She outlines the destitution, consequences, and lines she would not cross, grappling for stability and security practically, emotionally, and ontologically; issues which feature throughout the following findings chapters.

By writing how she did not cross a line of criminality regarding stealing, Heather protects her identity (Scott, 2018;2019; 2020), a narrative connected to her father's occupation in the Police. This provides Heather something to hold onto in this destabilising period, allows her to frame the difficulties and protect a part of her 'self' in the reassurance that she did not cross that line. As "...it is the thread that enables those situated on the margins...to retain a sense of self and thus their humanity" (Snow and Anderson, 1987:

1365). See 8.2 for dehumanizing impacts of UC and the subsequent responses and their consequences are discussed in chapter 11.

Heather naturally migrated to UC and described feeling ‘like a guinea pig’. The journey started with a bump as Heather felt deceived by her WC who she thought was ‘just being friendly’ and felt little control over the situation. Heather’s digital exclusion made managing her UC claim difficult and undermined attempts of responsabilisation (see 3.6). Heather describes the repeated needs to *prove* her status and the ‘interrogation’ at the JCP, both bureaucratic features of UC (see 2.3 and chapter 8). The experiences show the irrationalities of UC as Heather was advised not to take the advance because it would place her in difficulties financially and consequently emotionally (see 9.4 and 9.5 for emotional impacts). However, Heather was unable to refuse the advance and even with this, experienced challenges financially, emotionally, mentally and physically. Heather ensured the rent was paid providing physical and existential security (Daly, 2017:454) however went without food and rationed utilities (see 11. 2 for sacrificial responses).

I haven’t been able to talk to anyone about it because you don’t want to admit defeat and say look, I’m struggling, I’m starving (Heather).

Heather links her isolation and secrecy with ‘defeat’ due to her *inability* to manage financially. Asking for help for Heather signifies she has failed to meet neoliberal values surrounding individual responsibility (Wacquant, 2010) and consumption (Bauman, 2005). Consequently, the *threat* of stigma (Goffman, 1997; Tyler, 2020) impacts socially and thus materially for Heather (see chapter 10 for discussion of ‘self’ management).

The ‘defeat’ Heather felt ignores her skill and effort in managing the first six weeks from the UC advance which covered approximately 67 percent of her rent:

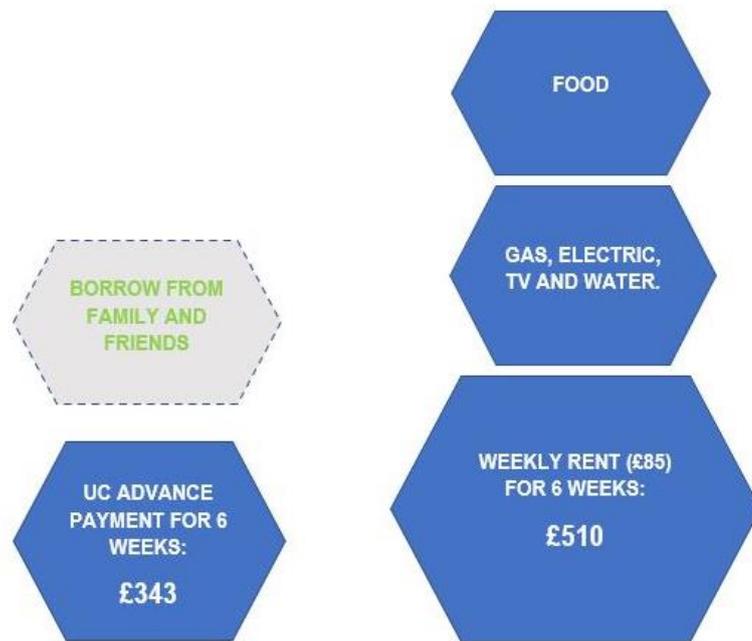


Figure 7 Heather's income versus expenses

Heather's internalised 'defeat' obscures the structural failings within the delivery and design of UC. Heather feels responsible for this struggle and a sense of shame (Scheff, 2003) from both the situation and consequences which intensifies as she did not reach out for help (shame is discussed in 9.6). Responses to UC can be aided and reduced by the individual balance of resources, the perceived cost to the 'self' and emotional wellbeing as discussed throughout this thesis.

For Heather, the 'daily struggle to survive goes on' as the last page describes; the challenges continue with the low monthly income, further reduced by historical debt. The findings here, and throughout this thesis, illustrate the importance of time and that the challenges continue – it is not one point of crisis although there are pressure points - but a persistent reduction in stability (financially, emotionally, physically, mentally and on the 'self').

The physical impacts of Heather's malnutrition incur an extra cost to treat (See 9.3 for physical impacts). Heather's experiences illustrate the importance of support from social networks and charities which aid the balancing act to 'get-by' (Lister, 2004) with the malnutrition showing the fine balance individuals manage and the serious consequences when unsettled.

In the response which made light of Heather's difficulties, the WC enacts further harm by ridiculing her experience illustrating the 'moral sleeping pill' (Bauman, 1989: 26) bureaucracy provides (See 8.2 for dehumanizing experiences of UC). It also links to how

encounters within ‘welfare’ can reinforce feelings of shame (See 9.6). For Heather, the shame was fourfold: stemming from the need to claim UC, the impacts of claiming, the disclosure to and response from the WC.

Heather avoided potential shame from non-disclosure, yet this choice worsened the situation she was in but was a sacrifice Heather felt worthwhile to protect her ‘self’ (other sacrificial responses are discussed in chapter 11). Shame is a powerful emotion and motivator in situations of behavioural change and social control (Elias, 1994; Scheff, 2003), which can be used by those in powerful positions on a ‘deviant’ population (see 5.2 and page 45). Heather experienced dual shame from engaging in ‘welfare’ bureaucracy (Chase and walker, 2012) and poverty (Jo, 2012). When Heather hides her starvation, it is due to the shame she feels but also an attempt to prevent further shame. But, when she discloses her experiences to the WC, an act of ‘contaminative exposure’ (Goffman, 1961/2007:24) occurs as he shames and blames her for the situation and the ‘decivilizing’ consequences are reframed by a narrative of *civilised* personal responsibility. This reinforces the treatment as *correct* and required to facilitate behavioural change.

The WC response delegitimizes Heather’s experience, now undeserving of compassion, re-framing it around a discourse of ‘weight loss’ rather than destitution consequently reducing the legitimacy of the ‘social harm’ (Wright et al, 2020) due to the six-week wait. Heather described how despite her anger towards the WC (see 9.4 and 9.5 for emotional impacts), she felt unable to respond to protect their ‘good’ relationship (Peterie et al, 2019a). The burden of this relationship falls on those claiming, who despite (or because of) being the less powerful actor in the dynamic (Boland and Griffin, 2015) must work hard to maintain good terms, even in the face of cruelty (See chapter 8 for experiences of dehumanization and ‘violence’).

## 7.4 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an introduction to the findings chapters (8, 9, 10, 11 and 12). Heather’s diary (7.3) presented a snapshot of the experiences and impacts of living with UC and touched upon several of the themes in the forthcoming findings chapters. The inclusion of participant-solicited diaries provides unique insights into living with UC and the choice to present whole sections verbatim aims to highlight this. Heather’s diary shows the ‘violence’ within experiences of UC, which not only occur at the start (with the five-week wait) but continue as she attempts to ‘get by’ on the low payment from UC

subsequently suffering from malnutrition. Heather's experiences show the systemic lack of security UC provides as 'life and the daily struggle to survive goes on'.

## 8. Dehumanization

### 8.1 Introduction

This chapter provides insights into how UC is experienced as dehumanizing and the harmful impacts of this. It addresses the first research question (see 1.2) investigating how the experiences of UC impact on emotions and the ‘self’, how this impacts the ‘UC journey’ and how resources intersect with these experiences. Therefore, the chapter makes an empirical contribution to knowledge by offering new understandings of how living with UC impacts on emotions and the ‘self’.

First, the dehumanizing effect of living with UC, associated feelings and harms are discussed as UC ‘chips away’ at people. The chapter then examines participants navigation of UC and the impacts of this. Next, the chapter discusses the issue of *uniformity* and how the surrounding scrutiny impacts on emotions and ‘self’. The issues of navigation and uniformity allow us to consider in more detail how UC is dehumanizing.

### 8.2 Dehumanization

Experiences of UC are considered using the concept of dehumanization, adding to literature on the ‘violence’ of social policy (see 3.8). While some interviewees used the term dehumanization directly, others referred to characteristics or synonyms. It provides a helpful way to investigate the intersections between the experiences, impacts and responses to living with UC inside and outside the JCP. First, a reminder of the definition adopted here for dehumanization (see 5.4):

Haslam (2006) defines dehumanization as the denial of human characteristics and outlines two types of dehumanization (mechanical and animalistic) which relate to the removal of different forms of humanness. If animalistic dehumanization compares humans to animals, mechanical compares humans to machines. Both forms of dehumanization affect those living with UC across their daily lives.

<p><b>Animalistic dehumanization</b> relates to the denial of unique humanness to those seen as ‘animal-like’ “...lacking in refinement, civility, moral sensibility and higher cognition” (Haslam, 2006:257) who are treated with ‘disgust’.</p> <p>“To live there is necessities you know there is a basic line of, ur humanitarian whatever it’s called. You know I am human; I should be able to shower two or three times a week you know. I’m not a dirty person” (Karl)</p>	<p><b>Mechanical dehumanization</b> denies individuals human nature or ‘depth’ to those “...lacking in emotionality, warmth, cognitive openness, individual agency...” (Haslam, 2006:258) who are treated with ‘coldness’.</p> <p>“My WC said to me ‘I’m gonna try and keep you because I don’t think its going to be very long until you find work’ because she was like ‘it’ll be good for my sheet’ and I was like well that’s great. That makes me feel special” (Alice)</p>	<p>“You don’t have any quality of life and you have to go to the JCP twice a week, I can’t even go out for a drink cos I can’t afford it. I can’t go out with my friend’s cos I can’t afford it. It does, that’s why it is so dehumanizing cos you don’t live a life, it’s not a life anyone wants to live” (Zara).</p> <p>At times, the animalistic and mechanical dehumanization can intersect. Zara is denied the neoliberal civilities surrounding consumption and <i>living</i> and treated with institutional ‘coldness’, based upon a desire to change her behaviour seen as ‘animalistic’.</p>
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Figure 8 Dehumanization adopting Haslam (2006)

Alice explains how mechanical dehumanization (Haslam, 2006) made her feel, as the WC openly admitted wanting to ‘keep’ Alice for her own job performance, leaving Alice feeling demoralised. Karl describes the inhumane consequences from living with UC, a form of animalistic dehumanization (Haslam, 2006) in both cause and consequence, he experiences destitution owing to the lack of ‘humanitarian’ basics’ highlighting a system of little dignity (Hodgetts et al, 2014). There are practical and emotional consequences as well as on the ‘self’ as Karl tries to protect himself yet is confronted by a harmful reality. Being ‘dirty’ is a physical and emotional experience, it is a visible signifier of *neoliberal failings* met with ‘disgust’ (Tyler, 2013) and connected to older notions of civility (Elias, 1994). A divide emerges of who people were, are and want to be (Scott, 2018;2019; 2020) with the continual struggle to preserve and persevere in managing the self (see chapters 10 and 11). It offers an example of how the dehumanizing instances can work together with intensifying consequences.

Living with UC, for Zara, is ‘not a life anyone wants to live’ because of its dehumanizing nature (Haslam, 2006) as her life is limited by UC with its invasive regulation of her

behaviours by the conditionality and poverty it creates. The regulation is implementing mechanical dehumanization based upon animalistic dehumanizing assumptions (Haslam, 2006), with the poverty further embedding this experience with practical consequences as well as stigma which reinforces the ‘animalistic’ (Haslam, 2006) ‘non-human’ status (Goffman, 1963/1997).

This is an isolating experience and at a time where people need compassion, they encounter the opposite. This reinforces the treatment, and the cycle perpetuates, with the consequences providing further legitimization of the dehumanizing treatment.

...the whole process is intimidating um I feel like you know that the whole way that they are is to try and sort of um scaremonger you into finding a job sooner so that you don't have to go through all this. Which I understand it's like if you're not willing to go through all this you shouldn't be claiming... (Zara)

Zara describes how feelings of intimidation not only occur in the JCP but throughout the process, which is intended to ‘scaremonger’ people into employment. The quote, typifying many participant experiences, provides insight into how UC is ‘violent’ (Cooper and Whyte, 2017) and treatment of those receiving it increasingly punitive (Fletcher and Wright, 2017; Reeve, 2017; Wacquant, 2009; Wright et al, 2020). The last sentence highlights the work and emotional toll, with Zara alluding to this being expected, indicating a level of acceptance to the underlying goals of UC and potential internalisation of undeservingness.

Participants described living with UC as demeaning, demoralising, and shaming. Such findings are reminiscent of Patrick (2017) who has written extensively on experiences of welfare reform in the UK based on longitudinal qualitative research. This thesis is focused on those living with UC which brings with it a new intensified regime (see 2.3) of conditionality, bureaucracy, scrutiny and reduced income for individuals to manage:

...going on the UC really was a nightmare mentally and physically... I think it's cos of the not, having no food and things which happened at the beginning of it and really on my knees and I mean owing people money and everything. It actually makes me feel ill thinking about it, I can physically feel ill with worry. Absolutely, especially with having a son that you are feeding and his life depends on... everything yeah it's all it is a horrible, being on UC is horrible [laughs] (Isabel)

The emotional impacts manifest physically as Isabel describes feeling ill with worry even after the event; such moments have enduring elasticity. The physical impacts (see 9.3) create emotional difficulties for Isabel, intensified by her parental role. Lone parents felt

this increased pressure and worry over providing for their children which resonates with literature on how low-income families ‘get-by’ (Daly, 2017; JRF, 2018) and the broader gendered nature of UC (Andersen, 2019). Coupled with this pressure lone parents and others with caring responsibilities engage with new levels of conditionality bringing additional challenges as their caring labour is ‘devalued’ by UC (Andersen, 2019; Johnsen and Blenkinsopp, 2018).

Twelve participants experienced food poverty whilst living with UC and four described ‘starvation’ (see 9.3 for discussion of physical impacts). It is discussed here regarding its dehumanizing and ‘violent’ characteristics:

I need to [go back to work] basically because um I’m pretty much starving to death you know on UC (Bill)

Bill clearly links his ‘starvation’ to UC and the *push* back to work. UC had been financially destabilising due to the low payment, debt repayments and a sanction, a situation which was intensified by mis-advice, navigating bureaucracy, managing conditionality, and attempting to prove his entitlement. The physicality of starvation and hygiene are visible markers of the ‘suffering’ (Frost and Hogget, 2008) from living with UC which impacts on emotions, wellbeing and the ‘self’. In this situation, the body becomes a site of struggle, power and political economy (Foucault, 1975/2020) for those in *need* of behavioural change:

It is just cruel; it just feels like some sort of hellish prison sentence that you’ve been charged with and given but for no reason at all...people are being cared for better in prison. That might be a better option, I even considered that along with suicide and other things, maybe if I can get myself incarcerated [chuckle] then I wouldn’t have rent and they would feed you. They would not let you starve like they are. It’s like that is wrong, isn’t it? (Isabel)

Isabel is describing how it feels to live with UC, the impacts of this and what it can *push* people to (see 11.2). The association with prison illustrates the punitiveness of UC with a sense of injustice and confusion at being subject to this ‘for no reason at all’. Again, we see the intersections of mechanical dehumanization via the ‘cold’ bureaucracy with animalistic dehumanizing (Haslam, 2006) consequences. The dehumanizing treatment Isabel experienced living with UC leaves her to consider prison as at least she would not be in destitution. Such responses bring into question UC’s goal of behavioural change and ‘making work pay’, as examples like Isabel show a different reality, one characterised by ‘social harm’ (Wright et al, 2020). Although ‘I can get myself incarcerated’ was said offhand, the intent and feelings of sadness, anger and frustration were visibly apparent.

The last section is haunting as Isabel questions the starvation she experiences and the morality of it. The dehumanizing experiences affected Isabel physically, emotionally, and mentally, often reinforced by the impacts and responses.

Zara explains why UC is dehumanizing as her life is ‘compromised’ (Pemberton et al, 2016a) by the poverty and conditionality, underlining its ‘institutionally violent’ nature (Cooper and Whyte, 2017):

Zara: ...you no longer feel like you are a person, that’s why I used the word dehumanizing because I don’t feel like a person anymore. Like it’s not a life, it’s not a life really so again putting it bluntly you are not living a life. You are scraping on to the next month, you are scraping on you know and I wouldn’t wish it on anyone, it’s horrid...like how can a Government turn round and say ‘You don’t deserve this. You are not a person anymore’ I think it’s horrid.

Sophie: Is that how it feels? It’s like you know you’re not a person you don’t deserve

Zara: Yeah, yeah. Condemned really like, absolutely. You are being punished for not having a job. You are being punished for trying to find a job. Everything is made more difficult for you and they’re not even giving you enough money to sort of have any sort of quality of life, I think it is terrible. It’s evil...

This dehumanization impacts emotionally and on the ‘self’ as people are undermined. Zara questions the Government’s motivation in relation to the dehumanizing experiences of living with UC linking this to notions of deservingness and citizenship (Patrick, 2017) and further illuminates the ‘social abjection’ of ‘welfare’ (Tyler, 2013). Much has been written about the punitive turn in ‘welfare’ (See Fletcher and Wright, 2017; Wacquant, 2009) and for Zara this left her ‘condemned’ feeling doubly punished.

Evidently, experiences negatively impacted participants practically, emotionally (see 9.4 and 9.5) and on the ‘self’, the latter arguably more damaging and long-lasting as explored in chapters 10 and 11. The impacts are intersecting, can ripple temporally and individuals juggle the impacts to negate certain consequences. For example, Zara left her Graduation early to attend the JCP and was unable to celebrate her 21<sup>st</sup> birthday as she explained “I don’t even know if I can afford to have food tomorrow and I’m not gonna have a cake. I can’t afford a cake”.

Arguably, these events are celebratory rites of passage, yet have been taken away, becoming ‘non-events’ (Scott, 2020), or *tainted* by UC. There are several issues here,

firstly, around conditionality under UC which can be invasive and irrational (Stewart and Wright, 2018; Wright and Dwyer, 2020). Secondly, the poverty caused from the low payment. Thirdly, the impact of isolation which is intensified by life events like a Graduation or Birthday. Fourthly, the transition from University to UC was difficult, as Zara was struggling with how quickly her life had changed and felt failure about being an unemployed graduate (Formby, 2017). Her background as a graduate created friction within the bureaucratic processes of UC, as she did not *fit* the universal design (see 8.4). Fifth, the emotional and wellbeing impact (see 9.2) which is in addition to juggling the impacts of the prior issues. Zara describes how the dehumanizing experiences (Haslam, 2006) of UC affected her mental health:

I think it treats you as lesser than a human and yeah it has, it definitely has like negative impacts on your life like yeah like I say my mental wellbeing out the window, it's gone. Um so yeah I think it condemns you to a life of not very much life at all (Zara).

Sixth, Zara's sense of 'self' is being chipped away at as she is 'condemned' to live a 'life of not very much life at all'. The missed memories surrounding her graduation and 21<sup>st</sup> birthday further this, symbolically stripping her of the 'grown up' status she had worked hard for and instilling a sense of 'failure' stemming from accessing 'welfare'. Lastly, whilst the experiences are damaging in the present their reach extends into Zara's future as the impacts become internalised. Zara's example highlights the intersected nature of the experiences and impacts of living with UC. Moreover, this degrading treatment is deepened by increasing poverty as "material and symbolic suffering reinforce each other" (Wright et al, 2020: 285), undermining people's ability to preserve their situation and 'self', and so can start to internalise this treatment.

The self is 'damaged' and could cause a social death or 'mortification of self' (Goffman, 1961/2007). For Zara, and other participants, there were various instances in which a form of 'self-mortification' occurred such as within the dehumanizing treatment from the JCP, which itself shares characteristics of a 'total institution' as Goffman explains institutions "...are the forcing houses for changing persons" (1961/2007: 12). The increased bureaucracy and surveillance, the distant yet invasive role of staff and arguably the balance and rewards of work are all apparent within the JCP and UC more generally. Moreover, due to the digital nature these characteristics extend into everyday life and so the boundaries are also blurred between 'sleep' and 'work', with 'play' frowned upon or restricted due to poverty.

Social death fits within the ‘civilising offensive’ which seeks to change the personalities of those deemed *uncivilised* (see 5.2). Zara’s experiences and framing of them as part of a ‘self-mortification’ reinforce the ‘violence’ of UC as it seeks individual *transformation*. In doing so, people lose parts of themselves, or they encounter death of future possibilities (Scott, 2018;2019;2020) as they feel ‘condemned’. Importantly, those who experience this treatment continue to be confronted by their ‘condemned’ fate as “...the dead are sorted but not segregated, and continue to walk among the living” (Goffman, 1952/1997:463) as a reminder to all others.

The bureaucracy, tasked with facilitating behavioural change in a ‘problem’ population, creates a rational environment (Bauman, 1989; Ritzer, 2002) where mechanical dehumanization (Haslam, 2006) manifests. The paradoxes create (un)intended and damaging consequences in which people are pushed further from the labour market, society and in some cases themselves (see chapter 11). Similarly, Wright and Dwyer (2020) explain how ‘mismatches’ in UC design create problems for those in-work and claiming UC which are ‘socially damaging’.

Participants were aware of UC’s intentions to ‘make work pay’ often experienced as being ‘forced’ back to work:

...it’s not ‘we are going to increase wages’, there is no more incentive to go into better paid jobs, it’s ‘we’re going to make you so badly off that you will accept the shit paid jobs that are out there’. So making work pay is making you pay for not being in work basically (Bill)

...I think it’s so extreme you push people too far they are either criminalising themselves or committing suicide or starving to death, being ill yeah. It’s just like I can’t survive, I am really horrified that it does feel a bit like genocide to me. It does feel like, that’s not the right word is it, genocide? But I feel like ‘Well if it does kill a few off and they’re all dead, who gives a shit anyway!?’... (Isabel)

UC pushes people into situations which are damaging physically, emotionally, mentally, ontologically and on ‘employability’. Individuals spoke of ‘surviving’ with UC but there comes a point where, as Isabel said, ‘I can’t survive’. Bill makes clear links to his ‘suffering’ (Frost and Hoggett, 2008) and the aims of UC to ‘make work pay’.

The violence of this experience is obvious when Isabel likens the experience to ‘genocide’ targeted towards those who access ‘welfare’, showing UC to be a type of ‘social harm’ (Wright et al, 2020) or even ‘social murder’ (Grover, 2019). This ‘violence’ gradually undermines people and damages wellbeing, mental health, and responses such as stealing or begging further damage the ‘self’ and experiences of ‘social death’ (see chapter 11;

Goffman, 1961/2007; Králová, 2015). The examples are extreme and often the consequences are smaller and less visible such as a feeling, not being able to afford something or the ‘threat’ of this, but these experiences and impacts combine, and each have the potential to signify a small part of this degradation. Hence, it is important to consider death as not simply physical as it can also occur to the ‘self’ (Goffman, 1961/2007; Králová, 2015) as this thesis shows.

Isabel expresses how no one cares about what is happening, a sense these individuals are to be blamed for the current situation and deserving of this treatment with such lives deemed as “...human weeds. Like all other weeds, they must be segregated, contained, prevented from spreading, removed and kept outside the society boundaries; if all these means prove insufficient, they must be killed” (Bauman, 1989: 92).

Isabel relates ‘genocide’ with living with UC, offering an interesting link to state violence or ‘barbarism’ in relation to the broad ‘civilising process’ and more targeted ‘civilising offensive’ (Elias, 1994; Van Krieken, 1999; Powell, 2013; 2007; Clement, 2015). A key feature of these is the monopolisation of force by the state which becomes hidden from ‘civilised’ society as ‘barbarism’ becomes distant from ‘us’ but is required to deal with the ‘threat’ the *uncivilised* pose (Van Krieken, 1999). The use of quiet forms of ‘violence’ (Cooper and Whyte, 2017; Wright et al, 2020) by the state shows how the ‘civilising offensive’ is being enforced by the Government to forcibly facilitate behavioural change or the alternative for individuals is ‘criminalising themselves or committing suicide or starving to death’. Such actions would be perceived as individual. The slippery nature of the state, in a society characterised by neoliberal responsibility (Wacquant, 2010) and of ‘national abjects’ (Tyler, 2013), is one in which ‘genocide’ can be enacted in broad daylight in a government office (Cooper and Whyte, 2017; Bauman, 1989).

The consequences Isabel described might be considered as ‘decivilizing’ contrary to the goals of the targeted ‘civilising offensive’ (Van Krieken, 1999; Powell 2013; 2007). The ‘decivilizing’ consequences evidenced in this thesis, which push people further from the neoliberal goal of work and off ‘welfare’, increase the hold and society's belief and support of the ‘civilising offensive’. Thus, the individuals need further state intervention to *mould* them and *correct* their problematic behaviours. The ‘decivilizing’ behaviours provide examples of where behavioural change is needed, legitimizing their treatment as people become the stereotypes and ‘abjects’ (Tyler, 2013) society had always believed them to be. In this sense, it is self-sustaining and ‘fails forward’ (Theodore and Peck, 2012). Additionally, the ‘decivilizing’ consequences may be seen by others as examples

of what *could* happen and therefore keep them in line as Goffman (1952/1997:463) noted the ‘dead’ are amongst us.

This section has discussed how those living with UC experience dehumanization (Haslam, 2006; Ritzer, 2002) which chips away at people, erodes their ability to ‘get-by’ and can push individuals further from the labour market, society and their ‘self’. Theoretically, we are attempting to see the realities of a ‘civilising offensive’ from those experiencing it.

### 8.3 The impact of navigating UC

The segment will unpick the features of UC, particularly how participants navigate UC and the impacts of this. Responsibilisation (see 3.6) and trust appear in the need for those living with UC to regularly prove statuses, entitlements, behaviours, and motivations. In this sense, they carry the ‘burden’ of proof as individuals are labelled ‘untruthful’ and ‘undeserving’ until proved otherwise:

It feels a bit like lots of hoops and it just kind of feels like well it’s bad enough that I am here in the first place (Alice).

This experience can be wearing (see 9.5) and as Alice points out, individuals already feel negative about the situation due to its demonised position (Patrick, 2017) with ‘hoops’ a way to scrutinise individuals and their deservingness to social assistance. When you start a claim, you must prove your identity and eligibility – described as a ‘conveyor belt’ due to the multiple meetings. Participants had to prove things multiple times and show numerous documents if they did not fit the uniform procedure. Such experiences align with Goffman’s (1961/2007) ‘admission procedures’ such as ‘trimming’, which reduces individuals to fit ‘administrative machinery’, and ‘contaminative exposure’, a forced harmful disclosure, all part of the processes of self-mortification. The online application, numerous stages of verification and initial WC meeting all ‘trim’ individuals living with UC who often experience ‘contaminative exposure’ due to the shame and stigma surrounding ‘welfare’. Such acts of ‘contaminate exposure’ may be more damaging within the open plan offices of the JCP. These experiences negatively impacted participants emotionally and on the ‘self’.

The paperwork, a visible form of bureaucracy (Graeber, 2012), and proof can be off-putting:

...I know what a pain in the fucking arse it is to complete all these forms and all the hoops you have to jump through, and I just couldn’t face it (Natalie)

Natalie delayed UC partly because of the effort she saw in applying. Exceptionally, she had savings and accessed UC ten months later, a month before her new self-employment started. Employed, Natalie automatically avoided many hoops the unemployed jump through and consequently her journey was eased.

After meeting the required level of proof, you meet your WC to *agree* the ‘claimant commitment’ which you must achieve and importantly prove. Individuals described a lack of explanation and individual tailoring of the ‘claimant commitment’, supporting previous research (Dwyer, 2018, 2020; Johnsen and Blenkinsopp, 2018). Most participants felt a limited ability to negotiate echoing Dwyer (2020); even those who described their commitment as ‘reasonable’ were aware that their acceptance was never in question.

Alice talked about the connected effort and emotional impacts of navigating UC:

...it’s a job in itself to cultivate and to look after your benefit claim. It’s, it can be quite stressful as well cos you know you are so heavily reliant on it unlike if you are working, this is your job and your actions make you get your money, you can control that. This is, you’re relying on a handout, praying that it doesn’t go wrong.

Alice’s comparison to paid work highlights that despite responsabilisation, ultimately even when meeting the conditionality requirements, individuals feel a sense of fragility ‘praying that it doesn’t go wrong’. The emotional impacts of this process make it harder for people to jump through the ‘hoops’ of UC.

The personal management of bureaucracy is in addition to the navigation of the wider rigid bureaucratic structure. The responsibility, costs and labour are placed solely on the individual accessing UC as well as any blame for potential failings in management, obscuring other factors. Yet, as previously noted, responsabilisation is undermined by the invasive and (ir)rational nature of UC. This contradiction in treatment and conception of those who live with UC is seen in the example of entering the JCP. Individuals are *presented* as responsible and independent within the boundaries set by UC outside the JCP but are irresponsible and dependent on entering the JCP where their body is monitored and managed (Foucault, 1975/2020). Alice asked, “What led to this kind of 1984 craziness?”.

Additionally, participants faced scrutiny over their past, current and future behaviours. This treatment is an example of how individuals living with UC are worn down, not trusted or respected as they are perceived as lesser for accessing ‘welfare’ (Bauman,

2005). Individuals spoke of the unease in the JCP with descriptions of intense security and feelings of being watched likening it to ‘prison’, with movements so closely monitored people are escorted to the toilet both animalistically and mechanically dehumanizing (Haslam, 2006):

Yeah so you go in and you speak to the security guard who directs you to another security guard and they walk you to where you need to sit. Like they can’t trust you to walk by yourself (Laura)

The treatment and symbolic connotations of entering the JCP have real consequences which are reinforced by the high level of security. The experiences offer an insight into how on entering the JCP, individuals are stripped of responsabilisation and their independence, as they are no longer seen as capable to *govern* themselves. In replacement, there is a panopticon of sorts (Foucault, 1975/2020; Wacquant, 2009) which is mirrored digitally (Fletcher and Wright, 2017; Wright et al, 2020), to physically manage the *irresponsible* individual’s *dependent* on ‘welfare’, who are perceived as *uncivilised* in this neoliberal society and in need of behavioural change. The experiences of the JCP are a pressure point in this civilising offensive as an increasingly ‘dangerous’ place (Wright et al, 2020) with the monopolisation of force (Elias, 1994) apparent in the (over)use of security. The apparent need of this is to manage the uncivilised who have yet to internalise the external restraints of neoliberal society and therefore a show of force is required.

In describing how people are not trusted to walk alone in the JCP Laura highlights the *irresponsible* perception of ‘claimants’ subject to paternalistic demeaning treatment. This untrusted status is also apparent in the bureaucratic practices scrutinising individuals from the start. Laura later explained how security is generally associated with situations where people might ‘kick off’, questioning why this was needed in a place where people seek support. Alice voiced similar concerns linking the security to the status of ‘non-human’ (Goffman, 1997):

...it kind of further instils this belief that you’re going in there and you’re less than a person because they need so much security and they need so much cos you are on benefits and you are just a bit scummy and like you are not worthy of like normal people (Alice)

Alice’s statement links the dehumanization (Haslam, 2006) and physical regulation (Foucault, 1975/2020) from her ‘non-human’ status (Goffman, 1997) to all experiences which reinforce her ‘unworthiness’, illustrating the power of stigma (Tyler, 2020). The ‘quiet’ and seemingly polite nature of this process was discussed by Bill when speaking about the JCP, the security and his WC. From Bill’s experience, the customer service is

not 'real' and is only in place for the benefit of staff which can be seen in actions (regulated and ignored) rather than words (fake and patronising). As Cooper and Whyte remind us "The violence of austerity is delivered by smartly dressed people sitting behind desks" (2017: 31). Here, again, the illusory nature of the respect and freedom given to those claiming UC is visibly juxtaposed with the regulation experienced. This experience is reflective of Wacquant's (2009; 2010) Centaur state with a "...comely and caring visage toward the middle and upper classes and a fearsome and frowning mug towards the lower class" (2010: 217).

Zara had multiple weekly meetings at JCP which she believed was due to her age (20), and the experience had been overwhelming. She described how in a training session the WCs would criticize the clothes people attending were wearing, an act of public shaming.

Yeah, they [WCs] were like 'well you know if you don't enjoy it you should find a job quicker'... that was in the job workshop ... (Zara)

Zara believes UC makes life difficult for people to force them back to work, the fact this was said to her by a WC highlights how ingrained this is, supporting findings from Redman and Fletcher (2021), with Zara's comments illustrating that this 'violent' culture persists:

...well considering they pretty much said it, that's [laughter] it's a bit meta of them. Um yeah I think it is just designed to force you into taking any job, so you don't have to do it...

The comments by Zara surrounding the treatment she experienced from the WC are reflective of a total institution where "staff tend to feel superior and righteous; inmates tend, in some way at least, to feel inferior, weak, blameworthy and guilty" (Goffman, 1961/2017: 2007:7). Zara, and all the participants, was often made to feel this way.

The invasiveness of UC left Zara feeling unable to make plans leaving her increasingly isolated, illustrating how the physical (see 9.3) and emotional impacts (see 9.4 and 9.5) interact and spread across daily life, in both the present and future. The impacts are not necessarily static as they ripple across lives and endure far beyond the 'claimant journey'.

Navigating UC is further hindered by a lack of or incorrect advice with all participants referencing at least one example, consequently increasing confusion and the efforts required to manage UC. Additionally, it can undermine the trust in UC and WCs, or trust continues and the individuals believe the (mis)information which creates unpredictable consequences. This has serious impacts as the examples will show.

Firstly, Tina was wrongly advised at the JCP about her eligibility to claim UC whilst working part-time. Subsequently, she lived on the 15 hours per week income (around £100) for 10 months as Tina explains “I struggled all that time because I was told I couldn’t get UC so I believed them”. During this time, Tina got into debt, housing arrears and relied on friends and family to help with food. She only started to rightfully claim UC when a third party helped Tina find the correct information and apply online.

Secondly, employed people living with UC faced similar issues regarding a lack of or inaccurate information. John, Ben and Laura received no information about the impact of paid earnings on their UC payment. For them temporary work was not a positive experience and did not lead to full-time work as UC often promotes as a ‘steppingstone’<sup>16</sup> a notion critiqued by Shildrick et al (2012: 191) and Ray et al (2010). Ryan, whilst self-employed, was given no information and misadvised which left him with no income for the first few months as he could not meet the MIF.

Lastly, Bill despite asking about ‘sickness benefit’ and handing in ‘fit notes’ was not told about the existence of this within UC or his potential eligibility, a similar experience was voiced by three others. When Bill finally got a WCA (which he missed due to breaking his ankle), he was misadvised by his WC he could not have another unless he developed a new medical condition. As Bill’s condition was degenerative, this seemed odd to him but as the advice came from the WC he believed it. Months later, Bill visited the Citizen’s Advice who ‘pushed’ to organise another WCA:

...this is the problem with UC with having a component. This is a component of UC yeah; it’s just not made clear that that even exists you know for starters. It’s certainly not made clear how much it is, what the means are to claim, what the criteria are, none of that...

The experience damaged Bill’s WC relationship leaving him angry and frustrated at what had happened. After his WCA, Bill was found ‘unfit’ for work (see 12.3) however he entered an ‘assessment period’ which delayed his increased payment. The difficulties navigating UC, and associated emotional and practical impacts, continued:

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<sup>16</sup> The idea temporary work is a ‘steppingstone’ to full-time or a permanent position has been widely promoted by UC (<https://www.understandinguniversalcredit.gov.uk/opening-up-work/>) yet there is little evidence this is the case (Shildrick et al, 2012).

Stuck on hold, trying to find out more about this payment. Bloody Vivaldi, 4 seasons, its always Spring at the DWP. Why don't they change their hold music?

OK, apparently I'm getting the first payment on my next pay day ie 20<sup>th</sup> Sept. I've been told so many different things though, I won't believe it til I see it in my bank account.

I'm not very well today, upset stomach and sweaty and tired. Could be a bug, could be my diverticulitis, I think it may be the diverticulitis, I just hope its not active again, crapping myself without warning is fairly demoralising at the best of times.

So I've now been told 4 different answers to my queries about this payment, does anyone at DWP actually know what they are talking about? How

is that possible. This last woman seemed to know what she was talking about, but then so did some of the others.

4 advisors, 4 explanations. I'm tempted to phone up again and see if I get a 5<sup>th</sup> different version.

I won't, because I feel like Luke-warm puke.

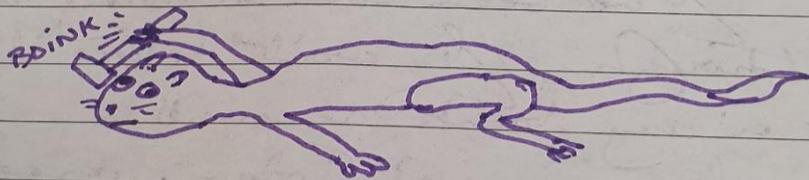


Figure 9 Bill's diary page 32-33

Over a month later the situation persisted as Bill struggled to get a clear answer speaking to six different advisors with the ‘most honest’ answer being “...it doesn’t mean anything...”. Bill was increasingly frustrated at this ‘assessment period’ which delayed his payment for five months and the misadvice worsened this experience. It also created new, unnecessary challenges as Bill believed he would receive a higher UC payment he did not ask for a historical debt to be reduced: “So, because didn’t get the payment in and cos I let that fine roll, err I ended up with £190 you know for the month” (see 12.3 for more details).

The lack of clear and correct advice across UC channels were confounding as Bill's experiences show and this time was challenging emotionally. Over the three months Bill was involved in the research he had been on a rollercoaster, and this was experienced by someone deemed by UC as ‘unfit for work’ yet was expected to singularly navigate this. Bill's experience offers insight into how the bureaucracy of UC is experienced and he was left with no trust in the system or faith that next year when he was reassessed it would be any different.

From the examples it is clear the level of misinformation, whether by mistake or intention, is widespread. Moreover, it leaves a bad taste, damages relationships between those living with UC and the WC and increases the emotional toll of UC in addition to the financial strain the misinformation generally creates. Karl describes how he felt after receiving the wrong advice by JCP staff at the foodbank:

Yeah cos it gives you a little bit of hope because you are not sure what to believe and then your hopes get up and you think now then and you sort of like think I might be a bit better off! And then to be kicked in the nuts again and that is what is has always been, kicked in the nuts all the time (Karl).

In this situation, trust and hope become dangerous and for Karl, like many others, undermines attempts to manage their UC ‘journey’. This process of apparent ‘simplicity’ (Summers and Young, 2020) is isolating and can be exhausting physically, financially and emotionally.

The WC is an important factor in the UC journey (Andersen, 2019) which Heather discusses:

My workcoach is really nice, which makes such a difference! I have had a really really nasty coach I and my friend nicknamed "Battle Axe". She really was a bitch. She had my friend in tears on numerous occasions: why? That is not the way to get the best from

people! A good, honest, trustworthy relationship between yourself & your work coach, with support & understanding, makes so much difference. It is not my fault I am not working & I do make a lot of effort to get a job I want to do & where my skills lie. Anyway, a pleasant & successful meeting. My work coach is happy with my efforts and I have 2 weeks more of freedom to enjoy my life! W.O.T.D: FREEDOM

Figure 10 Heather's diary page 19-20

Heather juxtaposes her 'nice' WC with the previous 'battle axe' outlining a 'good, honest and trustworthy relationship...with support and understanding' as the ideal. Interestingly, Heather writes about freedom, which contrasts the surveillance, invasion and regulation stemming from UC. The relishing of her freedom was perhaps a way to resist this and protect her identity by decompartmentalising these experiences. Importantly, key to this freedom was keeping her WC 'on side'. All participants were aware of the importance

in keeping your WC ‘on side’ and not ‘rock the boat’. People described the effort in managing this relationship and showing the WC they were a ‘good claimant’ (Whelan, 2020).

Individuals spoke of feeling the WC was working within a system which limited their actions. In this sense, it was important to think and act positively about this relationship and brush off poor treatment. The ‘managers’ related to local level management within the JCP or ‘case managers’ who are largely invisible but their shadowy presence ubiquitous. Negative situations were blamed on ‘management’ either directly or indirectly, thus providing the WC with a pass. Similarly, UC and the Government were regularly blamed for the damaging experiences. People were able to voice their anger at a distant figure whilst still maintaining the ability to engage with UC at the local level with the required personable and enthusiastic approach, mitigating their anger which is perceived as unacceptable (Peterie et al, 2019a).

Thus, as Redman and Fletcher (2021) also found, this bureaucratic separation provides all involved in the *machine* with distance, allowing workers to continue their roles distanced from the harm or immunized against empathy or compassion (Bauman, 1989; Ritzer, 2002) thereby sustaining UC and allowing it to continue despite, or because of, the dehumanizing results. Finally, for those who live with UC the bureaucratic distance provides the potential to protect, to some extent, the direct relationship between themselves and the WC as it provides a shadowy figure to blame for any mistreatment. The opaqueness of this bureaucracy, which removes ‘authentic human’ connections (Ritzer, 2013: 136), disconnects all individuals within the process, even from themselves and their morality (See Bauman, 1989:101). Therefore, those who live with UC become a depersonalised ‘case’ to be *corrected*.

#### 8.4 The impact of uniformity

All participants were deemed fit for work, until those who were not proved otherwise. The summary below shows the seven individuals who experienced this in varying levels and the responses to UC’s ‘burden’ of proof. Notably, the process is lengthy, those who had a WCA spent at least six months in the wrong conditionality group (likewise for the two who had their conditionality requirements reduced without a WCA). Crucially, this process is driven by those claiming UC who must navigate the bureaucratic hurdles.

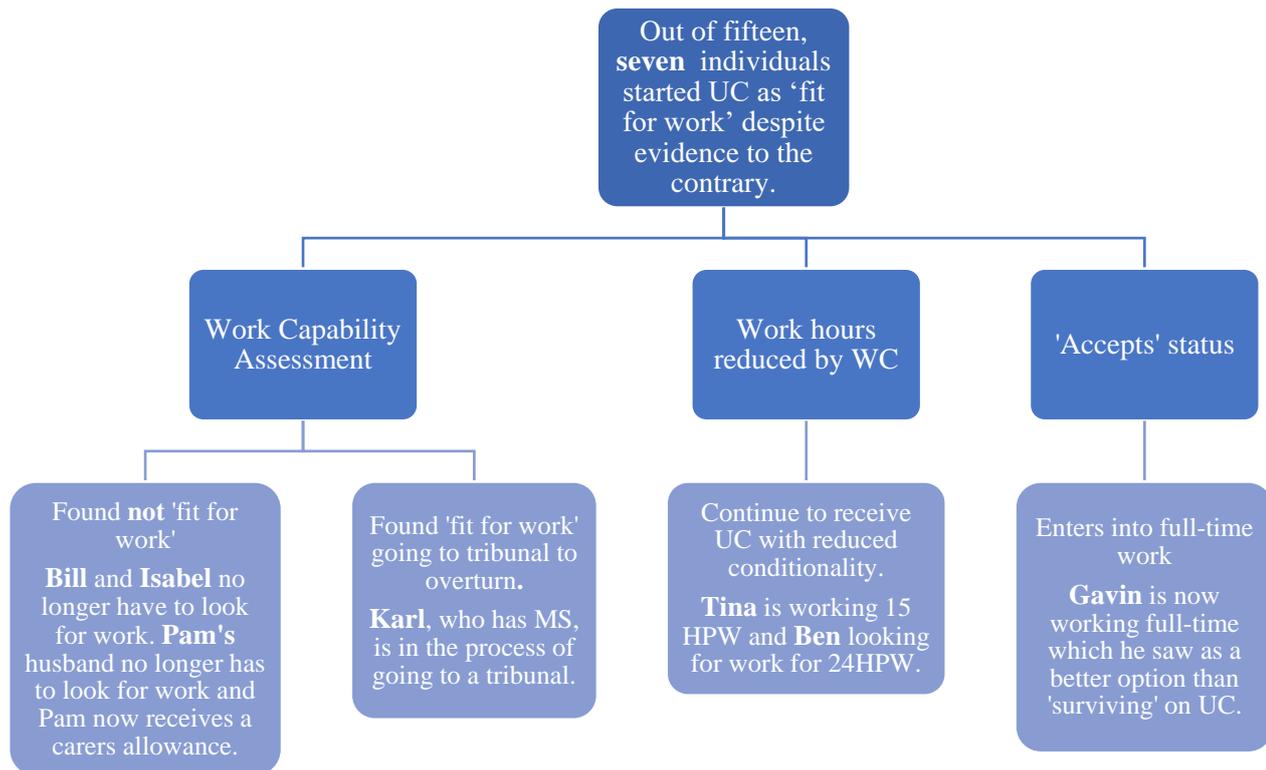


Figure 11 UC's 'burden' of proof

This experience is draining and faced by those in poor health. For those going through the WCA or tribunal, they must 'get-by' on the standard allowance<sup>17</sup> during this time which for Karl, Bill, Isabel and Pam resulted in destitution illuminating why individuals like Gavin decide to re-enter work.

