A Sheffield Hallam University thesis

Recognising Students in Higher Education Who Care for Children

Samuel Rhys Dent

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

Sheffield Hallam University
Sheffield Institute of Education
84, 857 Words

September
2019

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his/her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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.

3. I am aware of and understand the University's policy on plagiarism and certify that this thesis is my own work. The use of all published or other sources of material consulted have been properly and fully acknowledged.

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 84, 857 .

Name	*Samuel Rhys Dent*
Date	*September 2019*
Award	*PhD.*
Faculty	*Society & Development*
Director(s) of Studies	*Professor Colin McCaig*

Acknowledgements

It takes a village to write a PhD; a village I am eternally grateful for.

In writing a PhD fundamentally about care, which is ironically like a personal endurance test, my village has played a key part in supporting me to look after myself during a difficult number of years. I would like to thank the following:

- Jacqueline Stevenson, my original director of studies throughout this thesis, who has seen potential in me from the very beginning, nurtured it, and maintained unwavering faith in my ability to complete this work. Fearless and empathetic in her advice, support and guidance, who uses her own bright light to illuminate others. I am incredibly grateful for the impact you have had on my work and thinking but also on me as a person.
- My second supervisors past and present, who have included Dot Moss, Nicola Lightfoot, and Colin McCaig. They have left their fingerprints indelibly upon my thinking and work, both here and in the future.
- Kay Guccione, who gets a special mention for her friendship collegiality, care packages, pep talks, belief & championship of me (and countless others), the unquestioning provision of emergency hairspray, industrial toaster humour, and generally being a top-notch human being.
- A series of friends and colleagues from across the academy who during the past 6 years have at various times challenged my ideas, shaped my thinking (across many projects outside this thesis), and thus inherently shaped my sense of place in the HE research community. These include special mentions to: Jessica Gagnon, Camille Kandiko Howson, Kirsty Finn, Katy Vigurs, Tamsin Bowers-Brown, Ciaran Burke.
- My trusted band of old friends, Steven Sharpe and James & Samantha Gamble.
- My disability support over the years, including a special mention to Maggie Donovan and Gray Lanier Burke.
- The teams at SRHE and my team at NTU in Educational Research and Evaluation.

Finally, some extra special thanks:

- To my parents Gareth Dent and Julia Davis, for their continued love, support and patience – and occasional role as research funding council. They have both influenced and shaped me into the researcher this thesis represents in profound ways from a young age.
- To Chantal Sullivan-Thomsett – my partner in life and crime – without whose love support, and abundant patience, I am not sure anything I have achieved since we met would have been possible. Your pride and belief in me are entirely eternally mutual and, for me, has provided the fuel to try to be the best person I can be and inspire me to try and make the world become a better place.

Samuel Dent
September 2019

Abstract

In UK higher education (HE), different groups of students have moved into and out of the focus of policy and practice, under the headings of widening participation and the single Equality Act (2010). This often-changing focus has the potential to lead to inequitable experiences for those students who do not fit into any of the traditional student typologies.

In this thesis, I seek to further explore inequities in HE, specifically through considering the experiences of Students who Care for Children while Studying (CCS Students). This group does not fall directly within the lens of educational policy focus and is often discussed only broadly in terms of gender and age – thus missing the unique barriers and experiences attached to caring for children. My research, therefore, contributes to a small body of existing literature into student parents.

I present an Institutional Ethnographic (IE) study (Smith, 2006) involving 16 CCS students at a research-intensive UK University, collected over two academic years. Interviews with six members of staff from different areas within the institution are also used to gain further insight to the institutional context of this study.

I find that the experiences of CCS students can be complex, variable and related to individual personal circumstances. However, three recurrent themes are presented in the data, suggesting that: firstly, CCS students experience 'othering', whereby their difference from other students is made clear through a range of behaviours from subtle micro-aggressions to explicit hostility toward their needs as carers; secondly, CCS students experience 'individualisation', which frames these students as being in deficit and personally responsible for the barriers they face due to the 'choice' to be both students and carers; thirdly – and, as a result – this 'othering' and 'individualisation' leads to 'passing' behaviours, whereby students seek to or are actively encouraged to hide their caring status, conforming to a more institutionally-

accepted homogeneous conception of 'student' and their needs. Finally, I conclude, in analysing these three recurrent themes through Fraserian theories of recognition (1997, 2001, 2003), that the principal cause of inequity in the CCS student experience is a cultural misrecognition of their right to be students because of their caring status. Hence, I end by making recommendations which could address the inequity at an institutional and wider sector HE sector level.

This thesis makes an original contribution to knowledge in the following ways: by contributing to literature on UK CCS students and how their experiences are shaped on the ground within an HE institution; by adopting an Institutional Ethnographic (Smith, 2006) methodological approach in a UK HE context, I expand IE's usage, as existing IE research is usually based in the USA and is rarely applied to HE and the equity issues which exist there; finally, by adopting the use of Fraser's theories of recognition (Fraser, 2003), I expand the use of this theoretical approach in HE from questions of 'access' (Burke, 2013; Morrison 2015), to those of 'participation'.

Table of contents

List of tables

List of figures

Chapter 1: Introduction: the puzzle this thesis seeks to explore

This thesis began in 2013, when I worked in student-facing support services. My career had, by this point, involved working directly with students in a number of roles and organisations, starting in student unions and moving into university support services to become a manager of student support for taught postgraduate students. In developing my career during this time, I had been trained in student support with formal away days, courses, mentoring from senior colleges – the cumulative message of which had been to adopt a 'student-centred approach' and, particularly, to think about the complex and diverse way in which the services produced needed to work for 'all' students.

For me – although this may not be a shared experience across the sector – the 'all' students we were trained to work with were not a homogeneous group. Increasingly, I'd been driven by my employers to think about the different students I would work with and who would need my support. Responsiveness and inclusivity were often highlighted as key, especially in acting as a 'one-stop' shop for support as I did, leading on the delivery of student support services like facilitating mitigating circumstances, pastoral support, disability support, and general information advice and guidance. In part, some of this training and work had been supported by the introduction of the single Equality Act (2010), as the universities I worked for started to navigate with support – and pressure – from students how the institution's leadership would ensure they met their new, more clearly defined legal duties.

The challenge at the time felt new and refreshed, even if some of the issues, like disability discrimination, racism, and sexism, were not. I remember, in particular, spending one afternoon being trained on how to give one-to-one support to students with disabilities, which took as its source material an instructional DVD from B&Q, talking employees through the appropriate ways of helping a blind customer with a guide dog purchase taps. This may sound ludicrous,

but, at the time, it felt like it spoke of a sector trying to make progress in supporting students at a speed faster than, perhaps, it had been used to or had time to adapt to being.

As time moved on, however, many improvements appeared to be made; I saw new policies and institutional reviews emerge, which sought to make more visible commitments to different groups and communities. For instance, a series of internal policy launch 'roadshows' saw pro-vice chancellors stood next to a diverse crop of cardboard standee students, explaining the diversity of the student body to all staff. Following this, each practice, process and pedagogical tool underwent review to ensure it met the needs of all within this crop of cardboard students, with strategic plans developed to show how any gaps would be rectified. This work was underpinned by seeking new equality awards, such as Stonewall accreditation, and moves for greater progress within the bronze, silver and gold of the Athena Swann Charter.

It felt, in many ways, like I was part of a sector which was growing and focused on not leaving any students behind, making HE work for all, and considering the complex task of evoking change and achieving some form of social justice. This was a message which was very 'me', and I wanted to be part of this change. However, the longer I spent working on the front line of student support, the more I started to see some cracks appear in how the institution appeared to me and how it tried to appear to students. For example, I worked with staff in one department which won awards for gender equality but, at the same time, had polices about the types of contract needed to be a module leader. By requiring module leaders to be on full time, tenure-track (an American construct recently introduced as a pilot in some departments), or permanent contracts, all module leaders were invariably men.

This contrast of appearance and reality was also very closely felt in student support, where I was on the front lines of deeply distressed students, often pleading with me not to be withdrawn – as though I were their executioner from whom they were seeking to negotiate a pardon. An example of this came from the first case to spark my interest in the experience of

students who care for children. A student, having given birth on the eve of their exams, called me the following morning from hospital, pleading to be allowed to sit the exam a few hours later and not to be withdrawn, as they had been led to believed they would be by other staff in the department, if their birth conflicted with assessment.

Those cases involving students who Cared for Children while Studying (CCS Students) were often the most harrowing for me to respond to. Like the example above, they would usually start with a phone call to my office, often sparked by events which made these students feel like they had reached the end of the line, seeking my support. As the students calmed down and told me their stories, I would learn that, for me, a perfectly ordinary life event, such as pregnancy, childbirth, or childcare, had been the centre of the problems they faced. Often the student had sought the support in the first instance of someone else at the university, such as the academic who led their programme. Problems would then emerge, either when this informal support fell apart or the student infringed one of the conditions or interpretations of a policy or rule devised for them. Examples of this I came across included when:

- Academics would admit students to the course, provided they didn't miss lectures or need extensions because of their childcare.

- Students would be told they could stay on the course while pregnant or caring for children, as long as they gave birth during the Christmas holidays and made sure they never missed any exams.

- Programme handbooks – often over 100 pages long in size 9 font – started to feature among the many other 'programme-specific rules and guidance', sections on student parents, explaining what was and was not okay for these students to do – breastfeeding in toilets was 'good', missing lectures because of a sick child was 'bad'.

Despite the presentation of these conditions or support, there was little laid down about what would happen should the students fail to meet them. Instead, an ominous unwritten 'or else' seemed to hover next to each condition – or a passing remark which referred non-complaint students to the student support office, i.e. me.

I spent a great deal of my time challenging these attitudes in my work, and I still do when I see them. I am never convinced I have been entirely successful, and these challenges have often been fraught with difficulty or conflict. My experience of working with students who cared for children always seemed incongruous to the messages I had been trained and flooded with in my early career and had associated with HE myself. Although I had never questioned that I would go to university, as a student from low-participation neighbourhood, an image had been engrained in my mind of HE as a welcoming and enlightened place to be, supporting equality, diversity and inclusivity. Thus, the genesis of this thesis has been to explore my own puzzlement and confusion at my early experiences of working in higher education, and, in particular, focus on the experiences of students who care for children, remembering so vividly their confusing experiences in my practice.

The contrasts that appeared to me, when reflecting on my experiences of students who cared for children, seemed so clear. This was an environment where equality and diversity work, legislation and policy had been made so visible; yet, in ostracising and isolating these students, there appeared to me to be potentially transecting issues of the protected status of paternity and maternity and gender discrimination. Further, services which were being developed with a view to support a diverse range of students and support their inclusion, participation, and retention appeared to become positioned as regulators by informal channels of support who would exclude or punish students. For instance, my own role as a student support manager meant I was coordinating mitigation processes, creating individual student support plans and developing cohort-building activities but was also positioned by other staff

as the unseen 'other' who implemented the consequences which withdrew students rather than supported their continued study.

These contrasts filled my head as I sought to try and understand why they might be the case and how the institution shapes and influences these students' experiences. This became the inspiration for my research. While working in student support, I had the space to improve the experience of those students within the schools or faculties I worked, but, through research, I could help share my findings with the sector and improve the experience of more students. Existing research, such as into the experience of student parents, showed me that my experiences of students who care for children often facing difficulty in participating in higher education was not uncommon (Brooks, 2012a; Hinton-Smith, 2012a, 2012b; Marandet & Wainwright, 2010; Moreau & Kerner, 2013; Moreau, 2016, NUS, 2009), but, as I discuss in Chapter Three of this thesis, what these studies do not help me understand is why these difficulties are experienced. The research into students who care for children is a small body of work, often focused on documenting the lives of these students and drawing out examples of what could contribute to the improvement to these students' experiences.

My puzzle, however, is not directly addressed in this literature: how can these students' experiences exist within the landscape of greater focus in universities on equality and diversity and the provision of services aiming to support 'all students'? This, then, is the puzzle this thesis seeks to explore and understand. In order to support wider cultural change at an institutional or sector level, I need to know more about CCS students' experiences. I need to understand the up-close experiences of these students and the ways in which they have been formed within the institution. This has the potential to help me understand the contrasts I have witnessed in my practice between the institutional policies and the lived experience of CCS students, allowing me to establish if my anecdotal experiences are typical and how they could be remedied institutionally.

In the following chapter, I will further this introduction by exploring the UK HE policy landscape and discussing how different groups of students move into and out of specific policy focus. Critically engaging with existing literature which explores these shifts in focus, I go on to suggest that these changes may lead to an inequitable student experience, which this research will seek to explore further through the experiences of CCS students. Thus, in Chapter Three, I explore and critically assess the current literature specifically connected to CCS Students, interrogating this literature to establish common patterns and the gaps in knowledge which emerge, utilising this review to inform my research aims, objectives, and questions.

In Chapter Four, I discuss the methodological approach I adopted to achieve my aims and objectives, discussing both the conceptual methodological tools and establishing the case for utilising an Institutional Ethnographic approach (Smith, 2006), which I argue will help to most effectively address my research questions. I, then, move on to elaborate on how these conceptual tools were realised in practice through discussion of the methods of data collection and analysis.

In Chapter Five, I am led by the CCS Students accounts, and explore the nature of the practical topics which are navigated and experienced as they go about the *work*[1] of their everyday lives. Analysing the data to understand the recurrent themes across these accounts, I highlight the emergence of 'othering' (Ahmed, 2012; Archer & Leathwood, 2005; Burke, 2013; Phiri, 2015; Reay, 2001), and 'individualisation' (Burke, 2013, p. 37; O'Shea, et al; 2016; Smit, 2012), which lead CCS students to engage in 'passing' (Leary, 1999; Sanchez & Schlossberg, 2001; Stevenson, 2014) behaviours. In drawing this chapter to a close, I suggest that these themes hold an institutionally mediated quality which requires further interrogation.

---

[1] The Institutional Ethnography concept of work is understood as the *standpoint* (or focal) participants' experience of living their 'everyday/night' lives and is conceptually deeper than merely the tasks that the participant goes about in their employment. See Chapter Four for a more detailed discussion.

Hence, in Chapter Six, I focus on critically exploring the specific points of interaction with institutional policy and practice, looking at *texts*[2] (Smith, 2006; Smith & Turner, 2014) and their activation as points of engagement between the CCS student in my study and their institution. Using this approach, I probe deeper into understanding 'why' some of these student's accounts are permeated by the themes of 'othering', 'individualisation' and 'passing', suggesting that CCS students potentially experience an inequity of student experience due to the cumulative impact of the themes of 'othering' and 'individualisation', which encourages 'passing' behaviours in order for CCS students to navigate this particular institution.

In Chapter Seven, I probe further into the institutional context through the accounts of staff experience of working with CCS students. Here, I establish further evidence of the recurrent themes of 'othering', 'individualising' and 'passing' as a more accepted form of student. I conclude this chapter by suggesting that the prevalence of these themes across both student and staff data represent a wider institutional culture which marginalises CCS students and creates, for some, a potential inequity of student experience.

In concluding this thesis, in Chapter Eight, I summarise the findings from my research and utilise a Fraserian lens to theorise about the nature and the form of potential remedies to the inequity of experience some CCS students experience stemming from the recurrent themes in the data. Following on, I discuss potential institutional remedies and recommendations for the sector, drawing this chapter to a close with sections which: acknowledges the limitations of this study; outline my contributions of knowledge with this thesis; suggest possible areas for future research; and present some final reflections on this study and considerations on if I were to commence my study in the current HE context of 2019.

---

[2] Institutional Ethnography adopts a very broad definition of the *text*, including any material "in a form that enables replication (paper/print, film, electronic, and so on) of what is written, drawn or otherwise reproduced" (Smith, 2002, p. 45), which can be moved around an institution and interpreted or *activated* to coordinate meaning. See Chapter Four for a more detailed discussion.

Chapter 2 Exploring the HE policy context

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will seek to critically understand the policy landscape associated with the problem at the heart of this thesis before going further in the next chapter to consider the existing literature specifically connected to the group of students I focus on in this thesis – students who Care for Children while Studying (CCS). In opening this thesis, I presented a problem which I attributed to the reactiveness to policy changes of the Higher Education (HE) institutions I worked for and the fractures I felt emerged between the policy vision and its implementation around the beneficiaries of HE. This chapter will, therefore, probe the English HE policy landscape and the equalities legislation affecting the university-student relationship by considering what is already known about the cleavages between the aims and beneficiaries of HE policy and implementation more broadly.

In the first part of this chapter, I will briefly unpack the policy landscape following World War II up to the 1992 Higher Education Act, which saw a dramatic increase in the number of UK universities and, thus, places to study. This period of policy has been described as the move from 'elite' to 'mass' higher education (Trow & Burrage, 2010, p.94), and I will explore the extent to which this move symbolised the greater diversification of HE participation – or whether it just merely increased the numbers of students from backgrounds who already participated in HE. In the second part of the chapter, I will consider policy following the mid-1990s to the present day, where 'widening participation' was explicitly introduced as a concept in the Dearing Review (NCIHE, 1997, p.101) and the subsequent expansion and contraction of policy and practice connected to this. I will explore this policy landscape in stages, problematising policy assumptions around 'mass HE as diverse HE' and drawing on existing research to understand the extent to which this assumption appears accurate.

2.2 Elite to Mass Higher Education

In this section, I will briefly discuss the HE policy landscape prior to the early 1990s. While some policy work during this period did name specific beneficiaries, like the Robbins Report, expansion seemed to be the primary focus with some inherent implication for diversification, which became a more explicit focus of HE policy following the Dearing Report in 1997. This section, therefore, introduces the context from which subsequent HE policy evolves and explores the shift from elite to mass participation, which frames the more recent HE policy landscape from the 1990s and is the focus of the next section of this chapter, and – the context within which the puzzle I discuss in Chapter One is explored.

Prior to the second world war, participation in HE had been relatively low, at approximately 50,002 students in 1938/9 (Mountford, 1966, p. 57), compared with the highs of 2,503,010 seen in the decade 2004/14 (HESA, 2016a), leading to the expansion between this period to be characterised as a move from elite to mass participation (Trow & Burrage, 2010). Trow's work on elite and mass participation in higher education (Trow & Burrage, 2010) explores this concept in some detail, defining elite participation as providing places for about 15 per cent of the age cohort able to attend HE, in contrast to mass participation, which is defined as rising to about 50 per cent (Trow & Burrage, 2010, p. 94). Trow proposes other more qualitative aspects to consider in a theory of mass participation, such as the way HE is perceived by students and staff, the nature of the curriculum, and the character of academic standards (Trow and Burrage, 2010, p. 94); yet, by using specific numbers such as 15 and 50 percent to define his theory, Trow's work gains influence in policy because of its accessibility as a quantitative measure of the state of current HE participation.

Using Trow's quantitative indicators, there is a strong argument to suggest that the UK has moved into a period of mass participation in HE. Looking at the decade 2005/06 to 2014/15 in Table 2.1, using data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) (and considering

that there were approximately six million young people in the UK aged between 18 and 24 (Arnett & Gutierrez, 2015) during this period the data suggest that, on average, nearly 40 per cent of young people were in higher education, albeit having decreased slightly since 2010/11.

Students by level of study 2005/06 to 2014/15			
Year	Undergraduate	Postgraduate	Total
2014/15	1,727,895	538,180	2,266,075
2013/14	1,759,915	539,440	2,299,355
2012/13	1,803,840	536,440	2,340,275
2011/12	1,928,140	568,490	2,496,635
2010/11	1,913,940	589,070	2,503,010
2009/10	1,914,835	578,915	2,493,750
2008/09	1,860,425	537,160	2,397,585
2007/08	1,804,305	501,480	2,305,780
2006/07	1,802,280	502,965	2,305,250
2005/06	1,789,025	492,755	2,281,780

Table 2.1 HESA UK student enrolments by level of study 2005/06 to 2014/15 (HESA, 2016a)

This recent image of mass participation contrasts starkly with the pre-World War II figures cited above and the post-war figures of 126,445 in 1963/4 (Mountford, 1966, p.57), providing initial support for the notion that this period could be described as elite, according to Trow's definition of the term (Trow & Burrage, 2010, p. 94). However, I have chosen to locate the greatest momentum behind the development of a HE policy landscape as following the Robbins Report (Committee on Higher Education [CoHE], 1963), as this report principally called for the expansion of HE and is seen to influence HE even today (Scott, 2014).

The Robbins Report (CoHE, 1963) focused on how to shape the HE sector in a way to meet the needs of society. This included reacting to the heightened demand for HE, due to the increase in school participation (CoHE, 1963, pp. 51–52) following the 1944 Education Act, and the need to direct these students toward university as a means of meeting the demand for graduate skill sets in the employment market (CoHE, 1963, pp. 71–72). Robbins established a clear agenda of increasing participation, and, for the first time, HE policy focused on increasing participation for specific groups as a means of meeting these needs. Principally, the report

looked at the following groups of students: first in family to go to university (CoHE, 1963, p. 51), mature or part-time students (CoHE, 1963, p. 167), and women (CoHE, 1963, p. 273). However, the call to action the Robbins Report made was more sophisticated than purely increasing participation alone, as indicated by the recommendation to reach applicants who were the first in their family to go to university (CoHE, 1963, p. 51). While the term 'widening participation' would not be coined in policy until the mid-1990s, Robbins foregrounded the principle by suggesting that certain groups who were not currently participating in higher education should be targeted. For instance, Robbins acknowledged some of the reasons students did not participate in HE, such as drawing the connection explicitly in policy between the social class of students and their parents, observing that eight times more children reached HE whose fathers had continued their own education past age 18, compared to those who had left at 16 (CoHE, 1963, p. 51). By articulating this, Robbins makes the case that universities would need to acknowledge these gaps and their causes and widen participation to support drives for increased participation.

While the call for the growth in universities and increased participation had existed prior to Robbins, momentum built following this report and continued throughout the 1970s and 80s as a binary system of higher education was created, increasing places while meeting the pace of change the government required. The binary model saw two tiers of higher education institutions established: universities on the one hand and polytechnic colleges on the other, the latter providing mainly vocational degree and sub-degree programmes. This contradicted the recommendations of the Robbins Report, which advocated a unitary system of higher education (CoHE, 1963, p. 240). Between 1964 and 1972, 30 polytechnic colleges were established (Finch, 1984, p. 39), which accounted for much of the increased HE provision to supply the demand that Robbins anticipated. The increased participation agenda continued through the 1980s under the Thatcher administrations, which oversaw a rapid percentage increase of

student numbers. Participation rose from 535,000 to 710,000 during the 1980s, reaching over 2 million by the end of the Conservative government in 1997 (Evans, 2004, pp. 141–142).

Although more students attending Higher Education brought greater diversity in participation, such diversification was passive; the logic underlying such expansion was fundamentally egalitarian – that more places would inherently bring a fairer level of diverse participation due to greater opportunity to participate in HE. By the 1980s into the early 1990s, this was explicitly in accordance with the political philosophy of Thatcherism (McAnulla, 2006), which equated fairness with an egalitarian provision of equality of opportunity. This is seen both in the notion that places at university would increase the fair opportunity to access higher education but also that a fairer society would be created by equipping students with marketable skills (Radice, 2013, p. 408), meaning many more people would be able to perform within the market, having attained higher level skills.

Greater diversity within Higher Education would also, in a limited way, be supported by the creation of new equality and diversity legislation from the mid-1970s. Prior to the 1970s, students had experienced little legal Equality and Diversity (E&D) protections, as, historically, most E&D legislation in the UK had been focused around employment relationships. The two key pieces of equalities legislation to impact the university-student relationship, were the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (SDA) and the Race Relations Act 1976 (RRA), which, in many ways, echoed each other in their provisions for those two groups. The Acts mostly required all bodies to ensure that their practices did not discriminate, either directly or indirectly, toward women (the SDA) or based on race (the RRA). The SDA stipulated that a woman is discriminated against either directly, where she is treated less favourably than a man, or indirectly, where a requirement or condition is applied to both women and men but implicitly disadvantages women (Sex Discrimination Act [SDA], 1975, p. 1). Sections 22 and 79 of the SDA focused on educational establishments, including universities, and made provisions not

to discriminate against women in certain specific ways. Section 22 did this in two ways: firstly, in terms of admission policies, either by refusal of entry or different terms of admission on the grounds of sex; secondly, in terms of provision, by denying access to facilities or services or excluding access based on sex (SDA, 1975, p. 15). Section 79, however, specifically concerned itself with "educational endowments" (SDA, 1975, p. 51). Under this provision, single-sex bursaries would not be outlawed, but, for them to be sanctioned, the Secretary of State would need to be convinced that such provision would not lead to sex discrimination (SDA, 1975, p. 51). The RAA would put in place the same provisions; Section 17 of the RRA was almost a verbatim copy of Section 22 of the SDA (Race Relations Act, 1976, p. 11), and the only exception was that there was no equivalent of the SDA's Section 79 governing scholarships in the RRA. While the SDA and the RRA did not proactively ensure greater diversity, as such legislation provided reactive means of recourse for discriminated parties rather than implementing proactive change, the Acts did make clearly illegal discriminatory practices which had occurred in universities previously and provided future protection. For example, the practice of capping the number of female students, which occurred in Oxford until 1957 and Cambridge until 1960 (Dyhouse, 2004, p. 3), would now be illegal under the SDA.

This provides the background context for the subsequent HE policy landscape, discussed in the next section of this chapter and during which this thesis is written, which represents a greater concern with the diversity and target beneficiaries of HE policy discourses. As discussed in this section, though some discussion was held around the Robbins Report about who the beneficiaries of higher education should be, and equalities legislation introduced some new protections, these policies' implementation focused on expansion and were informed by an egalitarian notion of equality of opportunity. All people are seen as equal, and, if more spaces at university could be provided, the outcome of this would be inherently considered fair. The relevance of this for the problem I pose in this thesis is that the notion of expansion

evidences a key policy assumption: the expectation that, within a mass system of HE, 'all' students have the equal opportunity to participate. However, I seek to unpack this assumption, as my experience described in the introduction suggests this may not be the case for all students' experience.

2.3 Problematising mass HE as diverse HE?

In this section, I will look at the growth and debates in the HE landscape which have focused on the diversification of a massified HE system and who are seen, or not, as the target beneficiaries of such policy. I will focus on both the specific HE policy which emerged in the mid-1990s and the significant equalities legislation developments which started to shape and influence the student-university relationship. Breaking this period down into five key policy developments up to the period this research is conducted which I present in the following groupings: The Disability Discrimination Act (1995); The Dearing Report (1997) and Aimhigher; The Office for Fair Access (2004); Post-Aimhigher – 2010 onwards; and the Equality Act (2010). I will discuss each period in turn while critically engaging with existing literature related to these policies to understand to what extent the policy ambitions – and assumptions – have been seen to be accurate reflections of actual student experience, which is key to my puzzlement in Chapter One.

2.3.1 The Disability Discrimination Act 1995

Chronologically, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) would be the first piece of legislation following the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act which would affect the university-student relationship in similar ways to the equalities legislation in the 1970s. As with the RRA, Section 28 of the DDA would echo Section 22 of the SDA, focusing on admissions and the restriction of facilities, services, or education – but, in this case, based on disability (Disability Discrimination Act, 1995, Sect. 28). The DDA would add greater detail than previous legislation on discriminating practices which would be illegal once a student had

been admitted to university. This included suggesting that discrimination could occur "in the arrangements which [the university] makes for the purpose of determining upon whom to confer a qualification; [and] in the terms on which it is prepared to confer a qualification" (DDA, 1995, Sect. 28). Furthermore, the DDA introduced protections against the prospect that a university could be party to harassment through violating a person's dignity or creating a hostile environment for them, which the Act duly outlawed (DDA, 1995, Sect. 28). The Act also put the onus on institutions to make "reasonable adjustments" to ensure that their provision does not place disabled people "at a substantial disadvantage in comparison with persons who are not disabled" (Disability Discrimination Act, 1995, Sect. 28).

The DDA, therefore, introduced a far more robust equalities agenda affecting students than had been seen in the 1970s equalities legislation and made clear more explicitly the right of disabled students to be among the beneficiaries of higher education. This message would very much be echoed in the Dearing Report, which convened in 1996 and marked in many ways a significant expansion of HE policy discussion around HE's diversification and the system's beneficiaries.

2.3.2 The Dearing Report 1997 & Aimhigher

The Dearing committee was principally tasked, like the earlier Robbins committee, with considering the future of higher education, but, this time, in the context of a funding crisis due in part to expansion. Loans had been introduced in the 1990/91 academic year for additional maintenance funding, and there was a growing concern that the expansion of higher education, while needed, would become financially untenable as student numbers rose or that loans would prove a barrier for some students (Scott, 1995).

Dearing represented the first HE policy to make explicit the term 'widening participation' (WP) and emphasise the importance of encouraging diversity – rather than simply increasing participation – since the Robbins Report. By the term 'widening

participation' (WP), Dearing meant "the objective of reducing the disparities of participation in higher education between groups and ensuring that higher education is responsive to the aspirations and distinctive abilities of individuals" (NCIHE, 1997, p. 101). Dedicating a chapter of the report to WP, Dearing argued that, "as participation increases so it must widen" (NCIHE, 1997, p. 106). Prior to Dearing, there had been forms of widening participation, although these had existed in pockets of activity, potentially variable in provision nationally, including through adult learning, night schools, or through the introduction of the Open University (Perry, 1976) in 1968. However, Dearing represents the catalyst of the first attempt by the state to strategically fund and coordinate collaborative widening participation activity between institutions.

Dearing reframed and expanded on the conclusions of Robbins to reiterate and refine the call to focus on specific groups and demonstrate that increased participation did not naturally equate to wider participation. For example, Dearing acknowledged the complexity of women's participation in HE, noting that, while participation by women may have doubled since Robbins (NCIHE, 1997, p. 102), it was unevenly distributed across levels of study and disciplines (NCIHE, 1997, p. 102). This was also evidenced by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) report for the 1994/95 academic year, which showed that, while the gender gap had closed in HE overall – with 474,692 new first-year female undergraduate students to 472,227 males (HESA, 1995) – the distribution of women remained highly gendered toward the arts and caring professions, such as nursing (HESA, 1995). Such discussion complemented the equalities legislation of the 1970s SDA but did not overwrite it, as equalities legislation remained very much a separate cohabitant to higher education policy.

Dearing revisited each of the remaining groups Robbins had named, discussing in a more nuanced way the challenges facing first-generation, mature, and part-time students. For example, for first-generation HE attendees and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds,

Dearing looked at new factors affecting these groups, such as income or proximity to a university (NCIHE, 1997, pp. 102–103). The report also renewed the goal of increased participation by mature and part-time students (NCIHE, 1997, p. 103), with a view to create a "learning society" (NCIHE, 1997, p. 82) underpinned by a lifelong learning agenda to change the life chances of adults with no prior qualifications. Furthermore, Dearing also expanded the policy discourses around barriers to learning and social inequalities by adding new target groups to those Robbins had suggested, giving an explicit policy focus to ethnic minority (NCIHE, 1997, p. 105) and disabled students (NCIHE, 1997, p. 104), complementing the moves since Robbins in equalities legislation.

The Dearing Report would, in some ways, represent the genesis of an issue in implementation and policy which continues today: the lack of a coherent definition of widening participation and who its beneficiaries are. While Dearing did discuss 'widening' participation, the focus on a limited number of named beneficiaries positions a limited definition of WP around issues of access for these core groups of: first in family to go to university, women, mature/part-time students, ethnic minorities and people with disabilities (NCIHE, 1997, pp. 102–107). As I will discuss later in this chapter, when this policy was brought to life through initiatives such as Aimhigher, activity was focused on access to HE of undergraduate students, and, while many of Dearing's groups where included as the beneficiaries, there was a reduction in focus on mature and part time students, with most of Aimhigher's work targeting those under thirty (McCaig et al, 2008).

Burke suggests that the etymology of term "widening" encompasses expanding and deepening participation rather than "simply increasing access to, and participation in, higher education" (Burke, 2013, p. 35). In this interpretation, WP should work to broaden participation in both undergraduate and postgraduate modes of study, thereby creating an environment where everyone has the potential to become a student. Burke's interpretation of

the social injustices that widening participation seeks to rectify are complex, deeply ingrained and multifaceted, leading her to suggest "it is not enough to identify patterns of under-representation or to develop 'quick-fix' solutions to 'lift barriers'" (Burke, 2013, p. 35). Burke's interpretation of widening participation assumes a shared understanding of WP as a project of social justice (Burke, 2013, p. 35), when, in fact, some policy justice is foregone in favour of terms such as fairness, which itself is subjective and evolves across the policy in this chapter from the egalitarian form discussed earlier.

This difficulty in establishing a shared conception of widening participation and shared interpretation of WP policy and its drivers can make it difficult to know if progress has been made and creates ambiguity at a local level around what should be done to widen participation and why. As Stevenson, Clegg & Lefever (2010) observe in their institutional case study, ambiguity around the meaning of widening participation left staff to "fall back on their own repertories of values and meaning-making" in their work with students (Stevenson et al., 2010, p. 112). In this context, staff continued or defended practices which might lack evidence of effectiveness in widening participation by drawing on their own interpretation of ambiguous institutional terminology like diversity, inclusion, or equality – equating all of those with WP. Staff in universities have also been seen to view WP as a pre-entry activity and assume that students can be 'left to it' once at university (Crozier, Reay, Clayton, Colliander & Grinstead, 2008, p. 176; Stevenson et al., 2010, p. 112). Both of these scenarios have the potential to explain how gaps may emerge in the appearance and reality of policy, which I discussed in Chapter One.

The problem of definition and purpose of WP would be part of the problem which was realised with the policy implementation following the Dearing Report. Following the report, the new New Labour government oversaw several initiatives via the Higher Education Funding Council England (HEFCE), which aimed to raise student attainment and aspirations to HE

among lower socio-economic groups (Greenbank, 2006, pp. 148–149). For example, in 1998 HEFCE launched a £1.5 million special funding programme for widening participation (HEFCE, 1999, para. 3). Very shortly after these projects had been set up, during the 2001 election, New Labour committed to "open higher education to half of all young people" (New Labour, 2001, p. 20). This dramatic expansion of participation with a flagship policy would involve work to widen participation which came in the Aimhigher initiative (Aimhigher, 2014), which subsumed the 1998 funded smaller projects, such as Pass for Progression and the Excellence Challenge, and became a national WP initiative, with its activities channelled through mandatory regional and sub-regional partnerships, suggesting that WP/Outreach work should, in theory, extend beyond the interests of individual HEI's.

While Aimhigher would, in some ways, lead to more diversity in terms of WP work and the groups targeted as beneficiaries (McCaig & Bowers-Brown, 2007; McCaig, Stevens & Bowers-Brown, 2008), there would also be a contraction and homogenisation. In a review of the project, McCaig et al. (2008) identified the groups considered as under-represented to include:

> young people from neighbourhoods with lower than average HE participation; people from lower socio-economic groups; people living in deprived geographical areas, including deprived rural and coastal areas; people whose family have no previous experience of HE; young people in care; minority ethnic groups or sub-groups that are under-represented in HE generally or in certain types of institution or subject; other groups currently under-represented in certain subject areas or institutions; people with disabilities. (McCaig et al., 2008 p. 2)

However, as noted earlier, while this list marked an expansion of the previous target groups and demonstrated an explicit strategic move to increase and diversify participation, Aimhigher also entailed a contraction of target groups by focusing on school-leavers and moving away from the mature and part-time students, advocated by Dearing and Robbins (McCaig et al., 2008).

Furthermore, the concept of 'fair participation' and 'fairness' would also become a subject of increasing debate which impacted what was meant by WP in policy terms, contributing to the homogenisation of widening participation in terms of access to HE interventions and who the beneficiaries should be. The Schwartz Report into 'fair admissions' in 2004 characterised this shift. The report acknowledged 'equal opportunities' (Schwartz, 2004, p.5) as being key to a fair admissions system, moving away from egalitarian notions of equality which characterised the Thatcherite interpretations of fairness and, instead, engaging with principals of equity. The Schwartz Report claimed that there was an egalitarian consensus that places in higher education should be awarded based on merit but also acknowledged that, for some students, factors beyond their control can impact their attainment, with differences presenting themselves as early as two years old (Schwartz, 2004, p.6). This led to more equitable recommendations which included, for example, a more holistic approach to considering applications, particularly for candidates who were borderline in not meeting entry requirements, and work to 'minimise any barriers irrelevant to satisfying admissions requirements' (Schwartz, 2004, pp. 6-8).

Schwartz further cemented many existing patterns, such as the focus on admissions and access as well as on the 'young' under-represented groups, and a focus on process cemented egalitarian notions of equality of opportunity, instead of addressing inequity specifically. Accordingly, in the wake of the Schwartz Report, due to the competitive market forces at play in HE and their inherent inequity, little was achieved, as McCaig et al. suggest in their 2011 review post-Schwartz; while some:

> developments since then do appear to have enhanced transparency and consistency in admissions decision making, [this is] largely through the application of more centralised and 'professional' admissions processes that have tended to enable institutions to position themselves more precisely in the market. [but] Whether these changes have enhanced fairness in admissions policy remains more uncertain. (McCaig, Adnett, Bowers-Brown, & Slack, 2011 pp. 30-31)

2.3.3 The Office for Fair Access 2004

In 2004, the concept of fairness and under-represented groups in higher education would become more prominent with the establishment of the Office for Fair Access (OFFA), a direct result of the introduction of variable tuition fees in the Higher Education Act 2004 (flat rate fees of £1000 per year had been introduced in 1998). Tuition fees were directly related to the new mass system of HE, as the problem of funding higher education continued as student enrolment continued to rise (HESA, 2016a). When introducing variable fees, the government were keen to ensure that they did not deter applicants from entering HE for financial reasons (Office for Fair Access, 2016a). Accordingly, OFFA was established to monitor, and universities would be required to write annual Access Agreements, which would need approval by OFFA's Director of Fair Access if they sought to charge higher than the baseline fee (at the time, £1,250 per annum), capped to a maximum £3,000.

Through the establishment of OFFA, WP would be further positioned as an issue of entry for school leavers through outreach work, and existing research calls into question the extent to which access agreements have been effective in delivering change. For example, research by McCaig & Adnett into the contents of access agreements shows that universities are predominantly concerned with activities to "promote enrolment to their own programmes rather than to promote HE generally" (McCaig & Adnett, 2008, p. 1) or with financial access support in the form of bursaries (McCaig, 2010; McCaig & Adnett, 2008). This has led to two suggestions: first, that institutions appear to reinforce their "market positionality" (McCaig, 2010, pp. 8–9) through access agreements and the kinds of students they admit rather than invoking change; second, that widening participation work becomes siloed into marketing departments focused on reaching a homogeneous set of groups mainly of school-leaver age 'young' applicants.

Little subsequently changed about the view of what widening participation meant and who its beneficiaries should be as the New Labour government came to an end. Higher education funding continued to be an issue, exacerbated by the 2008 global economic crash. Following the crash, the government conveyed the Browne Review in 2009, charged with independently making "recommendations to ensure that teaching at our HEIs is sustainably financed …and remain accessible to anyone who has the talent to succeed" (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills [BIS], 2010, p. 2).

The Browne Review offered a consolidation of the assumption that mass participation had been achieved in HE and that concern should be focused on making this mass participation 'fair' rather than wider. Fairness under Browne would focus more than Schwartz on a Thatcherite, egalitarian notion of equality of opportunity and a sense that the outcomes of such approaches are inherently fair. Accordingly, Browne explicitly considered fairness in terms of graduate outcomes and questions of if students subsequently benefited from a 'graduate wage' (BIS, 2010, p. 19) or if there was fairness in terms of competition between institutions (BIS, 2010, p.47).

Following the Browne Review, the government raised fees to a £6,000 basic fee and £9,000 higher fee, with OFFA retaining the role of approving access agreements to allow universities to charge the higher £9,000 fee as they had for the £3,000 fee. This merely reinforced the notion that the work of universities was now to maintain a fair balance within a mass participation system and did not bring with it a challenge to the status quo of 'access'-focused work for a limited number of largely homogeneous target groups. OFFA's definition of under-represented groups did diversify during this period to include new groups such as "care leavers; carers; people estranged from their families; people from gypsy and traveller communities; refugees; students with mental health problems, Specific Learning Difficulties and/or who are on the autism spectrum" (OFFA, 2016b). However, universities

were still not compelled to include all groups, while OFFA would be guided by the principle of what was "appropriate" for each institution (BIS, 2011). This concept allows for considerable variation influenced by market competition, which means institutions were not inherently driven to expand outside of the homogeneous beneficiaries of WP initially introduced in Dearing: first in family to go to university, women, mature/part-time students, ethnic minorities and people with disabilities (NCHIE, 1997, pp. 102-107). Such homogenisation would be reinforced by the increased role of marketisation in HE – and its inherent unfairness – with a reduction in partnership working between institutions through the closure of Aimhigher, reframing WP/access work as competitive, informed by institutional, rather than collaborative, priorities.

A contraction of WP policy and targeting would be evidenced by the decision in 2010 to close Aimhigher the following year as part of the government's rapid austerity measures (BBC News, 2010). This would be framed by a narrative that universities were now better placed to "make much faster progress on social mobility" (BBC News, 2010). Ultimately, Aimhigher struggled in debates around its purpose and success by failing to coherently evidence its effectiveness, which made it harder to contest its closure. As Doyle and Griffin (2012) show in their analysis of evaluations of Aimhigher, the late establishment of targets and difficulties accessing and monitoring data sets cumulatively meant that Aimhigher had difficulty proving the extent to which it had "widened participation and contributed to improvements in social justice" (Doyle & Griffin, 2012, pp. 81–82).

While this period of state-funded widening participation policy came to a close and a contraction in activity would start to emerge, it would be beset by two fundamental issues evidenced in existing research. The first issue is an increasingly small and homogenised understanding of 'who' the beneficiaries of WP are, positioning these students as 'new' or 'non-traditional' in a way which inherently marked their difference and problematised these

students, surrounding them with a deficit discourse compared to their more accepted 'traditional student' peers. For instance, Trowler (2015) problematises the use of the term 'non-traditional' students and highlights the ways such a term points to a single identity frame of reference (Trowler, 2015, p. 299), such as working class or ethnic minority, and misses the complex ways in which students may adapt and reprioritize their identities in different contexts and in very personal ways. Trowler highlights how 'non-traditional' students are "essentialised beings whose presence in higher education can be accommodated through carefully choreographed interventions" (Trowler, 2015, p.309), which allows "the term [non-traditional] to be reduced or expanded to encompass whatever an agency, an institution, or a policy might wish, without the need for explicit recognition" (Trowler, 2015, p.309-10). This allows WP work to become loaded with political and ideological motivations through the role of marketisation (McCaig, 2010; McCaig & Adnett, 2008) and fails to demonstrate the ways in which specific groups of students may experience 'common' barriers, such as financial hardship, in ways which are specific to other aspects of their identity.

Ultimately, Trowler is highlighting the issue of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2001) and its relative absence from widening participation policy within a competitive market environment, as seen in UK HE policy. The concept of intersectionality was introduced in 1989 by critical race theorist and legal scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (Crenshaw, 2001) and accounts for the way in which a person's singular identity is, in fact, curated from multiple and complex strands of identity to create the whole. Intersectionality, therefore, affects how discrimination and inequalities are experienced on an individual level. As Crenshaw argued, in developing the concept of intersectionality, such discrimination and inequalities can be experienced in unique ways as both a black person and a woman, compared to singularly as a black person (Crenshaw, 2001). It is important to acknowledge here the way in which I am, at this point, introducing into my thesis theory originating from Critical Race Theory, and

applying it to contexts which are not primarily about race – although there are Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) participants in many of the studies I critique, and in my own study – the primary focus of my work here is caring status. However Crenshaw (2001) and the concept of intersectionality, give me a vocabulary to unpick aspects of both the literature and discussion of my study. To not acknowledge this, or try and craft my own would potentially lead me to 'whitening-out' the contribution of BME scholars to the academy.

The second issue is inherently linked to the first and to the absence of intersectionality, as, by contracting the scope of WP interventions and the target beneficiaries while returning control of such activity to universities through access agreements (i.e. the removal of Aimhigher collaborative partnership funding incentives and the encouraged competition between HEIs), this assumes that universities are guardians of diversity and not deeply classed and racialised spaces. Research consistently proves that this is not the case, as Burke highlights how groups of WP students become problematised, as applicants are compared to an "ideal (imaginary) student-subject of policy discourse" which "is constructed in relation to middle-class and white racialized norms and values" (Burke, 2013, p. 57). WP groups, therefore, become relocated as the problem "in terms of the ways those individuals or groups are seen to be 'lacking' (e.g. the right kind of attitudes, values and/or aspirations)" (Burke, 2013, p. 37).

For example, in research concerning admission to arts subjects, Burke and McManus (2011) identified how allegedly transparently documented admissions processes within a university were used in deeply subjective ways. Here, one working-class black student, Nina, did not gain a place despite receiving higher grades than a white middle-class peer because, when interviewed, she expressed preferences for living at home while studying to save money, which was conceived as immature. Additionally, Nina preferred contemporary design which was not viewed as the right kind of contemporary design by admissions tutors: "she's all hip-hop and sport tops" (Burke & McManus, 2011, pp. 40–41). This demonstrates the way in which

candidates can be required to display certain attributes to be considered to have potential (Burke & McManus, 2011, p. 22), which became activated in subjective, classed, and racialised ways.

Extensive literature on widening access supports Burke's assertions that WP students experience 'othering' based on subjective interpretations of what makes an ideal student subject in deeply classed, racialised ways. For instance, Archer and Leathwood highlight the way in which students, particularly women and ethnic minorities, experience 'underlying feelings of deficit' which can come from the negotiation of academic cultures which construct the norm in terms which are male, white, and middle class (Archer & Leathwood, 2003, p. 190-1). Thus, these non-traditional students become disadvantaged by "institutional cultures which position them as 'other'" (Archer & Leathwood, 2003, p.191). The direct impact of this on students is seen also in research by Bowl (2001), who shows that the barriers 'non-traditional' students face mean they become 'frustrated participants': "who have battled, often with little support, to find an educational and career direction … struggling against financial poverty, lack of time, tutor indifference and institutional marginalization" (Bowl, 2001, p.152).

What becomes apparent, therefore, is that students who are recognised as the beneficiaries of WP policies such as Aimhigher and by quangos such as OFFA are only recognised within homogenous descriptors of specific demographics, which can, in itself, reinforce the deficit discourses which surround these students. These patterns in existing literature, as discussed above, appear to suggest the possibility that, despite recognition in policy, there may still remain an inequity in the student experiences of these beneficiaries, which adds a further dimension to the potential causes of the puzzle I introduced in Chapter One.

2.3.4 Post-Aimhigher 2010 -2018

The closure of Aimhigher would not be the complete end of large national access initiatives, although those which were to be launched would continue the contracted focus on the 'access' of a homogeneous small group of students. In 2013, the Government announced the National Networks for Collaborative Outreach (NNCO), and, in 2016, the National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP). The NNCO projects did not focus on targeting specific groups but, rather, on ensuring the accessibility of current school's outreach provision by providing general light-touch signposting work to "help teachers and advisers find out about the outreach activity which universities" already provided (HEFCE, 2016b) and, hence, perpetuated the targeting issues discussed above. While NCOP contracted the focus of WP work further to young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and reintroduced targeted activity but focused only on specific geographical areas – the "gap" electoral wards identified by HEFCE as having "low levels of young participation (POLAR3 Q1) and lower than expected levels of young participation, considering Key Stage 4 attainment (Gaps Q1 or Q2)" (HEFCE, 2016b).

Policy discourse did shift in some ways in 2014, as widening participation started to be discussed as part of a 'life course' approach following initial indications that universities should start to move in this direction from BIS in 2011 (BIS, 2011) and the OFFA guidance for new access agreements in 2012/13 (OFFA, 2011). For instance, the annual report of the Director of Fair Access in 2014 argued for greater focus on "support for students as they progress through their studies and continue to employment or postgraduate study" (OFFA, 2014), while, in 2015, the *National Strategy for Access and Student Success in Higher Education* (HEFCE, 2015b) was co-launched with HEFCE and OFFA, focusing not just on access but retention, success, and graduate progression. Furthermore, in 2015, HEFCE would put some 'life course' work into action by funding 12 pilot projects, totalling an investment of

£4m, which looked at the concept of learning gain and the differential progress or gains students make once at university (HEFCE, 2015c).

The Cameron government's policy was still clearly centred around issues of access: evidenced in the balance of funding, with over £60m per year going into NCOP – in contrast to £4m focused on learning gain. Central government policy on widening participation contracted further in the final months of the Cameron-led governments, with focus directed toward two specific groups: black and minority ethnic (BME) students and white working-class boys. OFFA was instructed by the government in February 2016 to focus on doubling the entry of white working-class boys (BIS, 2016) while increasing the number of BME students in higher education from 2014 levels by 20% by 2020 (BIS, 2016). While policy statements around these announcements talked about ensuring HE is open to "many more people" (BIS, 2016), there is a clear contrast with the previous lengthy targeted group lists found in the Dearing or Aimhigher policy periods.

Furthermore, while the Office for Students (OFS) is at an early stage in its existence, the first policy announcements in the area of widening participation suggest that the contraction of beneficiaries may be set to continue. When OFFA merged with HEFCE to form the OFS, Access and Participation Plans (APP) – which replaced the Access Agreements of OFFA – are aimed at a much more restrictive group of beneficiaries, with a focus on access and continuation for underrepresented groups in terms of POLAR, low Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), degree outcome gaps between white and black students, and outcomes for disabled students (OFS, 2018a, OFS, 2018b, p. 4). The policy since 2010 has, in some ways, only served to maintain or perpetuate the contracted focus of WP policy on a homogeneous group of 'under-represented' or 'non-traditional' beneficiaries; this maintains the context within which my puzzlement at the disparities between policy and experience emerge,

potentially due in part to the inherent issues discussed above in Burke (2013) and Trowler's (2015) work.

2.3.5 The Equality Act 2010

Returning to the equality legislation which shapes and impacts the university-student relationship, The Equality Act (2010) provided significant change in the groups of students who previously had been the beneficiaries of equality legislation. The 2010 Act brought together all previous equality and diversity legislation into one codified document, including the Acts mentioned above, and incorporated new protected groups. The Act established a list of protected characteristics it would be illegal for bodies like universities to discriminate against. This list expanded the number of groups protected from discrimination in existing Acts beyond women, race and disability to include the following characteristics: "age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation" (Equality Act, 2010, p. 4). Notably, however, the Act focused on an essentially egalitarian notion of equality of opportunity rather than addressing the barriers and inequities which may manifest for these groups and are not the product of immediate acts or direct or indirect discrimination.

These protected characteristics hold some similarities with the groups targeted by WP, such as age, gender, disability and race, which correlates with various developments in widening participation since the Dearing Report and the targeting of support for mature students, women, students with disabilities, and ethnic minority students (NCIHE, 1997). At the same time, both these parallel groupings can be conceived differently; for example, the Equality Act (2010) also includes reference to protections for groups based on religion or sexual orientation who have not generally been targeted in widening participation policy. However, the Act does not protect social class, again highlighting its egalitarian focus, as, rather than remedying the complex patterns of inequity or considering the way in which

intersectionality may exist within the current protected characteristics, the act has the potential to create circumstances which may seek to provide equality of opportunity but can be inherently inequitable. These may, for instance, explain the continued inequity in admission and outcome seen in Oxbridge admissions, despite the Equality Act's existence for nearly a decade.