It's not trying to get people back to work, it's forcing people to go back to work and the problem is it's the people that can't, genuinely can't, go back to work that are paying for it (Gavin)

Gavin describes how UC 'forces' people back to work and this approach disproportionately impacts those who 'genuinely can't' re-enter work. Gavin gave examples of people with caring commitments or in poor health, both reflecting his own experiences. The phrase 'genuinely can't' connects to the underlying and often invisible deservingness of those who receive UC, which is scrutinised in the requirement of proof. For some, like Gavin, an alternative is the better option.

Individuals reported handing in 'fit' notes from the start but were still required to look for work and uninformed of the 'sickness' component. Likewise, those who 'naturally migrate' to UC, also enter this process, illustrating the starting position of the 'claimant'

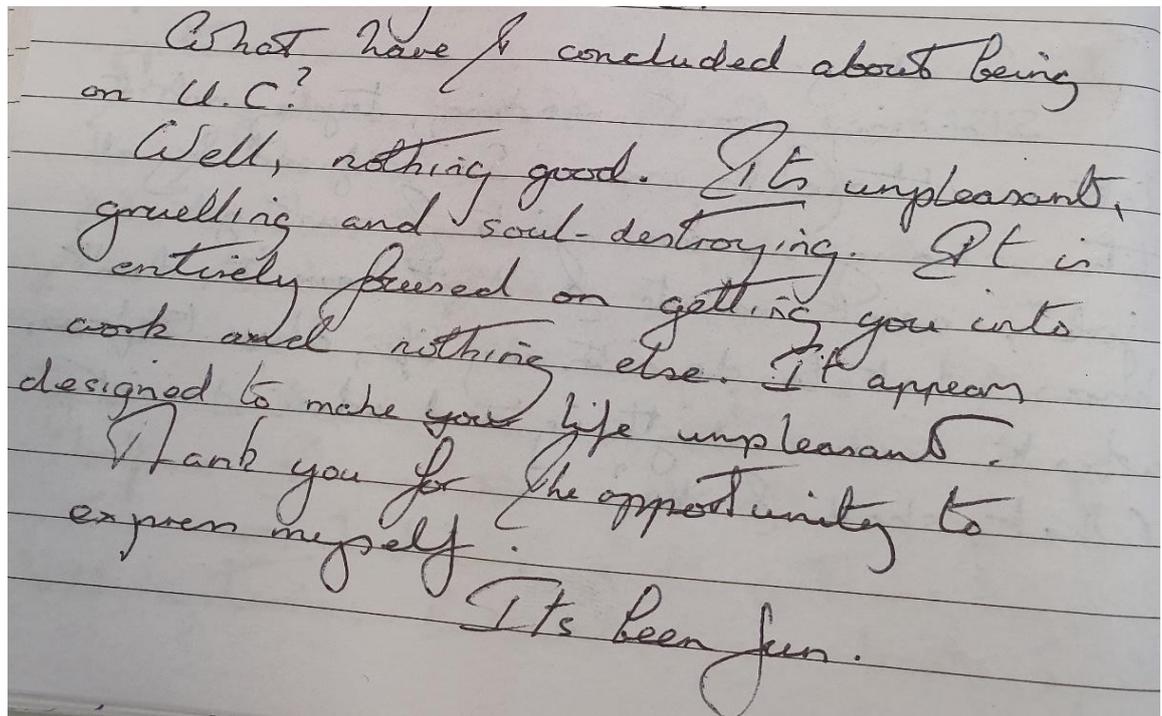
<sup>17</sup> For information on UC Allowances: <https://www.gov.uk/universal-credit/what-youll-get>

as untrustworthy and undeserving, even if they already have a 'relationship' with the JCP. This treatment seems at odds with rationality and efficiency (Ritzer, 2002), as it creates extra labour, but this is burdened mostly by those living with UC (Summers and Young, 2020). The irrationalities are obvious to those involved and harmful to those experiencing them:

But then when I rung them: 'oh we're never gonna ask you to go back to work' well why aren't I in the support group? 'Oh I'm not sure'. It doesn't make any sense. Why put me in a work-related group when you are never gonna ask me to go back to work? (Karl)

This experience caused pressures physically, emotionally and practically for Karl who, as the diagram shows, was taking the decision to a tribunal. His situation highlights the irrationality (Ritzer, 2002) within UC design and delivery. This process both required and reduced Karl's resources which made his journey with UC more difficult due to the confusing and misguided intentions.

Bill wrote about his navigation of UC, the efforts and impacts incurred and importantly how it felt:



What have I concluded about being on U.C.?

Well, nothing good. It's unpleasant, gruelling and soul-destroying. It is entirely focused on getting you into work and nothing else. It appears designed to make your life unpleasant.

Thank you for the opportunity to express myself.

It's been fun.

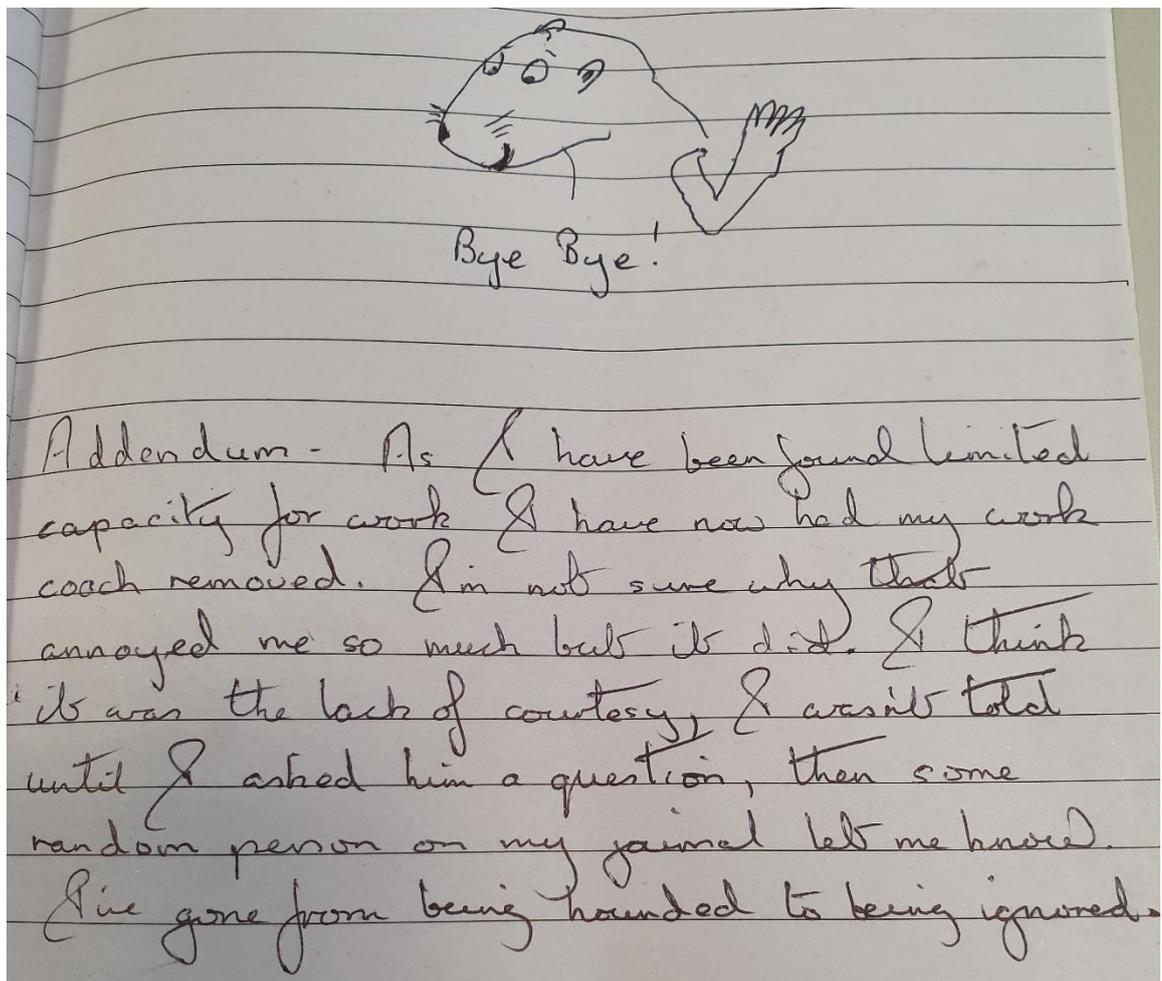


Figure 12 Bill's Diary pages 36 - 37

Bill's journey with UC was difficult and after transitioning to the limited capacity to work group, he described how he was now 'ignored' and his WC removed without explanation, the UC scrutiny has moved to silence. Again, this journey is focused on *moulding* towards and measuring against employment, with the result 'soul destroying'. Once this measurement is removed, the requirement for *correction* is gone.

This uniformity is unlike the legacy system with different forms of social security which enabled clear signposting and *appropriate* conditionality for those entering depending on the route they took<sup>18</sup>. UC may be simpler for those delivering it, although this is questionable (see 2.4), however it is certainly more complicated and costly for those living with UC as the findings so far show.

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<sup>18</sup> This is not to say the legacy system was without problems, according to Timmins (2016) it was 'incomprehensible', did not encourage work, difficult and costly to administer and 'almost actively encouraged fraud' (2016: 7).

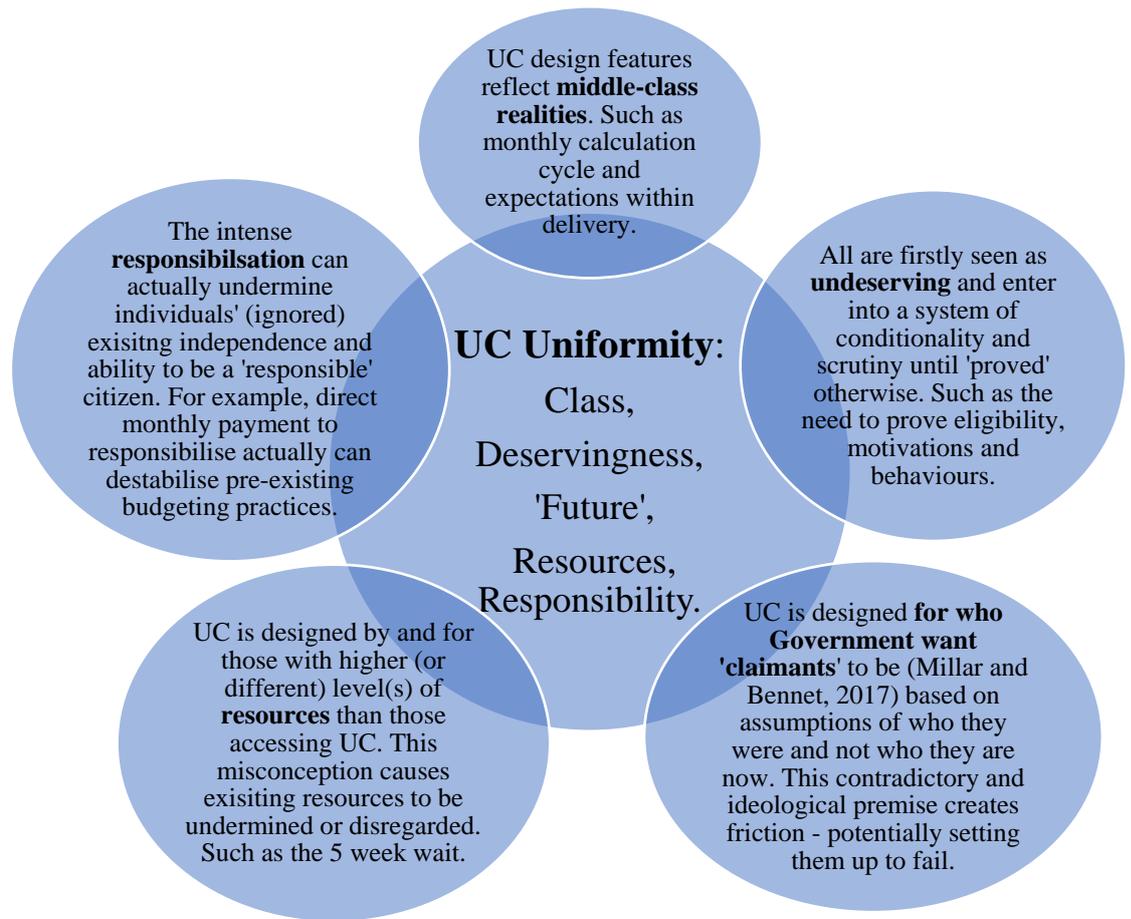


Figure 13 Uniformity of UC

The impact of uniformity has the potential to create and cement the very vulnerabilities and *irresponsibility* UC aims to change. For example, Gavin who despite mental health issues, a drug addiction and 'fit note' from his doctor, was deemed fit for work. For him, the choice was 'survival' with UC or re-entering employment:

I'd rather go to work and die at work because of my ill health than go back to trying to survive on what they'd offer me cos they still wanna take that three lots of money back (Gavin)

Yeah UC has destroyed my life. I've got three daughters I've had to move away from because I can't live there and if I'd stayed living there I'd be forced to live on £200 a month because I wouldn't be able to get work and I'd stay in a depressive pit, I'd stay on drugs and I'd stay being suicidal in which case I'd never be able to see my kids anyway. (Gavin)

Gavin was placed in difficulties when already struggling, having to relocate for work which reduced his ability to play an active parental role. For Gavin, UC had undermined

his financial independence, housing, travel, reduced his employability and limited his choices; with the experiences and options left emotionally damaging.

On arriving in [town], he was given a third repayable advance within six months. Gavin estimated his debt over the last year was £8000; he was most concerned about the council tax arrears which he could be imprisoned for and frustrated as this would not happen with ESA<sup>19</sup>:

...I've got legitimate concerns of going to prison and I'm not a bad person. Just had a rough year and that sucks, that's genuinely UC. ESA it would never happen... (Gavin).

The changes add a new layer of bureaucracy, further responsabilise individuals, reduce their income and create fear as Gavin illustrates. Adopting Millar and Bennet's (2017) assertion that UC was designed in a 'virtual reality', it seems to be designed for the minority not the majority.

Many of the aspects of UC policy were created to match the 'world of work' (Millar and Bennet, 2017), but what sort of work? Being paid monthly does not necessarily match the experiences of those living with UC. For example, 17 percent of those on the lowest incomes and 28.9 percent of temporary workers are paid weekly (Economic Affairs Committee, 2020). Issues arose for Alice when she was paid twice within her monthly calculation cycle. Alice visited the JCP but was ineligible for a crisis loan, and was subsequently supported by family:

It's bad enough asking for help from your like family but like having to go to somewhere with a complete stranger who doesn't know you, doesn't know your situation and go I can't feed my daughter please can I have some food? Like it is really humiliating, really dehumanizing (Alice).

Alice's dehumanizing experience (Haslam, 2006) felt more shameful due to her parental role as any *failing*, real or perceived, is damaging, but more so when it involves 'contaminative exposure' (Goffman, 1961/2007). Here, the impacts of the design and delivery of UC were confounding with design issues (payment calculations) intensified by delivery (ineligibility for crisis loan). In the discussion throughout this chapter there has been little room for humanity or flexibility within the experiences of people living with UC, which is symptomatic of a dense bureaucratic structure:

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<sup>19</sup> Since 2013, the council tax reduction replaced council tax benefit, is now run by local authorities and receives less funding (<https://www.entitledto.co.uk/council-tax-support/>) creating concern from individuals, housing associations (Williams, Clarke and Whitehead, 2013) and the Welsh Government (Charlesworth, Tims and Sanderson, 2020).

It was just ridiculous, it was bureaucracy. It's just these are the rules, there is no grey area. There is no room for human error, there is just these are the rules black and white (Alice)

This opaqueness characterises many experiences within UC, described as confusing, complex and destabilising (see 9.4). The bureaucracy creates little room for manoeuvre to overcome the opaqueness making navigation harder. Alice discusses the lack of a 'grey area' and others made similar comments surrounding the need for more flexibility. A bureaucracy focused on rationality and efficiency would oppose a 'grey area' as it requires human intervention and fluidity, things which are contrary to the bureaucratic principles (Bauman, 1989; Ritzer, 2002) underpinning UC.

## 8.5 Conclusion

This chapter has provided empirical evidence into the experiences of UC and how these impact on emotions and the 'self', addressing the first research question. It has presented insights into how living with UC is dehumanizing and based upon an institutionally 'violent' (Cooper and Whyte, 2017) (ir)rational bureaucracy (Bauman, 1989; Ritzer, 2002). It offers an empirical contribution to knowledge in exploring the dehumanizing experiences and impacts of living with UC and how this is negotiated. The aim of UC to 'make work pay' is enacted by conditionality, poverty and scrutiny based upon misguided ideological foundations (Wiggan, 2012). The experiences and impacts of dehumanization caused damage on emotions, wellbeing (physical and mental) and the 'self'. In some instances, experiences led to a 'social death' (Goffman, 1961/2007) in which identities are permanently damaged and futures lost (Scott, 2018; 2019; 2020).

The navigation of UC, a process in which personal bureaucracies are managed within a wider rigid bureaucratic framework, had negative impacts on emotions and the 'self'. The 'burden' of proof and associated scrutiny led participants to feel like they were being 'chipped away at'. The navigation of UC is challenged by the levels of mis-advice which again is emotionally demanding and can create a false sense of hope. All participants spoke of the difficulties navigating UC, the 'soul-destroying' impacts made engaging with UC more difficult as they were being undermined by the system itself.

The impact of uniformity, which categorizes everyone as 'fit for work' until proved otherwise, had negative impacts for participants. The uniformity within UC did not match the realities of those living with it and consequently negotiating the uniformity was challenging practically and emotionally. The misguided uniformity undermined

participants who often were entering UC at a time of crisis and resulted in a choice between 'surviving' with UC or re-entering work at a risk to their health.

This chapter has investigated the dehumanizing experiences of living with UC as individuals are continually undermined during their attempts to navigate UC which is based upon an ideologically notion of uniformity. Importantly, the negative impacts on emotions, wellbeing and the 'self' make it harder to successfully engage with UC.

## 9. Universal Credit: Wellbeing and emotions

### 9.1 Introduction

This chapter explores *how it feels to live with UC* and the impacts on wellbeing, addressing the first research question (see 1.2). These impacts made it harder for all participants (in and out of work) to engage with UC and manage daily life. The chapter offers a contribution to knowledge as little is known about the impacts of UC on wellbeing and emotions. First, the impact on mental health is examined which is followed by the related issue of physical health. Both provide important insights into the detrimental impact of UC on mental and physical wellbeing. Next, findings concerning the emotional impacts of destabilisation and feeling ‘worn down’ are explored, and lastly feelings of shame.

### 9.2 Mental health and wellbeing impact

It is important to note this research was undertaken from a sociological perspective and not a medical or psychological one. Therefore, the instances described were led by individual disclosures and were not probed deeply as this would have been inappropriate. However, if it arose, individuals were given the space to talk as so often this was lacking in other encounters. The findings add to the currently limited research on the impact of UC on mental health (Cheetham, Moffatt and Addison et al, 2019; Wickham et al, 2020; Dwyer et al, 2020) and are important to consider in relation to the current and potential long-term effects of UC and broader discussions around how individuals should be supported. Further, it offers clear examples of the depth of impacts, and how UC is destabilising and can increase ‘vulnerability’.

Thirteen participants discussed how since starting UC their mental health had worsened, with references to depression and anxiety most common. Over half spoke about impacts on pre-existing mental health issues. This supports longitudinal quantitative research (Wickham et al, 2020) investigating the impacts of the introduction of UC on mental health.

...some of my bills don't get paid and I struggle. I worry as I say I've got mental health problems, ur I've got so much shit going on in there (Karl)

...especially those first two months were really horrible and like I say with my bi-polar I just felt pretty terrible for a while. The start was really difficult. Um and I you know that just left me with a very bitter taste about the whole thing um, not that obviously they're responsible for my mental health but they didn't help (Ryan)

For those with prior mental health issues, living with UC often exacerbated the illness as

Ryan and Karl describe. Notably, the uniformity within UC design means for those who are unable to work due to their mental health this is particularly challenging. Even those able to work with pre-existing mental health issues experienced difficulties with little or no consideration given to their health.

All, apart from two in-work individuals, described how UC had worsened their mental health due to stress, uncertainty, and increasing poverty. Zara explained her mental health had gone ‘out the window’ and she was feeling increasingly depressed and anxious from living with UC, an experience all too common in this research. To improve mental health, people suggested more support as this was lacking: “There should be more emotional support, there should be emotional support offered alongside it because you get, you can get depressed so easily” (Zara). One exception was Alice whose WC took an interest in her wellbeing and on one occasion when she was feeling particularly stressed included the mindful activity of improving her bedtime routine within her ‘claimant commitment’.

Something important to touch upon, and which caught me off guard, were the times people spoke about suicide and UC. This was in four ways, about oneself, about others, in the media and in a humorous or light-hearted way; although the underpinning intent and desperation not so.

One-way ticket to bloody Beachy Head would be the only thing you know, I wouldn’t do it, but you think god, blimey you know what more, what more can you lump on me! (Heather)

Heather is talking about the impact of the five-week wait and paying her rent, which left her worried about eviction (See 7.3). Although she quickly clarifies she would not do it, this gallows humour highlights her desperation.

Seven individuals referenced suicide in some form including one who directly related UC to a suicide attempt. Whilst a complex and difficult issue, it is important to discuss this as it shows the severity of impacts and experiences for some living with UC. The empirical findings presented support a qualitative case-study in the Northeast of England (Cheetham, Moffatt and Addison et al, 2019) which found UC was damaging to vulnerable people’s mental health.

Those who spoke on this issue provided a detailed understanding of how their experiences of UC impacted on their mental health and illustrating the ‘violent’ nature of UC and its consequences:

I thought this was [UC payment], to punish people and to make our life

absolutely impossible. I'm not paying all my bills, I'm not paying everything, I'm not eating well. It doesn't work but instead of making you feel like you ought to get a job cos it would be better, its, I am too ill now to work [chuckle]...I'm more likely to commit suicide than I am get a job ... [UC] didn't do anything but destroy people. Destroy their well, their mental wellbeing and their lives and I don't, I honestly don't know how people are coping because I know I'm not. (Isabel)

Isabel describes the negative impacts UC had on her mental health and ability to cope. A lone parent with a teenage son, she struggles to 'get-by' with UC which is reduced due to the advance payment and the 'bedroom tax'. For Isabel, this experience has moved her further from employment and into destitution.

The quote also highlights the importance of voluntary work and the benefits it can bring (Crisp, 2010), particularly for Isabel in terms of self-worth and a sense of community. The intensity of the experience is captured in the language Isabel uses with words such as 'punish' and 'destroy', both describing a system in place to support people. However, it is a system which challenged participants and led them to question what was once normal and acknowledge destitution and difference as the new.

...they [the Government] have saved a fortune and they will keep saving a fortune and there will be a lot of people out there who will be committing suicide and they will save even more. That is really cynical but that is the truth and that is what I think of UC. It's desperate (Gavin)

Suspicion of the Government was raised regularly during interviews, stemming from experiences of UC and wider inequalities. A connection is made here between austerity and people's lives echoing the earlier statement from Isabel, and Cooper and Whyte (2017). Notably, UC cost saving measures used by the Government have been criticised and the benefits remain unclear (NAO, 2018). Increasingly clear from participants' experiences are the connected impacts financially, emotionally and for health; how poverty worsens mental health and leaves people increasingly desperate:

Isabel: I felt like I was starving to death, I really felt like I was going to make myself either very ill or suicidal it really was, just yeah rubbish.

Sophie: and do you think, UC kind of made those feelings worse?

Isabel: yeah.

The negative impacts on mental health offer another example of how UC wears people down and pushes people into places previously not conceived possible (Scott, 2018;2019; 2020).

### 9.3 Physical impact

Participants experienced physical impacts of living with UC, usually around food poverty, spoken of in terms of ‘rationing’, ‘starving’, skipping meals and hunger. It changed how some felt about food, with a meal a day becoming the norm and one commenting their feeling of fullness had broken:

Yes, but it’s sort of a choice, a lifestyle choice you have to make if you are on UC. Will I eat today? Maybe not, or if I don’t eat, if I only eat once a day that was my conclusion that would be, that would work out ok (Isabel).

The lack of food Isabel describes is longstanding due to the systemic low payment she receives from UC, going without to ensure her son has enough to eat creating a reality in which eating once daily will ‘work out ok’. Isabel refers to this as a ‘lifestyle choice’ which is in direct contrast to the narrative which often frames ‘welfare’ as a *lifestyle choice* (Jensen and Tyler, 2015; Patrick, 2017; Shildrick et al, 2012), again illustrating the gap between rhetoric and reality. There was also a sense of nostalgia for when participants could afford to shop freely, compared to their present restrictions:

If you wanna pack of biscuits, you think really have I got 99p to spare for four packs of biscuits? But if you don’t get that then you think well I need, it’s like a luxury [claps hand] but you shouldn’t have to think that way, but you do. And it is horrible, never had to do it until this [UC] (Pam).

Pam describes the ‘struggle’ she now faces with food shopping under a strict budget which created emotional difficulties as she reconciles the ‘compromised’ (Pemberton et al, 2016a) life with UC.

Food poverty is a physical example of the dehumanizing consequences from UC which are in addition to the impacts on emotions and the ‘self’:

I’m um forced to do something I shouldn’t have to do; I shouldn’t have to starve. I shouldn’t have to ration my food; I shouldn’t have to get ill... So that’s all part of being treated inhumanely (Heather)

The ‘inhumanity’ of living with UC removed some of the control Heather had over her own body, as she is *disciplined* (Foucault, 1975/2020) with the body bearing the mark of this conflict. It is important to remember that food poverty sits within wider poverty. Gavin and Bill also spoke of weight loss from living with UC, ranging from 2 to 4 stone and normally within a short amount of time such as Heather who on the ‘UC diet’ lost over 2 stone in six weeks (see 7.3).

I mean I've [sigh] I've never been really hungry before I was on UC yeah... I've been short of things you know and like oh I might struggle a bit 'til the end of the week sort of thing but I have never been literally there is nothing in the house and I'm starving, you know. And I have lost you know nearly four stone in weight yeah (Bill).

Due to his 'starvation' Bill described instances of stealing (see 11.2) he explained "I only ever took the barest minimum you know just to keep me alive" which illustrates the serious impacts of UC for Bill.

The widespread hunger highlights the low levels of payments on UC which were often further reduced by debt repayments, sanctions, and the benefit tax. This is dangerous for those with physical health conditions such as Bill, Karl and Gavin whose food poverty undermined their ability to stay healthy. The physical impacts also affected people's emotional wellbeing (see 9.4 and 9.5); as there were feelings of stress and anxiety over where the next meal would come from. The impact of not having enough food on people's physical and mental health made living with UC harder. Here, we begin to see how the conflict extends from the body to the 'soul' (Foucault, 1975; 2020). Zara described how engaging with the JCP was more challenging as she was only able to eat one meal a day and would often attend meetings without having eaten, which made it difficult to present herself in the enthusiastic way the JCP required.

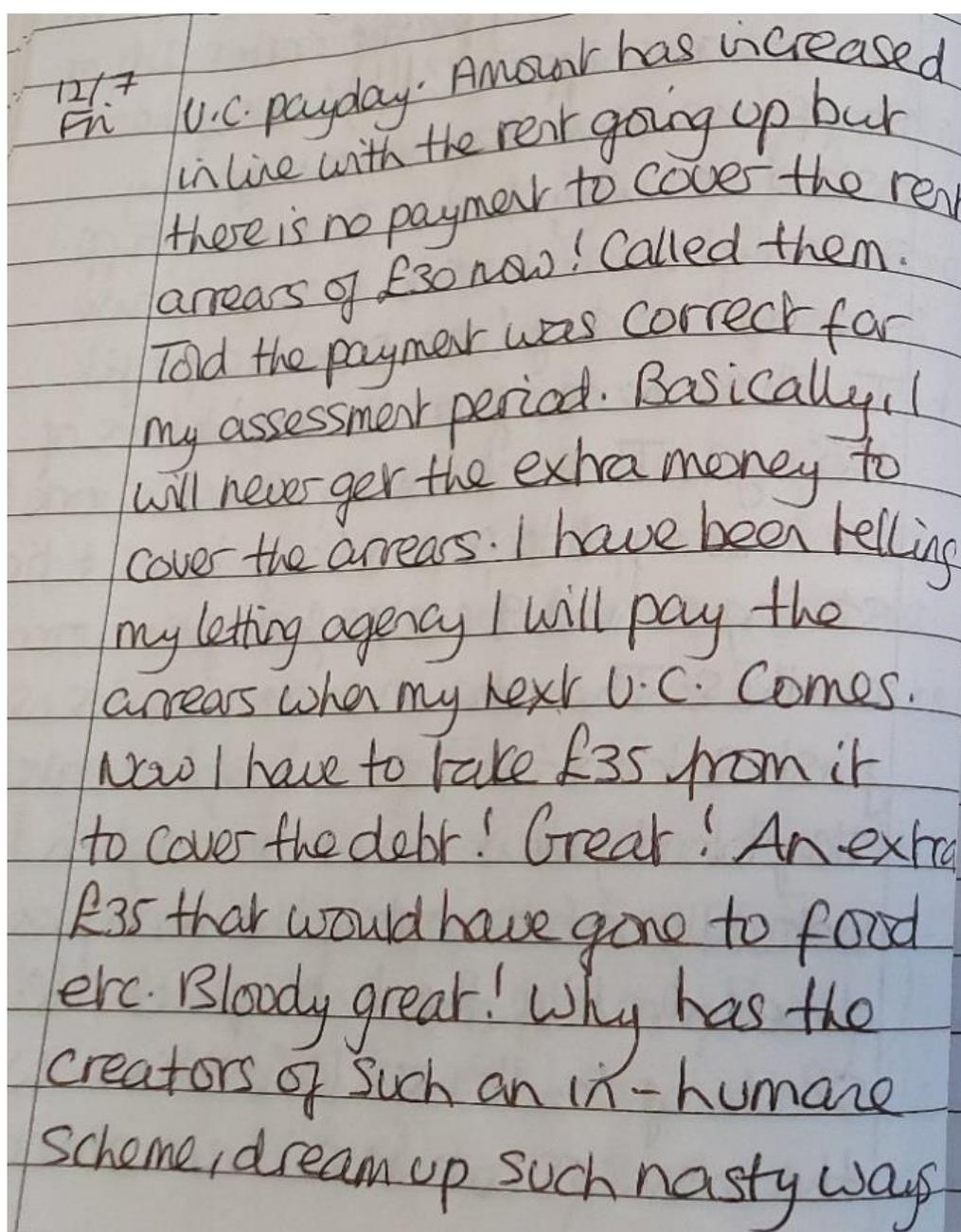
Participants faced enduring hunger not caused by an emergency but a small income which even with the best budgeting skills could not be stretched especially in austere times (Pemberton et al, 2016a). Also, foodbanks limit the choice of food (Purdam et al, 2016) which can be problematic:

...I'm not ungrateful but if you have to live on [foodbanks] with medical issues you don't last very long. When I was admitted to hospital in February for that overdose, I took an overdose because I was depressed but it was also because of physical health, constantly being ill with the effects of mental health um. I was that bad that when I took the overdose, they dealt with the overdose, but I was in um resuscitation ward for 48 hours because I was going in and out of consciousness because of my diabetes health, cos of lack of food (Gavin)

Gavin's situation shows the complex way physical and mental health (see 9.2) are intrinsically linked and how the lack of food intensified both issues. Living with UC impacted Gavin's health and ability to recover. Whilst the reasons for his suicide attempt are complex, Gavin felt UC had directly impacted in terms of cause and consequence.

## 9.4 Emotional impact: destabilisation

Feelings of destabilisation relate broadly here to distress (anxiety, fear and stress), anger, unfairness, and confusion, all common and spread throughout participants' experiences of UC. Wright et al (2016) found UC sanctions, or the threat of, caused emotional harm. This thesis found emotional harm extended beyond the sanctioning regime into various encounters with UC thereby expanding understandings of the spread and severity of the emotional impacts of living with UC. Heather provides a useful example of these intersections and a further example of how UC is experienced as harmful:



12/7  
Fri U.C. payday. Amount has increased in line with the rent going up but there is no payment to cover the rent arrears of £30 now! Called them. Told the payment was correct for my assessment period. Basically, I will never get the extra money to cover the arrears. I have been telling my letting agency I will pay the arrears when my next U.C. Comes. Now I have to take £35 from it to cover the debt! Great! An extra £35 that would have gone to food etc. Bloody great! Why has the creators of such an in-humane scheme, dream up such nasty ways

to torture the poor & needy!?! I will never  
turn to crime, but I can see why people  
do. I will just have to go hungry. All I  
can cut back on is food. W.O.T.D: ANGRY.

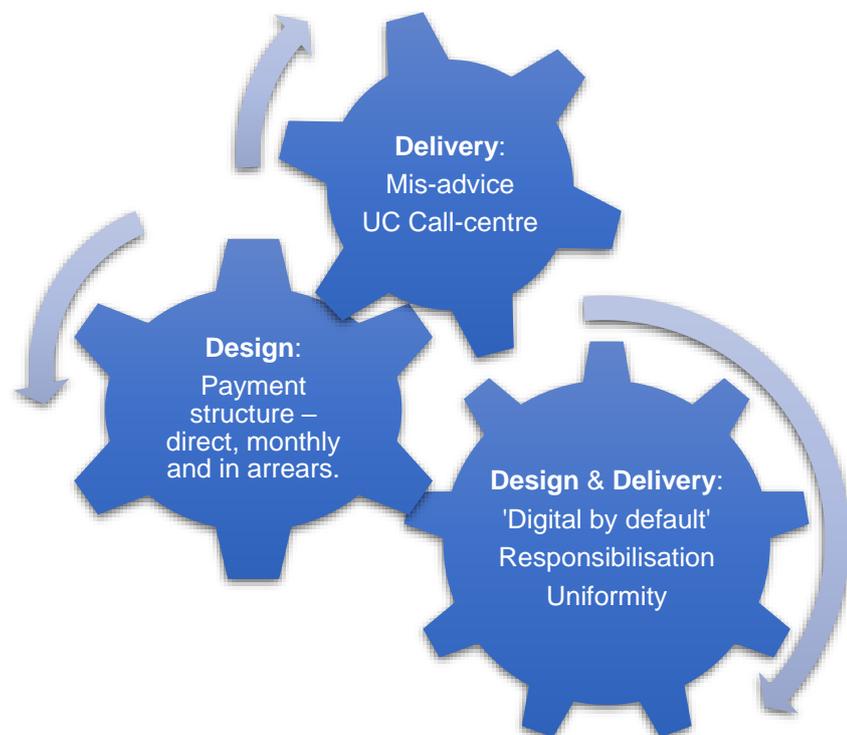
15/7  
Mon I didn't want to write in my journal  
over the weekend. I can't stop thinking  
about how angry I am about not getting the  
money to cover the rent arrears. I am  
going to get ill, again, with malnutrition.  
I certainly can't afford to get the supple-  
ments I have been taking. The only good  
thing about the weekend was watching  
federer vs Djokovic in the men's final.  
What a game! 5 hours of immense  
skills - I had no preference for who  
won, which makes the match even  
more enjoyable. A Titan against a  
Titan! Djokovic won. W.O.T.D:  
Wimbledon 😊 Pleased I'm home!

Figure 14 Heather's diary pages 30-31

The excerpt reveals the emotional impact where anger left a sombre silence as Heather dealt with the situation. Heather is limited by her poverty, for example she can no longer afford supplements to prevent her malnutrition returning (See 7.3 for details and 9.3 for physical impacts) which left her angry and fearful. Thereby, UC not only caused the original malnutrition but reduces Heather's ability to respond. An important coping strategy for Heather, and many people, is trying to stay positive and focus on 'silver linings' which can be seen in the latter part of her diary entry. Heather reflects later:

I think I always will be [angry] because I was expecting to get the money. My WC in good faith said I would get it and she was quite surprised when I didn't. So she now knows that you won't, yeah of course £40. £40 is a hell of a lot of money...It's not fair. You know the bloody UC, the Government...

Heather describes her feelings after being (unintentionally) misadvised about reporting a change (see 8.3). This meant, despite following the advice, she did not receive the extra payment to cover the arrears. Heather used her living allowance to cover the rent arrears providing a physical and existential safety net (Daly, 2017), but meant she could not afford £2.50 for the food bank. The unfairness and anger are not directed at her WC, but the faceless bureaucracy of 'UC' and 'the Government' as Heather questions their intent and punitiveness. Heather's feelings of anger and unfairness derive from UC's design and delivery:



*Figure 15 Challenges of UC design and delivery*

This example highlights the complexity of UC, subsequent consequences and the impacts of this both practically and emotionally. The UC design is built from a 'virtual reality' (Millar and Bennet, 2017), the reality for Heather and other participants is real as are the consequences with the complexities of UC placed "...onto the shoulders of claimants themselves" (Summers and Young, 2020:14).

Anxiety and worry increased with financial difficulties caused by UC, engaging with conditionality and JCP encounters. Literature (Daly, 2017; Patrick, 2017; Pemberton et al, 2016a; Shildrick et al, 2012) has discussed money worries for those on a low income and those receiving UC out of work (Cheetham, Moffatt and Addison et al, 2019) and in-work (Wright and Dwyer, 2020). Nearly all participants were anxious about current and future finances whilst receiving UC. It is clear from participant experiences that UC intensifies this pressure by undermining people's ability to 'get-by' (Lister, 2004) via its design and delivery with additional emotional impacts.

For example, the five-week wait assumes individuals will have savings to 'get-by' (Lister, 2004). Yet, this is rare and so participants opted to take the advance, rely on social networks, struggle to cover those weeks, or a combination of these factors. For many, this was a challenging time and the solution of an advance further destabilised budgeting the following year. Whilst this is a difficult experience financially when adjusting to living with UC, it is also destabilising emotionally due to the anxiety and stress of attempting to 'get-by'. Whilst experiencing an erosion in their ability to 'get-by', participants were routinely undermined by UC; this same system requires a positive presentation of self, such as enthusiasm and politeness, to successfully engage with it. This requires effort emotionally, physically and in relation to self-worth to negotiate the situation and avoid any further destabilisation such as from a sanction. Additionally, people must engage with employers, sustain other commitments (such as parenting), and manage the 'self' (see chapter 10).

Living in this heightened state of distress with feelings of anxiety, worry and at times fear is not conducive to good health; emotionally, mentally and physically:

...your brain doesn't go 'oh I've not got enough money now; I need a really good job so I can earn more money' it doesn't do that. It just goes 'oh god, oh god, oh god' for a bit until you feel really shit (Isabel)

You know so at the end of the day I could lose my home, it's not my fault I have MS unfortunately I have to survive on benefits but I feel I've got a right to fucking enjoy myself (Karl)

Anything under £100 a week nobody can survive on that and you don't wanna be about just survival because if you are just about survival you have no headspace to think well what do I want to do? You know, what decisions do you need to make in your life you know (Bill)

The statements characterise some of the emotional consequences of the financial impacts from UC; all showing a level of panic, desperation, and instability, reflective of JRF (2018) research into destitution. The impact of destitution on participant's mental health

and 'self' is evident and is often coupled with increasingly conditionality. The intensity of Karl's feelings of anger, anxiety and unfairness is likely linked to the increasing desperation at the situation, destitution and to some extent powerlessness he feels within his situation (Chase and Walker, 2012; JRF, 2018), all at a time when he must be the driving force to transition conditionality groups.

Isabel's and Bill's statements show the cognitive impact of their increasing poverty in relation to the ability to make choices, which relates to a 'scarcity mindset' (Mullainathan and Shafir, 2013; Curchin, 2017). It highlights the long-term effect on wellbeing and emotional health as well as physically, showing their confounding relationships.

The instability from UC left participants stressed, confused and some fearful as their financial situation quickly worsened. For John, the five-week wait caused him to 'burn' through his savings and it was uncommon to have savings. Uninformed his income would reduce after temporary work; John spent his wages paying off bills expecting his normal monthly UC payment. This was an unnecessarily stressful situation for John and to cover his rent and bills, he borrowed from his son as UC had destabilised John's financial security. The complexities of UC meant John was unaware his payment would be reduced because of his earnings, leaving him angry "...I feel like I'm being punished. Financially". The sense of unfairness over the situation is clear as John is 'punished' for earning money from temporary work. Similar sentiments were felt by three others. Such experiences do not encourage behavioural change as desired by UC; but test it.

Participants felt anxious about UC across their lives such as before and during JCP meetings, with many people making sure they were early. Anxiety was also associated with requirements such as job-searching, using the online journal and ensuring the monthly 'claimant commitment' had been accepted. The behaviours are typical of 'hypervigilance' and counterproductive due to fear of sanctioning (Stewart and Wright, 2018). There were certain points during a UC journey with higher anxiety such as at the start and at times of change. Feeling anxious made it difficult for people to relax and at times was overwhelming, indicative of the invasive nature of UC.

Now I just feel just really stressed all weekend, like I should be job searching and that I feel like I should spend literally all my time looking for work and if I'm not I'm going to get in trouble. (Laura)

...definitely like leaves you slightly uneasy, it's like that feeling that like if you worry you've left your straighteners on or you've left the gas on, you haven't it's perfectly fine but it's just that thought that niggles away. It's just

like that, it just doesn't make you very calm...Also the longer that I'm on them as well it's not um, it develops the feeling I think (Alice)

For Laura, the stress impacted her sense of time in that she can no longer enjoy her weekend, an indication of the 'liminality' of unemployment (Boland and Griffin, 2015). Other respondents spoke of disliking the weekend due to feelings of isolation and exclusion at being unable to consume. Alice describes the internalisation of this anxiety, how it is a constant and grows louder as time passes. Both expose how anxiety relates to UC's agenda of behavioural change, how this manifests internally and its underpinning notions surrounding deservingness. This internalisation *regulates* their behaviours.

Confusion, fear, and anger, whilst less common are still important to discuss. Confusion stemmed from the opaqueness within the design and delivery of UC and the lack of connected and sustained support to manage a claim (see 8.3 and 8.4). The 'digital by default' approach made overcoming confusion difficult with multiple layers of bureaucracy and mis-advice to navigate.

People expressed fear over numerous situations. As in wider research (Dwyer, 2018; Pemberton et al, 2016a; Wright et al, 2016; 2018; 2020) participants were fearful of sanctioning which often led to 'hypervigilance' (Stewart and Wright, 2018). Yet attitudes towards sanctions are complex, with six individuals in support of the idea of sanctions but not their implementation. A general feeling of fear surrounded elements of the design and delivery of UC, particularly encounters within JCP. Participants were fearful of the impact of UC on their health, finances, home, futures and felt fear from the responses to the impacts as UC *drove* them into difficult decisions and challenging situations (see chapter 11). In most cases the fear was connected to a lack of control, a common undercurrent of UC which goes against its responsabilisation agenda.

The reasons and experiences of participant's anger were vast and are simplistically grouped together into five categories, importantly anger had to be suppressed (Peterie et al, 2019a; Wright et al, 2020). Firstly, poor treatment with the WC (mis-advice, dehumanizing and disrespectful) and JCP staff (patronising). Participants who experienced this were angry but also felt powerless to counteract the treatment they experienced due to the inherent power imbalance (Boland and Griffin, 2015; Wright, 2016), with potential enduring damage to the 'self'. Secondly, anger resulted from the uniformity, dehumanization, complexities and perceived unfairness within UC design and delivery such as a lack of support, inappropriate levels of conditionality and for some the struggle to have this rectified (see chapter 8). Thirdly, and often in response to the latter,

people voiced anger at the practical impacts of UC regarding increasing poverty and conditionality which affected their lives. The financial hardship led to destitution for over half and the responses to this left people angry that UC had *pushed* them to things such as survival crime or informal work (see 11.2). Fourthly, anger derived from the wider inequalities, injustice and unfairness of the situation people were experiencing and this anger at times was targeted at the Government. Lastly, anger surrounded the misconceptions and invisibility of individuals (efforts, experiences and ‘voice’), stigma and ‘Others’ (see chapter 10). This complex collection of experiences connects the emotions, ‘the self’ and practical experiences. Peterie et al (2019a) argue anger is a form of emotional resistance to the *shame* attached to unemployment and underpinning moralistic narrative whereby individuals go against the expected ‘feeling rules’ of activation policies. Considering this, the anger voiced by participants in this thesis could be emotional resistance to shame, but this was a secondary reaction as the anger was not voiced in the first instance. However, anger is an important response for individuals as it allows them to reject the dominant narrative of personal failings towards for unemployment and promote structural causes (Peterie et al, 2019a) and their deservingness.

### 9.5 Emotional impact: worn down

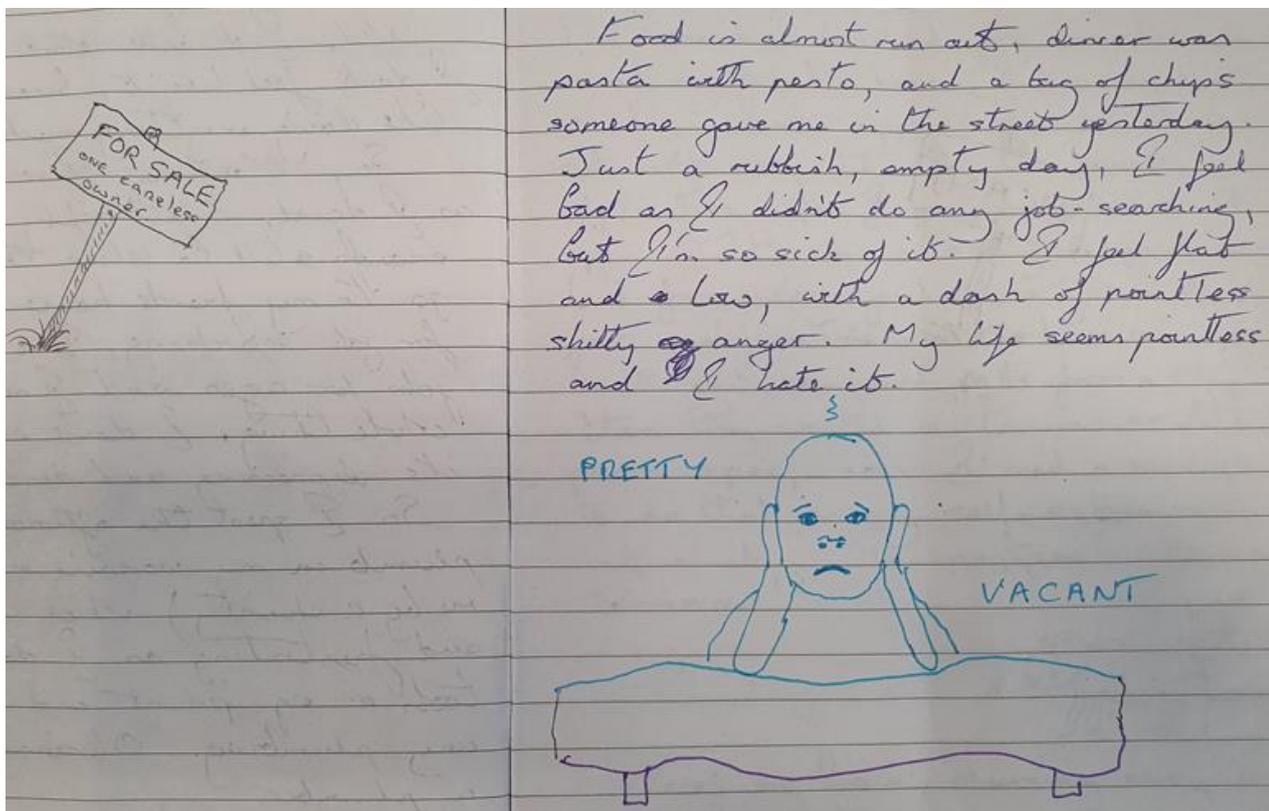


Figure 16 Bill's diary pages 3-4

Bill's diary captures the web of experiences, impacts and feelings towards life with UC. He felt worn down by the process of UC and the impact it had on his daily life, both of which made engaging with conditionality increasingly difficult. Such feelings for Bill coloured his life and affected his mental health (9.2). Here we can see the cumulative impacts of living with UC.

Participants experienced being worn down across a range of settings from UC, to employers and surrounding 'getting by'. The dehumanizing processes (chapter 8) and increasing poverty intensified this emotional impact and made it harder for people to engage with UC and daily life. Therefore, being worn down was for some a cyclical experience and one which became increasingly hard to manage. Participants spoke of feeling deflated which is strongly linked to the demeaning and demoralising experiences of 'welfare' (Chase and Walker, 2012; Patrick, 2017), feelings of sadness and hopelessness.

Poverty links to deflation:

I think giving you not enough money to urge you to work is a good thing, but I don't think it works. Because you are in a depressive spiral of no hope and doom and gloom and that's not, nobody wants to employ you anyway...  
(Isabel)

Isabel firstly provides a caveat in her statement ensuring she identifies with the *need* for incentivising, 'making work pay', which is an important strategy to show deservingness (see 10.7; Van Oorschot, 2000; 2006) and protection, in part, from 'Othering'. She explains why this will not work because of the impact the subsequent poverty has on mentally and emotionally; pushing people further from the labour market. Isabel indicates support for the idea of UC but not implementation; a reflection of wider problems within UC due to its paradoxical nature.

...there is so many people depressed over the UC. Because you can't get anywhere, I think you get further down in life than going up (Pam)

Pam explains how UC can wear and push people down; for her this was due to increasing poverty which resulted in isolation and strained the relationship with her husband. Pam described having her conditionality requirements removed by UC as 'being able to breathe again' which demonstrates the heaviness she felt prior to this. Both statements share a sense of hopelessness and suggest UC moves people further from employment and the life they would like to lead.

The feeling of deflation is strongly tied to experiences of unemployment which is well documented (Boland and Griffin, 2015; Jahoda 1972;1982; Shildrick et al, 2012):

I find myself now um struggling to motivate myself to do anything. I um most days I have to be honest, I don't even bother looking for a job (John)

Notably, features of UC increase feelings of deflation such as the online work-search requirements. For many like John at home alone, the lack of tailored support and conditionality (Dwyer, 2018), as well as the 'digital by default' approach, reduces human contact. As Wright et al (2020) argue, technology is used "...to self-facilitate social abuse..." (2020: 291), with increasing poverty intensifying and spreading deflation into other areas of life. John later described every day as 'Groundhog Day' questioning the long-term suitability of his work-search requirements, as it was an isolating and mundane experience, reducing wellbeing and *pushing* John further from work. John's feelings are reminiscent of the liminal experience of unemployment (Boland and Griffin, 2015). When John discussed volunteering, his WC advised he could only do it if it would directly increase his employability which reduced opportunities and resulted in John staying at home. Here, the benefits of voluntary work were disregarded, as activities are all measured against the labour market.

There are indirect ways UC can be wearing such as applying for work:

...I've done this and I'm highly motivated. No, I'm not, I'm not motivated to do anything, you know. It's really hard to go and conjure up that 'hey I'm a great employee' when actually you just throw it in the sea and it just disappears and that's how it feels. (Bill)

Searching for work can feel deflating especially as many applications and the labour (physically and emotionally) goes unseen and unacknowledged. This damaging experience of continually applying for jobs and receiving no response was discussed widely by participants. Over time, it was evident that staying positive and proactive became increasingly difficult as people were worn down, in turn making it harder to successfully gain employment, meet conditionality requirements, and sustain emotional wellbeing and self-worth (see 10.5).

I just feel um, deflated, worthless, just sitting there all day. It doesn't matter what I do... I don't have and can't have any influence over employers you know? (John)

Here, as Wright (2016) has suggested, the work-search requirements aimed at 'activating' John cause injury emotionally and to his 'self'. The responsabilisation under UC seems to extend to things beyond John's control such as the labour market (Wiggan, 2012).

For Laura, the complexities of UC and her experience of temporary work left her deflated and she explained how other people might 'give up'. Laura started a six-week job only a few weeks into her UC claim and advised her WC of the temporary nature of this employment. Despite this, Laura's UC claim was stopped and so when the employment ended, she had to start her 'UC journey' again. Laura explained how UC weakens people's ability to enter employment and how people may do the 'bare minimum' as more causes problems, thus, the opposite of promoting work.

Many described deflating experiences in the JCP as the regimented nature left little space for support:

Yeah the JCP isn't the right answer...Cos they [JCP] really crucified morale of people (Isabel)

As street level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 2010), WCs play a crucial role with the increasing importance of *discretion* within UC (Andersen, 2019):

I'm like deflated because I'm not getting the jobs I'm applying for, and she's [the WC] very good at being pragmatic but like 'look you are doing everything you can, don't get so down on yourself about it because we are really happy with what you are doing. You are clearly trying, so just don't worry about it. Don't beat yourself up too much' and it's really nice that there is someone that's trying to support you like that. (Alice)

For Alice, her WC was supportive during her UC 'journey' which she was struggling with as time passed. Therefore, the WC is key to shaping experiences and offers crucial interventions in a person's emotional wellbeing. However, Alice was in the minority and most commented on the lack of support from their WC.

... [the WC] made me cry actually. The thought of seeing her used to make me cry as well. (Isabel)

Isabel, who started claiming UC after leaving her job due to severe depression, was for the first six months required to look for work (see figure 11). Despite being in a 'catatonic state', Isabel had monthly meetings with her WC which she describes above later reflecting:

She was terrible, she just didn't understand anything and thought I should be getting a job and wondering why I was crying.

From Isabel's experience, the WC was not equipped to deal with her situation and offer the appropriate support instead treating her with 'coldness' (Haslam, 2006). This could

be due to several reasons such as the design of UC with its inbuilt uniformity (see 8.4). Participants described WC meetings lasting between 8 – 10 minutes which leaves little time for discussion (See Work and Pensions Committee, 2016), intervention or real human connection (Ritzer, 2013). As the numbers receiving UC increase, this will impact on WC caseloads, making it harder to offer tailored support which is essential for a successful ‘claimant journey’ (Dwyer, 2018). The anxiety over future visits shows the intensity of the experience and the negative effect it had on Isabel, who was already struggling with her mental health.

Third-sector organisations, friends and family offer much needed practical and emotional support during this time as individuals experience being worn down by UC. Participants spoke of the emotional and mental health support they received from third-sector organisations which Isabel described as “... the opposite to the [JCP], she helps you gain your confidence...”. For Isabel, the intervention was vital in improving her mental health and providing broader help with employability, allowing her the space to try and look forward: “They’ve...got me breathing again”.

Existing literature has highlighted the importance of social networks for a range of support (see 4.9) however accessing the support can be problematic and reduce self-worth (see 10.5). Increasing isolation was common within participant narratives and this slow process of withdrawal was emotionally damaging, as social isolation is “...an injurious state of being...” (Pemberton, 2015:129). The experience of UC as ‘digital by default’ limits social interaction by design and so social interaction becomes more important from friends, family and the third sector. Bill wrote about his loneliness and support (practical and emotional) which he received from the food bank:

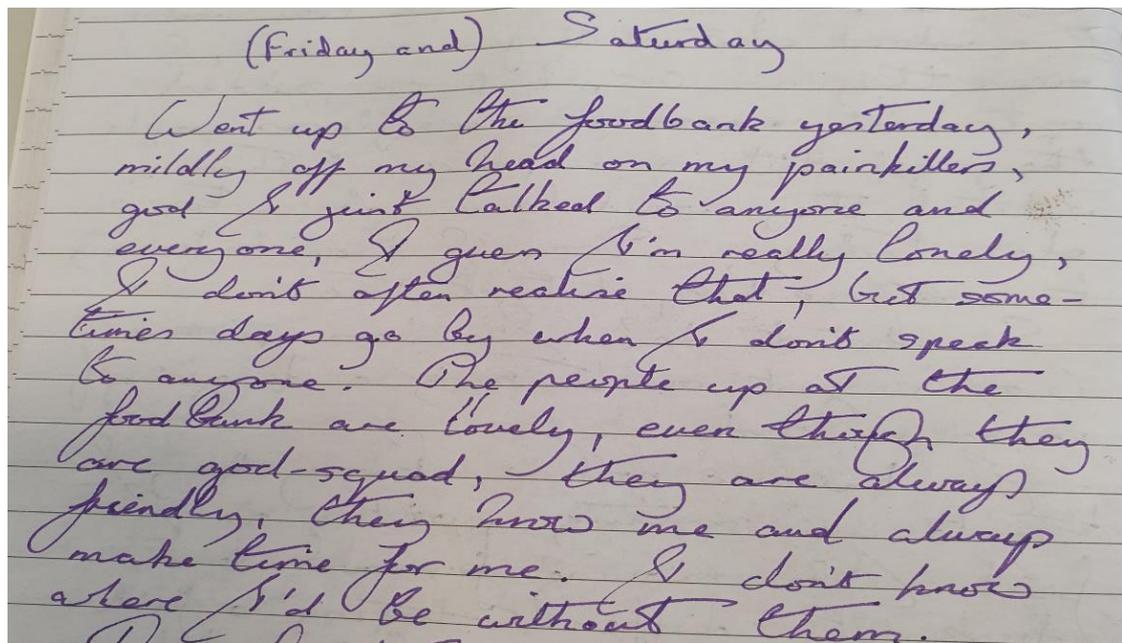


Figure 17 Bill's diary page 25

The foodbank is a lifeline for Bill as he explains 'I don't know where I'd be without them'. When accessing support financially there is often a trade-off with individuals' self-worth, but also benefits for wellbeing as Bill describes. The complex negotiations between the financial and emotional experiences, impacts and subsequent responses can be laborious and as resources become constrained the risks and internal negotiations are heightened.

### 9.6 Emotional impact: shame

Relating to poverty and UC, instances of shame permeated life and were underpinned by a sense of failure. Ten participants referenced feelings of shame as outlined by Scheff (2003). If broadened to include words synonymous to shame to consider the 'taboo' of the concept (Chase and Walker, 2012), then a further three individuals are added. The remaining two were employed and not subject to in-work conditionality, hence the requirement for behavioural change reduced and so too shame. Pam when asked if she speaks to anyone about UC answered:

Pam: I'm not ashamed of it. It's one of those things, it's something you have to go through but no I'm not ashamed. It's a life thing at the moment, so

Sophie: do you feel any differently now that you're on the carers allowance from when you were looking for work?

Pam: I was depressed. It made me depressed having to look for work...

In responding by saying she is not ashamed Pam is aware of the potential shame attached to UC and in speaking about those experiences. But, if we consider the assertion from

Scheff (2003) that acknowledging shame is a way to lessen it and ultimately bond people together, then Pam is reminiscent of this.

The depression Pam felt work-searching was related to a sense of failure and frustration. In her early fifties, Pam had been a housewife for thirty years supported by her husband until he naturally migrated to UC. Subsequently, Pam entered UC in a joint claim with her husband and for the first year both had full work requirements. After a year, Pam's husband was found unfit for work and a couple of months later she began to receive carers allowance. This experience was a 'struggle' for Pam, who felt the full brunt of UC conditionality and associated turmoil emotionally and financially.

Poverty links to shame (Chase and Bantebya-Kyomuhendo, 2015; Jo, 2012) and for those living with UC it was no different, yet as UC actively undermines strategies of 'getting-by' it increases experiences of shame. The 'poverty-shame nexus' is explored by Jo (2012) who discusses the psycho-social links between poverty and shame and how this manifests individually, socially, culturally, and institutionally.

Participants felt shame surrounding their inability to consume at *normal* levels which led to sadness and anger. As 'flawed consumers' (Bauman, 2005) the shame stemming from their perceived lack of work ethic is reinforced and inescapable.

The silence to protect against shame could intensify financial hardship as individuals negotiate the *costs* of living with UC, such as when Heather hid her struggles at the start of her UC journey (see 7.3).

I feel like I'm crazy if I do speak about it, I feel like I'm making it up and how could it be that bad? You know, I feel like people are thinking that I'm lying or exaggerating or you know when I have spoken, it feels like they are looking at me like 'Is she sure? That can't be right' (Isabel)

Isabel explains how poverty has impacted on her social life, with shame feeding into this as her friends have 'normal lives'. In the disbelief, Isabel shows how someone can be further undermined, humiliated, and shamed creating more distance and isolation. Hence, Isabel's voice is muted at a time when it most needed to be heard. This example brings into consideration how stigma and the attached shame (Goffman, 1997; Tyler, 2020) can be dehumanizing in both the animalistic and mechanical sense (Haslam, 2006) as Isabel is treated with 'disgust' and 'coldness'. Connections more broadly might be drawn with the Government media campaign and how they work together to delegitimize experiences of those living with UC (see 10.4).

Shame occurred in encounters with UC, a process and place in which participants felt degraded and scrutinised (Chase and Walker, 2012) and shame to be expected as unemployment is understood as an individual moral failing (Peterie et al, 2019a). Instances of shame are instilled in JCP encounters which are regulated, paternalistic and described as like being in ‘detention’. Examples of being shamed in JCP training sessions, WC meetings, patronising encounters with security staff were common reinforcing a status of ‘non-human’ (Goffman, 1997) via dehumanizing practices (Haslam, 2006).

Shame was minimized for those able to avoid the *taboo* attached to UC. People in-work often prevented or minimized shame via hiding this status (see 10.6), however some could not avoid the poverty and connected shame. The risk of shame is reduced through statuses which indicate work ethic or a deservingness to claim, however, UC does not offer this protection.

For Laura, shame surrounding UC stopped her from claiming for three months as she “...was trying desperately not to because I find it so embarrassing” making a financial trade-off to minimize shame, which is seen as the more harmful. This brings into question the very core of UC and what it represents, when increasing poverty is seen as the better option for those who can *afford* this.

## 9.7 Conclusion

This chapter has presented findings on the impact living with UC has on mental, physical and emotional wellbeing. This chapter has provided an empirical contribution showing how UC is damaging and destabilising emotionally and mentally and responds to the first research question surrounding the experiences and impacts of living with UC and how these effects the ‘UC journey’.

Importantly, UC has been harmful to all those accessing it, both in and out of work and those with and without previous health conditions, creating and intensifying *vulnerabilities*. Consequently, it was harder for participants to manage their UC journey which further intensified the experiences and impacts. *How does it feel to live with UC?* Participants felt angry, anxious, blamed, confused, deflated, demeaned, demoralised, distressed, frustrated, fearful, guilty, hopeless, overwhelmed, ashamed, stressed, useless and a sense of unfairness. People described UC, a system of social security, as a ‘nightmare’, ‘evil’, ‘genocide’ and ‘soul-destroying’. The impacts documented within this chapter highlight the potential consequences of living with UC which move people further from health and the labour market.

## 10. Managing the ‘self’

### 10.1 Introduction

This chapter explores how UC impacts on the ‘self’, presenting new findings on how people living with UC are undermined. The chapter responds to the second research question (1.2) surrounding how experiences of UC affects identities and how this is managed. The chapter outlines how stigma experienced by those living with UC is part of a system of social control and change; inherently laden with power, in line with the thinking of Link and Phelan (2014) and Tyler (2020) who provides a “...reconceptualising [of] stigma as a form of power that is written on the body and gets under the skin” (2020:9).

Whilst it is widely acknowledged that ‘welfare’ is stigmatizing with various strategies used to protect identities (see 4.4 – 4.6), this has not been explored in the unique context of UC. The context of UC is unique as it is available to all those working age in or out of work (for whatever reason), paid directly, monthly and in arrears, is ‘digital by default’ and all must sign a ‘claimant commitment’ with attached conditionality backed by sanctioning and surveillance (see 2.3 and 3.6). The chapter will provide new insights surrounding managing the ‘self’ whilst living with UC and investigate how identity is affected by UC.

### 10.2 Seeing ‘stigma power’

Sophie: I thought it was interesting what you said about um how benefit claimants are like the villain like in society, is that how, like have you ever felt like that or is that more how society sees

Alice: ...I think it’s just a lot easier to keep the lower and middle classes, especially the lower classes, keep them the villain because then no one is paying attention to what the richer people are doing... I think the media supports that and it makes it really hard for people to feel like they are worth more than that, so after a while they start believing it and it keeps them downtrodden and it stops them from revolution... it’s that like little um anecdote that meme thing that’s. There’s um a rich man, a poor man and someone else, oh an immigrant and they are all at a buffet. And the rich man takes 99 percent of the buffet, and then turns to the poor man and says ‘that immigrant is gonna take your one percent’

Alice details the impacts and intersections of stigma on those accessing ‘welfare’ and how it feeds into a longer, broader *assault* on the ‘lower classes’ fitting with the civilising process (Clement, 2015; Elias, 1994; Law and Mooney, 2012). She discusses the connection between the Government and the media and how together they control and cement the narrative sustaining the ‘antiwelfare common-sense’ (Jensen, 2014) via

‘stigma-optics’ (Tyler, 2020). The narrative is internalised by individuals, which makes it difficult ‘for people to feel like they are worth more than that’ which ensures inequalities persist and prevents ‘revolution’, thus they are ‘being kept down’ (Link and Phelan, 2014). It is the internalisation and subsequent harm to the ‘self’ which is damaging and often disguised as a personal *failing*. By illuminating the *tainted* trails of ‘stigma power’ (Link and Phelan, 2014; Tyler, 2020) we can see how it insidiously infiltrates and impacts at the levels of structure and agency. Alice questions who the people in power are and this highlights the invisibility afforded to those in power, particularly within large bureaucratic structures, and this is an example of ‘looking up’ (Chase and Walker, 2012; Tyler, 2020) and the attached difficulties.

The final part of the excerpt shows how ‘Othering’ (Chase and Walker, 2012; Patrick, 2016) mentalities manifest in everyday life with the contemporary example based on age old stereotypes. The subtle story of the buffet describes how ‘Othering’ is used as a discretionary tactic by *some* at the expense of others. It is important to recognise the complexities of ‘Othering’ particularly those surrounding ‘national abjects’ (Tyler, 2013). ‘Stigma power’ not only sustains inequalities and constrains lives (Tyler, 2020), but it can arguably shape what and how we ‘see’ the world at the same time as we lose the ability to control how we are seen. The findings and discussion will explore how stigma, or the threat of stigma, can shatter most chains (individual and structural) and how the impacts tear across lines (temporally, socially, ontologically and physically).

The narratives of ‘us and them’ can be utilised to control populations and pit them against each other by moving attention onto visible stereotypes (Chase and walker, 2012). Additionally, as Tyler (2020) asserts, stigma is connected to systems of oppression, economics, wider inequalities, and social control. Therefore, it is important to consider stigma and how it is used within a broader framework, in much the same way as the ‘civilising offensive’ (Van Krieken, 1999; Powell 2013; 2007; Clement, 2015) fits within the ‘civilising process’ (Elias, 1994). The use of stigma is key to the internalisation of this ‘civilising offensive’ and this chapter will continue to explore experiences, impacts and responses. Finally, it is important to note that stigma by nature is a deeply personal experience and consequently isolating as people grapple with a *tainted* identity (Goffman, 1963/1997) Moreover, the neoliberal focus on individual responsibility (Lea and Hallsworth, 2012; Stonehouse et al, 2015) and an ‘enterprising self’ (McGuigan, 2014) further supports this environment thereby allowing the flourishing of stigma in secrecy and societal silence.

### 10.3 'Benefit stigma'

The internalisation of stigma ('personal stigma') is particularly damaging (Baumberg et al, 2012; Patrick, 2017; 2016). Experiences of 'social stigma' and 'institutional stigma', as first outlined by Baumberg et al (2012) and later applied by Patrick (2016), were common in this thesis. Over half of participants, including those in-work, described feelings of 'personal stigma', offering insights into experiences of 'personal stigma' within the new context of UC. Stigma is not an isolated condition, and it is often mixed with other experiences and impacts (see chapters 8 and 9) which can intensify the situation.

The stigma experienced was linked to a perceived lack of work ethic and the lesser status of unemployment (Patrick, 2017) making participants feel 'non-human' (Goffman, 1997):

If you've got a job, you're a human being. You haven't got a job you're a low life scrounger... (Bill).

Bill explains the dominant connection between paid employment and citizenship (Patrick, 2012) but goes further suggesting unemployment removes individuals of their humanity and so they are treated like 'weeds' (Bauman, 1989). Here we can see a connection between stigma (Goffman, 1997; Tyler, 2020) and dehumanization (Haslam, 2006). What is interesting to consider is the impact UC has on this dynamic, as having a job for some is no longer enough to protect against stigma.

Ryan was working part-time when he participated in the research, he discussed his feelings towards UC and touches upon 'personal stigma':

Ryan: I'd still rather not be claiming because you know a burden to the taxpayer and all stuff like that...

Sophie: I mean it's interesting what you said, like you feel like, your like claiming is like being a burden to the taxpayer, is that how it makes you feel?

Ryan: yeah definitely yeah it's how I feel, I know it's like, you know it's a burden that I think the taxpayers afford and should afford and I believe that having a welfare system is a good but just individually it feels like I'd rather not be, um yeah in an ideal world I wouldn't be a claimant.

Sophie: that's interesting like the idea of it is okay like but then actually personally

Ryan: yeah it's funny it's like I don't think of anyone else who's claiming as a burden to the taxpayer, it's just like the way I see myself when I'm on it. I don't know it's a weird one isn't it um but yeah.

Ryan's feelings of 'personal stigma' are connected to his feeling like a 'burden to the taxpayer' which resonates with the 'us and them' narrative (Patrick, 2017). Two interesting points can be taken from Ryan's quotes, first he indicates that he feels 'personal stigma' without 'social stigma' as he explains he does not think others who claim are a 'burden' and supports the idea of the welfare state. This highlights the complicated and sometimes contradictory thoughts and feelings towards 'welfare' receipt as Ryan encounters an internal struggle with his perception of self, his values and society as he questions his own deservingness to claim. As Ryan is in-work, a position which generally places an individual within 'us', his requirement and subsequent status of living with UC, threatens this ontological *certainty* displayed in the appearance of 'personal stigma'. Second, Ryan is employed and unlike in the legacy system he is now included in the UC group of all working age individuals who are often characterised by the media and politicians as a *burden* against the *hard-working taxpayer* (Pemberton et al, 2016b). Ryan is caught between these two categories and feels a sense of stigma despite little interaction with the JCP ('institutional stigma') and being able to mask his 'claimant' status via his employment hence reducing instances of 'social stigma'. Yet, he still feels like a 'burden' which shows how rooted and powerful stigma surrounding 'welfare' is as it gets 'under the skin' (Tyler, 2020: 196).

Considering the Eliasian (1994) 'internalisation of external restraints', perhaps Ryan is displaying the confrontation of these restraints with his existing schema as previously, under the legacy system, he would have been considered 'civilised' and not in need of *correction*. Under UC, Ryan is placed within a homogenous group in which the reason or *deservingness* of a claim is not visible and thus all are open to scrutiny and potential stigma, the threat of which can incur the same consequences as stigma (power) itself (Link and Phelan, 2014). The contradictions Ryan feels over his status are corrosive to his existing internal restraints and allow for re-internalisation of new external restraints as he has gone from 'hard working striver' to 'potential skiver' (Carter and Whitworth, 2015b:151). Stigma plays a crucial role in this process and allows for the quick and invasive change of the neoliberal 'uncivilised' via the old and accepted notion of (un)deservingness (Shildrick et al, 2012).

The internalisation of stigma can also affect relationships with consequences practically, socially and emotionally.

...it's not nice to ask for help especially off friends and that. You talk to people and you know 'oh yeah go on then help yourself' and as soon as you go 'scrounging bastard'... (Karl)

The threat of 'social stigma' caused Karl to be cautious preventing him from asking for help, creating further financial difficulties. Thus, stigma has physical consequences even when it is only a perceived threat. Here, stigma power leads to Karl 'keeping away' (Link and Phelan, 2014) from friends; highlighting how stigma solidifies into material and social self-regulation. Karl's feelings were not uncommon; many individuals living with UC spoke of the difficulties of asking for help and the subsequent impacts.

Isabel discusses the 'social stigma' surrounding UC which is linked to her perceived work ethic and the idea that paid employment is key to citizenship (Patrick, 2012). She feels this stigma despite being in the 'preparing for work' group due to her health, but UC does not allow for this outward projection and so her claim is intrinsically linked to her lack of paid employment:

What I think people think is that you are useless, yeah, you are a useless person in society that has got nothing to contribute and doesn't want to yeah. I don't think they think you want a job...

The feeling of uselessness was discussed by participants across conditionality groups and with different circumstances. This feeling was reinforced by experiences with Isabel's WC:

... she just she used to be very, like she was telling off a small child that was being naughty... I heard her patronising them [other claimants] and them getting really angry and standing up and storming out. I saw a lot of people, which made me feel a lot better, I thought it's not just me...

Isabel's 'institutional stigma' adds to the feelings of 'uselessness' due to paternalistic and demeaning treatment. The perceived *deviance* stemmed from Isabel's unemployment with a disregard for any personal circumstances. Arguably, the uniformity of UC, the bureaucracy (see chapter 8) and the 'institutional stigma' create a 'moral sleeping pill' (Bauman, 1989), which allowed Isabel's suffering to be ignored as an admission would be an acknowledgement of her humanity, and not her 'otherness'. Isabel took comfort that her WC treated everybody similarly, this in a sense provides a feeling of 'us' with focus on the WC, creating a level of protection from individualistic introspection. Under UC, WCs are assigned a variety of individuals, unlike the legacy system which had personal advisors for the different forms of social security, and face increasing caseloads (see chapter 2). The design of UC reduces understanding as each 'claimant' is measured and categorised by the distance from work without recognition of circumstance (see 8.4).

Isabel's experiences of her WC treating everybody universally are a consequence of the design of UC exacerbated by 'institutional stigma'.

Isabel minimizes 'personal stigma' by affirming deservingness via her need (mental health) and the temporariness of the situation allowing Isabel to highlight her work ethic (past and future) therefore distancing herself 'workless' and 'idle' stereotypes. Similar strategies were found by Pemberton et al (2016b) with people in poverty who distanced themselves from the 'undeserving poor' via highlighting the 'transient' nature of their situation. This validation of deservingness is important for Isabel to negotiate living with UC and the associated stigma. The temporality of UC is important, as it is available to those in work and therefore people may not experience a clean break so must negotiate this *tainted* identity for longer and potentially reducing the validity of the transient protection. Nine individuals in this research entered work during their claim and some moved between the 'low pay no pay' cycle (Shildrick et al, 2012); importantly all were still living with UC whilst employed.

In addition to 'benefit stigma' (Baumberg et al, 2012; Patrick, 2016), Isabel faces stigma connected to her poverty which has increased from living with UC. It is this stigma she cannot overcome as there is no 'deserving poor' (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013). Isabel's increasing poverty ensures a secondary source of stigma which is harder to mitigate, enables a further undermining of individuals with a wider reach across lives, and it is this stigma Isabel has internalised:

Isabel: Yeah, I can't afford to live here [chuckle] yeah. I don't really belong. I'm not wanted, yeah definitely not

Sophie: is that how it feels?

Isabel: yeah

Sophie: yeah, like wanted by?

Isabel: anybody, yeah I'm useless or other...

Here, Isabel feels like an 'Other' linked to her inability to buy things at a supermarket. The daily grind and reminders of difference are wearing, and it is these 'daily indignities' (Link and Phelan, 2014) in plain sight which are inescapable. The simple act for many of going shopping becomes a complex negotiation financially, cognitively (Mullainathan and Shafir, 2013), emotionally and for stigma management.

The design of UC, which obscures and undermines people's ability to assert deservingness, intensifies experiences of 'benefit stigma', reduces strategies for identity protection, and increases other stigmas.

Empirical findings indicate 'benefit stigma' could affect individuals' mental health as Alice and Bill describe, building on existing research (Baumberg et al, 2012; Baumberg, 2016):

...I have to watch my head as well cos it would kick off that train of thought like that you are useless, what have you ever done? I've done this, yeah but you're not doing it now are you? What are you doing now? Nothing. You're useless then aren't you. And there is only so many times you can fend that off before it starts to like really fester you know and that's one of the ways I manage my mental health is I bat those thoughts away before they start to get recursive and obsessive you know. Um and that is more difficult to do if you are out you know... all the time the world is prodding me going 'nnaaahh' [wiggles finger] 'remember this, remind you of that...' (Bill)

Bill describes the intersections of stigmas, his mental health and physical exclusion as he is 'being kept in and away' (Link and Phelan, 2014) to avoid the threat of stigma with considerable effort used to mitigate the feelings of stigma on his mental health. The taboo of stigma (Goffman, 1963/1997) isolates and magnifies Bill's experiences and if his mental health worsens this is stigmatizing. In his attempt to avoid stigma by staying in, Bill could reduce his mental and physical health (see 9.2 and 9.3). Bill has internalised the judgements and stigma and is haunted by his previous life and the resources (and work ethic) attached to this. The haunting of the previous life and choices not taken (Scott, 2018;2019; 2020) creates an internal hall of mirrors which destabilises his current 'self' as it 'gets under the skin' (Tyler, 2020).

Alice spoke of how the 'personal stigma' fed into her anxiety and how over time living with UC, this 'anxiety demon' grew louder:

It's that little anxiety demon that's just like 'no you're not good enough' 'this is shit' 'you're a free loader' [stage whispers] stuff like that. It's just bullshit (Alice)

She described the anxiety as like when you think you have left the gas on and it is this persistent niggle which she could not silence, despite exceeding her conditionality requirements. The internalisation of stigma enables the scrutiny over deservingness to claim to become self-regulatory and reframes reciprocity so that individuals feel they are never doing enough, and here the power of stigma and its ability to control comes to the fore (Tyler, 2020). Alice and Bill both indicate how stigma reduces their self-worth which

is well-documented (Baumberg et al, 2012; Patrick, 2016) yet importantly, this reduction of self-worth via stigma increases the opportunity and intensity of stigma in the future as people have less resources to counter it. Additionally, over time people's financial resources and the ability to 'get-by' are eroded with the 5-week wait and then the low payment paid direct, monthly and in arrears, debt recollections and so on, all of which are confounding, increasing the instances and intensity of stigma as well as reducing the ability to mitigate the impacts.

The variation in experiences and understandings of stigma are clear and far from *universal*. Those perhaps closer to the labour market felt the stigma and impacts more violently than those further away, as they had more to lose but also more resources to protect their identities. On the other hand, it could be those with a longer history with the legacy system, particularly JSA, were 'used' to the stigma and so the experience was less damaging. In any case the increasing poverty has led to new levels of stigma for all by context or consequence.

Understandings of 'benefit stigma' are influenced by a range of factors. Individuals spoke of the media representations of UC and those who access it, with a much longer history than UC itself with negative coverage intensifying since the Great Recession (Baumberg et al, 2012), connected by participants to 'poverty porn' (Jensen, 2014) and described by two as 'propaganda' for the Government. Unlike the ideological political and media rhetoric of 'welfare dependency' and 'intergenerational worklessness' (Macdonald, Shildrick and Furlong, 2014; Slater, 2012), all participants wanted to work and the majority had recent employment. In addition to the media, 'upbringing' influenced people's views on 'welfare' intersecting with stigma and deservingness. Individuals had to reconcile beliefs from their upbringing with their current reality, which was challenging. This research found the memories and feelings towards their 'upbringing' partly shaped participants' feelings towards UC as they felt like 'failures', showing how deep-rooted stigma can be in personal histories. Moreover, this is the opposite of the apparent 'cultures of worklessness' socialising generations (DWP, 2010b) as Shildrick et al (2012) argue, with a strong work ethic and demonization of 'welfare' being handed down through families.

John connected his upbringing and the working histories of his parents to why he felt like a 'burden':

[sighs] I think a lot of it comes from for me probably um my upbringing and views of my parents. A lot of it comes from that, that is how they were. You know? They both worked all their lives... (John)

This feeling like a ‘burden’ seemed deeply embedded linking to the stigma John felt and experienced, a sense of failure and perceived lack of work ethic often typified by his inability to now afford activities he was previously able to. John’s statement is reminiscent of Shildrick et al’s (2012) assertion of work as an intergenerational ‘family tradition’ (2012: 92) with such experiences held in a dichotomy of (un)employment.

#### 10.4 (Mis)Understandings of UC and the ‘self’

The understandings and perceptions of UC affect how people feel and engage with it, how they think they are seen, how they feel about themselves and how this is impacted and responded to. As discussed (2.3), what is interesting is that all working-age individuals could enter UC whether in or out of work; unlike the previous legacy system, it is *universal* and treats individuals with uniformity (8.4). How does this *universality* change the experiences and perceptions of UC?

When asked about how UC was perceived by the general public, most responses were negative with some laughter. Participants frequently spoke of negative media coverage during the interviews, particularly surrounding where people had died. Whilst there was an acknowledgement that UC was portrayed negatively in the media, there was also a feeling those who claimed were perceived stereotypically (Jensen, 2014; Tyler, 2020). Julie and Alice described how the negative image was in part due to people ‘not helping themselves’, therefore protecting themselves via their own proactive engagement with UC. The negative image of UC in the media and public sphere becomes individualised to ‘Others’ yet their response reinforces the neoliberal individualised narrative of personal failings. What is clear is the differences amongst perceptions of UC between the Government, media, public and people’s experiences of UC and differences within these categories themselves. Heather described the public image of UC and her own experiences:

Double what you’ve heard [about UC] by two and then imagine living it... People are suffering, the Government go ‘What poverty?’ But until you’ve lived it you don’t know how bad it is, it really has been awful. It probably still is bad; I say my friend is dreading going on it....

Heather’s experiences highlight the disconnect between the reality of UC and wider perceptions and images. Even when there is an awareness of the situation, the severity of

it is hidden as it is a ‘taboo’ (Goffman, 1963/1997) and perhaps as a form of protection from the reality. Heather describes her friend ‘dreading’ UC, and this anxiety was commonplace personally or from friends and family. The Government image does not represent the reality of those living with UC and it further impinges on the space to voice their experiences in their everyday lives as it creates and sustains a false ideological narrative (Garrett, 2018) which then frames people’s experiences as ‘national objects’ (Tyler, 2013).

The diagram below illustrates some of the complexities surrounding images of UC:

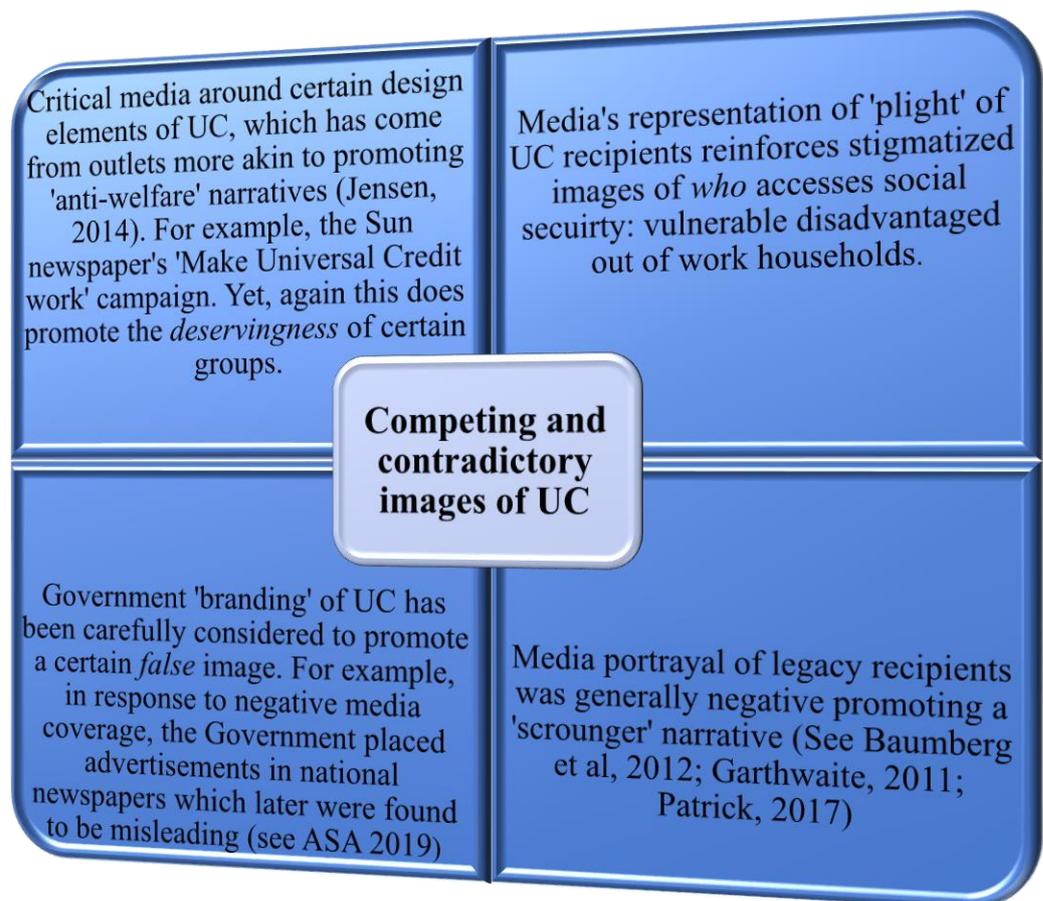


Figure 18 Images of UC

Generally, participants thought receiving ‘welfare’ would still be viewed negatively; portrayed as ‘benefits people’ thus treated with *disgust* (Tyler, 2013). Previously the legacy system provided more obvious markers of deservingness with separate benefits for the working age population due to their reason for claiming. All had varying levels of stigma attached to their perceived deservingness, with WTC the least stigmatizing (Baumberg et al, 2012) compared to JSA being the most. UC removes this and people now enter a system in which all could be viewed as ‘benefits people’ encountering stigma.

Arguably, aspects of the design and delivery of UC feed into this and spread the scrutiny individuals feel, as discussed in chapter 8, and is both based upon and is a perpetuation of ‘benefit stigma’.

People in and out of work were aware of the stigma attached to ‘welfare’, however those in-work felt more removed from this spoiled identity (Goffman, 1963/1997) which is discussed later in relation to stigma management. If we consider this awareness in relation to ‘stigma power’ (Tyler, 2020; Link and Phelan, 2014) the threat of stigma keeps people in line and shows how stigma can be utilised for social control and internalised by individuals as ‘neoliberal governmentality’ (Tyler, 2013). The inclusion of those in-work into this group brings them closer to stigma, or the threat of it, which is enough for social regulation and the ‘internalisation of external restraints’ (Elias, 1994). Similarly, those who are out of work due to health reasons are now also part of a group with those working and looking for work, again bringing stigma and scrutiny closer.

You felt safe, it’s like no you can’t have a go at me cos it’s sickness benefit... That doesn’t feel the same on UC.

Bill is reflecting on how ESA provided a sense of ‘safety’ because his entitlement and attached deservingness was not under scrutiny unlike how he feels now with UC. This provides an example of how UC feels different to the legacy system, which provided a level of protection to those receiving a clearly defined ‘sickness benefit’ enabling individuals to promote their deservingness, distance themselves from stigma and conditionality. Consequently, the threat of stigma is greater and more widespread with UC than the legacy system. The scrutiny and stigma surrounding disability has a long history (Baumberg et al, 2012; Garthwaite, 2011). However, for Bill there is a clear difference in his experiences of ESA and UC, one which no longer feels ‘safe’.

In-work participants were not currently engaging with conditionality and subsequently had minimal contact with the JCP. As UC progresses and more engage with in-work conditionality, stigma may become more prominent. Even without engaging with in-work conditionality participants still felt the stigma as it manifests throughout life. Tina experienced in-work conditionality and described how the WC made her feel ‘she was never doing enough’ and when questioned about the limit (of time) she said there was none, she was treated as a ‘coerced worker claimant’ (Wright and Dwyer, 2020). This highlights the invasiveness of conditionality and the emotional impacts, akin to the unemployed living with UC - raising important implications for the expansion of in-work

conditionality which is likely to increase the stigmatizing experiences as people engage with the JCP as well as the impacts of conditionality which can be counterproductive (Stewart and Wright, 2018).