The act would create new challenges for universities, as some aspects of these protected characteristics had not previously been stipulated or, rather, came under employment legislation, leaving the university-student relationship unaffected. For example, legislation relating to pregnancy and childcare was not directly the purview of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, although the way organizations responded to women's needs in these circumstances could be a source of discrimination. Maternity leave, for example, was enumerated in disparate legislation, appearing in the Employment Relations Act 1999, in statutory instruments, such as the Maternity and Parental Leave, etc. Regulations 1999, and in legislation relating to children, such as the Children Act 2004.

Accordingly, evidence is increasingly emerging of universities acknowledging this much-expanded list of protected characteristics and their duties to them in a variety of ways, thus raising awareness of the potential for discrimination and encouraging diversity. This is indicated through the adoption of specific policies or by the pursuit of accreditation from bodies such as Stonewall (Stonewall, 2016) to signify institutions' inclusivity of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community. Similarly, some universities have incorporated into their academic calendars events and celebrations, such as Black History Month and LGBT History Month, as a means of paying cultural recognition to groups who have historically experienced discrimination (National Union of Students [NUS], 2014, 2015).

There is also evidence which suggests that inequity of experience for students with protected characteristics has not significantly improved because of this status. For instance,

research by Formby (2015) shows how university support systems did not acknowledge the unique ways LGBT students experienced barriers to participation because of their sexual orientation. Student financial support may be operationalised in a way which is thought to be fair and transparent, such as means testing based on parental household income to establish need. However, this approach fails to take account of how finances for LGBT students can be used as a form of negative parental control. One student recalls how "[My] Dad threatened to cut off financial support if 'social activities' related to [being] LGBT could be found by employers" (Formby, 2015, p. 7). Thus, these fair and transparent forms of support system have the potential to inadvertently perpetuate inequalities and discrimination for these students – not through action designed to directly or indirectly discriminate against these students, in a way that could be challenged through the Equality Act, but by a passive apathy toward these students' different needs and experiences and the potentially negative consequences of this omission. This is a further point where the disparity between policy appearance and reality I present in Chapter One could emerge.

This complex image is also presented against a wider background of direct and indirect discrimination, which is also seen in Formby's study. For instance, while 36 per cent of students in the study had experienced some form of direct discrimination such as verbal threats while at university (Formby, 2015, p. 34), the more pervasive barriers in their experiences were those of systemic invisibility, where LGBT students experience little or no acknowledgment or consideration within the institution in the ways that some other groups are. For example, the acknowledgement in the curriculum of LGBT students and the issues they face were rare overall, such as adding LGBT literature or history to a module – but, even when they did happen, students felt at worst "forgotten" or at best "tagged on" to existing practice rather than embedded as it was an integral component of the course (Formby, 2015, p. 10).

When considering the experiences of religious students, similar issues of systemic invisibility occur to those experienced by LGBT Students. The common misconception of universities as secular grounds has the potential to make these students invisible (Aune & Stevenson, 2016, p. 1), which is especially apparent in accounts suggesting that religious students elect to "pass as non-religious" (Stevenson, 2014, p. 58). Furthermore, when a student's faith is acknowledged on campus, the impact can be variable. The presence of chaplains and societies, for example, can make some students feel part of a community while others "feel isolated and alienated" (Reid, 2016, p. 160). Again, as in the case of LGBT students, the extent to which religious students can be seen to experience discriminatory practices as defined by law is debatable (Stevenson, 2014, p. 60), but 'othering' as a barrier is a key feature of religious students' experiences. This 'othering' takes many forms, including concerns from student unions about religious students potentially causing offence to other students, the failure to acknowledge non-Christian holidays in the university calendar and timetabling, as well as students being ostracised by other students based on stereotypes (Stevenson, 2014, p 56-7).

An additional pattern is also discernible in the experiences of religious students, as, when visible on campus, because of their religious practices, this group can be a perceived as a threat, and experience direct religious intolerance as a result (Aune & Stevenson, 2016, p. 1) in ways that LGBT students do not. For example, Muslim students have recounted the othering impacts of the UK government's Prevent agenda, making students feel monitored, with staff instructed to identify potential extremists (Weller & Hooley, 2016, p. 45). Similarly, Jewish students report open anti-Semitism being common on university campuses, with research showing that 42% of Jewish students surveyed have experienced anti-Semitism (Graham & Boyd, 2011, p. 10), while other researchers cite examples of apathetic attitudes toward anti-Semitism during

seminars, with staff taking an unresponsive approach to students discussing Hitler as a great leader (Shira Schallie, 2016, p. 118).

By considering the experiences of two groups of students who are not directly catered for in widening participation policy but are covered in the Equality Act (2010) and the barriers they still face, a complex picture emerges which questions the equity of the student experience they receive compared to others. In part, this is attributable to the different forms of legislation; for instance, the Equality Act (2010) is a protective/reactive piece of legislation designed to impact incidences of discrimination, whereas WP policy and legislation (i.e. that relating to how the OFS regulates Access and Participation) more specifically governs the implementation of a support system by institutions.

Returning to the problems of definition which Widening Participation has experienced and the question of intersectionality discussed earlier, a question is raised as to why groups such as LGBT or religious students should experience differential forms of support in policy and legislation. Why are these groups not a factor in delivering authentically wider participation? Accordingly, the patterns in the experiences of LGBT and religious students raise questions about the extent to which there is a widening of participation and whether mass HE is also diverse HE when there are visible inequities as seen in the research into these students' experiences. If this is the case for these two groups of students, then further research is needed to understand the extent to which such inequity also occurs for other groups, especially those who do not comfortably fit into all, or both of the homogeneous definitions of WP or equality policy beneficiaries.

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have sought to establish the policy context within which my thesis sits and have done so in two sections covering English HE policy and equalities policy developments following the second world war to the present day. In the first part of this chapter,

I discussed the period following the World War II until the 1992 Higher Education Act, characterised as a period of movement from elite to mass HE (Trow & Burrage, 2010). This period is characterised by a significant expansion in participants in HE and established a very egalitarian move in HE policy which suggested that places would be available for those who had sufficient qualifications and, in effect, anybody capable of HE study could attend. However, questions over the extent to which this massification meant that participation had become diverse emerged. During this period, the Sex Discrimination Act [SDA] (1975) and the Race Relations Act [RRA] (1976) started to influence 'who' could go to university by offering recourse to anti-discrimination; these acts did not proactively encourage diversity, although HE did become more diverse within this mass system than it had in its previous elite form. Such diversity came as a result of the expansion of HE places to a degree that saturation of places existed for more traditional students, leading to space for more diverse groups of students. The implications of this period of policy for my thesis is that it supports the idea raised in my introduction – that there has been a long-standing policy position in English HE that there should be places for 'all' who are suitably qualified to take part in higher education (dating back to Robbins 1963), but that the extent to which this is delivered in reality requires further exploration.

In the second part of the chapter, I more specifically focused on the period of policy development from the mid-1990s and the question of diversity within a mass system of higher education that more explicitly permeated policy. This started with the introduction of the concept of widening participation as part of the Dearing Report (NCIHE, 1997) and the subsequent interventions of Aimhigher (Aimhigher, 2014), as well as access agreements through the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) focused on supporting 'under-represented groups' (OFFA, 2016b). For instance, the latest focus of the OFS is underrepresented groups in terms of POLAR and IMD, gaps between white and black students' degree outcomes, and outcomes

for disabled students (OFS, 2018a, OFS, 2018b, p. 4), representing a distinct contraction from the target beneficiaries of OFFA's underrepresented groups (OFFA, 2016b) or the beneficiaries of Aimhigher (McCaig et al., 2008 p. 2).

Such contraction limited the number of groups who would benefit from such policy interventions to diversify HE, but it is also worth noting that those groups, in themselves, have been seen to be problematic in the way in which they homogenise policy-recognised students into restrictive and singular groups. This can be seen by the way that while, I have joined together specific widening participation policy and equality legislation in this chapter, its operation has largely happened in siloes where the beneficiaries of those policies are either supported through WP policy OR equalities legislation rather than adopting a more complex intersectional approach. Furthermore, existing literature reviewed in this section has demonstrated how problematic this homogenisation can be – placing students as 'other' within dichotomies of being 'new' or 'non-traditional' students (Trowler, 2015, p.299) – and that allegedly 'transparent' practices which appear to protect or ensure WP and equability can be mobilised along these dichotomies in deeply classed and racialised ways (Burke, 2013, pp. 37 & 57; Burke & McManus, 2001, pp. 40-41), cumulatively demonstrating that such policies can be counterproductive even for students who are the recognised beneficiaries, as they become 'other' (Archer & Leathwood, 2003, p.191) and 'frustrated participants' (Bowl, 2001, p.152) in higher education. Hence, the policy discussed in this chapter and the diversification it encourages is not seen to be overly representative in policy documentation and subsequent practice, as both largely homogenise students into either underrepresented or protected characteristic groups. This means that, while some students are recognised as being 'different' and policy and, thus, practice reflects this, other groups who are not directly recognised in policy (and thus practice) may not be effectively supported to participate in HE.

Returning to students who Care for Children while Studying, it has been shown in this chapter that CCS are not the directly-named beneficiaries of the policy discussed in this policy landscape – except under the broad categories of 'carers' in WP policy or 'pregnancy or maternity' in the Equality Act. However they, too, may experience such inequity of student experience. This provided some vital context to the puzzle which I have introduced in this thesis and suggests that some students, even when directly recognised as the beneficiaries, may experience inequity of student experience. This has the potential to arise from the homogenisation in policy and the way in which students may then have inequitable experiences which I will go on to explore through the experiences of students who Care for Children while Studying (CCS) in the rest of this thesis. Thus, in the next chapter, I will review literature specifically related to CCS students, seeking to establish the gaps in existing knowledge and from this outline the aims, objectives and research questions my thesis will explore.

Chapter 3: The experience of students who care for children: a literature review

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a review of the existing literature related to Students who Care for Children while Studying (CCS), having established in the previous chapter the policy landscape shifts in terms of the target beneficiaries and means of reaching them, which may create inequitable experiences for some students. I propose to use CCS students as an example within which to explore this issue further. In this chapter, I will consider the broad scope of the literature CCS Students appear in, looking in detail at the specific barriers attributed to their experience in research, which looks predominantly at Student Parents. By tracing the gaps in existing literature, I seek to conclude this chapter by presenting my research aims, objectives, and questions.

3.2 The parameters of this literature review

This literature review faces the challenge that the body of literature connected to students' caring responsibilities for children is small and limited. A small number of books are included, but much literature is online either in journal articles or grey literature which came from systematic searches of library databases or from reviews of the bibliographies of existing literature. The focus of this review has been to seek to address the following questions:

- What is currently known about the participatory experiences of CCS Students once in higher education?

- What common barriers to these students experience emerge, and how, if at all, are they addressed?

In addressing these questions, a small body of academic literature is considered which dates from the late mid-2000s, increased somewhat in the 2010s by literature which stems from funding by the Nuffield Foundation. These first awards were in 2010 and supported work in the form of journal articles on participatory experiences by Brooks (2012a, 2012b), and Moreau

(2016)/Moreau and Kerner (2013), as well as projects with the support of the single parent charity Gingerbread, which lead to both articles and books by Hinton-Smith (2012a; 2012b, 2016).

Some academic literature is also discussed in the context of gender (Moss, 2004, 2006; Quinn, 200), and this could have been supported by a wider review of this literature or a consideration of mature or part-time students experience in more detail. However, while I acknowledge that there is a connection, and some aspects of the experience of CCS students will have commonality with issues of gender, mature or part-time study, I have avoided the inclusion of literature which conflates the act of caring for children as synonymous with gender, mature, or part-time status. I made this conscious choice because it has the potential to mask the uniqueness of the experiences and barriers CCS students experience because of their caring status while also failing to acknowledge, as the more specific literature does, that "all student parents are not mature students, nor are all mature students parents" (Moreau & Kerner, 2013, p. 4). Furthermore, to not be specific enough in my focus in this review and include too much literature which does not focus specifically on students as carers for children, I run the risk of amalgamating beneficiaries groups – which I have spent Chapter Two critiquing.

Further parameters of this literature review include a focus on UK literature and the use of grey literature. A brief discussion of US literature is given in the next section, and, through the work of Brooks (2012a; 2012b), comparison between the UK and Denmark is made. However, the body of literature on students with caring responsibility internationally is also limited, while, as discussed below, the differences in HE provision internationally make it difficult to draw useful on this literature in the UK context which is the focus of this thesis. Furthermore, a great deal of grey literature has already been covered in Chapter Two through the discussion and mapping of the policy context, citing government documents, legislation and reports. However, in seeking to robustly answer the specific questions which frame this

review, some grey literature is utilised, as it provided insight and context more relevant to the focus of this review than the discussion of the policy landscape, most notably the NUS (2009) report *Meet the Parents*.

3.3 The student 'parent' experience

Most research to date has considered specifically the experiences of student parents in HE (Brooks, 2012a; Moreau, 2016a; National Union of Students [NUS], 2009). The term *student parent* does have utility, as it is accessible and can be easily understood, but parenthood does not automatically denote caring responsibilities, and vice versa. For instance, the term may exclude some students who are primary care-givers for children while studying, such as legal guardians or grandparents. I, therefore, use the term *students who care for children while studying* (or *CCS students*) to describe my participants, both to be more inclusive and to focus my work on the barriers to study that are created by caring for children, which may be experienced in complex intersectional ways that change over time. CCS students can, for example, be from any social class, ethnicity, financial background, age or gender, and have the potential to appear in Higher Education (HE) policy for those characteristics but not their caring status.

Under HE policy on topics such as widening participation, the status of "caring" can be seen in the more recent forms of widening participation policy prior to the establishment of the Office for Students (OFS), albeit in a very limited way which only covers some CCS students. For example, the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) only named "carers" (OFFA, 2016) in its groups considered under-represented in HE which would directly include CCS students; yet the term "carers" used by OFFA was broad, capturing students with caring responsibilities for elderly or disabled parents or relatives as well as CCS students. Additionally, while OFFA did mention carers in its under-represented groups, institutions, acting competitively, write their own access agreements, set their own targets and are not required to target all groups (BIS,

2011), thus providing carers with no guaranteed or consistent support between institutions within the HE 'marketplace', despite the regulatory role of OFFA.

Research in the USA on students with caring responsibilities has predated UK-specific research and includes texts which seek to build the student service industry, documenting uncritically models of "best practice" to support replication in other institutions, such as *Establishing the Family-Friendly Campus: Models for Effective Practice* (Lester and Sallee, 2009). Texts like these do raise the profile of CCS students and the barriers they face but provide either limited anecdotal accounts (Quinn & Shapiro, 2009) or quantitative evaluation data on the "success" of policy interventions (McDade & Dannels, 2009, pp. 109–116). Consequently, such texts articulate solutions to the problems these students face but do not necessarily increase knowledge and understanding of the problems themselves or of their causes. Furthermore, US literature has limited transferability to the UK context, as degrees are structured and supported differently. For instance, in the US, doctorates take longer than in the UK (typically 5–8 years compared to 3–5 years), with greater parallels to UK early career researchers than students, and the average age of a completing US graduate student is 33.6 years old (Springer, Parker & Leviten-Reid, 2009, p. 437).

Research into gender (Moss, 2004, 2006; Quinn, 2003) and mature and part-time students (Reay, Ball & David, 2002) has also captured CCS students, but, as care is not the focus of these studies, the insight is limited; however, they do foreground barriers that these students face, particularly those related to time. For example, Moss demonstrates how female students manage "discordant" times (Moss, 2004, p. 297), and Quinn explains how their study time comes up "against material limits and is always under threat from encroachment of others" (Quinn, 2003, p. 449). Care work forms one such encroachment (Moss, 2006, p. 47), with women often expected to be constantly available for care, as they navigate a hierarchy of values where women's study is marginalised (Moss, 2004, p. 283). This echoes within students'

experiences of the culture of carelessness in the academy, seen in Lynch's work (2010) into academics' experiences and suggests that this culture also permeates students' experiences.

Since the late 2000s, a small body of UK literature has emerged which specifically explores student parents' experiences, cumulatively identifying six core barriers to participation which occur in unique ways because of these students' status as carers: time and space to study, financial support, personal relationships, childcare, health and mental wellbeing, and systemic invisibility within their institution. A key feature, however, of the literature is the relative consistency of methodological approach. Many studies in this review include one-time semi-structured interviews (Brooks 2012a; Brown & Nichols, 2012; Gerrard & Roberts, 2007), surveys of participants or policy (Springer, Parkers, & Leviten-Reid, 2009) or a combination of these (Brooks, 2012b; Marandet & Wainwright, 2010; Moreau, 2016; Moreau & Kerner, 2013, 2015; NUS, 2009; Wainwright & Marandet, 2010). Quite often, these studies gain a singular impression at one or a small number of institutions, focused on retrospective reflection on student experience, describing their experience in broad macro details or even cross-national comparative images (Brooks 2012b). Alternatively, the researcher has narrowed down their perspective in studying these students' experience by just looking at one aspect of student experience, such as financial hardship (Gerrard & Roberts, 2007) – though, again, methodologically, these studies have engaged in similar methods of single semi-structured interviews. There is some exception; Tamsin Hinton-Smith (2012a; 2012b; 2016), for instance, has sought to conduct a longer and richer study of 70 lone student parents across a year, seeking to gain a richer picture. Hinton-Smith, however, has reduced her focus to specifically 'lone' parents. There are some methodological challenges in identifying Student Parents, as they are not an easily identifiable group and are not recorded in student data collection (NUS, 2009). Furthermore, there is also the ethical challenge in trying to design a deeper or richer study with participants known to be short of time. However, in approaching

this literature and thinking about my own methodological approaches, it is noteworthy that this body of literature could be added to by seeking a deeper, longer and richer understanding about how these students go about their daily lives, such as seeking rich ethnographic data or trying to cover specific critical incidents in detail.

This existing body of literature does present six key barriers pertinent to understanding the context within which my research begins, the potential CCS student experience I could meet, and how I can contribute new knowledge to this field. I will now discuss each barrier in turn, critically summarising the findings and arguments in existing literature.

3.3.1 Time & space to study

Time and space to study is a prevalent barrier for student parents (Brooks, 2012a; Hinton-Smith, 2012a, 2012b; Marandet & Wainwright, 2010; Moreau & Kerner, 2013; NUS, 2009) and parallels the patterns seen in research on gender, which identifies how students juggle discordant times (Moss, 2004, p. 297), often to the detriment of free and personal time. This parallel with research into gender is not surprising, as the participants in studies are predominantly female – for example, 38 females to two male students in Moreau and Kerner's work (2013, p. 2). Care work for student parents mirrors gender dichotomies: even when male students are presented in research, they have often benefited from their female partner's flexibility to reduce their time-pressures (Brooks, 2012a, p. 7; Moreau & Kerner, 2013, p. ;), whereas many female participants reported that domestic responsibilities were not reduced to acknowledge the additional workload of study (Brooks, 2012a, p. 6; Marandet & Wainwright, 2010, p. 794).

While time limitations could be framed as a private experience, institutions impact student parents' time and space to study through their administration practices. For example, timetabling proves deeply problematic for these students (Hinton-Smith, 2012b, pp. 67–69; Marandet & Wainwright, 2010, p. 796; NUS, 2009, p. 29) when produced or changed at short

notice, making care arrangements difficult to plan – a problem which is compounded by the changes between semesters or academic years. Furthermore, HE term dates often do not correlate with school terms, creating additional challenges to planning and managing time for these students. Deadlines are also set at times which appear to assume students have no other commitments than study and have sufficient time between coursework to prepare for examinations, or they involve inflexible submission processes requiring hard copy submissions made in person, which maximize the time deficits student parents face (Marandet & Wainwright, 2010, p. 796).

What could be expanded on in richer ethnographic influenced approaches, however, is the extent to which student self-exclusion from learning and teaching is from individual choice or structural necessity. For instance Brooks shows these students prefer to study from home as a means of minimizing costs and juggling responsibilities (Brooks, 2012a, p. 6), while Moreau and Kerner (2013, p. 7) illustrate how things like on-campus childcare can make a significant difference to these students' time regimens. Yet it is unclear here is whether students are being excluded from full participation in universities by having insufficient time or space to study or by making choices about how to organize their time in ways which work best for them. The answer is possibly a complex mixture of the two, but, while existing research utilizing broad single-answer survey and interview data captures these students' attitudes and reports their barriers, it misses the detail of the decision-making processes these students engage in when negotiating time and space. Thus, further research which seeks to capture this detail around the complexity of time and space in these students' experience, such as from ethnographic inspired methodologies, for example 'walk-along' interviews as they go about their day, could be beneficial to understanding how the institutional setting shapes and impacts these students' decision making.

3.3.2 Financial support

Financial pressures and a lack of funding are widely reported as a barrier to participation for student parents – and one that can exacerbate other barriers. This phenomenon forms the focus of two papers (Gerrard & Roberts, 2006; Hinton-Smith, 2016). For instance, high levels of personal debt are common for these students and can have knock-on consequences for their participation in HE by raising stress levels and making students become risk-averse, thereby limiting the opportunities they take. For example, Gerrard and Roberts (2006) demonstrate how student parents engaged in highly pressurized, emotive negotiation and compromise because of financial pressure. All but one student in this study felt direct financial pressure with high levels of personal debt; they struggled to make bill payments, which led to care-related challenges, such as withdrawing children's pocket money to make ends meet and by making cuts to food bills as they struggled to ensure their children ate healthily (Gerrard & Roberts, 2006, pp. 396–7). This not only creates stress due to debt but also stokes feelings around being "good" or "bad" parents and knocks their confidence in being able to provide for their children in fundamental material ways. Similar patterns were seen in the experiences of lone-parent students by Hinton-Smith (2016), where students in this study limited their potential for possible further study or compromised on study time for employment to "keep a roof over [their] head" (Hinton-Smith, 2016, p. 210).

Additional funding, on top of student bursaries and loans, to cover the added costs of being a CCS students is rarely available to these students (Moreau & Kerner, 2013, p. 9), leading them to depend on informal forms of financial support; this can hide the inadequacies of more formal structured support (Hinton-Smith, 2016, p. 213). Where additional support is given, such as the Childcare Grant, only full-time home/EU undergraduates from low-income households are eligible, the grant covers only 85 per cent of childcare costs, and some students even give up on making claims due to the complex process of applying and demonstrating eligibility (Moreau & Kerner, 2013, pp. 9–10). The level of informal support varies

considerably, reflecting the student's individual circumstances, such as having a financially supportive family or being from a more affluent background. Informal support not only acts as a safety net, covering the unforeseen costs such as school activities or new shoes, but plugs gaps in the cost of daily life for these students, such as childcare (Hinton-Smith, 2016, p. 213). The reliance on informal financial support by student parents undermines the purpose of some of the HE policy discussed in Chapter Two, by demonstrating how these students could either be priced out of HE or have deeply problematic experiences with the potential to exacerbate the other barriers discussed in this section.

Existing research shows that finance is an issue and illustrates its potential consequences (Gerrard and Roberts, 2006; Hinton-Smith, 2016) but does not reveal the ways in which this lack of financial support is experienced; thus what is missing in the literature is a richer, more qualitative understanding of how this barrier is prioritized and navigated by student parents in contrast to the other barriers they face. For example, it is unclear whether additional financial support alone would be the best remedy for these students' problematic experiences. For example, additional funding may reduce the impact of inflexible timetabling on these students by ensuring they are able to afford more, or flexible, childcare. However, this financial redistributive remedy may, in turn, mask the deeper problem of systemic invisibility these students face by not redressing the ways in which university processes for timetabling create such barriers. Thus, further research which illuminates how these students navigate the complex interplay of these barriers, in order to understand what is required for the provision of effective holistic remedies for the difficulties these students face, could be beneficial.

3.3.3 Personal relationships

Student parents also face the challenge of maintaining personal relationships and a social life in ways that can be institutionally mediated despite being connected to the private domain of their lives. Universities student services have demonstrated a concern for many years with

the private lives of students, for example, by providing halls of residence, which recreate the home and provide space for students' private lives, or by providing personal tutors to give holistic support on both academic and personal issues.

The difference here is that patterns in existing research suggest that student parents experience personal and private barriers (Wainwright & Marandet, 2010, p. 458) in ways which are not currently acknowledged by institutions in the same way as they are for other students, leaving them unsupported. Research by the NUS (2009) has shown, for example, that 77 per cent of student parents surveyed felt that it was not easy to engage in university or college life, with 68 per cent citing a lack of "child-friendly attitudes" in the provision of student life activities like societies (NUS, 2009, p. 35). Furthermore only 11 per cent of those surveyed claimed to have been involved in a club or society and 17 per cent were course reps (NUS, 2009, p. 36). This contrasts with images of student life which are social and, in many ways, "carefree" (Moreau & Kerner, 2013, p. 5) and the purview of "bachelor boy" students (Hinton-Smith, 2012b, 2016) who can engage in social life without other commitments. This echoes the patterns in research into the value of care in higher education for staff, where findings highlight the Cartesian view of scholarly activity as focused on educating autonomous rational individuals are dominant, promoting the pursuit of "unbridled self-interest" (Lynch, 2010, p. 59), which fails to acknowledge the complex interconnected lives of care-givers.

As a result, student parents can experience deep-seated loneliness and isolation, as highlighted by numerous researchers (Hinton-Smith, 2012b, pp. 169–176; Marandet & Wainwright, 2010, p. 799; Moreau & Kerner, 2013, p. 12; Wainwright & Marandet, 2010, p. 458). This is a concern which has the potential to cascade into issues of retention and mental health yet goes unaddressed in many institutions – in part due to the complexity of understanding what contributes to this barrier. On the one hand, the isolation of these students from university life can be a result of their different age and lifestyle compared to students aged

18–19 who have just left school (Hinton-Smith, 2012b, p. 172; Marandet & Wainwright, 2010, p. 800) – a phenomenon seen also in mature students' experiences. On the other hand, for some students such as lone parents, participation in HE can enhance these students' current social lives (Hinton-Smith, 2012b, p. 172) but only by providing a relative decrease of loneliness and isolation compared to being, for example, an unemployed lone parent. These two points can undermine the call for greater visibility of student parents, allowing institutions to suggest they are catered for by the support available to mature students. Yet, as observed above in Moreau & Kerner's (2013, p. 4) work, the needs of student parents and mature students are not necessarily synonymous, and what supports one may not automatically meet the needs of the other. The second factor fails to acknowledge the relative nature of this point: just because lone parents are less isolated than before does not mean they are not isolated in participation compared to their peers. Feelings of isolation can also demonstrate the complex interconnectedness of the barrier student parents face. For example, dependency on informal sources of funding and childcare from family and friends can create stress and hostility in these relationships (Hinton-Smith, 2012b, pp. 176–77), intensifying barriers in the maintenance of relationships vital for study by potentially taking away time, energy or finances which are already heavily depleted for these students (NUS, 2009, p. 60).

Cumulatively, the barriers currently established in maintaining personal relationships for student parents highlight the need for further research which helps to understand the complex effects of these students' HE experiences on their personal and private lives, for instance, considering the ways in which institutional arrangements and settings can impact and potentially mediate these consequences. Existing research identifies systemic invisibility as a barrier, discussed later in this chapter, but it is unclear whether further visibility on campus would reduce the sense of isolation and loneliness if this provision draws these students further out of their personal lives, a point at which some of the tensions and isolation arise. Thus,

further up-close research into these students' experiences and their decision making could be beneficial to further understanding the nature of this barrier for CCS students.

3.3.4 Childcare

Childcare is a core barrier for student parents which can influence how they experience other barriers. For example, student parents can depend on childcare to provide time and space to study but are guided by the levels of childcare they can afford. When this is not available or affordable, these students become reliant on informal sources of support such as friends and family, patterns which are echoed across numerous pieces of research (Hinton-Smith, 2012b, pp. 122–146; Marandet & Wainwright, 2010, pp. 798–799; Moreau & Kerner, 2013, p. 7; NUS, 2009, pp. 57–66; Wainwright & Marandet, 2010, pp. 457–458) and demonstrate the complex, interconnected web that these barriers form.

Childcare is represented across research as either unaffordable, inconvenient, in short supply or unreliable. For example, only 11 per cent of student parents surveyed by the NUS said that they received enough funding to cover their childcare costs, which can be laden with hidden costs such as extra travel, retainers and registration fees (NUS, 2009, p. 57). Moreover, formal childcare such as crèches, nurseries or childminders did not meet these students' needs, often offering only fixed-term provision and inflexible contracts which do not provide the informal "drop-off" care that these students need to meet changing timetables and deadlines, leading 79 per cent of student parents to report frequent reliance on family and friends (NUS, 2009, p. 58). When care arrangements work well for these students, they prove invaluable; however, they are presented by researchers as "fragile" and susceptible to collapse at short notice, with women being expected to be constantly available for care work (Moreau & Kerner, 2013, p. 7).

The nature of childcare provision can also affect how student parents see themselves as providing for their children and act as a further source of guilt. Students express concern over

whether they are "good" parents – a standard influenced by notions of intensive parenting (Hinton-Smith, 2012b, p. 82; Moreau & Kerner, 2013, p. 6; Wainwright & Marandet, 2010, p. 460). This worry has the potential to exacerbate problems of isolation or poor mental health for these students. Care work can be conceptualised in a similar way to the demands of academia: both spaces can be "greedy", with the potential to be a better student or parent presented as being achievable with more time, energy or effort, which can lead to guilt and a sense of inadequacy if this is not possible (Hinton-Smith, 2012, pp. 81–86; Moreau & Kerner, 2013, p. 6).

The issue of being a 'good' parent or 'good' student recalls the dichotomies between the 'public' and the 'private' domain of care and variability of institutions taking responsibility for this, as reflected in their different levels of childcare provision. For instance, studies show that some institutions require students to seek written permission to bring their children onto campus (Marandet & Wainwright, 2010, p. 796). Other institutions are more accommodating and provide on-campus crèche facilities, which make an immense difference to some students in facilitating time management and routines (Moreau & Kerner, 2013, p. 7). Provision on campuses is in short supply: 87 per cent of student parents surveyed by the NUS had received no information about on-campus childcare, and places are not guaranteed for students at on-campus facilities, as they are also used by staff, and space is thereby limited (NUS, 2009, p. 63).

The impact of childcare provision can also vary by discipline; for example, those students with placements such as Nursing often have a more problematic experience sourcing adequate childcare (NUS, 2009, p. 63) than postgraduate or humanities students with low contact hours and, therefore, greater flexibility (Moreau & Kerner, 2013, p. 8). Furthermore, university childcare has increasingly been subject to closure following cost-cutting exercises at many institutions, which makes provision in the UK yet more variable and limited (Moreau, 2012).

Cumulatively, decisions to close on-campus childcare speak to the systemic invisibility of these students who may be under-represented and under-acknowledged in these decision-making processes yet experience the personal consequences of the decisions taken. Whether or not an institution provides childcare is explicit in current research; however, insight is missed in terms of how this decision is reached and the impact on the daily decision making by CCS students about childcare as a result. Thus, further research which seeks to understand the nature and location of institutional decision-making processes and the impact these have on CCS Student could be beneficial in further understanding their experiences.

3.3.5 Health & mental wellbeing

Despite the rising profile of student mental health (Brown, 2016), only a few studies have given this barrier – together with physical health and wellbeing – explicit consideration in the context of student parents to illustrate the health consequences of study on these students, partly caused by institutionally-mediated factors. Time constraints, for example, often lead to respondents reporting high levels of physical exhaustion and sleep deprivation (Moreau & Kerner, 2013, p. 11), while a pervading sense of guilt about lack of time and care provision acts as a stressor for these students with the potential to impact their mental health and wellbeing (Hinton-Smith, 2012b, p. 82; Moreau & Kerner, 2013, pp. 11–12). Alternatively, health can be presented as a site of vulnerability, particularly for lone parents, with some deferring or refusing medical treatment for fear of the consequences for their children or the risk they have invested in study; one parent even refused reconstructive surgery following breast cancer, finding it hard to justify the non-essential risk (Hinton-Smith, 2012b, p. 165).

To expand on this literature, further research could help to explore the extent to which CCS students benefit from support from student services. This barrier may align with services provided to all students, such as those by campus doctors and counsellors, or facilities such as sports centres, which have concerned themselves with improving the physical and mental

wellbeing of students. However, what is not clear is the extent to which the student parents who experience these barriers benefit from such services, and, thus, how accurately it can be claimed that these services meet the needs of all students. Thus, further research could be beneficial which helps to understand the ways in which students manage their health and wellbeing in their daily lives and the way in which, if at all, institutional infrastructure helps students to do this.

3.3.6 Systemic invisibility

A pattern emerges across existing research that student parents are presented as systemically invisible or in a minority, which compounds the difficulties they face. In the first instance, it is not currently known exactly how many student parents there are in UK higher education, as universities are not required to collect this data for the purposes of reporting to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) (NUS, 2009, p. 3) and do not generally collect this data at all (Marandet & Wainwright, 2013, p. 789). However, according to the Student Income and Expenditure Survey, student parents comprise 8 per cent of full-time and 36 per cent of part-time students in England (Moreau & Kerner, 2013, p. 4).

Systemic invisibility is reported across numerous studies (Marendet & Wainwright, 2013; Moreau & Kerner, 2013; NUS, 2009), principally manifested in notions of absence. However, two researchers do explicitly articulate the ways in which institutionally orchestrated practices specifically mediate this invisibility (Brooks, 2012a, 2012b; Moreau, 2016). Moreau (2016) makes explicit the way in which allegedly neutral ways of providing support to 'all students' can, in fact, lead to the othering of student parents and a failure to acknowledge their "full academic citizenship" (Moreau, 2016, p. 11). Moreau demonstrates three approaches to providing services to student parents. The first of these, the "universal" or "careblind" approach, which was adopted by most institutions in the study, makes no explicit acknowledgment of student parents apart from occasional references, such as in mitigation

examples or in health and safety policy to forbid children from campus (Moreau, 2016, pp. 9–10). This approach goes to the heart of how I opened this thesis – namely, by problematising the extent to which universities purporting to meet the needs of the generic "all students" do this by homogenizing 'all students' as care-free "bachelor boys" seen in other studies (Hinton-Smith, 2012b). Some universities provide alternatives to this in the form of the second approach, which Moreau terms "targeted" and which features explicit provision for student parents, such as policies, additional grants or childcare (Moreau, 2016, pp. 10–11). This approach, too, has the potential for othering these students by its explicit differentiating between student parents and all other students (Moreau, 2016, pp. 10–11). The third approach, "mainstreaming", provides an exception to careblind and targeted approaches by working to integrate targeted approaches into the natural operation of the university; however, this approach was only seen in a minority of institutions (Moreau, 2016, p. 10). This study questions the accuracy of HE policies alleged outcomes but goes further than other studies, as I seek to in this thesis, by not only highlighting the material inequalities in the provision of HE to student parents but also making explicit the significance of institutional cultures in understanding these students' experiences.

Brooks' research provides further evidence of the complex cultural nature of the systemic invisibility of student parents by making a cross-national comparison of universities in the UK with those in Denmark and demonstrating the way in which cultural values and ideologies account for how these students are treated within institutions (Brooks, 2012a, 2012b). For example, Brooks contrasts the UK's provision for student parents with that of Denmark, as characterized in Table 3.1 below, which summarizes the differences in support between the two countries. Brooks demonstrates how culture and ideology markedly influence policy and practice climates in HE and shows how "the influence of neo-liberalist individualisation within the UK has tended to erase the significance of structural inequalities, with the effect of making

student parents believe that any difficulties they face are a result primarily of personal failures"

(Brooks, 2012b, p. 242). This cultural and ideological influence on policy and practice could

benefit from further exploration to understand not just the material but the cultural factors

which contribute to the potential inequities CCS students experience.

	UK	Denmark
Financial support	All students pay tuition fees (loan available to cover this). Maintenance grant payable to those on low incomes; loans available for other students. Some dedicated funding for student-parents on low incomes or in financial difficulty: Access to Learning Fund, Childcare Grant, Parents' Learning Allowance.	No tuition fees payable. Government grants for all undergraduate students. Additional maternity and paternity grants for student-parents (12 months and 6 months, respectively). Salary for PhD students (equivalent to junior lecturer).
Parental leave	No automatic right to leave in all institutions. Often at the discretion of academic staff.	All students entitled to take this; funded by additional grant (see above).
Flexible modes of study	At the discretion of academic staff. Often not offered.	HEIs required to provide this by the state. Incentivised by payments to institutions for all students who complete their degree.
Childcare provision	Varies by institution. Some universities provide nurseries and/or crèches, others do not. Reasonably high coverage of childcare, generally, but expensive.	University provision varies. Extensive provision, generally, by state, at low cost.

Table 3.1. Table from Brooks (2012b, p. 427): Sources of support for student parents in the

UK and Denmark

3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the extent to which CCS students appeared in existing

literature. In opening this chapter, I highlighted how CCS students is a definition I have chosen

to adopt for this research with the aim of being more inclusive and specific in talking about the

experience of students who care for children. In so doing, I highlighted how these students

rarely appear in literature in explicit ways, often found either within American literature, which

focuses on providing support services (Lester & Sallee, 2009), or graduate students'

experiences (Springer, Parker, & Leviten-Reid, 2009). Furthermore, in UK literature, CCS

students can also be seen in studies of gender (Moss, 2004, 2006; Quinn, 2003) or mature or part-time students (Reay, Ball, & David, 2002) rather than as the focus of research. A relatively small body of literature does exist which explores UK CCS students' experiences focusing on student parents' experiences. From a review of this literature, I highlight that six key barriers have emerged which can pose problems for these students' participation, which I summarize below.

Time and space to study for student parents is a common barrier in the literature (Brooks, 2012a; Hinton-Smith, 2012a, 2012b; Marandet & Wainwright, 2010; Moreau & Kerner, 2013; NUS, 2009). This would often follow stereotypical gender roles and see female students sacrifice personal time for study or to keep on top of domestic labour in addition to their care work for children. While institutional factors like short notice in the production of timetables and their amendments or changing deadlines would compound the difficulty in finding time and space to study (Hinton-Smith, 2012b, p.67-69; Marandet & Wainwright, 2010, p. 796; NUS, 2009, p.29). The issues of time and space, however, is often framed as a private domain issue, meaning that, while the institutional barriers are presented, there is little up-close research which specifically considers how the institutional setting shapes the day-to-day lives of students who care for children while studying, which would benefit from further exploration to understand the problem with which this thesis contends.

Finances provided another barrier and specifically focused on the daily costs of study rather than on fees. Here, many of the students are shown to be under constant pressure, reducing expenditure, going without food, and accumulating personal debt (Gerrard & Roberts, 2006; Hinton-Smith 2016). When additional funding is available, it is often difficult to access and inadequate compared to actual need (Hinton Smith, 2016, p.213; Moreau & Kerner, 2013, p.9). This leaves students dependent on informal support from friends and family, which is variable and reflects their personal circumstances (Hinton-Smith, 2016, p.213). It is unclear in

existing research if additional financial support alone would help these students or make it easier for them to fit into existing patterns of institutional activity and mask their specific needs as carers for children. Furthermore, up-close research into the decision-making processes CCS students engage with in connection with their finances would elaborate on this and the problem with which this thesis is concerned.

Combining factors from the previous two barriers, personal relationships can also prove difficult to maintain for student parents in existing research. Many feel isolated and lonely (Hinton-Smith, 2012b, pp. 169–176; Marandet & Wainwright, 2010, p. 799; Moreau & Kerner, 2013, p. 12; Wainwright & Marandet, 2010, p. 458;), and few are able to engage in the social activities of the university, such as clubs and societies (NUS, 2009, p.36). Furthermore, support can be siloed on campus so that, when it does exist, it is targeted toward mature students, despite not all student parents being mature students (Moreau & Kerner, 2013, p. 4). While this research reports on this barrier, what is not covered is up-close study which helps to understand how this isolation is manifested within an institutional setting in these students' daily lives, which is key to understanding how this barrier could be remedied.

Childcare is a further barrier shown to be either unaffordable, inconvenient, short-term, or unreliable (Hinton-Smith, 2012b, pp. 122–146; Marandet & Wainwright, 2010, pp. 798–799; Moreau & Kerner, 2013, p. 7; NUS, 2009, pp. 57–66; Wainwright & Marandet, 2010, pp. 457–458). Childcare can also impact a student's sense of self as a good parent or not (Marandet & Wainwright, 2010, p. 796), while placements and the structures of programmes within different disciplines and the provision of on campus childcare (Moreau & Kerner, 2013, p. 7; NUS, 2009, p. 63) also impact this barrier. The specific ways in which the broader institutional setting of being at university shapes students' decisions about childcare on a day-to-day basis is less clear due to the short survey and interview outcome-reporting nature of the data. Again,

further research which considers students' decision making in this context would be beneficial to help understand the ways in which universities could respond better to this barrier.

Demonstrating the cumulative effects of the previous barriers, mental and physical well-being is given some consideration in the specific context of literature on student parents (Hinton-Smith, 2012b, p.82; Moreau & Kerner, 2013, p.11-12). Here, it can be seen that the high stress levels caused by factors such as finances and personal relationships, alongside deprioritising self-care such as time for leisure, being able to afford full meals, and postponing medical procedures, are all common aspects to being a student parent. Research which increases knowledge of this barrier and the way in which the institutional setting impacts CCS students' ability to maintain their health and mental well-being could be beneficial, considering how universities could respond.

Across all these barriers is a cumulative impression of the systemic invisibility of student parents within HE institutions which is picked up frequently in existing literature (Brooks, 2012b; Hinton-Smith, 20212b; Marandet & Wainwright, 2013; Moreau, 2016; Moreau & Kerner, 2013). This can be seen from the fundamental absence of these students from statistical monitoring and reporting (NUS, 2009, p. 3) to the way in which support can be 'careblind' or formulated in other ways which minimise the acknowledgement of a student's 'caring status' (Moreau, 2016, p.10-11). Furthermore, cross-national comparison research highlights the way in which the UK HE system has a neoliberal culture which can be seen to position individual student parents as consumers in a marketplace who are personally responsible for barriers they face, even when they are the result of entrenched patterns of institutional inequality (Brooks, 2012b, p. 242). This demonstrates a core aspect of the problem this thesis seeks to explore, which would benefit from further up-close research into how and why these patterns of inequality exist.

In taking each of the barriers student parents experience in existing literature in turn, I have thus shown in this chapter their time at university can be problematic in deeply complex and interconnected ways. What is unclear from existing research is the extent to which the institutional experience shapes CCS students' day-to-day lives. While the literature highlights that these students' lives have the potential to be problematic and experience barriers, the low number of accounts of their up-close experience within the institution means that it is unclear the extent to which the institutional setting specifically shapes and mediates their barriers because of these students' status as 'carers'. The presence of barriers in existing literature suggests that there is an inequity in CCS students' experiences of being at university, but further research is needed to understand the specific nature and role – or not – of the institutional policies and practices in manifesting inequity in these experiences. This thesis will, therefore, explore this further through the following research aims:

- To illuminate and develop our understanding of the experiences of students who care for children while studying at university;

- To explore the extent to which the institutional policy context supports these students to participate in HE while at this university.

In so doing, this research will seek to achieve the following objectives:

- To conduct an up-close study in order to develop a deeper understanding of the experiences of students who care for children while studying at university and identify the barriers experienced by these students at a single institution;

- To identify any barriers to these students' participation and understand their causes and make institutional or policy recommendations which could support these students to achieve equity of student experience.

I intend to deliver on these aims and objectives by trying to answer the following research questions across this thesis:

- What are the experiences of students who care for children while studying at university?

- How – if at all – are the experiences of these students shaped and mediated by institutional policies and documents?

- What do these accounts suggest about the extent to which these students are part of the policy and practice focus and beneficiaries of supporting participation in HE because of their status as 'carers'?

Having established these aims, objectives and research questions, in Chapter Four, I will move on to outline my methodology for approaching them.

Chapter 4: Researching students who care for children while studying: a methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an outline of the methodological approach and the method utilised in this research. The first section introduces the considerations I have given in planning my research to my worldview and positioning myself ontologically and epistemologically in relation to this study. In the second section, I discuss the methodological approach I have chosen – Institutional Ethnography (Smith, 2005, 2006) – and its appropriateness to addressing the aims and objectives of my research. In the following sections, I turn to the research design, discussing my method, recruitment of participants and a summary of those who participated. Following this, I explore my approach to data analysis and articulate how I was led by the CCS students accounts in the development of the themes and theorisation I employed, before providing definitions of how the theories I utilised are understood and defined, moving on in the penultimate section to discuss the ethical considerations that went into my work, with a specific focus on the role reflexivity plays in managing these considerations and the relationship my analysis has with validity. Finally, I draw this chapter to a close by providing vignettes of the student and staff participants in my study, providing more specific understanding of their background. In so doing, I end this chapter having established my overarching methodological approach toward the data I discuss in the subsequent chapters.

4.2 Worldview: epistemology and ontology

The process of establishing my epistemology and ontology is both a philosophical and a personal one. In my ontology, I view the world in terms which encompass its complexity and diversity; my worldview is informed by the sense that very few – if any – aspects of our being can be understood in black-and-white definition. I find my perspective reflected in a quotation from Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (Atwood, 1985) when the protagonist, a

subjugated woman in a dystopian future, reflects on her position in society prior to the new world order: "We were the people who were not in the paper. We lived in the blank white spaces at the edge of the print. It gave us more freedom. We lived in the gaps between the stories" (Atwood, 1985, pp. 66–7). I cite this to highlight my belief that, when claims are made which seek to reflect knowledge of the world, whether carefully articulated and caveated or polemic and definitive or not, there is always something partially or completely undescribed; there is always someone or something left in the "blank white spaces". The world, in my interpretation, can therefore be characterized as complex, messy and multifaceted.

The consequence of this worldview for my research is that I do not seek to present a definitive picture of what is the student experience for all students who Care for Children while Studying (CCS). My research is limited in that it will only be able to describe and discuss the particular slice of experience presented in this study. Thus, in designing a piece of research, I am aware that any conclusions drawn should come with caveats, such as that my findings may not be shared by studies of other CCS students at other institutions and/or at different times – though, equally, it may be that they are.

In seeking a philosophical perspective which helps to articulate in more detail this ontology and its consequences for my epistemology, I align myself with *bricolage*, from the French verb *bricoleur*, referring to a pragmatic handyman who makes use of the tools available to them to get the job done (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 680). *Bricolage*, thus, embraces the notion that the world is a complex and messy place and suggests that knowledge is not authentically produced if it does not embrace this messiness. For the *bricoleur*, therefore, the method should emerge in response to the task of conducting a study; rather than imposing a pre-determined method on the topic, the researcher is well-informed about a range of alternative approaches and selects from these pragmatically.

The *bricoleur* as researcher epistemologically problematises notions that there is a particular way to do research and questions "the status of the mainstream, rigorous and codified qualitative methods" (McLeod, 2011, p. 10) or the "guardians of research purity" (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 341). For the *bricoleur*, these guardians suggest that these approaches devalue the individual and subjective experience in the articulation of specific criteria for "real research", which Kincheloe suggests confuses "narrow-mindedness with high standards" (Kincheloe, 2005 p. 341). Accordingly, the:

> bricoleur is influenced by both postmodern thinking (the erosion of "grand narratives" and privileged perspectives) and the experience of conducting ethnographic research. There are many ways in which ethnographic inquiry demands that the researcher deploys whatever strategies, methods or empirical materials as are at hand to get the job done (McLeod, 2011, p. 12).

Bricolage, therefore, aligns with how I have already positioned myself as a researcher. In problematising the policy landscape through the core puzzle I raise in the introduction to this thesis, I challenge the capacity of some of the grand narratives of policy to describe the experiences of "all" students. Furthermore, *bricolage* aligns to my suggestion that the close-up experiences of CCS students are required to further understand these students' experiences from the gaps in current knowledge and my choices discussed later in this chapter to adopt an Institutional Ethnographic approach. Such an approach promotes the collection of qualitative data from a variety of methods 'to get the job done' – not merely the observational data, from ethnography's anthropological origins, but textual and interview data – in order to create rich probing descriptive data.

As a *bricoleur*, I aim to be, as I have articulated throughout this thesis, "intellectually informed, widely read, and cognizant of diverse paradigms of interpretation" (Kincheloe, 2005 p. 327). Thus, in the development of my aims, objectives and research questions, I seek to "ask informed questions developing complex concepts, construct alternative modes of reasoning and provide unprecedented interpretations of the data they generate" (Kincheloe, 2005 p. 339).

Accepting that my ontology and epistemology aligns with *bricolage*, I also seek to work in "the margins and liminal spaces between both formal knowledge, and what has been proposed as boundary knowledge, knitting them together, forming new consciousness" (Lincoln, 2001, p. 694). Thus, in positioning myself as a *bricoleur*, I suggest that knowledge becomes conceived not within a competitive framework which considers one approach more or less valid than another but in the form of a patchwork quilt, messy and disorganized, forming a blanket with the ability to expand almost indefinitely – the whole represents our collective knowledge while each piece of research forms a single patch.

In the current policy environment, of which this thesis is seeking to problematise aspects, as discussed in Chapter Two, there is a more recent tendency to support more positivistic research and evaluation approaches. This is seen, for instance, in the way in which the 'What Works' agenda has grown in relevance, informing the Office for Students Evidence and Impact Exchange (OFS, 2018c). The critique such approaches have received is focused around the way in which "experimental and quasi-experimental designs" are being used in "complex social fields", undermining efforts to 'prove' the effectiveness of certain interventions (Harrison & McCaig, 2017, p. 290).

My positioning could, however, be questioned, in such an environment where more positivist mythologies are prioritised, privileged and influential, due to a perceived lack of trustworthiness or generalisability. In part, this is an issue which I address later in this chapter through my discussion of 'validity'; yet, in response to this, in the context of my epistemological and ontological positioning, I have two reflections to make. Firstly, I see research as a very personal and subjective task and, in being clear and honest about my epistemological and ontological positioning, I believe I am – and my research is – inherently more honest, trustworthy and authentic as a result. This is a point I will go on to explore in

more detail later in this chapter, as I go on to discuss my reflexivity and the autobiography of the question (Miller, 1995).

Secondly, my positioning is also consistent with the core puzzle with which this thesis is concerned and from which the aims, objectives and research questions have been distilled, and, in so doing, I would argue my research has a coherence which empowers its trustworthiness. I am in this research concerned with giving voice to a group that has the potential to fall between the cleft created between the policy lens of Higher Education (HE) Widening Participation (WP) policy on the one hand and equalities legislation on the other. It is reasonable, therefore, to infer that one of the reasons these students may fall between the gaps in policy focus could in part be due to the tendency of positivist approaches, embraced by policy makers, to quantify and categorise individuals into singular groups for the purposes of analysis. If my argument has been that such groupings of students and approaches which encourage this singular grouping should be questioned and problematised, my epistemological and ontological positioning appears suitable to the task. To make such a critique and then feel obliged to embrace popular or conventional ontologies would have the potential to introduce an epistemological and ontological schizophrenia where such muddled thinking could fundamentally question the integrity of my research.

4.3 Methodological approach

In this research, I use an Institutional Ethnography (IE) approach (Smith, 2002, 2005, 2006). This approach aligns with my *bricolage*-inspired epistemology and ontology since it does not promote a specific orthodoxy of method. In fact, Smith is keen to avoid the establishment of a "how-to-do-it" guide in her writing (Smith, 2006, p. 1), appreciating instead the messy and subjective nature of knowledge production. Many individual IE studies differ from each other in terms of methods and the variety of issues they engage with, including: immigration policy (Nichols, 2008), elementary schools (Smith, 2006) and management

accountant practices in universities (McCoy, 2014). In fact, many IE studies feature methods and techniques which may not typically be found in other forms of ethnography; these include interviews (Smith, 2002, p. 26), which form a core part of the methods used in many IE studies.

Despite this variety and unorthodoxy of methods, studies which adopt an IE approach are united in their acknowledgement and use of the same principles. These principles guide their research design, shaping factors such as how to collect data and how to understand both the experiences of participants and the way in which an institution's settings can shape these experiences. Accordingly, IE aligns with the aim of my study: 'To explore the extent to which the institutional policy context supports these students to participate in HE while at this university'. IE's basis as immersive ethnography from the anthropological tradition has the potential to help deliver on the objectives to support the 'up-close' study of CCS students' experience, which, through my literature review, appears to be a gap which has shaped my research questions and the other aim of my study: 'To illuminate and develop our understanding of the experiences of students who care for children while studying at university'. I will now engage with some of the core concepts of the IE approach, including standpoint, *work*, *texts* (and their activation), demonstrating how this approach aligns with my thesis and shapes and informs my research design.

4.3.1 Standpoint and work

For the institutional ethnographer, people are at the centre of how knowledge about an institution is brought to life. An institution such as a university does not exist without people going about their "everyday/everynight" lives (Smith, 2002, p. 18) and bringing the institution to life through social interaction. As Smith argues, in IE:

> Inquiry begins where people are and proceeds from there to discoveries that are for them, for us, of the workings of a social that extends beyond any one of us, bringing our local activities into coordination with those of others (Smith, 2006, p. 3)

This already aligns with my *bricolage*-inspired epistemological and ontological foundations, with IE sharing the understanding that knowledge is messy and suggesting that, like the *bricoleur*, researchers in IE become "discoverers" (Smith, 2002, p. 27). IE researchers must learn and develop through every form of data collection, accepting that it may fall outside the devised framework to understand it. For example, Smith reflects, when engaging in interviews as an institutional ethnographer, even when using the same questions and prompts "in our dialogue with our respondents, our thinking was changed and sometimes in ways that were only contingently related to the planned relevancies that guided interview topics" (Smith, 2002, p. 27).

Institutional ethnographers, thus, value the adoption of a *standpoint* in data collection, used to document and understand the creation of social exchanges within an institution. This concept of standpoint as "the design of a subject position in institutional ethnography creates a point of entry into discovering the social that does not subordinate the knowing subject to objectified forms of knowledge" (Smith, 2005, p. 10). In order to deliver on my aims and objectives, the standpoint would become CCS students, whose own understanding of the institution I prioritise and value. I am more interested, therefore, in acquiring rich and thick qualitative data about their experiences, in line with my epistemology and ontology. Through this standpoint, I am seeking to capture "the language in which people speak of what they know how to do, of their experience, and of how they get things done" (Smith, 2002, p. 22). In order to achieve this, IE introduces the concept of *work*.

The IE concept of *work*[3] as a means of understanding the standpoint experience is conceptually deeper than merely the tasks that the participant goes about in their employment.

---

[3] As 'work' is a ubiquitous and generally non-technical word for clarity throughout this thesis, it is presented in italics when specifically referencing the usage as a conceptual tool in institutional ethnography.

Here, *work* is understood as the standpoint participants' experience of living their "everyday/night' lives. This conception is relevant to the subjects of my research, as their everyday/night lives reflect the "greedy" nature of both care and study (as highlighted in Chapter Three) since both endeavours lack concrete beginning and end times and can be constant. Smith is clear that, in capturing accounts of such *work* from participants, IE is not seeking to establish or evaluate their ability or competency (Smith, 2002, p. 46). Applying this to my research context, I am not assessing how good the standpoint participants are at being student carers; if this were the case, it would run fundamentally counter to my ontological and epistemological positioning by assuming that there is a particular way to be a CCS student. It would also perpetrate a degree of disrespect toward my participants by suggesting that I am in a position to judge them as "good" or "bad".

By conceiving of *work* as the standpoint participants' experience of how they go about their lives, I am, as an institutional ethnographer, seeking to understand how the institutional setting shapes this *work*. As Smith suggests, "the articulation of the social organizes multiple layers of diverging locations that are mediated to people through their activities, and people's activities themselves organize perspectives that diverge in the very process of concerting" (Smith, 2002, p. 22). Thus, accounts of *work* in this form have the potential to create a set of data in which the actual experience of individuals within institutional settings can be disentangled from the rhetoric of what institutional processes seek to deliver.

The attempt to understand an institution through the *work* of a particular standpoint is deeply ingrained in my research questions. I am not aligning myself with an understanding of the institution dictated by its own policy and rhetoric but demonstrating that "the process of institutional organization is in what someone has to say about his or her work" (Smith, 2002, p. 26). In this way, an institutional ethnography provides a 'standpoints' interpretation of the institutional setting, and there may be disparities between the viewpoints of students and even

staff as a result of this. However, just as Nichols explains in her study, the role of institutional ethnography is to make visible the individual's experience and their 'local knowledge' of the institution. Hence "bringing this [the local knowledge] (and other processes) more clearly into view so that the knowledge can be utilised" (Nichols, 2008, p. 696) by those – such as the staff deeply embedded in the system – who can make use of and help improve the experience: in Nichols' case of 'the social services interface' (Nichols, 2008, p.696) provided to young refugees, and, in my case, the student experience and support services provided to CCS students.

The IE interpretation of institutional organisation is valuable, as it makes visible the public/private dichotomies of the *work* the standpoint participants engage in and contributes to an understanding of how the public domain of the institution impacts and shapes the private domain. In this way, the implications of what seems acceptable within the institution are made visible and can be addressed. While not an Institutional Ethnographer, Wenger (1998) identified through the concept of communities of practice how staff in organisations can develop approaches inconsistent with their behaviours outside work, which can have significant impacts on those they engage with. For instance, Wegner frames the introduction of his book with a discussion of American health insurance and the dehumanising work culture toward patients for claims adjusters (Wenger, 1998, pp.18-35). As an Institutional Ethnographer, via the standpoint of nursing home practitioner, Diamond was able to not only identify similar dehumanising practices but understand more about how these came into being and were mediated within the institution through the *work* and *texts* that govern the day-to-day life of being in a care home. As Diamond explains:

> Nursing assistant work, I found out, is far more complex than it is written about in charts. The experience is full of physical and emotional turmoil, and it is supressed. "If it's not charted, it didn't happen" read the sign above the nursing station. (Diamond, 2006, p.50)

The way in which this is seen within the standpoint of being a nursing assistant captures the problematic ways meaning is imbued into *texts*, which has the potential to dehumanise. As Diamond recounts of an experience discussing with a nurse how to log a patients eating habits:

> I pondered, "she is not very hungry at meal times. In the middle of the night though, when there's no food available it's a different story." "No, no. I'm not interested in any of that" she snapped, eyes riveted on the chart, and the boxes to be checked. "Is she 'independent', 'requires assistance', 'dependent on staff' or a 'tube feeder'? (Diamond, 2006, p.56)

It is this kind of rich insightful detail which could inform how CCS students' experience is brought to life which I wish to elicit as a departure from the methodological consistency of existing research discussed in Chapter Three. This is particularly important, as previous research into CCS students' experiences, such as by Brooks, shows how "structural inequalities" (Brooks, 2012b, p. 242) in the public domain of the university are appropriated by student parents as private domain "personal failures" (Brooks, 2012b, p. 242). Adopting the CCS standpoint in my research would give the opportunity to understand – as Nichols does of the young refugee and Diamond the nursing assistants – how such patterns as Brooks identified are able to manifest and, in establishing this 'local knowledge', create insight which could lead to change.

An Institutional Ethnographer can, on occasion, collect data from a non-standpoint participant; however, the collection of such data should not seek to validate or endorse the perspective of the standpoint but only add colour to our understanding of the institution. These interviews are guided by "providing a different perspective on the major themes that have emerged" (Smith, 2002, p. 26) from interviews with the standpoint participants. For example, Smith did this in her research on the experiences of single parents in schools, as she wanted to understand how schools responded to these parents and their children; this involved interviewing school administrators (Smith, 2006, p. 3). However, these interviews come second to those of the standpoint and were not conducted in order to use the administrators'

accounts to refute the themes emerging from standpoint accounts. Instead, these additional interviews offer colour and context which, when they are analysed alongside those of the standpoint, give insight into the extent of the awareness of the standpoint's perspective within the wider institution.

4.3.2 Texts and their activation

The next key group of concepts that inform the IE approach is the role of *texts* and their *activation* in the standpoint participants' accounts of their *work*, in order to understand the *extra-local decision-making*. I will now expand on these concepts and demonstrate their significance to this research.

In IE, the institution is a mechanism for coordinating and constructing people's activities by developing "forms of consciousness – knowledge, information, facts, administrative and legal rules … that override individuals' perspectives" (Smith, 2002, pp. 22–23), which are borne out in the institution through *texts*. The institutional ethnographer adopts a very broad definition of the text, including any material "in a form that enables replication (paper/print, film, electronic, and so on) of what is written, drawn or otherwise reproduced" (Smith, 2002, p. 45). Reproduction is where the coordinating power of a text lies, as this is the way in which power is allowed to move around an institution. "This does not mean that every copy of every text is read in exactly the same way" (Smith & Turner, 2014, p. 5), and the text itself should, therefore, not be given agency (Smith & Turner, 2014, p. 9).

In this context, the text is subject to activation (Smith, 2005, p. 108; Smith & Turner, 2014, pp. 6, 9). This is characteristic of the belief that *texts* are not significant on their own but are brought to life by the standpoint participants and other actors in their *work* (Smith, 2006, p. 67; Smith & Turner, 2014, pp. 5–7). Accordingly, the text should be understood and incorporated by the researcher as part of people's experiences, as "they enter into and play their part in the ongoing sequences of action coordinating them with action going on at other places

or at other times" (Smith & Turner, 2014, p. 5). It is here then that *texts* are seen as a site of power; their introduction into one setting from another demonstrates the potential 'extra-local decision making' (Smith, 2006, p. 3), as power is attempted to be exerted from a different time and space through the contents of the text. However, the true 'ruling relations' (Smith, 2005, p. 10) at play come from bringing the text to life, as those interpreting the text exert their power and influence, appropriating new meanings to the text potentially counter-intuitive to aims of its original author.

Texts come into being through the process of activation, and this method of conceptualizing *texts* – an example here might be policies for student support – is useful in my thesis. While existing research establishes the nature of some of the support for CCS students (Moreau, 2016; NUS, 2009), it is through the exploration of activation that we can seek to comprehend the effects of these identified policies in the daily lives of these students – an image which is missing in existing research. For instance, an institution which, within Moreau's approach, might appear mainstreamed or careblind (Moreau, 2016, pp. 10–11) may, through close-up accounts of the standpoint participants' *work*, necessitate a reclassification. These accounts of *work* and policy activation may demonstrate that CCS students' experiences within a mainstreamed institution may be more problematic than within a careblind one. For instance the process of text activation in the apparently careblind institution may leave more space for interpretations which favour these students, while mainstreamed institutions with *texts* that recognize these students might explicitly either, in their activation of such *texts*, draw boundaries that inhibit CCS students' *work* through their specificity or not activate the *texts* at all.

Criticism could be levelled at the interpretation IE places on the role and value of *texts* and their activation, as policy could potentially influence students' experiences in ways that are not directly present in the standpoint, as unacknowledged, under-the-surface work of policy

which ostensibly supports students. However, this can be countered from two angles. Firstly, Burke and McManus' accounts of Arts admissions policies provide rich empirical evidence that equality policies which may not be in direct sight of students, embodied in consistent applicant interview forms, can be activated in deeply subjective ways counter-intuitive to the principles the policies seek to establish (Burke & McManus, 2011). Secondly, this way of understanding policy aligns with other interpretations such as those of Ball, who suggests that policy is the subject of "ad hocery" and is constantly "contested and changing, always in a state of "becoming", of "was" and "never was" and "not quite" (Ball, 1993, p. 11), and he, therefore, claims that policies and the discourses around them cannot be separated.

Furthermore, I would counter suggestions that a university could comply with the Equality Act (2010) but that this may not be directly observable in the standpoint's *work*. If policy is in place but is not active and there is no apparent/reported discrimination, there is little evidence that the policy is preventing discrimination – merely that discrimination in this space and time is not apparent or reported (i.e. no cause-and-effect relationship can be automatically established). If staff at an institution believe that a policy is preventing discrimination purely because cases are not being reported, this position may miss the fact that the nature of an act of discrimination itself may be such that it discourages all students experiencing it from activating the policy – for example, if these unreported cases of discrimination were perpetrated by the person responsible for handling such complaints.

To give credence in research to a policy which is not activated by analysing it can, at best, over-emphasize the significance of the policy and, at worst, lead to victim-blaming by suggesting that it is the victim's fault for not activating the policy in their experiences. It is these complex and problematic distributions of power and policy within institutions which IE seeks to make visible. Furthermore, making such complex and problematic patterns visible and understandable goes to the heart of the core puzzle with which I opened this thesis and my

objectives such as: 'To identify any barriers to these students' participation and understand their causes and make institutional or policy recommendations which could support these students to achieve equity of student experience'. This has informed research questions which seek to establish both the experience of CCS students and the role of the institution in mediating these experiences. Cumulatively, this provides further support for my choice to use IE to inform the structure of my data collection.

Throughout this discussion, I have mapped the way in which an IE approach could help structure the data collection about the standpoint of this research and focus of this thesis. I will now go on to discuss the specific research design, influenced by this methodological approach, in the next section.

4.4 Research design

I was constrained in the design of my data collection by the need for ethical approval and by the practicalities of what was possible within part-time study. Institutional ethnography, in line with my *bricolage*-inspired ontology and epistemology, does not propose an orthodoxy of methods but, instead, promotes any methods which support the rich collection of data from the standpoint perspective (Smith, 2006, p. 1). To frame my research in a form of action research would have been challenging; although I work in HE, my contracts have been largely temporary, and I have changed roles several times since commencing my doctorate, meaning long-term contact with an institution or group of students in my employment was not possible. A form of IE framed in close-up action research, such as Nichols' study of the refugee systems in Canada (Nichols, 2008), might have provided richer data than that collected in my study, but my rapid employment moves together with ethical concerns – such as impacting the observed circumstance, providing for informed consent and maintaining anonymity – meant this was not possible. While this constraint prevented conflicts between my research and professional work, I do regret the absence of data in this study from, for example, the chance

to record or observe how mitigation forms were activated in the context of a one-to-one student support meeting and then transferred around the institution to other offices and committees, similarly to Nichols' following of refugee paperwork and processes (Nichols, 2008, p. 696).

My original research design had been to seek to trace all standpoint participants' experiences via two or three interviews throughout the data collection period while analysing *texts* which appeared in student participants' experiences, as well as making ethnographic observations while on campus. In addition, my plan had included interviews with staff to discuss anonymised patterns from these students' experiences – again, for the aforementioned purpose of seeking greater insight into the cultural context of their experiences but also to return to students and explore the patterns from the staff data anonymously. However, in the process of delivering this form of data collection, my design changed when, during the interviews and focus group phase, it became clear that the majority of the standpoint participants had formed very structured approaches to their lives as students, which they did not anticipate changing fundamentally over time. While the student participants were initially willing to participate in longer periods of research, when it came to scheduling a second interview, many felt that they had already shared their stories and had nothing more to add. While changes could happen, most students had already recounted how they managed – or had developed techniques to manage – their lives, which they continued to deploy. Second interviews, therefore, took two forms: firstly, for some standpoint participants from the focus group (see below), to add detail; and secondly, to follow up with interview participants where they felt appropriate. This meant I did not have the opportunity to discuss patterns in the staff data with students. Staff interviews were broad with questions seeking institutional context and detail of their experiences of working with CCS students as well as some of the themes which had appeared in the standpoint data.

4.4.1 Research context

Data was collected for this research during the 2013/14 and 2014/15 academic years at one institution, a traditional research university based in the North of England – called in this study the North University. The North University enjoyed high league table status in a number of national and international rankings and had an established reputation for both teaching and research. On average, between 29,000-34,000 students are enrolled at the university each year. The institution is campus-based and contained in a central city location, including halls of residences and housing both on and off campus for students. While the North University had held a traditional faculty and schools structure, possessing a degree of federal autonomy, there had been greater centralisation in the university in recent years, and the prominence of centrally run and controlled "student support" services had grown. Other notable features included a large and well-resourced student union with advice centres, catering and social space, gyms, medical centres, counselling services, student support offices, campus childcare, and dedicated disability, equality and diversity offices.

4.4.2 Methods of data collection

Although in the literature review the extant use of semi-structured interviews in student parent research was critiqued, this has nonetheless formed one of the primary methods of data collection in this study. However, what make this research is different compared to other studies is the way in which these interviews are enacted in line with the institutional ethnographic approach. For instance by the way in which CCS student bring *texts* into the interview and explore these as a locus of their *work*, the interview acquires a unique dimension driven by the students, compared to previous research.

Interviews and focus groups were conducted in a conversational style, which sought to gain rich data about these students' experiences. The prompt sheets used in student and staff interviews can be found in Appendix One. The aim of these interviews was to elicit the richest image possible of each student participant's experiences, and I was, therefore, often guided by

the participant as to the topics and areas they wished to discuss and focus on. This research sought to give the standpoint participants space to authentically articulate their experiences rather than imposing a structured set of questions. My interjections and prompts were used only to either elicit more details or provide a clarification or summary of the point they had made, to ensure that I had understood them correctly, or to capture specific information about any *texts* referenced in the student's account. As shown in Appendix One, the prompts given to staff were slightly different, as they included follow-ups informed by broad patterns recalled from student interviews.

The second form of data collection used with standpoint participants was document analysis within the semi-structured interviews. In line with the IE approach and the discussion of the role of *texts* above, I focused on understanding *texts* from the standpoint participants when they appeared in their interview narratives and became activated in their accounts of their experience of the *work* of being a CCS student. I discussed the *texts* which appeared in the students' accounts with them, focusing on the principle that *texts* which are activated in the standpoint participants' experiences are those which carry power and influence over these experiences. I consciously did not seek to find *texts* within the institution, separate from the students accounts of activated *texts*, which *could* influence these students' experiences but were not present within them. This approach is consistent with other institutional ethnographies, such as Diamond's use of *texts* in a US care home (Diamond, 2006) or Nichols' exploration in the immigration experiences of young people in Canada (Nichols, 2008). While IE studies are usually conducted in areas such as health or government services, in North America, there has been some limited use in higher education. An example is by McCoy (McCoy, 2014), where she has looked at the role of financial *texts* in shaping deans' decision making and 'makes visible the structural ways in which people's work is being reorganised" (McCoy, 2014, p.94) through the incorporation of *texts* to coordinate activity and experience. In this study, I take a

similar approach by paying attention to present and coordinating *texts* which shape peoples'

accounts of their experience, such as the university's student parent policy. Hence, I did not go

on to consider documents such as the institution's broader equality and diversity policies,

which at no point were raised or alluded to by either standpoint participants or staff.

The interviews and focus groups were recorded on a personal recording device, stored

securely and transcribed verbatim. When analysing the data, audio files were replayed to ensure

that the tone and emotion behind the transcription was understood accurately, and notes made

on this are discussed in the data analysis subsection below.

4.5 Recruitment

The student participants for my study were recruited via emails facilitated by gate-

keepers through announcements sent via university mailing lists (see Appendix Two). The

students' union also featured a permanent member of staff who worked directly with student

parent groups and included the call for participation in their newsletter. I utilised convenience

sampling, and, accordingly, my only criteria for participation were that students be one of the

primary caregivers in their household while studying, in any mode (i.e. full-time/part-time) and

at any level of study (i.e. undergraduate, postgraduate). Initially, 32 students came forward, of

whom 16 chose to participate in the research. An implication of such convenience sampling

may be that there is a greater presence of PhD students than Masters or undergraduates, and,

while I opted to use the broader definition of CCS students, all but one student was, in fact, a

parent, as can be seen in Appendix Three. This form of sampling is consistent with my

epistemological and ontological positioning, as I have not, through this sampling, sought to

manufacture a neatness or orderliness by being proactively "representative" to the sample of

CCS which may be a false presentation of the 'messy' and complicated truth of the CCS student

experience.

All replies to the call were sent directly to me rather than the gate-keepers, which meant that gate-keepers did not have the opportunity to influence the selection of standpoint participants, which further helped support the anonymity of participation. The use of gate-keepers may have had the potential to influence participation, with students either not reading or discarding the call for participation because of their opinion of the gate-keeper. However, the diversity of opinion and experience from the students who participated would suggest that such bias is not apparent in the sample.

Staff participants were recruited via individual emails directly from me, following a search of the institution's websites and directories. I sought to contact staff who had a focus on working in student support roles or roles which coordinated pastoral support. Only a small sample was sought, as the focus of this study, in line with the IE approach (Smith, 2005, 2006), was the standpoint participants: students who care for children while studying. The staff interviewed were not directly connected to the student participants but instead provide a perspective on the wider culture and perspectives across the wider institution of CCS students at the North University. Appendix Three shows six staff interviewed who were from a variety of roles at different levels within the institution, including senior leadership, academic, and professional student support staff. This sample was, by no means, exhaustive but guided by my methodological approach to understand more about the institutional context of the standpoint participants' experiences. This echoes a similar application of IE by Smith, who, in looking at single mothers' (standpoint) experiences of US high schools, interviewed a small sample of school administrators alongside the standpoint participants for context (Smith, 2005, pp. 151–155).

4.6 Participants

The 16 standpoint participants in this study comprised of a diverse mix of students who care for children while studying. Appendix Three presents a table with the core demographic

information of each participant, while the final section of this chapter provides more detailed vignettes. While I chose the term "students who care for children while studying" rather than simply "student parents", all but one standpoint participant (Martin, a grandfather with a social services care order for his grandchild) in the study was the mother or father of the child they were caring for. This fact does not render the distinction I made between student parents and other students who care for children invalid, and Martin, for example, is evidence that the population of students who care for children can be more diverse.

The disciplines in which standpoint participants studied were also diverse with a balance of ten students from social science and arts backgrounds, five from physical environment science and medical subjects, and one from a WP foundation course. The physical environment science and medical subjects includes doctors and dentists as well as nurses, while social sciences includes only one student from the school of education. This sample, therefore, adds perspective to that seen in some research into student parents, where participants were mainly in "caring" subjects such as nursing or teaching (NUS, 2009, p. 11). Furthermore, 11 out of the 16 standpoint participants were full-time students, providing a different perspective to studies where student parents are witnessed as part of part-time or lifelong-learning routes of study (Reay, Ball & David, 2002). Despite the relative strengths and merit of the sample, there were some limitations which, ideally, I would have liked to gain insight into but was unable to – for instance, any differences in experience for disciplines unrepresented in the sample, including STEM and the natural sciences such as physics and chemistry and profession-facilitating subjects other than medicine, such as law. This limitation presents interesting opportunities for further research, such as similar close-up study of CCS students specifically in these disciplines.

In terms of demographic characteristics, such as gender, age and class, this study presents a pattern which is consistent with other research capturing some groups of student parents. In

terms of gender, there were four male participants, a slightly higher representation of male students than in other studies (Moreau & Kerner, 2013) but not necessarily representing a significant divergence from them – and, in fact, providing further support for the suggestion that the distribution of caring responsibilities perpetuates gender inequality. The mean age of students in this study was 33.7 years old, which, if taking the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) definition of mature students as those over 21 years old (UCAS, 2017), offers no immediate challenge to the assumption that CCS students are often mature students.

Social class is an aspect to which I give some attention, but this is not a central aspect of my approach. On self-reporting data, however, as captured in the interviews, most student participants considered themselves to be either working or middle class. I did not complete a systematic study of class, using measures such as postcode profiling, National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC) data or net household income, as the primary demographic focus here is care, not class. In line with my IE approach, I am more interested in the self-reporting value of class to the standpoint participants if and where this is signalled as a significant aspect of their experience, which, in this study, was limited. Where class was discussed by participants, it was brought forward by the standpoint participants, and, in relation to how they saw or described themselves – and, principally, only in Catherine's account. Catherine reflected on class explicitly – but in terms of how, by moving to a new house to attend university, she was pleased that her daughter had now entered a more diverse school – framed as a positive experience with a wider breadth of classes represented. For Catherine, class was framed in a material way, as the change had meant a move away from an upper middle-class environment for her daughter where 'Cath Kidston school bags' are no longer a priority. Class was not, however, reflected on as an issue for Catherine directly within the university or her account of her *work*.

In relation to ethnic diversity, this sample is biased toward the experiences of white ethnicities. This is an inadvertent consequence of convenience sampling and presents a limitation, as there is a possibility that this lack of ethnic diversity fails to capture patterns related to the complex intersectionality of race or gender and care. However, this could be an aspect of future research which seeks to purposefully sample the experiences of students from BME backgrounds to see if the patterns established across my research are experienced differently or similarly.

The demographics of the six staff participants are also detailed in Appendix Three; these participants were also recruited using convenience sampling, utilising a mailing list of staff built from the institutions publicly available online address book. As these staff participants are not the standpoint of this IE study, their sample is significantly smaller and provides a simple snapshot of staff experience. The gender balance is 50:50 female to male, and the sample is also 50:50 in academic to professional roles. There is a slight bias in these staff toward those who work in access courses or widening participation – a bias not reflected in the student sample. This is, again, a product of convenience sampling and of the fact that the nature of their work means that they are predisposed to take interest in this type of study and in CCS students. Further research as a part of a project that studies a particular discipline, such as the STEM idea mooted above, would represent an interesting opportunity to resolve this gap. However, as the vignettes toward the end of this chapter demonstrate, the sample does contain a cross-section of roles, including tutors, senior managers and student support staff, which brings together experience of local, faculty and central university policies.

4.7 Data analysis

In analysing the data, I was primarily concerned with maintaining a rich and authentic reflection of the experiences of CCS students as they had recounted them to me. In transcribing and analysing the data from student interviews and focus groups, I used a foot pedal and NCH

transcription software to create verbatim transcripts in the first instance. I sought to avoid the possibility of dehumanising the transcript by re-listening to the audio recording while reading through the transcripts to add details to help to convey and capture the tone and attitude of the participants. While this opens up the possibility of my own subjectivity shaping the transcript, I discuss below in my ethical consideration the processes of reflexivity and positionality, which I deployed during such tasks in order to be aware of my own biases. As discussed in my epistemological and ontological positioning, all data is in some way subjective; engaging in this transcription, my focus was on ensuring the authenticity of the participants' voices and meaning.

It is possible that other tools during the transcription could have been deployed, such as to share my draft transcriptions back with participants; however, as identified in discussing my research design and the barriers CCS students face, as a group, they are largely time poor and rereading and providing comments on the transcript was an unrealistic expectation. Aware of this potential issue, I used techniques in the interviews such as repeating back to the participants a point they had made to ensure I had fully understood their position and allow them to correct me. Such points I also flagged during transcription and coding when I had concerns about ensuring the participant had been understood and to ensure, during analysis and citation, I did not lose sight of the participants' views or perspectives when their words are presented verbatim in the transcripts.

I adopted a manual approach to data analysis as opposed to utilizing software such as NVivo, which I believe, though systematic, could disconnect me from the data. Appendix Four shows a sample section of an analysed transcript and is notable for trying to retain the authenticity of the participant's voice – for example, in the way in which points such as laughter were captured as part of my transcription process as well as the use of parentheses to represent pauses or difficulty articulating a point. The transcript was overlaid with handwritten notes

from re-listening to the recording once the entire data set had been transcribed and reflective notes of the emotional tone displayed by the participant were made.

Following this initial stage of analysis, the transcripts were highlighted and coded to delineate data corresponding to the research questions, using highlighters, as also shown in Appendix Four. At this initial stage of coding, my reflections were also noted in the margins where the data either revealed experiences of any barriers from Chapter Three as well as the development of conceptual themes, patterns or significant markers of the IE methods, such as the activation of texts. Only five *texts* were analysed, as only these appeared in the standpoint participants' accounts. They included application forms and admissions, email mailing lists, websites, mitigation forms, and the university's student parent policy. *Texts* which appeared in the student participants' accounts of their experiences were also analysed. The *texts* were read side-by-side with the transcripts of the students and staff who had mentioned them or described their activation; the patterns of how *texts* were activated were noted, and the *texts* were highlighted to reflect points of connection or disconnection between the written word from the initial reading and the accounts of how the *texts* had been activated from standpoint participants.

The development of the theoretical framework in the analysis was led by the CCS students' accounts, in an inductive manner, influenced by grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), although this study was not a grounded theory, due in large part to the epistemological and ontological differences – which means, from opening this thesis, I have openly held a number of ideas about the landscape and issues which interplay CCS students experiences – which would be potentially considered as 'forcing' ideas on participants from a grounded theory approach (Glaser, 1992). The direction and process by which the key themes and theorisation emerged from a 'bottom-up' approach and was led by CCS student accounts, is similar to grounded theory due to its inductive nature, as represented in Figure 4.1 on the next

page. In the first instance following the coding process described above. I identified key themes from CCS students, as the standpoint participants, the accounts of their *work*, and the activation of *texts* – for example, barriers, concerns, and key texts which facilitated these, which are discussed in Chapters Five and Six, respectively. Not all students experienced all these themes or in the same way, as I go on to discuss in the presentation of the findings, and, accordingly, these themes are not experienced in the same way by all participants, reflective of the diversity of the CCS student experience.

As indicated in Figure 4.1, from the themes, I engaged in a first order of theorisation as a means of seeking to usefully organise and understand the patterns in the participants' data which illustrated these. From this approach, the data provided a growing body of evidence which could be understood using the three recurrent theories: 'othering', 'individualisation', and 'passing'. These three theories, which I provide short definitions of below, are useful not only as a way of understanding the themes but also their collective effect and affect on many CCS students' experiences.

In completing my analysis, I utilised Fraser's recognition theories as useful way to make sense of and understand the collective image of both the themes and first order theorisation, providing an overarching theorisation of my data. In making this decision, I was influenced by the ontology and epistemology, taking a *bricolage* approach by utilising theory which appears most suitable to the task of understanding the data rather than introducing a theoretical framework which I have predetermined to be useful.

In the presentation of my data chapters, I have chosen to be led by the Institutional Ethnographic tools I have used, taking the presentation of the themes through students' accounts of their *work* in Chapter Five and, subsequently, the activation of *texts* in Chapter Six. This approach to structuring my thesis helps to demonstrate how the first level of theorisation emerged from the themes in my data and is then followed, in Chapter Seven, by my utilisation

of these theories as a means of understanding the staff data, as described below. This structure is a conscious decision on my part to ensure my thesis reflects the journey I have been on in analysing this data as seen in Figure 4.1, but this thesis structure also helps to make clear how, by Chapter Eight, recognition was then useful to theorise the overarching picture of the inequity and how this could be effectively remedied.

Themes from Standpoint Accounts • of *work* • of the activation of *texts*	→	First Level Theorisation • Othering • Indervidualisation • Passing	→	Overarching Theorisation • Recognition
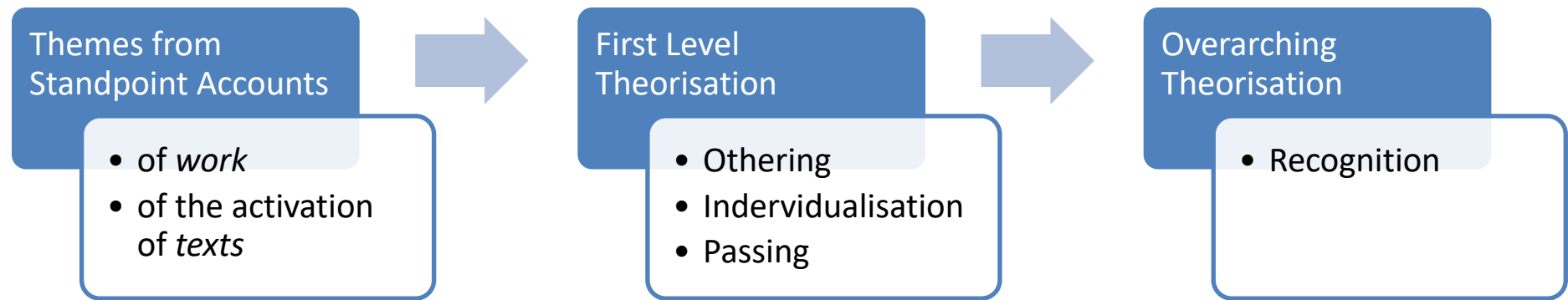
Themes from Standpoint Accounts of *Work*	Themes from Standpoint Accounts of the activation of *texts*
Location & Mobility Group Work Flexibility of PhD Study Sacrifice of Personal Time Childcare Tuition Fees Domestic Costs Hidden Costs of Study Children on Campus Timetabling & communication Service Design Changes in Support International CCS Student Support Accessibility of Student Support	Application Forms and Admission Email Mailing Lists Websites Mitigation Forms Student Parent Policy

Figure 4.1 Diagram to demonstrate the inductive process of data analysis and development of themes and overall theorisation framework

At many points during the Chapter Five and Six, it is possible that a tension of wanting to seek other perspectives on the students' accounts (such as seeking a particular staff member's rebuttal to the inference a student participant has drawn) may be felt as a reader; however, the purpose of this research and the role which I see it as seeking to fulfil is presenting the CCS students' experiences, not those of staff. In my mind, therefore, it is for another piece of research to provide the staff perspective on the experiences or challenges of supporting CCS students. The staff transcripts were analysed after those of the standpoint, utilising the recurrent themes from the student transcripts as lens with which to understand similarities or differences from the standpoint. In interviewing staff, therefore, I sought a narrative about the institution and, in analysing the data, sought to review these narratives through the eyes of the standpoint participants, using the three recurrent theories utilised there: 'othering', 'individualisation', and 'passing'. This is methodologically consistent with the IE approach, as discussed above, where, for instance, Smith (2002, p. 26; 2006, p. 3) interviewed school administrators about their experiences of working with single mothers. To resume my metaphor of the *bricolage* conception of knowledge as a patchwork quilt, by creating my contribution to this patchwork quilt, I have operationalised this research within a methodological framework which allows me to prioritise the student perspective and, therefore, deliver on the aims and objectives of this research, as IE adopts a standpoint perspective and seeks to view the institution's operations through their eyes. For me, it is for another piece of research to contribute a 'patch' on the staff experiences of working with CCS students to our collective knowledge.

4.8 Themes and theoretical frameworks

Having discussed the way in which the data analysis above to identity key recurrent themes and establish an appropriate frame with which to theorise about the data, I now present a series of short vignettes to ground how these theories are defined in the theory used in this thesis.

4.8.1 Othering

One of the most common themes to appear in the data is related to the sense that students felt that they were being 'othered' or excluded from the institution because of their status as carers for children. This 'othering' took a variety of forms, from indirect microaggressions, such as gestures, attitudes and demeanours the students experienced, to more explicit ways in which students were directly made aware of their difference and the inconvenience and difficulty they posed. This echoed Archer & Leathwood (2003) – whose use of 'Othering' is highlighted in Chapter Two – who have explored the ways in which institutional cultures can position such students as 'other' (Archer & Leathwood, 2003, p.191), instilling in these students "underlying feelings of deficit' (Archer & Leathwood, 2003, p. 190-1).

In further understanding and defining 'othering', I draw on a range of different theoretical contexts to understand how it is constructed. Such sensations of 'othering' can be created in a number of contexts; for instance, research which considers issues of race highlights how both direct aggression and subtle acts of 'microaggression' take place which prioritise valued identities – in this case, whiteness (Ahmed, 2012; Bhopal, 2018; Phiri, 2015). As Ahmed (2012) suggests, this occurs both in terms of noticeable quantifiable difference as well as the cultures and patterns of value attached to individuals and groups arguing:

> some bodies more than others, are recruited, those that can inherit and reproduce the character of the organisation, by reflecting its image back to itself (Ahmed, 2012, p. 41).

Microaggressions can take many forms but are common in furthering these cultural patterns of value, making the 'othered' feel diminished, excluded, or in some ways in deficit. In a setting such as a university institution, this can also relate to the extent to which students have or feel a sense of 'belonging' within the institution, participating as an equal who is confident to occupy the space of the institution (Thomas, 2019).

To be 'other', then, is to be surrounded by or part of a wider discourse of 'deficit' (O'Shea, Lysaght, Roberts & Harwood, 2016; Smit, 2012); this may be experienced

individually or as part of a group, and hence transects the next theoretical lens of 'individualisation'. In the context of 'othering', I locate this as being connected to group or identity group deficits. This, for instance, is particularly researched in the context of class (Reay, 2001) and lower socioeconomic background (McKay & Devlin, 2016,), where:

> discourse around students from low socio-economic (SES) backgrounds in higher education often adopts a deficit conception in which these students are associated with low entrance scores, decreasing standards and academic struggle and failure (McKay & Devlin, 2016, p.347)

It is also important to consider that processes which may intend to change or problematise the deficits and 'othering' which surround certain groups may have the potential to further exacerbate and compound this sense of othering. For instance, as Burke (2013) suggests that, while 'diversity' is commonly framed as 'a positive phenomenon in higher education' (Burke, 2013, p. 61), this is done "without reference to the ways that unequal and hierarchical relations of difference underpin diversity" (Burke, 2013, pp. 61-2). In this way, activities which seek to encourage diversity can exacerbate the sense of 'other' or make it more pronounced in some contexts:

> as higher education [becomes] increasingly characterised by diversity, the anxiety about closeness of the 'other' to those deemed to be worthy of higher education participation is expressed through narratives about contamination by the lowering of standards, and the 'dumbing down' of the university curricula… (Burke, 2013, p.61)

Hence, in considering 'othering', it is important to not only focus on the how exclusion is presented but also the ways in which attempts at inclusivity and diversity are framed and presented to consider if they truly provide 'recognition' (Fraser, 1997, 2001), discussed further below.

4.8.2 Individualisation

As either a direct result of being 'othered' or independently of this theory, many students reflected on the sense to which they were positioned to or had felt obliged to reflect on their studies as a personal choice. This meant that they became individually accountable for the

'choice' of being a student and a carer, providing an example of how, as in Chapter Three, Brooks identified "the influence of neo-liberalist individualisation within the UK has tended to erase the significance of structural inequalities, with the effect of making student parents believe that any difficulties they face are a result primarily of personal failures" or choices (Brooks, 2012b, p. 242). In this way, considering how others have theorised about the way in which such individualisation is manifested and using this to understand my data compliments the analysis of 'othering', particularly unpicking the way in which 'problems' or 'characteristics' which lead to such 'othering' "are re/located to the individual ... certainly in terms of the ways those individuals (or groups) are seen to be 'lacking' (e.g. the 'right' kinds of attitudes, values, and/or aspirations)" (Burke, 2013, p. 37).

'Individualisation' is, therefore, a useful theory with much in common with 'othering' and its impacts. In essence, I differentiate the two concepts in coding and theorising my data by focusing on examples in 'individualisation' that are close and local to the participant and the specific framing of them as in deficit or to 'blame' for their circumstances rather than as a group. It may be that patterns of such 'individualisation' may be common across a group of CCS students, yet they will be experienced in unique and different ways, in part reflecting on the complexity of the CCS students as a group identity. For example, 'choice' (Leathwood, 1998; Reay, David, and Ball 2005) and how choice is presented and conceptualised in my participants' accounts may have parallels and reinforce a sense of 'other' for my participants. The choices, themselves, and the sense that students are making a choice, or faced with choices will be experienced on a very individual level. Choices may be the result of 'caring' status, but they will be deeply intersected with other factors, such as gender, class, socio-economic status, or race and ethnicity. As Reay, David, and Ball (2005) argue:

> we are suggesting that in important respects choice of university is a choice of lifestyle and a matter of taste, and further that social class is a key aspect of these subtexts of choice" "That is to say cultural and social capital, material

> constraints, social perceptions and distinctions and forms of self-exclusion are all at work (Reay, David, and Ball, 2005, p. 29)

'Choice' becomes a deeply complex and troubling construct in HE, as students, in essence, may not be free to make unrestrained individual choices, which is likely to be even more the case for many CCS students, who, at the very least, have their child's needs to include in their choices.

It is also important to note 'individualisation' has a complex relationship with the new managerial and neoliberal cultures which permeate both students and staff experience of higher education (Burke, Crozier, & Misiaszek, 2017; Lynch, Baker, & Lyons, 2009; Lynch, Grummell, & Devine, 2012). As Burke, Crozier & Misiaszek explain of staff:

> the rampant levels of individualism that encourage teachers to position themselves in competition with their peers rather than to collaborate to change pedagogical space in higher education… [is part of a] damaging and toxic discourses that leads to feelings of shame and fear, which are embedded in the individualising frameworks in which teachers are experiencing greater levels of pressure and regulation through often dehumanising practices of measurement, assessment and performativity (Burke, Crozier & Misiaszek, 2017, p.137)

In this way, it is important to consider within the institution how this 'individualisation' is manifested, where within the *work* of CCS students it manifests, if this relates to wider individualising discourses in HE, and what are the unique ways in which this is experienced for CCS students because of their caring status.

4.8.3 Passing

Both directly – but also as a result of the subtle weaving together of the theme of 'othering' and 'individualisation' – many students demonstrated a proactive attempt or desire to supress their status as 'carers'. The theory of 'passing' is a subtle, complex and nuanced one, and although its application for some maybe a repressive act, for others it may be liberating. In the context of exploring race and ethnicity and LGBT experiences, passing has, for some researchers, a very specific context, linked to safety and avoiding oppression. Leary (1999) defines passing as "a cultural performance whereby one member of a defined social group

masquerades as another in order to enjoy the privileges afforded to the dominant group" (Leary, 1999, p. 85). In this way, 'passing' becomes synonymous with submission to oppressive or discriminatory forces. As Leary explains, in discussing the career and life of Anatole Broyard, a black *New York Times* book editor:

> Broyard performed whiteness on the social stage of his professional and personal life. For most of his life, he was in some important sense a white man to those who knew him. His white identity was forged in the eye of his audience. But by other measures, Broyard's passing was far from complete. For anyone who cared to listen, he spoke continually – albeit in code – as a black man in a racist society. For Broyard, this included the sad belief that by being black he could not also be effective. Being black did not feel like a usable identity for him. (Leary, 1999, p. 94).

'Passing' has the potential to link and intersect with 'othering' and 'individualisation', as it becomes positioned as part of masking and hiding or smoothing over differences as a result of these experiences. For instance, in Broyard's case, he is experiencing the 'otherness' of not being 'white', developing 'passing' behaviours as a means of responding to the sense that he individually had to change and develop a 'useable identity'.

Broader uses of 'passing' theory demonstrate a complex landscape whereby passing can be positive and affirmative and "disrupts the logics and conceits around which identity categories are established and maintained" (Sanchez & Schlossberg, 2001, p.1). In this way, passing can be an affirmative positive act, "a passive resistance" (Sanchez & Schlossberg, 2001, p.3), or a way of 'performing various identities' (Sanchez & Schlossberg, 2001, p.2). What is significant to applying the theoretical lens of 'passing' to this data is the way in which examples fit into the standpoint accounts to understand how they historicise and position their act of 'passing' – for instance, as positive (i.e. liberating, affirmative), neutral, or negative (i.e. subjugating, repressive) acts.

4.8.4 Recognition theory - drawing the theories together

Cumulatively, these three theories used to understand the standpoint account present a complex and troubling image: one whereby CCS students were both seen and not seen – seen

within the institution through the presence of special policies or childcare facilities, but unseen within the social culture of the institution. Despite this, CCS students are still 'othered', required to adopt 'individualised' reasonability for their support needs due to their caring status and ultimately sought to 'pass' as a non-caring student to make navigating their *work* easier.

I was inspired to consider this issue of 'visibility' in terms of recognition – or misrecognition – drawing on the theories of Fraser (1997, 2001, 2003) as a useful tool to understand the theory used at first to understand my data. Others HE researcher, such as Burke (2013) and Morrison (2015), have similarly found Fraser's theories beneficial. For instance, in the example of art student admissions cited in Chapter Two, utilizing a Fraserian lens, Burke (2013) argue that one BME student, Nina, is denied a place through her misrecognition as a suitable student subject:

> of art and design studies because she cited a form of fashion seen as invalid in the higher education context. Nina embodied black racialised ways of being, which were seen as signs of immaturity and lack of fashion flair … The male middle-class, white-English candidate knew how to cite discourses that would enable him recognition as a legitimate student-subject. The admissions tutor's judgement were shaped by implicit, institutionalized, disciplinary and racialized perspectives of what counts as a legitimate form of experience and knowledge. (Burke, 2013, p. 134)

Here, Burke is confronting the issues similar to the individualisation in my student data, as Nina is held individually accountable, through being framed as immature, for not 'passing' and assuming the homogeneous accepted forms of 'fashion'. Ultimately, Nina does not receive a place – the ultimate act of 'othering' – in favour for a more accepted student, despite him being less qualified than Nina.

Fraser's recognition theories give a vocabulary which can be utilised to understand the combination of the three theories I use to understand my data by promoting the consideration of social injustices in terms which are not morally or ethically defined but conceived in terms of status and resolving the status subordination through 'the status model' (Fraser, 2001). For Fraser, status "represents an order of intersubjective subordination derived from

institutionalized patterns of cultural value that constitute some members of society as less than full members of society" (Fraser, 2003, p. 49). Judging social justice in terms of status rather than in terms of ethical and moral judgements avoids the potential "philosophical schizophrenia" (Fraser, 2001, p. 23). For Fraser, ethical judgements require "judgements about the value of various practices, or traits" (Fraser, 2001, p. 23), while moral reasoning appeals rather to a community of values which relate to a matter of "fairness" or "rights" (Fraser, 2001, p. 23). Both forms of judgement, therefore, have the potential to carry biases which can lead to the perpetuation of the social injustice they are seeking to remedy by creating false 'either or' dichotomies (see substantive dualism below).

To avoid this philosophical schizophrenia, Fraser adds to the status model by suggesting that judgements in this model apply the principle of participatory parity. Fraser argues that:

> To redress the injustice, requires a politics of recognition, to be sure, but this no longer means identity politics … rather, it means a politics aimed at overcoming subordination by establishing the misrecognised party as a full member of society, capable of participating on a par with other members (Fraser, 2001, p. 24)

The idea of participatory parity does not support the promotion of traits from a culturally subordinate group, as an ethical judgement might suggest, or the extension of rights to a culturally subordinate group, as a moral judgement might. Instead, the question of judgement becomes about what is needed, through the lens of perspectival dualism, to support a subordinated group to participate fully in society, through de-institutionalising "patterns of cultural value that impede parity of participation and to replace them with patterns that foster it" (Fraser, 2001, p. 25).

This overarching theoretical framework aligns well to the problem this thesis is concerned with. Through allowing judgements about participatory parity, I am able to consider the extent to which CCS students experience an inequity of student experience or not within a coherent frame used by others, such as Burke (2013) or Morrison (2015). Furthermore, Fraser's

conception of perspectival dualism as a model for judging and remedying such inequalities sits contra to substantive dualism, an approach I would suggest, in some ways, echoes the current approach to beneficiaries of HE or Equality policy I seek to problematise in this thesis.

Substantive dualism captures the belief that social inequalities can be redressed by either cultural recognition or material redistribution and that there are direct causes and effects. One approach (i.e. cultural recognition OR financial redistribution) is assumed to address the others' concerns (i.e. financial redistribution will reduce cultural misrecognition, and vice versa). A theoretical polemic is, thus, created which can be characterized by egalitarian theorists such as John Rawls (Rawls, 2009) on the redistributive side, and interpretivist theorists such as Axel Honneth (Honneth, 2003) on the recognition side, with the actions to reduce inequalities these theories support being very linear.

For example, in simple terms, Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* (Rawls, 2009) proposes a form of redistributive equality through the thought exercise of the "veil of ignorance" (Rawls, 2009, p. 11). Here, Rawls asks people to consider and apply the principle of devising a society from a position of ignorance in terms of what position, status or gender the architects will occupy in this society. This supports the "original position" (Rawls, 2009, p. 15) that justice is a matter of fairness, where inequalities that result in a society stem from natural individual causes and are, thus, fair and just. In HE, this approach echoes the Equality of Opportunity emergent during Thatcherism, as discussed in Chapter Two.

At the opposite pole of substantive dualism, recognition theorists such as Axel Honneth argue that social injustice is often associated with the withholding of recognition and that cultural – rather than redistributive – solutions are required (Honneth, 2003, p. 135). For Honneth, this means that:

> experiences of injustice (can) be conceived along a continuum of withheld recognition – of disrespect – whose differences are determined by which qualities or capacities those affected take to be unjustifiably unrecognized or not respected. Such an approach also allows us to consider that differences in

the experience of injustice can be determined not only with regard to the object, but also the form of the missing recognition. (Honneth, 2003, pp. 135–6)

In other words, social inequalities become rooted in the absence of value attributed by society to cultural identity rather than in material maldistribution. The latter material inequalities would be remedied by Honneth as a result of the greater recognition of these devalued cultures. Again, in HE, this is characteristic of equality and diversity policy, seen in accreditations such as Stonewall or celebration months such as LGBT History Month.

By proposing perspectival dualism, Fraser adopts an alternative approach to substantive dualism that holds potentially greater realism for the complexity of social inequalities as experienced by CCS students and the problems explored in this thesis. Perspectival dualism avoids taking more linear approaches to social justice; Fraser argues that the reality is far more complex, as social inequalities are deeply intertwined, claiming that "even the most material economic institutions have a constitutive, irreducible cultural dimension; they are shot through with significations and norms" (Fraser, 1997, p. 15). For example, one group's social injustice may require both a redistributive and a recognition remedy in equal measure, whilst, in another instance, a social injustice may benefit from a predominantly redistributive remedy in a situation where cultural recognition of the group experiencing that barrier is not in deficit or is, at least, not the substantive cause of the inequality; similarly, the reverse might also be the case. This messy, shifting, fluid way of conceiving social injustice aligns with my *bricolage*-inspired epistemological and ontological foundations and consequent conception of knowledge as equally messy and fluid, further strengthening the alignment and utility of an overarching Fraserian theoretical framework to this thesis.

This section's discussion of theory provides small vignettes of the theory I have used to understand and analysis my data, which I discuss as I present my results in the remaining chapters of my thesis.