...but I think that [stigma] spreads to everyone like yeah. Anyone who's claiming kind of gets tarnished with that same brush... (Ryan)

Ryan outlines how UC 'tarnishes' all with stigma based upon a stereotyped minority promoted by the media as the norm (Jensen, 2014). Employed, Ryan is acutely aware of the stigma attached to his UC claim even though he is mindful of the misguided underpinnings. Moreover, like Bill's experiences with ESA, Ryan's experience of UC is different to the legacy benefits he accessed as these offered a 'safety' from stigma (Baumberg et al, 2012). Thus, along with practical and emotional implications as discussed (chapters 8 and 9) UC brings new experiences of stigma for those who were previously *untainted*, as Pemberton et al (2016b) have alluded too. Importantly, despite the differences in participant's experiences and circumstances, the threat of stigma was widely apparent.

People juggle their experiences against the public image of UC, in terms of the Government image and the media image which promotes *vulnerabilities* of those accessing social security, and which impacted how participants experience and respond to UC:

Sophie: Do you think it matters how the general public views UC or the people who claim it?

Natalie: Well there is always a stigma, there will always be a stigma for anyone that claims benefits.

Sophie: Do you feel that? I suppose cos you're in work does that feel any different?

Natalie: [5 second pause] ... I probably haven't told that many people that I am claiming whilst I am working. So it's not, but yes I would think I could be judged or people think I am on the fiddle because I am working and claiming even though it is legitimate.

Natalie responds to the stigma by hiding her UC receipt, which her employed status enables, reducing the threat of stigma. It also reduces the scrutiny she feels is attached to her claim as she fears it could be perceived as fraudulent. What is interesting is the narrative surrounding WTC, unlike UC, was not one of 'welfare' but a 'hand up' (See Timmins, 2016) to those who were *deserving* (working families) therefore avoided much of the stigma and scrutiny.

People in-work avoid the acknowledgement of UC using other statuses as masks. This whilst offering individuals protection from stigma, also obscures and potentially heightens the stigma, stereotype and scrutiny of those out of work (for whatever reason) who are unable to avoid this ‘spoiled identity’ whilst living with UC. Alice had previously worked whilst living with UC, and when asked if she felt differently now, responded:

Alice: um I felt better about claiming [UC] when I was in work because if anyone asked me what I did I was like well I’m working. I didn’t have to say and I’m supplementing with benefits um now that I’m out of work um if someone goes ‘what do you do?’ I say I study because I am, I’m starting studying in September um because I’ve, it’s a pride thing. I’m much happier saying that I study or I’m a stay at home mum than saying I’m on benefits.

Sophie: mm yeah so it’s an easier thing to say?

Alice: yeah cos again I don’t want people to look, view me in this negative light cos it makes me less of a person which is weird but that’s my own personally view of it I think. I’ve worked very, very hard to dismiss this stereotype of what someone on benefits should look like because to be honest we all could be on it; it doesn’t take a lot to have to go on it.

Alice shows the effort and complicated negotiations to avoid the ‘spoiled identity’ attached to UC, one evaded whilst working and now adopts her impending studies as a new mask. Alice offers an interesting perspective as someone who has experienced UC in and out of work. The stigma (personal and social) fuels this response as Alice does not want to feel ‘less of a person’ which the status of ‘claimant’ entails (Patrick, 2017). Such experiences highlight how there are not only vast differences between individuals but within individual experiences and ‘journeys’ themselves, an issue which has received little consideration in the design and delivery of UC.

Also, Alice raises the issue of *universality* of ‘benefits’ across a lifetime as ‘we could all be on it’ yet the stigmatized perceptions obscure this and the connected structural causes in place of individual behavioural ones as Alice describes those who are able to avoid acknowledgement of their access to social security. The efforts Alice took to ‘dismiss this stereotype’ by hiding the identity and fitting in with society’s expectations reinforce the divisive ‘them and us’ narrative surrounding ‘welfare’, as it makes the *stereotypes* more visible and demonised subsequently increasing the need for strategies to manage a ‘spoiled’ identity (Goffman, 1963/1997).

## 10.5 Impacts on self-worth

It is important to consider how self-worth is affected by living with UC, which is impacted by stigma as previous research has shown (Patrick, 2016; Pemberton et al, 2016b) as well as issues surrounding poverty, family and (un)employment. The presented findings explore how living with UC impacts on self-worth, attempts of preservation and how the process made it harder to engage with UC and the labour market. Self-worth is connected to work (Crisp, 2010; Jahoda, 1972, 1982); past, present and future (see 4.3 and 4.8 for broader discussion). This temporality is important as people used it to validate their deservingness and preserve their ‘self’.

All participants linked employment to pride and unemployment vice versa as Ben explains “...I am willing to find work so I can actually be proud of myself”. For Ben, pride was connected to re-entering paid employment, yet he had to juggle this with his mental health, and so often there was a fine balance between preservation of ‘self’ and health. Ben routinely entered temporary work and his experiences are characteristic of the ‘low pay no pay’ cycle (Shildrick et al, 2012) with a work history characterised by a multitude of low-paid, temporary, zero-hour employment. He described various poor employment experiences whilst living with UC, due to the employment nature, conditions of work, treatment by employers and issues such as travel and infrastructure (see Crisp et al, 2018).

Seemingly, UC facilitates this harmful side of the economy of ‘poor work’ (McDowell, 2003; Shildrick et al, 2012) as “...it is about creating workers for jobs that nobody wants...” (Peck, 2001:6), which Ben's experiences epitomize. It is this type of work which Bill, Heather and Laura were actively avoiding due to its negative impacts. In doing so, they *accepted* increasing poverty and subsequent practical and emotional challenges this brought. For a time, John was among those avoiding this ‘bottom-end’ (McDowell, 2003) of the labour market. However, as his unemployment continued and he became increasingly worn down (see 9.5), John started to apply for this type of work. When asked if he felt closer to the labour market since starting UC, John said he felt further away.

Julie was the only participant to enter permanent employment during fieldwork which quickly became problematic due to the employers and challenging nature of the work. By the next month, she had a new part-time job through her voluntary work:

It's like, finally I'm where I wanted to be, put it that way. I'm getting to the point where I'm only starting out with this but it's yeah, it's all good. It's like, it's so much less heavy. I think before, before I did the first job over there um

yeah I didn't have enough to occupy my mind and things and didn't have enough money to do anything (Julie)

In juxtaposing her experiences of (un)employment, Julie offers an example of the benefits of work when it is *where you want to be*. Julie works flexibly at home, in a varied and challenging role. It provides structure and extra income, relieving the financial strain she faced whilst unemployed. Julie describes a common experience of how unemployment brought a heaviness and boredom (Boland and Griffin, 2015; Jahoda, 1972) which coupled with a low income can quickly become damaging. Julie still receives a monthly UC payment which is tapered to her part-time earnings and so far, she was pleased with how this was working.

Tina's experience of in-work conditionality negatively impacted her self-worth as UC had redefined her as a 'shirker' (Pemberton et al, 2016b) and described the work-search requirements as "hard because there is nothing out there". Tina was the only person to experience in-work conditionality; a unique element of UC (see 2.3). It was experienced by Tina as 'coercive' (Wright and Dwyer, 2020), a source of anxiety and introspection.

Participants had to preserve their self-worth whilst engaging with UC as the 'claimant' is positioned as *lesser* (Boland and Griffin, 2015; Chase and Walker, 2012) with a 'non-human' status (Goffman, 1997). The stigma attached to the JCP meant there was something symbolic about entering, a feeling reinforced by the treatment experienced within a place described as 'dangerous' by Wright et al (2020). People experienced both institutional stigma and institutional scrutiny, as discussed in chapter 8, bolstering dehumanization (Haslam, 2006). Notably, the institutional stigma and scrutiny are connected as the latter is fuelled by the first and this is particularly the case with UC and its ideological conception (See Slater, 2012; Wigan, 2012). Moreover, the institutional scrutiny can wear people down (see chapter 8 and 9.5) and make them more susceptible to stigma and attempts for preservation more difficult.

Pam experienced this when she began her journey with UC, a challenging time as she had been a housewife for many years:

I struggled. I was sort of like nervous, anxious. I remember going to a meeting and breaking down basically um cos I've never had to do it before. I've never had to look for a job before, never had to sort of like go for meetings...

For Pam, going to the JCP was difficult; it was associated with the stereotypes surrounding 'welfare' and institutional stigma (Chase and Walker, 2012; Patrick, 2016); this experience coupled with conditionality negatively affected her self-esteem and

mental health (see 9.2). The joint claim element was introduced with UC, which connected Pam's self-worth to paid employment disregarding her other forms of labour (Andersen, 2019; Patrick, 2012) therefore opened her 'self' up for scrutiny. Additionally, Pam had challenges at home, as her husband was in poor health and mourning his labour market exit, which impacted on his own self-worth and wellbeing. Hence, Pam was attempting to preserve her 'self' and wellbeing, as well as her husband's, in line with Rao (2017).

Heather explained how WC encounters negatively affected her self-esteem, treatment which reduced the chance of re-entering employment:

You're supposed to be helped to get back in [to work] not intimidated into 'why are you so useless that you can't be employed' doesn't help, doesn't help your self-esteem.

Importantly, the institutional stigma and treatment from the WC which is focused on 'making work pay' perceive Heather as 'useless' as she is not working, yet the treatment hinders her attempts to find work and so recreates the *imagined* reality. The institutional stigma and scrutiny are widespread within encounters with UC and are underpinned by notions of undeservingness:

Bill: ...you have to struggle to preserve your sense of self-worth in any of your dealings with the DWP these days you know cos at the drop of a hat they will try and chip away at it yeah you know

Sophie: Is that how it feels then they are trying to chip away at your self-worth in any dealing or all the time?

Bill: Yeah, I mean the whole you know the whole thing is never been about well what's best for me, you know what am I entitled to? How can you best help me? How can you give me the service that you are supposed to be giving me that I'm entitled to? It's like 'eugh think yourself lucky you scrounging bastard you are getting anything at all!' Not obviously as explicit as that but that seems to be the underpinning you know... it's an element of state control as well you know. It's opinion shaping, it's messing with people's sense of themselves and their minds you know.

Bill outlines how there is a need to constantly preserve your self-worth in dealings with the DWP [UC] and this is needed more than with his legacy system experiences. He discusses how he is not seen as deserving of *any* help and should be grateful for what he receives, which links to how deservingness should be portrayed (Van Oorschot, 2000; 2006).

In his reflections on how the situation is not geared to help him, Bill reveals the underlying stigma and notion that those who claim 'welfare' are lesser and undeserving.

Furthermore, Bill connects his treatment of being ‘chipped away at’ with social control which is ‘messing with’ the minds and selves of those engaging with UC. Such experiences highlight how institutional stigma (Baumberg et al, 2012) and ‘institutional violence’ (Cooper and Whyte, 2017) connect, an illustration of how ‘stigma power’ quietly manifests to reinforce inequalities (Tyler, 2020).

Similarly, Karl experienced constant scrutiny in his JCP visits, and this was a new experience as he naturally migrated from the ESA support group. Karl now encountered institutional stigma and scrutiny:

...It was quite unnerving sometimes it was as if they [JCP] was trying to catch you out... it’s quite soul destroying sometimes, you feel absolutely fucking useless because you are not being told that, but you are being shown that you know. ‘Why should we give you extra money? What do you need extra money for?’ well when I was working it was alright wasn’t it? Paying my tax, insurance, I was in the 40 percent bracket with me tax. You know but the past is the past. This is the future. Yeah and if that is my future I might as well go now because it’s not enjoyable, it’s just necessity I suppose. It’s just, it’s just err you feel like an outcast...

Karl’s ‘soul destroying’ experience of UC is rooted in his fight to receive his full entitlement, a process which has taken over a year. It is the small, indirect and hidden ‘daily indignities’ (Link and Phelan, 2014) which are damaging as often they can only be acknowledged within that moment. Yet these ‘daily indignities’ feed into bigger questions about (un)deservingness and stigma, ones which are reflected back in the media and public discourse. Karl utilises his citizenship and past work history as a form of self-preservation, but this defence is currently disregarded and is written off to the past. The experiences and feelings about this time lead Karl to question the point of his future if he must continue living in this way with UC. This treatment coupled with his increasing poverty led him to feel like an ‘outcast’ and illustrate the damage inflicted on his ‘self’. Importantly, to continue his fight with UC to gain his full entitlement he needs his self-worth and wellbeing, but the process erodes it.

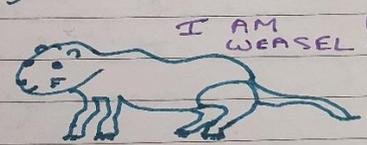
Participants regularly described the difficulties with work-searching and how this impacted on their self-worth, particularly when many applications receive no response. These left individuals wondering, when or if, they might hear something, and this silence was deafening. As work searching is online, Bill visits a friend to use their internet as he cannot afford it which is additional unseen effort. Further, Bill describes how it is important to be ‘enthusiastic’ yet the process and living with UC makes him feel the

opposite. The process requires and undermines self-worth and for Bill connects to his mental health:

(Tues and) Wednesday.  
Did some half-hearted job searches round my friend's house (I'm using her wi-fi, and applied for one job and got half-way through the second application before I quit and saved the app. It was a badly designed on-line form where you have to type in all your qualifications and work record, you can't just copy and paste from a CV, then they wanted me to answer the person spec, now I need a run-up to do that as my self-esteem is a bit shaky. So manāna! Or even tomorrow.)

Thursday.

Here's my brain, churning away on automatic pilot, worry, worry, worry. More official-looking letters arriving, I haven't got the right head on to even open them, my head tells me they



more demands for money I haven't got, if I don't open them I worry and if I do I still worry.

It's hard to stay focused on applying for jobs, I'm getting no-where and getting very discouraged, I'm supposed to be all upbeat in job applications, really keen and enthusiastic about whatever role I'm applying for, when quite frankly I'm blank, empty.

When I try to explain depression (which I'm diagnosed with) it's this bit, the blankness, that people struggle to understand, because it's not all about feeling down all the time, it's often about feeling nothing, blankness and emptiness, interspersed with racing panicky thoughts and bizarreness, and then more emptiness.

MOTORCYCLE



EMPTINESS



There was little recognition, as often throughout the process of living with UC, of the labour (practically and emotionally) which went into applying for work:

...but the thing is they [the employers] don't appreciate you put more effort into the job and try and apply for as many as you can and try sell yourself but it still ain't good enough (Ben)

Ben explains how difficult applying for work can be and how unappreciated this effort is by employers. In a similar way to UC, job applicants can face a feeling of dehumanization (Haslam, 2006). The impact on Ben's self-worth is evident when he describes how you 'try and sell yourself but it still ain't good enough', the experience is deeply personal. Boland and Griffin's (2015) conceptualisation of 'liminality' is useful here as they note how the requirement of 'constant self-reflection' (2015: 44) is damaging, which Ben and others experienced. Ben's self-worth is being increasingly damaged by UC and employers as he 'sells' himself, an impact which makes entering paid employment harder. If we consider UC is to 'make work pay' it raises the questions of who and how they are making work pay for, as it certainly is not Ben, Karl, Bill or any involved in this research.

Treatment from employers and WCs can intersect, strengthening the damage to self-worth and both UC and employers demand a proactive enthusiastic approach which requires self-worth. Thus, the situation simultaneously requires and removes self-worth intensified by institutional scrutiny and stigma. John explained how his WC asked him to contact employers where he had been unsuccessful ("yeah chase them up and say why haven't I got this job? What is wrong with me?") illustrating the profoundly impacts of looking for work emotionally and on the 'self', particularly when you are unsuccessful (Boland and Griffin, 2015). Furthermore, it is dehumanizing and humiliating for John to do this and forces him to (re)confront something that will damage his self-worth. The forced 'contaminative exposure' (Goffman, 1961/2007) is a damaging act of institutional 'coldness' (Haslam, 2006) and 'violence' (Cooper and Whyte, 2017).

This experience reduces self-worth as people deal with UC, employers, and increasing hardship:

I think so much of finding a job as well is about positivity, self-esteem and stuff like that is so important when it comes to finding jobs you know... Um and it [UC] just knocks it out of people the whole system just knocks it out of people (Ryan)

Like I had an interview yesterday for ur Wetherspoons and you know you have to be like, the perfect candidate or whatever and it takes a lot, it takes a

lot when you are going through you know. I'm being interviewed for somewhere that you know, that is relatively cheap, but I couldn't even afford to get lunch afterwards... I understand why people end up feeling so shit about it to put it bluntly (Zara)

Ryan and Zara highlight the importance of self-worth when looking for work and the threat to this from encounters with employers and living with UC. The 'system' utilising institutional stigma and scrutiny chips away at people and people are further undermined in this way by their increasing poverty caused by UC. Zara paints a more complicated picture of the intersections between these issues and how each chip away, remind her of her 'failings' and make it harder to get a job.

Crucially, UC undermines self-worth at a time when it is increasingly needed. The experiences discussed in this section highlight how "...the active awareness of power-infused social relations led to realisations that were of profound consequence to sense of self" (Wright, 2016:247). These 'power infused' dynamics took place not just in the JCP, but with employers and in the homes of participants via the digital channels of UC.

## 10.6 Responding to stigma

So far, the findings have shown living with UC is a stigmatizing experience, following the legacy system (see 4.4 and 4.5 for existing literature). Importantly, this research found UC spread and intensified experiences of stigma and limited participants' ability to manage their identities. In response to stigma, people engaged with 'Othering' (Patrick, 2016) to displace stigma, protect identities and shore up their own deservingness. In this research, there was a wide range of 'Others' echoing stereotypes and more succinct behavioural examples. It is important to remember that those living with UC already experience being 'othered', potentially in multiple directions in a thread of 'daily indignities' (Link and Phelan, 2014).

Chase and Walker (2012) discuss the ripples created by 'Othering' – this divides the group and sustains the stigmatizing narrative on which it is based. What is interesting to consider is that to the outside UC is one 'benefit', a notion reinforced by its design and delivery, thus how does this change 'Othering'? Arguably, UC both increases the need for 'Othering' and undermines people's ability to protect against it. First, the need for 'Othering' is increased as deservingness is invisible, much less attainable and under constant inspection. Moreover, being part of one homogenous group could create encounters with identities more *tainted* than your own and therefore could be stigmatized by association (Goffman, 1963/1997). Secondly, participants are undermined by

increasing conditionality and poverty which reduces the ability to preserve the self as it reduces the resources available and can create further stigma thereby increasing their risk of being ‘othered’. The findings show ‘Othering’ still frequently occurs and the ripples may be more pronounced than before as participants struggle to assert their own deservingness as features of UC undermine people’s ability to do so. The ripples deepen the divisions along the lines of (un)deservingness therefore reinforce the scrutiny from within an already stigmatized group and ultimately reduce the potential for solidarity (Lister, 2004).

Some ‘Othered’ their opposites (Patrick, 2016); for example, John and Heather, both over fifty, described ‘young people’ in stereotypical ways and did this to justify their own deservingness. Isabel, a lone parent, ‘othered’ the ‘benefit brood’ (Jensen and Tyler, 2015). Importantly, the ‘others’ were used as a legitimization for the levels of reciprocity within UC as such ‘others’ required behavioural change. The use of ‘Othering’ by participants illustrates the complicated and often paradoxical internal negotiations which rely on and reinforce the damaging neoliberal anti-welfare narrative, which shapes their own experiences (Patrick, 2017; 2016).

They haven’t been brought up in that world, oh what are you doing today? I’d ask. ‘Oh gonna go to me mates, play the Xbox, smoke some weed and get drunk’ it’s like that is your day. Don’t you have, obviously you can’t say it, don’t you have any ambition? Don’t you wanna travel? They just go and breed with each other. Swap boyfriends and girlfriends, there is lots of half brothers and sisters, I saw it all my god! You know, that is their life (Heather).

Heather’s ‘Othering’ intersects with notions of the ‘underclass’, generational ‘worklessness’ and ‘welfare dependency’ which despite wide promotion are unsubstantiated (MacDonald, Shildrick and Furlong, 2014). The description of young people suggests a primal nature driven by pleasure, one that is ‘non-human’ (Goffman, 1963/1997). The language used suggests a feeling of ‘revulsion’ (Tyler, 2013) towards these young people who are described as promiscuous and incestuous. A web of stereotypes appears touching upon morality, criminality and behavioural concerns and their *difference* is clear as ‘they haven’t been brought up in that world’ thereby, linking the young people with the previous generation, an ‘underclass culture’ (Murray, 1996) and firmly away from ‘us’. Heather’s concern over the lack of ambition was raised in an earlier conversation:

So that's our young people who are going to be running the country when I'm long buried you know and I think oh god really, yeah shame.

It is interesting that Heather suggests these young people could 'be running the country' if it were not for their individualised failings, thus disregarding the structural issues around austerity, poverty, labour markets, education, infrastructure and so on which have influenced their lives. Subsequently, these young people are not only blamed for their own situation but now responsible for the country's future and fate. This example highlights how 'Othering' can mutate arguably due to the power inherent within stigma (Tyler, 2020).

In some instances, family members became the 'Other' connected to their lack of work ethic and reciprocity:

Resentful. You know, I've worked for 30 years and I've paid into the system and somebody who's been on the system for 30 years and hasn't paid in a penny gets more than I do. You know. I feel a degree of injustice, but that's life. (John)

John resents his 'career unemployed' brother who John sees as receiving more money than himself and with less conditionality as his brother receives legacy benefits. The resentment echoes the 'strivers and skivers' narrative (Garthwaite, 2011; Patrick, 2017) as John positions his history paying 'into the system' against his brother 'who's been on the system'. John is frustrated as he feels he receives less for having to do more now and having done more in the past, in terms of a long work history. By emphasising his brother's undeservingness John validates his own, something Gavin did also with his siblings. Notably, the injustice John feels is directed towards his brother and not the Government who control and create policies, actions which impact on all our daily lives. If we consider the earlier discussion surrounding stigma power (Link and Phelan, 2014; Tyler, 2020) the same web of stigma, power and control are apparent, potentially stronger than familial ties and quietly reshaping relationships or understandings of them. Arguably, within a neoliberal society characterised by responsabilisation (Lea and Hallsworth, 2012), this practice of 'Othering' is a way to regulate via 'stigma power' (Tyler, 2020), engaging with and reproducing the 'civilising offensive' (Van Krieken, 1999; Powell 2013; 2007; Clement, 2015).

'Othering' is complicated and personal, in terms of experiences, responses and execution and this is made more challenging by UC as participants struggle to distinguish themselves and assert their deservingness:

...[sighs] it's just bad because the bad ones make the genuine people who are trying to claim and do good, look worse but the people that work there just view everyone in this category where we are all just claiming benefits and all just people that are like 'urk yeah they are benefit people' (Alice).

The 'Other' of 'benefit people', exemplified and amplified by the 'bad ones', seemingly spreads to all living with UC. Alice contrasts herself against this with her 'genuine' need and proactive behaviour, thus validating her own deservingness whilst vilifying the 'other'. Also, an important issue is raised as Alice describes how UC staff begin to see all as undeserving 'benefit people' which legitimizes and intensifies the institutional scrutiny and stigma inherent within this system to *transform* the 'national subjects' (Tyler, 2013).

Concealment of a *tainted* identity is another way to deal with stigma (Goffman, 1963/1997). The strategy, restricted by participant's resources, occurred by adopting identities which indicated a positive work ethic: worker, student, carer, or parent (although this was the weakest protection). Hence, due to "...the great rewards in being considered normal, almost all persons who are in a position to pass will do so on some occasion by intent" (Goffman, 1963/1997:74). So, the only individuals *having* to openly identify with UC are those out of work. Further protection derives from the invisibility of in-work individuals who have limited engagement with UC and are generally contacted digitally, thus avoid entering the stigmatizing and institutional JCP. It will be interesting to see if and how it changes with more widespread in-work conditionality, as the only participant to engage with this encountered similar experiences and feelings as those with full work-search requirements.

One noteworthy concealment comes from Heather, who aged 52, described herself as retired. Unemployed for five years Heather did not envisage returning to employment, as she wanted a *good* job. The retired status is perceived as the most deserving (Van Oorschot, 2000; 2006); in contrast to unemployment, it also requires no validation of work ethic as retirement posits you have already completed a history of work and contributions. In presenting herself as retired, Heather is resisting the unemployed label, attempting to preserve her identity and rejecting the implementation of conditionality.

People could also avoid the stigma of UC by delaying the claim, which three were able to do because of available resources. The findings support previous quantitative research (Baumberg, 2016) which found stigma affected 'benefit' take-up with differing levels across legacy groups. What is interesting with UC, as the findings in this thesis show, is that all initially are treated *uniformly* (see 8.4) and now even those in-work face scrutiny

and stigma, therefore the impact of stigma on access to UC could be greater. Participants did not want to engage with UC because of the stigma, shame and negative image surrounding it particularly regarding conditionality. This highlights how differences within resources relate to identity management; both in one's ability to protect it and the risk to it. In general, the impacts of living with UC undermined participant's ability to protect their identity and self-worth and made their 'claimant' status more visible due to increasing poverty, which is also stigmatizing.

Hiding poverty also provided protection against potential stigma (Chase and Walker, 2012; Hamilton; 2012; Jo; 2012; Shildrick et al, 2012). The findings throughout this thesis have shown the increasing poverty, and at times destitution, that individuals living with UC encounter. Hence, the need to hide poverty rises and in some cases, this means not accessing support. The concealment of any identity takes effort (Goffman, 1997), and this is particularly difficult when hiding poverty as you are already in a challenging position.

Ok. Today, Friday. I met up with my friend  
Shirley. To last December. She doesn't  
live in [redacted] but I met her when I  
was doing a table sale just outside the  
official craft market. We clicked straight  
away + regularly meet in Debenham's  
cafe (which really could do with a  
facelift!) Shirley buys coffee + always  
brings her own cake bars which she  
hides under a serviette. I just bring my  
water bottle. Skin-flints! Cheap day  
out. We then had a wander around the  
charity shops. Shirley is a hoarder. The

Figure 20 Heather's diary page 22

Heather details taking her own water which removed the question and potential 'humiliation' (Goffman, 1963/1997) from not being able to consume. It is these small, often taken-for-granted ways, which can be a source of shame and stigma for individuals and it is with this constant threat they live their lives. The response presents a 'respectable self' (Casey, Goudie and Reeve, 2008) to enable Heather, and her friend, to be in the space without risk of 'daily indignities' (Link and Phelan, 2014). These protective acts are attempts to engage in public spaces in the expected neoliberal ways.

Heather also spoke of not being able to afford water and gas in terms of energy efficiency, and in this way, she is framing her poverty (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013) and subsequent actions, in a more socially acceptable way:

...when I wash my hair I squeeze my hair out into the bucket which is in the bath where the spare water goes and that goes to toilet flushing you see. So

all these little things, squeeze your flannel out everything. You know so, as I say I don't shower everyday if I'm not going out because that saves on gas, I sit in the dark with the TV on to save on electric. I've become very self-sufficient you know, you have to...but in a funny looking way it's not that bad. Um I'm saving water, I'm helping save the planet for my grandson, you know.

Heather is describing living with UC, but she resists framing it in a narrative of poverty speaking in terms of self-sufficiency, or 'resilience' (See Hickman, 2018), and 'helping save the planet', providing a proactive rationale for this hardship which provides a purpose and a *bigger picture* for her struggles and sacrifices. The engagement with environmental reasons also provides an opportunity to increase 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 2000) and concealing the lack of 'economic capital' as the driver for these actions, all of which protects the self against damage and attempts to resist the stigma of poverty.

...there's a bit of shame that keeps you inside as well. You don't wanna be, personally me, I don't wanna be seen out and about you know (Bill)

For some, like Bill, concealing their poverty meant hiding themselves, showing how stigma has the power to 'keep people in' (Link and Phelan, 2014). This attempt of self-preservation led to isolation and often negative impacts for emotional wellbeing (see chapter 9) which is an equally damaging experience. It highlights the 'stigma power' (Link and Phelan, 2014; Tyler, 2020) associated with poverty and what this represents in a neoliberal consumer society (Bauman, 2005).

The concealment strategy highlights the multiple forms of stigma those living with UC engage with, confounding and intersecting with wider impacts (practically, emotionally and for wellbeing) of UC. The stigma associated with poverty is pervasive as there are no 'deserving poor' (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013) and so people go to great lengths to hide this status. Increasing poverty meant some participants were unable to maintain themselves physically, with a reducing 'identity kit' (Goffman, 1961/2007) which impacts on wellbeing, self-worth and increases risk of 'revulsion' (Tyler, 2013). Here, we can see that UC undermines people's ability to protect themselves and who they want to present to the world which is damaging to the 'self' – examples included not being able to shower, shave, dye hair, buy make-up or clothes which all chip away at people and shows how physicality, poverty, and stigma links to the self.

...that security guard waddling over to you and goes 'oooo' you can just read the script behind the guy's eyes you know 'Oh yeah this guy hasn't shaved today, he's obviously worthless' (Bill)

Bill shows how the physicality of self, in his unshaven appearance, links to treatment in the JCP as he is perceived as 'worthless'. It highlights the importance of physical appearance within the JCP and when looking for work as individuals are expected to look 'respectable' (Skeggs, 1997) and those are not treated with 'disgust' (Lawler, 2005). Thus, Bill's work ethic and deservingness, he feels, are signified to security by his unshaven appearance. The security guard within the vast bureaucracy of UC quickly categorises Bill; what is unseen are the challenges from UC: poverty, conditionality, and the fight for his entitlement.

The physicality of the 'self' is useful as it illustrates how important the self, as Goffman (1963/1997) noted, is presented to others and ourselves. The physicality of the self is related to the interlinked concepts of work ethic and consumption (Bauman, 2005; Hamilton, 2012) and deservingness (Van Oorschot, 2000; 2006).

First, presenting the self in a certain way provides people with self-worth and protects against stigma as they can visibly distance from and conceal against the stereotype, a response Casey, Goudie and Reeve (2008) term 'dis-identifying' in research exploring homeless women's identities. Participants described the importance of presenting themselves to distance from the 'benefit people' stereotype, as Alice explains:

But if I was all dressed up like nice and I had this conversation with someone, and I said oh do you think I'm on benefits? They'd be like 'pfft no' cos I don't fit their norm.

The quote illustrates the pervasive physical stereotypes surrounding 'benefits' (Tyler, 2013) and how this can be overcome. This phrase itself seems coded resonating with Skeggs' (1997) discussion of glamour, gender and class, and relates to the way middle class identities dominate and distinguish themselves via vilifying the working class 'other', who are treated with 'disgust' (Lawler, 2005). When attending a training course, Zara described how the JCP staff would publicly shame and question people over their attire and advise them how to dress *better*. Here, the aesthetics of unemployment and activation become clear as it indicates 'work-readiness' and deservingness based upon moralistic judgements (van den Berg and Arts, 2019) and used as a further site of *transformation*. As Skeggs suggests "clothing is used...as a vocabulary which conveys moral quality" (1997: 85) thus can be imbued with symbolic capital (Skeggs, 1997).

As mentioned earlier, UC makes it harder for people to *look* a certain way with increasing poverty leading to destitution where participants are unable to maintain the version of the self they wish to present:

...even in the JCP people look at me funny because I'm not the stereotypical person that is in a tracksuit... I'm not gonna lie about that, definitely mostly the stereotype but you do feel, especially me which is probably why I present myself a certain way and you know I do fight to keep that perception of me with my outside appearance. Like I would never want to turn up without having showered, but you know there has been weeks where I haven't had the money to even buy like shower gel and things like that but like yeah I think there is definitely. I had that conception of people and I do feel like the only thing that I can kind of like do for myself is to keep myself looking the way that I always have, which is the only way I kind of feel half human like if I don't have make up on I feel like a zombie and things like that and it's mainly to do with my own mental health and keeping myself feeling kind of happy and feeling somewhat human. Um yeah I feel like there is definitely that preconception and I do, I did play into it myself and now I'm kind of seeing oh well it's not just those people there is people like me as well...

Yeah you know even doing washing is sometimes difficult and things like that but I feel like definitely with me I just wanna, I do kind of I guess it is kind of like a defence system but you kind of just want to prove that you. I always dress smartly when I go to the JCP and I always present myself like that because it's kind of like a fight for like look I am trying my best, I am presenting myself this way, there is no reason for me not to have a job, what is going on? Um but you know like there will come a point when I won't be able to afford to do washing and I won't be able to afford make up and things like that. And it's just like you will get forced into wearing or looking a certain way and you don't have a choice and I just think it's so tough (Zara).

Zara reveals the complexities bound up in what appears a simple action and the importance of aesthetics of living with UC in terms of unemployment, activation and poverty. The poverty from living with UC has limited Zara's 'identity kit' (Goffman, 1961/2007) subsequently damaging her 'self'. Zara wants to present herself in a certain way to distance herself from the stereotype attached to claiming 'welfare' and because it makes her feel 'human' opposed to 'non-human' (Goffman, 1997) caused by the 'daily indignities' (Link and Phelan, 2014). This action visibly expresses Zara's identity which as she feels under attack becomes more important, attempting to 'pass' (Skeggs, 1997), illustrate her deservingness by looking like 'us' (Van Oorschot, 2000; 2006) and arguably 'salvage the self' (Snow and Anderson, 1987:1364). This is challenged by UC as Zara struggles to continue to *look* how she wants to, thus the 'escape route' of glamour is removed (Skeggs, 1997: 110). Importantly, Zara describes how this is part of her 'defence system' and therefore key to protect her self-worth against this dehumanizing process (see chapter 8). The last reflections illustrate the difficult choices Zara sees in which she will be 'forced into...looking a certain way'; the stereotype she has tried to avoid. This process describes how living with UC can 'force' people into a stereotype, thereby

creating and reinforcing images of ‘welfare’ surrounding UC which reduces the ability to protect identities.

Moreover, it reduces Zara’s ability to present herself ‘smartly’ which physically illustrates her work ethic in the JCP (van den Berg and Arts, 2019). UC *requires* individuals to be ‘well-presented’ as this is required to gain employment. As suggested earlier, this is based upon middle class ideals (Lawler, 2005; Skeggs, 1997). Yet attempts to attain this are undermined, therefore, UC promotes an image whilst simultaneously making it harder for those living with UC to achieve it. If individuals are unable to present themselves as a ‘respectable self’ (Casey, Goudie and Reeve, 2008), they risk stigma and the damage this does. Subsequently, this stigma is reinforced by treatment from JCP and in daily life as people see them as the stereotype they are perceived to be. Over time, people become sensitive to this feeling of ‘otherness’ towards and can find it difficult to reject, as Bill describes:

There are three or four sort of relatively scruffy guys in the day standing around and there will be looks and those looks are judgement kind of looks you know, it’s like ‘what are you doing? Are you taking drugs or what are you doing? Are you not, you’re not one of ‘us’ you know? And that attitude comes across in shops you know stuff like that and it’s subtle, but you know it’s there, ...you do get extra sensitive towards it as well if you’ve been on benefits a while...

Bill’s ‘scruffy’ appearance and ‘standing around’ causes feelings of judgement and stigma from those around him, as he is obviously ‘Othered’ (Lister, 2004) and treated with *disgust* (Tyler, 2013). He describes the small ‘daily indignities’ (Link and Phelan, 2014) which chip away at him and shows how stigma is often sealed with a smile.

By eroding people’s ability to ‘get-by’, UC further undermines people physically, mentally, emotionally and their sense of ‘self’. It pushes people into situations which are stigmatizing, damaging, and for some *risky* (see chapter 11). In this way, people experienced layers of shame, embarrassment and stigma and had to navigate which would be the least damaging route.

## 10.7 Dealing with Deservingness

Another way to protect the ‘self’ is to validate your deservingness to claim, which again is linked to stigma as perceptions of undeserving cause stigmatization (Baumberg et al, 2012). Validation was commonplace in this thesis and occurred in a variety of formats. Existing literature on deservingness surrounding social security focuses on public attitudes to recipients (see 3.4). Van Oorschot (2000) conceptualised five criteria

(CARIN) of deservingness: Control, Attitude, Reciprocity, Identity and Need. More recently, Baumberg et al (2012) characterized deservingness into: need and reciprocity (see 3.5). The findings presented in this section will explore how such criteria are promoted by individuals to validate their own deservingness as a strategy of identity management and the impacts of this.

Firstly, participants reinforced their work history and subsequent contributions to promote their deservingness linking to reciprocity. As noted, even those who emphasised prior contributions struggled with their own feelings of undeservingness and stigma, typified by feeling like a ‘burden’ particularly for the unemployed who face the highest level of conditionality, scrutiny, and stigma within UC, yet some in-work also felt this way. Secondly, unemployed individuals emphasised their engagement with work-related requirements, employability, and willingness to work. Again, this reinforced their level of reciprocity, which is central to the design of UC with the ‘claimant commitment’, high levels of conditionality, responsabilisation and expected levels of engagement with the JCP (showing the right ‘attitude’). However, over time there was a level of disengagement from the work-related requirements due to the regimented, impersonal and at times irrational nature, which indicates a counterproductive use of conditionality (Stewart and Wright, 2018). Not only does this challenge assertions of deservingness but it reduces people’s ability to engage with other activities such as volunteering which brings rewards such as increased self-respect (Penny and Finnegan, 2019).

Thirdly, need was promoted due to health and the subsequent effect this had on levels of expected reciprocity. As previously discussed, (8.4), the uniformity of UC obscures the need of those accessing UC and challenges their ability to validate their deservingness via need of their health. This results in inappropriate levels of reciprocity for individuals to engage with which ultimately are unachievable and therefore perceived as undeserving. Fourthly, parents would connect their need to their children, and this also impacted on reciprocity. All the parents involved in this research were lone parents, with three women having a single child under 18 and for each their child was a central reason for their claim:

...I need to make sure that she is fed and is clothed and unfortunately that takes much more priority over my pride any day you know (Alice).

Alice describes how the financial benefit comes at a cost to her ‘self’. As the need is closely linked to their parental status, this can become a site for scrutiny and parents ensure their children do not go without and feel guilt and blame when they cannot provide to the socially acceptable levels (Hamilton, 2012; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013).

Fifth, references to certain behaviours such as not drinking, smoking, or drug-taking were used to validate deservingness, as it showed *genuine* need opposed to stereotypical representations of ‘welfare’ (Patrick, 2017; Shildrick, 2018) with individuals describing how monies was not spent on this (Summers, 2018) opposed to *irresponsible feckless* ‘Others’ (Batty and Flint, 2013; Lister, 2004; Patrick, 2016). Lastly, the identity of individuals accessing social security is important as those “...who are closer to ‘us’ are seen as more deserving” (Van Oorschot, 2006: 26). Hence, those who look and act like ‘us’ are perceived as more deserving therefore it is important for people to show this, highlighting the need for and importance of aesthetic labour (van den Berg and Arts, 2019). However, as discussed earlier, the poverty from living with UC reduces the ability for individuals to look and act like ‘us’, again, providing another example of how UC undermines people’s ability to promote their deservingness and how over time this is further reduced.

People encountered internalised challenges in accepting help which occur in the attempt to ‘save face’ (Goffman, 1967/1997) or not look greedy, both ways of protecting one’s identity and connected to notions of (un)deservingness. These are linked to stigma and shame surrounding their situation (Chase and Walker, 2012), understandings of ‘welfare’ and the complexities of accepting charity. This can make it difficult to accept help, for example Pam could not face going to the foodbank (see Garthwaite, 2016). Heather explained how her WC gave her his banana when he heard she had been ‘starving’ for 6 weeks (see 7.3 for details):

I said I was so hungry, I didn’t, I wasn’t fishing or anything and he said ‘do you want a banana?’ and I said yes please and I sat there and ate it.

Heather emphasizes she was not asking for the banana despite her hunger because to directly ask for charity would be damaging. This small act and the way in which it is framed by Heather illustrates the complexities of accepting charity and ensuring it, and you, are seen as deserving.

The internal challenge is apparent in reluctance to take the full advance, both Isabel and Alice took less than needed as they did not want to appear *irresponsible* (Lea and Hallsworth, 2012; Patrick, 2017). Therefore, to protect against this, participants deliberated between the financial need and potential damage to the ‘self’. UC has designed an advance system, which creates scrutiny over the *need* of this payment.

The internal conflict over deservingness is apparent when participants spoke of previous work and contributions (Patrick, 2017) however still felt uncomfortable, undeserving and like a ‘burden’ whilst receiving UC linked to the stigma that surrounds ‘welfare’ receipt:

I’ve put the work in in previous years but...still view it as in my head I get given it. I’ve done nothing to earn it, I’m not helping clean the streets, I’m not...trying to help my community because I am a nice person. I’m not doing anything to earn this money. This money is given to me because I have no job and for me that is not weak but that makes me feel like, crappy (Alice).

Here, Alice is describing the internal conflict over her UC receipt as she validates her deservingness by promoting her past work ethic yet still feels ‘crappy’ as presently she is unable to openly show her work ethic in a socially acceptable way. Her personal perceived lack of reciprocity makes her feel undeserving and *taints* her UC payment. Alice described how her ‘brain’ accepts her UC claim as she has ‘earnt it’ but receiving it does not feel this way. This seems to indicate conflicts between the head and heart, past and present, disputes which are difficult to reconcile.

Participants were conflicted over their UC access as they did not feel or were unable to validate deservingness, even if they believed in the welfare state. Zara explained her complicated feelings surrounding UC:

...it was like sort of the rock bottom, you didn’t want to do it. I was always you know held to the sort of value like if you claim benefits it is bad you should be able to get a job and it’s just like. So that, you know that preconception also plagues my mind cos like now I’m doing the thing that I never, I kind of made a pact with myself that I would never get to the point of having to claim benefits and yet I’m in a position that I’m having to (Zara).

Zara must attempt to reconcile the internal challenge over her deservingness interwoven with feelings from her past about what she expected for herself; as a recent graduate these feelings were particularly acute (See Formby, 2017). Such feelings are reinforced by the treatment she experienced at the JCP and the strict conditionality. Zara explains how in accessing ‘benefits’ she has crossed an ontological line which historically she thought not possible and something which she sought to define herself against (Scott, 2018;2019; 2020), thus changing the ‘boundaries’ (Hall, 1996) of Zara’s identity as she *becomes* the ‘other’.

Those who delay accessing UC also delay this internal challenge over their deservingness or perhaps do not claim as after engaging in this question feel undeserving. During ten months described as a ‘sabbatical’, Natalie lived off savings and did not claim UC. The use of language is important as a ‘sabbatical’ infers a temporary, planned, and *deserved*

break from work, one which is earned and still preserves work ethic. A 'sabbatical' confers symbolic divergence from the words associated with 'welfare' and their underlying, pervasive myths (See Garrett, 2018). The word offers control to Natalie, who had the power to define her experience as not unemployment but a 'sabbatical'. There are various forms of capital utilised here to protect Natalie from stigma; mainly economic (via savings) and cultural. When asked why she did not claim during this time, Natalie explained that as she had the money, she felt she should support herself. However, after ten months Natalie's financial security was gone and so she began with UC but only once her future self-employment was arranged. Natalie felt better about accessing UC as her unemployment would last under a month and could define herself as a 'worker'. This meant Natalie did not encounter the strict conditionality and scrutiny from living with UC whilst unemployed. Natalie's savings make her an 'ideal claimant', on which UC is based, yet as she supported herself for ten months, when she entered UC she required the advance payment. Yet in actively avoiding UC, Natalie was a *responsible neoliberal* citizen.

The endless examination of deservingness and the difficulties of validation stemming from living with UC can result in scrutiny over the smallest choices:

Karl: ...I think it's just more of a struggle now and it makes you unhappy and it depresses you. I'd like to go down the chippy and get myself fish and chips once a fortnight. But I can't justify that because if I want to do that, I'm thinking about how they'd think, so I don't have it.

Sophie: about who?

Karl: Them yeah. I wouldn't tell UC what I do or what I don't do because it is always marked off against you. 'He had fish and chips last night, I only get that once a week. He's not working he gets it once a fortnight. That's a bit cheeky isn't it' you just don't know what goes on...