4.9 Ethical considerations, reflexivity, & validity

This research has been conducted within the ethical guidelines of three universities. The project was subject to ethical review in 2013 at Leeds Beckett University, where I started my doctorate, and in 2014 at Sheffield Hallam University, where I followed my Director of Studies to her new role; it also gained the external approval process at my site of research. My research has been guided by ethical research training at these institutions, by methodology workshops given by the Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE), and by the ethical principles of the British Sociological Association (BSA, 2002).

Written informed consent was sought from all participants, using the documents shown in Appendix Five for students and Appendix Six for staff. Participation was voluntary, and anonymity was assured throughout the research. Confidentiality was also assured to participants in the introduction to interviews, provided that no direct threat of harm to the participants or others came to light. No such incidents occurred during the research. All audio files, interview transcripts and research findings were redacted of identifiable personal details at the point of collection, and pseudonyms were attached to participants.

The overall risk from the study to participants was low. As the study had the potential to deal with deeply personal experiences, discussion of which could be upsetting, steps were taken to ensure that participants were comfortable and that I was suitably prepared for this eventuality. Before starting interviews, I fully briefed myself on the location of support services available for students at the site of research, such as counselling and advice centres, to ensure that I had points for referral to signpost students in distress. However, all students in the study who had experienced upsetting circumstances were already engaged in such support.

The location of interviews was agreed with participants to ensure their convenience when participating. Most interviews occurred on campus in public spaces like coffee shops, although the opportunity to use a private meeting room was available, and the location and space was

agreed with the participant before the interview. Participants chose the location, which allowed them to pick spaces they felt comfortable with, which were often a mix of away from or within their academic buildings. Time is a precious commodity for these students, as highlighted in Chapter Three, so this approach allowed for maximum flexibility, meaning that participation could take place at both short and long notice and around other commitments such as lectures. Some participants (four) felt more comfortable participating via phone or skype, as this gave them the privacy they felt they needed and corresponded with their routines. For example, these students stated that a skype interview after 8pm, when their children had gone to bed, would be best, as it would not detract from limited on-campus study time. Such flexibility enhanced the sample and ensured that all students who initially enquired were given ample opportunity to participate.

Ultimately, my own bias and the issue of being an HE insider in an ethnographic study is a significant ethical consideration. In the first instance, while I had worked within the region where my study was based, at no point did I incorporate students in my study with whom I had previously worked. In the opening of the first interview, I disclosed who I was and my background so that students were aware of my potential biases. Furthermore, in Appendix Five it is clearly stated that my study is unrelated to their programme of study. Such acts of transparency helped to build further trust with participants and give them confidence in my research.

The second control of this issue comes in the form of my own reflexivity, which I will go on to discuss next. Taking such space in my thesis to discuss reflexivity is particularly important in the context of insider research and managing the 'duality' of HE researcher and HE manager (Coghlan, 2007, p.297-8). Engaging explicitly in my reflexivity keeps this in check, especially when engaging with perceptions of HE which may be fundamentally contradictory to my own and uncomfortable to hear. Furthermore, when dealing with research

which affects inequalities, this discomfort has the potential to become more likely and could hinder my ability to present authentically the position of groups who may already experience inequity and, inadvertently, contribute further to it.

4.9.1 Reflexivity

Reflexivity, the process of acknowledging my presence in the data and analysis and accepting its potential to influence this work, is a core aspect of many of the conceptual tools I have discussed in this chapter. My relationship with my research is an important and symbiotic one. This research exists because I have invested myself in it; my time, emotions, energy, and finances have all been consumed. Reflexivity, therefore, allows me to appreciate the ways in which I may frame my data and to acknowledge that the conceptual tools and devices, which will inform my choices of method, may be influenced by my own biases. In reflecting on my own position in relation to my research, I bring a level of rigour to the data which provides context for the subjective, messy, qualitative knowledge created.

My use of reflexivity in research is influenced by the concepts of the *Autobiography of the Question* (Miller, 1995). I aim to reflect on my relationship with my research and the ways in which this may shape and frame my argument. Miller suggests that researchers:

> start by telling the story of their interest in the question, and that they then begin to map out the relation of their own developing sense of the question's interest to the history of more public kinds of attention to it … historicising the questions they are addressing and of setting their lives and educational history within contexts more capacious than their own (Miller, 1995, p. 23)

In part, I do this from the very beginning of my thesis through the core problem I articulate in Chapter One which comes from my direct experience. Furthermore, the way in which my research considers the intersection of the traditionally private activities of being a caregiver with the more public educational context of being a student seems even more relevant to Miller's point. My own experience of navigating and engaging in HE has certainly shaped my private life, providing an area where I *can* relate to my participants' present situation. This

commonality supports the maintenance of rich and authentic accounts through my analysis; at the same time, there is a question of which, in the private domain of my life, I have very limited experience: I am not a caregiver for children.

My research has changed me and has become deeply interwoven with my private life. As a part-time student working full-time, my study has intersected my identity. Combining employment with a reliance on private bank loans and family financial support to study, common to CCS students as discussed in Chapter Three, are patterns I myself have experienced. Aside from childcare, I can relate personally to many of the barriers identified in this complex web – but in ways unique to my own circumstances and biography. Furthermore, these patterns in my private life have not been experienced in a vacuum; I am surrounded by people who have thrived through HE, and its value and benefits have influenced my desire to study it as a subject. My stepmother, a now-retired senior lecturer in education, is a prime example and inspiration; my father has worked in education policy and management most of his life. I also remember how my own identity construction through HE has come about from the liberation I felt at becoming an undergraduate and the ways in which being at university and working in HE have helped me to understand and craft meaning in my own life and identity.

I flag this aspect of my identity not so much to highlight the positive impact of my own studies but to reflect on why some of my participants may not share this positive relationship with HE; my own autobiography may make it difficult to understand others who have not had positive, self-actualizing experiences. In answer to this, I would draw out two critical periods of my life which give me some perspective on this. Firstly, I gained empathy from my early career experience on the frontline of student support motivating this study, where I saw at close quarters the ways in which HE can reinforce difference, frustration and isolation in students. As seen in the introduction to this thesis, I became a frustrated participant in this work,

experiencing at first-hand the gaps in policy that have inspired my thesis. Secondly, my own direct experience of being a student with dyslexia has been a continual challenge in HE. Support in this area has, in my experience, been predicated on a medical definition of disability (i.e. there is something wrong with you which requires fixing) and on the belief that support which is not undertaken in complete isolation, such as through software, is in some way tantamount to being, at best, lazy and, at worst, a plagiarist. The sense of isolation this can create is immense and enhances my ability to empathise with other students' frustrations. I have overcome these obstacles with thanks to my supervisors and other supporters for their continued confidence in my academic ability; it takes a village to give you the confidence to write a PhD in these circumstances, and it is this village which leaves me feeling perhaps not as cynical about HE as I might be. However, these factors within this reflection create an interesting space for me as a researcher of which I must be mindful in my analysis, where I am in danger of adopting an omnipotent, HE insider role – from both the perspective of a professional and a student in the sector.

I do not suggest this reflection with the idea that it enhances my analysis because I can see 'both sides of the coin' but, rather, that this makes the autobiography of the question as a concept even more important. I would suggest that it makes it harder to be reflexive in my analysis, as I balance almost three identities at once: a professional member of the HE sector, a student within the sector, and an amalgamation of the two. I say this because, in the *Autobiography of the Question*, Miller posits that this concept helps make visible in the student "the sense of working consciously *within* and *against* accepted forms" (Miller, 1995, p. 26).

I am both within and against a system, but, at the same time, a third dimension exists of creating and sustaining the system that I am "within". While I do not claim to be an authority within the sector, I have been an innovator in the area in which I work. I currently lead a team of innovators in educational research and evaluation, advising senior leadership on issues of

inclusivity. I am, perhaps, not a passive voice of an early-career researcher in HE, subject to changes in the sector, but an active actor helping to define ways of making change happen. I have 'played the game', made compromises, and driven work within the terms which have been established in the policy landscape I discussed in Chapter Two. In this sense, I have potentially reinforced some of the messages that I critique as well as having supported their development in others. The risk that this poses to my researcher identity is to inadvertently become a form of higher education Don Quixote: on a mission to civilize, with romantic notions, imbued with a potential ideological schizophrenia.

I feel that this interpretation is perhaps too harsh a reflection on my current state, but it is a challenge to reflect on and avoid, and I have been relieved by the ways that others have identified with this problem, finding that tensions are natural, as "making a difference is fraught with contradictions" (Clegg, Stevenson & Burke, 2016, p. 233). I consider that my research is not a discreet activity but part of a complex and fluid process of supporting change in the HE sector, which, at the same time, involves compromise. Managing these tensions and reflecting on them are the price paid for avoiding martyrdom and irrelevance and for not allowing inequalities to be perpetuated unchallenged. As the above authors suggest, "making a difference inside a system inevitably involves making a compromise whereby a bracket is effectively placed around things that are not under the control of actors in concrete situation" (Clegg, Stevenson & Burke, 2016, p. 235). The message I take from this is that anxiety about the potential compromises is not a weakness but a normal part of navigating complex problems. When dedicating such space to reflexivity, it is important to be open and clear about these compromises, as I have tried to do here, and to have some form of flexible responsive framework to understand how and why they are made.

Drawing this self-reflection to a close, this not only acts as ethical control in such a rich qualitative research design but is also consistent with my epistemological position and

methodological approach. As a *bricoleur*, I accept that knowledge production is not objective and recognize that there are multiple obstacles in its path (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 372), of which I am, myself, one. I must engage in a process of reflexivity to demonstrate that I am "cognizant of [the] diverse paradigms of interpretation" (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 372) which imbue my relationship to power and knowledge production. This complements the IE approach, where Smith has talked about the importance of ensuring the researcher is not omnipotent in an IE study but not absent either; they should be "just present in an ordinary way" (Diamond, 2006, p. 57). This entails that, while presenting the story of the standpoint participants, I need to reflect on the relationship I have with them and the data but not obscure the standpoint in the process. I am aware of the challenges I present to my topic and participants and the need to keep these self-reflections in mind when analysing and discussing the data. I must, at the same time, not obstruct the authentic articulation of my participants' voices nor be so presumptive as to assert that I have definitively captured all my biases in this reflection.

It is also important to address the concern some readers will have around the concept of 'validity' in my research due to its rich, immersive qualitative design. This, in itself, becomes an ethical issue, as it speaks to what my expectations are for how this research should be received and used; if my research does not have a relationship with validity, how can I expect it to be utilised to address the inequities it may unearth? I will now turn to addressing my relationship with validity in this research.

4.9.2 Understanding validity

The concept of validity becomes a challenging one in the context of ethical and reflexive discussions and my *bricolage*-influenced epistemology. It is important to ensure that research has a purpose and creates meaning. However, the idea that it should be valid has connotations which do not align with the messy conception of knowledge I hold in alignment with *bricolage*. When looking for notions such as validity, a polemic can be created whereby, in proving

something valid, it could be suggested that I have in turn proved something else to be invalid. Kincheloe describes those who adopt this kind of thinking as "the guardians of research purity, who proclaim a clear distinction between empirical (scientific knowledge production) and philosophical inquiry (unscientific knowledge production)" (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 341). This is not as simple as a positivist versus interpretivist position, as some interpretivists would also argue that certain forms of knowledge production are invalid but for different reasons. I do not seek to suggest that my research will be proven wrong or invalid, but to help build our collective knowledge of the problems I seek to address. Returning to the metaphor about *bricolage* from earlier in the chapter; I welcome additional patches to the quilt of our collective knowledge to sit side by side with my own, growing it by increasing the presentation of rich and authentic data.

In approaching the question of authenticity and the richness of a data set, I am influenced by Grumet and Wolcott, who, while not *bricoleurs* themselves, provide accounts and contrasting examples of how to achieve richness in qualitative data as a means of demonstrating 'rigour' rather than validity. Their work shaped and influenced my decisions when crafting a method to explore the experiences of CCS students. For Grumet, the production of qualitative research is an "art rather than a science" (Grumet, 1990, p. 101), and she argues that we should not be "radically disassociated from the object of our enquiry and subjugated to the epistemological loneliness that plagues the scientist" (Grumet, 1990, p. 101). For example, Grumet positions herself with the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, citing his argument that "there is no inner man, man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself" (Grumet, 1990, p. 107). With this in mind, Grumet approaches her research with the view that, in exploring a participant's experiences, she must enter the participant's world and:

> join her in a hermeneutic stroll, meeting the relatives, the neighbours, locating the object, educational experience within her horizons, her body, her language. She joins me on an epistemological perch, from which we survey the territory that she has travelled. (Grumet, 1990, p. 108)

Grumet's research may not provide a generalisable or predictive insight, but it has great strength through the way in which it seeks to stimulate and articulate an understanding of what qualitative enquiry should create. This notion of a "hermeneutic stroll" is also consistent with the design of my research, as I focus data collection about participants' *work* and, specifically, how they go about their day-to-night lives and interpret their actions, stimulating in this approach a richness in their accounts and demonstrating authenticity within my data.

Similarly, Wolcott argues that knowledge is deeply subjective and that "our efforts at understanding are neither underwritten with, nor guaranteed by, the accumulation of some pre-determined level of verified facts" (Wolcott, 1990 p. 147). Rather, he has attempted to achieve a deep but subjective understanding though his research techniques and practical data collection skills, such as making full notes and probing for detailed descriptions (Wolcott, 1990, pp. 126–135). Wolcott also serves a lesson in the importance of accurately and authentically representing one's self in qualitative research. In Wolcott's *Sneaky Kid* trilogy (Wolcott, 2002), a series of initially-applauded ethnographic articles about a homeless boy, Brad, who lived in a shack on the edge of Wolcott's property, Wolcott explores how Brad learned in these conditions, keeping lengthy notes and rich accounts of his time with Brad. Wolcott becomes a fundamentally unreliable narrator across the articles, as it is later discovered that he is intimately involved with Brad.

There are fundamental ethical issues raised by Wolcott's work as well as issues about the relationship between validity and qualitative research. First is the importance of acknowledging accurately the presence of the researcher in the research and the flaws and biases they might bring. I have attempted to do so in this chapter both by articulating my epistemological and ontological positioning and by engaging in a reflexive account of my relationship with the research. Second is the importance of honesty and openness in this reflection as a means of instilling trust in the authenticity of the research. As Page highlights in discussing Wolcott and

his initial success, validity is something a reader accords a text, "perhaps because an author persuades them to, and not as a quantity that the text simply has" (Page, 1997, p. 152). Hopefully, this methodology has been an example of such openness and honesty about my study and I have persuaded you of the merits and authenticity of this research, as I share the result in the next chapter.

4.10 Participant profiles

Finally, in drawing this chapter to a close, I provide a series of brief participant profiles which help bring their stories to life; the students' names have been changed to protect their privacy and confidentiality.

4.10.1 Student profiles

4.10.1.1 Claire

Claire is a former medical professional who decided to progress her career by training to be a doctor. She is in her late twenties and has one child, aged six. In the first year of her course, she started as a self-funded student, having previously attended university under the government's student loan program at a different institution. She is single and relies heavily on family who live local to the university for support with her childcare, but she lives a significant two to three hours' daily commute away from university. At the time of interview, she had reached the end of her qualification and was awaiting results.

4.10.1.2 Ellen

Ellen is in her mid-thirties and has one young child currently in the first year of primary school. She studies at undergraduate level in the business department alongside working for the university in a non-academic administrative/management role. She is about two-thirds of the way through her qualification and previously engaged with university childcare/support

services before her daughter went to school. She studies and works part-time, but some of her teaching is based in the evening or at weekends when she relies on her mother's support.

4.10.1.3 Fiona

Fiona is in her mid-forties and has two children – one of nursery age and one in primary school. She is self-employed and married and studies part-time in the education faculty at a taught postgraduate level. She relies heavily on her husband for childcare support in relation to her studies, and, due to the flexibility she gets from her self-employment, she maintains a clear routine of specified days for her studies where she can lock herself away and her husband takes over childcare for the day.

4.10.1.4 Martin

Martin is a PhD student in his early fifties studying in an arts-related faculty. He is at the end of year one of his full-time programme, having studied all of his previous qualifications part-time around his work and childcare commitments. He is a grandparent who has primary caring responsibilities for his grandchild and appreciates the flexibility of studying a research degree in the arts gives compared to being in full-time employment. While he is committed to his studies, it is clear that the independence offered by a PhD and the flexibility this creates for childcare is a significant draw, and he only uses childminder support infrequently.

4.10.1.5 Rebecca

Rebecca is an undergraduate student in her mid-thirties studying within a healthcare department at the university. She has a four-year-old child who will go into primary school in the next academic year. At the minute, she juggles a combination of childminders, parents, and partner to provide support and childcare while at university. She lives in a large city nearly three hours' commute away but chose this institution due to localised funding, having previously completed an undergraduate degree in a similar field and now re-training to develop in her career.

4.10.1.6 Sue

Sue is a student in her forties who has three children, one with learning disabilities. She is completing a part-time programme targeted at widening participation; she has been at the university for almost seven years and is nearing completion of the programme. Her time at the university was extended due to time taken mid-way through her degree to adapt her studies during the separation and divorce from her partner. Her children are of the age that they are all in school, but, otherwise, she relies on her parents for childcare and support. While she lives quite near to the university, she is outside the city it is based in, and, despite the relative proximity, transport links mean that she commutes for extended periods.

4.10.1.7 Emma

Emma is a single parent in her thirties who joined the university through a widening participation programme but now studies as a full-time student in a healthcare department. She is in her second year of the programme, but, due to her entry route, this is her third year at the university. Her daughter is now in school, but, prior to that, she relied heavily on her family who live very close to the university to provide childcare. She lives in the town next to the city the university is based in, but transport links are strong; this significantly reduces travel time, as does being able to park at her parents.

4.10.1.8 Arthur

Arthur is a PhD student in his mid-twenties who has a four-year-old child and lives with his partner just a short walk from campus. He has studied at the same institution for his entire Higher Education experience, and his child was born toward the end of his second year of undergraduate study. The support he feels he received from the university during this initial period of birth and childcare frames his perspective – namely, that he was not supported. The benefit he feels PhD study brings is the flexibility of time management and the independence, which means study can fit more easily around childcare.

4.10.1.9 Eliana

Eliana is an international PhD student from the Middle East. She studies within a science-related discipline and has a three-year-old child. Her husband is also studying for his PhD within the same department and discipline, and they share an open plan office together close to the university-provided childcare facilities. They also live in a university-provided house on campus, which is specifically let to students with children. As international students, they have also engaged with a wider range of university support services designed specifically for them, such as international student support offices and the university visa advise services.

4.10.1.10 Douglas

Douglas is a PhD student in his mid-thirties with two young children in primary school. He is studying within the business faculty and lives four to five miles from campus outside the traditional university areas of the city. He is a North American international student who came to the university for the PhD opportunity and is also a junior member of academic staff in the department on a part-time basis, but his time is mainly taken up with study as a student. He is a single parent and supports his children alone, drawing on paid childcare, bringing them on campus or working from home.

4.10.1.11 Richard

Richard is a PhD student in his mid-thirties within the arts and humanities faculty and is completing his studies full-time. He is married and has two children currently in primary school. He does have access and entitlement to facilities on campus but largely chooses to study from home, attending campus infrequently to meet with supervisors or to collect and return library books. He can work with flexibility due to his wife and mother's support to provide childcare as needed to fit in with his studies.

4.10.1.12 Sarah

Sarah is an undergraduate student in her late twenties studying with the faculty of social sciences. She has one son who has just entered primary school; they live locally to the

university, and the flexibility of undergraduate study means she serves as primary childcare outside school. She has been at the university for two years prior to her current studies at level one of undergraduate, having previously completed a widening participation access route course. Sarah is now a full-time student and sits purely within her courses school/faculty in terms of support and study – having previously sat within the Lifelong Learning Office – and observes the differences between these experiences.

4.10.1.13 Catherine

Catherine is a PhD student in her mid-thirties. She has one daughter in primary school and is completing her degree within a health sciences faculty, supported and funded by a research council grant. She lives over five miles from the university with her partner and has school-orientated childcare commitments, dropping off and picking up her daughter each day and utilising breakfast and afterschool clubs. She approaches her PhD in much the same way as attending work – by having a strict set of boundaries between academic and personal life.

4.10.1.14 Emily

Emily is an undergraduate student in her mid-twenties with a young child in pre-school. She is studying within the healthcare faculties at the university while relying on her parents for childcare. Her interview was markedly shorter than most in the sample, but she wished to convey her overall satisfaction with the university and support she has received.

4.10.1.15 Nicola

Nicola is a PhD student with the faculty of social sciences in her mid-twenties. She is completing a research council-funded PhD and gave birth during her programme; her daughter is now one year old. She lives with her partner in university accommodation and is the primary source of childcare at the moment; she has only recently returned to study following maternity leave. Living on campus makes access significantly easier, but Nicola utilises methods of research/interview such as Skype to avoid travel for data collection as a means of remaining

on campus to provide childcare. At the time of the interviews, she was registered as a full-time student; however, she was in the process of exploring a move down to part-time study.

4.10.1.16 Rita

Rita was originally recruited through the staff interview period, as she is a member of staff, a student, and a parent. Her accounts focus predominately on her personal experience as a student and, therefore, she has been re-categorised as Student 16. She is in her mid-thirties, a tutor who is completing further postgraduate qualifications at doctoral level at the university to develop her career. Working at the university also comes following a change of career, having worked before in a creative role within the private sector. In her current role, she provides tutorial support and one-to-one support, acting as a personal tutor. She has one daughter who is eight years old, and studies part-time around her full-time role, supported by her husband and, occasionally, her mother to balance childcare responsibilities.

4.10.2 Staff profiles

4.10.2.1 Peter

Peter is responsible for student support in the Lifelong Learning Office of the university. He is in his mid-thirties and has been in the role for a number of years now. He has two roles within the university: one involving working directly with students on widening participation programmes and outreach projects, and the other to work across the university advising staff and students who are part of diverse or underrepresented groups on the support they are entitled to and may need.

4.10.2.2 Diana

Diana is responsible for the career and personal development of students in the Lifelong Learning Office of the university. She is in her fifties and has worked at the university for the majority of her career – but always in a similar role or department, usually within student support roles for diverse groups. She has frequently contributed toward policy and practice at

the university, and, like Peter, has a dual role local to the department and university-wide in supporting students from widening participation backgrounds.

4.10.2.3 Jools

Jools is a former programme manager and personal tutor who has worked for the university for over ten years. She has studied part-time for many previous qualifications and completed her PhD recently while raising two children. She has experience of personal tutoring at the university for a number of years and has experience of working with students who either have children or become parents while studying.

4.10.2.4 Steven

Steven is personal tutor in undergraduate programmes for the business faculty, working with undergraduate and access course students. He is currently completing his PhD and was previously a tutor in a school and further education college. He has two children and is in his early forties. He has had several years' experience as a personal tutor.

4.10.2.5 Jo

Jo is a programme director for an academic programme in the education department which receives a great number of students who are also carers, but she also works with a large number of more traditional students in this role. She is the programme manager for a widening participation programme and completes a great deal of outreach work. As a programme manager, she also sits on the special cases committees in her department which awards extensions and adaptions to study for students who have mitigating circumstances.

4.10.2.6 Leo

Leo is a senior member of staff in the university at a cross-institutional level. He is responsible for the delivery of widening participation across the university, but this is separated into several functions; directly, he manages the delivery of the university's Lifelong Learning Office, which has the equivalent status to a school or faculty within the university. Working in partnership with other schools and faculties, his portfolio supports their work with non-

traditional students and in improving and supporting the accessibility of the wider university to these students. However, Leo's work sits in parallel to a separate department with a separate director that looks specifically at equality requirements and disability support at the university.

4.11 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined my methodological approach and the methods I have utilised in this research. I started this chapter by articulating my epistemological and ontological positioning and illustrating how my worldview and *bricoleur* (Kincheloe, 2001; 2005) epistemology shapes and influences my considerations in designing a research project. In the second section of this chapter, I discussed my choice of methodological approach, having chosen to adopt an Institutional Ethnography (Smith, 2001; 2006), highlighting the appropriateness of this approach to my aims and objectives and the need to specifically understand the up-close but institutionally-mediated experiences of CCS students. In the third section, I explored how I put this methodological approach into practice through a two-year study at a traditional research-intensive university in the north of England with 16 CCS students and six staff participants, going into detail about the method used and how participants were recruited.

In the fourth section, I explored the way in which I analysed the data, discussing how the data was transcribed and coded as well as the inductive way in which the topics, themes and theorisation were determined, led by the CCS students accounts, selecting the most appropriate theoretical frameworks as tools to understand the data, influenced by *bricolage* epistemology. In the following section, I provided vignettes of the theories of 'othering' (Archer & Leathwood, 2003), 'individualisation' (Brooks, 2012; Burke, 2013), and 'passing' (Sanchez & Schlossberg, 2001; Stevenson, 2014), including how I have defined and understood them. I also provided a brief summary of Fraser's Recognition theories (Fraser, 1997; 2001), which I

utilise as an overarching theoretical frame, helping to understand the nature of – and potential – remedies the CCS students in my study experience.

In the following section, I discussed the ethical issues which presented themselves in this project. Of primary focus here was the ethical implication of myself as a practitioner/researcher and how my privilege and insider status could prove problematic. In exploring this, I engaged in my reflexivity by utilising *the Autobiography of the Question* (Miller, 1995) as a tool to position myself in relation to my data and the core puzzle with which this thesis is concerned. Leading on from my use of reflexivity, I briefly explore the relationship my analysis has with 'validity', articulating the way in which I have found 'rigour' a more appropriate frame for my data, focusing on establishing 'rich' and 'authentic' data (Wolcott, 1990), for which my reflexivity is a key consideration.

In the final section of this chapter, I provided vignettes of the 16 student and 6 staff participants in this study, preparing the reader with background information of the participants whose experiences are presented in the following chapters. Thus, having established my methodological approach, I will now turn in the next chapter to sharing the results and analysis: firstly, by articulating the practical themes CCS students navigate in my study and how the institutional setting and its organization mediated these students' *work*.

Chapter 5: The *work* of being a student who cares for children

5.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the accounts Students who Care for Children while Studying (CCS) give of their *work* – in the Institutional Ethnography (IE) conception, describing how they go about their day/night lives at the North University. This chapter focuses on the themes CCS students navigate within the accounts of their *work*, which are prioritised by them in their interviews. This chapter will consider, in turn, each theme CCS students navigate and theorise about how these are presented. In so doing, this chapter will reflect on whether the topics, such as barriers experienced by these students, are institutionally mediated or not with the view to understand how such barriers manifest, which is a key step in unpicking the core puzzle I introduced at the start of this thesis.

5.2 The *work* of being a CCS student, and the practical topics they navigate

As discussed in Chapter Four, the key guiding principle in conducting an IE study is to capture the most authentic account of the standpoint participants' *work* of going about their every day/night lives, and, in so doing, seek to understand the complexity of their experiences and how challenges and barriers in these accounts of *work* manifest. In exploring and analysing the accounts of these participants' *work*, there were three key recurrent patterns of themes which were not singularly held but were a feature of most CCS students' narratives. These patterns included:

- Time and space to study;

- Financial issues;

- The inaccessibility of the institutional norms and practices.

Such topics may exist in the experience of other students or underrepresented groups – or, particularly with the first two, could pertain to the experiences of anyone engaged in doing an

activity. However, my focus in this chapter and discussion are to consider the ways in which these themes are experienced by CCS students and the commonalities about these experiences as a result of the students' caring status. For example, Table 5.1 below illustrates how these are common for CCS students by showing the number of times each participant mentioned one of these broad patterns of themes from the coding of the data and, hence, why I have chosen to structure this chapter around the discussion, taking each in turn. While I have quantified the distribution of these practical topics as a means of coherently structuring this chapter and demonstrating a systemic approach to understanding this data, this approach should not be confused with simplifying what are rich and complex experiences.

Participant	Time & Space to Study	Financial Issues	The Inaccessibility of the institutional Norms & Practices
Student 1 Claire*	7	7	12
Student 2 Ellen	3	2	2
Student 3 Fiona	4	1	8
Student 4 Martin	3	1	2
Student 5 Rebecca*	8	8	15
Student 6 Sue	3	2	7
Student 7 Emma	8	6	1
Student 8 Arthur	4	3	6
Student 9 Eliana	3	1	7
Student 10 Douglas	3	2	7
Student 11 Richard	4	7	1
Student 12 Sarah	2	2	6
Student 13Catherine	3	5	6
Student 14 Emily	3	6	5
Student 15 Nicole*	6	8	9
Student 16 Rita	5	1	4

* Denotes students whose stories are featured as detailed case studies in Chapter Six on institutional experience; hence, examples from these students' accounts are less frequent in the discussion of this chapter.

Table 5.1 The frequency of key topics from coding student participant data.

The experiences within these three frequently held narratives of these CCS students are complex and different but serve to highlight that CCS students are a multifaceted demographic who may experience barriers in ways unique to them based on their particular circumstances. For instance, as discussed below, Claire (Health PhD, 2 Children) is one of the few students

who reflects on finance in terms of 'fees'; her background characteristics are shared by other students in the study, but finance in terms of fees is not an issue for them because of factors such as family financial support, prior HE participation, or having defined funding as from a research council, charity or government. Claire's unique set of intersectional circumstances, including but not limited to her caring status, affect how she experiences financial difficulty.

Furthermore, the way in which the three patterns are presented within the data means that other barriers identified in previous research, such as personal relationships (Hinton-Smith, 2012b, pp. 169–176; Moreau & Kerner, 2013, p. 12), are framed within the participants' accounts as being the result, or symptom, of these three patterns. For instance, as in the quotation below, Rita reflects that time and space to study creates the challenge of maintaining personal relationships:

> it's just the pressures of fitting the study around my family life really, and it's kind of balancing a relationship with your partner, and with family members. I had a fall out with mother this year because she was upset that I don't get to see her. But I get three days off a month around working and studying and that's three Saturdays and I just want to chill out at home… (Rita, Education, PhD, 1 Child)

What I promote, through this analysis, is a deeper, richer understanding of these students' experiences, which is key to understanding the core puzzle this thesis seeks to explore. Different students will experience and prioritise different barriers in different ways, so my first finding is to share that, for these students, the three patterns of themes above and their associated barriers are their priority, which I will now take in turn and discuss in further detail throughout this chapter.

5.3 Time and space to study

In this first section, I focus on examples in students' accounts which provide some insights into the ways time and space to study impact CCS students' *work* as a result of their

caring status. I discuss examples related to: location and mobility; flexibility of PhD study; sacrifice of personal time; and childcare.

5.3.1 Location and mobility

The lack of time and space to study was a barrier which presented a number of common factors across participants' accounts of their *work*; the first was that many did not live on or near campus and often lived quite far away. The primary implication of student proximity was that participants often had to travel far and made strategic decisions about how to organise their time and space to study. Rebecca travelled furthest out of all of the participants, coming from another university city in excess of two hours' travel time away. This makes time for Rebecca precarious and in deficit, and she studies when she can during her commute and in gaps before formal teaching:

> I had to catch the 6.30 train everyday… so I would wake up, make sure that there was a babysitter around like a grandparent or something or my partner to look after him. I'd drive to the station, park up take the train and get here about 8 o'clock, wait here (the building we interviewed in) till about 9… (Rebecca, Health PhD, 1 Child)

However, in the preservation of time to study, Rebecca was aided by using the train, allowing travel time to be repurposed as an opportunity to catch up on sleep if she did not have any coursework, or a positive time to study, giving her the boost she needed to get things done:

> I get that nervous energy to get me started, adrenaline kicks in and I work at a faster pace than if I'd tried to plan it out… because yeah at home it's broken concentration… because I start, but if my son needs to eat or needs me, or needs me to take him somewhere then I have to stop, and reboot my system and get back into the flow, whereas on the train I know I'm going to be there, not going anywhere, table, exactly…. (Rebecca, Health PhD, 1 Child)

However, most students who lived outside of the city travelled by car to the North University and had to combine this journey with other activities such as school runs. An example shared by many students can be seen in Emma's account:

> I live in [Northern Town approx. 15 miles from North University], erm… so it's about balancing the childcare …so like for me the kids[4] have to be put into a breakfast club which starts at 8 o'clock and then you have got lectures that start at 9 (Emma, Health BSc, 1 Child)

Driving created a barrier to study for students where a considerable of amount of their day was lost to travel which could not also be used for either study or other activities. In order to make the most out of their time, students often had to plan their movements and activities with great precision, and this led to metaphors of military exercises being used to describe their use of time, such as Claire claiming, "it's like being in a military regime being in a medical school," (Claire, Health PhD, 2 Children), or Emma's account of "pick the kids up, bring them home, feed the kids and then it's like that 'right what do I do now'…quite military..." (Emma, Health BSc, 1 Child). These examples could be shared by others, such as the awkwardness of time for commuter students, yet it is important to consider the way in which the presence of children and childcare adds an additional dimension of pressure to the experience of being a commuter student.

These examples also speak to the complexity of timescapes in the CCS students' experience, as they seek to navigate the time demands of the university; although any parent who works may also face similar constraints, the context of the institution and the timing of the university may be unique. For instance, Burke et al (2017) explore in their work *It's About Time* how students respond to an institutionally-defined 'dominant time' (2017, p18), providing insight to the unique conceptualisation of time at universities and how they shape students approaches. As they go on to explain:

> Time is composed of complex irreducible elements… experienced contextually in relation to social positioning and reaches deep into our psyches (Burke, et al, 2017, p.18)

---

[4] It was common, and a colloquialism of the participants to refer to children or kids in the plural, even when the CCS Student only had one child. This has been retained in quotes to preserve the authenticity of the transcription.

Although this work does not look at CCS students specifically, the additional dimension of a child introduced an additional 'irreducible element' to these students' experiences and can have a specific impact on the students' psyches in my study. This can be seen in the ways in which these students juggle multiple factors in thinking about their time during their commutes or the way in which these elements bring in the "nervous energy" that Rebecca describes. In part, this nervous anxiety and pressures to operate like a 'military regime' comes from a tension between what is achievable and the compromises students are aware they are making against this notion of the 'dominant time' they need to meet. Universities may not be responsible for all of the timescapes of the CCS student – for instance, as schools or drop-off schedules create their own impacts – but, in this way, all students may have other timescapes to contend with, but the institutions could be better structured to respond to their competing demands than they may for those which come from caring for children for CCS students. While some aspects may be positioned as a general element of time management, Burke et al. highlight how:

> Dominant time is institutionally structured and students different timescapes (perceptions, locations and lived experiences) are all caught up with complex webs of social networks, relations and inequalities that are also pictured different within different contexts. (Burke, et al, 2017, p.18)

It could be suggested that the university does have a role in establishing their own dominant timescapes and could choose to do so in a way which better responds to the needs of CCS students through an awareness of the 'networks, relations and inequalities' they can sometimes face.

A second key factor of the time and space to study was how decisions about where to live or study were informed by these students' lives as 'carers' and their lives prior to being a student, which challenges any potential suggestion that such travel is a simple personal choice. For instance, most students were in positions of stability before their studies, which they felt important to maintain for the care of their children, such as by ensuring they were still in the same school, with friends and support networks. Claire has "one [child] at secondary school

and one at primary school. I had my children when I was 19, and the second when I was about 21 …I've lived most of my life here being a single mum" (Claire, Health PhD, 2 Children). Claire, like Emma and Richard, also owned her own house prior to becoming a student, tying her to particular geographical locations because of her mortgage. "I had my own house, mortgage, so I couldn't just change…. I knew I wouldn't be able to live the uni experience" (Emma, Health BSc, 1 Child). For Richard, who also lived in a village some 20 miles from the North University, his choice had been guided by working in a town near his village "as a college tutor", as well as being keen to stay living "in the same street as my father and sister-in-law." (Richard, Arts & Humanities PhD, 2 Children). Sue, who lived 13 miles away, did so as she had a 13 and 15-year-old in school, one of whom had autism, making change difficult, and she did not want to return to issues of establishing school disability support for him, which had already disrupted her studies "trying to fight for a diagnosis, and when things have really hit the fan!" (Sue, WP Access Programme, 3 Children) at his current school.

This provides a further example of the tension which emerges between students and the 'dominant time' of the institution. Although such tensions may exist from other dominant times for CCS students, such as the school or childcare provider, which means the university is not singularly responsible for such tensions, neither is the university a passive body in setting their own dominant timescape; the university could choose to address such tensions. To some extent, this provides evidence of the points Burke et al rise around the 'im/possible geographies' of time and space created by and within universities and how this has the potential to lead to inequities in higher education because students, as individuals:

> are neither the blank slate or docile bodies that the human capital model presumes/desires, nor do they have the complete freedom to apply unrestrained choice. Where we as individuals come from and go to, and the timing we have to get there, are generatively developed according to our social and geographical locations – where we sit in time and space. (Burke, et al, 2017, p.13)

Additionally, for CCS students, it may not just be a matter of having a complex web of commitments, which means they are not 'docile bodies', but also the potential for them to have complicating factors to their time and mobility which do not fit neatly into existing institutional perceptions of 'mobility' – specifically because of their 'caring status'. For instance, as Finn (2017), highlights:

> Within the specific field of UK, HE scholarship, [a] dualism persists between students who move away (domestically and internationally) and students who stay at home (local students). Indeed, student mobility is generally understood as 'the semi-permanent move associated with leaving home and migrations over distance rather than mobility and everyday-life (Finn, 2017, p. 5)

From the examples above, it is unclear to what extent these students are truly 'local' if they live in excess of 13 miles away and if these distances are part of the mobility of everyday life. While aspects of this experience may be common for non-CCS commuting students, their caring status creates a pressure and additional consideration which plays a key role for them in informing their decisions about commutes and the best use of time.

Only four of the sixteen students in my study had made the decision to completely relocate to attend university, which might be understood within the dichotomy Finn discusses, "migrating over distance rather than mobility and everyday life" (Finn, 2017, p.5). Of those four, two were international students who had made the decision to relocate to the UK, and only Catherine and Emily were UK home students who decided to relocate to be nearer to campus. In Catherine's case, this came as the result of a desire to seek a significant relocation following her separation from her partner, as she explains:

> I thought do you know what yes, I'm going to stand on my own two feet. I am not going to rely on my parents, and my friends and everybody else to help with childcare I'm going to do it. I'm going to do it; I'm going to show that I can do it. (Catherine, Health PhD, 1 Child)

When Emily chose to relocate closer to the North University, she did this to be closer to her family, which became even more important when the move led her to end her relationship with her daughter's father:

> I mean my partner was quite good when we were together, and he'd help with bathing Ruby and putting her to bed and stuff but yeah the real time that I had which was quiet time was of an evening when she was in bed… now [she] sees her dad a lot so that frees up some of my time to study through the day ...But obviously it's difficult as well because I'm not spending that much time with her… (Emily, Health BSc, 1 Child)

Thus, the only students who chose to relocate appear to be influenced by factors which are not related to study, and it is perhaps more common at this institution for CCS students to live away from campus.

It is at this juncture that I would suggest that 'othering' and 'individualisation' are useful theories with which to start to understand the emerging themes of the participants' account across the data in this chapter. By 'othering', I draw on a range of researchers and theorists (Ahmed, 2012; Archer & Leathwood, 2005; Burke, 2013; Phiri, 2015; Reay, 2001), as discussed in Chapter Four, who have also used this concept to suggest that students experience patterns of behaviour or institutional structure which make clear to them their 'difference' from the 'norm', which can make them feel in 'deficit' (Archer & Leathwood, 2005, pp. 190-1; Burke, 2013, p. 57). This 'othering' has been extensively documented in race and ethnicity studies of HE (Ahmed, 2012, 2014; Bhopal, 2018; Phiri, 2015), as the patterns of micro/macro aggressions occur which prioritise whiteness support 'embodied identities' (Burke, 2013, pp. 60-61) and their dominance within the structures of higher education.

In thinking about the data above, I would suggest that, just as it can be seen how there is a 'dominant timescape', as Burke et al (2017) would describe it, and there is a dominant dichotomy of travel and commuting within HE (Finn, 2017), these do not seem to fit with all CCS students' experience. In this way, patterns and experience start to emerge, such as 'nervous energy' for Rebecca or a sense of disconnection which comes from distance travelled, which foregrounds this idea of difference for these students. This feeling is not shared by all, as some of the students in my study, such as Emily and Catherine, do relocate and engage in

the timescape of the institution by being nearby and perhaps having an experience more akin to the migration experience Finn discusses (2017).

This contrast in experience has the potential, as Burke et al (2017) discuss in the context of dominant timescapes, to be positioned as an issue of time management for the individual student. As they explain:

> Time management focuses on individual students' competencies and skills in using and planning their time effectively in relation to institutionally imposed time structures, regulations and rhythms but often without consideration of the multiple demands, expectations and needs at play across different and competing timescapes. (Burke, et al, 2017, p. 12)

At this stage in the discussion of time, the notion of self-time management which individualises could be understood as seeing the choice to relocate or not. This, in turn, has the potential to shift the blame for the challenges, a common feature of 'individualisation' (Burke, 2013, p. 37; O'Shea, et al; 2016; Smit, 2012), onto the students who have not relocated as a result of their own personal choices. See, for instance, the way in which Emma framed her morning as about 'balancing' and maintaining a 'military regime'; these are examples of how she has internalised the idea that it is her responsibility and up to her to combat this dominant time in order to be able to participate as a CCS student in HE.

The notion of 'choice' is itself a problematic one, as Reay, David, and Ball (2005) argue:

> Choice is rooted in fine discriminations and classificatory judgments of place for us, and place for others (Reay, David, and Ball, 2005, p.160)

> influenced by cultural and social capital, material constraints, social perceptions and distinctions, and forms of self-exclusion... [that] are all at work in the process of choice (Reay, David, and Ball, 2005, p.29)

In this sense, choice is not a 'free' activity for most and is an aspect of all students' experience – not just CCS students. Although being a student may be a period for most which perhaps offers the most flexible lifestyle many will experience, it is also one in which many different socio-economic and structural constraints come into play, making the concept of being able to choose freely false, and it is within the act of choosing that structural inequalities are replicated.

The considerations CCS students face feature an additional dimension and pressure than other students in the consideration they have to give for their children and their needs. For instance, if Sarah's choices were truly free, what would she 'need' to 'balance' or process within such a metaphorical 'military regime', or would she even choose to live such an intensive experience? Again, this echoes the patterns seen in commuter student research discussed above by Finn, who highlights the complex way commuter students 'choreograph' their time:

> designing sequences of movements of physical bodies; agency and creativity is implied, but the room to manoeuvre and take up space may well be limited, thus structuring and at times constraining movement (Finn, 2017, p.16)

This echoes both Burke et al on the role of 'dominant timescapes' (2017, p18), and Brooks' (2012b) study of student parents, which highlights how the students in her study started to adopt structural inequalities as individual "personal failures" (Brooks, 2012b, p. 242). Aspects of these experience may be present for all commuting students, regardless of the motivation for their decisions to commute, but it is notable that, in considering CCS students, their caring status presents an additional barrier compared to others who commute without children. This barrier provides a further restriction to their choices unique to their caring status and compounds the potential 'othering' and 'individualisation', as even alleged commonalities between CCS students compared to other groups such as commuters, have the potential to be experienced differently. These presentations of 'othering' and 'individualisation' develop more across the data, as discussed in Chapter Four, and I foreground them here as I move through the other thematic patterns represented in CCS students' *work* to highlight the complex way in which the themes emerge across the data, unique to them and their caring status.

5.3.2 Group work

If most CCS students are often located away from their institutions, the designs of some pedagogies, such as group work, have the potential to be problematic for them. For example, assessed group work proved difficult for Rebecca, especially when others live on campus:

> I can't go to group work, because it's at times which are suitable for all the majority of people … obviously I'm the only student parent in my year so I can't use that to stop everyone else trying to do that… during lunchtimes here we discuss what needs to be done, and individuals go off home and sort it all out separately. Or I go off and figure out my end while the rest of them go off and figure out their sections together… I don't want to let them down either, when its group work, so it's been useful to make sure that we meet up regularly, but yeah Facebook has probably been the best source… (Rebecca, Health PhD, 1 Child)

Here, a theme starts to emerge where CCS students are frustrated by not being able to participate as others do in their courses.

The CCS students' ability to participate in group work with the same ease as other students puts their differences into more immediate contrast and, for some CCS students, builds into the sense of 'othering' discussed earlier, creating "underlying feelings of deficit' (Archer & Leathwood, 2005, p.191). This can be seen as Rebecca reflects on her role in group work:

> I do feel like I'm not quite of the right calibre as everyone else, generally, not just because of presentations, I just don't have the same amount of time, or space to learn things, I'm cramming last minute all the time (Rebecca, Health PhD, 1 Child)

Pronounced in Rebecca's account is also the sense of the individual responsibility she adopts for this barrier and the difficulty she faces, adopting blame for the problems her difference from other students causes by saying "I don't want to let them down". This echoes the sense of 'individualisation' (Burke, 2013, p. 37) mentioned earlier, whereby problems or barriers are:

> re/located to the individual or communities who are seen themselves as the problem… in terms of the way those individuals or groups are seen to be 'lacking' (e.g. the 'right' kinds of attitudes, values, and/or aspirations (Burke, 2013, p. 37)

This is echoed in the way Rebecca adopts personal responsibility for the structural barriers of the programme design. For instance, the choice to incorporate group work within a module, and the way in which it is organised and coordinated, could be seen as an institutional one, as staff make such decisions in designing their modules which reflect what they think students need to be able to do and can do. While I have not undertaken an analysis of module designs

or descriptors, there is the potential here for such designs and their application in practice to be sources of 'othering' (Archer & Leathwood, 2005, p.190-1) or 'individualisation' (Burke, 2013, p. 37). This is especially the case if the ability to not participate with ease frames students in a deficit discourse (Archer & Leathwood, 2005, p.191; O'Shea, et al; 2016; Smit, 2012), which may have led Rebecca to worry about letting down her peers.

5.3.3 Flexibility of PhD study

As the majority of the students in this study were studying at a doctoral level, there was an acknowledgement that this mode of study did bring with it benefits such as flexibility in time and space to study, but, at times, this also suggested a level of 'otherness' compared to their non-CCS student peers. The flexibility which characterises PhD study, such as limited contact time and mostly self-directed study time, was experienced by CCS students in specific ways which limited their participation in the wider university experience. For instance, it was quite common that PhD students in this study would work from home, driven by the balancing of time – as in Martin's case because he knew he had to work from home outside his child's school hours "so, it's much easier than transferring files" (Martin, Arts & Humanities PhD, 1 Child). Alternatively, this decision to work at home was shaped by the commute and the fact that being on campus was not necessarily a more productive period of time as a result, as Richard explains:

> it can be quite frustrating because it can be quite hit and miss sometimes, I can do eight hours on that Tuesday and sometimes I might only do three… I usually get less done because I need to travel there, which just eats up the time (Richard, Arts & Humanities PhD, 2 Children)

This provides some further evidence of the complexity of CCS students' experiences. On the one hand, by being able to 'just transfer files', there is evidence to suggest that PhD CCS students are able to more easily craft their timescapes independently to meet their needs and are, therefore, less subject to the pressures of 'dominant timescapes' (Burke et al, 2017, p. 18) than students on structured taught programmes. On the other hand, there is an extent to which

these students could be experiencing a disparity of student experience compared to their 'non-care' status peers.

Evidence of a disparity in experience with non-CCS student peers was common when CCS PhD students talked about missed opportunities for development and career advancement as a result of time-orientated pressures. Martin spoke about the potential for missed opportunities, such as attending conferences and publishing research, having made the decision to avoid or cancel such activity if he could not make it work around his caring commitments:

> you are very much encouraged to publish during the time of your PhD, … and I am looking to get something out for publication early next year so that will be a kind of, extra deadline to hit and that might impact on time management shall we say…I have managed to get to a conference in, or book a conference in Essex, because it falls on the weekend, and my daughter can pick him up from school on the Friday…However there was another conference in Cambridge again in September, which was a midweek one and that was, would be impossible (Martin, Arts & Humanities PhD, 1 Child)

Similarly, Eliana spoke of making a similar trade off in terms of avoiding what became framed as 'extra' *work* of being a PhD student because of a cumulative lack of time:

> I want to send a poster, preparing the poster it is not, I say to myself no it is waste of time I am not preparing the poster it is best to write my thesis it is best to do my analysis [than] to travel and waste 3 or 4 days (Elaina, Physical Sciences & Environment, PhD, 1 Child)

In making these decisions, CCS students are aware that their experience is not the same as those of other PhD students as a result of their status as carers, disadvantaging them as individuals who do not receive credit within the institution for balancing the complexity of PhD study with raising children. As Douglas reflects:

> it somehow reflects on your commitment to the programme, so I would never discuss my children in relation to not being able to turn up to something. And yet it's always in the background to sort things out and accommodate requests, this is going on, that conference is happening (Douglas, Business PhD, 2 Children)

This cumulative pattern of a sense of 'missing out' – and personally taking responsibility for it – further foregrounds a sense of 'othering' (Archer & Leathwood, 2005,

p.190-1) and 'individualisation' (Burke, 2013, p. 37) which permeates being a student and a carer. In missing out on opportunities, such as in Martin and Elaina's examples, there is a suggestion that they are 'other' or different from their peers, who are seen as more freely able to take up opportunities for development or conferences because of their lack of caring status, as well as being 'individually' responsible for these compromises which limit their experience.

However, in Douglas's case, this is more complex. In the first instance, he is aware of his difference – that it is 'always in the background' – and he is adopting an individual responsibility for this 'to sort things out'. Alluded to here is the sense that Douglas is also seeking to 'pass' (Sanchez & Schlossberg, 2001) as a student without caring responsibilities: 'I would never discuss my children'. In this way, to pass becomes part of a "highly charged site for anxieties regarding visibility, invisibility, classification, and social demarcation" (Schlossberg, 2001, p.1). Whether consciously or not, Douglas's actions suggest he is aware of these classifications and demarcations in this institution and that they are potentially 'mainstream' or 'care-blind' (Moreau, 2016, p. 10-11) in nature; he could be adjusting his behaviour to 'pass' as part of a more institutionally accepted 'norm'.

This introduction of 'passing' theory further demonstrates the complexity of CCS student experiences. For instance, the flexibility of PhD study did allow CCS students to work when more structured study may have hindered their ability to continue, but this led to different experiences of PhD study for these students. For example, Nicole reflected on how she was able to continue to collect data for her PhD remotely after she had given birth and continued her studies when she was unable to travel because of childcare commitments:

> I'm still doing fieldwork at the moment so a lot of this would be interviews, arranging interviews, completing interviews, but I'm not traveling anymore, so I'm doing them all by Skype and telephone. When I was pregnant I was still traveling down to London, or wherever they are but yeah so it's just a lot of desk work now. (Nicole, Social Sciences PhD, 1 Child)

This echoes the findings of existing literature on PhD student parents (Springer, Parker & Leviten-Reid, 2009) in highlighting the ways, similar to Nicole's, that ad hoc individual strategies are more common (in the USA) than campus or departmental strategies to support retaining student parents on PhD programmes.

Despite examples of the benefits of flexibility provided by PhD study, it was often noted that this known flexibility meant it was difficult to carve out time when things went wrong or call on the support of others. For instance, both Martin and Eliana are expected to "drop everything" (Martin, Arts & Humanities PhD, 1 Child) if needed to care for their children, and the time involved in unforeseen extra childcare is not easily regained. For instance, when Elaina's son broke his elbow at nursery and had to be cared for at home for the next couple of weeks, her supervision meeting was postponed a week; while, in some ways, this delay provided flexibility, Eliana still needed to make the time lost up, "work[ing] until two in the morning or three in the morning, which is very difficult. It is very stressful" (Elaina, Physical Sciences & Environment, PhD, 1 Child). This further emphasises that, despite some benefits to flexibility, there is an 'individualisation' (Burke, 2013, p. 37) quality to this CCS student experience. In other words, CCS students hold themselves accountable for their 'choice' (Leathwood, 1998; Reay, David & Ball, 2005) to study while caring for children. As in Elaina's case, the responsibility to remedy issues is placed on her, and the need for her to manage her time and find space to study, which is already potentially in short supply, led her to sacrifice sleep in order to keep on track.

5.3.4 Sacrifice of personal time

Building on this theme, the sacrifice of personal time in order to study was also presented by the students in my study, and, while referenced by all students, this was often more intensely stressed among female participants. This echoes the findings of existing literature (Brooks, 2012a; Hinton-Smith, 2012a, 2012b; Moreau & Kerner, 2013) which highlight the gendered

way in which time and space are occupied and how women are more likely to experience greater sacrifice of personal time. For instance, both Rebecca and Claire presented the loss of personal time most strongly and framed this as being an ultimatum which comes from being both a student and a carer, as seen in these quotations:

> You can either have a social life, enough sleep, or pass your exams with amazing grades. And I chose to get enough sleep, and to have a decent balance between having enough time with the kids, and to pass… I didn't go to [university] to make friends, I didn't go to have fun…it would have been nice to socialise, as well, not necessarily at university, but with my own friends where I live. Unfortunately, I lost a lot of friends, I've even lost my family because of what I'm doing, it's isolated me definitely…. (Claire, Health PhD, 2 Children)

> I have no social life… I actually have no social life…I've got some close friends if I've got any problems or if I'm just tired, you know they would help me … but I don't actually have time to kind of go for a coffee or go to the movies or something…it's a mission just to get home… (Rebecca, Health PhD, 1 Child)

What unites these accounts is a sense of 'othering' (Archer & Leathwood, 2005, p.190-1) from this experience of isolation as a disparity in experience emerges because their caring and studying status means that they are losing aspects of their lives as a result of their studies. Losing contact with friends and family due to not having the time to maintain these relationships is highlighted in existing research as a barrier in its own right for CCS students (Hinton-smith, 2012b; Moreau & Kerner, 2013; Wainwright & Marandet, 2010). However, this loss of personal relationships is also a quality of the neoliberal culture of higher education studied in detail in the experiences of staff (Lynch, Baker, Lyons, 2009; Lynch, 2010). The choices that Claire and Rebecca discuss are also examples of 'individualisation', framing them as necessary 'choices' (Leathwood, 1998; Reay, David & Ball, 2005), despite the students not always having agency in these choices due to their caring commitments. Claire and Rebecca seem to simply accept: "I choose to get enough sleep"; "I didn't go to have fun"; "I have no social life".

5.3.5 Childcare

While some of the issues discussed in relation to finding time and space to study relate to providing childcare, the provision of childcare was not raised as a specific barrier to *work* itself, and, for instance, there was not a specific call across the participants for the greater provision of childcare within the institution. In part, this came as a result of the pattern highlighted at the beginning of this section whereby students' geographical location had been determined by factors existing prior to attending the North University; by now, being part of the way through their studies, they had established rhythms around their childcare which worked for them. Occasionally, it was reflected that childcare can be a little ad hoc at times, as Rebecca comments:

> Because my fiancé is a firefighter, so he's doing 12-hour shifts. So, neither of us are around, and sometimes the grandparents work so… it's all last minute, it's always the night before trying to figure out the arrangements for the next day. (Rebecca, Health PhD, 1 Child)

In the main, however, most students had managed to establish a rhythm which fitted in with their day and worked for them, easing some of the pressures. As Emma reflects:

> I have to pick the kids up from the childminder's no later than 5.30 and then it's getting the kids home, … my other half does the cooking I'm very lucky… getting the kids fed, getting them sorted (Emma, Health BSc, 1 Child)

Or giving students a sense of stability and security by being close to home and reliable:

> I am lucky that I've got a childminder who knows what I am doing, and is supportive you know I am a panicker you know when heading up the M1... but I know my kids are safe... (Emma, Health BSc, 1 Child)

This sense of stability and continuity in childcare arrangements made it almost a secondary concern to the need to find time and space to study and to make decisions about the best use of time. Only one student, Ellen, reflected that she needed additional childcare in order to be able to find the space and time to study and keep up with the pace of work. As she reflects:

> I do need childcare as study is on an evening, one day a week, and so I have to get my mum to look after my little girl, and that is the only way that I would have been able to study. If I didn't have that I basically wouldn't have had a chance to be able to study. (Ellen, Business (WP) BA, 1 Child)

Ellen studied and worked part-time and was able to fund this extra childcare in order to isolate time to study.

The experience of CCS students is diverse and complex, and, in some way, it should not automatically be taken that childcare was not an issue for all -- or even for those students who were content with the consistency of their arrangements. For instance, Nicole, when describing the *work* of going about her day with her child and navigating drop-offs and hand-overs for childcare, highlighted how the inaccessibility of campus caused most of her issues:

> my partner took the baby to one of the bars in the SU the other day, and they gave her like a colouring pack when they were just sitting having a drink. I don't know where they got that from, but it was nice of them, it was quite geared up to it, I think the union is quite good. But then some of the access ways around the university, the building my office is in, it's a real pain to get there, and you have to go around a really long way via the ramps. So, I think it's different areas may be worse, in terms of how accessible they are. (Nicole, Social Sciences, PhD, 1 Child)

While students were perhaps content with their consistency of childcare, for Nicole, the inaccessibility of campus is frustrating and speaks again to a sense of being 'othered' (Archer & Leathwood, 2005, p.190-1), as the institution is physically inaccessible to CCS students. There is also an extent to which these students are engaged in 'individualisation' (Burke, 2013, p. 37) through decisions around childcare, based on the idea that they have made a 'choice' (Reay, David & Ball, 2005; Leathwood, 1998) to be at university which they should manage themselves, potentially reinforced by such visible themes of 'othering' from the inaccessibility of campus, communications and timetabling. This echoes patterns in the findings of existing literature (Hinton-Smith, 20012b, pp.122-146; Moreau & Kerner, 2013, p. 7; NUS, 2009, pp. 57-66) in highlighting both physical communication barriers to arranging and managing childcare and the inaccessibility for CCS students of institutional norms and practices which I discuss later in this chapter.

5.4 Financial issues

In this section, I focus on examples in students' accounts which provide some insights into the ways in which financial issues impacted CCS students' *work*. I discuss, in turn, the three broad areas of tuition fees, domestic costs, and the hidden cost of study, which were the primary financial concerns for the students in my study. These examples are complex and experienced by CCS students in intersectional ways – both as a result of their caring status and other demographic factors.

5.4.1 Tuition fees

In the first instance, only two students, Richard and Claire, discussed finance in terms of direct institutional costs such as tuition fees. This came about as Richard was a part-time student and had subsequently found that, in order to balance his time to work and time to study, he needed financial support from his parents with his tuition. As he explains, in order to make more time to study:

> I would have to cut more hours at work and that would mean less money so we wouldn't be able to survive so for me…But I'm very fortunate to have my parents paying my fees – in fact all of the fees and that's very fortunate for us … (Richard, Arts & Humanities, PhD, 2 Children)

This echoes the findings of Hinton-Smith (2016, p.213), demonstrating the way in which some students in my study did turn to informal forms of financial support. Claire, however, was not in a position to call on such informal support and, instead, engaged in work while studying full-time as a result of returning to study after dropping out from another course. Claire had to cover her initial first year's tuition fees herself, having already used some of her Student Finance England (SFE) entitlement. She explains:

> In my first year, I was working as a nurse Saturdays and Sundays every single week, because I had to pay my own tuition fees, and you can imagine, I can't even believe I did it, I very nearly burnt out, I was an absolute mess, without telling the university I was doing any of it, without asking for any help (Claire, Health PhD, 2 Children).

Claire's account, which becomes a case study explored in detail in Chapter Six, foregrounds the potential dangers of the results of the institutionalised culture of 'othering' (Archer & Leathwood, 2005, p.190-1), and 'individualisation' (Burke, 2013, p. 37), which have become recurrent themes across this discussion. Here, Claire 'very nearly burnt out'; while she did not burn out on this occasion in connection to fees, from her perspective, she came close, in part due to the recurrent sense of being 'other' because of her caring status and responsibility for her individual choice to attend university, which peppers Claire's story across this study. I foreground this notion as it makes clear that, from the beginning, Claire felt a sense of 'otherness' and the need to 'pass' in considering her issues of tuition fees during the first year of her course. In this context, while it is a recurrent caveat in this analysis that there is complexity and diversity about CCS students' experiences, I would suggest this goes to the heart of the core problem this thesis is concerned with: some students enter university feeling in deficit, despite policy discourses which suggest this should not be the case. It is, therefore, not good enough to merely dismiss such complexity and diversity as too difficult and variable to address. By unpicking these students' experiences and the recurrent themes of 'othering', 'individualizing' and 'passing' I have identified so far, I am starting to build insight into why the core problem this thesis explores might exist.

5.4.2 Domestic costs

Embracing this intersectional plurality of experience is particularly important considering that, while not all CCS students in this study experienced Claire's specific circumstances, financial hardship was a common theme; this included issues faced in terms of meeting personal, childcare, and domestic costs, such as those related to housing, food or other core domestic utilities such as gas and electric. As Catherine clearly articulated:

> The financial is my biggest issue… and there are times when I feel a little bit resentful … all we have is you know my stipend and then the little bit of tax credit so, I have got £1300 a month [stipend] 850 is on rent, 450 is on childcare, so there isn't an awful lot left over, I don't have to feed the kids [*Because this*

> *is covered in childcare*] … but there isn't a lot left over for food for me. And we don't have the heating on, in the winter very much an hour a day and stuff like that is hard and I feel sad for the kids you know… (Catherine, Health PhD, 1 Child)

Even when the financial burdens were not so clearly set out by participants in terms of their income and expenditure in the way Catherine does, it was clear that there is a regular struggle. Again, this echoes the findings of existing literature (Gerrard & Roberts, 2006; Hinton-Smith, 2016), which suggests that CCS students are often just about managing or engage in informal support or commercial private debt to make ends meet domestically due to low or insufficient institutional funding. As Catherine went on to say:

> If I had a blank cheque book, I would double my money so that I could afford childcare, and food, to be able to afford proper protein, a breast of chicken, that would be so lovely… (Catherine, Health PhD, 1 Child)

Again, while there is not one single CCS student experience and some of the domestic financial pressure CCS students face may be witnessed by other groups of students, such as those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, for some CCS students, their needs border on 'food poverty', a common theme of the national policy landscape (Garthwaite, 2016). In making decisions about how to navigate this, there is the additional pressure that CCS students need to stretch their domestics funds to cover their children, almost above prioritising their own needs: an issue other non-CCS students do not have to face. Catherine's desires are not luxurious or ostentatious, and this image brings a very real ethical and moral dilemma to the question of the financial support CCS students need when their unique circumstances require it. The need for such support should not be easily dismissed but also seems incompatible with the policy landscape I problematise throughout this thesis: where financial support, such as bursaries, has consistently been a key aspect of access and participation policy.

5.4.3 The hidden costs of study

While these costs may appear 'personal', another pattern orientated around the regular financial struggle for CCS students was the juggling of finances to meet hidden institutional

costs, which have the potential to make their financial stability precarious. While this may also be a consideration for all students, the already precarious position of CCS students finances being stretched to cover children, as well as themselves, compared to non-CCS students creates an added dimension to such decision making. For instance, Emma's account highlights how issues such as placement travel costs, core to her programme of study, could create an extra burden: "because there is no buses that get me there so that will cost me like £7 extra but that's all part of it [Study]" (Emma, Health BSc, 1 Child). Emma also details how childcare costs became an issue as a result of overrunning lectures or seminars or last-minute changes to the timetable, resulting in childcare overtime costs; she explains:

> I need to be here by this time and then I need to get the kids by this… [the Childminder] is good, but like if you are late by 10 minutes 15 minutes then it's an extra £5 so you have got that pressure there." (Emma, Health BSc, 1 Child)

This often meant that the financial struggle was positioned as institutionally mediated; although these costs where not directly charged by the institution, the tone created by these practices meant that students who experienced such fiscal difficulty saw these as the result of being a student. When discussing the ways these barriers could be remedied, participants placed some responsibility for this with institutions – in part because the institutions were seen to have taken on this responsibility through admitting CCS students. For example, Rebecca explained very directly in summarising, "if you [the institution] don't want to have student parents, then don't accept us on to the course" (Rebecca, Health PhD, 1 Child). The tension emerging here as Rebecca feels both frustrated to be the recipient of 'othering' (Archer & Leathwood, 2005, p.190-1), and 'individualisation' (Burke, 2013, p. 37), which places her as being responsible for the barriers she faces. At the same time, the institution is also limiting Rebecca's ability to 'pass' (Sanchez & Schlossberg, 2001) as just another student if she wanted to. This echoes the tensions and complications Moreau identifies, and discussed in Chapter Three, as she seeks to typologise institutions into three categories; "careblind", "targeted" or "mainstreamed"

(Moreau, 2016, pp.10-11). The more common 'careblind' or 'targeted' institutions do miss students – either in the former by taking an approach of treating all equally regardless of caring status or in the latter by providing only very specific institutionally-defined forms of support. As I saw in the development of the problem with which this thesis is concerned, some students, such as Rebecca, have the potential to become frustrated participants in their institution, as they are either not catered for at all or have experiences not covered by the defined supports on offer at the institution.

Despite my participants' awareness of the potential institutionally-mediated nature of the financial difficulty they faced, a common pattern in their accounts was to individualise or minimise this by justifying or adopting as a matter of personal choice or resilience the hardship which they faced. For instance, Catherine, despite being one of the strongest critics of the financial hardship she faced and appearing resentful that greater institutional funding was not provided, sometimes minimised the implications for her and her children by highlighting the temporary nature of their hardship: "I would like to be able to do things that [her child] see other people doing and we can't do that but it's only temporary" (Catherine, Health, PhD, 1 Child). This sentiment was repeated by other students, like Emma: "it's just dealing with that it's just knowing it's not forever" (Emma, Health BSc, 1 Child). Catherine also held a unique perspective compared to the other students in my study, building on this 'individualisation' by suggesting that the hardship her children faced was a positive development opportunity for them. She explained that, prior to becoming a student, her child had, in her view, the potential to become spoilt:

> at 6 [years old] "I need the latest mobile', and my daughter got one, much to my disgust, but I couldn't let her not be the only one… and [then] it was like you know, 'I need a Cath Kidston PE bag', but I was like 'you are 8 you don't need a Cath Kidston PE bag' (Catherine, Health, PhD, 1 Child)

By becoming a student, Catherine explained how she positioned this financial hardship as a positive outcome in some ways:

> ...learning opportunity because people that have enough money you know they don't necessarily know the value of that and so by not having those opportunities it allows us to, enjoy things that we perhaps wouldn't have thought of for free, so a day out in the park people that have got lots of money might go to a theme park (Catherine, Health, PhD, 1 Child)

Catherine's positive framing of the financial hardship here is neither consistent with her views discussed earlier in connection to domestic costs, nor was it shared by any other students in this study.

In the main, financial hardship was positioned as temporary and subject again to narratives of 'individual' responsibility (Burke, 2013, p. 37) and the 'choice' (Leathwood, 1998; Reay, David & Ball, 2005) to take on this burden, although it may not always have been clear to students what the implication of their choices would be. This could come in small caveats, as seen when Emma implied the difficulty of childminder overtime was 'all part of it [Study]' (Emma, Health BSc, 1 Child); however, it was at times explicitly stated and discussed, as in the quotation below from Emily:

> I've just kind of accepted that I've taken the course on, and I've just accepted that it is what it is when I get my placements, and whatever happens I just do what I have to do to manage it… [Resigned but unsatisfied tone] (Emily, Health BSc, 1 Child)

In discussing the financial barriers which students face, 'othering' (Archer & Leathwood, 2005, p.190-1) and 'individualisation' (Burke, 2013, p. 37) recurs, and the institutionally-mediated nature of the CCS student experience is seen again as a theme.

5.5 Inaccessibility of institutional norms, and practices

In this section, I focus on accounts that illuminate some of the ways institutional norms and practices were inaccessible to the students in my study because of their caring status. The role of these norms and practices is a key theme in the following chapter, which looks specifically at how *texts* move around the institution and are activated within students' experiences. Lengthier, detailed stories around this theme, specifically from Claire, Rebecca

and Nicole, are therefore featured there. The examples discussed here provide context ahead of this chapter, and in this section, I will discuss in turn: children on campus; timetabling and communication; service design; changes in support; support for international CCS students; and the accessibility of student support. Again, these examples are complex and experienced by different CCS students in different ways.

5.5.1 Children on campus

The first factor focused on the norms around the acceptability of CCS students bringing their children onto campus. While there was no evidence of a formal policy around whether or not children were allowed on campus, there was a lack of clarity, leading to a feeling that campus was not 'family friendly' or designed to accommodate students with children, as highlighted in the example from Nicole mentioned at the beginning of the chapter about navigating campus with a pushchair: "the building my office is in, it's a real pain to get there, and you have to go around a really long way via the ramps" (Nicole, Social Sciences, PhD, 1 Child).

Most often, therefore, students avoided bringing children onto campus, although the reasons for this varied. Some students, for instance, explained that there had simply been no need to bring their children onto campus because their support networks worked for them and had currently not made it necessary:

> I haven't because I've already got networks in place, I think it would be quite different for students who come from another part of the country, we got our mates and family around us, so I don't think from the kids point of view that the university itself is a focus of their lives. (Arthur, Arts & Humanities PhD, 1 Child)

Others had taken the conscious decision that university was, in fact, a personal escape and, therefore, had not tried to bring their children onto campus, as Sue described it: "because I was a stay at home mum before, this is for me. It's not for them, it's for me," (Sue, WP Access Programme, 3 Children).

Even students who expressed a lack of need, or desire, to bring their children onto campus had stories which supported the notion that they were encouraged not to do so by the 'othering' (Archer & Leathwood, 2005, p.190-1) they had witnessed or experienced in relation to this. For instance, while Sue made claims that the decision not to bring her children onto campus came from a personal feeling about wanting university to be preserved as a special place for her, she drew on an example which explained how she had once tried to bring her children to university and described the negative reaction this had received from staff and other students:

> **Sue:** I have brought her to lectures once, she had one of those training days and it was a lecture that I didn't want to miss, and why should I miss it anyway! So, I asked permission for if she could come to this one-hour lecture and she sat at the back with a puzzle book and was quiet as a mouse, but it wasn't very… it wasn't very… what's the word…they weren't happy…
> **SD**: The school or the individual academic?
> **Sue:** yeah, it was [The Academic] …a little bit tetchy... and I wasn't impressed… I emailed to ask permission, because obviously I wouldn't just bring her, and that attitude was a bit…hum ummm umm [*gestures to suggest stand offish/look down upon*] and I wasn't happy, but her behaviour (child) and I said her behaviour will be exemplary, and it was …. (Sue, WP Access Programme, 3 Children)

Sue's feelings of being looked down on or 'othered' (Archer & Leathwood, 2005, p.190-1) were shared by other students who had experienced either similar microaggressions which made them feel 'less than' or that they did not belong. For example, Fiona reflects that, while she did not bring her children onto campus, she remembered it not being a positive experience for other CCS students on her course: "I remember that a woman who was on my course, had to bring her children in and they had to sit in the common room while we had our lectures…" (Fiona, Education MA, 2 Children). The actual isolation of the children in Fiona's example is more pronounced but speaks to a sense that university has a culture that it is not child friendly, as expressed by Elaina, who could recall, like Sue, the sense that it was not appropriate from people's looks:

> It is not family friendly. For example, we can't take him to our office, because other student is working and look at him like this [gestures to indicate being looked down on], or sometime we are take him to our [study area] or something

> like that they look him [gestures again to suggest being looked down on] … I think it is not family friendly the campus no (Elaina, Physical Sciences & Environment, PhD, 1 Child)

These are difficult patterns to articulate in some ways because of their intangible quality of a look or a gesture, but these represent microaggressions which are significant to these students and embody a culture which does not accept them or suggests to them that having a child on campus is unacceptable.

Up to now, CCS students have experienced 'othering' (Archer & Leathwood, 2005, p.190-1) and 'individualising' (Burke, 2013, p. 37), with occasional suggestions that they 'pass' (Sanchez & Schlossberg, 2001). However, now, through these microaggressions, the implication that the 'othering' and 'individualisation' is so pronounced it starts to suggest that 'passing' (Sanchez & Schlossberg, 2001) could be part of the institutional culture and a desirable practice for CCS students to engage in. As 'passing' is not always "simply about erasure or denial… but the establishment of an alternative set of narratives" (Schlossberg, 2001, p. 4), it can be a positive and affirmative experience, but, at the same time, the notion of "political and social invisibility" (Schlossberg, 2001, p. 4-5) must be taken into account to contextualise acts of passing and the natives which surround them. For instance, when 'passing' is positioned in response to microaggressions and cultural desire for groups or individuals to be unseen, this raises serious questions for the equity of experience CCS students are able to have, when the culture they find themselves in does not accept them fully unless they hide key parts of their identity.

Even when some CCS students raised and discussed concerns about the appropriateness of bringing children into teaching, these provided further evidence of 'individualisation' (Burke, 2013, p. 37) and 'othering' (Archer & Leathwood, 2005, p.190-1) themes becoming deeply entrenched in CCS students' own thinking, which further suggests they are engaged in an act of 'performativity' (Schlossberg, 2001, p.6) to not be seen as CCS students. For

example, in the focus group, Arthur raised the point that he could not trust his children to behave enough in class to allow him to give the seminar his full attention, and that this would also disrupt the learning of others:

> **Arthur:** yeah but I would not bring my children to a class…because I would be too concerned about their behaviour…
> **Douglas:** mine wouldn't sit still.
> **Arthur:** But for me I wouldn't be able to focus and to get the most out of it, and at any given moment to disrupt would be embossed and take away from the other people. They are here to hear the lecture not have me with my kids going 'daddy...daddy…daddy can I do this? Or that?' but then again, we all manage it differently …
> (Arthur, Arts & Humanities PhD, 1 Child; Douglas, Business PhD, 2 Children)

This position was shared by Douglas, who explained:

> I think children ask too many questions if they are sat there, 'yeah what does that mean?' and I wouldn't be able to get the best out of it because I'd be bloody thinking oh god, I'm neglecting him (Douglas, Business PhD, 2 Children)

Here, despite the reasonable concern around distractions in seminars and lectures, a complex 'individualising' tension underpins these accounts which supports the assertion the CCS students are 'other' (Archer & Leathwood, 2005, p.190-1) and encouraged to 'pass' (Sanchez & Schlossberg, 2001) as both Douglas and Arthur take on responsibility for how their role as students impacts others. Woven into their accounts is an apologetic dynamic for their status as 'carers' and the potential of disruption 'taking away from other people', which is prioritised before their own or their children's needs or how the institution could support them better. Again, this echoes Brooks (2012b, p242) and the sense to which student parents adopt as 'personal failures' the structural inequalities of the institution, which the norms of not bringing children on campus have the potential to generate.

Of those students who did bring their children onto campus, a notable pattern was how they only brought their children onto campus at times when such behaviours would go largely unobserved or unnoticed, although these students did not always seem conscious of this. For instance, a common pattern, seen in Sarah, Richard, and Arthur's accounts, would be that they

would bring their children onto campus during institutionally organised 'outreach activities' specifically designed for introducing young children to higher education. For instance, as Sarah described:

> I brought them once so they can see where I'm at, and what I'm doing, and so they can aim towards... I think they did something with films where they all put some films on and we came to that and it's not just like going to the pictures, it's something that the university has put on… (Sarah, Social Science BA, 1 Child)

It is important to note that this example occurs in addition to Sarah's needs to be on campus, and it could be suggested creates a defined and acceptable time and space within which children are allowed to be on campus within a 'dominant' 'institutionally structured' timescape (Burke et al, 2017, p.18). In an environment where there is no clear guidance on when children are allowed on campus, this has the potential to imply CCS students are only 'allowed' to be visible on campus as carers with children at specific times and for specific reasons.

The next most common alternative discussion of bringing children onto campus came from cases where it was unavoidable. As reflected by Fiona:

> I've had to bring all three [children and husband] of them on to campus when I've had to sort things out with library books and things, and they have always been fine, well they are pretty well-behaved kids… (Fiona, Education MA, 2 Children)

Such actions are often permeated with justifications which relate to how 'unproblematic' and well-behaved children are, which makes such choices acceptable or appropriate; for instance, as Fiona goes on to explain:

> but the children have always gone everywhere and we don't treat them particularly childlike if that makes sense, so if we need something we will explain to them this is what we need to do, and how they need to behave as well… (Fiona, Education MA, 2 Children)

This furthers the idea here that the presence of children should, in some way, be minimised or justified when on campus – particularly in a culture which shows silent disdain for such actions, as seen earlier in the accounts of Sue and Elaina. These examples provide a further impression

that CCS students may not be entitled to occupy this space, in some way, as both 'students' and 'carers', adding to the sense of 'other' (Archer & Leathwood, 2005, p.190-1) within the institution.

Similarly, some students, such as Douglas, brought their children onto campus but only outside of working hours, such as weekends:

> I would just because it's a nice place to come to, you come here, sometimes on a Saturday, and they do their homework while I do mine, and they look around and then we go down to the park, on the edge of campus…and so to them now this is a destination point, so they ask me are we going to the university today? And to me it's a bit about …my son who can be brilliant or very lazy and its already showing at 8 and a half, I want to impress that studying can be a good thing… (Douglas, Business PhD, 2 Children)

Douglas describes this as seeking to introduce his children to higher education in a similar way to Sarah and the more formal outreach activity. When placed in the context of Douglas's reflections discussed in relation to time and space to study that he was aware not to mention his children because "it somehow reflects on your commitment" (Douglas, Business PhD, 2 Children), his actions could be taken as a manifestation of his awareness of the 'otherness' of having children on campus and that bringing his children on campus 'out of hours' forms part of 'passing' (Sanchez & Schlossberg, 2001) behaviour. He feels he needs to avoid being seen as a CCS Student because the culture within the norms of the institution suggests having children is not part of being an accepted form of 'student'.

5.5.2 Timetabling & communication

The recurrent 'othering' (Archer & Leathwood, 2005, p.190-1) and the lack of consideration of CCS students, however, appeared to imbue the fabric of the North University, and students generally appeared to be aware of the institutionally-mediated quality of some of the difficulties they faced and how small changes could make a big difference. For instance, in terms of supporting time and space to study, students reflected on the way in which the fundamental structure of the academic year of the North University worked against them

because "the school holidays don't necessarily match the university ones…" (Arthur, Arts & Humanities PhD, 1 Child), a point echoing broad patterns around timetabling in the existing literature (Hinton-Smith, 2012b, pp. 67-69; Marandet & Wainwright, 2010, p.796; NUS, 2009, p.29).

Timetabling could be particularly problematic, especially when the use of lecture capture technology is used inconsistently on campus:

> I'm missing lectures, I'm missing seminars, if I can't get anyone to look after him cos he wasn't able to see his dad for a week, I had to look after him all the time, so but I missed a lot work, sometimes I can get it recorded, but I wasn't always able to do that, so that was the same with inset which are always on Mondays which are always my busiest day… (Sarah, Social Science BA, 1 Child)

Timetabling and its communication also proved to be delivered in such a way which meant that CCS students had difficulty participating in HE as well as exacerbating the problem of time and space to study. For instance, it was not uncommon for timetables to be confirmed at short notice, even on the same day, so, if a CCS student had not planned to be on campus, they may not be able to attend. As Sue reflects:

> I'm at home 13 miles away and I would love to go to that, and it would be beneficial for me both personally and professionally, but I can't just go 'yeah let's go' cos I'm 13 miles away (Sue, WP Access Programme, 3 Children)

A similar issue is the scheduling in full-time programmes of evening teaching, as the university tackled issues of not having enough teaching space, which caused issues for care arrangements; Sarah reflects: "I mean if there is a seminar that ends at 9.00-9.30 I end up getting home after 10.30-11.00 at night, and I can't do that…" (Sarah, Social Science BA, 1 Child). Such timetabling issues were also not the sole preserve of taught students, as often the research group seminars, invited talks, or training and development – important to the development of PhD students' research – were also timetabled in ways which overlap with key handover periods for childcare:

> **Douglas:** we get all these seminars, some of them 2-3 hours but they are in the afternoon at 4pm in the evening, and that's the only one you can take, and then they don't give it again for 5-6 months…
> **Arthur:** ours are always at 5pm.
> (Douglas, Business PhD, 2 Children; Arthur, Arts & Humanities PhD, 1 Child)

This point aligns to the barrier of time and space to study discussed earlier, particularly echoing the struggle in reconciling the "dominate timescapes" determined by institutions (Burke, et al, 2017, p.18). This pattern of timetabling is built into the 'othering' (Archer & Leathwood, 2005, p.190-1) of CCS students because it is an example of institutionally mediated and regulated time, which does not acknowledge these students' needs. Here, the structure of time management and organisation within the institution appears to be absent of consideration of the diversity of students who may be participating and leads CCS students, as seen in the discussion above, to 'individualise' (Burke, 2013, p. 37) this barrier as something for them to resolve and manage themselves. This highlights a key aspect of the core problem of this thesis: a disconnect between the sphere of policy and practice, which appears to systematically exclude and isolate some students.

5.5.3 Service design

Further evidence of this systemic lack of acknowledgement and 'othering' (Archer & Leathwood, 2005, p.190-1) of CCS students came specifically in the design and delivery of services, which students would often position in ways which minimised their right or entitlement to raise such concerns. For instance, one core concern discussed in the focus group was the way in which exam periods left students open to not being able to act as an emergency contact for their children's schools. This had the potential to be very significant for CCS students with a small support network, such as international students or single parents. As Douglas reflects, this has been overlooked in the design of the process, and expressed a lack of empowerment and frustration as possible solutions seem simple:

> I don't know you would have to work it out but there should be an allowance where the invigilators… [Frustrated pause] I don't know…. [Frustrated pause/Heavy sigh] some kind of a process for registered parents, where there is a number you can call, any school, and the invigilators would come and get you, and maybe there would be a form you would fill out to register for that… (Douglas, Arts & Humanities PhD, 1 Child)

Furthermore, Fiona's concerns around the opening times of the student services, such as finance, or not being open for long enough are positioned as "really silly things" (Fiona, Education MA, 2 Children). This occurs despite the fact that Fiona attends a programme specifically designed for evening study, yet all significant student services departments close by 4.30pm, which has caused particular issues for Fiona:

> you're only coming over once a week, and the student services closes at 4.30 or something then it's really difficult… last year my student card expired because I was only on a one year program and I knew I couldn't get library books out, so I knew that I had to leave work early in the end to ensure that I was over in time, and it's those little fiddly things… (Fiona, Education MA, 2 Children)

This speaks, in part, to a wider 'othering' of students who do not fit a typical mould, of a full-time student who is dedicated to study with little or no additional commitments outside of their timetabled university activities. Such patterns echo the frustration shared by students such as Rebecca, noted earlier in discussing financial issues: that the institution does not adapt to support the students they accept.

Considering Moreau's (2016) typology of student services for student parents, discussed in Chapter Three, there is a possibility that this institution is either providing 'careblind' or 'targeted' supports (Moreau, 2016, pp.10-11) – but it is unlikely from these accounts that 'mainstreaming', which would integrate the status and needs of CCS students into wider services, is provided. What is unclear is to what extent this is an example of the specific lack of support for CCS students. Although this is an example of how the practices, such as the opening time of student services or exam arrangements, do not appear to give consideration to or meet the needs of CCS students, these issues are not given structural credit in the experience of these students and become individualised problems. This can be seen in the way such

challenges are significant enough to students to discuss in some detail but become marginalised as being seen as 'silly', 'little' or 'fiddly', which compounds the 'othering' of CCS students, as not only are their needs not being met but their articulation of them is marginalised, too. This issue will be explored further in the following chapter, when the specific role of *texts* as carriers and distributors of institutional policy and decision making is explored through the accounts of how *texts* are 'activated' in the student experience.

5.5.4 Changes in support

There is further evidence of 'othering' (Archer & Leathwood, 2005, p.190-1) and 'individualisation' (Burke, 2013, p. 37) which require closer consideration to locate their causes and sources within the institution. The evidence can be seen in accounts where previously provided support is changed within the institution. For example, many students on access or widening participation programmes enter the university receiving a form of additional support and flexibility through the Lifelong Learning Office. This support can become inconsistent and problematic when the student disconnects from these tailored services by entering schools and faculties within the wider university. This was present in Sarah's experience, as she moved from the Lifelong Learning Office to the main school of social sciences:

> when I came for my interview [at the lifelong learning office] I was told it was more designed for mature learners, so getting into education in a non-traditional way so we only had 3 days a week, and it was more flexible. We would be finished by 1, and there was a lot of support there in the first year, in the foundation year, so I thought it would be easier for me because they knew all about me and I knew all about them, but when I went from foundation year to year one [in the social science faculty] things were a bit more difficult, courses were here there and everywhere and made it more difficult, but not too tricky. (Sarah, Social Science BA, 1 Child)

When such a contrast becomes apparent, it foregrounds a potentially variable culture within the institution which has some departments more attuned to the needs of CCS students than others. This also echoes the point made earlier around the nature of 'passing' (Schlossberg,

2001, p.1) within this institution and to what extent CCS students like Sarah are being acknowledged. This could be through the kinds of support she received originally or being inducted into a culture which ultimately seeks to encourage her to assimilate and 'pass' as a student without caring responsibilities. As an Institutional Ethnographer, this is a pattern which I will return to in the next chapter through the exploration of the role of *texts* within the institution as a means of understanding how the institution coordinates its culture and potentially mediates CCS students' experiences.

5.5.5 Support for international CCS students

In addition to the issues of inaccessible norms and practices, already discussed above, in some cases, it appeared in the data that these can be exacerbated for international CCS students, specifically because of their status as both 'international' and 'carers'. In my study, two students were international: Douglas was from North America, and Eliana was from the Middle East. Of these two, Douglas experienced few noticeable barriers because of his international status, having brought his two children with him at the start of his programme, and appeared to settle into study with relative ease. Elaina's story, however, differs significantly, having given birth mid-way through her PhD; she was faced with navigating this change in her circumstances within the institution while also responding to external regulations.

Elaina's most significant barrier would be navigating the complex visa regulations of both the UK and her home country with limited advice and guidance from her institution. Eliana took only one month's maternity leave due to the implications of visa restrictions, around official suspensions: "and after that we start as normal" (Eliana, Physical Sciences & Environment, PhD, 1 Child). While an advice centre was available, the visa regulations proved complex, and, with the time pressures of completing a PhD, Eliana reflected how seeking the advice felt like a waste of time: "they take your time, they waste your time" (Eliana, Physical Sciences & Environment, PhD, 1 Child). In addition to ensuring Eliana maintained her own

visa status to study, she was also concerned to ensure that her son would be given citizenship

in her home country, as she describes:

> When I was born my son, they [Middle East Country Government] didn't give his citizenship, I was born him here. So we must go back to our country, we must get visa from our country, get passport from our country so we take some holiday to go back to [Middle East Country], to get the passport and identity everything, and go from [Middle East City 1], to [Middle East City 2] to get the visa for our son. (Eliana, Physical Sciences & Environment, PhD, 1 Child)

While the university may be limited in the support they could provide regarding this visa and

citizenship process, it is notable that the university advised Eliana to resolve this process via a

holiday instead of as some form of formal leave. As seen here:

> [the] international office they are not helpful they say you must go back to your country…take 4 months holiday, not suspension, to take all this process, we just take 3 months. (Eliana, Physical Sciences & Environment, PhD, 1 Child)

Conflicts start to emerge between the institutional policy and the legal visa

requirements, which cause further distress in Eliana's account. Whilst the guidance to take

leave was provided via the international office, her supervisors advised her of a strict limit her

department places on the time to complete a PhD. As she explains:

> there is a policy that you must finish in fourth year, you are able to attend or access the labs for 4 years, you can access the office or use the desk everything for 4 years but… (Eliana, Physical Sciences & Environment, PhD, 1 Child)

This information leads Eliana to rush the citizenship process for her son, taking three months'

holiday to pursue the process instead of the recommended four, in the knowledge that the time

on her qualification is both limited and not protected by the institution, such as through a

formally acknowledged suspension. When studying a STEM subject like Eliana's, such time

away is also unproductive as "we only do our analysis and writing out thesis in the lab, and

there is no time for this" (Eliana Physical Sciences & Environment, PhD, 1 Child). This aspect

of Eliana's experience may vary in disciplines where remoting working might be easier.

Cumulatively, while Eliana had overcome these challenges, she acknowledges that this

has been to the detriment of her qualification, reflecting that she is making "very, very slow

progress" (Eliana, Physical Sciences & Environment, PhD, 1 Child), while internalising responsibility for this. When asked what the institution could provide to remedy this, she is clear this is her own individual responsibility: "No I don't think. It is all related to us. [I] must manage this" (Eliana, Physical Sciences & Environment, PhD, 1 Child). This echoes the reflections made earlier in the chapter in relation to 'timescapes' and the individualising nature of these. As Burke et al reflect:

> Dominant time is institutionally structured and students' differential timescapes (perceptions, locations and lived experiences) are all caught up in complex webs of social networks, relations and inequalities that are 'pictured differently within different contexts (Burke et al, 2001, p.18)

Within a regulated institutional context, where strict dominant time is laid out in the 'four year' rules and regulatory requirements discussed, Eliana has internalised the view that she has chosen to diverge from this dominant institutional time and, accordingly, sees it as her responsibility to resolve this, despite the way in which this dominant time frame does not take account of the complexity which comes from clashes between her 'caring' and 'international' status. Furthermore, this provides further evidence of Brooks' observation that student parents adopt 'structural inequalities' as 'personal failures' (Brooks, 2012b, p.242).

It is a challenge, at times, to make sense of Elaina's account in full, given that she is unable to point to *texts* or formal guidance, and hence I have chosen to discuss her experiences as part of understanding accounts of CCS students' *work* and the barriers they experience rather than as the observation of textually mediated processes in the next chapter. A couple of observations appear within this context which highlights the inaccessibility of the institution to Eliana as a CCS student and an international student. Firstly, as Eliana observes that it is part of her culture that, at her age, women are expected to give birth, it is questionable to some extent why an institution, which caters to a significant number of international research students, did not appear more coordinated or organised in responding to Elaina's needs. As seen here:

> in our culture, our people say you are getting older, as you know women getting older it is difficult to give birth, or pregnant so they think me it is a four year, studying PhD is selfish why you are, why you are not getting pregnant with babies it is not difficult we are sure, people say to me, but it is difficult… (Eliana, Physical Sciences & Environment, PhD, 1 Child)

Eliana's claims are also not unique, in some ways, to her being an international student and echo those of Springer et al (Springer, Parker & Leviten-Reid, 2009) which highlight that, given the average age of child birth and the average age of a graduate research student, it is not uncommon or to be unexpected that these students may have children. Just as with the patterns highlighted above in relation to children on campus or the provision of timetabling, it is potentially an institutional norm which furthers the 'othering' (Archer & Leathwood, 2005, p.190-1) of CCS students in this study.

Secondly, it is unclear as to how 'flexible' or 'supportive' Eliana's supervisors are in supporting her as a student with caring responsibilities or if they are potentially furthering the presentation of 'othering' via their approach. On the one hand, Eliana talks about how flexible and supportive her supervisors have been, but, at the same time, although being unable to point to any documentable policy, makes claims about an inflexible policy of a four-year time limit:

> the university have the [Health and Safety] policy which they can't change for me or for another student but my supervisor they are very helpful. For example, when I say to them, I want to take… suspend my studies they say take as much as you can, to relax but the university have the policy if you are suspend one month you must tell the postgraduate tutor. But when I have spoken to my supervisor, they are very flexible and they are very helpful, they consider my situation differently. (Eliana, Physical Sciences & Environment, PhD, 1 Child)

Eliana is grateful, as her supervisors appear to be giving clearly defined information, such as in relation to the duration of study, but it is unclear form some of her accounts what is actually different or changing about her experience as a result of being pregnant or having children. It is difficult not to bring my own experience of student support practices into this analysis, but it is questionable as to why extensions to study were not offered and what form flexibility actually takes. In considering this point, I refer back to Eliana's earlier example of how

flexibility was provided when her child broke his arm. Here, in moving her supervision meeting, a further backlog was ultimately created which involved her working into the early hours of the morning to make back time, 'individualising' responsibility to Eliana to overcome this issue. It is unclear from this account to what extent Eliana's supervisor is seeking to subvert such homogenisation through the flexibility and respond to Eliana as a complex intersectional CCS and international student – or if they are, in fact, supporting her to remain on track and 'pass' (Sanchez & Schlossberg, 2001) as a full time PhD student.

While the accounts of many CCS students are complex, Eliana's account highlights a complex patterning of 'individualisation' and 'othering' which comes from the combination of her 'international' and 'caring' status. This reflects, in essence, the core problem with which this thesis is concerned, the critique of the policy landscape and the way in which students who are visible in this landscape appear so in very homogeneous ways. In this context, students such as Eliana, with complex intersectional identities (Crenshaw, 2001), run the risk of falling between the gaps in policy and support.

5.5.6 Accessibility of student support

Finally, returning to the wider experience of the CCS students, the question of the form of support and its accessibility is also presented. For instance, Catherine clearly claimed that in order to seek support from her institution, "my kids would literally have to be dying" (Catherine, Health PhD, 1 Child) and strongly positioned herself as an 'individual' responsible for her 'choice' to study with children. For Catherine, a claim to support had the potential to be personally injurious to her ability to self-actualise as a successful student, as seen in this example:

> at work [i.e. employment] you wouldn't, so I wouldn't expect by my having children to be given special consideration erm… and I wouldn't expect it here, in fact I would potentially find it quite offensive that I wasn't being treated the same as everyone else and that I needed special help because I've got kids. Yes, it would piss me off severely actually. (Catherine, Health PhD, 1 Child)

At the same time, Catherine took an approach to her status of 'carer' and 'student' whereby she draws clear distinctions between the two roles, which could be argued were positioned as seeking to 'pass' (Sanchez & Schlossberg, 2001) as a non-caring student – something not seen in other accounts quite so strongly. In this example, Catherine has possibly internalised the institution in her perspective to such an extent where she is actually encouraged to acknowledge her caring status by the staff when she is adamant to keep it separate from her student status. This highlights the complexity and diversity of the CCS student experience and identity. As she explains:

> my son was in hospital, I did not take any time off there was no way that my education was going to be impacted by a sick kid. There were nurses there that's what they do, and you know if other members of the family felt that it was appropriate to go and sit with him fine, but it wasn't going to affect me. So, and university were shocked that that would be my attitude because they knew that he was in hospital, he wasn't dying but he was quite unwell, so when I said to take time off my kids would have to be dying yes, they would. So, I was talked to about where my priorities lie, erm… so yes, I can understand other people think that that's appropriate support but from a personal point of view, erm… I would feel that I had failed in what I want to be doing … (Catherine, Health PhD, 1 Child)

While this quotation shows some evidence of an institution attempting to provide support, it also appears to subtly reiterate 'individualisation' (Burke, 2013, p. 37), returning the focus to Catherine to manage this situation and placing the focus on 'her' priorities. This makes it questionable how this could be seen as an authentic supportive recognition of the caring status of a student and makes the institutional culture around CCS students appear messy and complex, an area I will seek to unpick in the next chapter.

5.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, across these students' accounts of their *work*, a complex and diverse image appears whereby different CCS students experience different themes – and their associated issues and barriers – in different ways. There is a coherence about the grouping of three

common practical topics, which this chapter has sought to explore: time & space to study; financial issues; and the inaccessibility of cultural norms and practices.

Within these three topics, I suggest that there are three useful ways to theorise themes. First – and most commonly seen in this chapter – is 'othering' (Archer & Leathwood, 2005, p.190-1), where, consistently across these topics, as students report on how their difference is present within the institution to greater or lesser degrees based on context or individual circumstances. For instance, when bringing a child onto campus, the microaggressions students recounted which positioned their status as carers as in deficit or unwelcome were subtle but pronounced for nearly all students who recounted them. Secondly, and interwoven at times with the sense of 'otherness', was an 'individualisation' (Burke, 2013, p. 37) narrative, whereby some CCS students where positioning themselves as to blame for the challenges they faced. Their 'choice' (Leathwood, 1998; Reay, David & Ball, 2005) to study had brought with it barriers, such as financial hardship or deficits of time, with influence of 'othering' reaffirming this perspective, leading students to internalise as individual failings what are either 'structural inequalities' (Brooks, 2012b, p.242) or the complexities and restrictions that do not give them a freedom of 'choice' (Reay, David, Ball, 2005, p.29). Thirdly, 'passing' (Sanchez & Schlossberg, 2001) is foregrounded in these accounts of *work* and the barriers CCS students face – although perhaps less pronounced than the 'othering' and 'individualising' themes in this chapter but connected to both. 'Passing' is not automatically a negative, and, in some ways and depending on the context and the individual student, it can be a positive affirming experience, as CCS students are allowed to 'pass' as themselves and fit in with other students. However, while some students demonstrated this relationship with 'passing', most demonstrated either a frustration at not being able to 'pass' or a sense of needing or having to 'pass' as without caring responsibilities as a result of a need for "political and social invisibility" (Schlossberg, 2001, p. 4-5). This is when their status as carers is positioned as

'other' with 'individualising' deficits, as discussed, and appears to require them to 'pass' in a way unique to carers, compared to other students who may experience 'othering' and 'individualisation'. The extent to which this is an institutionally mediated as desirable I will seek to explore further as I move through this thesis.

Returning to the core problem within which this thesis is concerned, the recurrent 'othering', 'individualisation', and 'passing' do start to suggest that some CCS students have the potential to have inequitable student experiences as a result of their 'caring' status. Perhaps this problem was best expressed by Rebecca, who posited in frustration, "if you [the institution] don't want to have student parents, then don't accept us on to the course" (Rebecca, Health PhD, 1 Child). In this chapter, the extent of the role of the institution in manufacturing and establishing these feelings as the norm is still unclear and requires further exploration. As an Institutional Ethnographer, I now turn in the next chapter to explore the activation of *texts* within student participants' *work* as a means of understanding how power and decision making is carried around the institution and shapes these student experiences.

Chapter 6: CCS students' institutional experiences: activated texts

6.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the ways in which *texts* are activated within the experiences of the students who Care for Children while Studying (CCS). I identify five *texts* which appear with different levels of detail and frequency across the student participants' accounts: applications forms & admissions documents; email mailing lists; websites; mitigation forms; and a student parent policy. The latter two *texts* form key case studies, as they are activated in some detail in the accounts of critical events in three students' experiences. In this chapter, I take each *text* in turn, discussing their activation, seeking to understand how these examples of *texts* and their activation build on the recurrent themes seen in CCS students' accounts of their *work* from the previous chapter. I seek to understand how – if at all – the institutional setting mediates the recurrence of 'othering' (Ahmed, 2012; Archer & Leathwood, 2005; Burke, 2013; Phiri, 2015; Reay, 2001), 'individualisation' (Brooks, 2012b; Burke, 2013), and 'passing' (Leary, 1999; Sanchez & Schlossberg, 2001) identified earlier. In so doing, I seek to understand more clearly the role of the institution and institutional setting in the experiences of the CCS students, and, thus, the central puzzle with which my thesis is concerned: understanding if and why some students may experience inequities of experience in a landscape of policy and practice which can appear contra to this.

6.2 The activation of 'texts' within the 'work' of CCS Students

As discussed in Chapter Four, a key methodological tool in an Institutional Ethnographic (IE) approach is to explore the presentation of *texts* and their activation in the accounts of the standpoint participants. While *texts* can take any form (Smith, 2006, p.66; Smith & Turner, 2014, pp. 4-5), in IE, the *text* is not a standalone form to be analysed (Smith & Turner, 2014, p.5) but "something being done in an actual sequence of action at a particular time and

particular place" (Smith & Turner, 2014, p.5), so the *text* is analysed not as an object but as an occasion in a social space.

As with the process in Chapter Five, for analysing the themes CCS students navigate in their *work*, a similar approach was taken in identifying *texts*. First, I looked at the frequency of citation of the *texts*, as shown in Table 6.1, but also considered the significance of the *text* within the participants' accounts. Having identified five key texts across participants' accounts shaped the nature and analysis of this chapter. For instance, the first three *texts* – applications forms & admissions; email mailing lists; and websites – are peppered across participants' accounts in greater frequency of mentions; these *texts* do not serve as a core part of a critical event for these participants. The latter two *texts* – mitigation forms and student parent policy – are only the subject of three students accounts, but these *texts* form a cornerstone of their experience discussed in rich detail. Thus, while I have quantified the distribution of these *texts* as a means of coherently structuring this chapter and demonstrating a systemic approach to understanding this data, this approach should not be confused with simplifying what are rich and complex experiences. This chapter, therefore, takes a structure that reflect this pattern, the first three *texts* analysed across numerous students' accounts, while the fourth and fifth *texts* are explored more in a rich case study form.

Participant	Applications Forms & Admissions	Email Mailing Lists	Websites	Mitigation Forms	Student Parent Policy
Student 1 Claire	3	0	1	10	0
Student 2 Ellen	4	1	2	0	0
Student 3 Fiona	0	1	2	0	0
Student 4 Martin	1	1	0	0	0
Student 5 Rebecca	0	0	3	0	15
Student 6 Sue	0	1	5	0	0
Student 7 Emma	0	1	1	0	0
Student 8 Arthur	1	0	3	0	0
Student 9 Eliana	1	0	2	0	0
Student 10 Douglas	1	3	4	0	0
Student 11 Richard	1	0	1	0	0
Student 12 Sarah	0	1	1	0	0
Student 13 Catherine	2	0	1	0	0
Student 14 Emily	1	2	0	0	0
Student 15 Nicole	1	0	2	0	12
Student 16 Rita	1	0	1	0	0

Table 6.1 The frequency of key texts from coding student participant data.

6.3 Application forms and admission

To join the institution, all students needed to engage with some form of *text* to facilitate their admission. As the core problem with which my thesis is concerned focuses on the participatory experiences of CCS students once at university, I did not seek to recruit new applicants to the institution. When starting interviews, some students chose to start by sharing their reflections on how they entered and, specifically, their application forms. The dominant discourse around these forms reflected on the ways these students had sought to hide their status as carers to 'pass' (Leary, 1999; Sanchez & Schlossberg, 2001), which subsequently framed their experiences of being at university.