Karl describes how internalisation of this scrutiny leaves him unable to 'justify' going to the 'chippy' as he is always 'thinking about how they'd think', as the *threat* of stigma materialises into physical regulation. Thus, scrutiny over deservingness spreads throughout his daily life which reinforces the negative emotional impacts. He is fearful of such behaviour getting back to UC and being perceived as undeserving for the *luxury* of fish and chips, which he *yearns* for (Scott, 2020). This example conceivably shows the 'internalisation of external restraints' (Elias, 1994) as Karl regulates his desires and behaviours in line with what he thinks his WC wants. Despite UC not being physically there Karl feels their *gaze* and feels anxious as the socially illegitimate income invisibly polices his actions (Foucault, 1975/2020). Therefore money, how it is (un)used and

understood becomes an area of identity management and a site of conflict and social control. To avoid the guilt, shame and perceived scrutiny, Karl denies himself yet this has consequences emotionally and potentially reinforces the *lower* status and distance from society as Karl, and many others living with UC, is a ‘flawed consumer’ (Bauman, 2005). This extends insights into how UC can feature ‘self-inflicted social abuse’ by not only conditionality as Wright et al (2020) suggests, but consumption.

Moreover, even if the finances are available, the money is *tainted* to Karl and hence problematic. Unintentionally in their attempts to not be perceived as an *irresponsible* ‘Other’ spending their money on ‘luxuries’ (Summers, 2018) and part of *us*, individuals are further exiled. The experiences of Karl highlight how the material, emotional and the ‘self’ intersect and how non-physical ideas manifest and have real consequences.

The felt scrutiny over spending UC money meant participants believed they did not deserve ‘treats’ or ‘luxuries’ related to food, personal care and clothing. The internet was described as a luxury by one, and three did not have it at home. These items illustrate how “...social security money has a role in shaping the definition of ‘basic’ or ‘essential’ for the participants” (Summers, 2018: 225) which does not match what wider society considers a necessity<sup>20</sup> or luxury. Consequently, it impacted on people’s mental health (see 9.2), self-worth (see 10.5) and identity as they internalized these feelings of undeservingness:

I’ve had many tearful nights where I’ve thought to myself do you know what I just want to get myself a bag of sweets. But I feel guilty, you know I just want to treat myself to a bag of sweets (Karl)

The deliberation over ‘luxuries’ is multifaceted, driven by practical factors such as the low income from UC, the perception they are *irresponsible* with their monies (Flint, 2010; Summers, 2018), therefore a denial of items attempts to avoid scrutiny and stigma. Importantly, it is also linked to people feeling undeserving of such items, which have become *sacred* whilst living with UC. For some participants, the items have a temporal nature, as it is something they used to have before UC and so act as a reminder of who they are now and who they are not, and this ‘nothingness’ reverberates (Scott, 2018;2019; 2020). Hence, “The memory and knowledge of what once had been looms large in

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<sup>20</sup> The Minimum Income Standard (MIS) report (Davis, Hirsch, Padley and Shepherd, 2020) found the UC allowance fell below the MIS, meeting only 43.4percent for a single working age claimant at £90.70 per week compared to the £208.91 required. The £208.91 is the MIS excluding rent, childcare and council tax and produced before the temporary Covid-19 £20 weekly uplift.

consciousness, so that the past continues to haunt the present” (Scott, 2018: 11). Items such as biscuits are not just a pack of biscuits but are loaded with social connotations and scrutiny over one’s deservingness; hidden in plain sight.

Money, how it is used and understood, relates to identity management and stigma. Money exposes how the pervasive ‘welfare’ narrative (Jensen, 2014; Tyler, 2020; Shildrick, 2018) and deservingness physically manifest to further control and undermine people in their daily lives, extending the ways in which living with UC can ‘chip’ away at people, who they understand themselves to be, how they present themselves and consume.

Alice explained how she budgeted:

My money I have earned is like 50/50, 50 percent necessity food, clothes, household, gas, electricity, bills stuff like that. 50 percent saved, treat. That’s when I’m working. When I’m on UC 90 percent of it will go to food, bills, clothes for my daughter, books for my daughter, things that she needs um and food for the house, heating for the house. 10 percent will go onto me so if I need new shoes that will take me a couple months and I will save that up but, I feel bad using any UC money for like treats in inverted commas, for the tape recorder there. Um I feel very guilty about using it for going out drinking or cigarettes or anything that I would deem a luxury item cos it’s not my money, it’s there to help me live. It’s there to help me exist... this money is there to help us live not, not to be living it up like... (Alice).

Alice has a clear distinction between monies, extending to how she feels about and uses money. The division of monies between necessity and treats highlights the freedom when money is ‘earned’ and when there is more money to spend. The quote illustrates the emotional nature of budgeting as Alice feels guilt over certain expenditures (Summers, 2018) with the underlying narrative that those who access ‘welfare’ do not deserve any more than to ‘exist’.

Treats were warranted for children (Hamilton, 2012; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013; Summers, 2018) but Alice still scrutinised this expenditure compared to if she was working. Therefore, the benefits and pressures of providing treats for children must be balanced against the scrutiny over the income. Alice later described a ‘disconnect’ with paid earnings compared to UC income, as money from work is *her* money which she can spend freely without scrutiny. The data shows the complex negotiations practically and emotionally attached to money when individuals consider how they spend and how it looks regarding their deservingness. Paid earnings can be spent without concern yet money from UC is *tainted* and laden with illegitimacy which leads to a self-regulation over expenditure and the gaze of deservingness – ‘who should get what, and why’ (Van

Oorschot, 2000) – into the details of daily life. Participants become responsible for their own *constraints* by feelings of guilt and shame as well as the institutional constraints imbued by low income therefore providing another layer of governmentality (Foucault, 1979) as the ‘webs’ of responsibility spread and entangle (Peeters, 2013).

Paid earnings provided ‘empowerment’ and ‘pride’ as opposed to money from UC which was perceived as a ‘hand out’. Ben and John described when this income was reduced by UC as a ‘punishment’ causing frustration and confusion. The findings illustrate the preference and non-financial benefits of paid earnings (Peterie et al, 2019a; Summers, 2018), and show for some the unique features of UC reduced the legitimacy of paid income thus lowering the potential benefits to the ‘self’ and self-worth. The reduction of chances to present socially legitimate monies, as experienced by Ben and John, is another way in which UC decreases opportunities to validate deservingness at the same time as increasing individual need for it. The universal nature of UC consequently extends to create a universal income, as there is no longer a visible hierarchy of social security income (Summers, 2018), but this opaqueness obscures work ethic and deservingness to the outside world and intensifies the illegitimacy.

Generally, people do not identify as undeserving as this would leave them open to stigma and this has been identified as a potential driver for not accessing social security (Baumberg et al, 2012). Karl openly discussed how he did not feel deserving of UC. Whilst not to reinforce notions of deservingness, as social security should be accessible and benefit all without stigma, Karl was clearly in need. His experiences from living with UC had been characterised by intense institutional scrutiny which had impacted on him financially, physically, emotionally and on his ‘self’.

Linked to participants' *validation* of deservingness is comparison to those who are seen in a worse position (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013). This re-positioning of the self enables a rationalising of one's experiences as *not that bad* and creates a *lower* ‘other’ (Chase and Walker, 2012). Notably, this was not done in a derogatory sense but an empathetic one of feeling sorry for ‘others’ who were struggling with UC such as ‘vulnerable’ individuals, resonating with the ‘universal dimension of support’ (Coughlin, 1980). Participants often spoke sympathetically for those who could not engage with the online system of UC who needed extra support as the challenges they encountered were not by their own design. Comparisons came from stories in the media, from personal experiences with friends, family or events in the JCP:

You know I feel lucky that I only had quite a short and relatively simple um experience with it but you know the long term unemployment is a real thing for someone who's on UC for that long I can't imagine it does anything good for them ultimately (Ryan).

The sympathetic comparison to 'others' brought a level of protection, as Ryan describes himself as 'lucky' and to some extent allows their negative experiences to be rationalised within a broader framework in which they were not the worst off. That is not to say that there are not individuals who had worse experiences, but this comparison lessens their own experiences, moreover the feelings of 'luckiness' obscure the structural roots of the situation and so removes blame from UC and the Government. The use of the word *luck* arguably links to neoliberalism, in its individualised, unregulated and irrational nature and importantly it prevents and hides the strings of the deep-rooted inequalities.

Similarly, people spoke of their gratefulness towards their situation, either that it had not been too bad or that the help, however little and challenging, had been there. Gratitude resonates with deservingness (Van Oorschot, 2000; 2006), resilience (Hickman, 2018), and was important when engaging with the WC which showed an underlying acceptance of their 'activation' (Peterie et al, 2019a). People with difficult experiences from living with UC put effort into framing these in a positive way (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013), for example Tina discussed how her 'only complaint' with UC was the JCP misadvice which led to her 'struggling' for ten months as she was told she was not eligible to claim. Or Heather, whose challenges have been well-documented in this thesis:

I'm lucky. I've got a lovely home, good friends, nice family, um you know so I can't moan about it.

Despite the harms, the experience in hindsight is framed positively, a coping strategy to navigate the 'compromised' life (Pemberton et al, 2016a) with UC which ultimately responsabilises and legitimizes the experiences and damage to the *uncivilised* individual.

## 10.8 Conclusion

This chapter offers an empirical contribution to knowledge by investigating how UC impacts identities and how this is managed by different individuals. Therefore, addresses the second research question (see 1.2). UC spreads and deepens the *threat* of stigma (Goffman, 1963/1997) which is now felt by all those who access UC and the protections found in the legacy system for some have been removed.

Participants faced multiple stigmas which can be intensifying and intersect with the practical impacts such as increasing poverty; in creating more stigma, reducing strategies

to mitigate or the strategies themselves become stigmatizing (Hamilton, 2012). As Tyler (2020) suggests the inclusion of power within discussions of stigma illustrates the fluidity and pervasiveness of stigma and how it acts in and between the micro and macro, ensuring the self-regulation of our own societal inequalities. This reconceptualization illuminates how stigma is a site of conflict, multiple and far-reaching, which individuals actively engage with. In this chapter a series of conflicts are discussed: stigma as conflict, conflicted identities, conflicted realities, the conflict from *above* and *below*, and the body as a site of conflict.

The thesis findings show how stigma has increased in terms of spread and intensity with UC; touching new groups and reaching new depths. The strategies to protect the self can increase individual stigma, make life more challenging and reinforce the stigmatized notions surrounding UC as one *type* of ‘claimant’ becomes increasingly visible.

A range of responses and impacts of stigma have been discussed, a process which despite being often invisible has considerable physical and practical consequences. The chapter has also explored the physical nature of managing the self and how this is both of growing importance and undermined by UC. A theoretical thread through-out the thesis but particularly this chapter is the notion of deservingness which formed the final section (10.7). The question over deservingness once internalised by individuals regulates their own behaviours and shapes understandings of ‘Others’. The scales of deservingness are muddied by UC, as the requirements for deservingness became tighter yet the mix of individuals and experiences flood the rigid bureaucracy. UC has fundamentally restructured understandings of deservingness, reduces visibility of it and increases the need for validation by intensified scrutiny and stigma.

Evidently, deservingness runs on temporal lines, with past, present and future choices and behaviours of participants being used to evaluate the levels of need and reciprocity for UC. Individuals living with UC must negotiate this question internally and externally which embeds itself into the smallest actions, as the ‘external restraints’ become ‘internalised’ (Elias, 1994).

# 11. Responding to Universal Credit: secondary impacts on the ‘self’

## 11.1 Introduction

This chapter investigates how participants’ responses to UC impacts on the ‘self’. It explores the consequences of having your emotions, wellbeing and ‘self’ undermined as documented in the preceding findings chapters (7, 8, 9, 10).

This chapter provides new insights addressing the third research question which focuses on the responses to UC, how this affects the ‘self’ and the impacts of this (see 1.2.). It provides an empirical contribution to knowledge by exploring how the responses to UC cause secondary impacts on the ‘self’, emotions and wellbeing.

The chapter begins by discussing the risks and sacrifices participants made living with UC and how this impacts the ‘self’. The section (11.2) illustrates how responses to living with UC themselves have consequences as individuals negotiated their lives against UC’s aims of behavioural transformation. Resistance is then explored which considers how participants attempted to ‘resist’ the aims and conditionality of UC which took effort, particularly over the long-term. The acts of resistance were used to protect their emotions, wellbeing and ‘self’ from the ‘violence’ of UC (8.2). This type of resistance occurred on a micro-level. Lastly, being a ‘good claimant’ is discussed which is an interesting response to UC and illustrates another attempt of ‘self-preservation’ used by participants.

## 11.2 Risks, Sacrifices and the ‘self’

Sacrifices are made as a response to living with UC for example the negotiation of financial impacts and those on the ‘self’. Such ‘acts of commission’ cause ‘nothingness’ (Scott, 2018; 2019; 2020) which potentially reduces identity management strategies, further damages the ‘self’, and incurs its own impacts practically and emotionally. These consequences hinder the journey with UC and relate to individual resources.

The poverty from living with UC meant John became increasingly isolated as he sacrificed ‘everything he enjoyed doing’ which impacted on John's wellbeing, sense of ‘self’ and reinforced exclusion. The dislocation from the life he used to lead when he was working is illuminated for John in the small and mundane sacrifices, like going to the cinema with friends. John is ‘haunted’ by his past consumption (Scott, 2018; 2019; 2020) which reminds him of his current situation and becomes another source of ‘humiliation’

(Goffman, 1961/2007). Therefore, inflicting further damage to his 'self' and is a source of 'suffering' (Frost and Hoggett, 2008).

Sacrifices appeared when participants gave up on part of their life, or paused it, due to living with UC for example both Gavin and Zara had to relocate to stay with family owing to finances. In doing so, individuals are potentially less equipped to protect their identities and emotional wellbeing as their life becomes increasingly 'compromised' (Pemberton et al, 2016a). Heather's comment links to her continued food poverty and the physical impacts she has experienced living with UC (see 7.3 and 9.3):

I haven't got the money; you know so that bit makes it feel inhumane because I'm a different portion of society. I go shopping with my friend, she buys me some cheese and it's really nice. To her it's nothing...I don't live in your world. I didn't say it, but I think it... but she works for it, yes, I'll give her that. She works very hard, but I don't live in her world (Heather).

Heather demonstrates a cost to 'self' in her awareness that she cannot afford what society deems *normal* and this reinforces a feeling of difference and *acceptance* of the status as 'Other'. Heather describes the low income as 'inhumane' because it denies her full participation within neoliberal society (Bauman, 2005) with the access she does have *tainted* (see chapter 10). She is reminded of this *difference* whilst with a friend, whose status of worker and subsequent experiences are in direct contrast to Heather's. At the end, she discusses the different worlds she and her friend inhabit which is a reference to Heather's choice not to enter 'bad work'. This *act of commission* enacted to protect herself creates a spiral of potential 'no-things, no-bodies, and non-events' (Scott, 2019: 175) which Heather must now negotiate. She is 'haunted' by her 'Otherness' but also uses her rejection of 'bad work' (see 4.8) to validate her struggle and frames the 'nothingness' in a different, positive, light.

'Bad work' can possess benefits (Crisp, 2010; Shildrick et al, 2012) and understandings of 'bad work' varies from individual and can change over time. For example, Heather characterized 'bad work' as zero hours, temporary and insecure akin to 'poor work' (Shildrick et al, 2012), and 'good work' a full-time secure job with a good company, such as a supermarket. Bill, however, would class a supermarket job as 'bad work' as it is 'boring' and repetitive. Ben regularly works in what could be perceived as 'bad work' yet he does not consider it such and feels pride in his status of worker and gains self-esteem. For him, 'bad work' was connected to conditions (pace and pressure) and employer treatment. As a researcher it has been important to reflect, be mindful of individual perceptions of work and attempt to represent the complexities of these understandings.

Older participants were more vocal about ‘bad work’ who previously experienced secure full-time employment, whereas younger participants had only known a more precarious labour market (McDowell, 2003; McDowell and Bonner-Thompson, 2019; Standing; 2011).

In response to UC, Heather has sacrificed (financially and the ‘self’) to protect against the harm from ‘bad work’ thereby rationalizing the situation and sacrifices as a choice she is ‘responsible’ for (Peeters, 2013). Importantly, the lack of money not only reinforces Heather’s feeling of *difference* but reduces her mitigation whilst intensifying the need to protect her identity. Therefore, the acknowledgement of *difference* provides a way to move closer to society as she accepts the narrative and positions herself as ‘us’ yet this complex maneuvering actually only serves to maintain the exclusion and legitimize this treatment. The experiences of living with UC have led to a form of acceptance that Heather is not part of the world society inhabits and this sense of societal dislocation is unlikely to facilitate the aims of UC. The sense of sacrifice experienced by Heather illustrate the consequences of ‘surviving’ with UC, the impact this has on her ‘self’ and how it is negotiated.

Sacrificial responses to UC also relate to employment. Ryan naturally migrated to UC; he was looking for support with his self-employment. However, after being deemed ‘gainfully self-employed’ and the application of the MIF (see 2.3 for definition) he received no UC payment for the first two months. Consequently, he stopped his self-employment, on advice from the JCP, and became unemployed (he now works part-time and receives a small amount of UC). Ryan is fearful of taking self-employed work in case it interferes with UC and now has given up on a decade long career:

Yeah, going to them looking for support and ultimately yeah stability and some help and then actually getting the opposite of that was um was quite shocking really, that that can happen (Ryan)

For Ryan, UC was challenging financially, mentally, emotionally and within employment. The sacrifice of a career is an irrational consequence of UC, as it reduces employability, future earnings and means he now will continue to access UC. Moreover, a career for Ryan was a part of himself, this now induces a sense of loss and creates a ‘nothingness’ which destabilises his identity via this coerced ‘*act of commission*’ (Scott, 2018; 2019; 2020). To a lesser extent three others sacrificed their careers, such as Isabel who could not afford to renew her nursing registration.

The sacrificial responses and the impact of ‘nothingness’ which follows are a secondary source of ‘violence’ from UC, as violence is “...the cause of the difference between the potential and the actual” (Galtung, 1969:168). This lost ‘potential’ becomes a source of ‘nothingness’.

A risk from UC is feeling *pushed* into inappropriate work – physically, financially, emotionally or for wellbeing. The work being deemed inappropriate was driven by the participants and their feelings towards work as like ‘bad work’ is subjective.

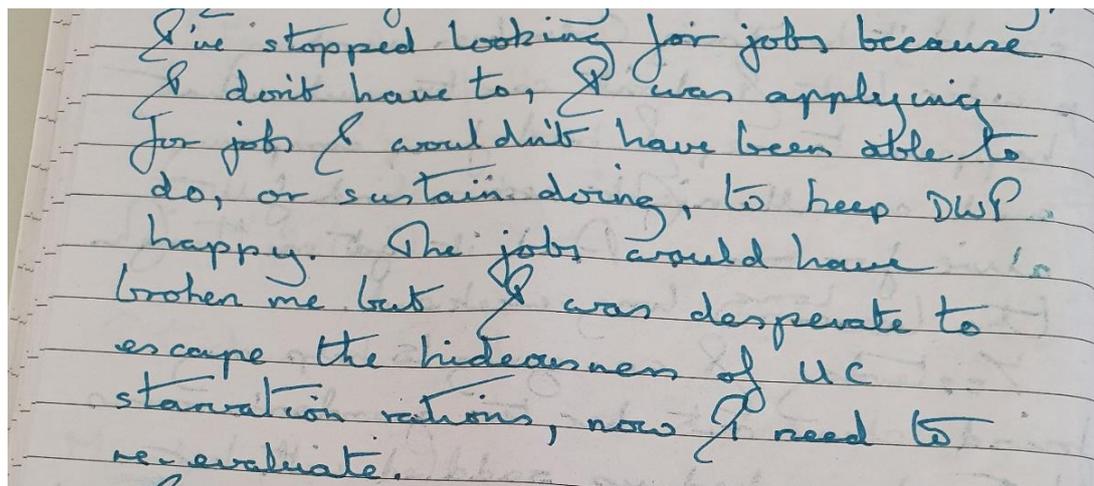


Figure 21 Bill's diary page 31

Bill was confused over his new circumstances (withdrawal of conditionality due to health) and reflects on how the jobs previously applied for could have ‘broken’ him, but he did so to ‘escape’ UC. This adds further detail on how people respond to UC’s *push* towards work from the conditionality and increasing poverty, and the potential damage of this for emotions and wellbeing. Despite the removal of conditionality, Bill could not *escape* this situation due to the low income, as the grip of UC was twofold. Bill now felt at a crossroads and with the institutional scrutiny lifted he now was able to ‘re-evaluate’.

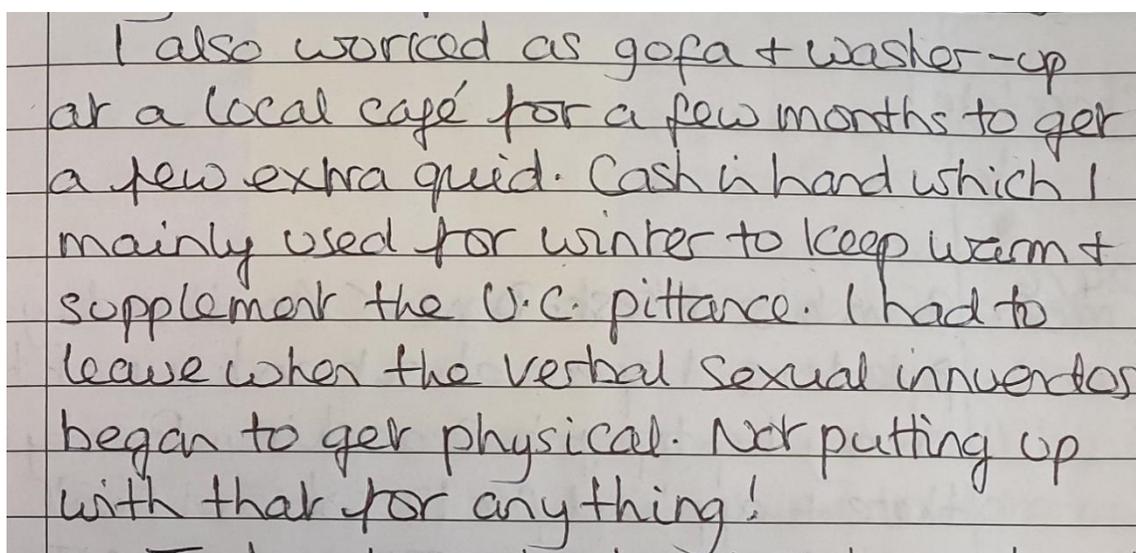
The *push* into inappropriate work for seven came from the WC with direct requests and the need to please the WC, *a sign of irrationality* (Ritzer, 2002). An indirect push came from increasing hardship, Karl attempted to alleviate his poverty:

I went for a job at Morrisons um my MS nurse said ‘What the hell are you doing?’ and I said well I can’t live on the money I’m getting and she said ‘You can’t do that!’ which I knew I couldn’t but I was trying to do something to try and [sighs] do you know what I mean?

Karl provides another example of the consequences of UC and the attached risks. Yet perhaps the *push* into inappropriate work is a symptom of UC’s drive to ‘make work pay’

and seemingly get people into (any) work regardless of personal circumstances and potential harm. Such an aim derives from the misguided foundations of UC based on ideology and myth (Slater, 2012; Wiggan, 2012) consequently the results of the ‘civilising offensive’ are as irrational as its inception. On the other hand, the results could be a sign of success as it is *pushing* people towards work by increasing poverty, conditionality, stigma and for some reducing their need for ‘welfare’. However, for many the work is insecure and low paid, so they still access UC, thereby the ‘low pay no pay’ cycle (Shildrick et al, 2012) is further reinforced and institutionalised.

Some of the responses enacted to mitigate the poverty from living with UC can be risky, as Heather wrote about:



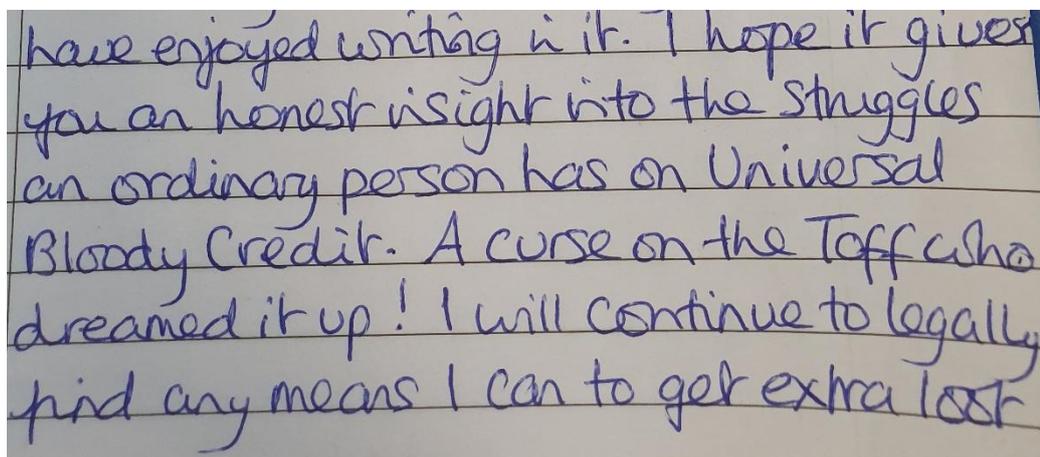
I also worked as gofer + washer-up at a local café for a few months to get a few extra quid. Cash in hand which I mainly used for winter to keep warm + supplement the U.C. pittance. I had to leave when the verbal sexual innuendos began to get physical. Not putting up with that for anything!

Figure 22 Heather's diary page 5

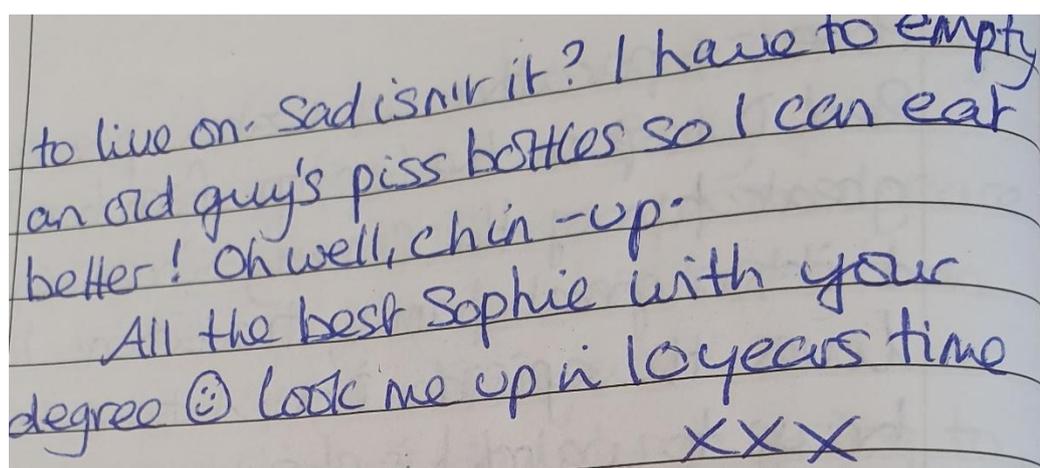
...he'd lock up and pull the shutter down, lights were off um the door would be shut but not locked that is the only access out and I don't think. I don't know whether he would but, I'm now in an enclosed space with a man who I know wants to do things with me and I don't want to. What do I do? (Heather)

Heather describes how to get extra money she entered informal work which she left due to sexual harassment. ‘Fiddly work’ (MacDonald, 1994) is a survival strategy for social security recipients living off a low income and within deprived areas is accepted (Lister, 2004). Moreover, it is used to present an individual’s work ethic and can be utilised for ‘self’ management (Fletcher, 2010a; MacDonald, 1994) reinforcing the non-financial benefits of work (Crisp, 2010; Jahoda 1972) even informally. For Heather, undertaking ‘fiddly work’ was a survival strategy which involved an unsafe workplace and as a worker she had no formal protections; characteristic of the hidden economy (Fletcher, 2010a; MacDonald, 1994).

The vulnerable position was a response to living with UC, as the £5 hourly pay would help Heather through the winter, when to keep warm she spends September to April living in the front room. This experience highlights the risks of such work and the balance between money and safety. Heather now does informal work for someone she met via her social network:



have enjoyed writing in it. I hope it gives you an honest insight into the struggles an ordinary person has on Universal Bloody Credit. A curse on the Toff who dreamed it up! I will continue to legally find any means I can to get extra lost



to live on. Sad isn't it? I have to empty an old guy's piss bottles so I can eat better! Oh well, chin-up.  
All the best Sophie with your degree 😊 Look me up in 10 years time  
XXX

Figure 23 Heather's diary page 37 and 38

The extract highlights the cumulative effects of living with UC which seeks to transform, yet experiences discussed in this thesis have shown it *pushes* people further from the labour market and their 'self'. As they grapple with a 'compromised life' (Pemberton et al, 2016a), participants respond in (un)intended and creative ways.

Isabel also discussed informal work:

...I also think this is making me into a criminal as well because I've been considering, I haven't done anything, but because of the situation I'm in I've considered doing work for cash in hand... I think this situation will make you your life choices more desperate (Isabel).

Isabel describes her dilemma and how this is linked to UC which makes ‘your life choices more desperate’ due to increasing poverty. Both Heather and Isabel show the active responses to living with UC and the trade-off between financial, personal, and *criminal* risks. For Heather informal work was better than ‘bad work’ and for Isabel, it was a response to reducing options to ‘get-by’ (Lister, 2004). Isabel had also considered letting a room out in her home but had not done so as she was worried it would affect her UC, the bedroom tax, as well as fears for her and her son's safety:

Because if it wrecks the fine balance of survival it might tip me over the edge, I’m too frightened (Isabel).

The responses could have consequences for Isabel’s mental health (see 9.2) and emotional wellbeing and these concerns are considered when making choices about how to ‘get-by’ (Lister, 2004). The feeling of walking on a tightrope for some participants living with UC highlights the precarity, risk and anxiety of their experiences as changes and actions can reverberate causing them to lose balance. When people enter situations to ease this journey it can offer some respite but also risk as described in the experiences of Heather and Isabel.

Other responses to the impacts of UC utilised by participants include using a food bank (Garthwaite, 2016) and asking friends and family for support (Chase and Walker, 2012; Fletcher et al, 2016; Flint, 2010; Pemberton et al, 2016a; Wright and Stewart, 2016) risk potential stigma and damage to self-worth. Bill provides a complex example of how responses to UC can be risky, sacrificial and damage the ‘self’. For Bill UC had negatively impacted him as his payment was reduced by a sanction (with questionable grounding), debt repayments, a delayed uplift to his UC payment and misadvice creating and intensifying the challenges.

So, I wasn't given the correct info, they have just opened a new service centre and the staff are still training. (Yeah I know, I would have had a job there if DBS hadn't screwed up my background check, I'll tell you about it sometime).

Right, it can take up to 12 weeks to get the doctor report back and process the claim. In my case the doctor's report has already been sent back, so it should all be done in time for my next payment in Sept.

Good news. I mean it doesn't help me this money (£190, I'd like to see one of these M.P.s bigging up U.K. live on £190<sup>per</sup> a month! It's Hobsons bloody choice; pay the bills, or eat and have electric. Can't do both. So I paid the bills, and got a food and fuel voucher. My last fuel voucher for 6 months, I saved it for

emergencies, and this is one.

Anyway that cheered me up a bit.

Just to re-emphasise, the Govt says £317 is the minimum I need to live on for a month. How can they then keep taking chunks out of it? Big chunks at that.

£190 for a month, leaves me scratching around in horrible poverty. I've taken food out of bins ffs.

I've picked food off the ground.

I've stolen food from shops.\*

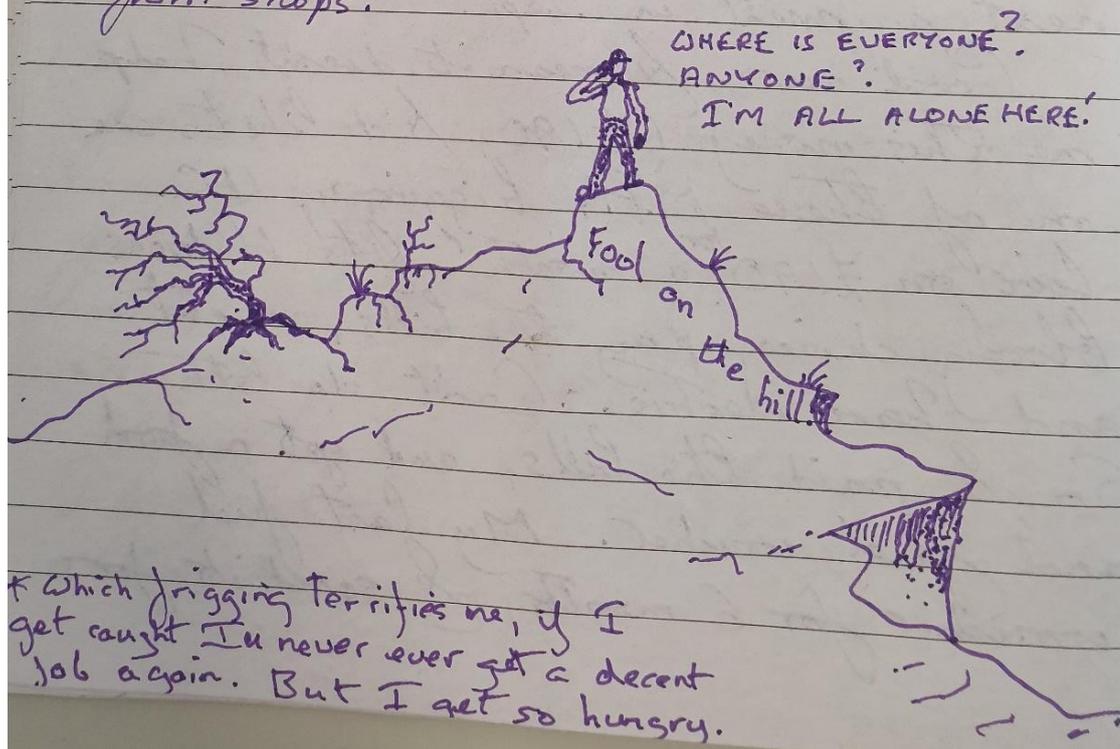


Figure 24 Bill's diary page 26 and 27

... the thing I resented was it just made me have to make unpleasant choices like that you know, like you say Hobson's choice. Oh, right great so I either become a criminal yeah and do something really stressful in order to feed myself or I go home and there is nothing to eat, how long can I bare that?  
(Bill)

Bill explains how living with UC puts him ‘scratching around in horrible poverty’ resulting in a ‘Hobson’s choice’. Subsequently, he enters damaging situations so that he can eat but is aware this may reduce his future employability. Bill had to choose between survival now at a risk to his future, with practical consequences from living with UC having impacts emotionally and on the ‘self’, which must be managed. The impacts are harder to deal with and consequences become and feel intensified at a time when Bill is trying to navigate UC and of misadvice (see 8.3). Bill’s drawing shows the sadness, loneliness and sense of abandonment as no one helps him during this time (see 9.4 and 9.5 for emotional impacts).

When pushed to destitution, survival becomes key and participants who have experienced ‘violence’ (see chapter 8) find themselves in a further dehumanizing ‘Hobson’s choice’ including stealing, borrowing, informal work and suicide (see 9.2). The experiences and responses of living with UC can reinforce the notion that those who access ‘welfare’ are lesser (Boland and Griffin, 2015), further *pushing* people into this narrative (Tyler, 2013).

Crucially, it moves people away from how they see themselves:

... you know it’s not who I see myself as ...just a horrible thing to be made to do you know...like I say it wasn’t the actual guilt from the stealing it was just like this like me being pushed away from who I am, you know my sense of self. Like I said they chip away at it and that’s one of things you know that gets, because you do things that you said you’d never do that you know? (Bill)

Bill connects UC with his stealing food, is angered at the ‘Hobson’s choice’, and highlights the structural causes of this act. He describes how it is not the act of stealing but the realisation this was now his situation as the source of shame (Scheff, 2003), damaging emotionally and to his ‘self’. Bill not only experiences being ‘chipped away at’ in his dehumanizing dealings with UC but in daily life due to the consequences of the increasing struggle to ‘get-by’ (Lister, 2004). This duality intensifies the experiences, impacts and responses to living with UC as the scrutiny and stigma are not contained to one area of life.

It shows the complexities of how practical responses have consequences emotionally and on the ‘self’, and it is the latter consequences which causes enduring damage. In describing his loss of ‘self’, Bill demonstrates a form of social death (Goffman, 1961/2007; Kralova, 2015) created by the ‘daily humiliations’ of living with UC. This sentiment resonates with Scott (2018; 2019; 2020) as Bill has *lost* himself and engages in reverse biographical identity work to make sense of the situation (Scott, 2020:13). The

'Hobson's choice' starts a process of 'non-being' with Bill moving further away from societal norms and crossing lines previously not thought possible, with his identity increasingly damaged. Bill displays a sense of loss for who you were and confusion for who you are now, as the 'self' comes adrift which is likely to hinder successful engagement with UC, the labour market and daily life. The changes in his identity were discussed in relation to other *risky* behaviours:

Saturday & Sunday  
→ Wasted. Nuff said

Monday.  
Blough.

Tuesday/Wednesday.

I hate weekends. Bank holidays are just long weekends. Everyone is out having fun, I feel excluded, marginalised, invisible. I fell in with a couple of dodgy geezers I vaguely know, looking for trouble, coz at least trouble is excitement.

tells me I'm still alive, so we raised some cash and got stuck into the Class A's. Now a 60 yo heart attack survivor shouldn't be doing Colombian marching powder but I don't care too much what happens to me, I had fun, company and an all-night session and felt alive for once. And it got me through the ~~long~~ long weekend.

I got my hood well pulled down over me whilst I'm begging thinking please don't be my next-door neighbour [chuckles] yeah (Bill).

Bill provides an insight into the indirect ways his life had been affected by living with UC. The secondary impacts have real consequences; far from moving closer to the workplace Bill is moving further away from his 'self'.

In the first diary extract, Bill describes his hatred of 'weekends' as he feels 'excluded, marginalised and invisible' from the hedonism and consumption outside as he stays indoors characterised by 'nothingness' (Scott, 2018; 2019; 2020). Those who are *uncivilised* neoliberally feel exclusion and shame in their inability to participate in the 'weekend', showing how the *ordinary* becomes connected to conflict.

Bill details begging and taking drugs as 'at least trouble is excitement, tells me I'm still alive'; it demonstrates how he normally feels not *alive* as he has been 'chipped away at' in terms of engagement with UC and the poverty it creates. For Bill this involved fighting to move conditionality groups, a sanction due to missing his WCA, multiple debts reducing his monthly payment resulting in a monthly income of £190 and widespread misadvice, all connected to UC's design and delivery. Bill's statement resonates with Goffman's 'self-mortification' (1961/2007) and his desire to feel alive illustrates his contrasting feelings of a 'non-person'. Whilst the JCP is the most intense site of potential self-mortification via 'institutionalisation', 'daily indignities' (Link and Phelan, 2014) are experienced everywhere due to poverty, scrutiny and stigma.

The actions of begging and drug taking are risky socially, for Bill's health and sense of 'self' which requires identity management. The potential damage to the 'self' is interesting as these actions were in response to harm already incurred living with UC showing how consequences can spiral unpredictably. Whilst there was potential damage for Bill, he saw benefits in this situation in terms of socialising and escapism. It is important to acknowledge the benefits that Bill found in otherwise *risky* actions.

The use of 'random' is noteworthy as it indicates a fluidity, freedom and in a way reduces the ownership of the situation and separates himself (and his 'self') from the actions, as a connection could be damaging. Arguably, it creates distance from the *tainted* nature of certain drug use in line with Hoolachan (2020). Being 'random' is also the opposite of the rigidity experienced within UC and the restraints (fiscally, time, behaviours, conditionality, socially) it imposes. Instead of doing *nothing* (Scott, 2018; 2019; 2020),

Bill engages in actions, ‘acts of commission’ (Scott, 2018; 2019; 2020), which themselves create ‘non-beings’ and further risks, thus *nothing* itself is complex and can be negotiated.

Bill comments on his concern of being seen by his neighbours whilst begging which illuminates the risk and stigma attached to his actions. The act of begging provides another example of how Bill does not *see* himself and illustrates the distance between who he is now, who he was and who he wants to be (Scott, 2018), displaying a form of ‘social death’ (Goffman, 1961/2007; Kralova, 2015). Additionally, it shows how for Bill the dehumanizing impacts of UC (increasing poverty and inappropriate conditionality) can be ‘decivilizing’ (Mennell, 1990) as the behaviour is further away from neoliberal civility which the offensive aims to enact. The findings demonstrate how UC can create the stereotypes on which it is based and subsequently further increases the need and intensity of behavioural change. Furthermore, within the responses we can trace the ‘violence’ (Galtung, 1969) of UC as participants experience further losses of ‘potential’ within the ‘nothingness’ (Scott, 2018; 2019; 2020) of their responses.

### 11.3 Resistance

This section considers resistance to the aims and conditionality of UC and relates to participants ‘self’ understandings and self-preservation. The focus is on micro acts of resistance which were used to mitigate the impacts of living with UC and effected individual’s UC ‘journey’. First, a brief exploration of resistance and agency (Lister, 2004):

Keep your country sad and angry at each other and they won’t focus on [the Government], that’s why everyone is really freaked out about um like extinction rebellion and things like that because people are starting to up rise and that’s not exactly what they want (Alice)

The statement is reminiscent of Chase and Walker (2012) who explore poverty, shame and the power and complexities of ‘Othering’. The emotional impacts of UC (see chapter 9) can be used in conjunction with other measures for reinforcing social control. Alice describes how ‘getting organised’ is undermined by ‘Othering’ (Chase and Walker, 2012; Lister 2004; 2015) and provides an example of stigma as neoliberal governmentality (Tyler, 2013) which weakens opportunities to ‘get organised’ (Lister, 2004).

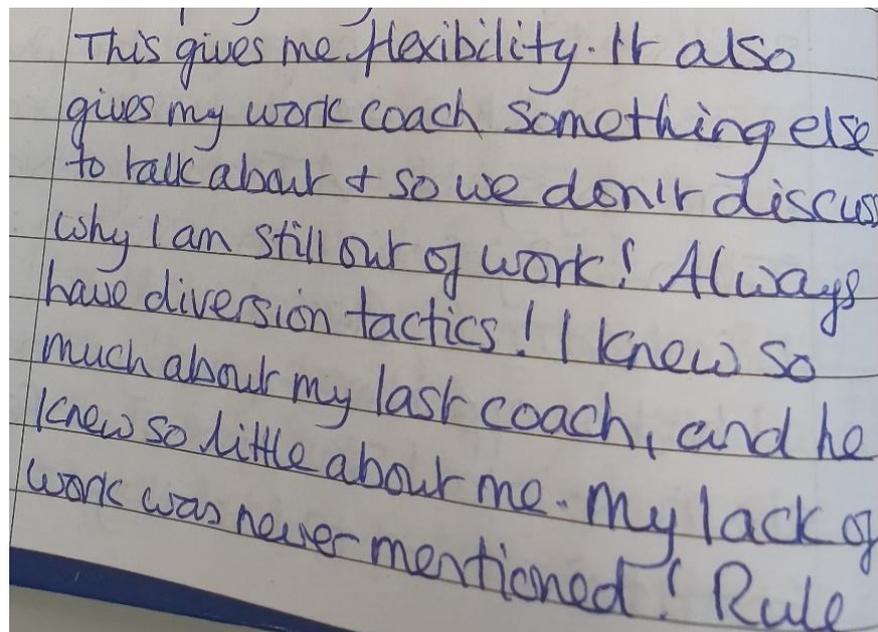
However, others with similar experiences think and react differently, shaped by resources and experiences. Heather shows her ability to *protest* on an individual level by not conforming to conditionality:

Even as a group we are still, if thousands of people protested, it still wouldn't change it...they've [the Government] decided that um they are gonna make you suffer if you don't take any crappy job... they planned it that way and they are gonna squeeze the life out of you until you give in, well I am not giving in. You know [chuckles] sorry!