At times, the feeling of 'need' to 'pass' was grounded in the students' other demographic characteristics, which had already, in their mind, positioned them as in deficit or 'other', echoing a common theme in existing literature around passing and LGBT or BME students (Bhopal, 2018; Formby, 2015). Claire, for instance, did not mention her caring status in approaching the application, as she felt:

> I'm already against all the odds having no A-Levels… coming from an access course, I'm older than the traditional students. I'm not from a wealthy background (Claire, Health PhD, 1 Child).

Accordingly, Claire had already approached the institution with caution before applying, unsure if she was a suitable candidate for study at all, regardless of her caring status:

> I was quite cautious in my emails to them, and kind of just emailed them about open days and entry requirements and sending tentative emails just to see if they would consider me, from my background. (Claire, Health PhD, 1 Child)

After not being reassured in the responses from admissions of her suitability as a candidate, this shaped how Claire felt about writing her application and mentioning her caring responsibilities:

> I didn't want my name to be linked to the ideas that I might be a difficult student… I already ticked a number of the equal opportunities boxes, I ticked all those, I ticked all the disadvantaged boxes, and I felt the less I told them about my particular circumstances [as a CCS Student] the better (Claire, Health PhD, 1 Child)

This feeling – that having caring responsibilities would count against her – was shared by other students, influencing how they wrote their personal statements. For instance, Emily (Health, Undergraduate, 1 Child) recalled how:

> I didn't think it was relevant to put anything in there about having a child, and I suppose a little bit of me in the back of my mind did think that maybe it would affect my chances, because maybe you know people with children are a struggle (Emily, Health, Undergraduate, 1 Child)

It is in the examples of Emily and Claire that the sense of 'othering' (Ahmed, 2012; Archer & Leathwood, 2005; Burke, 2013; Phiri, 2015; Reay, 2001) as a CCS student permeates experience before entering the university. The sense of difference they have at this stage leads them to feel the need to cover-up or 'pass' (Leary, 1999; Sanchez & Schlossberg, 2001) as a student without caring responsibilities as a means of gaining access. In this way, 'passing' is an acknowledgment for these students that their difference is not accepted. Just as Leary (1999, p. 94) discusses of Broyard, mentioned in Chapter Four, Emily and Claire's passing appears as a sad acknowledgment that their identities as carers are not useful to them in this context and

that they must engage in a performance of a more useful identity of 'student'. This pattern is echoed in existing literature on admissions, such as Burke & McManus's (Burke & McManus, 2011, pp. 40–41) study of arts student admissions, discussed in Chapter Two, where students are expected to present and conceptualise themselves during admissions in ways which demonstrate that they already hold qualities and credentials of an accepted form of 'student' in order to be admitted.

Some students were more confident in disclosing their caring status to the institution at admission; the key difference here appeared to be that these students could mobilise and use their caring status as a means of supporting their ability to 'pass' as a more accepted and unproblematic form of students. For example, Catherine (Health, PhD, 1 Child) spoke about how she had always seen herself as doing a doctorate. She did disclose her caring status at interview – but only as a means of demonstrating how well organised she was and how seriously she would take the course:

> Once I had had my interview, literally the same day, I went to look at the area that I wanted the kids to be in, from a schools point of view… even though I'd not been offered it. I did say that in the interview that was what I was going to do next, because they were like how will you adapt to this I was like well this is what I'm doing today, I am planning already if you give me this (Catherine, Health, PhD, 1 Child)

Catherine's example provides further evidence of the complexity of CCS student experience and the way in which personal perspectives, such as the positive affirmative desire to pass, provides greater complexity to these students' experiences in addition to the intersectionality of their demographic characteristics.

Ellen's account echoes Catherine's to some extent by demonstrating a confidence at admission orientated around her own individual ability to organise as seen through her navigation of application documents:

> I sorted everything out myself, I basically went online and just saw what was available and I was looking at the funding that was available…I got my work on board, so that they could give me time…I just applied direct myself, and I

> just sourced it all myself, and I just applied. (Ellen, Business Undergraduate, 1 Child)

Ellen's account later references the lifelong learning office:

> I went to the lifelong learning office where they were brilliant, they were really supportive, and I took it from there. I didn't have any issues about whether I could or couldn't do it, as I had done 2 years of a degree previously… (Ellen, Business Undergraduate, 1 Child)

Ellen's focus is on her own individual capacity to complete the application form; hence it is unclear, even after prompting, what, other than directing her toward the application form and accepting her on the programme, the office did to support her as a CCS student. Ellen's account also echoes Catherine's in the way there is an absence around any specific accounts of being 'accepted' as a student with caring responsibilities. Ellen's account is further complicated by the fact that she also mobilises other factors, such as prior study, and takes individual ownership of tricky aspects of the application, such as researching and securing funding or getting paid study leave. In this sense, Ellen's account has elements to it which are visibly more aligned to being a mature student and the tropes of lifelong learning policy (Osborne et al, 2004): a mature student; prior credits or experience of higher education to support their admission; returning to university initially via an access course or part-time study; supported by part-time work. In Ellen's case, combined with the absence of an explicit acknowledgment of her status as a CCS student in this process, it is possible to suggest that she is able to 'pass' as the more accepted form of mature student, and her needs as a CCS student become just another aspect of this mature status. This possibility echoes Moreau's (Moreau & Kerner, 2013, p. 4) finding that the needs of students who care for children can often be positioned as synonymous with the needs of mature students, reducing the visibility of the former through the provision of support for the latter, and reinforcing the absence within the institution of an specific acknowledgment of the students 'caring' status and specific needs as a result. Such patterns are common in institutions which Moreau positions in later work as 'careblind' or 'targeted' (Moreau, 2016

pp. 10-11) which, as discussed in Chapter Five, the North University appears to be emerging as through this analysis.

Looking at these four students' accounts of approaching admissions documents, what unites them is the role of 'passing' (Sanchez & Schlossberg, 2001) by minimising their status of being a (potential) student who cares for children and an absence of an explicit acknowledgment of their status as 'carers' during this process. It includes both those who explicitly hide their status (see Claire and Emma) and those who present it minimally (see Catherine) or who are potentially acknowledged more as a 'mature' than CCS student (see Ellen). In this sense, there is an echo of other contexts of 'passing' and the need within institutional settings to demonstrate a convincing performance:

> A convincing performance of, for example, "whiteness", or "straightness" or "womanliness" requires not just culture but skill: the seams must not show. We should note briefly that, generally speaking, as Bill Clinton's informs "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" military policy illustrates, the ability of homosexual subjects to pass as straight is comforting to the dominant social order (Schlossberg, 2001, p.6)

When seeing 'passing' in this context, I suggest that there is a possible culture of "don't ask, don't tell" surrounding caring status for CCS students. Claire and Emma, for instance, express more than a concerted effort to 'pass' and 'not let the seams show' in their application forms. Ellen has the potential to be seen as part of the dominant social order which accepts 'mature students'. Catherine's account, to some extent, remains complex in this lens, but reflecting on a different aspect of her story (seen toward the end of Chapter Five), Catherine has also demonstrated examples of seeking 'not to let the seams show' in refusing to take time away from her studies when her son was in hospital. As discussed, an institutional reaction emerges, questioning Catherine's actions and offering support, but, given the earlier absence of acknowledgment at admission, it is reasonable to suggest this is due to the specific circumstances – a hospitalised child – rather than a wider acknowledgment of Catherine's caring status.

Even for those students who are admitted and do not directly express a sense of 'othering' (Archer & Leathwood, 2005, p.190-1), all of these students' accounts demonstrate evidence that they are, in fact, recognised not as carers but as their ability to 'perform' and 'pass' (Schlossberg, 2001, p.6) as a student without caring responsibilities.

6.4 Email mailing lists

The complex interplay of 'othering' (Archer & Leathwood, 2005, p.190-1) and 'passing' (Sanchez & Schlossberg, 2001) was also seen in the way students described and discussed the use of email mailing lists at the North University. In the first instance, the process of being added to the mailing list itself was a means of highlighting CCS students' 'difference' and the sense that they were 'other' (Archer & Leathwood, 2005, p.190-1) for some participants and, in some ways, hindered students' ability to 'pass' (Sanchez & Schlossberg, 2001). It was not uncommon for students to be confused as to why they had been allocated to a mailing list for mature or student parents. This was seen in the interviews in reflections like Emily's below:

> I don't remember ever declaring on an application from that I had a child… but, I know that the university knows that I've got a child because I get lots of emails for family events and things, so I suppose at some point [I did] … (Emily, Health, Undergraduate, 1 Child)

Considering Emily had sought to hide her caring status, and 'pass' as a non-caring student at the point of admission, as previously discussed, being added to the mailing list was a source of confusion. It appeared from these accounts that, at some point in these students' administrative journeys, they had been added to these mailing lists, but none were clear when, how, or why, and the impression was created that an unseen action by staff had determined that this would benefit these students' participation at university. This either affirmed a sense of 'otherness' (Archer & Leathwood, 2005, p.190-1), as their difference had been highlighted without their agency, or that students like Emily had not been allowed to – or had, in some ways, failed to – 'perform' and convincingly 'pass' (Sanchez & Schlossberg, 2001) within the institution.

Many students even commented on the way these email mailing lists did not give them information which might support them in being both a student ***and*** a carer for children. For instance, Ellen reflects that both "the university, [and] the Lifelong Learning Office, didn't really send anything out to do with childcare or anything" (Ellen, Business Undergraduate, 1 Child) through these lists. The following interaction in the focus group between students demonstrates a lack of information about mature student support, which was the reason some mailing lists had been created:

> **Martin**: What's MATSOC?
> **Sarah**: Mature Student Society
> **Douglas**: I've never heard of that one either
> **Martin**: Well, that another one that's passed us by obviously…
> (Martin, Arts & Humanities PhD, 1Child; Sarah, Social Science BA, 1 Child; Douglas, Business PhD).

While time and energy is being spent by staff within the institution to develop resources which reach out to these students, such as mailing lists, a pattern develops to suggest that these prove ineffective in terms of providing information which would help to meet these students' needs, and actually help to perpetrate a further 'othering' (Archer & Leathwood, 2005, p.190-1) of CCS students by making visible the way in which they are being singled out as different without their engagement in this process.

The 'othering' (Archer & Leathwood, 2005, p.190-1) within the institution of CCS students appeared again when students tried to suggest improvements. For instance, Douglas recounts his frustration following an attempt to make suggestions about how the activities in the mailing list could be tweaked to meet his needs better:

> I was invited to a Saturday event [via a mailing list], which was actually offered, to bring my children there and leave them there. And I emailed back to say can it be done in the evening, and it was one of these no response general emails…
> (Douglas, Business PhD, 2 Children)

By not receiving a response to these suggestions or having his views dismissed or ignored, Douglas experiences a microaggression as part of this 'othering' (Archer & Leathwood, 2005,

p.190-1), which builds upon the examples in the application experiences previously discussed. In the case of the mailing list, some forms of acknowledgement are seen, like the advertising of provision of activities for children which could be interpreted as acknowledging CCS students. However, there is, again, an absence of these students in this acknowledgment which echoes the sense of absence discussed in the context of admissions earlier in the chapter and the sense of 'otherness' this helped build for CCS students because of their caring status.

6.5 Websites

Websites were frequently mentioned by the standpoint participants' accounts, as seen in table 6.1 earlier. Despite this frequency, websites rarely featured as a cornerstone for activity or activation for the students in my study. Websites were the first port of call for information, reflective of the role the internet plays in society, but often meant that participants went away from this frustrated or inconvenienced due to the absence of information specifically relevant to them as CCS students. This was a pattern I, myself, had found in approaching the North University as my site of research, and searches for simple key words such as 'student parent' on their website would produce results entirely aimed at the parents **of** an undergraduate student. Such as in this extract below:

> We have compiled a list of questions that are frequently asked by parents:
> - What happens if my son or daughter fails any of their modules?
> - What will my son or daughter's contact hours be?
> - How can I find out how my son or daughter is doing academically?
> - What is freshers' week? (The North University website)

What this exercise suggests is the way to find information about being a student who is not a young undergraduate becomes an extra barrier to these students and provides further evidence of the 'otherness' of CCS students at this institution.

Participants also shared the view that the institution's websites were positioned toward the 'young' undergraduates aged 18-21 years old, and this was a key issue for them. While spoken about with humour, as seen in the following quotation, this concentration on 'young'

undergraduates reinforced a notion that nothing would be provided for CCS students – that they were 'different' or 'other' (Archer & Leathwood, 2005, p.190-1) – and compounded 'individualisation' (Burke, 2013, p. 37) in that CCS students had to take responsibility themselves for any barriers they may face:

> **Sue**: When going into year one with all the younger ones…
> *(Group laughs)*
> **Arthur:** (*laughing too*) It was more tailored towards them…
> **Douglas:** yeah let's be careful defining what we mean by young
> **Emma:** well 18-year olds…
> **Richard:** Children!
> **Sue:** (*laughs*) Kids!
> **Sarah:** I didn't expect anything at all I just, I just thought oh yeah, I'll do that, yeah so, I didn't expect any support or any recognition of the fact…
> (Sue, WP Access Programme, 3 Children; Arthur, Arts & Humanities PhD, 1 Child; Douglas, Business PhD, 2 Children; Emma Health BA, 1 Child; Richard, Arts & Humanities PhD, 1 Child; Sarah, Social Science BA, 1 Child).

Again, as seen in Chapter Five, this sense that students become – or frame themselves as – 'individually' responsible for their 'choice' (Leathwood, 1998; Reay, David & Ball, 2005) echoes Brooks' (2012b, p.242) research and how student parents in her study accepted individual personal responsibility for the structural inequalities they experienced.

This 'individualisation' (Burke, 2013, p. 37), was common not only to explain why information was not expected, like Sarah does at the end of the quotation above, but also to explain why such information would not be provided for some CCS students. For example, Fiona, expressed she could understand the lack of information and support because, as a part-time student, providing support for her might not be as important for the institution:

> I guess probably for somebody who was on a full-time course, but because mine is an evening course, it's probably not as important, as an undergraduate who has fulltime caring responsibilities… (Fiona, Education Masters, 2 Children)

Here, Fiona assumes that her needs as a carer are synonymous with her part-time status, while also creating an unknown other in the institution who has the agency to decide that support for her as a CCS student is not important or needed at the institution because of her mature and part-time status.

This absence of information on websites and the 'individualisation' (Burke, 2013, p. 37) of the student in this institution to supplement deficits of information about support, such as through additional research and informal online sources, only furthered the sense of unwelcome 'otherness' (Archer & Leathwood, 2005, p.190-1) CCS students experienced. For instance, only Rebecca specifically said she found the institution's Student Parent Policy online (a text I will discuss later) without being sent a link, as others had. However, for Rebecca, this was not easily accessible:

> I went to *The Studentroom*[5], I registered, and just asked if there are any student parents out there, or from previous years. And no one came forward, and no one was a student parent…but when I checked on the website [Student Room], and googled [The Specific Title of the Policy for The North University], and when I read through [The Policy], it was 15 pages outlining all the support, and how they support you, and make sure everything is ok for you. And I thought ok, yeah [The North University] sounds like a really good Uni, and that's what made me choose [it], most of all because of that policy. (Rebecca, Health PhD, 1 Child)

As demonstrated by this quotation, the policy had a central role in helping Rebecca chose the North University, although its difficulty to find is further evidence of the absence of easily accessible information to support the needs of CCS students. Furthermore, the use of informal *texts*, such as the online forum, by Rebecca, echoes the patterns identified by Hinton-Smith (Hinton-Smith, 2016, p. 213); when student parents are faced with inadequate formal support, they resort to more informal support as a means of coping. The difference here, however, is that these are identifiably textually-mediated in this context, as students seek to understand the workings of the institution. Hinton-Smith's informal supports were, instead, often familial and focused on filling gaps in childcare and finances.

---

[5] *The Studentroom* is an online discussion forum for students to post content and questions as well as a searchable archive of previous topics. It is not affiliated to a university but run by a private company. See: https://www.thestudentroom.co.uk/

In Rebecca's case, the aforementioned informal support acted as a positive guide to more formal information, the institution's Student Parent Policy. However, when sources such as online forums and archives of information are used, there is potential that information available in these forms can be wrong or out of date. An example of this came in the form of references by some students to the student union's Student Parent society website. For instance, Sue (Access Programme, 3 Children) reflects on the way the society and its website have increasingly become inactive, as "much of it is voluntary, the societies, and events, and I think that's why it's so disorganised, someone should project manage it to bring it all together" (Sue Access Programme, 3 Children). At the time of Sue's comment, the information on the Student Parent society website was six months out of date, and, when I consulted the website in 2019, the same information and events Sue found are listed from 2013.

The precariousness of informal information and the lack of more formal alternatives became a significant source of discontent among the students. For instance, in the focus group, the frustration was clearly expressed that such deficits of information could easily be resolved by the institutions if resources could be directed toward it:

> yeah just a website, a central place that brings it all together, so it's not always like climbing Mount Everest to get there… (Arthur, Arts & Humanities, PhD, 1 Child)
>
> I still go on the webpage (of the Uni) which was my first point of contact for these things, and it's not obvious, it doesn't say like yes here's your service and support, and click here if you have a child etc, there should be an obvious way to do this, an algorithm, something which is an easy solution to [help] because when you do need it (support), you ***NEED IT***. (Douglas, Business PhD, 2 Children)

Such support seemed feasible to students, but an unseen other was making choices not to provide it or that it was too difficult, which was common to how the sense of 'otherness' (Archer & Leathwood, 2005, p.190-1) was manifested by students. It echoes Fiona's suggestion discussed earlier in this chapter that such support was just "not important". While

talking about class and 'othering', Reay (2001) highlights the challenge of claiming entitlement to support in education as:

> transformation is a fraught, risky business if you and your kind have historically been, and are currently positioned as, `other' to the educated, cultured subject (Reay, 2001, p. 341)

The pressure which Douglas feels, for instance, stressing the importance of support when "you **NEED IT**" and frustration of it "not being Mount Everest" highlights this fraught riskiness and suggests Reay's interpretation of 'otherness' is also felt by some CCS students as a result of their caring status. Furthermore, for some students, this may also be exacerbated by the intersection of 'caring' identities with others such as class, highlighting the complexity of identity which CCS students can hold.

The interplay of an absence of information and 'othering' (Archer & Leathwood, 2005, p.190-1) comes into play in other examples, such as in the provision of and information about on-campus childcare, which, in itself, has the potential to positively acknowledge CCS students' needs. Only Ellen and Eliana used or referenced the on-campus childcare. Since Ellen was a member of staff at the university both prior to and during her studies, she had always used the service, paying for it via the university payroll. Elaina, however, as a full-time PhD student, had not been able to find information on arrival about childcare near campus and instead enrolled her son in a local nursery in the first instance, only to learn of the centre by passing it on campus:

> we registered him at the nursery next to our flat, next to our accommodation, but it was very bad, very messy…. we just saw the childcare centre, and we had waited for 1 year in the waiting list, in the waiting list until we got a place. (Eliana, Physical Sciences & Environment, PhD, 1 Child)

The long waiting list, which was problematic for Eliana, and the content of the website was also indicative of the way the service seemed geared toward the needs of staff more than students. Despite the website's focus on information about on-campus childcare, the lack of reference to students highlights why most students might be unaware of this service,

complemented by the way Ellen, as a member of staff as well as a student, felt easily recognised, reflecting: "I felt very comfortable, I didn't feel any issues around the childcare or anything at the time" (Ellen, Business Undergraduate, 1 Child).

6.6 Mitigation forms

The provision of mitigation at the North University was federalised, with the exact process devolved across the university for schools within faculties to determine. By the term 'mitigation', I mean a formal application for a particular set of circumstances to be considered as impacting on a student's performance by their department and for reasonable support to be put in place. Examples could include: an extension to assignments, adjustments to placements, or for consideration to be made at an exam board when classifying a student's degree.

6.6.1 Claire's story

Only one student, Claire, underwent any formal processes to seek mitigation, citing her status as a student who cares for children. Claire was a medical student coming to the end of her studies, but her journey had not always been a smooth one. As indicated in discussing applications forms, earlier in this chapter, Claire had entered university unsure of her suitability as a student because of her demographic background: a BME student and first in family to go to university.

On entering the first year of study, Claire needed to pay her own fees because she was re-entering undergraduate study, having previously studied for a year elsewhere and, on top of her caring responsibilities, worked part-time as a locum nurse at weekends. This had nearly led Claire to burn out: "I can't even believe I did it. I very nearly burnt out. I was an absolute mess, without telling the university I was doing any of it" (Claire, Health PhD, 1 Child). While Claire looks back on this and reflects that she should have asked for help sooner, she is reminiscent of why she did not, remembering her anxiety at applying for university and being keen not to be "linked to the ideas that I might be a difficult student" (Claire, Health PhD, 1 Child). Being

perceived as a difficult student was a motif which permeated Claire's account, and she frequently referred back to how she had been vindicated in not disclosing her caring status earlier because, even once admitted, her position still felt precarious. As Claire reflected:

> One thing I've learnt over the 5 years, is that your kind of just tolerate this kind of stuff, and keep your mouth shut, because it's not necessarily particularly easy but I don't think it would be particularly difficult to get rid of a difficult student, so I think if you have problems it's not worth the adverse publicity (Claire, Health PhD, 1 Child)

These views, however, were shaped by her experience in navigating the formal processes of support.

Claire's formal request for placement mitigation came at the prompting of her department, who sent out an email to all students. Claire perceived this task as simple, and one she did quickly: "Just fill in your form express your preferences and let us know. You will be given priority if you've got a valid reason and can give us evidence…" (Claire, Health PhD, 1 Child). Despite her caring responsibilities being known to the department via her personal tutor, she completed the application in some detail, including evidence such as birth certificates and school registration letters, and was confident in her suitability for the support offered when submitting the application.

After submitting the application, Claire received no formal acknowledgement until her placement allocations were confirmed weeks later, and she found out that she had not received adaptions to her placements or any justification. As Claire recalls:

> I didn't get an email back, but I just assumed that I'd filled the form in, sent it back and done what was expected, or needed from me. But then when I got my placements they were actually the most far away regions possible, so obviously I started panicking, and I contacted the lady who had received all these forms and had started to do all the allocations, didn't get a reply… (Claire, Health PhD, 1 Child)

When Claire did receive her placement allocations, each one of them was in excess of 30 miles from the main campus of the North University, and Claire lived an addition 10 miles away from campus. Claire panicked, concerned about her ability to meet all her commitments, and

tried to explained to the administrator that: "I can't even travel there, because they were expecting me to be in [*Another Northern City*] for one placement, for 9.00 o'clock, and so I'd be battling the rush hour traffic" (Claire, Health PhD, 1 Child).

Having only received short emails saying that the matter would be looked into without any further advice, Claire followed these up with further emails which got no response, until Claire then received a referral to a formal disciplinary process for her attitude. As Claire recalls:

> [the administrator responsible] actually reported me to the university for bullying and harassment, and this is on the belief that I had been bullying and harassing her, but the reality was that she refused to answer my emails (Claire, Health PhD, 1 Child)

For Claire this was a distortion of the panic she felt about her concerns, as she became framed as a 'difficult' student, reinforcing her earlier concerns; she recounts:

> I didn't send lots of bullying and harassing emails, I sent about three emails, but she sent me back like a one-word reply, or one sentence saying I'll look into it, without actually addressing the distress in my emails. And I was like I've got these placements, I'm really worried (Claire, Health PhD, 1 Child)

As Claire's case moved to the Head of School (HoS) as a formal disciplinary matter, she is further framed as in deficit in a complex way, symptomatic of shifting the blame for any difficulties on to the individual student and away from the institution. In entering this disciplinary process, the HoS acknowledged Claire's point of view on events, agreeing with her that she had followed the process as laid out in the documents and providing recognition to her claim for consideration. However, in reaching a decision about the best way forward, the issue became framed not as one for the institution to resolve (such as through providing the placement adjustment) but for Claire to resolve as an individual. As Claire recounts, the HoS: "said to me that they can't be seen to support students at the expense of the support for their administrative staff" (Claire, Health PhD, 1 Child).

Following this, the HoS sought to mentor Claire into understanding how she could take responsibility and apologise for the issues and inconvenience caused. As Claire recounts:

> he basically said there's ways of apologising in the NHS, as a doctor, there's ways of apologising without accepting any responsibility or liability. And he said you need to apologise, even when you're not in the wrong, and to me that was basically saying to me that I believe you and support you, but you need to be quite diplomatic about this. (Claire, Health PhD, 1 Child)

What is more troubling is the way Claire internalises the HoS's advice, accepting it as supportive – "I'm glad I learnt that lesson then, rather than in the future" (Claire, Health PhD, 1 Child) – and, in so doing, accepting institutional inequalities as personal failures, as Brooks (2012b, p.242) has seen in other CCS students experiences.

A complex sense of injustice emerges at the end of Claire's story, as she reveals how students who did not have caring responsibilities did receive adjustments to their placements through this mitigation process. Claire recounted how Steve, a friend who did not have any caring responsibilities, submitted mitigation on this basis:

> I found out that one student, *Steve,* who doesn't have any children, or caring responsibilities, but he thought he'd try his luck and fill out one of the forms anyway….and so lo and behold he was actually given a [*City where North University is based*] placement. (Claire, Health PhD, 1 Child)

Her reaction to this is frustration, both with the institution – "I'm glad he did… but if his form was listened to, why wasn't somebody else's, especially when they fit the criteria to be considered…" (Claire, Health PhD, 1 Child) – and with herself, echoing the barriers associated to time discussed in Chapter Five. Claire's 'caring status' intersects her timescape and prevents her from seeking support with her case: "I haven't spent any time on campus, other than what's required of me. So, in terms of making appointments in the student's union and so on…" (Claire, Health PhD, 1 Child).

6.6.2 Understanding Claire's story

Claire's story touches on all the three recurrent themes carried across this thesis so far, providing further developed examples of 'othering' (Ahmed, 2012; Archer & Leathwood, 2005; Burke, 2013), 'individualisation' (Brooks, 2012b; Burke, 2013), and 'passing' (Leary, 1999; Sanchez & Schlossberg, 2001;). As discussed in the presentation of admissions forms,

Claire already felt the need to 'pass' and perform an identity of being a student without caring responsibilities, and this is reinforced by her reflection that, over five years she has learned to 'keep [her] mouth shut'. Claire seems to suggest that the 'otherness' she felt at admission has been reinforced, as she is not accepted but 'tolerated' – provided she successfully 'passes'.

In starting the analysis of Claire's story, there is a motif to her descriptions of oppression and hiding which is very pronounced and gives the impression that Claire sees herself as fighting to exist within the institution as both a student and a 'carer'. There is, to some extent, a constant threat in Claire's mind that her failure to 'pass' and the sense to which she is 'other' makes her place at the university precarious and that it is her 'individual' responsibility to ensure this does not happen. She reflects: "it's not particularly easy, but I don't think it would be particularly difficult to get rid of a difficult student" (Claire, Health PhD, 1 Child).

It is through the story of Claire's use of the mitigation form, however, that insight is developed as to how she has come about these views and the extent to which her relationship with 'otherness', 'individualisation' and 'passing' becomes institutionally mediated. At first, Claire's experience is set up in terms of the mitigation form to be part of a 'targeted' (Moreau, 2016 pp. 10-11) approach to supporting CCS students, among other groups, by proactively weaving support into the operation of the programme and calling students who need it toward these routes. This is different, for example, to Claire feeling entitled to the support and seeking it from the institution; instead, she is quite literally invited by email to gain support, and the principle of this could have the potential to counter the sense to which Claire feels the need to 'pass'. However, it is the way in which this form is activated and managed which reinforces the sense of 'other' and 'individualisation' which ultimately drives home to Claire the importance of being able to 'pass', suggesting that the policy is activated in such a way as to actually make clear the department is more 'careblind' than 'targeted' (Moreau, 2016 pp. 10-11) in the way it delivers its support.

In the first instance, Claire experiences the microaggression of being ignored (or not receiving a response to her form) which echoes the recurring motif of absence and further supports the sense to which she is 'other'. Claire's 'panic' at this is not shared by the staff, as she is told simply that this is something which will be looked into, furthering the sense of absence and the microaggression of not being listened to or ignored, as it does not seem to acknowledge Claire's genuine logistical concerns which come from the clash between the importance of placements and the importance of childcare through barriers of time and travel. To this extent, there is already an inference from these microaggression that this is 'Claire's problem' and that she is in deficit – and something she may 'individually' have to resolve if it cannot be solved by being 'looked into'.

The extent to which Claire is a 'problem' or to 'blame' for the challenges she faces from being a CCS student trying to deliver being 'on placement' are furthered when she becomes subject to a disciplinary procedure. The deficit discourse that surrounds Claire becomes most pronounced, as she is held individually accountable for the barriers she faces in a way that echoes the polemic tension which O'Shea et al (2016) identify as coming from the institutional practices which take place when faced with 'non-traditional' students and framing them as in deficit:

> At one extreme, there is the focus on the deficit of (or within) the student who must adapt and learn to cope with the institution's expectations. At the other is the focus on the institution itself, which needs to respond to the changing demands of a diverse student body by instituting effective support. (O'Shea, Lysaght, Roberts & Harwood, 2016, p.331)

Staff are faced in this disciplinary process with a choice: to move along this polemic and consider how their practice should respond to Claire, or to problematise her and shift the blame to her as an individual, 'other'.

Unfortunately for Claire, the choice by the Head of School is to focus on her as an individual in deficit and explore how she could remedy the problem she has caused which has

led her to a disciplinary by apologising. Claire is not asked to apologise for her caring status, per se, but her approach to seeking support for it. The way in which there is no discussion or remedy for Claire's problem or acknowledgment of the genuine nature of the concerns she has around her ability to care for her children and engage in a placement highlights the perceived deficit. By seeking an apology and not acknowledging these concerns, the three theories seen in this study merge:

1.   Claire is '**othered'**; her difference is made clear, and it is not addressed;

2.   Claire and the barriers she faces are '**individualised'** for her to resolve;

3.   It is ultimately made clear that '**passing'** as a traditional student is desirable.

The latter aspect of 'passing' is most troublingly seen in the way the Head of School asks Claire to apologise while also being aware of the challenge this presents to Claire and her identity, as she is advised "there's ways of apologising without accepting any responsibility" (Claire, Health PhD, 1 Child), seeking to soften the injury Claire faces in supressing her caring status in order to 'pass'. As discussed in Chapter Five, the nature of the performativity or 'passing' is shaped by the context of the need for "political and social invisibility" (Schlossberg, 2001, p. 4-5), which influences the extent to which passing is a positive affirmative experience or not. In this context, the Head of School tries to guide Claire through this political/social context, and the advisability of her caring status becomes less visible through the apology. In this way, Claire's account echoes the findings of Brooks (2012b, p.242) again and demonstrates how structural inequalities can be adapted as personal failures by these students – but also how staff within the institution can actively manufacture this.

While Claire does suggest that she receives these messages from the Head of School as positive, claiming "I'm glad I learnt that lesson" (Claire, Health PhD, 1 Child), there is also evidence to suggest she is not convinced by this, aware of the injustice she is experiencing in being asked to 'pass'. Relaying the account of her friend Steve, whose receipt of support for a

barrier she believes him not to have adds insult to injury and jars with Claire, highlighting how there are students who do not have to work as hard as she does to be seen as needing support; "if his form was listened to, why wasn't somebody else's, especially when they fit the criteria to be considered…" (Claire, Health PhD, 1 Child). In a quite explicit way. the inequity Claire experiences as a CCS student is confirmed through the treatment of Steve and serves to highlight Claire's status within the theoretical trinity emerging across CCS students account in this thesis: 'othered', 'individualised', and needing to 'pass' as a more recognisable form of student, like Steve.

6.7 The Student Parent Policy

Whilst the mitigation process and forms provide an opportunity to support CCS students, it was not a specific targeted policy, unlike the final *text*, the University's Student Parent Policy, which was activated in the accounts of Nicole and Rebecca. The Student Parent Policy is a pseudonym to protect the identification of the specific university where my research was conducted. The actual title for this policy was significantly longer and positioned it clearly for students who become pregnant and who had young children. The policy, thus, frames student parents as synonymous with becoming pregnant while studying and hence having very young children. This may be an indication of why the policy only appears in Nicole and Rebecca's accounts, as they both became pregnant while studying.

The positioning of the policy, in the first instance, for students who become pregnant echoes a similar 'othering' (Archer & Leathwood, 2005, p.190-1) across this chapter. The university can be seen to be designed to support a more accepted form of student, and the policy may act as a guide for how to manage a change in circumstances for more traditional students who become pregnant. This perhaps sheds light on the difficulty Rebecca had in locating the policy on admission, as the policy is located on an internal website designed to act as a library of policies for both staff and students on managing significant life changes during study. For

instance, advice on managing a newly-diagnosed mental health condition sits alongside this policy online.

6.7.1 Nicole's story

Nicole first came into contact with the policy when she became pregnant during her studies and received the policy following a referral to it by the student union's advice centre. While Nicole was able to find the policy in a more direct way than Rebecca's account via the *Student Room*, it was still a challenge: "it wasn't like a clear page on their website it was in a document" (Nicole, Social Science PhD, 1 Child). This shaped Nicole's perspective of the policy as something which the university did not actually want students to find and use, leading her to conclude: "[the University] obviously don't kind of advertise it to pregnant women", especially as "they [the University] didn't give me it when they found out, when I told them I was pregnant" (Nicole, Social Science PhD, 1 Child).

Nicole was nervous about seeking support from her department and, at first, sought the support of the student union. The difficulty Nicole had finding the Student Parent Policy served to reinforce this feeling about talking to her supervisors, which had been reinforced by informal accounts from peers who had also been pregnant while studying. Nicole explained her motivation for approaching the student union:

> to get advice from the student advice centre because …I guess it was about maternity allowance etc.… And also, just some advice on how to approach the department and so on, to tell them about the pregnancy…I was a bit nervous about that because I'd heard stories from other PhD students in my department about quite negative reactions from their supervisors and just comments like 'oh not another one' when someone told their supervisor they were pregnant again (Nicole, Social Science PhD, 1 Child).

The policy does not put Nicole's mind at ease, as it does not appear to speak to her needs as a research postgraduate student, which impacts the extent to which Nicole thinks the policy is useful. As Nicole reflects in reading sections of the policy with me:

> I don't know 'make accommodation to ensure that they are able to complete their programme of study', 'discuss your support needs', 'you should go and

> see your GP' …That seems to all be very like, infantilising the student a little bit, that also makes me think that it is geared more towards taught students in a way because, I don't know, as a research postgraduate I don't know if I need all this. (Nicole, Social Science PhD, 1 Child).

The tone and nature of the report appears to Nicole to cater more for navigating barriers of rigid structured study, which does not correlate with the more flexible nature of research study where self-driven learning takes place with monthly supervisory meetings. This lack of clarity around the audience leads Nicole to question the focus and purpose of the policy, positioning it to be something which she "can't imagine an academic reading" as they would not "have the time or the motivation" but is aimed at staff such as "HR officers or admin types" (Nicole, Social Science PhD, 1 Child). She draws on her own experience to reach this conclusion, as her "supervisors weren't clued in to any of the procedures of polices" (Nicole, Social Science PhD, 1 Child). This lack of clarity of audience and positioning of the policy as something for taught students is significant especially considering the correlation between the average age of postgraduate research study and age of highest fertility seen by Springer et al (Springer, Parker & Leviten-Reid, 2009, p. 437), thereby providing a misrecognition of the way students like Nicole might be more in need of the policy.

For Nicole, the activation of the policy is characterised as a back-up, compartmentalising the policy as a form of future defence. This shapes Nicole's behaviour and informs a sense of entitlement to support as a means of guiding her support when she told her department she was pregnant. As Nicole recounts:

> it was nice to know they had a policy so if anything went wrong, like in terms of my supervisors reacted badly or something like that then I knew like I would have this behind me. (Nicole, Social Science PhD, 1 Child).

This decision was informed by the largely laissez-faire approach her supervisors took to providing informal support. Nicole recounted that, despite guidance in the policy to document support, nobody minuted "any of my pregnancy stuff because we just had quite casual conversations" (Nicole, Social Science PhD, 1 Child). The need to have the policy as a form

of back-up defence makes clearer the precariousness of this support for Nicole and deference for her supervisors' casual approach. Nicole did gain ESRC maternity pay and six months' leave, yet she is aware in this account of the potential for this not to have happened. Nicole is aware there may be hostility within the university and relies on the power of her own individual capacity to tackle this:

> I would feel confident if my supervisor sort of says something negative or whatever in kind of taking that document to the university and saying they didn't like to live up to this policy. (Nicole, Social Science PhD, 1 Child)

Nicole eventually seeks to become a part-time student to accommodate her caring needs, drawing on the Student Parent Policy to do this, and a contrast appeared in the support Nicole received from her supervisors in making the decision to move to part-time study. One, for instance, relates to Nicole and tries to share how "he was managing his work, and working more flexibility, around childcare responsibilities that (was) really like helpful, in terms of helping me work through the issues" (Nicole, Social Sciences PhD, 1 Child). Nicole's second supervisor actively discouraged her, as she reflects, "he is always attempting to influence my decisions actually. He explicitly said that he thought I shouldn't go part-time" (Nicole, Social Sciences PhD, 1 Child). This sits in contrast to one of the key principles in the Student Parent Policy, which states that, to enable informed choices, staff should "not attempt to direct or unduly influence a student's decisions" (Student Parent Policy).

Further, Nicole reflects on the lack of information she has received once she had chosen to switch to part-time study. Despite the change being officially confirmed, anxiety set in, as she reflects:

> in terms of the finances I haven't had any confirmation of like how much money I am going to be getting, I have like chased it up and they haven't sent me it yet. And I don't know exactly how much I am supposed to be working. I assumed I would be 50% of full time but then a friend of mine doing a part-time PhD says it is 60% so, and yes basically nothing has been explained… (Nicole, Social Science PhD, 1 Child).

Again, not only do these examples point to a lack of consistency with the Student Parent Policy but they are evocative of 'individualisation', which has permeated the discussion of other *texts* earlier in this chapter.

6.7.2 Understanding Nicole's story

Again, Nicole's story, like Claire's, brings together a development of 'othering' (Ahmed, 2012; Archer & Leathwood, 2005; Burke, 2013), 'individualisation' (Brooks, 2012b; Burke, 2013), and 'passing' (Leary, 1999; Sanchez & Schlossberg, 2001) in a complex way, which brings some further insight into the role of the institution in shaping the CCS student experience. As with Claire's account, Nicole's *text* in some ways suggests CCS students are meant at this university to receive a 'targeted' rather than 'careblind' approach (Moreau, 2016 pp. 10-11) to the support they receive. The presence of the Student Parent Policy, for instance, with a holistic approach to student support, would, on the surface, appear to suggest support should be there for these students and be weaved into their experience. The reality, however, is different when looking at Nicole's account of her experience and the activation of this policy in her account.

In approaching the Student Parent Policy, Nicole is aware of her 'otherness' in becoming pregnant while also a student and has found the policy as a result of trying to understand her rights and entitlements in a climate which can be unsupportive and requires her to 'individually' manage and organise her support. For instance, it is the stories of the "oh no not another one" (Nicole, Social Sciences PhD, 1 Child) reactions from academics to her pregnant peers which symbolise the kind of aggression she feels she may experience, and she seeks out the policy as preparation to help tackle this attitude if/when she faces it.

The policy does not actually serve to put Nicole's mind at ease, as it is difficult to find and, in her view, seemingly written for staff rather than students, suggesting a furthering of the 'otherness'; student parents are potentially a 'issue' for staff to be managed through this policy.

If anything, this makes the use of the policy complex and precarious. Nicole even goes so far as to acknowledge that "I am sure the people who wrote it would say it covers everyone", but that "some people might need to refer to it [the policy], you know and to say the university is not supporting me at all" (Nicole, Social Sciences PhD, 1 Child). The document is also full of caveats, created by terms such as 'reasonable' and 'if possible', which furthers this potential for precarious support in Nicole's eyes:

> I can imagine taking this document to my department and say I really want to breastfeed could you provide me with the facilities. And they could easily point to that and say no, no, no as the university says it is very difficult and we don't currently have the space, so it is kind of the total opposite in a way it's really unsupportive. (Nicole, Social Science PhD, 1 Child).

As well as confirming a sense of 'other', the policy also replicates 'individualisation', as Nicole identities the potential that the policy is not there to support her and that it is up to her to organise, shape and craft the support she needs. The way Nicole frames seeking this support and the policy as something to back her up or have "behind me" (Nicole, Social Science PhD 1 Child) in this individual claim for support, also echoes both the sense of 'otherness' and the a slightly more muted version of the defensive approach Claire took to approaching the institution in her story in response to this 'othering'.

In reality, Nicole's experience does not display the same need for defensiveness as Claire, as her supervisors take quite a relaxed approach to support, although this also echoes aspects of the motif of absence and the 'individualisation' this leads CCS students to. As Nicole suggests, her supervisors are not proactive in defining and providing support, and the reaction to her pregnancy was:

> just do what you have to do [...] they didn't even comment I think they just weren't really particularly interested. They were happy, but they just kind of trusted me to just get on with it and do what I needed to do. (Nicole, Social Science PhD, 1 Child).

In some ways, this approach fits the "taking a flexible approach" (Student Parent Policy) which forms one of the key aims of the Student Parent Policy and would also seem to fit the self-

directed nature of PhD study. At the same time, Nicole is aware of the way in which the relaxed-attitude support comes from the way in which her current support has not been either too demanding or difficult for the department to accommodate.

Further, when considering the desire of one of her supervisors to influence her decision and discourage her from moving to part-time study, there is a glimpse in this account of a desire for Nicole to 'pass' by following 'a way' to be a PhD student within this institution. While not in the same circumstances as Claire's disciplinary process, Nicole's experience echoes the desire shown in Claire's account from the Head of School for CCS students to 'pass' within a more accepted form of 'student' and take 'individual' responsibility for conforming to this 'way' of being a student.

Drawing Nicole's story to a close is the further presentation of 'individualisation' (Brooks, 2012b; Burke, 2013) as a result of the motif of absence. Nicole is left without communication about the finances or what it means to be a part-time PhD student at this institution. Emails go unreplied, and the impression is given through this microaggression that Nicole's needs are not important, despite the fact that these questions impact practical issues, such as how much money Nicole will have to pay for food, bills and rent, echoing findings from other research about the precariousness of these students' finances (Gerrard and Roberts, 2006; Hinton-Smith, 2016) and demonstrating an institutional role in this. A structural inequality is presented here where the absence of information about finance or the timing of a part-time PhD mean that she is left to find the answer on her own and draw on informal sources of information. Again, this echoes Brooks' (2012b, p.242) findings of the personal responsibility CCS students accept for institutional inequalities while also echoing my earlier discussion of Hinton-Smith (2016, p.213) and the use of informal sources of support by students in my study — particularly in Rebecca's account, which I will now explore, of websites and locating the Student Parent Policy.

6.7.3 Rebecca's story

The final story in this chapter, Rebecca's experience of the Student Parent Policy, also cements the recurrent themes which have been woven throughout the accounts of *texts* discussed in this chapter. Rebecca, a student in a health department with one child, had specifically selected the North University because of its Student Parent Policy, despite the difficulty she had in finding it – in the end, through informal online forums. The desire to find the policy had been informed by her experience of being pregnant while an undergraduate at a university in the south of England. At that university, policy had been positively and proactively mobilised:

> They met me right at the beginning, and showed me the courses and the modules and how timetables worked, and they had given me e-learning support, once he was ill for a couple of weeks, and they would give me extensions… They were open and let me finish the course tailored to my needs… (Rebecca, Health PhD, 1 Child)

Once Rebecca had started at the North University, her experience had been markedly different for over a year and had only recently started to change, as "they didn't even know about the Student Parent Policy until I mentioned it, so now they've updated their policies, and only now are they saying to me… 'ok what do you need?'" (Rebecca, Health PhD, 1 Child).

The first experience of staff being unaware of the policy came when Rebecca needed to unexpectedly pick her son up from school because he was sick, which swiftly became a disciplinary matter at the university, as practical exercises in this lesson were an assessed part of the programme. As Rebecca recalls:

> I had to pick my son up from pre-school because he was ill and there was no one who could pick him up. And so I…ended up getting an official school level warning, and I had a meeting with this professor, and she yelled at me about it and I said this was the situation, and I didn't know it was progression and I can give you evidence to show that I had to pick him up because he was not well, and they weren't having it at all. (Rebecca, Health PhD, 1 Child)

The speed with which this escalated surprised Rebecca and echoes Claire's story. Unlike Claire, however, Rebecca was not even given any superficial acknowledgement of the

correctness of her actions due to her caring responsibilities. There was no retraction at this point from the disciplinary process, and, despite Rebecca's provision of evidence and citation of the Student Parent Policy, she was threatened by being reminded: "'We have the power to get you kicked out' that's what one of them told me…" (Rebecca, Health PhD, 1 Child). While Rebecca had objectively deviated from the academic requirements of the programme by missing a progression component, the flexible approach, promoted in the policy, was not taken. Instead, a cluster of 'resit' exams were put in place in August, where Rebecca's marks would be capped at a pass, in a fashion which, to Rebecca, betrayed the spirit of the policy and punitively penalised her for her caring status, thereby informing Rebecca's sense of 'otherness' and approach to future requests for support.

This incident made Rebecca hyper-aware of her precarious position. The consequences were that Rebecca was keen to follow processes laid out for all students quite strictly in any subsequent case of needing support. However, she grew frustrated when this did not seem to make a difference in terms of gaining support or credit for her conformity. Rebecca describes these feelings, using an example orientated around her own health needs:

> if you miss anything you have to put it online, in advance, so I'd put a description up of I'm going to an operation, and I submitted evidence from the Hospital, so they should have been aware of it… they just ignored it basically… (Rebecca, Health PhD, 1 Child)

This lack of support, which Rebecca associated as being connected to her status as a difficult student because of her caring status, meant that Rebecca's sense of entitlement to support and recognition as a carer became eroded, despite the basis of this entitlement coming in the form of the Student Parent Policy. As Rebecca explained: "I just thought they'd been so unsupportive then what's the point of even submitting [requests for support] it if they are going to turn it down anyway, and I'd just be in more trouble than I'm already in…" (Rebecca, Health PhD, 1 Child).

Rebecca's circumstances worsened during this academic year, when she became pregnant and experienced severe medical complications. Her actions and decisions became informed by the previous approach staff in the institution had taken toward her, which meant she framed her options as being a dichotomy between continuing her studies or having a second child. This choice was fundamentally life-changing for Rebecca, but the response it received within the institution only served to provide further evidence of the lack of support or acknowledgment of Rebecca as a carer for children, as she recalls:

> at the same time, I found out I was pregnant, again, and they wouldn't let me sit my exams as a first attempt in August. And so, based on my experience I ended up having an abortion. Which had an awful lot of complications as well, like a molar pregnancy scare, and they just weren't supportive of me at all, the whole time I had the operations. And they said that when I mentioned that I'm you know going through all this, they said that's your own fault, that's your own problem… (Rebecca, Health PhD, 1 Child)

While Rebecca did start to receive more support at the point of participating in the research, this support was informal and not driven directly by the Student Parent Policy, making it precarious and not actually marking a change by the department to recognise Rebecca's caring status or CCS students more widely. As a result of the turbulent and distressing circumstances around Rebecca's abortion, she started a supportive friendship with one of the professor's secretaries while trying to navigate requests for support. This support was in no way formal, and this member of staff had no formal role in the university to provide student support and did not work in a student support office. However, she became a vital personal advocate for Rebecca. For instance, not only was she "warm and so supportive" to Rebecca but "as soon as I started talking to her she kind of spoke to that professor and told her to back off, and handled that situation for me, and I go and see her regularly now as sort of like a course councillor" (Rebecca, Health PhD, 1 Child). This became a consistent role which Rebecca drew on constantly at the time of being interviewed, explaining how this member of

staff talked on Rebecca's behalf: "she has been there to resolve the issue without me having to really get involved" (Rebecca, Health PhD, 1 Child).

If Rebecca's PA were not there to support her or if there were a change in staff, it is unlikely that this support would remain in place. Rebecca highlights she is aware her 'course councillor' is in a minority and is the only one preventing Rebecca from being in 'trouble' because of the complexity of juggling her studies with caring responsibilities:

> She's the only one I think who is on the student's side, and I only go to her if I have a problem, she'll kind of sort things out for me without having to get into trouble (Rebecca, Health PhD, 1 Child)

While Rebecca did talk of a development of the Student Parent Policy becoming a more visible entity within the department at the end of her studies, she remained clear that the department was "so very closed minded" and "not willing to change" (Rebecca, Health PhD, 1 Child), meaning it is unclear whether these developments will significantly improve the experiences of CCS students in this department.

6.7.4 Understanding Rebecca's story

Rebecca's story brings together 'othering' (Ahmed, 2012; Archer & Leathwood, 2005; Burke, 2013), 'individualisation' (Brooks, 2012b; Burke, 2013) and 'passing' (Leary, 1999; Sanchez & Schlossberg, 2001) in perhaps their most extreme form of all the students' accounts. A stark contrast emerges between the reality of the lived experience of a CCS student and rhetoric of the policy. Rebecca's story echoes Claire's through the presence of a formal disciplinary process and the way in which this is utilised to reinforce and support the desire for Rebecca to conform or 'pass' as an idealised form of student. This has a profound effect on Rebecca by ultimately informing her decision to have an abortion, convinced that she faces a choice between having a second child or dropping out of her studies. The most troubling aspect of her story through is, perhaps, the way it echoes the three theories used in understanding other

students' accounts and suggests it is possible to reason that her experience has the potential to be repeated within this institution, under the right conditions, for any of these students.

As with Claire and Nicole, the existence of the *text* has the potential to provide Rebecca with a 'targeted approach' (Moreau, 2016 pp. 10-11) to student support, weaving in the support so that it provides an equity of experience for students. The reality of this is seen to suggest a 'careblind' (Moreau, 2016 pp. 10-11) culture which adopts an perspective attitude to the process and tries to shape the CCS students to fit within the approaches to student experience which are provided for all, reducing and minimising divergence from these expectations, despite the policy document promoting a 'flexible approach' (Student Parent Policy).

This homogenisation toward a singular student experience which CCS students have to 'pass' within is achieved through 'othering' and 'individualisation' in the first instance, which emerge and permeate the activation of the policy. As Rebecca admits, staff have only come into contact with the policy as a result of her presence in the department, and both Rebecca and the policy are positioned as 'new', 'different' and 'other'. Examples of this 'otherness' and 'individualisation' are deeply interwoven in Rebecca's account through both micro- and outright aggressions, while she is positioned as being to 'blame' for her 'problems'. Examples of the 'othering' come in the way in which Rebecca is not believed and required to 'evidence' the claims she makes about the impact of her childcare needs, which builds into a pattern of open aggression as she is advised or warned through the disciplinary process of the power her tutors have over her to 'kick her out'. Even when Rebecca does provide evidence, engaging in the online systems which administrate this, it appears to go unresponded, showing again the motif of absence as microaggression, which perpetuates the sense of 'othering' even when students attempt to overcome through conformity.

The disciplinary action also epitomises the 'individualisation' of Rebecca, where she, like Claire, is formally brought into a process which explores or challenges the extent to which

she is in some way 'wrong' and requiring of 'discipline' in order to be 'correct'. Such approaches further the inequity of students such as Rebecca by shrouding them within an individual deficit discourse which perpetuates the barriers and challenges CCS students face. As Smit (2012) describes of wider uses of deficit discourses within HE:

> Employing a deficit mindset to frame student difficulties acts to perpetuate stereotypes, alienate students from higher education and disregards the role of higher education in the barriers to student success. In the process, universities serve to replicate the educational stratification of societies. (Smit, 2012, p.378)

In this sense, if the aim of the Student Parent Policy is to use HE as a vehicle for greater equality and diversity, as the policy landscape I discussed in Chapter Two suggests it could be, the application of such 'individualisation' and deficit discourses, is counter intuitive.

Even when Rebecca's story takes a more positive direction, through the sense of support she gains from her PA, this is not necessarily something which can be understood as a change in the institutional approach or an activation of the Student Parent Policy. Instead the support from her PA appears to offer a mechanism within which Rebecca is able to 'pass' more effectively. Any amendments to Rebecca's support is facilitated through this more accepted and understood individual, her PA, who 'sorts things out'. In this context, Rebecca is not made to be accepted or seen; instead, she has her support brokered for her in order to be able to perform as a student. Rebecca's PA, in effect, acts as a lone wolf in an institutional context which still sees Rebecca as problematic because of her caring status, and the support she receives is not codified or enacted through the Student Parent Policy but is informal, individual and precarious; if Rebecca's PA were not there, it is unclear if this support would be there or would be substituted. Rebecca is also aware of this, acknowledging that the department at large is "very closed minded" and "not willing to change" (Rebecca, Health PhD, 1 Child). Rebecca's ability to 'pass' is therefore deeply linked to "the political and social invisibility" (Schlossberg, 2001, p. 4-5), of 'passing', which her PA helps her to navigate. This also provides a very direct example of the open pressure and aggression to 'pass' which some other groups

who have experienced 'othering' and 'individualisation' may not experience in the same way and could be unique to their status as carers.

Ultimately, CCS students like Rebecca and the others in this chapter appear to be marginalised within the institution as a result of pervasive, recurrent, institutionally-mediated 'othering', 'individualisation' and a desire to see them 'pass' as a non-CCS student. While the complexity and intersections of student identity means that there is individual variation in these students' experience – for instance, not all students' experiences resemble those of Claire, Nicole and Rebecca – there is a commonality in the evidence used to theorise these students' experiences across the institution despite their individual differences. This alludes to a wider cultural positioning of CCS students within the institution, which suggests these students do have an inequitable experience as a result of their caring status – an important aspect when considering the core puzzle of this thesis.

However, there is a subtle tension in these accounts between the potential for these students to receive a 'targeted' approach to support in the presence of such *texts*, but their activation becomes 'careblind' (Moreau, 2016 pp. 10-11). This suggests that there may be aspects about the wider culture of the institution and the status of CCS students which may seek to frame them more positively than has been seen so far. Hence in the next chapter I will seek to explore this tension further, to understand the 'status' of CCS students in the broader institution. To do this, I will consider how (or if) 'othering', 'individualisation' and 'passing' from the standpoint accounts manifests in those of the staff participants.

6.8 Conclusion

In conclusion, across this chapter, accounts of students' experience of *texts* within the institution has further developed the theorisation from Chapter Five of "othering" (Ahmed, 2012; Archer & Leathwood, 2005; Burke, 2013; Phiri, 2015; Reay, 2001), "individualisation" (Brooks, 2012b; Burke, 2013) and 'passing' (Leary, 1999; Sanchez & Schlossberg, 2001). In

looking at the five key *texts* identified in students accounts of work, this theorisation has become more defined and developed within the understanding of the cultural practices of this institution.

In considering application forms and admissions documents, some CCS students appeared to enter the university with a sense of 'otherness' which encouraged them to 'hide' their caring status in approaching entrance materials in order to 'pass' as a potential student. Across these accounts was grounded the notion of an 'absence' within and from the institution in relation to CCS students. For instance, those who did not hide their CCS status did not receive a positive affirmative acknowledgment of their status as carers in this process, making these students individually responsible for their choice to be a student.

In exploring the use of mailing lists in the institution, the complex interplay of 'othering' and 'passing' were also seen. In the first instance, some students felt 'othered' by the fact they were part of the mailing lists, as, having 'passed' at the application stage and hidden their caring status, someone somewhere within the institution had added them to a mailing list. These students were confused at why this had taken place, and, in effect, were unable to 'pass' by the institution's process of adding them to such mailing lists. Furthermore, the content of such mailing lists did not always meet the needs of CCS students as carers and appeared, in many ways, to see these students as synonymous with mature students. When students tried to contribute feedback to improve the ability of such mailing lists to meet their needs, they received no response, which echoed the motif of absence and compounded the sense of 'otherness' CCS students felt.

These themes were echoed in CCS student's accounts of websites and the way in which they were very aware how they were 'different' and, in turn, 'other' because the focus of the institution in supporting students was geared toward "all the younger ones" (Sue, WP Access Programme, 3 Children). Students started to 'individualise' their difficulty in accessing

information and frame this as a problem they experience as part of their 'choice' to become a CCS student. Students also started to look for informal sources of information online, such as via *Studentroom*, to fill the gaps they experienced and expressed frustration at the precariousness of information about their needs – in part, because it appeared to be an easy enough task to include such information, reinforcing the motif of absence.

In considering the presentation of mitigation forms and the Student Parent Policy, these *texts* formed more of a cornerstone to a critical event or account of experience. By exploring the accounts of three students, Claire, Nicole and Rebecca, the theorisation of the data through the lenses of 'othering', 'individualisation' and 'passing' was further developed. All three students' experiences presented motifs of absence and microaggression, while two of these, Claire and Rebecca, were referred to disciplinary processes related to the challenges they faced due to their caring status. A complex image takes form here where students also appear to be actively encouraged to 'pass' by hiding and overcoming their status as carers in order to fit into a more accepted form of 'student' in a way unique to their caring status and perhaps not experienced by other students who are 'othered' or 'individualised'. Furthermore, a tension is present from the way in which these themes are presented and manifest in the student data. For instance, a recurrent pattern is that, in principle, the *texts* symbolise the potential of the institution to adopt a 'targeted' (Moreau, 2016 pp. 10-11) approach to support but are activated in a 'careblind' (Moreau, 2016 pp. 10-11) way.

The cumulative effect of Chapters Five and Six is to suggest that 'othering', 'individualising' and 'passing' denote a culture within this particular institution where CCS students have the potential to have an inequitable student experience, illuminating aspects of the core problem this thesis is concerned with. Despite the potential complexity of CCS student experience – and these theories are consistently evidenced and recurring within this institution – in this chapter, their presentation also demonstrates how in some students account 'passing'

is seen as a desired position either explicitly or implicitly and sees some staff guiding and coercing students toward such behaviours or ways of thinking about their experience. Understanding the extent to which these students' experiences are isolated to their accounts or endemic of a wider institutional culture would benefit from further analysis. For instance, the presence of some of these *texts* or resources, such as on campus childcare, suggests the CCS students may not be completely absent from the wider culture of the institution. In this sense, it becomes unclear what the status of CCS students are within the wider culture of the institution and what this might mean for how the inequities the students describe could be overcome. It is with this question of status and inequity in mind that I move to the next chapter to analyse the data from staff participants and seek to understand what insight these accounts could add about the wider institutional context.

Chapter 7: Understanding CSS students within the wider institution

7.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the position of CCS students within the North University more broadly. To do this, I discuss the data from interviews with six members of staff from across the institution. In keeping with other Institutional Ethnographic studies, the data from staff – who are not the standpoint participants in this study – is explored using the theoretical lenses from the standpoint participants (Smith, 2002, p. 26; 2006, p. 3). I, in turn, explore and discuss the presentation of 'othering' (Archer & Leathwood, 2005; Burke, 2013; Reay, 2001), 'individualisation' (Burke, 2013, p. 37; O'Shea, et al; 2016; Smit, 2012) and 'passing' (Leary, 1999; Sanchez & Schlossberg, 2001) of CCS students within the staff data and consider how this reflects on the status of these students within the wider institution. In doing this, I reflect on what the staff data suggests about the inequities discussed in the previous chapters, which some CCS students have experienced at this institution.

7.2 Staff perspectives

My staff interviews were coded as described in Chapter Four, were recruited from email contact, and are not directly connected to the student participants, but provide a perspective on the wider culture and perspectives on CCS students across the wider institution of North University. As seen in Chapters Five and Six, Table 7.1 gives a quantitative indication of the three theoretical patterns in the staff data. As before, I do not present this table to merely quantify this data, diminishing its richness and sophistication, but to demonstrate that a systematic approach has been taken to understanding core recurrent themes and their prevalence. When undertaking the initial analysis and read-throughs of the data, it is notable that there were no discernible additional themes to emerge in the staff accounts. Furthermore, in terms of the activation of *texts* not present in the standpoint data, there was no evidence of

new *texts*, as only the Student Parent Policy re-emerged in three staff accounts (Peter, Diana, and Leo), providing some support for IE's approach to understanding *texts* and their activation.

Participant	Othering	Individualisation	Passing
Staff Member 1 Peter	14	13	7
Staff Member 2 Diana	15	4	7
Staff Member 3 Jools	5	7	12
Staff Member 4 Steven	14	7	11
Staff Member 5 Jo	7	20	9
Staff Member 6 Leo	10	17	14

Table 7.1 The frequency of the recurrent themes from coding staff participant data.

7.3 Findings from the staff data

7.3.1 Othering

In the staff data, there are many complex and recurrent examples of 'othering' which echoed those seen in the accounts of the student data. In the first instance, staff were quite open that CCS students at this institution were different, and that such difference was not generally accepted within the university apart from within very specific departments, such as the Lifelong Learning Office (LLO). For instance, Peter (a student support officer in the LLO) draws a metaphor comparing CCS students to American Express credit cards, which are notoriously not accepted in all stores in the UK where other cards are; he explains:

> So they [departments in the university] accept American Express [CCS Students] but they only have to deal with it say once every year, so when it comes along it is like oh sorry we need to go over there, and they make life as absolutely, as awkward for people as possible. (Peter, LLO Student Support, Professional Services)

This view was echoed several times. Diana, an employability advisor, claimed 'student parents are largely invisible on campus' because:

> this is a very traditional university, it's Russell Group, it's largely full time, largely young people, from quite privileged backgrounds, so they [CCS Students] are very much in a minority. (Diana, Employability, Professional Services)

Meanwhile Steve, a tutor, talked about an ambivalence toward the recruitment of non-traditional students like CCS students across the institution with staff in other departments openly questioning:

> why do we need to do that [recruit non-traditional students] when we are so very good at, taking tens of thousands of students with very good A levels, 18 year olds, international students, lots of fees, why do we need to open our doors to non-traditional students who are you know hard work? (Steven, Tutor, Academic)

All of these observations about the institution were also echoed by Leo, a senior leader in the institution responsible for widening participation, who observes that the institution is geared toward:

> an assumption about what an 18 to 21-year-old is going to be like. And the assumption about an 18 to 21-year-old in this institution is they are going to be clever and able, and capable of getting on their own, doing stuff, and doing it well (Leo, LLO Senior Manager (WP), Professional Services)

Entering into a discussion of this quote, there is a clear 'otherness' of students who do not meet the traditional norms described, and, in opening their accounts with this contextual information, staff are clear that CCS students form a constituent of the non-traditional student who is widely 'othered' at this institution.

Some staff also observe how this difference and 'otherness' has a visible quality for CCS students when on campus. Steve, for instance, reflects:

> I could probably walk round on a typical day it's a bit quieter now, but I could probably walk round on a typical day and see no children, no pushchairs, no toddlers nothing like that. I think they are very much the exception. (Steven, Tutor, Academic)

Meanwhile, Jools highlights how the students are aware of this, reflecting that, when campus is empty at summer, and CCS students attend LLO:

> out of term teaching, they call it being like real students. They then come in, and use the refectory, they love sitting on the grass, so they see that as being a real student, so they know they are not getting the same experience as other students. (Jo, Tutor, Academic)

Both these quotations highlight an awareness among staff of some of the themes discussed in Chapter Five, providing further evidence of how campus, itself, feels 'othering' to students, as seen in the account of Nicole and the inaccessibility of campus for prams or the discussions of bringing children onto campus.

However, Jo's language, 'real students', in the quotation foregrounds a problematic pattern in the staff data where CCS students are consistently framed as 'other' with the inference that they are not entitled to occupy the space of the university and title of 'student'. For instance, it was common across many accounts for CCS students to be called 'older learners' (Peter, LLO Student Support, Professional Services) or 'part-time-mature learners' (Steve, Tutor, Academic). Leo reflects:

> many of our learners are older, a large proportion of them will have caring responsibilities typically for children. (Leo, LLO Senior Manager (WP), Professional Services)

This means that CCS students' needs, issues and barriers become seen as synonymous with mature students:

> [departments] are putting up invisible barriers so the reason that they are not having to deal with student parents is because they have designed it that way. Not necessarily knowingly I am not saying there is people saying right let's keep mature students out here, but so in the same way when a student is invited to an open day, within the letter they are told please feel free to bring your parents, I mean they need to change that to say friends and family it would say exactly the same thing, but it wouldn't make like the 35 year old reading the invitation to the open day feel as if oh this isn't for me I haven't got parents to bring, it must be an 18 year old thing. (Peter, LLO Student Support, Professional Services)

Peter is perceptive of an issue which some CCS students in my study did observe, such as when the focus group discussed websites being focused toward young students in Chapter Six. Perceptions of CCS students and their potential needs are not, by the majority of staff I interviewed, expanded on past these tropes of age difference to consider how CCS students may have barriers unique to their status as 'carers'. This also echoes patterns in existing research, such as Moreau and Kerner (2013, p. 4) discussed earlier.

The 'individualisation' and 'otherness', which frames CCS students, can also be seen in the way some staff draw comparisons with disabled students in explaining their understanding of CCS students. Such comparisons refer to and make assumptions about the difficulty staff face with the approaches of both disabled and CSS students, framing them as 'to blame' for these difficulties because of an individual lack of communication on their part:

> the majority of students aren't in a wheelchair but you would still make sure that if someone in a wheelchair needed to access the course that their course was designed in that way … it [the problem with CCS student support] sort of echoes I guess the thing that disabled students do, one of the big difficulties we have with disabled students is getting support for them in place, when they arrive because they haven't declared before they have come here, because they think that it will jeopardise their place on the programme. (Peter, LLO Student Support, Professional Services)

This is deeply problematic not only because of the ways in which it frames disabled students as in deficit but also the inference that having a child is in some way synonymous with having a disability. This speaks to the culture of the North University and suggests that patterns in existing research around the conceptualisation of 'care' in higher education for staff are echoed here for students – principally, the way in which to care or have caring responsibilities is, in itself, an 'other' quality which is not recognised, rewarded or valued (Lynch, Baker, Lyons, 2009; Lynch, 2010).

There were also common misconceptions with the potential to 'other', such as the perceptions that CCS students are few in number and mainly mothers:

> there is not many of my students who don't have a caring responsibility. In the main they are mothers (Jo, Tutor, Academic)

Or, by contrast, that they are only fathers:

> the experience has been that they have had children already when they have come on to the course, and they have also with the exception of one, been father's, so its people who have usually not been the primary carer (Jools, Tutor, Academic)

This echoes the notion in existing research that care falls down deeply gendered lines in ways which perpetuate inequities, as seen in existing research touched on in Chapter Three (Moss, 2004, 2006; Quinn, 2003).

A further 'othering' perception by staff was that it was not enough to just be a CCS student to warrant specific support; instead, there had to be other factors in addition to caring responsibilities to qualify for support, such as having a disabled child. Jools explains:

> students who have caring responsibility for children who have special needs, tend to need a lot more support and have found it more challenging to work and to keep up with the academic work. (Jools, Tutor, Academic)

For Jools, this embodies the idea that most CCS students who just have caring responsibilities have engaged in a 'choice' to study and choose how much they want to "make a big deal of being a parent and caring." (Jools, Tutor, Academic). In discussing this further, Jools recounts the story of a student in a group tutorial who appears to embody her preferred CCS students' approach to their caring status:

> [We had a group tutorial the other day, and] went through [the assignment] and she was fine and she went away, and then one of the others said 'do you know she does really well to say she works full time and she has got 2 children'. I didn't realise. She doesn't see that as an issue, whereas most of the others I know do. She will have been asked in interview it will have been a part of the conversation, but she didn't say to me I am having a problem with this essay I am stressing over it because I have got too much caring responsibility. (Jools, Tutor, Academic)

This quotation foregrounds 'individualisation' and 'passing', which I discuss later, echoing findings in the student data. This example also contributes to the sense in which CCS students are 'othered' by demonstrating how staff like Jools are hostile to the notion that CCS students deserve specific acknowledgement or the right to occupy the space of being a 'student' and a 'career' simultaneously, unless there are further mitigations. The way that Jools highlights the 'choices' made by the student not to reveal their identity as a carer and not to make it a 'big deal' embodies Reay et al's critique of 'choice' (Reay, David, and Ball, 2005), as discussed in Chapters Five and Six, who challenge the assumption that all students are able to make free

unconstrained choices as Jools implies. Furthermore, the attitude of Jools as dismissive of those who do see caring responsibilities as an issue and choose to make it a 'big deal' perpetuates, in itself, an 'otherness' by suggesting there is 'a way' to be a CCS student, either receiving support for other factors, or 'passing' by not framing their caring responsibility as a 'problem'. This highlights again, as in the student data, how 'othering', 'individualisation' and 'passing' act as linked trinity within this institution, perpetuating inequity toward CCS students.

Some staff were aware of the 'otherness' which the structural constraints of the institution perpetrate and that some students who come to university will experience problems because of it. Diana, for instance, is aware of the issues caused by school holidays and university timetables not matching up and the issues these generate, as seen while discussing time within the student data in Chapter Five:

> you have got to be very, very aware of that when half term is on. I think it is something the university is not clued into at all really. I think this department is very clued into the idea that half term is a difficult time, we wouldn't schedule anything if the university cheerfully schedules things, the volunteering fair was held at half term, … and got loads of e-mails back saying 'you must be joking, you know it's half term'. (Diana, Employability, Professional Services)

Diana adopts a lone wolf role, very similar to Rebecca's PA in Chapter Six, and advocates consistently throughout her account on behalf of CCS students – in distinct contrast to the other staff interviewed. She also flags the microaggression she has had to combat which makes clear the 'otherness' of CCS students and their allies, as she recounts:

> I can remember having a conversation with Estates when we were talking about student parents, basically it came down to the fact that they didn't want them going into the library with their children, because of health and safety issues to do with the bannisters. You know it was all this 'well let's see what barriers we can put up' [to stop CCS students], and they were hanging it on the health safety agenda, it just struck me as a time warp. (Diana, Employability, Professional Services)

Inspired by students' accounts, Diana even took a proactive role in forming "the working party for the Student Parent Policy at the university" (Diana, Employability, Professional Services).

In highlighting these barriers, Diana is the only member of staff who starts to understand the cumulative impact of the microaggression and 'othering' CCS students face and why it may lead them to hide their caring status. Diana understands that CCS students may be inhibited from a free 'choice' and compelled to 'pass' in the way tutors like Jools perceive and admire; Diana sees these actions as a result of the microaggression and 'othering' she has witnessed:

> they will say I didn't want to tell anybody because I thought you wouldn't offer me a place. Or I thought you wouldn't want me, because I would be too much of a nuisance, or a bad risk (Diana, Employability, Professional Services).

This echoes the accounts of students such as Claire and Emily and their approach to their applications, discussed in Chapter Six.

As will be seen across the discussion of the staff data, Diana sits in contrast to other staff by acknowledging the 'othering' the CCS students face and actively seeking to remedy the difficulties. For example, Peter demonstrates a similar awareness of building resentments but is passive toward the issue, recounting:

> [it] is really starting to be flagged to us that there is a growing resentment I think that the core curricular and extracurricular opportunities that are afforded the students here potentially aren't available to student parents here and there is a growing kind of resentment about that (Peter, LLO Student Support, Professional Services).

In the context of 'individualisation', as I will discuss below, in response to these issues, Peter engages in individualising discourses around the partnership of the institution with the student, which places focus on the role CCS students must play here and creates a deficit frame, a position echoed by other staff.

7.3.2 Individualisation

The strong recurrent presentation of 'individualisation' of CCS students within the staff data supports and reinforces the themes of 'othering' and suggests a possible common culture within this institution which corresponded with the finding's student data and the inequities CCS students experience. For instance, a common perspective held by staff was that a

partnership between the institution and the student existed, but this partnership seemed to place

the onus on the student to meet obligations which the institution had laid out in documents such

as the Student Parent Policy. As Leo, the most senior member of staff in my sample reflects:

> I think it is talking about things like partnership and so on, which is softer than HR contractual stuff but it nonetheless represents some way of structuring that there are responsibilities on the part of the institution for its students just as for students… (Leo, LLO Senior Manager (WP), Professional Services).

This furthers the notion that he is, in some way, 'a manager' of students in this 'softer than

HR' interpretation, but 'individualisation' becomes more apparent:

> I still need the job [student's work] to be done, so there is a balancing thing to it. Now I am not sure how different that is. A mature student who is here and within a framework of a programme going on for so long with expectations to jump through certain hurdles to be able to demonstrate learning, to be able to get an award. We have a duty to make sure that we are providing a good, safe, effective learning environment for them to be learning in appropriate resources and all those things (Leo, LLO Senior Manager (WP), Professional Services).

The language here becomes problematic in that it makes clear that the partnership is not one of

equals. For instance, it is Leo who 'still needs the job to be done', and, while he acknowledges

'a duty' to provide a supportive environment to CCS students, this is framed as a power

differential of what Leo 'needs' and 'does' rather than a partnership of listening and responding

and working with CCS students to support them. Leo's perspective is also echoed by Peter:

> The university have talks about a partnership all the time, partnership between staff and students, I would hope to talk about that student's parent policy in the same way that it is a partnership between the university and student parents and that document sets out the partnership… (Peter, LLLO Student Support, Professional Services).

Leo and Peter's thinking may appear to be a subtle from of 'individualisation', but, when

returning to the stories of Rebecca and even Claire with their disciplinary experiences in

Chapter Six, there is an echo between the interpretation of the policy in their cases and this

interpretation of a partnership, enchanted in such a didactic manner, which allows inequity to

develop. For instance, both Claire and Rebecca experienced situations where the staff framed

themselves as having supported or done their 'duty' and proceeded to disciplinary measures

when these duties and obligations had not rendered fruitful. This happened, despite the relative reasonableness of Claire and Rebecca's concerns, both of whom fundamentally just wanted flexibility for placement location and to pick up sick children, respectively – barriers caused by their caring status, which, in theory, the policy, which embodies the partnership spoken about by Leo and Peter, should seek to support.

The role that 'partnership' and the Student Parent Policy has for some staff, in making them a transparent broker who has laid out its position, draws back to the idea discussed earlier: that students have 'chosen' to be CCS students. For instance, Peter is clear in opening the discussion that "the student parent is self-identifying" (Peter, LLO Student Support, Professional Services), echoing Jools' earlier claim that CCS students choose to "make a big deal of being a parent and caring" (Jools, Tutor, Academic). Meanwhile, Leo is clear that CCS students – especially mature students who, 'in most cases our learners would be parents already' (Leo, LLO Senior Manager (WP), Professional Services) – are making the choice to study with children and should be prepared for this when:

> Making the commitment to do study, rather than in being something that is cropping up for them as students already, and then them needing to think through how that is going to work out. (Leo, LLO Senior Manager (WP), Professional Services).

Jools also explicitly suggests it is a choice to study for CCS students, which she frames automatically as mature students:

> I suspect that's the case with a lot of mature students, because there's an underlying "well I don't have to do this" there's a sort of choice to it. (Jools, Tutor, Academic)

In making such claims, staff echo patterns seen in the student data around the notion of 'choice' which are, as discussed earlier, problematic as they position students as free rational actors, unconstrained in their decision making – which few, if any, students actually are (Reay, David, and Ball, 2005). In framing students in this way, staff are set up to see any students who do not automatically have such freedoms as in 'deficit', even though, by their very nature, CCS

students have a deeply interwoven set of commitments and barriers about their *work* of being

a student, as mapped out in Chapter Five. Very few CCS students truly have such freedom and

are structurally set up to have inequitable experiences, as the institution is not framed to support

their needs accurately if false assumptions about their freedom and choice underpin its design.

This again echoes Brooks' suggestion that "the influence of neo-liberalist individualisation",

seen in such 'choice' narratives, "tended to erase the significance of structural inequalities,

with the effect of making student parents believe that any difficulties they face are a result

primarily of personal failures" (Brooks, 2012b, p. 242).

Only Diana presents an alternative 'lone wolf' perspective on the role of the Student

Parent Policy which supports the notion that the institution frames CCS students as in deficit,

suggesting the policy may need to be used defensively by students to protect their rights. As

she claims:

> I think the student parent policy is really useful because it's given us something
> to go back to departments with when they are being unreasonable about things
> and you know making them aware that they have responsibilities…You know
> I suppose in some ways we might be going back to how they might have reacted
> to disabled students back in the day and maybe we are just waiting for life to
> move on a stage. (Diana, Employability, Professional Services)

While Diana returns to this notion of disabled students, which I highlighted earlier as an

'othering', she is using it to frame the CCS student experience against a wider pattern of

inequity – students who diverge from the 'traditional' experience – rather than framing the

student as problematic, as others did earlier in the chapter. Diana's approach to the Student

Parent Policy is pertinent, not only because it sits contra to those of Peter and Leo above and,

in so doing, says that the institution is something that CCS students may need to defend

themselves against but because this echoes CCS students' framing of their experience of the

institution: the motif of battles Claire draws up or the way in which Nicole speaks of "it was

nice to know I had a policy so if anything went wrong, like in terms of my supervisors reacted

badly or something like that then I knew like I would have this behind me." (Nicole, Social Science PhD, 1 Child).

Fundamentally however, CCS students were framed by most staff in a number of ways as 'individuals' who would be problematic or would face a number of personal challenges the student had to resolve. For instance, Peter was clear that he expected CCS students to struggle with time keeping and that the Student Parent Policy would be something he would need to use to curb that, claiming:

> [I will] say look we have got a policy on that, and there is things that you need to attend, you can't just say well I am a parent and I am not going to attend on a Tuesday and a Thursday but I signpost them to that policy and things so that they know what is expected of them (Peter, LLO Student Support, Professional Services).

The idea that time keeping was an 'issue' that these students would fall down on was a common motif in the staff data, as Jools claims: "I think in the main, the issue probably relates to time and time management" (Jools, Tutor, Academic). Jools highlights how she manages this concern at admissions:

> [In] part of that interview, one of the questions we ask and we spend time on is work / life balance, how are you going to manage to study you have got children and you have got work so we have that conversation (Jools, Tutor, Academic).

Despite Jool's claims that this makes it "very much out in the open" (Jools, Tutor, Academic), and that such honesty is a positive thing, it is also possible to see how such transparency is still about determining if the student is 'the right kind of student'. The openness is not with a view to support students but to see if, as an individual, they will comply with the ideal type of student Jools is looking for. Even with such openness, Jools is critical of CCS students who diverge from their plans and seek mitigation. Recounting how, in a mitigation committee, she is:

> always a bit of a pain, because sometimes people [CCS students] talk about work responsibilities, and I sometimes think well that's not really his mitigation because they all have work responsibilities… (Jools, Tutor, Academic)

Jools' approach to CCS students echoes patterns seen in Burke and McManus' (Burke & McManus, 2011) research into arts admissions, discussed in previous chapters, where, despite the transparency at interview, staff were making decisions that were still deeply subjective in classed, gendered and racialised ways. Jools, like the tutors in Burke and McManus's study, is, in fact, looking for students to demonstrate that they already have the qualities they value rather than to develop them while in education (Burke & McManus, 2011, p. 22). For instance, as part of the 'very open' conversation, Jools expects CCS students to be able to say:

> this is my plan and the fact that they have thought about it and they see that it is something that has got to be overcome because they are not coming in, without any responsibilities they have got responsibilities usually for work, usually for caring, and also other caring responsibilities sometimes (Jools, Tutor, Academic).

In this way, it is clear that CCS are individualised by this openness, expected to take complete responsibility for how they will fit in with the 'dominant timescapes' (Burke, et al, 2017), as discussed in Chapter Five. Furthermore, this approach to students' time puts into perspective discussion of 'partnership', as it makes clear that the expectation is for the student to be flexible and malleable to fit within these dominant times. This sits in contra to the 'flexible approach' the Student Parent Policy suggests the institution should take and made Claire, Nicole and Rebecca's experiences problematic in Chapter Six.

In addition to time, CCS students were 'individualised' and framed by staff to be low in academic confidence, which they would need to build up while students, resorting, in part, to references being made to derogatory tropes of mature students – which may not be true of either CCS or mature students, in reality – to all because of the complexity of these students' identities and experiences. For instance, Peter claims CCS students will have had:

> a prolonged period away from education. A lot of them with low confidence, a lot of them academically haven't been given the same opportunities and just need a lot of handholding and as I say by default because they are non-traditional students, they bring non-traditional problems and issues, that can be student parents (Peter, LLO Student Support, Professional Services).

Jools echoes and expands by going as far as to suggest that CCS students lack a desire to learn:

> their academic skills, confidence might be low, because they are older… we find it very difficult for them to see learning as an experience in itself. The learning and education is a means to an end, and when they come to graduation they will say, do you know I really enjoyed that as a surprise it's not something that they come in to do… we find it difficult for them to think of learning. It is always like how I do this assignment; it's not just enjoying the experience (Jools, Tutor, Academic).

For Jools, it is her role to take these older, unconfident students, who are dispassionate about education and 'support' and 'enable' them, 'individualising' terms placing the focus of activity onto the CCS student:

> I prefer support and enabling, empowering, building self-confidence, building self-esteem. Enabling them to be a person in their own right which will leave here ready to change the world. (Jools, Tutor, Academic)

Jools even goes as far as to suggest that CCS students are in some way 'Neanderthal' when they enter the university and require civilising through her use of metaphor:

> I would love to do like a picture have you seen sort of like the Neanderthal they grow up and they get taller. Our students come in a bit like, 'oh my goodness they are going to find out I shouldn't be here', to the day they graduate with a BA and they change the way they look, their hairstyle, their clothes they become a completely different person that is my role. (Jools, Tutor, Academic).

Throughout the staff data, it starts to become apparent that there is a wider institutional culture of deficit which surrounds CCS students, whether explicit in the ways Jools is or more subtle through the microaggressions and assumptions about, these students seen in Peter, Jools, and Leo's accounts.

Only Diana stands as a strong consistent contrast to the predominantly negative accounts and impressions staff have of CCS students and their potential. Recalling a skills seminar she led a few days prior to interview, she reflects on how she proactively challenges the individual sense of deficit some CCS students have:

> I took the class the other day [about transitions] and somebody said 'I moved house, I am really proud of that, because I was really worried about it'. So we had a bit of a session unpicking the skills that lie behind moving house, and then putting them into the terms [that CCS students can use] that a graduate

> employer would understand; negotiation, project management, budgeting skills, there is a whole raft of stuff that goes on and it's getting students to recognise that in themselves (Diana, Employability, Professional Services).

In this way, instead of focusing on how CCS students are different, are 'other', need to change and mould to meet the university or evolve in the way Jools characterises, Diana helps the CCS students in her session understand how their life experience is an asset and how these can be translated into transferable skills.

However, Diana acts out of her own personal sense of and commitment to social justice, echoing similar patterns to how staff in existing research interpret widening participation (Stevenson et al., 2010, p. 112). Diana is aware of the difference in her approach to other staff and the wider institutional culture. For example, as one of the original authors of the Student Parent Policy, she could see even from its conception that the policy would, "protect students from people who aren't sympathetic, so you can go back to your department, and you can ask for this" (Diana, Employability, Professional Services). This echoes Nicole's sentiments around the policy, in the student accounts, of having something to fall back on if things go wrong, having heard from other students about the wider culture of the university and the reaction of 'oh no not another one' to some students' pregnancy announcements.

In exploring the staff accounts, there are many recurrent themes which individualise CCS students, echoing the pattern in the student accounts and painting a picture of a negative culture. Many staff place these students in deficit or to blame for their barriers, 'othering' and 'individualising' CCS students. Within the student data, the recurrent themes cumulated in many students feeling compelled to 'pass' as a student without caring responsibilities by coming into contact with staff coercing or advocating for the desirability of students to 'pass'. This is echoed by some of the staff such as Jools, and now I will look at the presentation of 'passing' within the staff data in more detail to see if there are further indications of this.

7.3.3 Passing

As seen in the students' accounts, the complex nexus of 'othering' and 'individualisation' also cumulated within the staff accounts in views and behaviours supporting CCS students to 'pass' as more traditional students. The conception of a more widely accepted student that CCS students should 'pass' as corresponds with those patterns seen in existing literature (Hinton-Smith, 2012b, 2016): carefree or responsibility-free, able to make 'choices' (Reay, David, and Ball, 2005) unencumbered.

There were varying degrees to which the culture of 'passing' were explicit – seen in Claire or Rebecca's story in Chapter Six – or the result of subtle microaggressions – such as the reaction Sue witnessed to bringing children on campus discussed in Chapter Five – or the pervading pattern of absence across students' accounts of *work*. For instance, Peter, in the frame of trying to help CCS students, makes subtle allusions to the need to help students 'pass' by going into 'fixer mode':

> we are reactive to the one-to-one in that I always make the joke a lot of the times, whenever someone comes to reception that I am a coiled spring I am always just ready, just whatever anyone needs, I am there just to fix things, like that Harvey Keitel character in *Pulp Fiction*, just walk in, fix it out we go everything is fine. But that doesn't mean fixing those individual problems, we start seeing the emerging themes so we can then put strategies in place so hopefully we mightn't have to do as much of the one-to-one stuff (Peter, LLO Student Support, Professional Services).

In this elaboration of what is valued and what the support he is trying to offer seeks to do, it is clear that the CCS student is subject to purposeful correction or putting 'right'. Keitel's character in *Pulp Fiction*, 'the Wolf,' famously works to put things back to normal, restoring crime scenes to 'normal', as though nothing ever happened. In this way, Peter's help becomes a microaggression of supporting 'passing', helping CCS student return to 'normal', and, instead of embracing the complexity and diversity of the experience of different CCS students, his instinct is to generalise. By looking for patterns within CCS students' experience as a means of reducing one-to-one contact, Peter is seeking to get ahead of the complexity and difference

of CCS students and adopt a 'one-size fits all approach' to any 'issues' he needs to 'fix'. In this way, Peter's approach of homogenising and organising students and their problems, in ways, echoing neoliberal approaches, has the further potential to 'other' students that these strategies may not work for and 'individualise' them as responsible for their inability to 'pass'.

Further examples of this notion that CCS students should fit into models or approaches of support and 'pass' were echoed in other accounts by staff. For instance, Peter's approach mirrored Leo's suggestion that, despite the need for some adjustments, CCS students 'still needed to get the job done'. The prioritisation of the institutional structures and patterns which CCS students need to 'fit into' is also seen in Jools' suggestion that:

> if you do this programme of study you need to achieve these things and in that there is an inbuilt time pressure because that is the way we do it, you do a masters in year, or two years part-time, and you do an undergrad in 3 years, or 4 if you do an industrial placement and there is just isn't that flexibility to do other things (Jools, Tutor, Academic)

Even when adaptions to programme delivery are made, such as by the Lifelong Learning Office, these could also be seen to demonstrate subtle forms of supporting CCS students to 'pass' within the institution as they progress within their studies. As Steven recounts:

> I have a feed into the business school, for my [Foundation Year] part time students and the way I deliver my course for the 3 years they are with me, is very different to the way that they are receiving the delivery at the business school it's being delivered more on the lines of if you were a full time student. (Steven, Tutor, Academic)

Leo, who has overall responsibility for such programmes, expands on this, suggesting:

> the foundation years they are delivered with the expectation that students are going to become fulltime within mainstream programmes, [hence] we have actually got less room for manoeuvre in terms of providing something that we think is necessarily going to work for learners (Leo, LLO Senior Manager (WP), Professional Services).

Furthermore, there is also some evidence to suggest, that, without engagement with CCS students in determining what their needs may be, staff make assumptions about what the needs of CCS students are:

> I think we have tried to design curricula … to anticipate what could work for students with caring commitment (Leo, LLO Senior Manager (WP), Professional Services).

Not only are students being prepared to 'pass' as a more traditional form of student once they leave foundation year but there are assumptions made in the curriculum design about what it is to be a CCS student, echoing the theme of 'othering' which sees CCS students synonymous with mature students. In this sense, not only are students expected to be prepared and supported to 'pass' as a more traditional and accepted form of student but they are also expected to 'pass' as a more understood form of CCS student before this point with little or no agency in establishing this conception of CCS students.

There is also a perception among staff that CCS students take pride in the difficulty of participating in HE while caring for children, viewing it as a 'badge of honour' (Leo, LLO Senior Manager (WP), Professional Services), and seek to 'pass' because this is something they elect to do. This is echoed in Jools' interpretation of what CCS students do at interview:

> present[ing] themselves in the best possible light that they will be able to be a model student. And they see a model student as someone without children who is young and who is able…they [CCS student applicant] will say I came here and I got, they [Current CCS Students at Open Days] tell them about their caring responsibilities, and how they managed and our students they think right if they can do it I can do it so it's open about your caring. Absolutely open (Jools, Tutor, Academic).

While there might have been some evidence of this desire to 'pass' in the student data from those such as Catherine, in the main, students were engaging in passing exercises as a means of avoiding the negative culture of 'othering' rather than as taking pride in their ability to 'fit in' or 'pass', as seen in Claire and Emily and how they approached their application forms in Chapter Five.

Reflecting back on Jools' account of CCS students across this chapter so far and the way in which she frames the ideal or 'model' answers she expects a CCS student to deliver, it can also be suggested that some staff do think in ways which 'individualise' students and reinforces

the staff's desire for students to 'pass'. Jools' talk of openness is not necessarily a reflection of an acceptance of CCS students but about being clear and open about what is expected of them. Her quotation reflects a didactic one-way conversation about how CCS students she interviews are going to fit in within the dominant timescale (Burke, et al, 2017) of the university. Here she uses others who have 'passed' as an example rather than how Jools responsively would cater to the different needs of the students admitted to the institution. Such an approach does not respond to the complexity of the student experience I have established in Chapter Five and Six, having the potential to contribute to the inequity CCS students' experience.

The form of 'passing' seen in the staff data is complex, as was also seen in the student data, and is dependent on the social and political factors at play and the need for "political and social invisibility" (Schlossberg, 2001, p. 4-5). While the culture embodied in supporting passing behaviours seen in the views of Jools and Leo may be positive and affirmative for some CCS students, it has the potential to be oppressive and debilitating for others. What becomes troubling, however, is the way in which some staff have been on the receiving end of the complex socio-political factors in passing as students yet play a key role themselves in perpetuating such cultures now they are staff. For instance, Jo is a member of staff and a mother of two children about to finish her part-time PhD. Throughout all her prior experience of higher education, Jo has been a CCS student. She recalls the 'othering' she felt and how she had been unable to 'pass' at admissions as a potential student for her first masters programme application:

> the response that I got to my application was very much, you're not really business school, you're not one of us, and I was absolutely furious because I had more than what was required to get on to the masters. I had the qualifications, I had the experience, and there was something in the back of my head which was… ah that's because I'm a mature student, that's because it's clear that I had maternity leave (Jo, Tutor, Academic).

In her current role, Jo seems to help maintain the status quo of CCS students, based in part on the passing behaviours she had to engage in. There is a sense that it remains normal for Jo that

CCS students are 'other' and that it is ultimately the individual choice of a student to be at university and subject to the barriers they experience. For instance, Jo recalls how she is frequently assigned to CCS students in her programme team because she is perceived to understand their needs:

> my programme team knew that I had children, and that I had done a masters with children, and was currently doing a PhD while I had children. So, I knew what some of the issues around that might be [and am] more able to flag up where people can go for support" (Jo, Tutor, Academic).

When talking about her practice, Jo sees her role as allaying concerns while helping CCS students to assimilate by 'changing behaviours' and, therefore, 'passing'. As she reflects:

> [I] guide them through a set of difficulties, and guide them through all the bureaucracy for instance, or say well this is the person you need to speak to, but it's still very much just someone who would say … 'there there, never mind' … with a view to changing some behaviours along the lines … (Jo, Tutor, Academic).

Furthermore, echoing Leo and Peter, Jo talks quite openly about how CCS students need to, as Leo put it, 'get the job done' and that as 'other' students CCS students do need to find ways to 'fit in' or 'pass':

> I think there's a long held institutional set of norms… right… "this is how we do it" but there's also considerable agency… For a lot of people, the status quo makes a lot of sense, and in lots of ways students who are parents…are the anomalies, *they* are the outliers, and so the whole system isn't going to change to adopt practices which would suit them better (Jo, Tutor, Academic).

It is not my suggestion that Jo should be a lone warrior herself, taking on the pressures of trying to subvert a system based on her own experience. Clearly from the data across this thesis, a set of wider cultural factors are at play which establish this pattern of 'othering', 'individualisation', and 'passing' for CCS students. Jo's approach perhaps foreshadows consequences of the culture of 'passing' on current students, as seen in Claire's account from Chapter Six, where she says "I'm glad I learnt that lesson then rather than in the future" (Claire, Health PhD, 1 Child), when reflecting on the advice from the Head of School following her disciplinary. Despite the claims to be helping CCS students, Jo is passing on lessons in how to

'pass' by changing students' behaviour to fit in and navigate the system they are in, conscious of its inequities, similar perhaps to the approach Claire's Head of School took, which she subsequently internalised.

In ending this discussion of 'passing', I return to Diana, the lone wolf in the staff data, who draws together a theory about the culture of the institution, suggesting it to be pervasively intolerant of difference, comfortable only in responding to the students they understand:

> I think there are gatekeepers in departments, and we could all name departments that are mature unfriendly. I can name one where I wouldn't like to see a mature student go to because they would have such an unhappy experience and I daresay a mature student with children probably even more unhappy. But there are other departments where you know that they will be better cared for, where there are sympathetic staff and to some extent it's to do with the student profile, I think that they have already got. Because people are quite happy to stick with what they know, and if you can recruit, a whole load of straight A students, from private schools in the south of England, why would you not go for the low hanging fruit, why would you go that extra mile to deal with students who may be more complicated, have more complicated needs. The university departments will always go for the low hanging fruit, it makes life easier [for them] (Diana, Employability, Professional Services).

There is, for Diana, an element of performativity (Schlossberg, 2001, p. 4-5) to being accepted or 'passing' at this institution which is about being part of the 'low hanging fruit', who is: a student without caring responsibility, middle class, high-achieving – in many ways, the traditional 'bachelor boy' image seen to be presented as the accepted norm against which CCS students in existing research are judged (Hinton-Smith, 2012b, 2016). Students who cannot 'perform' in this form in an unsympathetic department will face difficulties, like many of the students did in my study.

Cumulatively, across both the staff and student accounts, there is a pervasive pattern of 'othering' and 'individualisation', which encourages 'passing' behaviours in CCS students. The complexity of the CCS student identity may mean that not all CCS students experience this pattern in the same way, but many of the students in my study do and many of the staff acknowledge or present views and attitudes which support this pattern. This pattern of

'othering', 'individualisation' and 'passing' ultimately suggests that there is a dominant cultural narrative at this institution treating CCS students as second-class citizens and placing many at a disadvantage by treating them differently.

7.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, across this chapter, I have explored the perception of CCS students and demonstrated a recurrence in the staff data of the theorised patterns in the student data of 'othering', 'individualisation' and support or encouragement of 'passing' behaviours in CCS students. In terms of the 'othering' of CCS students, the staff data showed attitudes which highlighted the difference of CCS students from the rest of the student population. This was also reflected on as part of a wider institutional culture where CCS students were only accepted in specific departments. Subtle microaggressions, such as seeing CCS students as synonymous with mature, part-time, or non-traditional learners, compounded 'othering' by staff. More explicit 'othering' was also present, such as reflections on questioning within departments about why such students needed to be recruited or staff making demarcations between 'real students' and CCS students in discussions.

In terms of specific theme of the 'individualisation' of CCS students, the staff data echoed patterns seen within the student data. For instance, common among staff was a discussion of the 'partnership' between the university and students, seen as embodied in documents like the Student Parent Policy; however, such partnerships were framed in language which problematised the student as responsible for 'getting the job done'. These patterns echoed how the Student Parent Policy was activated in the case of Rebecca in the student data. Assumptions were made by staff that students had made a 'choice' (Reay, David, & Ball, 2005) to study and were, therefore, to 'blame' for the barriers they faced. CCS students were also received as being in deficit around issues such as time management, echoing themes in the

student data, or that they were lacking in academic ability, self-confidence or even an enjoyment of learning.

Finally, 'passing' was seen in the staff data by the expectation on CCS students to 'fit in' with homogeneous structures aimed at more traditional students. For instance, some staff talked about going into 'fixer mode' for CCS students, focused on how to remedy issues for CCS students so that they 'fitted in' with the institution. Some staff also perceived that CCS students wanted to 'pass' and took pride in their ability to 'fit in' as a more traditional student. This contrasted with the student data which suggested most students sought to 'pass' in response to perceptions that they would not be accepted and would be framed as 'difficult' (i.e. Claire or Emily on application forms). Some staff were also explicit in their encouragement of CCS students to 'pass', as these students were seen as 'outliers'.

Across both the student and staff data, a consistent set of theorised understandings of 'othering' and 'individualisation' of CCS students, leading them to be encouraged to 'pass' in a more accepted form of student, has been established. In turn, there has the potential for many CCS students to have an inequity of student experience as a result of the cumulative impact of these themes. I will now move on, in the next chapter, to conclude this thesis by recapping the key findings and consider how remedies could be developed to address these themes and their associated inequities using a lens of Fraserian recognition theories (Fraser, 1997, 2001, 2003) as an overarching theoretical framework.

Chapter 8: Conclusion; findings, remedies and recommendations

8.1 Introduction

At the start of this thesis, I introduced a problem: my puzzlement at the contrasts between the presentation of the institution I worked for, at the time, in policy around widening participation and equality and diversity, and the experiences I witnessed of students who cared for children while studying. My aims included:

1.   To illuminate and develop our understanding of the experiences of students who care for children while studying at university;

2.   To explore the extent to which the institutional policy context supports these students to participate in HE while at this university.

These were complemented by the objectives:

1.   To conduct an up-close study to develop a deeper understanding of the experiences of students who care for children while studying at university and identify the barriers experienced by these students at a single institution.

2.   To identify any barriers to these students' participation, understand their causes and make institutional or policy recommendations which could support these students to achieve equity of student experience.

In delivering on these aims and objectives, I conducted an Institutional Ethnography (IE) (Smith, 2002, 2006) across two academic years with 16 student participants who acted as the standpoint or focal participants in an IE study and a further six members of staff to provide insight into the wider institutional context and recurrent themes identified in the standpoint accounts (Smith, 2002, p.26; 2006, p. 3).

This chapter brings my thesis to a close by providing a key summary of how I have achieved these aims and objectives. To begin, I provide a summary of key findings presented in this thesis around where I address my core research questions. Having identified that many

of the CCS students in this study do face an inequity of experience, I draw on Fraser's theories of recognition (Fraser, 1997, 2001, 2003), discussed in Chapter Four, by applying the constructs of the Status Model and Participatory Parity (Fraser, 2001, p.21-23) to the recurrent themes of 'othering', 'individualisation' and 'passing' to understand how to address the inequity CCS students face at this institution. I, then, utilise Fraser's perspectival dualism (1997, p. 15; 2003) to theorise the form remedies could take, utilising this discussion to suggest remedies which restore equity for CCS students' experiences institutionally, followed by a discussion of recommendations for the wider HE sector which stem from this research. I draw this chapter to a close by discussing, in the final sections, the limitations of this study and the contributions to knowledge, suggesting some possible recommendations for future research and providing some final concluding reflections on this research.

8.2 Summary of key findings

In designing this research, I sought to find answers to three research questions:

1. What are the experiences of students who care for children while studying at university?

2. How, if at all, are the experiences of these students shaped and mediated by institutional policies and documents?

3. What do these accounts suggest about the extent to which these students are part of the policy and practice focus and beneficiaries of supporting participation in HE because of their status as 'carers'?

The answers to these questions I have sought to address across this thesis and will now summarise.

In Chapter Five, the first research question was addressed by considering the students' accounts of their *work* at the North University and what themes emerged from this. I identified that CCS students are a complex and diverse group whose experiences vary depending on the

personal circumstance and intersection of different characteristics. While themes were identified across the accounts of the participants in my study, not all of these were experienced by all participants or in the same way, and these barriers could be experienced with varying degrees of intensity or impact. The three patterns to the themes CCS student navigate included: time and space to study; financial issues; and the inaccessibility of institutional norms and practices.

These themes and their issues and barriers were characterised by the potential for CCS students to have an inequitable student experience, and this was reinforced by theorising the data using 'othering' (Archer & Leathwood, 2005, p. 190-1) as a lens where students reported how their difference is presented and reinforced to them at this stage through the subtle microaggressions some students encountered when navigating barriers during their *work*. Complementing this 'othering' with the theoretical lens of 'individualisation' (Burke, 2013, p. 37), I saw students positioning themselves as feeling 'to blame' or in 'deficit' for the challenges they faced, that these students had made a 'choice' (Reay, David, Ball, 2005, p.29) to study and were responsible for the implications of this 'choice' and being a carer for children. However, these students were not free to make choices unencumbered, as was expected of more traditional students, and the students had started to internalise as individual failings – 'structural inequalities', which had also been seen in existing research by Brooks (2012b, p.242). The third theoretical lens of 'passing' (Sanchez & Schlossberg, 2001) was foregrounded in Chapter Five but was, perhaps, less pronounced than in subsequent chapters. At this stage, 'passing' held a complex relationship for the CCS students in my study. Some demonstrated a positive affirmative relationship with being able to 'pass' as a more traditional student while others expressed troubling views that they had a need to 'pass' as a result of their experiences of 'othering' and 'individualisation', making this form of 'passing' more

oppressive, as it responded to a need these students had for "political and social invisibility" (Schlossberg, 2001, p. 4-5).