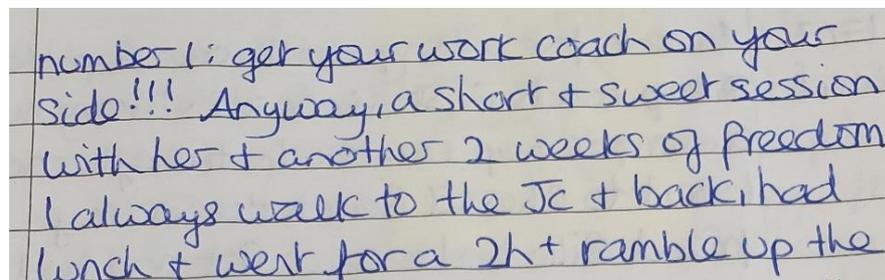
Lister (2004; 2015) explains how different forms of agency are utilised by those in poverty which can be seen throughout this thesis but particularly here in relation to 'getting organised' and 'getting (back) at'. Both statements offer reasons as to why 'getting organised' is difficult, and Heather's quote describes a sense of powerlessness and political disenfranchisement (Patrick, 2017). For Heather resistance is enacted personally by 'getting (back) at' the conditionality and underpinning aims of UC, despite this making it harder to 'get-by'. Heather's agency is fluid within negotiating UC and daily life and utilised in different ways. Moreover, it offers an example of how UC's agenda of responsabilisation to 'make work pay' can be *resisted* which questions how "...the new or positive welfare state seeks to work upon the ways in which citizens themselves can contribute to the realisation of policy ambitions" (Peeters, 2013: 585).

Alternatively, Zara discussed local solidarity having recently attended a UC 'protest' in the town. The activism against UC provides a safe 'us' to identify with and 'them' now comes from looking up (Chase and Walker, 2012). This type of coming together is one way in which the stigma and shame attached to claiming 'welfare' can be challenged, an activity akin to 'getting organised' (Lister, 2004). The solidarity and activism arguably reduce the 'taboo' attached to UC as in that moment the shame (Scheff, 2003) is not to do with the claim as such but the system itself.

This section explores *managing* the WC to avoid inappropriate work, unrealistic conditionality, appear compliant and be a 'good claimant', based upon humanizing of those living with UC, opposed to its dehumanizing nature (see chapter 8). Heather described her 'diversion tactics':



This gives me flexibility. It also gives my work coach something else to talk about + so we don't discuss why I am still out of work! Always have diversion tactics! I knew so much about my last coach, and he knew so little about me. My lack of work was never mentioned! Rule



number 1: get your work coach on your side!!! Anyway, a short + sweet session with her + another 2 weeks of freedom I always walk to the JC + back, had lunch + went for a 2h+ ramble up the

Figure 26 Heather's diary pages 32 - 33

The focus of attention onto the WC is a planned technique which takes effort to sustain, practically and emotionally – part of the ‘emotional work’ of unemployment (Peterie et al, 2019a). Investing in the WC relationship garners more understanding, empathy and perhaps ‘discretion’ (Andersen, 2019; Fletcher, 2011; Lipsky, 2010) which eases Heather’s journey with UC. Arguably, the relationship counters the bureaucracy of UC as Heather is humanized negating her status as a statistic (see 8.2 for dehumanizing experiences). Heather had been unemployed for roughly five years, and receiving UC for nearly two, and was strategic about her non-compliance with getting the WC ‘on side’ so that she could enjoy her ‘freedom’. Whilst Heather saw no end to her journey with UC, she used considerable personal resource to ease it by managing her WC and the demands of conditionality.

Bill managed his WC:

My WC didn't make my life a misery basically cos I turned round and said to her 'if you push me I will go and try and kill myself again yeah', which was a bit of emotional blackmail but the last thing I needed was to be pushed at that time... (Bill).

The 'emotional blackmail' provides another example of how people resist being *pushed* into 'bad' work. Again, this act of resistance relies on the humanity and empathy of the WC, their discretion (Fletcher, 2011; Lipsky, 2010) and that Bill is seen as human. Both examples show the active role in resisting being *pushed*, the importance of the WC relationship and the emotional labour that goes into managing it. Moreover, it highlights the need for human connections within the rigid bureaucracy of UC which reduces people to a number or problem (Bauman, 1989; Ritzer, 2002) only *fixed* by behavioural change.

The management of a WC relationship requires emotional resources and can cause negative impacts for individuals, for Ben it was a source of anxiety as he tried to please his WC feeling frustrated when other WCs disregarded his efforts. The lack of recognition negatively impacted Ben and this was reinforced by feeling he had let his WC down as he explained '...it upset the job coach because they think I do nothing'. Ben is carrying his own concern and that for his WC and their relationship, creating a hidden burden.

A more common way participants 'resist' is non-compliance of conditionality, often covertly, for example by not completing the work-search as Wright et al (2020: 286) describe the work-search requirements are a 'punitive treadmill'. Although, the majority commented on how difficult it was to fill a 35 hour a week job-search so it could be argued the (ir)rationality of requirements in part caused the non-compliance. The completion of 35 hours became more difficult over time due to reducing opportunities and for some participants it was increasingly challenging to stay motivated, a feeling cemented by the general silence from employers when applying for work (Shildrick et al, 2012).

Heather 'resisted' by using different CVs, one for *good* jobs and a 'dumbest down' one for *bad* jobs she felt *pushed* towards, and when filling in applications would put in the wrong age (older) and tick yes under the convictions, all to reduce her employability. Heather used these strategies to avoid 'bad' work and frequently expressed how she did want to a job, but a good one. Heather saw these actions as a 'way to get through' living with UC, to keep 'your work coach on side' and present herself as a 'good claimant'. The creative responses from Heather show the effort in resistance and the importance individuals place on what work they are being *pushed* into to 'make work pay'.

Heather also used JCP interview training to avoid 'bad' work her WC told her to apply for. Heather presented herself negatively by doing the opposite of the training showing the interviewer unsuitable traits; allergies, a spinal injury and being 'a bit stiff' which

would not be desirable in the fast-paced hospitality work environment. Heather commented “Funnily enough I didn’t get the job, but I’ve been for an interview, WC is ecstatic I’ve been for an interview”. The examples show how Heather adopts a ‘spoiled identity’ and uses stigma to her advantage to resist the *push* into work she feels is unsuitable. Following the assertion of stigma as a site of power (Link and Phelan, 2014; Tyler, 2020) means the stigma power can be negotiated and, in the findings presented, used by individuals to their advantage. Whilst presenting a spoiled identity is damaging (Goffman, 1963/1997) this is an acceptable risk on balance with the damage entering such work could cause. Additionally, a secondary advantage is the reward Heather receives from her relationship with the WC who was ‘ecstatic’ she had been to an interview. Notably, the stigma she is using is not close to the real stigma and spoiled identities she encounters, and this distance may allow for these strategies to be successful without too much damage to her ‘self’.

In the resistance of ‘bad’ work, Heather *accepted* life with UC:

I’ve created my world, I could go and take a crappy job but I don’t want to so I’ve kept myself out of work, out of bad work waiting for a good job to come along so I have to live in that world and not moan about it. Cos it’s my creation you know? But I have my freedom which is more important to me than going to buy a top and a skirt or something (Heather).

Heather describes how she is the creator of her world, in the refusal of ‘bad’ work she *accepts* poverty, and in her positioning of creator relinquishes the ability to ‘moan about it’. The choices of ‘bad’ work, poverty - although this is a factor of ‘bad’ work - with ‘freedom’ and a ‘good’ job, frame Heather’s world. Markedly, this binary ontological framing focuses on Heather’s choices and not the structural factors surrounding the labour market and social security. The creator status implies responsibility for the cause and consequence of this world and an acceptance of this responsabilisation. Whilst Heather is resisting ‘bad’ work and conditionality, this micro level resistance does not extend any further as her acceptance and responsibility as ‘creator’ of her world mitigates any further action or ‘getting back at’ (Lister, 2004; 2015). Moreover, perhaps this acceptance offers a coping strategy for the irrationality and hardship of living with UC, as Heather balances her poverty against the ‘freedom’ she enjoys in her life and from ‘bad’ work. In a way, this trade-off is also a sacrifice, but one Heather is willing to make for ‘freedom’. Heather’s framing is an example of *negative responsibility assumption* (Scott, 2020) where she makes sense of the *nothingness* within her own narrative.

One third of participants exhibited an acceptance of life with UC, with what might be best described as an acclimatization. The acclimatization took place over time, interestingly, the majority of those with this response had experience with the legacy system. Once people had ‘got used to it’ UC was described as not as *bad* as individuals had acclimatized to the low income and conditionality:

But we’ve got used to it, like I say we’ve been on it a few years now, once you get over the first initial shock of going on it... (Pam).

The acclimatization to UC exposes the earlier ‘shock’ most prominently financially but also in terms of conditionality, responsabilisation, digital nature and routines of UC. Financially people had to adapt to the payment structures of UC, a shift felt most by those ‘naturally migrated’ from the legacy system who were without transitional protection of their income. Participants also had to adjust to a lower income, and less frequently, with those who were able organising other income streams (social security or paid earnings) so money would be fortnightly. UC challenged ‘resilience’ (Hickman, 2018) whilst raising the *need* for it.

There were also impacts of acclimatization emotionally and on the ‘self’. Firstly, the ‘initial shock’ had emotional impacts for participants as they tried to ‘get used to’ living with UC (see chapter 9). Literature (Daly, 2017; Flint, 2010; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013) has shown how budgeting links to pride, self-esteem and preservation, which is undermined by UC. Secondly, the acclimatization allowed participants to rationalise experiences as something they had gone through and got *over* (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013) resonating with the problematic concept of ‘resilience’ (Hickman, 2018). Phrases like ‘got used to it’ shows the individual effort in adjusting and creates distance from the earlier struggle.

The issue of time is important, as all those who displayed a sense of acclimatization had been living with UC for over a year and for three individuals nearly two years or more. Arguably, the adaptation to UC and how participants present themselves as such links to Shildrick and MacDonald’s (2013) work on how people talk about poverty and how such acts can preserve a sense of ‘self’. In their acclimatization to living with UC and the emphasis on the positive individual achievement of adjustment, it focuses the attention on the individual, their responsabilisation and offers legitimization for their treatment following the narrative of behavioural change. Moreover, the acclimatization could illustrate how people can be worn down, *moulded* over time and a way to mitigate some of the impacts of this emotionally and on the ‘self’ is acceptance. The acclimatization

demonstrates ‘governing the self’ (Foucault, 1979) as participants have internalised and become responsible for the aims of UC.

#### 11.4 Being a ‘good claimant’

Underlying the managing of the WC, covert non-compliance and UC acclimatization, the presentation as a ‘good claimant’ is important as Whelan (2020) notes, discussing this in relation to resistance via ‘disguised compliance’ and survival, suggesting this presentation is intrinsically connected to notions of *good* citizenship. In responding to UC by being a ‘good claimant’ participants attempted to protect their ‘self’ from the ‘violence’ of UC (see chapters 8, 9 and 10) however this response could serve to intensify the institutional scrutiny and stigma experienced by those living with UC. The act of being a ‘good claimant’ as a response to UC placed some participants in potential harm, used considerable resource and was emotionally demanding.

Being a ‘good claimant’ is related to notions of deservingness and pertaining an appropriate work ethic, theoretically linking to Van Oorschot's (2000; 2006) characteristics of deservingness: Control, Need, Identity, Attitude and Reciprocity (see 3.5). Whilst deservingness relates to citizenship, the theorisation offers a deeper understanding of how this is understood and enacted by individuals. Additionally, by being ‘good’ individuals are distancing themselves from ‘Others’ (Patrick, 2016), minimizing stigma and protecting identities. Lastly, the ‘good claimant’ links to ideas of civility, enterprising neoliberal self (McGuigan, 2014) and class which has long and historical links to the civilising process (Law and Mooney, 2012).

By being ‘good’ participants engaged with characteristics such as being proactive, responsible, capable, motivated, and grateful, all behaviours which participants promoted themselves particularly proactivity and responsibility. UC was designed for the *ideal* ‘good claimant’ yet is based on the premise they are ‘bad’ (‘workless’ and ‘welfare dependant’) and require *transformation* (Wiggan, 2012). Findings already presented in the thesis have touched upon being a ‘good claimant’ - for example Zara wanting to wear certain clothes (page 190), Ben wanting to impress his WC (page 214) and individuals feeling like they were not doing *enough*. In feeling they were a ‘good claimant’, participants garnered a sense of self-esteem and self-preservation, but this was also at considerable effort, much of which was unseen and unvalued.

I think a good claimant is someone that is committed to it, understands that it's not meant to be something that you're on forever, understands that you have to put the work in and is a bit proactive. Like at least wants to get a

job. Wants to make themselves not better, wants to make themselves contribute. It's not someone that just goes 'just give me money' like [tuts] people like that really annoy me (Alice).

Alice discusses two deservingness criteria (Van Oorschot, 2000; 2006): reciprocity (current and future) and attitude. In a less obvious way, Alice also talks about need and the temporal nature of a claim as not 'something that you're on forever', this also makes clear that her binary of good/bad focuses on unemployment fitting with her own circumstances. Alice uses words which indicate the active role of 'good claimants' within the responsabilisation agenda of UC in which unemployment is "...their own responsibility and a matter of 'self-care'" (Peeters, 2017: 5). Whilst Alice hesitates when she says, 'make themselves not better' it could be argued the underlying connotation of her statement is that individuals *should* make themselves 'better'.

Alice contrasts a 'good claimant' with someone who shows no reciprocity and a poor attitude – someone who takes 'something for nothing' (Pemberton et al, 2016b). In demonstrating her annoyance at 'people like that', Alice reinforces her identity (Van Oorschot, 2000; 2006) as part of *us* distancing herself from *them*. The findings illustrate how the question of 'who should get what, and why' (Van Oorschot, 2000) play out in everyday life for those claiming social security. This question over deservingness has become harder to fulfil with UC as it has removed central signifiers of deservingness (see 10.7) and so the presentation of being a 'good claimant' becomes even more important.

If you are gonna look at it like 'oh this is awful you know I've been out of work for 20 years and I'm having to go to charity shops for me clothes' I don't ever think like that. I'm always like I'm glad I've got that what if I didn't have that then? What if they didn't have a benefits system, then what? You know where would I be then? (Julie).

Julie juxtaposes someone with a negative attitude against herself, who is positive and grateful showing the *appropriate* attitude (Van Oorschot, 2000; 2006). A 'bad attitude' resonates with the notion that unemployment is due to individual moral failings (Peterie et al, 2019a; 805). Julie's gratitude not only promotes her deservingness but provides a framework for her experiences and prevents acts of resistance as she questions 'what if they didn't have a benefits system, then what?'. This *it could be worse* situation provides a reassurance to Julie as she struggles to 'get-by' and illustrates the importance of how people talk about poverty (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013). Julie described in our first interview how she runs out of money the third week of each month for her and her daughter, with each monthly UC payment different due to debt repayments. Often, participants spoke positively with *it could be worse* implicit in their narrative even when

they had faced extreme hardship due to UC. Therefore, the need for gratitude extends outside of the JCP and UC into daily life.

The importance of appearing as a ‘good claimant’ means individuals go to great effort and potential risk:

...I bust my foot a few months ago and I was on crutches for a little bit and my WC was really nice she was like ‘we can do a telephone appointment in this case cos then you don’t have to bust your leg coming up here’. And I said yeah but I would prefer to travel up here cos it shows that I am trying, it shows that I am doing stuff you know and somewhere down the line someone will be like ‘oh well she is trying, look she is doing this’ and she [WC] was like ‘yeah fair point’ (Alice).

Alice felt unable to not visit the JCP as it was important to show she was ‘trying’; she was being ‘good’. Thus, the visibility of being a ‘good claimant’ is essential to show the WC and anyone who may question Alice’s deservingness. This act not only illustrated her deservingness at the time but could be used against future scrutiny, a point which her WC agreed with. It highlights Alice’s anxiety around her status and deservingness and that it is fluid and fragile, therefore she goes to extreme effort to *secure* it. The example resonates with the ‘hyper vigilance’ that conditionality can create (Stewart and Wright, 2018). Moreover, the WC endorsement of the action will serve to further reinforce such acts and the anxiety Alice feels over her deservingness and the need to show she is a ‘good claimant’. The example shows how being a ‘good claimant’ expands from acts of proactivity and responsibility to ones of potential injury. It illustrates the power the internalisation of deservingness can have and is another layer of governmentality (Foucault, 1979), as those under scrutiny from living with UC attempt to lessen the gaze.

It was important for all those engaging regularly with UC to show their WC they were a ‘good claimant’, both in meetings and online. This protected against sanctioning as participants met their requirements, demonstrated their engagement with UC in the encounters, and within this paternalistic relationship it provided a positive response and made people feel better if they were praised therefore could offer feelings of pride or self-esteem.

The felt importance of the online journal, was a source of anxiety and many spent extra time ensuring it was filled in ‘correctly’ and showed them to be ‘good’ – proactive, enthusiastic and motivated to find work. As discussed, the desire and *push* to meet the expectations of a ‘good claimant’ could lead individuals to apply for unsuitable work or

attend inappropriate training (Wright et al, 2020), in the (ir)rational attempt to satisfy their conditionality requirements and WC.

Karl offers an example of not acting like a ‘good claimant’ as he was ‘a bit direct’ with his WC when discussing his natural migration from the ESA support group. He described the result as “you are black-marked...” as he had been *disruptive*. The appearance of anger from Karl is an act of resistance and opposes the suppression of anger required from activation (Peterie et al, 2019a). In his ‘retaliation’ Karl was perceived as *uncivilised* within the rigid environment of UC with irrationality leaving little space for humanity or emotion despite the impacts it has on both (chapter 8) as he is *pushed* away from being a ‘good claimant’. Yet this *uncivilised* behaviour, caused by UC, adds additional reasoning and intensification for the need of behavioural change. Thus, the decivilizing consequences further reduces Karl’s perceived deservingness (Van Oorschot, 2000; 2006) as he is unable to assert his control and need because his attitude and identity dominate.

Displaying oneself as a ‘good claimant’ takes time, effort (practically and emotionally) and allows a space to demonstrate deservingness. Importantly, such strategies are increasingly needed to protect individuals’ ‘self’ and self-esteem as UC reduces opportunities to validate deservingness and constantly brings it into question by design and delivery (See 10.7). The dichotomy between the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ creates more opportunities for ‘Othering’ (Patrick, 2016; 2017) and opened the participants to further blame if they fail to engage with UC *properly* masking the difficulties within the system. The responsabilisation of individuals to be ‘good claimants’ displays how social control takes place as individuals navigate the impacts of living with UC.

The example of a ‘good claimant’ illustrates one response to the civilising offensive (Powell, 2013) as individuals show themselves as *civilised*, promoting their deservingness and work ethic and exhibit a ‘personality’ more fitting with neoliberal society. Yet the situation is complex, as participants were still in receipt of UC therefore engaging in *uncivilised* behaviour and so behavioural change to ‘make work pay’ is still required. As a response to mitigate the impacts of UC being a ‘good claimant’ creates further challenges for individuals to navigate and ultimately serves to reinforce the ‘suffering’ experienced.

There were instances such as Heather and John when presentation of a ‘good claimant’ was either for a different or no *real* benefit, ultimately moving participants further from

employment. The complexities highlight a central misconception of UC, that those receiving ‘welfare’ have no work ethic (Macdonald, Shildrick and Furlong, 2014) and so need to be ‘helped and hassled’ (Mead, 2014) into the labour market, with all treated as undeserving.

### 11.5 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how participants’ responses to the impacts of UC (see chapters 7, 8, 9 and 10) impact on their ‘self’, therefore creating secondary impacts which individuals must negotiate. The chapter has explored what the consequences of participant responses to UC are particularly to the ‘self’, addressing the third research question (see 1.2). The findings demonstrate the importance participants placed on protecting their identities, often above nearly all other considerations. The chapter has presented important insights into how individuals respond to being continuously undermined and the subsequent impacts of this.

Responses were grouped together around notions of sacrifice, risk, resistance, and being a ‘good claimant’ all of which show how individuals attempt to preserve their ‘self’ and mitigate the effects of UC, conditionality and poverty. The responses are often an unintended consequence and the findings have shown the blurring of lines physically, emotionally and ontologically in reaction to a policy designed in a ‘virtual reality’ (Millar and Bennet, 2017).

The chapter demonstrates an empirical contribution to knowledge in providing new understandings of how living with UC incurs secondary impacts. This gives greater evidence to the (ir)rational nature of UC and questions the *transformational* aspect of UC as the findings illustrate participants moving further from the labour market, security (financially, emotionally, physically) and their ‘selves’. In failing to understand *who* accesses social security any transformational aims are flawed and, as has been evidenced in this thesis, cause serious consequences. Moreover, those who live with UC are responsabilised for such outcomes, masking the structural inequalities and institutional failings of our current social security system.

## 12. Experiencing UC: Bill's Diary

### 12.1 Introduction

To conclude the findings section, Bill provides a detailed picture of living with UC for one week. A brief pen portrait of Bill is included before his diary extracts. His account covers much of what has been discussed from the challenges practically and emotionally of engaging with UC over time (see chapter 9), the effort this requires and the destabilising features of UC design and delivery which individuals must navigate and the importance of outside support (see chapter 8). Bill shows the reality of the 'violent' bureaucracy which is stressful and 'half-starving' him resulting in reducing physical and mental health (see 8.2, 9.2 9.3). The weekend cannot be enjoyed fully by Bill as UC has 'paralysed' his life due to the low income and inappropriate conditionality (see chapter 8). He questions why his situation must be one of 'despair' living with UC or 'low-grade torture in some horrible workplace' illustrating the push towards 'poor work' (see 4.8). Bill resists this push (see 11.3 for other forms of resistance) and describes an alternative view of work. Bill explores different ways people can contribute to society and the attached values, contrasts this with the dominance of paid work, vast income inequalities in the UK (see 3.3) and the feelings when you are excluded: 'You can't have anything because you have nothing, therefore you are nothing, you are worth nothing...' (see 10.5 for impact on self-worth).

His experiences show how people are undermined, from a multitude of angles, and the cumulative impacts practically, emotionally (see chapter 8 and 9.4, 9.5, 9.6), physically (9.3), mentally (9.2) and on the 'self' (See chapter 10). Bill's UC journey was challenging and even when he transitioned to the limited capacity to work group, new complications arose which he had to navigate (See 8.3. and 8.4). Due to an arbitrary 'assessment period' Bill must wait, despite a *successful* WCA, three months to receive the extra UC income and has to continue to live on the 'survival rations' he currently received. This causes a financial and emotional strain on Bill who continues to struggle with his mental health. In following Bill's experiences over a week, and using the diary verbatim, the challenges of living with UC and the impacts this has emotionally, mentally and physically are clear.

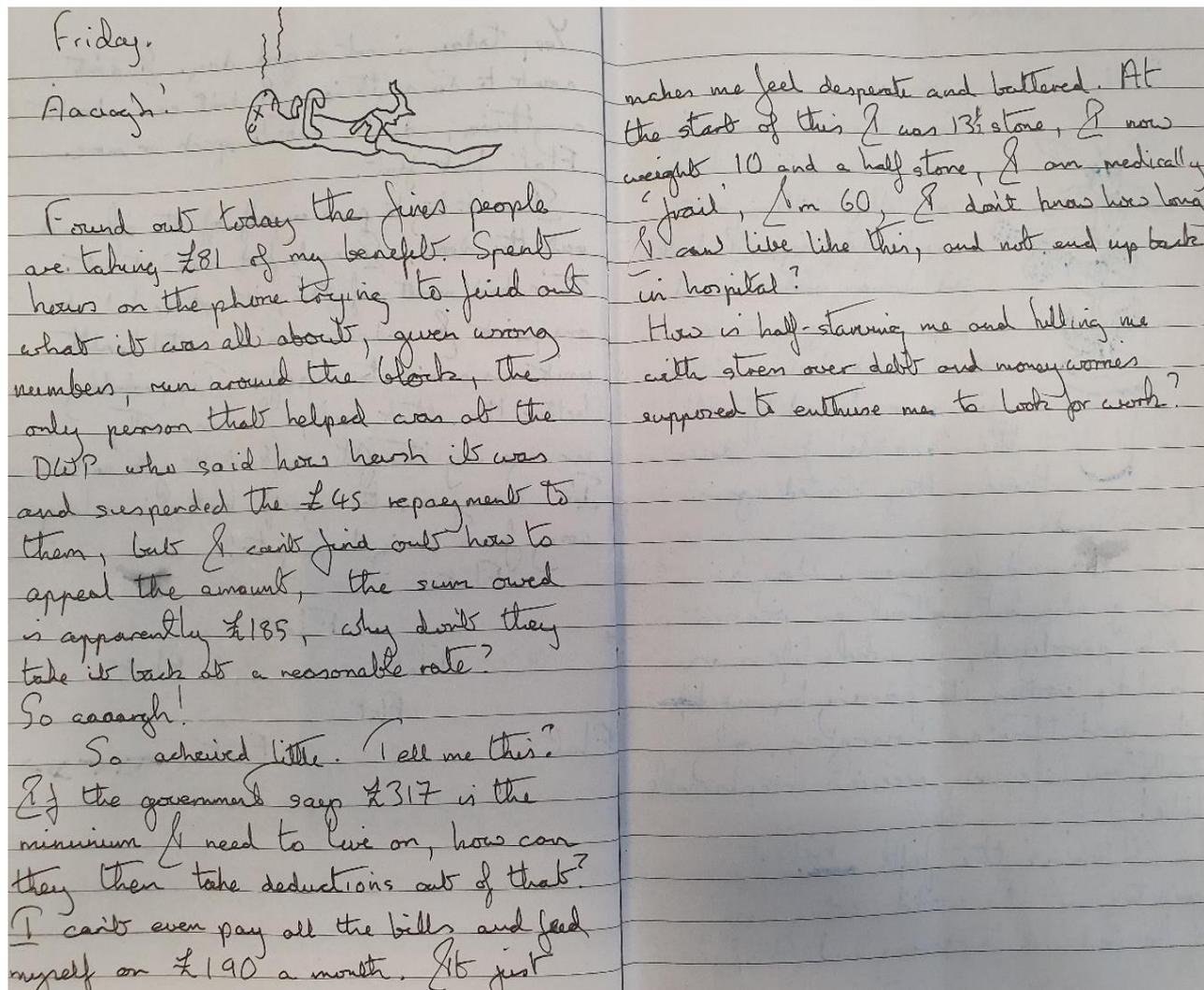
### 12.2 Bill: a pen portrait

Bill is sixty years old and lives alone in a studio flat which he owns. He has no family but a small network of friends. Bill left work due to his physical and mental health in 2016 and was in the ESA support group until his UC claim began in February 2018. He has a

BA in Social policy, is a trained counsellor and spent his career working in the social work sector. Bill found this work rewarding but stressful and is keen to do something different. He is a keen writer and hopes to finish and publish a book he has written.

Bill likes listening to live music, attending open-mic nights, and singing karaoke. His favourite karaoke song is Simon and Garfunkel's 'The sound of silence' but anything 'rock or bluesy' will do.

### 12.3 Bill's Diary



Da Weekend.

Well Saturday was ok.  
Spent the day and night  
around my friends house,  
actually chilling out  
and relaxing, I don't  
feel down and screwed  
up, managed to be  
myself and have a bit of  
fun, I scratched off all  
the 'shoulds' for a day  
though they started again



by Sunday.

I need an income. I say I'm  
not greedy, but without an income  
I'm paralysed, my whole life is on  
hold, worse, its passing by me ~~like~~  
like sand through an hourglass, only  
thats my life, my precious irreplaceable  
life!

This is the fifth ~~most~~ richest  
country in the world, why must  
I be reduced to penury and despair



MONDAY.

Nearly mid day but I'm having trouble kick-starting myself. I don't know what to do first. Go to CAB, try to find out how to challenge the amount of this fine? Or go to my friend's house and look for jobs? Sit and stare blankly at the wall, rocking back and forward?

OK. Going to CAB. Then job-search.

Nil desperandum.

Tuesday.

Well, strangely, nil desperandum turned out to be a good policy, I have been found as limited capacity for work, which means I no longer have to show job searches, and I get some extra money. My WCA was carried out by an actual doctor, who has done a fair assessment of my health and finally got me what I'm entitled to, months after I should have got it. I will tell you the saga of my misad

WCA appointment later, but now I'm off to get some breakfast. I remember breakfast. Just. It's a real ~~trick~~ treat.

~~the day~~  
Wednes day.

There was a catch. Well of course there is, I mean duh!

Look, of course I am limited capacity for work, if you want a laugh stick me on a building site with a shovel in my hands! It would be pure physical comedy.

I had what is referred to as a 'massive heart attack'. 3 little words that profoundly changed me. Physically, mentally, spiritually, ~~phys~~ just writing that down is horribly uncomfortable even nearly 3 years ago, it took some (is taking) getting used to!

Yes, it pretty much smashed me to pieces

Thursday.

Oh yeah, the catch.

Apparently, I've got to wait 3 months until I get the first payment. But no-one knows why. I spoke to my care manager and she said she'd try to find out, but judging from the note she left in my journal she ~~has~~ hasn't.

WTF?

Nobody knows why. It makes no sense. I've been assessed. By a doctor. (Not a physiotherapist or a nurse, a real doctor)

He had my medical records open, on his P.C. It's all there, the heart attack, the spinal and bowel conditions, the suicide attempts, the stay in [redacted], the hospital stays, everything, and finally he's given me a fair assessment.

Fuck this, I need that money, I'm on frigging starvation rations,

I used ~~to~~ to weigh 14 stone, now I weigh 10½ stone. My skin is hanging off my bones. I'm hungry all the time.

I survived.  
But I haven't been able to recover, because I don't have the resources. My friends have looked after me, if it wasn't for them... well I don't know.

As for my day, well I just overused my pain-killers so I could (and did) sleep through it.

I've been seen and assessed.

Why why why do I have to wait?  
Til November!

I'm barely getting through this.  
I'm just about keeping myself out of hospital.

Today I am so unhappy.

I feel blank, empty and tearful.

I ~~was~~ need that money.

I feel like road-kill.

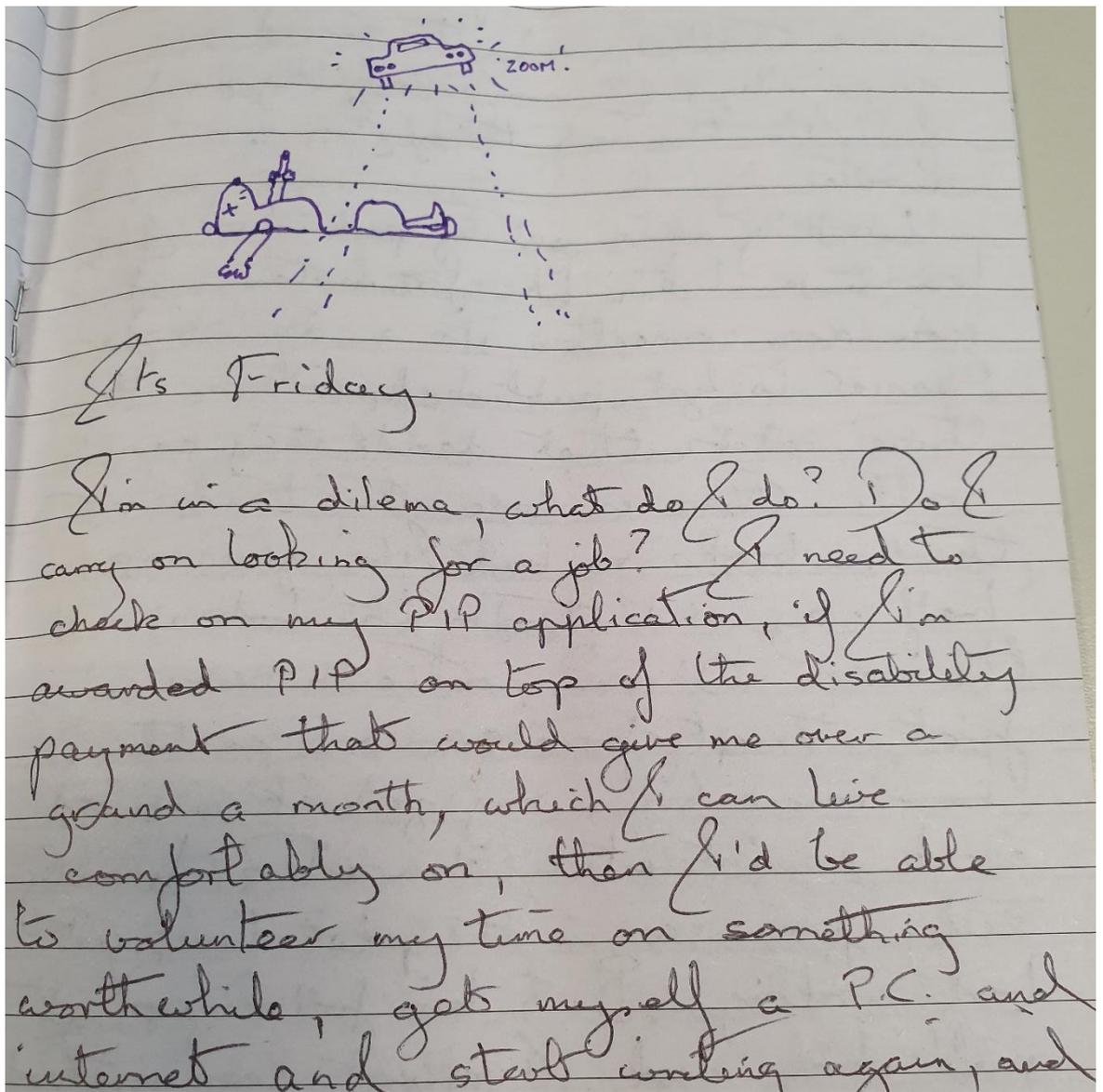


Figure 27 Bill's diary pages 13-22

## 13. Conclusion

### 13.1 Introduction

This thesis has explored the dehumanizing experiences of living with UC, the impacts this has on emotions, wellbeing, identities and the ‘self’; how participants responded; and the secondary impacts of responses. The harm inflicted from living with UC carries dehumanizing consequences and the experiences indicate not one instance but a systemic erosion of people, lives and possibilities.

The research adopted a case-study methodology, using semi-structured interviews and participant-solicited diaries (see chapter 6). The research took place in an English coastal town, and it is important to reflect on the implications of this on the participant’s experiences. The local labour market is dominated by health and social care which makes up over a quarter of the town’s employment. Like many seaside towns, tourism plays a vital role in the town’s economy (estimated value of tourism is £386 million) and creates thousands of seasonal jobs. The town has high numbers of people claiming social security with approximately 20% of the local population accessing UC or the legacy system. This is reflective of the persistent high levels of deprivation within the town, and this is something which often came up in conversations with individuals. For example, John described the town as “this hole where life doesn’t really matter”. It was felt by most participants that the high level of UC locally reinforced a negative image of UC based upon a stereotypical view of ‘welfare’. Yet, Zara did not feel this way and felt the high level of people receiving UC locally created feelings of solidarity. Thus, the town shaped experiences of living with UC and local understandings of UC itself which is bound up within larger issues (historically and economically). Growing up, I was always told the town was the ‘end of the line’ (it does have poor infrastructure) yet I think this does the town and its inhabitants a discredit. The town has its challenges, but it is quirky, creative, and characterful much like its people.

This thesis offers a broad empirical contribution to knowledge surrounding the extent and severity of the impacts of UC on emotions, wellbeing and the ‘self’. The empirical findings illustrate the dehumanizing experiences of UC which ‘chip away’ at individuals with damaging impacts. Due to increasing poverty the degrading experiences spread throughout daily life and intersected with the ‘violence’ experienced whilst engaging with UC. Identity management was challenged by UC as the empirical findings show stigma has spread to new groups and intensified, thus the ‘self’ is in *threat*. UC by design and

delivery, reduces individuals' ability to manage identities whilst simultaneously increases their need for example via the constant question of deservingness. The dehumanizing experiences of UC intersect with stigma as the 'self' becomes increasingly damaged by institutional scrutiny and stigma. Additionally, the increasing poverty, often destitution, creates further stigma and again reduces strategies for identity management. Here, we can see the cumulative and cruel impacts of living with UC which pushed participants further away from the labour market, society, health and sometimes their 'self'. However, it does not end there as individuals responded to the experiences and impacts attempting to salvage a sense of security with a constant balance between health, wealth, and the 'self' with often the latter being the strongest driver. The thesis's empirical findings demonstrate how UC is corrosive and leads to (un)intended consequences which ironically may lead to the creation of what it set out to *transform*.

Currently, six million people live with UC<sup>21</sup> which will increase with the impacts of Covid-19<sup>22</sup>. Previous estimates concluded by 2024-25, would be seven million households receiving UC (Kennedy and Keen, 2018), yet this was before the pandemic. The changes will increase and diversify<sup>23</sup> those living with UC which expands its reach and impacts. Moreover, the current and future uncertainties, especially impacts on wellbeing, could intensify the experiences of living with UC and reduce strategies of protection financially, emotionally, cognitively and for the 'self'.

UC is a new distinct means-tested working age social security system which incorporates six forms of assistance from the legacy system (see 2.3). UC has a range of unique features, many of which now extend to a much larger population. It encompasses stricter conditionality, sanctions and surveillance, a 'digital by default' approach and a range of payment structure changes which are reflective of UC's aims of responsabilisation and to match the world of work (Millar and Bennett, 2017). Additionally, all are at first measured against the labour market (see 8.4) and this yardstick is ominous throughout with conditionality now extended to new groups like low paid workers, a questionable and untested idea (Wright and Dwyer, 2020).

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<sup>21</sup> Government statistics show 6 million people receiving UC in England, Scotland, and Wales - a 98 percent rise from March 2020 which shows the impact of the pandemic (see <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/universal-credit-statistics-29-april-2013-to-14-january-2021/universal-credit-statistics-29-april-2013-to-14-january-2021>)

<sup>22</sup> The OBR (2020) 'central' estimates show in 2021-22 unemployment at 7.5 percent, with the worst estimate 11 percent.

<sup>23</sup> See <https://www.distantwelfare.co.uk/winter-report> for on-going impact of pandemic on social security.

Previous research has investigated financial issues (IFS, 2019a), DP (Hickman et al, 2017), food poverty (Reeves and Loopstra, 2020), conditionality and sanctioning (Wright et al, 2016; 2018) as well as impacts on certain groups such as women (Andersen, 2019) and couples (Griffiths et al, 2020). Additionally, research has explored the impacts on mental health (Cheetham, Moffatt and Addison, 2019; Wickham et al, 2020) and design elements such as in-work conditionality (Wright and Dwyer, 2020) and UC's apparent 'simplicity' (Summers and Young, 2020), all of which are important however this evidence base is still limited.

There is a gap in understanding in terms of how living with UC impacts on emotions, identities, wellbeing and the 'self', and how these are experienced and responded to which this thesis addresses. This chapter will present and discuss four empirical contributions to knowledge, moving on to consider the implications for policy and future research.

### 13.2 Contributions to knowledge

The contributions to knowledge are:

1. Living with UC is dehumanizing with the design and delivery of UC experienced as harmful by those engaging with it and is damaging financially, emotionally, and on wellbeing and the 'self'. The research applies Haslam's (2006) conceptualisation of dehumanization to the new context of UC with the two forms of dehumanization (mechanical and animalistic) providing a way to explore these experiences.
2. UC feels distinctive and impacts on emotions and wellbeing. UC was experienced as destabilising and wore participants down which not only caused damage to emotions and wellbeing but hindered attempts to engage with UC, employers and daily life.
3. UC impacts on identities by increasing the level, reach and severity of stigma, encompassing new groups and extending across lives. The design and delivery of UC, whilst increasing stigma, makes it harder to manage by reducing strategies of identity management yet simultaneously increasing their need.
4. The dehumanizing process of living with UC, which adversely impacts on emotions, wellbeing, and the 'self', can lead to unintended secondary consequences as people respond to being perpetually 'chipped away at'.

### 13.3 Dehumanization

The research found UC to be dehumanizing for participants on a multitude of levels (see chapter 8); commonly experiences were described as a ‘nightmare’ and by one ‘genocide’. Broadly, dehumanization connected to conditionality, scrutiny, uniformity, bureaucracy, poverty and stigma all of which due to the design and delivery of UC spread throughout everyday life. As Zara commented “...that’s why I used the word dehumanizing because I don’t feel like a person anymore” when referring to the intense conditionality and scrutiny she had experienced coupled with increasing poverty.

Adopting Haslam’s (2006) theorisation of dehumanization (see 5.4 for definition), the doctoral findings illustrated how individuals living with UC often experienced both types of dehumanization, sometimes simultaneously. It is important to try and unpick the processes of dehumanization which often we only glimpse through their damaging consequences and the application of Haslam’s (2006) concepts have aided this.

Conditionality is dehumanizing as it assumes *deficiency* which requires invasive behavioural change, thereby individuals are perceived as problems to be solved based on ideological ‘disgust’ (Haslam, 2006; Tyler, 2013), a common experience for those involved in this thesis. For UC this involves ‘self-inflicted social abuse’ (Wright et al, 2020) due to its intrinsically digital nature; with people further dehumanized by employers’ ‘coldness’ as Ben described “...[you] try sell yourself but it still ain’t good enough”. Therefore, this doctoral research adds detail into the multiple sites of dehumanization including the conditionality and subsequently the employers. Notably, UC intensifies conditionality and extends it to new groups therefore growing numbers are exposed to this treatment and the potential harms.

In chapter 8, the findings illustrated how scrutiny based upon ‘animalistic’ assumptions instils an institutional ‘coldness’ as individuals must provide perpetual proof of their deservingness, yet it is never enough to avoid this insidious gaze. Individuals experienced institutional scrutiny which saw them carry the ‘burden’ of proof and engage in acts of ‘contaminative exposure’ (Goffman, 1961/2007) characterised by Alice as ‘jumping through hoops’. For John, the ‘contaminative exposure’ was forced directly from his WC who *asked* him to follow up on unsuccessful applications and ask “What is wrong with me?”. Here, we can see the intersections between scrutiny, conditionality and employment which John internalises. The ‘burden’ of proof could never be relinquished as it connected to statuses, entitlements, motivations and behaviours underpinned by a

sentiment of undeservingness. Thereby the ‘burden’ of proof is reflective of the perceived burdensome nature of ‘welfare’ itself, for the majority the only way to escape institutional scrutiny is to leave the institution itself like Gavin or avoid it like Natalie. Institutional scrutiny and the constant question over deservingness have serious implications for the ‘self’ (see 10.7) as individuals internalise the scrutiny leading to self-regulation and introspection. For example, Karl who encountered intense scrutiny from UC, felt undeserving of his social security and questioned whether he *deserved* ‘luxuries’ such as fish and chips. This is reflective of the ‘internalisation of external restraints’ (Elias, 1994) and shows aspects of the ‘civilising offensive’ (Van Krieken, 1999; Powell, 2013; 2007; Clement, 2015) in action.

Underpinning the conditionality and scrutiny is the bureaucracy and uniformity of UC which by design and delivery are dehumanizing. Bureaucracy by its nature causes dehumanization (Bauman, 1989; Ritzer, 2002) which can be seen within the findings, for example in how people experience being treated as a ‘number’ or the ‘scripted’ nature of conversations. It could also be more explicit, for example when Alice’s WC wanted to keep Alice within her caseload commenting ‘it’ll be good for my sheet’ because Alice was likely to quickly re-enter the labour market. It can be seen in the ‘digital by default’ approach which further reduces human interventions towards a *problem* population. In its attempt to ‘simplify’ social security, which is questionable (Summers and Young, 2020), UC has created a bureaucratic labyrinth which is based upon contradictions of *who* recipients are and *who* UC thought they should be (see chapter 8). This doctoral research found these ideological inconsistencies create friction for those encountering UC, making their *journey* more challenging and the rigidity of the bureaucracy leaves little space for human emotion or intervention, such as when Heather told her WC about her ‘UC diet’ which involved a six-week period of ‘starvation’ (see 7.3), he commented “some people would pay for that” showing no empathy towards Heather. Hence, UC is dehumanizing by design and in its delivery which can intensify each other as Heather’s experience illustrates.

Whilst the dehumanization is clear in the mechanical sense, it also features animalistic dehumanization with individuals living with UC discussing instances where they were treated with ‘disgust’, for example within their physical regulation in the JCP. Yet this notion also extends to how individuals’ time is managed, here bureaucracy, conditionality and scrutiny intersect to manage those living with UC. For example, those experiencing full work-related requirements such as Zara, Alice and Laura felt the conditionality was

invasive and left them feeling at times overwhelmed and ‘uneasy’. Their time is regulated as they are *uncivilised* therefore *transformation* is required as Bill comments “If you’ve got a job, you’re a human being. You haven’t got a job you’re a low life scrounger...”. The ‘non-human’ status (Goffman, 1997) attached to those living with UC has dehumanizing undercurrents and outcomes. The uniformity within UC (see 8.4) sees individuals measured to and moulded against the labour market to ‘make work pay’ and such flawed foundations were destabilising, generating and growing *vulnerabilities*. This thesis has presented crucial findings showing how individuals experienced and responded to the destabilisation, the most damaging captured by Isabel “...I think it’s so extreme you push people too far they are either criminalising themselves or committing suicide or starving to death” and each of these were found in this research. Individuals are perceived as irresponsible due to their access of social security, yet the design and delivery of UC undermines attempts of responsabilisation whilst requiring it.

This thesis has presented findings showing how experiences of poverty and stigma extend the dehumanization from living with UC across lives. UC is animalistically dehumanizing in the low income often further reduced by debt repayments in an act of institutional ‘coldness’, such as when Karl questioned why he could not afford to shower as his UC income did not cover the ‘humanitarian’ ‘necessities’ or when Julie described always running out of money on the third week of the month as her UC income was erratically reduced due to debt. Findings have also shown that living with UC creates further animalistically dehumanizing experiences because of the poverty, for example when Bill took food from bins. Individuals also faced further dehumanization when asking for help, for example, Alice felt her experience of asking for a crisis loan at the JCP, which she was turned down for (see chapter 8) was ‘humiliating’ and ‘dehumanizing’. Here we can see intersections of the dehumanizing features of UC regarding bureaucracy, poverty and uniformity.

The dehumanization is often experienced in small ways which build to become, as described by Isabel, like ‘genocide’ with some questioning why they were not being treated as ‘human’. Importantly, this experience of dehumanization was seen as the fault of the Government supporting Wright et al (2020). This doctoral research has found the cumulative feeling and experience of dehumanization across daily life leaves those living with UC feeling ‘chipped away at’ and treated as ‘lesser than human’, and such experiences have serious consequences.

Whilst experiencing dehumanization individuals engage in a system which requires *positive* engagement to be successful, thus requiring and depleting individuals' resources. Notably, this ideological informed dehumanization is experienced by all who access UC and due to the uniformity within its design and delivery it is impacting a much wider cohort including those employed, with health issues, single-parents and those unemployed. Isabel's statement encapsulates the dehumanizing and harmful experiences "...it just feels like some sort of hellish prison sentence that you've been charged with and given but for no reason at all". Moreover, Bill alludes to the *reason* behind these experiences, "So making work pay is making you pay for not being in work basically".

Individuals are treated like 'human weeds' (Bauman, 1989) as UC seeks to *transform* them yet the dehumanizing process actively undermines people's ability to manage and engage with UC, daily life and employers. In this sense, the gardener (Bauman, 1989) is creating the very weeds it sorts to remove thus providing impetus for further invasive *treatment*. The thesis supports the literature on the 'violence' of social policy, extending understandings within the new context of UC. Most importantly, it provides insight into the participants dehumanizing experiences of UC and the negative impacts of this.

#### 13.4 Impact on emotions and wellbeing

UC impacted on the wellbeing of participants both physically and mentally. Existing research (Cheetham, Moffatt and Addison et al, 2019; Wickham et al, 2020) has investigated the impacts UC has on mental health, yet this thesis offers an empirical contribution into the spread and severity of the mental health impacts (See 9.2). Wickham et al (2020) quantitatively explored the increasing 'psychological distress' of UC on the unemployed and Cheetham, Moffatt and Addison et al (2019) qualitatively illustrated the mental health impacts on those already with health issues. This thesis found both those in and out of work and those with and without previous mental health conditions experienced a deterioration of mental health, highlighting the damaging impact of UC.

Individuals most frequently spoke of increasing anxiety and depression. Seven participants spoke of suicide, in various ways, with one relating UC directly to his suicide attempt. The impact living with UC has wellbeing is reflective of its 'violent' nature and intensifies experiences, further undermines people and their attempts to navigate UC and life. As Isabel explained "...I'm more likely to commit suicide than I am get a job ... [UC] didn't do anything but destroy people. Destroy their well, their mental wellbeing and their lives...".

The poverty stemming from UC affected physical health (see 9.3), with participants unable to manage pre-existing conditions such as diabetes, recover from a serious health event such as a heart attack or eat well causing weight loss and malnutrition. Thus, the destabilisation from UC extends to bodies themselves which become a site of conflict for this civilising offensive (Van Krieken, 1999; Powell, 2013; 2007; Clement, 2015). Significantly, these experiences occurred over time and whilst the start of living with UC was extremely difficult these challenges were enduring due to a systemic low income often further reduced by debt repayments. People's physical health overlaps with their mental health as the example from Gavin (see 9.3) poignantly shows as he discusses the aftermath of his suicide attempt. The considerable impact on participants mental and physical wellbeing raises serious questions for UC, as currently for those involved in this research, it is damaging their health.

Living with UC was 'soul-destroying'. Participants felt angry, anxious, blamed, confused, deflated, demeaned, demoralised, distressed, frustrated, fearful, guilty, hopeless, overwhelmed, ashamed, stressed, useless and a sense of unfairness. Wright et al (2016) found sanctions under UC impacted on people emotionally and this thesis builds on those findings as it has shown the emotional impacts extend further than sanctioning into the broader design and delivery features of UC. This thesis has focused on how UC feels, and the emotions attached to the subsequent experiences, impacts and responses in the understanding that the physical and the non-physical are interwoven. The emotional impacts presented were divided into feelings associated with destabilisation and those associated with being worn down and were developed from the thematic analysis. Destabilisation relates to feelings and emotions including distress, anger, unfairness, and confusion (see 9.1) Deflation links to being 'worn down' with feelings and emotions including sadness, depression, and hopelessness (see 9.5). Destabilisation resonates with shifting and uncertain terrain and deflation a sense of *heaviness* – which offers some insight into their causes - and these feelings and emotions are bound up with the experiences of dehumanization discussed earlier.

Experiences of destabilisation were often complex with intersections between the design and delivery of UC (see figure 15) and a common feature surrounded financial worries which was distressing and is well documented for those on low incomes (Daly, 2017; Patrick, 2017; Pemberton et al, 2016a; Shildrick et al, 2012). This research adds to the literature on how those living with UC experience emotional impacts from financial concerns with those out of work (Cheetham, Moffatt and Addison et al, 2019) and in-

work (Wright and Dwyer, 2020) included in this research. Notably, nearly all were anxious about their finances and the two who were not were ‘just about managing’. The emotional impact could hinder attempts to ‘get-by’ (Lister, 2004) due to ‘scarcity’ (Mullainathan and Shafir, 2013; Curchin, 2017) as participants were pushed to ‘survival’ reducing the ‘headspace’ to deal with everyday life. The destabilisation was not isolated to one instance, with experiences, impacts and responses often intersecting and reactive. Hence, the consequences of living with UC could be equally, or more, damaging than the initial experiences.

Anxiety over conditionality caused ‘hyper-vigilance’ (Stewart and Wright, 2018) for some participants and this could destabilise individuals’ sense of time, with the sense of *uneasiness* growing over time. The regulation of those living with UC extended to the weekend which individuals could no longer enjoy due to their ‘failure’ (Bauman, 2005). Individuals were also fearful over the impacts of living with UC which *pushed* them into difficult situations. Again, the notion of time is important as such responses and fear ripple out into the future as people grapple for *control*, which undermines attempts of responsabilisation. People also responded with anger due to their frustrations of living with UC. Literature has explored instances of anger in encounters of unemployed individuals in JCP settings in Australia (Peterie et al, 2019a) and the UK (Wright et al, 2020). This thesis adds details to the complexity of this response within the context of UC, which is designed without emotion. Yet, as has been discussed, the experience of living and interacting with UC is inherently emotional.

Participants experienced a sense of deflation due to the corrosive nature of living with UC connected to the increasing poverty, conditionality, work-search requirements, and a lack of employer engagements. Notably, these factors were inter-linked and thus those unemployed and actively work-searching felt most deflated. Although, due to the deflating nature of poverty nearly all felt this sense of deflation as Pam commented ‘...I think you get further down in life than going up’, thus people led increasingly ‘compromised’ lives (Pemberton et al, 2016a). By design, UC undermines people’s attempts to ‘get-by’ (Lister, 2004) and increases poverty. The *heaviness* made life harder, with the weight of behavioural change bearing down. Coupled with this, the monotony of work-search grows over time with reducing opportunities with days described by John as ‘Groundhog Day’. Additionally, the silence from employers reinforces this sense of deflation and undermines the efforts utilised in applying for work.

The diversity and depth of emotions were experienced by a range of individuals with varying circumstances and resources, and all were impacted negatively highlighting the damaging nature of UC. By exploring the emotional impacts, detailed insights emerge into the experiences, impacts and responses of living with UC. Engaging and living with UC is an emotional process and the journey is often started at a time of ‘crisis’ yet there is no room for emotion within the rigid bureaucracy which facilitates UC. Contrary to real experiences, individuals are expected to present a positive, polite and enthusiastic ‘self’ to UC, an indication of work-readiness and the emotional responses discussed do not align with this agenda. The expectations from UC are hindered by living with UC which means more are likely to be perceived as *failures* in need of *transformation*.

In sum, living with UC negatively impacted the physical and mental wellbeing and emotions of participants. The negative impacts made it harder to engage with UC, meet conditionality requirements, the labour-market and ‘get-by’ on a low income which itself is emotionally demanding. The thesis has shown how it is not only those with pre-existing health issues or the unemployed who are impacted mentally, physically, and emotionally. This experience spread across conditionality groups and personal circumstances.

### 13.5 UC and the ‘self’

This thesis, in chapter 10, provides an empirical contribution on the stigma caused by living with UC, in terms of stigma attached to ‘benefits’ and poverty. By design and delivery, UC increases the amount of stigma incurred, spreads it to new groups and reduces the ability to mitigate against it. Thereby, arguably UC is more stigmatizing due to its pervasiveness.

No previous research has explored the impact of UC on identities or the experience of ‘benefit stigma’ within this context. This research contributes to broader understandings of ‘benefit stigma’ as developed by Baumberg et al (2012) who later provided quantitative research on the extent (Baumberg, 2016) and Patrick (2016; 2017) who provided insights into how this stigma is experienced and responded to. All investigated ‘benefit stigma’ regarding the legacy system which entailed different forms of social security for different needs whereas UC combines all to offer one system for all working age individuals to engage with, as well as wider changes surrounding money, responsabilisation, digital and conditionality. Due to the increasing poverty those living with UC experienced, individuals faced stigma due to their poverty which intersected with ‘benefit stigma’ and the poverty challenged strategies of identity management and impacted self-worth. The

adoption of ‘stigma power’ (Tyler, 2020) adds a new analytical dimension to the experiences of stigma discussed in this research as it illustrates how stigma operates as a form of social control to maintain and reproduce inequalities. Moreover, it shows how stigma can physically manifest and regulate bodies (Link and Phelan, 2014; Tyler, 2020). This thesis has presented insights into how stigma is experienced and responded to differently by individuals between and within groups such as those in or out of work, illustrating how UC has blurred previous policy and ontological lines.

Deservingness underpins stigma and UC obscures deservingness by design; hence all face the institutional scrutiny and stigma over their access to social security. Thus, at a time when validating deservingness is more important, it continually brings this into question and undermines people’s ability to assert it. Therefore, individuals can internalise this question over deservingness which serves to regulate behaviours with varying consequences (practically and personally).

Individuals like Ryan and Bill now felt stigma attached to their access of social security, unlike when they were engaged in the Legacy system. Bill explained how the *safety* had been removed leaving him open to stigma and Ryan felt like a *burden*, both examples of how ‘benefit stigma’ (Baumberg et al, 2012) manifests within new cohorts via UC. The uniformity of UC embedded within its design and delivery (see 8.4), its availability to all work-age adults and the invisibility of deservingness creates an environment which as Ryan comments “Anyone who’s claiming kind of gets tarnished with that same brush...”. Thus, this feature extends stigma so that all are seen as ‘national abjects’ (Tyler, 2013) who face increasing scrutiny due to their access of UC which is experienced alongside the emotional impacts and efforts of living with UC. The dehumanizing bureaucracy facilitating UC further increases stigma as it reduces the humanity creating ‘cases’ (Bauman, 1989) which is reinforced by the ‘digital by default’ approach. The position of those living with UC as *guilty* and *untrustworthy* is ingrained in how people are treated (see chapter 8) which increases and reinforces stigma as well as challenging existing strategies of self-preservation. Hence, the institutional scrutiny potential involving acts of ‘contaminative exposure’ (Goffman, 1961/2007), based upon ideological ideas of *who* accesses ‘welfare’, strengthens the impact of stigma.

The responses to stigma transverses physical and non-physical boundaries and require a balance between the practical and personal; with the ‘self’ nearly always held above all else. This meant individuals were ‘kept in and away’ (Link and Phelan, 2014) in attempts to mitigate stigma and protect their ‘self’ which led to people not asking for help and

becoming increasingly isolated. Responding to stigma also impacted on relationships as people withdrew and also via ‘Othering’ (Patrick, 2016) both in terms of feeling like the ‘Other’ and labelling kin as such. Individuals attempted to *conceal* (Goffman, 1963/1997) their status of ‘claimant’ by presenting different, more socially acceptable, statuses such as parent, student or worker. The status of worker conferred most protection to individuals yet in utilising this strategy of identity management, workers are obscured from the image of *who* accesses UC which further promotes unemployed people as the image. Therefore, it actually increases the stigma and need for such strategies. Work to an extent, removes the question mark over the ‘self’ yet the design of UC creates new questions reducing the potency of work for protection (Chase and Walker, 2012) as people are now *not working hard enough* (Carter and Whitworth, 2015b; Pemberton et al 2016b).

Responding to stigma is dependent on individual resources and three participants used their financial resources to delay their claim, thus protecting themselves from the stigma surrounding UC. Baumberg et al (2012) warned that non-take up of social security could be a consequence of ‘benefit stigma’ and the thesis provides evidence of this. The balancing of resources and impacts between the practical and personal was common and it was only when individuals felt they could no longer ‘get-by’ they would engage with UC. Individuals also used resources to present themselves a certain way as a form of self-preservation so they could look like ‘us’ (Van Oorschot, 2000; 2006) and ‘dis-identify’ (Casey, Goudie and Reeve, 2008) from the stereotypes surrounding ‘welfare’ (Tyler, 2013; Patrick, 2016). However, this strategy was undermined by the increasing poverty caused by UC consequently as Zara described “...you will get forced into wearing or looking a certain way and you don’t have a choice...”. Moreover, the *universal* nature of UC makes aesthetics more important for identity management, yet in actively eroding the ability to do this, it makes the ‘self’ more vulnerable. The importance of aesthetics can be seen clearly in the JCP as individuals are judged on their appearance which is seen to outwardly project their motivation, deservingness, and morality (Van den Berg and Arts, 2019). The physicality of the ‘self’ becomes another site of conflict and illustrates the intersections between stigma, poverty and identity management whilst living with UC. Clearly, stigma or the *threat* of stigma manifests in the mundanities of daily life. It is with this *threat* individuals must live and navigate the ‘daily indignities’ (Link and Phelan, 2014).

The regulation can also be seen physically in how money is (un)used and understood as individuals described governing their expenditure in response to the scrutiny and stigma

they faced living with UC. This scrutiny was now internalised and led to individuals feeling undeserving of ‘treats’ and ‘luxuries’ (Summers, 2018) which could lead to further societal and ontological dislocation. The denial of items had an emotional toll as well as on the ‘self’ such as when Karl describes his sadness about being, or feeling, unable to buy a packet of sweets and has become ‘haunted’ by such items (Scott, 2018; 2019; 2020). Consumption is a part of identity management (Bauman, 2005; Hamilton, 2012) and UC *taints* and restrains this action, creating another way to inflict damage facilitated by the individuals themselves. This extends insights into how UC can feature ‘self-inflicted social abuse’ by not only conditionality (Wright et al, 2020) but consumption. Once internalised, the scrutiny and stigma of living with UC extends to all areas of life.

The culmination of ‘benefit stigma’ and institutional scrutiny ‘chips away’ at individuals and the addition of poverty stigma (which UC increases) intensifies the experience and impacts. Participants experience multiple sources of stigma and with the adoption of ‘stigma power’ (Tyler, 2020; Link and Phelan, 2014) we begin to see how it reinforces existing inequalities and once internalised individuals regulate themselves, hence are themselves perpetuating inequalities. Importantly, the design and delivery of UC means that all who encounter it are under *threat* regardless of personal circumstance. Whilst there is currently limited research on UC and identities, this research builds upon a broader body of work surrounding social security, poverty and stigma (see chapter 4).

### 13.6 (Un)intended secondary consequences of responses

Investigating how participants responded to the ‘violence’ of living with UC and the subsequent secondary impacts these actions had on the ‘self’ provide a fourth empirical contribution (see chapter 11). The secondary impacts have not previously been considered and provide new insights into the severity of the impacts from UC and the importance participants placed on ‘self-preservation’. The data has shown how living with UC pushes people further away from the labour market, society and even their ‘self’, bringing into question the *transformative* aims of UC; to what and for whom? Far from being ‘lesser’ (Boland and Griffin, 2015) participants showed creativity and strength.

Responses included those of sacrifice in which people gave up something of themselves (activities, belongings, relationships and careers) subsequently becoming a site of ‘nothingness’ (Scott, 2018;2019; 2020) which is damaging for emotions and the ‘self’. Such responses reduce strategies of identity management, yet these ‘acts of commission’

(Scott, 2018) were in some cases a choice for something. For example, Heather whose sacrifice was perceived as a trade-off between finances and the 'self' to avoid entering 'bad work' which she felt UC was pushing her towards. This framing of the sacrifice as a trade-off, whilst providing Heather agency, obscures the structural factors at play and responsabilises Heather for the situation. Hence, there is a complexity to these actions including defiance and deference. Regarding 'bad work' others like Bill, Karl and Ben sacrificed their health and wellbeing by entering into, or attempting to, inappropriate work (see 11.2). The push towards inappropriate work, regardless of individual costs, is a consequence of UC's aim to 'make work pay' which measures all against the labour market. The attempts to enter inappropriate work even when it is damaging illustrates these individuals do not lack work ethic; they lack an equality of opportunity, health and wealth.

It has been argued that living with UC, for some, can cause a form of 'social death' (Goffman, 1961/2007) in terms of a loss of identities or potential, extending Grover's (2019) assertion of austerity as 'social murder' from physical death to the realms of the ontological and expanding understandings of *how* social policy is 'violent'. The responses to 'social death' can also be problematic and here again we can see how living with UC causes secondary impacts.

Participants responded to the impacts of UC with risky behaviours which were damaging to identities, emotions, wellbeing and sometimes physically unsafe. For example, Heather entered informal work to 'get-by' (Lister, 2004) living with UC and left due to sexual harassment and others described applying for inappropriate work which would have risked their health. The navigation of risks involved a balancing act between impacts (emotionally, for wellbeing and the 'self') and financial gains within the context of insecurity, as Isabel commented "...I think this situation will make you your life choices more desperate".

Bill provided insights into a different way responses to living with UC could be risky by describing the situation of 'Hobson's choice' UC had placed him in which saw him steal and take food from bins. A situation which left him fearful if he were to get caught and angry and upset that this is what his life had become – he did not recognize his 'self'. In 'wanting to feel alive', Bill engaged with drug-taking with a 'couple of dodgy geezers'. His search for excitement was in direct contrast to his dehumanizing experiences with UC, yet this experience had pushed him away from who he saw himself as. In responding to the experiences and impacts of UC, Bill is moved further away from the labour market,

society and his 'self'. The findings contribute to knowledge as they provide insights into how people respond to the impacts of living with UC and the subsequent negotiations of self-preservation. In engaging in risky actions, participants seek survival or to feel alive as UC offers the opposite. This process also leads to a sense of 'nothingness' (Scott, 2018; 2019; 2020) in which 'no-bodies, non-events and no-things' interact with identity management and alter how people understand their 'selves' as Bill crossed ontological lines, he previously thought not possible in response to UC. Importantly, this illustrates the temporal nature of the experience as 'nothingness' extends like a fault line into the future for example Zara who missed life events such as her 21<sup>st</sup> Birthday.

Individuals also experienced 'haunting' stemming from their current 'nothingness' which caused further damage to the 'self' as well as their emotional wellbeing, like John who was 'haunted' by his past consumption, his inability to now do this, and what this meant about who he was now. In a sense, UC's aim of *transformation* instils the notion individuals are lacking, itself a form a 'nothingness' (Scott, 2018), and the experience of UC via design and delivery reinforces this.

A final important form of identity management was presenting yourself as a 'good claimant' to protect against, and in response to, the scrutiny and stigma surrounding UC. The presentation as a 'good claimant' has been explored by Whelan (2020) who conceptualises this practice as a form of resistance to conditionality within an Irish social security setting. The findings presented (see 11.4) showed how being 'good' took considerable resource, which went unacknowledged, and ultimately reinforces ideologically binary understandings of 'welfare' (Patrick, 2017; Shildrick, 2018) further legitimizing their treatment and requirement for behavioural change. In *becoming* a 'good claimant' individuals perpetuate the civilising offensive and further entrench the surrounding ideology.

To conclude, in responding to UC and attempting to protect their 'self' participants engaged in an array of experiences which generally were a deviation to the purported aims of UC and came with considerable risks. Individuals often felt further away from the labour market, social networks, society and sometimes their 'self' which created ripples across people's lives. The findings illustrated a strong desire for participants to protect their 'self' often above other practical costs which became increasingly difficult within the context of 'ontological insecurity' (Pemberton et al, 2019a: 1170). It is important to consider how individuals respond to UC and the subsequent impacts of these actions. Not only are the consequences enduring and potentially escalating but they can

lead to further harm being inflicted which society deems the individual responsible for. Therefore, the ‘decivilizing’ effects (Mennell, 1990) can strengthen the grasp of the ‘civilising offensive’ in the shadow of *self-destruction*.

### 13.7 Policy implications

This section will consider policy recommendations which range from the large (and likely unachievable) to the smaller (slightly more achievable) suggestions. A pragmatic approach to the policy implications has been taken, like others (NAO, 2018) I believe it is unlikely UC will be abandoned and therefore the implications offered focus on improvements to this inherently flawed social security system. The thesis has illustrated the various ways in which the design and delivery of UC is harmful and often creates the reverse of its purported aims. Some of the most intrinsic features of UC design are the cause such as its uniformity and to ‘make work pay’ yet as these are encased within dense layers of bureaucracy, and ideology, they are somewhat impenetrable without broader societal shifts surrounding ‘work’, social security and citizenship. As the focus of this research has been the experiences, impacts and responses to living with UC this will be the focus of the policy implications looking at mostly the delivery of UC as changes here could improve millions of lives.

First, the standard allowance of UC should be increased, further than the current £20 weekly uplift so that individuals could feel life was more than about ‘existence’ and ‘survival’. This would have the largest impact on the people living with UC, but sadly is the least likely. The five-week wait and advance system should be removed and replaced with something more akin to that of the Legacy system, as it is destabilising. The premise of the five-week wait is irrational particularly within the context of a pandemic – it is meant to reflect work and offer the time to find new employment which is challenging normally but especially so during a ‘lockdown’. The percentages of debt collection should be reduced and more information should be given as many participants were unaware of the amount or reason relating to debt collection. If the Government has calculated a *minimum* income, then this should be protected not reduced.

Better signposting for individuals from the start would improve the experience, likely reduce the impacts and *smooth* the journey from the current bumpy reality. By signposting for available support, such as the disability component and importantly how to do this, individuals would be better equipped to manage their claim. Signposting could also include details around changing the monthly payment to fortnightly, payments to

landlords as well as to third party support such as Citizens Advice and charities. Additional signposting could detail information around employment, particularly the taper rate and other unique changes which most individuals were unaware of until their UC payment was reduced. Improved signposting would help everyone.

There seemed to be a lack of communication between the WC and the 'case manager' (based within the call-centre) and this could add confusion and difficulties for those living with UC which they had to navigate. Better internal communication would improve the 'journey' with UC and could prevent some problems arising such as when conflicting advice is given. Improving communication would aid understanding between DWP staff and reduce the current disconnect between in-person and digital channels.

The 'claimant commitment' should include considerations of wellbeing and this should be actively engaged with by the WC. Individuals generally enter social security at a time of change, even crisis, thus it is important to support people's wellbeing. Moreover, as the findings within this thesis have illuminated, people's wellbeing can change over time therefore by having a regular check support can be offered potentially preventing more serious consequences. There was one example from Alice, whose WC set mindful activities in her monthly commitments which illustrated an interest in wellbeing, yet most of those in the research discussed poor wellbeing or negative emotions. The inclusion of wellbeing would allow for individuals to be signposted for extra support if required, likely improve the relationship of the WC and those living with UC and reduce the 'institutional coldness' (Haslam, 2006) widely experienced.

Originally, UC was combined with a Universal Support scheme to assist and support those living with UC in more vulnerable circumstances, the scheme has since been replaced with a 'help to claim' scheme facilitated by Citizens Advice. The Government should consider relaunching the Universal Support scheme with increased investment to offer a more holistic service to the growing and diverse cohort accessing UC. The relaunch of the Universal Support scheme could provide a broader shift in focus within the DWP as discussed below. Whilst there will be variations in the level of support individuals require, its availability via UC will strengthen the safety net with individual and societal benefits. UC and the JCP could become a place within communities for support as opposed to the current more punitive image. A further benefit of this shift would be the potential to reduce the stigma surrounding social security, as it would be a system which provided real security of and for society.

Lastly, a broader shift in ethos across the DWP would improve experiences of UC, if there could be a move to provide more time, more trust and more transparency to those living with UC then their journeys would be greatly eased. The issues of time, trust and transparency are apparent throughout the findings and intersect the issues of UC design and delivery. The notions of transparency, trust and time offer ways to re-evaluate how those living with UC are perceived, treated and experience UC; if there was more transparency, trust and time offered (or increased value of these) then their ‘journey’ would be easier. Trust, transparency and time are all big things and perhaps too vague, but they can be broken down into smaller actions which would ease journeys with UC and create a more stable, considerate and fair footing for people to engage with.

Currently, those who claim UC are positioned as untrusted and must prove their deservingness (see 10.7). This sense of being untrusted is also experienced in the JCP where there is a high level of security, scrutiny and regulation (see chapter 8). Trust should be given to individuals instead of a sense they are guilty of something, individuals are trusted to manage their own claim and this sense of trust could be reflected in other experiences. As the findings have shown, there is a lack of transparency within the UC process and across the in-person and digital channels. The level of mis-advice or no advice made individuals attempts to manage their claim extremely challenging financially and emotionally. Trust again comes into play here as individuals trusted the advice they were given, even when it was wrong which led to hardship and also it could reduce the trust between those claiming and those supporting them. Transparency is key for individuals to successfully manage their UC journey and if instances of mis-advice or no information could be reduced it would also reduce the time individuals had to spend navigating UC and subsequently the contacts made with UC. The value and importance of the individual’s living with UC time needs to be considered as often participant’s felt this was overlooked and instead their time was spent ‘counter-productively’ (Stewart and Wright, 2018).

### 13.8 Future research

With growing numbers of people accessing social security this area of research is of increasing concern especially given the current and future social and economic uncertainties caused by the pandemic and Brexit. This research has demonstrated the negative impact UC has on emotional, mental and physical wellbeing and more research is needed to understand the longer-term impacts of this as well as the effect of the pandemic on these damaging impacts.

As this thesis is based upon a small case-study, further research could explore UC in different geographical areas which would provide a comparison and more insights into the experiences, impacts and responses to UC. Moreover, as the implementation of UC is different across the devolved nations of the UK it is important to consider how this affects the experiences, impacts and responses to living with UC which would likely lead to policy lessons. As UC was introduced without an evidence base it is crucial to explore how different modes of delivery, and the underpinning attitudes, affect social security recipients particularly when the reach of UC is continually increasing. Thus, would add to understandings of how living with UC is negotiated over time and by different people, as this research has shown the experiences are not universal.

This doctoral research has explored the diversity within and across the categorisation of individuals designed via UC, providing a clear illustration the experience of UC is not universal and more research is required to investigate this. There is limited research on different groups such as women (Andersen, 2019), couples (Griffiths et al, 2021) and those in-work (Wright and Dwyer, 2020) but more is needed to understand the impacts and negotiations of living with UC. It is not only different characteristics which need investigating but also the entry point of UC such as those who ‘naturally migrate’ and those who make new claims, as well as those with experience of the legacy system compared to those without. More research would add weight and understanding to the un-universal experiences of UC and its misguided aims of *transformation*. As how you can you seek *transformation* when you do not understand the start or end point?

Future research is required to grow insights into in-work conditionality and how being in-work changes the experiences, impacts and responses to UC as this research found paid employment could be actively challenged by the design and delivery of UC. Additionally, understanding is needed into how support can be delivered to those in-work as this research has shown they access and require different levels and modes of support to those out of work. As discussed (see 6.7 and 6.8), accessing those in-work and receiving UC can be challenging yet this adds to the importance and need for this research as it illustrates the different understandings individuals have of UC and the on-going identity management.

In relation to identity management, this research has clearly shown that living with UC is stigmatizing and more research into this area would gain further insights into how this is negotiated, particularly the physical impacts of stigma. Importantly, the thesis has illustrated the considerable negative impact UC has on emotions, wellbeing and the ‘self’;

research is needed to see how such issues are being impacted upon during the pandemic which is likely to intensify such destructive experiences.

Research is also required to investigate the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on living with UC in the years ahead. A large ESRC funded study, is already taking place exploring social security during and after the pandemic (see Welfare at a (social) distance, 2021) which provides a national picture. Greater qualitative insight is needed into the impacts of living with UC during the pandemic and more broadly how the shifting demographic changes the impacts, experiences and understanding of UC. During the pandemic, UC payments received an ‘uplift’ and conditionality was paused for a time, features which will have altered living with UC. In terms of stigma, it could be the growth in social security numbers reduces stigma based upon an increasing understanding of the benefits of social security and increasing visibility of those living with UC; both of which could reduce the threat of stigma. However, those newly engaging with UC may have experienced a ‘nicer’ version due to the aforementioned changes which may reduce the capacity for understanding therefore the underlying stigma attached to social security remains.

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## 15. Appendices

Appendix 1: Participant Leaflet

**Sheffield  
Hallam  
University** Centre for  
Regional Economic  
and Social Research.

### **Would you like to be interviewed about your experience of claiming Universal Credit?**

I am interested in speaking to:

- Unemployed claimants who are looking for work
- In work claimants
- Self-employed claimants

#### **What is involved?**

The voluntary interview lasts around 1 hour. We will talk about your experiences of claiming Universal Credit and any impacts this has had on your life.

**You will receive a £10 voucher as  
a 'thank you' for taking part.**

If you would like to take part or want to know more, please contact me on:

Sophie Negus

Call or Text: 07851939320

Email: [Sophia.C.Negus@student.shu.ac.uk](mailto:Sophia.C.Negus@student.shu.ac.uk)

This flyer is for information only. For full details please contact Sophie on the details above.

## Research into claimants' experience of Universal Credit

### Participant Interview Information Sheet

**1. Invitation and Purpose** You are invited to take part in a doctoral research study about how Universal Credit is experienced by, responded to, and impacts on claimants. The study is being conducted by a doctoral student at the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research at Sheffield Hallam University. Please read the following information carefully before you decide whether or not to take part.

**2. Legal Basis for Research Studies** The University undertakes research as part of its function for the community under its legal status. Data protection allows us to use personal data (the information you have provided) for research with appropriate safeguards in place under the legal basis of public tasks that are in the public interest. A full statement of your rights can be found at:

<https://www.shu.ac.uk/about-this-website/privacy-policy/privacy-notices/privacy-notice-for-research>

All University research is reviewed to ensure that participants are treated appropriately and their rights respected. This study has been approved by the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC). Further information can be found at: <https://www.shu.ac.uk/research/ethics-integrity-and-practice>

**3. Why have I been asked to participate?** You have been approached about this study because you are claiming Universal Credit.

**4. Do I have to take part?** Taking part in this research is voluntary. If you would prefer not to take part, you do not have to give any reason. If I change my mind I should contact [Sophie Negus, 07851939320, Sophia.C.Negus@student.shu.ac.uk] up to 14 days after the interview date. If I withdraw after this point then I understand that my data may be retained as part of the study.

**5. What will taking part involve?** The interview will take place in a public venue/ a location where you feel most comfortable/ your home, and should last approximately an hour. You will be asked about your experiences of being a Universal Credit claimant and how Universal Credit has impacted on your life, both practically and personally.

**6. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?** I do not anticipate that there are any risks in taking part. You will not be under any pressure to answer questions or talk about topics that you prefer not to discuss and you can choose to halt or withdraw from the interview at any point.

**7. What are the possible benefits of taking part?** There are no direct benefits of taking part although some people enjoy the opportunity to share their experiences. You will receive a £10 high-street shopping voucher to thank you for your time. You will still receive the voucher even if you choose to withdraw from the research.

**8. How will my confidentiality be protected?** I may ask to record the interview, with your consent. This allows me to accurately reflect what is said. The recording will be transcribed (written out), with names or identifying information removed. Any quotes will be anonymised (using pseudonyms) in my thesis and subsequent written and verbal outputs. Confidentiality will only be broken in circumstances where there is concern that there is a risk of harm to you or someone else. In this instance I am obliged to report this information to the relevant agency that can provide assistance.

**9. What will happen to my data during the study and once the study is over?** Sheffield Hallam University will be responsible for all of the data during the study and when it is over. No one except the doctoral student and supervisory team will have access to this data, which will be held securely on Sheffield Hallam University servers.

Data from this study may be retained by Sheffield Hallam University for up to 10 years after the study has finished and may be available to the public but only if it can be sufficiently anonymised to protect your identity. The only personal data we keep will be your signed consent form. We have to keep this for seven years from the end of the project so we will keep it separately in a secure file for this length of time.

**10. How will the data be used?** The data from your interview will be used to inform the doctoral research, as well as presentations and academic publications.

**11. Who can I contact if I have any questions or concerns about the study?**

Sophia Negus

Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research, Sheffield Hallam University, City Campus,  
Howard Street, S1 1WB

Mobile: 07851939320 Email: [Sophia.C.Negus@student.shu.ac.uk](mailto:Sophia.C.Negus@student.shu.ac.uk)

Supervisory Team:

Professor Paul Hickman

Telephone: 0114 225 4522 Email: [p.g.hickman@shu.ac.uk](mailto:p.g.hickman@shu.ac.uk)

Dr Lindsey McCarthy

Telephone: 0114 225 6283 Email: [L.McCarthy@shu.ac.uk](mailto:L.McCarthy@shu.ac.uk)

<p><b>You should contact the Data Protection Officer if:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• you have a query about how your data is used by the University</li><li>• you would like to report a data security breach (e.g. if you think your personal data has been lost or disclosed inappropriately)</li><li>• you would like to complain about how the University has used your personal data</li></ul> <p><a href="mailto:DPO@shu.ac.uk">DPO@shu.ac.uk</a></p>	<p><b>You should contact the Head of Research Ethics (Professor Ann Macaskill) if:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• you have concerns with how the research was undertaken or how you were treated</li></ul> <p><a href="mailto:a.macaskill@shu.ac.uk">a.macaskill@shu.ac.uk</a></p>
<p>Postal address: Sheffield Hallam University, Howard Street, Sheffield S1 1WBT. Telephone: 0114 225 5555</p>	

**Research into claimants' experience of Universal Credit Consent Form**

*Please answer the following questions by ticking the response that applies*

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
1. I have read the Information Sheet for this study and / or had details of the study explained to me and understand that I may ask further questions at any point.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study without giving a reason. If I change my mind I should contact [Sophie Negus, 07851939320, Sophia.C.Negus@student.shu.ac.uk] up to 14 days after the interview date. If I withdraw after this point then I understand that my data may be retained as part of the study.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I understand that I can stop the interview at any point or choose not to answer any particular questions and this will not have any impact on me or the support I am receiving.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I understand that the information collected will remain confidential, unless I say anything that makes the researcher concerned that there is a risk of harm to me or someone else. In these circumstances I understand that the researcher must report this information to the relevant agency that can provide assistance.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I understand that my personal details such as my name will not be shared outside this project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I agree that the data in anonymised form can be used for other research purposes (e.g. writing articles in journals).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. I understand that the data from this study may be retained by Sheffield Hallam University for up to 10 years after the study has finished and may	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

be available to the public (but only if it can be sufficiently anonymised to protect your identity).

8. I agree to take part in the interview for the above study.

9. I agree for the interview to be audio recorded and to quotes being used. I understand my name won't be used.

*Name of participant* *Signature* *Date*

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

.....  
***If the researcher is taking verbal consent:*** "I confirm that verbal consent has been recorded and that the consent form, information sheet and privacy notice have been read/explained verbally to the participant" (researcher signs below).

*Name of researcher* *Signature* *Date*

.....

## **Research into claimants' experience of Universal Credit**

### **Participant Diary Information Sheet**

**1. Invitation and Purpose** You are invited to take part in a doctoral research study about how Universal Credit is experienced by, responded to, and impacts on claimants. The study is being conducted by a doctoral student at the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research at Sheffield Hallam University. Please read the following information carefully before you decide whether or not to take part.

**2. Legal Basis for Research Studies** The University undertakes research as part of its function for the community under its legal status. Data protection allows us to use personal data (the information you have provided) for research with appropriate safeguards in place under the legal basis of public tasks that are in the public interest. A full statement of your rights can be found at:

<https://www.shu.ac.uk/about-this-website/privacy-policy/privacy-notices/privacy-notice-for-research>

All University research is reviewed to ensure that participants are treated appropriately and their rights respected. This study has been approved by the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC). Further information can be found at: <https://www.shu.ac.uk/research/ethics-integrity-and-practice>

**3. Why have I been asked to participate?** You have been approached about this study because you are claiming Universal Credit.

**4. What will taking part involve?** You will be asked to keep a diary for two weeks. The diary will be provided to you and you will be asked to write about your day to day life whilst claiming Universal Credit, including your experiences and feelings. After completing the diary, you will be asked to return the diary (either in person or using the free-post envelope provided) to Sophie Negus. Once the diary has been received, a digital copy will be made and the original diary returned to you.

**5. Do I have to take part?** Taking part in this research is voluntary. If you would prefer not to take part, you do not have to give any reason. If I change my mind I should contact [Sophie Negus, 07851939320, Sophia.C.Negus@student.shu.ac.uk] up to a month after receiving the diary back. If I withdraw after this point then I understand that my data may be retained as part of the study.

**6. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?** There is a small risk if you were to lose your diary, as it may include personal details. To reduce this risk, the diary will be numbered and I would ask you not to include your name. Also, it is important to keep the diary in a safe place to reduce the risk of loss. You will not be under any pressure to answer questions or write about topics that you prefer not to. You can use the diary as much or as little as you want to. You can choose to stop writing the diary, not answer certain questions or withdraw from the research at any point.

**7. What are the possible benefits of taking part?** There are no direct benefits of taking part although some people enjoy the process of keeping a diary and the opportunity to share their experiences. You will receive a £10 high-street shopping voucher (£5 at the start and £5 at the end) as a thank you for your time. You will still receive the voucher even if you choose to withdraw from the research.

**8. How will my confidentiality be protected?** To protect your confidentiality and anonymity, the diary will have a number and I would ask you not to include your name. Only sections of the diary in which identifiable information has been removed or without any identifiable information, will be used within research outputs. Any quotes will be anonymised (using pseudonyms) in my thesis and subsequent written and verbal outputs. Confidentiality will only be broken in circumstances where there is concern that there is a risk of harm to you or someone else. In this instance I am obliged to report this information to the relevant agency that can provide assistance.

**9. What will happen to my data during the study and once the study is over?** Once the diary has been completed and returned to the researcher, a digital copy will be made and the original returned to you. Sheffield Hallam University will be responsible for all of the data during the study and when it is over. No one except the doctoral student and supervisory team will have access to this data, which will be held securely on Sheffield Hallam University servers. Any hard copies will be kept securely in a locked draw on Sheffield Hallam University premises.

Data from this study may be retained by Sheffield Hallam University for up to 10 years after the study has finished and may be available to the public but only if it can be sufficiently anonymised to protect your identity. The only personal data we keep will be your signed consent form. We have to keep this for seven years from the end of the project so we will keep it separately in a secure file for this length of time.

**10. How will the data be used?** The data from your diary will be used to inform the doctoral research, as well as presentations and academic publications. Copies of the diary and quotes from the diary may be used within the research and future dissemination outputs (only if it can be sufficiently anonymised to protect your identity).

**11. Who can I contact if I have any questions or concerns about the study?**

Sophia Negus

Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research, Sheffield Hallam University, City Campus,  
Howard Street, S1 1WB

Mobile: 07851939320

Email: [Sophia.C.Negus@student.shu.ac.uk](mailto:Sophia.C.Negus@student.shu.ac.uk)

Supervisory Team:

Professor Paul Hickman

Telephone: 0114 225 4522

Email: [p.g.hickman@shu.ac.uk](mailto:p.g.hickman@shu.ac.uk)

Dr Lindsey McCarthy

Telephone: 0114 225 6283

Email: [L.McCarthy@shu.ac.uk](mailto:L.McCarthy@shu.ac.uk)

**You should contact the Data Protection Officer if:**

- you have a query about how your data is used by the University
- you would like to report a data security breach (e.g. if you think your personal data has been lost or disclosed inappropriately)
- you would like to complain about how the University has used your personal data

[DPO@shu.ac.uk](mailto:DPO@shu.ac.uk)

**You should contact the Head of Research Ethics (Professor Ann Macaskill) if:**

- you have concerns with how the research was undertaken or how you were treated

[a.macaskill@shu.ac.uk](mailto:a.macaskill@shu.ac.uk)

Postal address: Sheffield Hallam University, Howard Street, Sheffield S1 1WBT.

Telephone: 0114 225 5555

**Research into claimants' experience of Universal Credit Consent Form**

*Please answer the following questions by ticking the response that applies*

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
1. I have read the Information Sheet for this study and / or had details of the study explained to me and understand that I may ask further questions at any point.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study without giving a reason. If I change my mind I should contact [Sophie Negus, 07851939320, Sophia.C.Negus@student.shu.ac.uk] up to a month after receiving the diary back. If I withdraw after this point then I understand that my data may be retained as part of the study.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I understand that I can stop keeping the diary at any point or choose not to answer any particular questions and this will not have any impact on me or the support I am receiving.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I understand that the information collected will remain confidential, unless I say anything that makes the researcher concerned that there is a risk of harm to me or someone else. In these circumstances I understand that the researcher must report this information to the relevant agency that can provide assistance.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I understand that my personal details such as my name will not be shared outside this project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I agree that the data in anonymised form can be used for other research purposes (e.g. writing articles in journals).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. I understand that the data from this study may be retained by Sheffield Hallam University for up to 10 years after the study has finished and may be available to the public (but only if	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

it can be sufficiently anonymised to protect your identity).

8. I agree to keep a diary for the above study.

9. I agree for digital and hard copies of the diary to be made and for quotes being used. I understand my name won't be used.

10. I agree for copies of the diary to be used within the research and future dissemination outputs (only if it can be sufficiently anonymised to protect your identity).

*Name of participant*  *Signature*  *Date*

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

.....  
***If the researcher is taking verbal consent: "I confirm that verbal consent has been recorded and that the consent form, information sheet and privacy notice have been read/explained verbally to the participant" (researcher signs below).***

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

## GUIDE TO COMPLETING YOUR DIARY

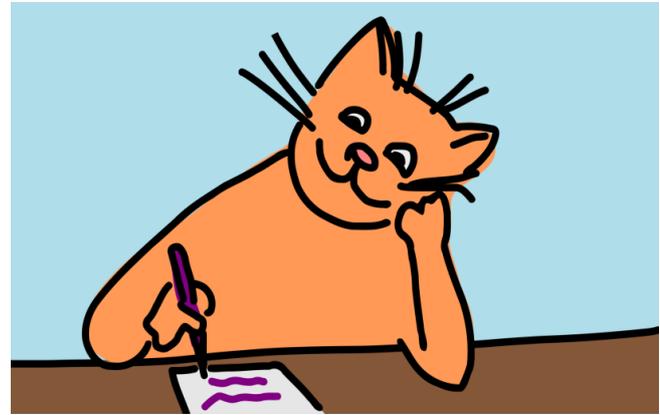
- YOU HAVE BEEN ASKED TO COMPLETE THIS DIARY AS PART OF A RESEARCH PROJECT LOOKING INTO EXPERIENCES AND IMPACTS OF UNIVERSAL CREDIT. THE DIARY WILL COVER THE DAY TO DAY REALITY OF CLAIMING AND LIVING ON UNIVERSAL CREDIT.
- THE DIARY SHOULD LAST FOR ABOUT TWO WEEKS, BUT YOU CAN DECIDE HOW MUCH OR HOW LITTLE YOU USE IT.
- THERE ARE QUESTIONS IN THE DIARY, ASKING YOU ABOUT YOUR DAY, EXPERIENCES AND FEELINGS, WHICH SHOULD HELP TO FILL IN THE DIARY. YOU CAN ANSWER ALL THE QUESTIONS, SOME OR NONE - IT REALLY IS UP TO YOU.
- THE DIARY ALSO INCLUDES PLENTY OF SPACE FOR YOU TO WRITE DOWN YOUR OWN THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS, WITHOUT ANY PROMPTS.
- TO PROTECT YOUR ANONYMITY, THE DIARY HAS BEEN NUMBERED AND I WOULD ASK YOU NOT TO INCLUDE YOUR NAME IN THE DIARY.
- YOU CAN STOP USING THE DIARY AT ANY TIME AND WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY (PLEASE SEE YOUR INFORMATION SHEET FOR MORE DETAILS).
- WITH THE DIARY, YOU HAVE RECEIVED A SMALL PACK OF ITEMS TO HELP YOU FILL IN THE DIARY. I HAVE INCLUDED THESE SO YOU CAN MAKE THE DIARY AS CREATIVE AND PERSONAL AS YOU LIKE. SO IF YOU LIKE, YOU CAN DRAW, DOODLE OR STICK THINGS IN THE DIARY. I HOPE THAT YOU FIND KEEPING THE DIARY A USEFUL AND ENJOYABLE EXPERIENCE.
- PLEASE RETURN THE DIARY, EITHER IN PERSON OR USING THE FREE-POST ENVELOPE, ONCE IT IS COMPLETED. IF IT IS SENT BY POST, I WILL CONTACT YOU BY TELEPHONE TO LET YOU KNOW I HAVE RECEIVED IT. I'LL MAKE A DIGITAL COPY AND RETURN THE ORIGINAL TO YOU, FOR YOU TO KEEP. AFTER THIS, YOU WILL BE INVITED TO A VOLUNTARY SECOND INTERVIEW TO DISCUSS THE DIARY.

**BELOW ARE SOME QUESTIONS TO HELP YOU FILL IN YOUR DIARY AND THEY ARE ONLY SUGGESTIONS OF THINGS FOR YOU TO THINK AND WRITE ABOUT. THIS IS YOUR DIARY AND YOU CAN ANSWER AS MANY OR LITTLE AS YOU LIKE.**

**TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF?**

**WRITING ABOUT YOUR DAY:**

- DESCRIBE YOUR DAY IN ONE WORD
- HOW WAS YOUR DAY?
- WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN UP TO?
- HOW ARE YOU FEELING TODAY? WHY?
- TELL ME SOMETHING GOOD ABOUT YOUR DAY?



**WRITING AFTER CONTACT WITH THE JOB CENTRE (BY PHONE, IN PERSON OR ONLINE):**

- DESCRIBE THE CONTACT. WHAT WAS IT ABOUT? WHO WAS IT WITH? WAS IT USEFUL?
- HOW DID IT MAKE YOU FEEL?

**WRITING ABOUT YOUR WORK (IF IN EMPLOYMENT):**

- HOW WAS WORK? WHAT DID YOUR DAY INVOLVE?
- HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT YOUR WORK/JOB?

**WRITING ABOUT YOUR 'WORK-RELATED ACTIVITY':**

- WHAT DID YOU DO? HOW LONG DID IT TAKE? ANY CHALLENGES?
- HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT IT?

**OTHER SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES:**

**DRAW ABOUT YOUR DAY**

**CARTOON YOUR WEEK**

**STICK THINGS IN - PHOTOS, MEMENTOES OF YOUR DAY ETC**

## Research into claimants' experience of Universal Credit

### Topic Guide

#### At the start of the interview:

- This topic guide is intended to steer discussions (interviews) with claimants in receipt of Universal Credit.
- This is a guide only - the researcher will use judgement when asking and phrasing questions, and ensuring they are relevant to the research and participant.
- Provide the information sheet and consent form and emphasise the confidentiality and anonymity of all respondents. Informed consent must be obtained.
- Make clear they are able to stop or take a break from the interview at any time and do not have to answer questions they do not feel comfortable with.
- Explain purpose of interview: to talk about their experiences and feelings of claiming Universal Credit and the impacts Universal Credit has had on their lives.
- Before asking for permission to record the interview, explain that you would like to do so for two reasons:
  - 1. So that we can have a proper conversation without having to scribble down notes;
  - 2. So that we do not misrepresent your views.
- Do they have any questions?

#### General

I thought we would start by talking a bit about yourself and your current situation.

#### USE PARTICIPANT ATTRIBUTE SHEET Questions 1 to 12

Can you tell me about:

13. Are you working at the moment? (type of work – full/part time)

- Yes: Tell me about your work (nature of work, how long have you worked there, job security, how do you feel about your job)
- No: How long have you been out of work? How/why did you leave your last job? (Previous work experience, how do you feel about work – confident in gaining employment?)

#### Experiences of claiming UC

Now I would like to talk about your experiences of claiming UC.

14. Could you tell me about your experiences of claiming UC?

15. What led to start claiming UC? (Claim straight away? Reason for claiming – unemployed, LP, Disabilities, low income).

16. Have you been in or out of work during that time?

17. Can you tell me about your initial experience of claiming UC?

- What was it like when you first went into the Job Centre? (how did it feel)
- going to JCP – getting there: travel/time

- the staff – What is your work coach like? How often do you speak to them? Could you describe your first meeting with them?
- The online system – how did you access (at home, library, mobile – how did you find it) IT skills?
- Applying online? Any issues/problems?

18a. Thinking about starting your claim, can you tell me about your claimant commitment?

- what is on it (the conditions)
- was it negotiated
- do you feel it takes into account your personal circumstances
- how do you feel about it
- achievable/realistic

18b. Have you received any support to meet the conditions on the commitment?

- What? (Good/bad/useful – why)
- Has the support helped you into work/increase hours?
- Would you like support (if yes what)?

19. What happens if you don't meet the requirements on your commitment? (Has this happened?)

20a. Have you been sanctioned? If so when, why, for how long? (Impact, how did you cope, feelings, did this change your behaviour)

20b. Have you ever felt at risk of a sanction? Tell me about it (what led to it, what did you do, how did you feel)

21. How have you found managing your claim? (Universal Job search, keeping the journal, attending meetings, meeting the requirements)

22a. Have there been any changes to your UC requirements? (Employment changes – hours of job, relationship changes, household changes).

22b. Has UC been flexible towards these changes?

23. Have you claimed other benefits in the past? How does UC compare (amount/conditions/support).

**24. How do you feel about claiming UC? (Why is that, if appropriate is that different from legacy and why). Does it feel different to being on UC? Why do you say this?**

25. [Show prompts] I've got a two pictures here about UC, what are your thoughts on them?

- As you can see UC is for all working age claimants, what do you think about that?
- How does it make you feel about claiming UC? (why)
- Under UC, claimants in and out of work may have work requirements, what do you think about that?
- Do these pictures fit with your understandings of UC?

**26. How do you think the general public views UC and UC claimants? Why do you say this?**

- Does it matter how others view UC/ UC claimants? Why do you say this?
- Do you think UC/ UC claimants are viewed in a more positive/ same/ less positive light as legacy benefits? Why is this the case?
- (IF YES) Does this matter?
- Does it matter to you what type of benefit you are on? Why do you say this?

Does the type of benefit claimants are on say anything about them?

27a. Have you had any experience of temporary work or zero hour contracts? (Tell me about it – practical and personal impacts)

27b. Have JCP encouraged you to take such work? Tell me about it – was it useful? How did you feel about it?

### Daily life on UC

I'd like to move on and talk about how UC has affected your day to day life, could you tell me a bit about that?

28a. Do you think claiming UC has affected other areas of your life?

28b. How do you feel about that?

29. What do you like to do in your free-time? Do you feel able to relax?

30. How has claiming affecting your home life? (family/household)

31. Do you think claiming UC has changed how you see yourself (or how others see you? - other roles i.e parent) Why do you say that?

32. Do you think claiming benefits has affected your wellbeing? (why/how)

33. Has claiming UC affected other commitments? (household, family etc) How?

34. Do you talk to anyone (friends, family, work colleagues) about claiming UC?

- Yes -Who, why, what about
- No - why not? would you like to?
- comparison to legacy?

35. Is the benefit payment you receive enough to live on?

- 35a. Do you have any other sources of income (Paid work, friends and family, loans, credit cards, cash in hand, hardship payments)
- 35b. Could you tell me a bit about your budget/expenses?
- 35c. Are you currently in any debt? (What, how, why, managed?)
- 35d. Have you been affected by other benefit changes? (Bedroom tax eg)
- 35e. How does UC payment compare to legacy? (why)

36. What do you think about how UC is paid (DP, in arrears, monthly)?

- 36a. Have you experienced any delays with UC payments? Or issues with UC payments?
- 36b. How do you feel about your money situation going forward?

37a. How have you found UC payment and working? (monthly calculations, reflective of work?)

37b. Does this affect how you deal with your money? If so how?

38. Do you have any extra costs to meet your UC requirements? (Travel, IT, Time, Internet etc)

### Working on UC

If not already covered ask 39 and 40:

39. What has your work situation been since claiming UC? (In or out of work, both, for how long)

40. What kind of work are you doing (job, hours, pay, security, contract, travel)

41. Is this a job you would like to stay in? (progress?)

- 41a. Do you feel secure in this job?
- 41b. How do you feel about the work? (Satisfied, happy, stressed?)
- 41c. Has your feeling towards work changed since claiming UC?
- 41d. How do you feel about the future

42. What are your work requirements under UC?

- 42a. Have you been able to meet them? Are they fair?
- 42b. How often do you have to go to JCP? How do you feel going there?
- 42c. How do you keep in contact? Are they flexible?

43. Have you been offered any support? (If so what) Do you feel supported by JCP? How would you like to be supported to find work?

44. How do you feel about having to meet these requirements, whilst in-work?

45. Has claiming UC affected your work?

- 45a. Have you increased your hours? Is this possible
- 45b. Have you got other employment? Is this possible – what sort of jobs? Is this sustainable?
- 45c. How have you found fitting in this with work?
- 45d. Has this added extra pressure?

46. How has working and claiming UC fitted with other areas of your life? (Household, friends, family)

Concluding points:

47. Is there anything else you'd like to talk about that we've not covered?

48. Just one last thing, I have a statement here from the Government talking about Universal Credit, do you mind if I read it to you and get your thoughts on it?

"Universal Credit aims to reduce poverty, by making work pay, and to help claimants and their families to become more independent" DWP 2018

MENTION DIARY - SECOND STAGE OF RESEARCH.

## UC6 Diary Interview Guide

### At the start of the interview:

- This topic guide is intended to steer discussions (interviews) with benefit claimants in receipt of Universal Credit. As a second interview, the topic guide has been informed by first interview and diary (if they kept one).
- This is a guide only - the researcher will use judgement when asking and phrasing questions, and ensuring they are relevant to the research and participant.
- Provide the information sheet and consent form and emphasise the confidentiality and anonymity of all respondents. Informed consent must be obtained.
- Make clear they are able to stop or take a break from the interview at any time and do not have to answer questions they do not feel comfortable with.
- Explain purpose of interview: to talk about their diary (which they kept for research), exploring these experiences in more detail, following up on issues raised in first interview. Again, the focus is to talk about their experiences surrounding Universal Credit and their thoughts and feelings about claiming.
- Before asking for permission to record the interview, explain that you would like to do so for two reasons:
  - 1. So that we can have a proper conversation without having to scribble down notes;
  - 2. So that we do not misrepresent your views.
- Do they have any questions?
- Structure of guide as follows: Brief catch up since last meeting, talk about diary (expansion and clarification), crossovers with interview, experience of keeping the diary and if time final section.

### THANK YOU FOR KEEPNG THE DIARY!

1. How have things been since we last met?
2. You mentioned in your diary about UC not covering your rent arrears, could you talk me through that?
3. You kindly included an insert from your UC Journal, detailing a conversation you'd had with someone at the call centre:
  - Were the call-handlers helpful?
  - How would you describe your treatment (from them)?
  - Do you have to contact them often?
4. After this happened, you missed two days over the weekend, would you mind describing how you were feeling then?
5. Looking back at the situation now, how do you feel about it? (Were you able to talk to anyone about it?)
6. Is your work coach able to help or advise with those kinds of situations?
7. Do you feel able to talk to them about this sort of thing?
8. How would you describe their role? (and your role?)
9. How would you describe your relationship with your work coach?

### **JCP/UC interactions**

In the diary and during the interview, several things to do with your work coach came up and I wanted to talk a little more about those.

10. You describe in the diary, having to tell your work coach about an upcoming visit to your daughter as you won't be 'available' for work, how did that conversation go?

- Was your work coach obliging (or did they question it?)
- How do you feel about having to tell your work coach about time away?

11. You also wrote about 'diversion tactics' you use with your work coach, could you say a little more about this?

- Are there more tactics that you use (than mentioned in diary)?
- Why do you think they are useful/important?
- When did you start to use them?
- In the interview you said how you have to 'play the game and stay one step ahead', is this part of it?

12. I thought it was interesting how in the diary you said that you knew loads about your last work coach and they knew nothing about you:

- How did this come about?
- Was it purposeful?
- Do you think this is important (the distance)?
- Do you think the work coach was aware of this?

13. Is the relationship you have with your work coaches on UC different to those on JSA/ESA? (Why is this).

14. The word freedom, or phrases like it ('oh the joys of being free'), was used a lot in your diary. Could you say a little more about that?

- Free from what?
- How do you feel about your freedom?
- Has being out of work changed this?
- How do you think JCP/UC see your freedom?

15. In the diary you explain how you told your work coach that you don't have a computer at home and use the ones down at Hastings works, so that you can enjoy your weekends. Do you think that without this, you would be expected to job search at weekends?

16. Are there other things you prefer not to disclose to your work coach?

17. In your interview and diary you spoke about being treated inhumanely by work coaches and UC in general, could you tell me more about this? How do you feel about this?

18. In what ways do you think things could be done differently to prevent such feelings?

19. How has this treatment affected you? (before/after meetings/outside the job centre/in other situations?)

*(Added 'before' to pick up whether the thought of going to a meeting at the JC induces feelings of heightened anxiety, sleeplessness etc.)*

### **Experiences and feelings of work/looking for work**

20. You wrote about some cash in hand work in the diary, would you mind talking a bit more about that?

- When, where, for how long?
- What was the work like? Did you enjoy the work?
- (Work doing for Older friend)

21. In the diary, you wrote about some voluntary work, has this started? Are you enjoying it?

22. You spoke fondly about your Art shop job in the interview and diary and described how getting the job as the 'good old days'.

- How do you think getting a job has changed since then? (why)
- How do you feel about work now?
- Do you feel closer to 'work' being on UC (compared to legacy)?
- Do you think UC has helped you/will help you get into work? (Why)
- Have your views/feelings about work changed from when you claimed JSA?

23. Do you feel differently about UC/claiming benefits from your time on UC? (Why is this)

24. In the diary you write how there are plenty of jobs out there and that you pick around 10 – 12 each week to apply for but that interviews are tough to get:

- How do you decide what to go for?
- Have your feelings/attitude towards job hunting changed since you started claiming UC?
- Can you give a bit more detail about getting the interviews? (Why)
- Has your work coach offered support around getting interviews (What/Would you like some/What sort of thing would be useful)

25. In the interview you mentioned how you use different CV's to apply for jobs to increase or minimise your chance of getting an interview:

- When did you start to do this? (Before or after started claiming UC – why the change)
- Is there anything else you do like this?
- How do you decide what jobs to do this for?

26. In the diary, when you're talking about your work coach and job hunting you write 'It is not my fault I am not working and I do make a lot of effort to get a job I want to do and where my skills lie':

- Could you say a little more about this?
- What struck me about it was the last part; do you feel able to do this (get a job you want and where skills like)? (Why is that)
- Do you think UC and your work coach supports you in this?
- In the first part you talk about where the blame lies for not getting a job. Quite rightly you see it as not being your fault. Is this important for you to keep in mind?
- How do you think other people view your situation (unemployment/claiming UC)?
- Do you think it is important that others see the effort you put into job searching?
- How does that make you feel? Do you think it changes the way you behave?

### **Feelings around experiences**

27. From your diary, I can see you lead a very active life and social life – are these things important to you?

28. How has claiming UC affected this?

29. In the interview several times you used the word ‘adapting’ to talk about how you’ve coped and, in the diary, ‘survival’. To me these words are similar, and I wondered how you felt about them? Would you say they characterise your experience?

30. One line you wrote ‘being on UC is not like living’ really stuck with me, would you say a little more about this?

31. I also wanted to ask about the FB (food bank) which has been a real lifeline to you from what you’ve said, is it difficult sticking to your Vegetarianism? How do you feel about the food there?

32. Through-out the diary, and in the interview, you spoke quite positively about your situation, sort of making the best of it/looking on the bright side; do you think that is fair to say?

- Do you feel this is an important thing to do/attitude to have whilst being unemployed?
- Has UC tested this? (how/why)
- Looking back, during the you’ve been claiming, have you always felt this way?

33. Do you feel you have been treated fairly? How would you like to be treated?

34. Do you think claiming UC has changed you? (How/Why)

#### **Experience of keeping the diary**

35. How did you find keeping the diary? (Positive/negative – why is that)

36. Were there any problems with the diary (keeping it, the pack, the guidance)?

37. Do you normally keep a diary?

38. Did you find the diary intrusive?

39. On some occasions you wrote to me, did knowing that I'd be reading it affect the content? (How/why?)

40. Are there things you chose to miss out?

#### **IF YOU HAVE TIME:**

Something we didn’t cover in the first interview, which I’d be interested to get your take on, is how UC claimants can be in work.

What do you think about that? (Why)

Do you think UC should be for people in and out of work?

As it is for both people in and out of work, does it change the way you think about it? Feel about it?

Finally, (show advert for UC) I thought we could finish by looking at this advert for UC, I wonder how this fits with your understanding/view of it? (Why is this/ Is this a fair representation)

## UC10 Diary Interview Guide

### At the start of the interview:

- This topic guide is intended to steer discussions (interviews) with benefit claimants in receipt of Universal Credit. As a second interview, the topic guide has been informed by first interview and diary (if they kept one).
- This is a guide only - the researcher will use judgement when asking and phrasing questions, and ensuring they are relevant to the research and participant.
- Provide the information sheet and consent form and emphasise the confidentiality and anonymity of all respondents. Informed consent must be obtained.
- Make clear they are able to stop or take a break from the interview at any time and do not have to answer questions they do not feel comfortable with.
- Explain purpose of interview: to talk about their diary (which they kept for research), exploring these experiences in more detail, following up on issues raised in first interview. Again, the focus is to talk about their experiences surrounding Universal Credit and their thoughts and feelings about claiming.
- Before asking for permission to record the interview, explain that you would like to do so for two reasons:
  - 1. So that we can have a proper conversation without having to scribble down notes;
  - 2. So that we do not misrepresent your views.
- Do they have any questions?
- Structure of guide as follows: Brief catch up since last meeting, talk about diary (expansion and clarification), crossovers with interview, experience of keeping the diary and if time final section.

### THANK YOU FOR KEEPNG THE DIARY!

1. How have things been since we last met?
2. You mentioned at the end of your diary your WCA and the changes this led to, would you mind talking through that? (Update on what has happened since, when diary had finished you were trying to find out about the extra money you were now entitled too).
3. How long has the process of been of changing your work requirements?
  - Has anyone supported you in this?
  - How would you describe the process?
  - How do you feel about it?
4. So you've now had your work requirements completely removed, what's that been like?
  - Can you describe your average day or week
  - In the diary you write how you feel confusion about these changes, is that still the case?
  - How have your interactions with UC/job centre changed?
  - Do you feel differently about claiming UC with this change?
  - How do you think others see your situation?
  - In general, how do you feel about claiming UC now?
5. Do you feel you have been treated fairly by UC? How would you like to be treated?
6. Do you think claiming UC has changed you? (How/Why)

## WC

7. On the last page of the diary, you wrote how you no longer had a WC and had gone from being 'hounded to ignored' would you say a little more about that?
8. How do you feel that situation was handled?
9. Looking back, is the relationship you have with your work coaches on UC different to those on ESA? (Why is this)
10. I wanted to pick up on something you talked about in the first interview which was about how you keep your WC at arm's length, is this important?
- Why
  - How else do you do this?
  - In a similar way, you also spoke of emotionally blackmailing your WC to stop her pushing you about your work related activities, was there anything else you did to keep her 'at bay'?

## Money

11. In the diary you write of a total of 4 different answers about the extra UC payment, what happened with that?
- How much time did you spend on this?
  - How do you feel about it?
  - *It seems that through this process, something which could have been positive became increasingly difficult; do you think that is fair to say?*
  - Improvements?
12. You wrote about a situation where the 'fines people' took £81 from your UC payment, could you talk me through this?
- Not receiving any information, has this happened before?
  - What was the 'fine' for?
  - How does that feel?
13. You used the phrase 'Hobson's choice' to describe the situation you were in with having £190 to live off for the month, that seemed pretty apt and I wondered if you thought this phrase could be used to describe UC in general? (Why?)
14. It's clear you've had to make some difficult decisions on how to spend the money you have, how do you feel about the situation and choices you've had to make?
15. You were very honest and wrote about some of the things you've had to do with living off the small amount of money UC gives such as taking food from bins and stealing
- Would you mind saying how you feel about that?
  - Was it the deduction that led to that? (Has it happened on more than one occasion?)
  - The stealing food was surrounded by fear of getting caught as, as you wrote, it could limit your opportunity to get a decent job. To me, it seems UC led or pushed you into this, is that right to say? What do you think about that?
  - Were you able to talk to anyone about this?

## The weekend

16. In the diary you wrote about how you hate weekends, could you say a little more about this?
- Have you always felt this way?

- Do you still feel this way?

17. You wrote of one Saturday where you were able to 'switch off all the shoulds for the day', what 'shoulds' were they?

- Is it difficult to switch off and relax? (Why, has this changed because of UC)
- Do you think you were expected to job search every day?
- Do you still feel this way now (with the removal of requirements)

18. The following weekend was the bank holiday which you said was even worse (essentially a long weekend) and you wrote 'everyone is out having fun, I feel excluded, marginalised, invisible', why is that? (because of the money?)

19. You later write about how you spent the weekend [taking charlie ('Columbian marching powder') with some dodgy geezers] you say 'looking for trouble, cos at least trouble is excitement, tells me I'm still alive', could you say a little more about that?

20. *This phrase to me, leads me to think do you normally feel the opposite? And is that a feeling because of or made worse by claiming UC?*

21. You also wrote about how your 'life was on hold' would you mind saying a bit more about that? Why you felt like this? (Is it due to UC/low income?)

### **Job searching**

22. In the diary, you used words like 'up beat' and 'focus' to describe what is needed when looking for work, could you say a little more about this? (How has UC changed this - positive or negative ways?)

23. You also spoke of self-esteem when applying for jobs, how important is this?

- How has your self-esteem changed over time? (Particularly over UC)
- Has claiming UC affected this? In what ways?
- What could be done differently? Why?
- How do you feel about your self-esteem going forward?

24. Do you think it is important that others see the effort you put into job searching? How does that make you feel?

25. Do you think it changes the way you behave?

26. In the diary you wrote about how you had applied for jobs which were inappropriate and would of 'broken you' to keep the DWP happy:

- Could you say a little more about this
- What sort of work?
- Were there any other ways you 'kept the DWP happy'? (Why is this important)

27. From your interview and diary, one thing I think came across that I thought was interesting was that the feeling that UC was pushing you into any work (it's aim) do you think that's fair to say?

- I wondered now how you felt (with work requirements removed) now?
- Is there still this pressure/feeling?
- Do you think this feeling changed the way you acted/things you did around your claim?

28. Do you feel differently about UC/claiming benefits from your time on UC? (Why is this)

29. How do you think other people view your situation (unemployment/claiming UC)?

30. You spoke about the support from your friends in your first interview and in the diary, how important has this been?

### **Misc.**

31. Something I wanted to pick up on, which you spoke of in your interview and diary was around wider inequality between the rich and poor and the role of the Government, could you say a little more about this?

32. I wanted to ask, how do you see UC within this picture?

33. Do you think UC is represented by Gov as a positive within this (so reducing inequality?)

34. *Is this the reality of it?*

35. You mentioned in your interview, in a jokey manner about 'revolution' and how people were voting for Conservatives like Turkeys voting for Christmas, why do you think this is?

36. Do you see it as linked to this wider inequality?

### **Future**

37. You wrote in your diary how you were 'going to be me' and not 'driven by others expectations' could you say a little more about that?

- How has being on UC affected this?
- Do you feel differently about this now that you have had your work requirements removed?

38. You wrote in the diary about your novels and I think the diary shows you are really creative, is that something you'd like to pursue?

39. Do you feel able to do this (now)?

40. How are you feeling about the future? (Why is that?)

### **Experience of keeping the diary**

41. The diary had quite a few drawings (examples) which I think showed a mixture of feelings from fun to despair. Could you talk me through these (feelings behind them?)

42. There was also a poem, did you write it?

- Could you say a little more about what you were thinking when you wrote it?

43. How did you find keeping the diary? (Positive/negative – why is that)

- reflected on diary on last page - painful, fun, beneficial

44. Were there any problems with the diary (keeping it, the pack, the guidance)?

45. Do you normally keep a diary?

46. Did you find the diary intrusive?

47. On some occasions you wrote to me, did knowing that I'd be reading it affect the content? (How/why?)

48. Are there things you chose to miss out?

## UC4 Diary Interview Guide

### At the start of the interview:

- This topic guide is intended to steer discussions (interviews) with benefit claimants in receipt of Universal Credit. As a second interview, the topic guide has been informed by first interview and diary (if they kept one).
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- Provide the information sheet and consent form and emphasise the confidentiality and anonymity of all respondents. Informed consent must be obtained.
- Make clear they are able to stop or take a break from the interview at any time and do not have to answer questions they do not feel comfortable with.
- Explain purpose of interview: to talk about their diary (which they kept for research), exploring these experiences in more detail, following up on issues raised in first interview. Again, the focus is to talk about their experiences surrounding Universal Credit and their thoughts and feelings about claiming.
- Before asking for permission to record the interview, explain that you would like to do so for two reasons:
  - 1. So that we can have a proper conversation without having to scribble down notes;
  - 2. So that we do not misrepresent your views.
- Do they have any questions?
- Structure of guide as follows: Brief catch up since last meeting, talk about diary (expansion and clarification), crossovers with interview, experience of keeping the diary and if time final section.

THANK YOU FOR KEEPNG THE DIARY!

1. How have things been since we last met?

1a. Any changes?

1b. Are you still claiming UC?

### **Working on UC**

2. How is work going?

3. Could you describe your average working week? (job, hours, pay, security, contract, travel)

4. Is this a job you would like to stay in? (progress?)

- 4a. Do you feel secure in this job?
- 4b. How do you feel about the work? (Satisfied, happy, stressed?)
- 4c. Has your feeling towards work changed since claiming UC?
- 4d. How do you feel about the future

5. Do you have any requirements from the JC? If yes: do these feel achievable? Have you been offered any support?

6. Has claiming UC affected your work?

- 5a. Have you increased your hours? Is this possible
- 5b. Have you got other employment? Is this possible – what sort of jobs? Is this sustainable?
- 5c. How have you found fitting in this with work?

- 5d. Has this added extra pressure?
7. How have you found working and being on UC?
- 7a. Any challenges
  - 7b. How have you found managing work with your other responsibilities (parent/volunteering)?
8. You mentioned in your diary you no longer have to go to the JC, how do you feel about that?
9. How has working affected your money situation?
- 9a. How much UC do you receive now?
  - 9b. In your first interview you described how on the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of each month, your money would start to run out. Is this still the case?
  - 9c. How do you feel about your money situation going forward?
  - 9.d In the first interview, you spoke about how your money went up and down from UC because they collected old debts from the past. Is this still ongoing?
  - 9e. How have you managed this?
10. In the diary, you wrote about workshops you were setting up. Could you say a little more about them?
- 10a. Is this something (the type of work) you'd like to pursue?
11. Did you stop volunteering?
- 11a How do you feel about that?
12. During the diary you write quite positively and have a positive attitude about things, would you say that is fair?
- 12.a Do you think a positive attitude is important? (whilst claiming?)
  - 12.b. Has anything tested this? (UC/work)
13. Looking back how would you describe your time on UC?
14. Do you feel differently about UC/claiming benefits from your time on UC? (Why is this)
15. Do you feel differently about it now you are in work?
16. Do you feel you have been treated fairly? How would you like to be treated?
17. Do you think claiming UC has changed you? (How/Why)
18. How are you feeling about the future now?

**Experience of keeping the diary**

19. How did you find keeping the diary? (Positive/negative – why is that)
20. Were there any problems with the diary (keeping it, the pack, the guidance)?
21. Do you normally keep a diary?
22. Did you find the diary intrusive?
23. On some occasions you wrote to me, did knowing that I'd be reading it affect the content? (How/why?)
24. Are there things you chose to miss out?

## UC7 2<sup>nd</sup> Interview Guide

### **At the start of the interview:**

- This topic guide is intended to steer discussions (interviews) with benefit claimants in receipt of Universal Credit. As a second interview, the topic guide has been informed by first interview and diary (if they kept one).
- This is a guide only - the researcher will use judgement when asking and phrasing questions, and ensuring they are relevant to the research and participant.
- Provide the information sheet and consent form and emphasise the confidentiality and anonymity of all respondents. Informed consent must be obtained.
- Make clear they are able to stop or take a break from the interview at any time and do not have to answer questions they do not feel comfortable with.
- Explain purpose of interview: to talk about their diary if they kept one (which they kept for research), exploring these experiences in more detail, following up on issues raised in first interview. Again, the focus is to talk about their experiences surrounding Universal Credit and their thoughts and feelings about claiming.
- Before asking for permission to record the interview, explain that you would like to do so for two reasons:
  - 1. So that we can have a proper conversation without having to scribble down notes;
  - 2. So that we do not misrepresent your views.
- Do they have any questions?

### 1. How have things been since we last met?

- What have you been up to?
- Are you still claiming UC?
- How has that been? (Better/worse?)
- Any issues?

### **WC and Job Hunting**

### 2. When we last met you were just about to meet your new work coach, how was that?

- Do you still have this WC?
- You were a little apprehensive about him, how has he been?
- Could you describe how you would like your WC to be?

### 3. Has your WC suggested any courses or training for you to attend?

- IF yes: What sort? How was it?
- Has the training been useful? Appropriate?
- Do you feel it has/will help you get a job?
- What training would be helpful? (Why?)

### 4. Could you tell me a bit about what is on your claimant commitment?

- How do you feel about it? (Achievable?)
- Do you think it is important to have a claimant commitment? (Why?)

### 5. How do you feel about your 35 HPW job search requirement?

6. In your first interview, you talked about how it was difficult to actually do 35 hours of job searching, could you say a little more about that?

- Realistically, how much do you think it is possible?
- Why do you think you are set that amount?
- Do you think it helps you to find a job?
- How does it make you feel being made/asked to do 35 HPW job searching?
- If you don't do that much, how do you keep your WC happy? (What sort of things do you do to give appearance of 35HPW?)

7. Something you said when we met before when we were talking about you going to see your WC was *'They just need to tick a few boxes to say yes you are still looking for work but they should know that because you, every time you do something you have to go online and record it in your journal you know I've applied for this job...'* I thought that was really interesting. I wondered:

- Why do you think you go to a meeting when they can already see from your journal what you have been up to?
- How does that make you feel?
- Are there any other things that feel like 'box ticking'?

8. You also spoke about how UC doesn't have a 'grey area' so things are right or wrong and there is no middle ground, could you say a little more about this?

- Do you still feel this way?
- In what ways does this show itself?
- Do you think UC has been designed this way? (Why?)
- Would you feel able to question something, if you felt you had been mistreated in this sense?

9. What sorts of jobs have you been applying for?

- (Still avoiding the part-time/zero hour/temp?)
- What, to you, makes a job appealing (or a good job?)

10. How do you feel about work now?

- Do you feel closer to 'work' being on UC?
- Do you think UC has helped you/will help you get into work? (Why)
- Have your views/feelings about work changed over time?
- *Do you think UC should be for people in and out of work?*
- *As it is for both people in and out of work, does it change the way you think about it? Feel about it?*

11. **Positivity:** Do you feel this is an important thing to do/attitude to have whilst being unemployed?

- Has UC tested this? (how/why)
- Does your WC support in this?
- Looking back, during the you've been claiming, have you always felt this way?

### Life on UC

12. In your first interview, you told me about how the form you had to fill in at the dentist and then pharmacy was wrong, I wondered had anything else like that happened?

- To me, it came across that those sorts of experiences made life more difficult, is that fair to say?
- Are there any other things connected with UC that life more difficult?

13. You described life on UC as ‘ground hog day’ I thought that was an interesting phrase, could you say a little more about that? Do you still feel this way? Has this feeling changed over time? (Why)

14. Since we last met, how has your money situation been? (Better/worse/the same)

15. Something I thought came across when we last spoke was how frustrated you were by your experience of temporary work and UC, do you think that’s fair to say?

- Would you take a temporary job again? (Why?)
- Does claiming UC make a difference to this?

16. One of the results of taking the temporary job was it affected your next UC payment, which you described as a ‘punishment’ could you say a little more about that?

- Was it explained at any point that this could happen?
- ‘punishment’ is an interesting word, I wondered if there was anything else you saw in UC as a ‘punishment’?
- Do you think it is intended to be a ‘punishment’? (why/for what)

17. Something linked to this, is around the money which you earn from work (like the temp job) and the money from UC, do you think it matters where the money you have comes from?

- Why is that?
- Have you always felt this way?
- Do you feel differently spending money from UC than money you have ‘earned’? (Why?)
- Do you feel able to spend the money on what you want?
- *Question about things that have been given up?*

### **Feelings on and about UC**

18. In the first interview you described how you felt ‘resentful’ towards your brother as he got more money than you and you explained that:

J – Resentful. You know, I’ve worked for 30 years and I’ve paid into the system and somebody whose been on the system for 30 years and hasn’t paid in a penny gets more than I do. You know. I feel a degree of injustice but that’s life

...

J - yeah I’ve put in for all these years and I’m you know, not entitled to anything. So why you know.

- *Could you say a little more about this?*
- *Do you think it is important to ‘pay into the system’?*
- *Does it matter that somebody, as you describe, does not?*
- *Why is it you feel this way?*
- *How do you think the system should work?*
- *Do you think it matters that someone, in your words, who has ‘been on the system’ is on the same benefit as someone whose ‘paid into the system’?*
- *How does this feel? (‘paying in’ expand)*
- *Who do you feel ‘injustice’ against?*

19. You also mentioned when we spoke before, ‘feeling like a burden’ and you felt this way despite ‘paying into the system’ is that fair to say? (Why is this?)

- When does this feeling occur? (All the time or in certain situations i.e at JCP?)
- How do you deal with this feeling?

20. This feeling of a ‘burden’ was connected to money and ‘paying your own way’, could you say a little more about that?

- Have you always felt this way?
- How has UC affected this?

21. Do you feel differently about UC/claiming benefits from your time on UC? (Why is this)

- Have your feelings/attitude towards job hunting changed since you started claiming UC? (First interview said unemployment was 'draining')
- How do you think other people view your situation (unemployment/claiming UC)?
- **Do you think it is important that others see the effort you put into job searching?** Why is that?
- How does that make you feel? Do you think it changes the way you behave?
- How do you feel about the future?

**If time:**

22. *Do you feel you have been treated fairly? How would you like to be treated?*

23. *Do you think claiming UC has changed you? (How/Why)*

## UC8 2<sup>nd</sup> Interview Topic Guide

### At the start of the interview:

- This topic guide is intended to steer discussions (interviews) with benefit claimants in receipt of Universal Credit. As a second interview, the topic guide has been informed by first interview and diary (if they kept one).
  - This is a guide only - the researcher will use judgement when asking and phrasing questions, and ensuring they are relevant to the research and participant.
  - Provide the information sheet and consent form and emphasise the confidentiality and anonymity of all respondents. Informed consent must be obtained.
  - Make clear they are able to stop or take a break from the interview at any time and do not have to answer questions they do not feel comfortable with.
  - Explain purpose of interview: to talk about their diary if they kept one (which they kept for research), exploring these experiences in more detail, following up on issues raised in first interview. Again, the focus is to talk about their experiences surrounding Universal Credit and their thoughts and feelings about claiming.
  - Before asking for permission to record the interview, explain that you would like to do so for two reasons:
    - 1. So that we can have a proper conversation without having to scribble down notes;
    - 2. So that we do not misrepresent your views.
  - Do they have any questions?
1. How have things been since we last met?
    - What have you been up to?
    - Are you still claiming UC?
    - How has that been?
    - (Daughter started nursery this September) How is that working?
  2. You mentioned in your first interview about starting to study in September, how has that been?
    - Positive/negative?
    - What's the course like?
    - How does it fit with UC? Do you still have searching for work requirements?
    - Are you still going to JC once a week? How do you feel about this?
    - How has your WC been? (Supportive – in what ways)
    - Has it changed the way you feel about claiming UC?
  3. Something I wanted to check, when did you start claiming UC originally (rough date/in or out of work)?
  4. How do you feel about work now?
    - Do you feel closer to 'work' being on UC (compared to legacy)?
    - Do you think UC has helped you/will help you get into work? (Why)
    - Have your views/feelings about work changed over time?
    - *Do you think UC should be for people in and out of work?*
    - *As it is for both people in and out of work, does it change the way you think about it? Feel about it? (Question about her time in work – did she have to look for extra?)*
  5. Before, in your first interview you described UC as a 'stop gap' and that you cannot be on it 'long term', why do you think this is? Do you think it was designed to be this way?

6. Something I'd like to pick up on which came up at different times when we last met was around the Bureaucracy within UC, you said you were 'good at bureaucracy' do you think that is important for UC? (Why do you think this?)

7. You described things like 'jumping through hoops', 'feeling like a number', there was 'no grey area' and that this process was 'dehumanizing'. I thought that was really interesting and important, could you say about more about that?

- Do those feelings exist outside the job centre?
- How do you deal with 'feeling like a number'?
- How does that make you feel?
- What could be done differently?

### **Feelings**

8. In your interview you spoke about how UC could be dehumanizing and demeaning (feelings of being watched, the paperwork, treated like a number), could you tell me more about this?

- How do you feel about this?
- In what ways do you think things could be done differently to prevent such feelings?
- How has this treatment affected you? (before/after meetings/outside the job centre/in other situations?)
- *(Added 'before' to pick up whether the thought of going to a meeting at the JC induces feelings of heightened anxiety, sleeplessness etc.)*

9. In your first interview you spoke of this niggling feeling you had about being out of work which got louder over time, do you still have this feeling? (Same/louder/quieter – why)

10. Do you feel differently about UC/claiming benefits from your time on UC? (Why is this)

- Have your feelings/attitude towards job hunting changed since you started claiming UC?
- How do you think other people view your situation (unemployment/claiming UC)?
- **Do you think it is important that others see the effort you put into job searching?** Why is that? (Mentioned when she broke her foot she still went to JC)
- How does that make you feel? Do you think it changes the way you behave?

11. You described the process of UC as it 'chips away at self-confidence' (paper work and JC treatment) how do you deal with this?

12. **Positivity:** Do you feel this is an important thing to do/attitude to have whilst being unemployed?

- Has UC tested this? (how/why)
- Does your WC support in this?
- Looking back, during the you've been claiming, have you always felt this way?

13. You talked about how the WC acts flippantly about claim and for you it is a 'life-line' how do you feel about this? Does it change the way you behave, how?

14. Something I wanted to pick up on from your first interview was around the way you described the money from UC so you said things like 'I get given money' 'hand out' and that you were at the 'beck and call of the government' because of receiving this money:

- How does having this money make you feel?
- Why is that?
- Do you think other people see the money in the same way?
- Do you feel differently about spending this money compared to money from work?

### **Stigma 'benefits people'**

I want to move on to something which came up at different points in our last conversation which was this thing around stigma and ‘benefits people’ so I’d like to talk about that a bit more today.

15. You spoke of how the WC’s view everyone as ‘benefits people’:

- Why do you think that is?
- Do you do anything to try and avoid being seen as ‘benefits people’?

16. Also, you explained how the high level of security in the JC ‘instils the belief’ you are ‘lesser’ because you are on benefits, could you say a little more about that?

- What do you think it is about claiming benefits that creates this belief you are ‘lesser’?
- Do you think this feeling has changed since UC? (Why is this?)
- How does it make you feel?

17. Something else, which I think is similar, is something you said which I’ll read to you ‘...but unfortunately I think a lot of like class systems view benefits people at a whole other level’ I thought that was really interesting, could you talk a bit more about that?

- Why do you think this is?
- How do you think it shows itself in everyday life?
- How does it make you feel?
- Does it change the way you act?

18. You also mentioned that there had been some positive changes to welfare within UC reforms, but that the government needs to act on ‘perceptions’ say a little more – how? Why is this important?

**If time:**

*19. Do you feel you have been treated fairly? How would you like to be treated?*

*20. Do you think claiming UC has changed you? (How/Why)*

Appendix 13: Participant characteristic table

UC Claim Length	UC Activity	UC Entry	Education	Housing	Age	Name
12 months	Work-search (24 HPW)	New claim	Secondary	Private rental	29	Ben
19 months	Working no requirements	New claim	Secondary	Housing association	62	Tina
4 months	Full Work-search	New claim	Degree	With parents	25	Laura
23 months	Work-search (10.5 HPW)	Natural Migration	Secondary	Private rental	50	Julie
12 months	Working no requirements	Natural Migration	Degree	Private rental	32	Ryan
20 months	Full Work-search	Natural Migration	Diploma	Private rental	51	Heather
10 months	Full Work-search	New claim	Secondary	Private rental	53	John
18 months	Full Work-search	New claim	Diploma	Private rental	37	Alice
1 month	Full Work-search	New claim	Degree	Private rental	20	Zara
13 months	Full Work-search	Natural Migration	Degree	Owner	60	Bill
20 months	Preparing for work	New claim	Degree	Housing association	52	Isabel
18 months	Full Work-search	Natural Migration	Secondary	Owner	54	Karl
8 months	Working no requirements	Natural Migration	Secondary	With parents	36	Gavin
5 months	Self-employed	New claim	Secondary	Private rental	50	Natalie
34 months	Carer	Natural Migration	Secondary	Housing association	53	Pam

UC Deduction	Experiences of UC and Paid Work	UC Transition	Name
No	Temporary	Yes	Ben
No	Part-time	Yes	Tina
Yes	Temporary	Yes	Laura
Yes	Part-time	Yes*	Julie
No	Part-time/Self-employment	Yes	Ryan
Yes	No	No	Heather
No	Temporary	Yes	John
Yes	Part-time	Yes	Alice
No	No	No	Zara
Yes	No	Yes *	Bill
Yes	No	Yes	Isabel
No	No	No *	Karl
Yes	Full-time	Yes	Gavin
Yes	Self-employment	Yes	Natalie
Yes	Carer	Yes	Pam

In terms of research involvement, Julie, Heather and Bill completed diaries with Zara and Isabel not completing and dropping out of the research. Julie, Heather, Bill, Alice and John had two interviews, between 2 -3 months apart. The rest had one first interview only.

The UC claim length was the months at first interview. In terms of UC transitions most occurred prior to the first interview; however, this was not always the case (marked by \* on table). Bill transitioned to the Limited capacity to work group during fieldwork, Karl was awaiting a Tribunal to be moved to this group due to his health and Julie entered part-time employment.