In Chapter Six, I sought to develop a further understanding of the role of the institution from Chapter Five by implementing an analysis of *texts* and their activation (Smith, 2006, p.66; Smith & Turner, 2014) in the CCS students' accounts, thus seeking to address the second research question. In this chapter, five key *texts* were identified as shaping the experiences of the CCS students, although some of these played a more prominent role than others. These *texts* included: application forms and admissions; email mailing lists; websites; mitigation forms; and a Student Parent Policy. In understanding these *texts* and their activation, further evidence was seen to support the theorisation from Chapter Five of the 'othering' and 'individualisation' of CCS students and, more prominently, the desirability for CCS students to 'pass' as more traditional students. For example, *texts* such as application forms were approached by students wary of a sense of 'otherness' and not wanting to be perceived as a 'difficult' student. Websites were clearly geared toward younger students, with a simple search of the website presenting results for 'parents of students', instead of 'student parents'. This was both 'othering' and helped establish a sense of the 'individualisation' felt by CCS students who had to resolve their own problems and find their own sources of advice and support. More pronounced, however, were the 'othering', 'individualisation', and 'passing' seen in the stories of Claire, Nicole and Rebecca, as the former engaged with mitigations forms, and the latter two the Student Parent Policy. While all experienced microaggressions, which implied 'othering' and 'individualisation' across these accounts, the sense to which staff used *texts* and formed more open aggressions were also present here. For instance, both Claire and Rebecca became subject to disciplinary processes, with messages which framed them as to blame for the barriers they faced, individualising them as a result of their caring status. All three students were faced with the desirability to 'pass' by staff as a more accepted form of student: Claire by

being asked to apologise for the difficulty she caused; Nicole by being encouraged to stay fulltime; Rebecca by the open aggression faced toward her needs – positions established by staff through process and discussions mediated by the institutional *texts* of the mitigation form and the Student Parent Policy.

In response to the third research question, the recurrent presentation of 'othering', 'individualisation' and 'passing' across the student data served to suggest that these students did experience an inequity of student experience at this institution, and, in Chapter Seven, I continued further analysis of the position of CCS students within the wider institution. I first analysed the staff data, utilising the three theoretical lenses from the discussion of the student data to understand the institutional context and the wider culture, consistent with how other Institutional Ethnographers have approached the use of data from non-standpoint participants (Smith, 2002, p.26; 2006, p.3). Once again, the three theoretical lenses were repeatedly useful in understanding the staff data, reinforcing the notion that these are reflective of a common aspect of the institutional culture toward CCS students. The accounts of staff presented a consistent pattern of microaggressions toward CCS students, which reinforced the themes of 'othering' and 'individualisation' seen in the student data. For instance, CCS students would commonly be confused with mature or older students, thus their needs would be seen as synonymous, despite the fact that, as Moreau and Kerner (2013, p. 4) have also identified, not all CCS students are mature/older and not all mature/older students care for children. Furthermore, discussions often focused around the notion that CCS students had made a 'choice' (Reay, David, Ball, 2005, p.29) to study, and, when discussion was framed by ideas of partnership, the locus of such discussion focused on what the student needed to do and how the University still needed the student to 'get the job done'.

Furthermore, Chapter Seven also identified some open aggression alongside the microaggressions toward CCS students in staff accounts, which cumulatively pointed to the

inequitable, marginalised status these students occupied within this institution. For instance, one member of staff, Jools, was clear that the system was not going to change for CCS students, who were 'outliers' and needed to be guided to 'pass' within the institution. Many other staff reflected on similar hostility they were aware of in other departments who put up 'invisible barriers' and were 'unsympathetic' to CCS students' needs. Of all the staff interviewed, only Diana appeared to openly acknowledge, problematise and seek to address the inequity CCS students faced and, like the secretary in Rebecca's story from Chapter Six, adopted a lone wolf position, seeking to support CCS students against the wider attitudes and culture of the institution. For instance, Diana, an architect of the Student Parent Policy, was clear that its function was to give CCS students "something to go back to departments with when they are being unreasonable" (Diana, Employability, Professional Services), responding to the perspective that these students were in this institution, not positioned as a focus or beneficiaries because of their status as carers, despite some evidence of attempts to acknowledge them, such as on campus childcare.

Having established a consistent set of theoretical patterns – 'othering', 'individualisation' and 'passing' – which help create inequity of experience for many of the CCS students in my study, I utilised Fraser's theories of recognition (Fraser, 2997, 2001, 2003) to theorise and understand the nature of the inequity these students experience and the form potential remedies and recommendation should take in the following section.

8.3 Theorising how to redress CCS students' inequities of experience

In Chapter Four of this thesis, I introduced a preliminary discussion of the use of Fraserian theories of recognition and highlighted how these theories had been useful to others, such as Burke (2013) and Morrison (2015), to understand questions of equity in higher education research. These studies had, however, focused on questions of access to HE, whereas I focus on the participatory experiences of students. Both Burke and Morrison put Fraser's theories to

use in understanding the experiences of groups who have in some perceptible way 'entered the HE arena physically'. Nina, a BME applicant, is invited to interview in Burke's study (2013), and there are male teacher training applicants in HE, the focus for Morrison (2015), but Fraser is useful in these studies because it helps to understand how being present in the arena of HE is not the same as being recognised and accepted. It is here that I would suggest a parallel emerges between these studies' participants and the CCS students in my research.

This thesis has shown that CCS students are present within the area of HE and the North University. This study featured 16 CCS students, with 32 initially coming forward at recruitment; however, despite their presence, they recurrently experience 'othering' and 'individualisation' and are encouraged to 'pass' as a more traditional form of student. In essence, the combined collective effect experienced across most of the students in this study to varying degrees is to suggest that, while CCS students are present at The North University, they are not recognised here as CCS, and their experiences are eased by their ability to not be seen as CCS students and 'pass'.

In describing how to understand if a group is experiencing inequity, Fraser draws on the concepts of a 'status model' (Fraser, 2001, p. 21-23) and understanding the extent to which such a group experiences 'participatory parity' (Fraser, 2001, p.25), as discussed in Chapter Four. In the status model, Fraser suggests that judgments should be made on if the group or persons making a claim of social injustice are subject to such an injustice by a subordination of their status as full participants in society. Judging social justice in terms of status rather than ethical and moral judgments avoids a potential "philosophical schizophrenia" (Fraser, 2001, p. 23), as both forms of judgment have the potential to carry biases which can lead to the perpetuation of the social injustice they are seeking to remedy. For instance, ethical judgements require "judgements about the value of various practices, or traits" (Fraser, 2001, p. 23), while moral reasoning appeals rather to a community of values which relate to a matter of "fairness"

or "rights" (Fraser, 2001, p. 23). Fraser encourages first to establish if the status of the injured party is subordinated in contrast to their peers, and, if so, understand and consider how to restore parity of participation, through the lens of 'perspectival dualism' (Fraser, 1997, p.15).

The example Fraser uses to highlight the fluid nature of social injustice and the value of seeing it in terms of 'status' is that of the rich African-American Wall Street banker who cannot flag down a taxi (Fraser, 2001, p. 28). If the claim for social injustice toward this individual were to be understood in purely egalitarian or redistributive terms, then, on the surface, social injustice is absent; this man is a rich banker, and taxis are available. The inequality is, therefore, not redistributive and would not be resolved by providing more taxis or supporting him to earn more. A social injustice has still occurred by the way the man has been misrecognised as a potential passenger for the taxi, based on racially-determined subordination, so this barrier has the potential to be addressed through culture change which disrupts racially-motivated misrecognition.

I would suggest that a number of equivalents to Fraser's example occur for CCS students at the North University. In the first instance, they, like the African American Wall Street banker, have managed to arrive within a privileged institution and take up space there – in one case, Wall Street and, in this study, a traditional research-intensive university. However, just as the Wall Street banker does not seem to comfortably fit and access all the privileges of occupying such space, Chapter Five of this thesis explored the ways in which CCS students' accounts of their *work* suggest that they, too, do not have access to the same privileges nor navigate the institution with the same ease as their colleagues. Fraser's example is brief, so, of course, this focuses on one specific microaggression – that of the banker unable to flag down a taxi with the same ease and acceptance that would be granted to his similar colleagues. It is safe to assume from existing research on race and white privilege (Bhopal, 2018) that such microaggressions would not be isolated to taxi ranks alone.

Chapter Five in this study identified three patterns to the themes which CCS students in this study face, which suggests they do not occupy the North University with the same ease and privileges as other students: time and space to study, financial issues and the inaccessibility of institutional norms and practices. For instance, in terms of time and space to study, many of the students' reflections illustrate how they are subject to fitting in within the 'dominant timescapes' (Burke et al, 2017, p. 18) of the institution, which do not complement their status as carers. Some even explicitly draw comparisons between themselves and others in ways which highlight the 'otherness' they experience and sense of deficit they feel, as in this quotation from Rebecca:

> I do feel like I'm not quite of the right calibre as everyone else, generally, not just because of presentations, I just don't have the same amount of time, or space to learn things, I'm cramming last minute all the time (Rebecca, Health PhD, 1 Child).

Being pregnant and later becoming a CCS student also makes apparent to some students the 'change' that has taken place to mean that they now engage with the institution differently and that they are not accessing the North University, or its courses, with the same ease and privilege they once had. As Nicole reflects:

> I'm still doing fieldwork at the moment so a lot of this would be interviews, arranging interviews, completing interviews, but I'm not traveling anymore, so I'm doing them all by Skype and telephone (Nicole, Social Sciences PhD, 1 Child).

Meanwhile, Richard highlights the challenge of doing his PhD in the same way as others who are publishing or presenting at conferences, a core part of the research student experience:

> I have managed to get to a conference in, or book a conference in Essex, because it falls on the weekend, and my daughter can pick him up from school on the Friday… However there was another conference in Cambridge again in September, which was a midweek one and that was, would be impossible (Martin, Arts & Humanities PhD, 1 Child).

Similarly, with a focus on financial issues often including domestic costs, some CCS students experience an additional barrier in that they have to also fund and prioritise the needs

of their children, compared to other non-CCS students who may experience financial hardship. Concerns such as diet highlight how there is a sense that they are subjugated in their lifestyle as a result of institutional funding not acknowledging their caring status:

> If I had a blank cheque book, I would double my money so that I could afford childcare, and food, to be able to afford proper protein, a breast of chicken, that would be so lovely… (Catherine, Health PhD, 1 Child)

Furthermore, the way in which institutional norms and practices – already a stand-alone barrier – is telling of the way in which CCS are not able to exist within the institution with the same privileges and freedoms as other students. Just as some staff such as Jo are clear that CCS students are 'outliers', 'the anomalies' and that 'the whole system isn't going to change to adopt practices which would suit them better" (Jo, Tutor, Academic), the CCS students in Chapter Five foregrounded microaggressions which implied they were breaking norms and practices in ways that were unwelcome to others, such as bringing their children on campus:

> [The Academic was] …a little bit tetchy... and I wasn't impressed… I emailed to ask permission, because obviously I wouldn't just bring her, and that attitude was a bit…hum ummm umm [*gestures to suggest stand offish/look down upon*] and I wasn't happy, but her behaviour (child) and I said her behaviour will be exemplary, and it was … (Sue, WP Access Programme, 3 Children).

Services are also not designed with the complex balancing acts CCS students have to navigate in mind, as Fiona reflected:

> you're only coming over once a week, and the student services closes at 4.30 or something then it's really difficult… last year my student card expired…I had to leave work early in the end to ensure that I was over in time, and it's those little fiddly things… (Fiona, Education MA, 2 Children).

The cumulative effect of these barriers and experiences establishes differences for CCS students and suggests that there is a homogeneous student body for whom such study space, time, funding and service design norms work.

These thematic patterns suggest CCS students are 'othered', 'individualised' and required to 'pass' and, thus, become subordinated through the expectation to conform to such norms, which is not shared by peers for whom this system works. In effect, returning to Fraser's

example, just as the African-American Wall Street banker does not experience the same privilege and status in Wall Street as his peers, the CCS students in my study do not seem to experience the same privilege and status at the North University as their peers in navigating themes which can be understood through these theoretical lenses.

In further understanding CCS students' status, Fraser would suggest the need to understand if the patterns of "intersubjective subordination [are] is derived from institutionalised patterns of cultural value" (Fraser, 2003, p.49). Evidence of such subordination and cultural value can be seen in activation of *texts* discussed in Chapter Six. For instance, the accounts of students' textually-mediated experiences reflect on both their experiences and the institutional culture, as these experiences are mediated and shaped by extra-local decision making within the institution as a *text* is written and disseminated from elsewhere within the wider institution. For instance, decisions have taken place in the institution about the creation and coordination of application forms and websites that cater for the homogeneous form of non-CCS student, such as how the university's websites derive search results which focus on the 'parents of students' rather than student parents, serving to 'other' CCS students. Application forms make visible some student demographics in ways which draw attention to their difference but do so in ways which make CCS students question if their status as carers would actually be accepted when it is not included explicitly:

> I didn't want my name to be linked to the ideas that I might be a difficult student… I already ticked a number of the equal opportunities boxes, I ticked all those, I ticked all the disadvantaged boxes, and I felt the less I told them about my particular circumstances [as a CCS Student] the better (Claire, Health PhD, 1 Child).

Within the analysis of the critical incidents in Claire, Nicole and Rebecca's stories, the activation of mitigation forms and the Student Parent Policy provide more evidence of the patterns of cultural value 'active' within the institution are seen. These accounts bring together the earlier presentations in this thesis of 'othering' (Archer & Leathwood, 2005; Burke, 2013;

Reay, 2001) and 'individualisation' (Burke, 2013, p. 37; O'Shea, et al; 2016; Smit, 2012) but more prominently demonstrate the active encouragement within the institution of CCS students by staff to 'pass' (Leary, 1999; Sanchez & Schlossberg, 2001). While 'passing' can be a positive affirmative experience, discussed earlier in this thesis, and some CCS students may seek to 'pass', the extent to which this is the case depends on the political and social context and impetus to 'pass'. When the conditions require 'passing', this becomes evidence of status subordination, which I would suggest is the case to varying degrees in these three students' stories.

For instance, both Claire and Rebecca become subject to formal disciplinary procedures because of their inability to 'pass' and fit in with the homogeneous rules and processes around placements and absence, respectively. These stories are compounded with open aggression from the placement administrator for Claire, who accuses her of bullying, and from the Head of School in Rebecca's case, who screams at her. While, in both cases, the outcomes are shaped by finding ways in which the students can more easily 'fit' within the homogeneous processes and operations of the university – in Claire's case, through apologising and, in Rebecca's case, by finding a 'lone wolf' advocate who sorts out any subsequent issues for her. Nicole's account does not reach the same level of hostility, but there are clashes and challenges which come from her seeking support to meet her needs as a pregnant student. For instance, the initial reaction of some staff she has heard from other students of 'oh no not another one' (Nicole, Social Sciences PhD, 1 Child) foregrounds the notion in her mind that she is going to come into contact with problems, leading her to seek the advice of the Students' Union. While the reaction is muted from her supervisors, Nicole is openly discouraged from becoming part-time by one supervisor, to carry on with her PhD regardless of her circumstances and in effect 'pass' as just another student. As discussed, in Chapter Six, these stories are peppered by the recurrent patterns of 'othering' and individualisation' which lead up to these most extreme

demonstrations of encouraging CCS students to 'pass'. These patterns are present across the student data in Chapters Five and Six, and the most troubling thing about them is their pervasiveness, which suggests a culture permeating the institution, and, under the right set of circumstances, could potentially see any of the CCS students subjected to the same treatment as Claire, Nicole and Rebecca.

Cumulatively, the student data points to a 'pattern of cultural value' (Fraser, 2003, p.49) within this institution which subordinates the status and needs of CCS students, which is further reinforced in exploring the accounts in the staff data, suggesting it reflects on the broader culture within the institution. The 'othering', 'individualisation', and 'passing' of CCS students are all present within the staff data in Chapter Seven – with the exception of Diana, who performs a role similar to Rebecca's PA, empathetic to the needs and perspective of CCS students. The other staff in the data evidence subtle microaggressions and subordination, such as considering CCS students synonymous with mature or older students, or attributing CCS students with the active labour within a partnership with the university, and the institution's need to 'get the job done' (Leo, LLO Senior Manager (WP), Professional Services). Overall, the effect of the staff data is to demonstrate that the patterns of subordination seen in the student data and its theorisation are also seen in the wider culture of the institution. Peter and Steven both reflect very explicitly how CCS students' presence in the university is questioned by the wider institution, while Diana highlights both the openness with which she is aware gatekeepers in departments can be 'unfriendly' or are not 'sympathetic' and the sense which, in supporting the development of the Student Parent Policy, she knew that CCS students needed 'something to go back to departments with when they are being unreasonable" (Diana, Employability, Professional Services). Thus, the subordination and diminished status of CCS students is not only something these students anticipate and experience but something that staff are aware of and a small minority actively seek to mitigate against.

Having established that CCS students are subordinated, how to redress this becomes a question of how to establish their status as 'full members' of the university and achieve participatory parity. The question, for Fraser, is raised of how to de-institutionalise the "patterns of cultural value that impede parity of participation" (Fraser, 2001, p.25) – which, in this case, through the 'othering', 'individualisation' and 'passing' of CCS students – are the theoretical lenses which demonstrate these students' subordination. However, by suggesting a de-institutionalisation of patterns of cultural value, Fraser does not automatically suggest these become about providing recognition. Instead, Fraser suggests that these patterns of cultural value which subordinate can take both material form in terms of maldistribution of resource to, and/or the cultural misrecognition of, the subordinated group (Fraser, 1997, 2001, 2003). To navigate this balance, Fraser proposes that, to establish participatory parity while avoiding 'philosophical schizophrenia' (Fraser, 2001, p.24), the nature, and form of remedies should be explored through the conceptual construction she terms 'perspectival dualism' (Fraser, 1997, p.15).

In introducing the concept of perspectival dualism and Fraser's motivations for it, I return to the example of the African-American Wall Street banker. An important aspect is that the banker's claim of social injustice, as real and present as it is, is also plausibly different to those of others who share his African-American identity but not his financial position and/or the nature of the claim for social justice. Furthermore, the claims to remedy injustices, made either individually or collectively, may change over time, which Fraser seeks to acknowledge through perspectival dualism without fundamentally undermining her overall theoretical coherence. In shaping perspectival dualism, Fraser seeks to provide a responsive and flexible approach to assessing remedies to social injustice which is sophisticated enough to respond to changes and support shifts in status over time.

As discussed in Chapter Four, for Fraser, the common theoretical approaches to remedying social injustice fall within what she terms a "bivalent" of "substantive dualism" (Fraser, 2003, pp. 61–62). In summary, *substantive dualism* captures the belief that social inequalities can be redressed by either cultural recognition or material redistribution and that these are effectively cause-and-effect relationships. One approach (i.e. cultural recognition OR resource redistribution) is assumed to address the others' concerns (i.e. resource redistribution will reduce cultural misrecognition, and vice versa).

Fraser promotes an alternative in perspectival dualism, arguing that, in reality, social inequalities are deeply intertwined with both material and cultural factors, claiming that "even the most material economic institutions have a constitutive, irreducible cultural dimension; they are shot through with significations and norms" (Fraser, 1997, p. 15). The understanding of social injustice and appropriate remedy is constantly changing, as claims for recognition by different groups emerge and disperse or change in nature over time. For example, one group's social injustice may require both a redistributive and a recognition remedy in equal measure, whilst, in another instance, a social injustice may benefit from a predominantly redistributive remedy in a situation where cultural recognition of the group experiencing that barrier is not in deficit – or is, at least, not the substantive cause of the inequality; similarly, the reverse might also be the case. For instance, consider the complexity and contrasts of the African-American Wall Street banker and other African-Americans, as well as the complex evolution of race in America from slavery to the present day.

Perspectival dualism moves away from this polemic by acknowledging the complex, shifting, fluid way of conceiving social injustice, which aligns with my *bricolage*-inspired epistemological and ontological foundations and consequent conception of knowledge as equally messy and fluid. This both further strengthens the alignment and utility of an

overarching Fraserian theoretical framework to this thesis but also aligns to the complexity seen in the CCS students' experiences in this study.

In terms of considering the redistributive aspects of the CCS students' experiences in my study, although discussed in Chapter Five, overall, this is not a predominant factor in these CCS students' status subordination, although it could be improved and may be more significant for some. Compared to the general picture of institutions nationally (NUS, 2009), the North University does provide a number of facilities which have the potential to cater for the needs of CCS students. For instance, there is family-friendly accommodation, in which Nicole lives, and there is on campus childcare, which Eliana and Ellen use. Diana also identifies that some parts of the campus do have changing facilities. There is also, through the Student Parent Policy, a specific policy initiative to support CCS students, and there is not, for example, a campus-wide ban on bringing children onto campus, which has been seen at some institutions, such as Teesside University where a ban was implemented in May 2019 (Hartley-Parkinson, 2019).

In this context, the North University appears to cater for CCS students resource-wise in a way that does offer some support to them and would not necessarily be seen as 'careblind' (Moreau, 2016, p. 10), entirely by material resource distribution. Investment in new and improved resources could always benefit CCS students, as, for instance, Nicole identifies that the campus is not always accessible for prams and Diana highlights issues she has had with Estates over health and safety concerns about bringing children onto campus, and the way in which changing spaces appear to be targeted toward open day visitors rather than students. There are also some observations about providing more funding to CCS students, such as for domestic costs, which could reduce some pressures, though this is not necessarily a consistently identified issue by all students.

This speaks, in part, to the complexity and diversity of the CCS student identity, which can be conditional on their own socio-economic status. For instance, Catherine's funding barriers meaning chicken breast is a luxury, which is very different from the experiences of students such as Ellen, who have the socio-economic ability to isolate time and space to study, making food costs absent from discussion of their concerns. It is difficult to reflect on whether, at this particular institution, there is an overall need for greater material resource redistribution as a means of addressing the inequity which the CCS students in my study experience.

In response to this complexity and diversity, the institution could ensure that they remain open-minded to the material needs of students, such as to consider means testing for childcare in on-campus facilities or greater flexibility in provision of additional or emergency funding to CCS students. This is, in part, an aspect to Claire's story, and accounts for her decision to work during her first year and be brought to the edge of burnout, discussed in Chapter Five. Claire's circumstances were complex and influenced by her perceived need to hide her caring status as she would not be accepted within the institution. Because Claire had studied previously (her employment was to cover tuition fees), she was only eligible for a reduced entitlement with Student Finance England. She did not disclose this issue or the problems it caused her until she moved into the second year. Influenced by the perception that she would be seen as a 'difficult' student, she took individual responsibility for the issue by working: "I very nearly burnt out I was an absolute mess, without telling the university I was doing any of it, without asking for any help" (Claire, Health PhD, 2 Children). If the culture of the institution were different, Claire may have felt more empowered to ask for help reducing her material barriers sooner.

The dominant patterns which shape and influence the inequalities CCS students experience are cultural and embodied through the consistent presentation of 'othering', 'individualisation' and the need to 'pass'. These shape both a CCS student's relationship with the institution and the sense that they can be there and be carers while entitled to the material

resource available to them. For instance, in Chapter Six, Sarah explicitly says she did not have an expectation of any additional support, and a common part of the individualisation CCS students experienced in my study was the notion of 'choice' (Reay, David, & Ball, 2005): the idea that as CCS students had engaged in the choice to study, so they were responsible for the barriers they faced and did not expect the university to specifically cater for them. This was used to justify and explain an absence of information across a number of *texts*, such as about childcare or the Student Parent Policy. The recurrent themes of 'othering' and 'individualisation' in the student data placing them in deficit or to blame for the structural inequalities that they faced, echoing Brooks (2012b, p.242) were replayed within the staff data to create a culture which subordinated CCS students' status. For instance, Leo and Peter both articulated a view of 'partnership' and decision making on the part of CCS students which placed emphasis on the student, as the university still needed them to 'get the job done'.

The consistent presence of micro- and actual aggressions across my data paints a picture of an oppressive culture which does not welcome CCS students. This subordinates the experiences of the students in my study, regardless of how it shapes and imbues the material resources available to them. To establish a culture change addressing the outward aggressions, as seen in the accounts of Claire and Rebecca, as well as the broader microaggressions is key to remedying the inequity CCS students experience. These aggressions embody the disparity of participation and are, in their own right, a source of inequity experienced by CCS and must be deprogrammed from the institutional culture to restore CCS students' status and achieve greater equity. In utilising a Fraserian lens of recognition theories (Fraser, 1997, 2001, 2003) and applying perspectival dualism (Fraser, 1997, p.15), the focus of potential remedies should address issues of cultural recognition above redistribution. As for these particular CCS students at this particular institution, the cultural misrecognition of their status to participate as full citizens of the North University is a fundamental source of the inequity they experience.

8.4 Institutional remedies

In the development of remedies, following the Fraserian analysis above, my suggestions for institutions such as the North University focus on ideas, informed by my data, which look to establish or restore the CCS students as recognised with the full status as members of this institution. While there are indications that some students would benefit from interventions which would redistribute resources toward them, the cultural misrecognition and status subordination through 'othering', 'individualisation' and 'passing' are key to the inequity these CCS students experience.

I now make four key recommendations, which focus on the issue of destabilising this theoretical trinity and establishing the recognition of CCS students. First, I recommend that the universities should *focus on activity which proactively makes visible and normalises care and 'caring' status and roles on campus for both staff and students*. Such an approach would have the potential to reduce the sense of 'otherness' CCS students experience on campus, potentially boosting confidence for students to identify themselves, be vocal about their needs, feel entitled and able to engage in the material resources provided, and reduce apprehension to seek support when an individual CCS student's circumstances require it. By being clear that there is a genuine diversity of students – all accepted and entitled to be present and visible on campus – this could challenge the assumptions seen in the staff data which also contribute to 'othering' and 'individualisation'. This work should also seek to make clear that it is not appropriate or desirable for students to be homogenised and encouraged to 'pass' but that creative solutions to support should be sought, underpinning the principles of the further recommendations.

Secondly, the universities should *engage CCS students in decision making about their experiences at multiple levels of the institution, such as about the creation of policy and setting the standards for the application of such policies*. In addition to seeking to make CCS students more visible on campus, there appears to be disconnect between the creation and the

interpretation of policies, which has demonstrated a range of interpretations and applications. For instance, in the case of Claire and Rebecca, the Student Parent Policy became activated within a disciplinary context. For Nicole, it was useful to have as a back-up, but it did not reflect her experience, and neither of the practices, such as avoiding undue influence on decisions and being provided with timely information, were followed. For Peter and Leo, the policy was meant to illustrate the partnership between students and the university, while Diane was clear the policy was a form of defence for CCS students against unfriendly departments. Furthermore, the majority of CCS students in this study were unaware of the policy, let alone the spirit of its application. As part of a combined culture change activity, policy should be developed with CCS students playing a key leadership role in shaping the policy document designed to help them. This document should speak to multiple audiences – not just staff, as Nicole felt it did. The document should also be supported by advice and guidance, perhaps delivering training in partnership with students about how the policy should be interpreted and applied to manage all stakeholder expectations. This may help inform student decision making and avoid applications of a document with supportive aims becoming a mechanism to regulate student behaviour via disciplinary actions.

Thirdly, universities should support the *engagement of staff at all levels in reflexive practice to consider how they view different groups of students and address both explicit and unconscious forms of bias.* Common in both the staff and student data was evidence of staff engaging in thoughts and actions which established or perpetuated the recurrent themes of 'othering', 'individualisation' and a desire for students to 'pass', subordinating the status of CCS students and creating an exclusionary environment for them which cumulated in encouraged attempts to 'pass' as a non-CCS student, hiding a core part of their identity, and adding additional stress and pressure to these students' experiences. While, at times, the hostility of staff toward CCS students appeared explicit, for many, there was also evidence of

unreflective or unconscious thinking, such as in the common slips into describing CCS students as mature and discussing their needs as synonymous or anticipating a desire that CCS students to want to be like other students. Staff from a variety of roles in the students' accounts, such as the administrator in Claire's account, as well as academics, play a role in these biases being perpetuated and should be part of addressing these issues. While aspects of the assumptions made may be true for some students, the diversity and complexity of CCS student identity suggests that staff need to think more deeply about their potential needs to create inclusive environments. As part of supporting wider culture change and the increased visibility of CCS students, the complexity of their potential needs should be made explicit in any such staff training on reflective practice or unconscious bias training which seeks to support inclusive university communities or pedagogy.

Finally, universities should ensure that *policy and practice developments should be underpinned by a common institutional conception of social justice, robustly developed and practically applicable.* As discussed in Chapter Seven, some staff are explicitly engaged in making value judgments to understand or interpret what the purpose of a particular institutional policy is seeking to do. This has also been seen in other research, such as Stevenson et al., (2010, p. 112) where, in the absence of a coherent interpretation of widening participation, staff fall back on their own value systems. This leads to a great deal of disparity across the staff data about how to approach CCS students – from those who talk about partnership but interpret this in individualising ways (i.e. Peter and Leo) to those who seek to support or act as lone wolves (i.e. Diana), or those who are concerned with a different form of individualisation through an expectation of self-sufficiency and growth while studying (i.e. Jo and Jools). To tackle this and the variation of experience and inequity this may cause for all students, including those with caring responsibilities, policy and its implementation should be underpinned by work which establishes a coherent understanding of social justice within institutions and helps staff to

understand what these aims and policy aspirations look like in practice. This would support my second recommendation by supporting other policies not just those focused on one group, more coherently complementing each other through conceptual alignment.

8.5 Recommendation for the Higher Education sector

As highlighted in Chapter Three, there is currently little to no attention paid to CCS students within the national policy landscape. The sector does not collect data on how many CCS students or student parents there are in HE (NUS, 2009, p.3). While OFFA did have the broader group of 'carers' (OFFA, 2016) identified as one of its underrepresented groups, when the OFS was created and published its Access and Participation Plan (APP) targets, the beneficiaries of this were dramatically reduced, removing references to carers. Due to the absence of attention to this group, there is no particular sector impetus on the universities to target CCS students within their APP plans, and, due to a lack of data on how many CCS students there are, there is little way to tell who and what impact such targeting would have.

Given the inequity witnessed in this study and the focus of APP policy, it would be beneficial for OFS to reintroduce a target for care and to break this down to include specific focuses on CCS students. Furthermore, HESA could incorporate CCS students into their demographic data collection to help build an image of CCS student participation in HE and allow further insight through big data modelling and mining. For instance, we do not know, because of an absence of such demographic data, if CCS students experience gaps in attainment, progression or retention locally or nationally. However, given the difficulty and complexity of CCS student identity, the potential burn-out students like Claire have witnessed and the hostile environment Rebecca experienced, it is plausible that such gaps exist and remain unseen.

Furthermore, given the complex intersectionality and identity of CCS students seen in my study, this introduction of targeting by the OFS could help to reach existing targeted groups

more effectively. For instance, four of the CCS students in my study were BME, and some talked of being the first in their family to go to university. The unique way in which CCS students experience higher education because they are carers may mean that existing strategies to deliver on existing targets, such as to close BME attainment gaps (OFS, 2018b, p.4), may be less effective for them. By ensuring that institutions take a holistic and intersectional approach, responding to the complexity of group identity, and catering for the needs of CCS students, the likelihood is increased that the OFS would be able to deliver on its existing targets.

Given the way in which the OFS is increasingly concerned with evidence-based and -informed practice (OFS, 2018c) in understanding how to inform its APP plan targets and goals quantitatively, there is also an argument for institutions to focus on CCS students now, as a means to build up such an evidence base. Not only would this have the potential to help institutions respond to existing targets, for the same intersectional reasons, but it would also help institutions future-proof in the eventuality that OFS responds to the contributions of myself and other researchers in trying to draw attention to CCS students. For instance, there is nothing to stop an institution collecting, monitoring and modelling data on CCS students as part of its own activity, and thinking outside of the confines of existing targets would make sense if done as part of coherent vision of social justice, as I suggest in my fourth recommendation.

8.6 Acknowledging limitations to this study

In considering in this chapter the summary of the findings and the recommendations which stem from these, it is also helpful to acknowledge some of the limitations to this study which may influence decisions about application or the pursuit of further study on this topic. Chapter Four lays out, for instance, in the discussion of validity, some key limitations to this study; however, I will summarise the specific limitations pertinent to consideration in proximity to the findings and recommendations detailed above.

In the first instance, the study was conducted at one institution, and it is difficult to positively claim that such findings will also be seen at other institutions. However, considering the prevalence of many of the recurrent themes across both the student and staff data and the level of rich quality detail collected, it does provide some indication that such findings are not experienced in isolation. While this may provide some limitations to the wider application of the findings and require more specific inquiry at another institution before adopting my recommendations, it is reasonable to infer that any of the themes CCS students navigate may be experienced by students at other institutions; they do echo patterns in existing research, discussed in Chapter Three.

A further limitation to this particular study is the bias toward PhD students in my sample and a limited number of STEM subjects students engaged with. While there was no significant divergence from the overall recurrent themes and many commonalities in the practical topics CCS students navigate in this study, it is worth noting that mode of study and discipline could prove a factor in the application of these findings or their recommendations – for instance, further undergraduate participants or the structural issues of the study and assessment of STEM subjects could pose additional practical topics or recurrent themes or create additional dimensions to how those identified in this study are experienced by this study.

Finally, and as I discuss in making recommendations for further research, while I sought in adopting the term 'CCS students' to expand the understanding of students who care for children more diversely than simply parents – or, more commonly, mothers – in existing research and policy, the extent to which I have been able to do this is limited. Only Martin, as a grandparent, represents a new group within existing research in my study, and there is a limitation to which this study could claim to have provided much insight into the wide diversity of CCS students. Martin does perhaps demonstrate a need for the continued exploration of this greater diversity of understanding so that such students are not left behind in policy or research.

8.7 Contributions to knowledge

In this thesis, I have sought to make several original contributions to knowledge, both in terms of the outcomes from my research and with methodological, theoretical and practice-orientated contributions that stem from this research, which I will now briefly summarise.

8.7.1 Methodological contributions

My study has sought to make an original contribution methodologically by adopting a research approach which has previously been the focus of studies in America and in contexts such as health care, as discussed in Chapter Four. In making this decision, I have not only expanded the use of the Institutional Ethnographic (IE) (Smith, 2006) methodological approach into a new context but have also demonstrated its potential to address questions of equity in higher education research. The challenge in researching equity in higher education can be the ethics of repeating studies with particular groups for whom little may have changed, and such research merely replicates existing knowledge or their problematic experiences. Part of the attraction of the IE approach is, not only does it proffer rich qualitative data but it also has the potential to evoke real change in an institutional context. For instance, by considering the role of how *texts* are activated, insight is offered into the extent to which policy ambitions, such as the Student Parent Policy, are actually experienced and the ways certain activities or interpretation could hinder the achievement of greater equity.

8.7.2 Theoretical contributions

My study has made a contribution to knowledge by expanding the existing use of Fraser's theories of recognition (Fraser, 2003) in higher education research, exploring issues of equity (Burke, 2013; Morrison 2015) or the use of 'passing' theory (Sanchez & Schlossberg, 2001). In my use of Fraser, I have not only moved away from issues of access common to Burke and Morrison's study and demonstrated an application to the participatory experiences of students but I have also focused on a new specific demographic group where Burke, for instance, has

considered more broadly the question of under-represented groups. While there are a range of theoretical approaches and perspectives utilised across existing educational research, such as Bourdieu or Critical Race Theory and many more, I would suggest Fraser's theories give a new angle and possible solution to the challenges substantive dualism (Fraser, 2003, pp. 61-62) may present in determining remedies. While utilising 'passing' theory (Sanchez & Schlossberg, 2001), I have moved this theory outside of the more traditional application in the context of sexuality, race and religion, furthering the utility of this lens to understanding inequities in HE.

8.8 Implications and recommendations for future research

Drawing on the contributions to knowledge, these all spark further questions and ideas for future research. Firstly, in terms of methodological implications, future research could apply the Institutional Ethnography approach to a range of different equity issues in higher education or target different benefactor groups to gain a more nuanced understanding how to deliver policy and activity which might make a difference. For instance, in a climate where attainment gaps have being explicitly targeted in policy, as highlighted in Chapter Two, it would be interesting to consider how, at an institutional level, such policy is activated in practice and if it effectively reaches target groups such as BME students in the same way the Student Parent Policy is discussed in this study.

Secondly, future research could look to expand the current use of the concept of 'passing' as a theme or utilise Fraser's recognition in their theorisation to explore further how these concepts may be useful to understanding inequity of other groups in higher education. For instance, while othering and individualisation may be common in the experiences of other underrepresented groups of students, it would be useful to see if other complex and intersectional groups experience the same additional burden of 'passing' as a result of this 'othering' and 'individualisation'. The wider discussion of this theme -- and the consideration

of these combined themes within a framework of misrecognition – could have interesting implications for new and existing debates in higher education research.

Finally, in the specific context of the research around the specific experience of CCS students, I would encourage any future researchers to seek, even if it proves difficult, greater diversity in the understanding of who students who care for children while studying are, moving away from specific rigid definitions, such as student parents, to gain a greater, more nuanced understanding of the 'caring for children' experiences of students and how this group may help support a wider call for change in policy practice and the sector.

8.9 Final reflections

This thesis commenced in 2013 and has run for six years through some of the most complex social and political events since the beginning of the century. On a macro scale, I have written this thesis during a period which has been characterised by a slow grinding standstill; parliament has been gridlocked by Brexit. In this climate, a form of populism has taken hold where 'people in this country have had enough of experts'. This has been the background noise to the period within which I have been seeking to develop and hone my own expertise through this study.

Higher education has not lived in a vacuum during this period, and, despite all the political gridlock, HE in England has been subject to some significant policy shifts. HEFCE and OFFA have closed to be replaced by the Office for Students; the Leadership Foundation for HE, the Higher Education Academy and Equality Challenge unit have all be merged to form Advance HE; Access Agreements have been replaced with Access and Participation Plans; The Teaching Excellence Framework has been introduced. Many of these moves have only furthered the marketisation and trends discussed in Chapter Two, as HE has, in some ways, never been more regulated by central government or autonomous governmental bodies

then it is now; the Higher Education and Research Act (2017), which established the OFS, also established possibilities that a university could 'fail' and close.

Despite the relative infancy of these changes, I am led to question if this is an advent of progress. As mentioned in Chapter Two, in the change from OFFA to OFS, many of the groups that formed OFFA's under-represented groups are no longer mentioned in OFS policy. Quantitative inquiry has also adopted a greater potency in HE with the focus on metrics in the TEF and the increasing value placed on quantitative pieces of research or evaluation, ideally featuring randomised control trials and focused on understanding 'what works'.

The temptation, if I had started to collect the data or embark on this thesis more recently, may have been to try to address some of these macro-political landscape issues and, perhaps, consider meeting the HE landscape in the middle. For instance, I could have tried to anchor my research into one of the fewer target groups, such as being a BME CCS student, or incorporated a quantitative dimension into the study, with the view that it may gain greater external traction. In doing this, a key concern would have been how to ensure that I respect the time my participants have given me and seek to have my research gain traction with institutions and the sector. I do, after all, want to see a change in their experiences and a reduction in their inequities, as highlighted in the recommendations I make.

I stand by the decisions I have made in shaping and crafting this research as a qualitative enquiry grounded in an understanding of a marginalised group of students I witnessed in my practice. The context of the inequity my thesis has explored is played out in a culture which culturally misrecognises a group, even when there is superficial material recognition (i.e. policy and on-campus childcare); qualitative enquiry aided the knowledge that these approaches alone do not seem to work. In a post-expert climate which promotes quantitative measures, qualitative research gives a voice to individuals and articulates the experience of idiosyncrasies, which is the best form of defence against inequity.

A background of the reduction of beneficiary groups by the OFS, in this more metricised context, has the potential to infer that the widening participation and equality work of the sector is simple and nearly finished; it is 'job done' if a few more targets, such as attainment gap closures, can be reached in the next decade. While influenced by expanding our common knowledge, I would recommend future research, and, exploring the limitations I discuss, my choice of methods has helped shine a light on the myths of any 'job done' inference because of the complexity, diversity and nuance of how inequity manifests for different groups. There is an important role for research such as this thesis to challenge and hope that the progress of equity in HE is allowed to move forward and not backward.

Bibliography

Ahmed, S. (2012). On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Ahmed, S. (2014). Cultural politics of emotion Edinburgh University Press.

Aimhigher. (2014). The National Archives; Department For Education website; the Aimhigher website: What is the Aimhigher programme? Retrieved from http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20040117082828/http://dfes.gov.uk/aimhigherprogramme/index.cfm?i_pageId=1&s_pageType=level2

Archer, L., & Leathwood, C. (2005). Identities, inequalities and higher education. In L. Archer, M. Hutchings & A. Ross (Eds.), *Higher education and social class: Issues of exclusion and inclusion* (pp. 175–192). Oxon: Taylor & Francis.

Arnett, G., & Gutierrez, P. (2015). UK election 2015: Can young voters make a difference? *The Guardian*. Retrieved from *http://www.theguardian.com/politics/datablog/2015/feb/24/uk-election-2015-can-young-voters-make-a-difference*

Atwood, M. (1985). *The Handmaid's Tale*. London: Vintage.

Aune, K., & Stevenson, J. (2016). *Religion and higher education in Europe and North America*. Oxon: Taylor & Francis.

Ball, S.J. (1993) What is policy? Texts, trajectories and toolboxes. Discourse13(2) 10–17

BBC News. (2010, November 25). *Aimhigher university access scheme scrapped*. Retrieved from *http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-11839774*

Bhopal, K, (2018) White Privilege: the myth of a post racial society, Bristol, Polity Press

Bowl, M. (2001). Experiencing the barriers: Non-traditional students entering higher education. *Research Papers in Education, 16*(2), 141–160.

Brooks, R. (2012a). Negotiating time and space for study: Student-parents and familial relationships. *Sociology, 47*(3), 443–459.

Brooks, R. (2012b). Student-parents and higher education: A cross-national comparison. *Journal of Education Policy, 27*(3), 423–439.

Brown, P. (2016). Higher education policy insitutie (HEPI) report 88: The invisible problem? improving students' mental health. Retrieved from http://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/STRICTLY-EMBARGOED-UNTIL-22-SEPT-Hepi-Report-88-FINAL.pdf

Brown, V., & Nichols, T. R. (2012). Pregnant and parenting students on campus: Policy and program implications for a growing population. *Educational Policy, 27*(3), 499–530.

British Sociological Association (BSA). (2002). Statement of ethical practice for the British sociological association (2002). Retrieved from https://www.britsoc.co.uk/equality-diversity/statement-of-ethical-practice/

Burke, P. J. (2013). *The right to higher education: Beyond widening participation.* Oxon: Taylor & Francis.

Burke, P.J., Bennett, A., Bunn, M., Stevenson, J., Clegg, S., (2017). It's About Time: Working towards more equitable understandings of the impact of time for students in higher education. Retrieved from https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Penny-Jane-Burke_Newcastle_About-Time-Report.pdf

Burke, P. J., Crozier, G., & Misiaszek, L. I. (2016). *Changing pedagogical spaces in higher education: Diversity, inequalities and misrecognition.* Oxon: Taylor & Francis.

Burke, P. J. & McManus, J. (2011). *NALN Research Report: Art for the few: Exclusion and misrecognition in art and design higher education admissions*. Retrieved from https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/naln_art_for_a_few.pdf

Clegg, S., Stevenson, J., & Burke, P. (2016). Translating close-up research into action: A critical reflection. *Reflective Practice, 17*(3),

Coghlan, D. (2007). Insider action research doctorates: Generating actionable knowledge. Higher Education, 54(2), 293-306.

Committee on Higher Education. (1963). *Higher Education: Report of the committee appointed by the Prime Minister under the Chairmanship of Lord Robbins 1961-63*. London: H. M. Stationery Office. Retrieved from http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/robbins/robbins1963.html

Crenshaw, K. W. (2001). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. In R. O. Mabokela & A. L. Green (Eds.), *Sisters of the academy: Emergent black women scholars in higher education* (pp. 57–80). Virginia: Stylus.

Crozier, G., Reay, D., Clayton, J., Colliander, L., & Grinstead, J. (2008). Different strokes for different folks: Diverse students in diverse institutions – experiences of higher education. *Research Papers in Education, 23*(2), 167–177.

Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. (2010a). *Securing a sustainable future for higher education: An independent review of higher education funding and student finance.* [Browne Review]. Retrieved from https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/422565/bis-10-1208-securing-sustainable-higher-education-browne-report.pdf

Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. (2011, February). *Guidance to the Director of Fair Access issued by the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills and the Minister for Universities and Science*. Retrieved from https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/32404/11-728-guidance-to-director-fair-access.pdf

Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. (2016, February). *Letter of guidance from the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills and the Minister of State for Universities and Science to the Director of Fair Access*. Retrieved from https://www.offa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/11-02-2016-OFFA-Guidance.pdf

Diamond, T. (2006). "Where did you get that fur coat Fern?" participant observation in Institutional ethnography. In D. E. Smith (Ed.), *Institutional ethnography as practice* (pp. pp. 45–63). Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield.

Doyle, M., & Griffin, M. (2012). Raised aspirations and attainment? A review of the impact of Aimhigher (2004–2011) on widening participation in higher education. *London Review of Education, 10*(1), 75–88.

Dryhouse, C. 2004. Gaining Places: Stagnation and Growth in the Proportion of Women in Universities End of award Report. Online: Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). Retrieved from http://www.researchcatalogue.esrc.ac.uk/grants/RES-000-22-0139/outputs/read/68f383f3-9dc2-4b16-b43c-af07dd26d1c5

Evans, E. J. (2004). *Thatcher and Thatcherism*. London: Routledge.

Finch, J. (1984). *Education as social policy*. London: Longman.

Finn, K. (2017), Everyday student mobilities: Exploring the relationship between wellbeing, inclusion and sustainability, Retrieved from https://www.srhe.ac.uk/downloads/reports-2015/FINN_Kirsty_Project_Report.pdf

Formby, E. (2015). *From freshers' week to finals: Understanding LGBT+ perspectives on, and experiences of, higher education*. Retrieved from http://www4.shu.ac.uk/_assets/pdf/freshers-to-finals-end-report.pdf

Fraser, N. (1997). *Justice interruptus: Critical reflections on the "Postsocialist" condition* Routledge.

Fraser, N. (2001). Recognition without ethics? *Theory, Culture & Society, 18*(2–3), 21–42.

Fraser, N. (2003). Social justice in an age of identity politics: Redistribution, recognition, and participation. In N. Fraser, & A. Honneth (Eds.), *Redistribution or recognition?: A political-philosophical exchange* (pp. 7–109) London Verso.

Garthwaite, K. (2016). *Hunger pains: Life inside foodbank britain* Policy Press.

Gerrard, E., & Roberts, R. (2006). Student parents, hardship and debt: A qualitative study. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 30*(4), 393–403.

Glaser, B.G., Strauss, A.L., (1967) The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research New York: Aldine de Gruyter

Glaser, B. G., (1992) Basics of grounded theory analysis Emergence vs. forcing California: Sociology Press

Graham, D., & Boyd, J. (2011). *Home and away: Jewish journeys towards independence. Key findings from the 2011 national Jewish student survey*. Retrieved from http://archive.jpr.org.uk/download?id=1512

Greenbank, P. (2006). The evolution of government policy on widening participation. *Higher Education Quarterly, 60*(2), 141–166.

Grumet, M. (1990). On daffodils that come before the swallow dares. In E. Eisner, & A. Peshkin (Eds.), *Qualitative inquiry in education: The continuing debate* (pp. 101–120). New York; London : Teachers College Press

Harrison, N., & McCaig, C. (2017). Examining the epistemology of impact and success of educational interventions using a reflective case study of university bursaries. British Educational Research Journal, 43(2), 290-309.

Hartley-Parkinson, R. (2019). Student mums banned from taking babies into library while they study. Retrieved from: https://metro.co.uk/2019/05/20/student-mums-banned-taking-babies-library-study-9601806/

Higher Education Funding Council for England. (1999). *HEFCE Report 99/07: Widening participation: special funding programme 1998–99 Outcome of bids*. Retrieved from http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20120118171947/http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/1999/99_07.htm

Higher Education Funding Council for England. (2015a). *Policy guide: National strategy for access and student success in higher education*. Retrieved from http://www.hefce.ac.uk/sas/nsass/

Higher Education Funding Council for England. (2015b). *£4 million awarded to 12 projects to pilot measures of learning gain*. Retrieved from http://www.hefce.ac.uk/news/newsarchive/2015/Name,105306,en.html

Higher Education Funding Council for England. (2016a). *Applications and funds: National collaborative outreach programme*. Retrieved from http://www.hefce.ac.uk/sas/ncop/maps/

Higher Education Funding Council for England. (2016b). *Policy guide: National networks for collaborative outreach*. Retrieved from http://www.hefce.ac.uk/sas/nnco/

Higher Education Statistics Agency. (1995). *Table 1a – Full-time undergraduates by qualification aim, fee-paying status, domicile, subject area, location of institution and gender 1994/95*. Retrieved from https://www.hesa.ac.uk/dox/pubs_archive/student_1994-95_table_1a.pdf

Higher Education Statistics Agency. (2016). *Students by level of study 2000/01 to 2014/15*. Retrieved from https://www.hesa.ac.uk/free-statistics

Hinton-Smith, T. (2012a). Lone parent students' motivations for and hopes of higher education engagement. In T. Hinton-Smith (Ed.), *Widening participation in higher education: Casting the net wide?* (pp. 108–128). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hinton-Smith, T. (2012b). *Lone parents' experiences as higher education students: Learning to juggle*. Leicester: National Institute of Adult Continuing Education.

Hinton-Smith, T. (2016). Negotiating the risk of debt-financed higher education: The experience of lone parent students. *British Educational Research Journal, 42*(2), 207–222

Honneth, A. (2003). Redistribution as recognition: A response to Nancy Fraser. In N. Fraser, & A. Honneth (Eds.), *Redistribution or recognition?: A political-philosophical exchange* (pp. 110–197). London: Verso.

Kincheloe, J. L. (2001). Describing the bricolage: Conceptualizing a new rigor in qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry, 7*(6), 679–692.

Kincheloe, J. L. (2005). On to the next level: Continuing the conceptualization of the bricolage. *Qualitative Inquiry 11*(3), 323–350.

Leary, K. (1999). Passing, posing, and "keeping it real". Constellations, 6(1), 85-96.

Leathwood, C (1998) Irrational bodies and corporate culture: further education in the 1990s, International Journal of Inclusive Education, 2:3, 255-268

Lester, J., & Sallee, M. (2009). *Establishing the family-friendly campus: Models for effective practice.* Virginia: Stylus.

Lincoln, Y. S. (2001). An emerging new bricoleur: Promises and possibilities—A reaction to Joe Kincheloe's "Describing the bricoleur". Qualitative Inquiry, 7(6), 693–696.

Lynch, K. (2010). Carelessness: A hidden doxa of higher education. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education, 9*(1), 54–67.

Lynch, K., Grummell, B., & Devine, D. (2012). *New managerialism in education: Commercialization, carelessness and gender*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

Lynch, K., Baker, J., & Lyons, M. (2009). Affective equality: Love, care and injustice Palgrave Macmillan.

Marandet, E., & Wainwright, E. (2010). Invisible experiences: Understanding the choices and needs of university students with dependent children. *British Educational Research Journal, 36*(5), 787–805.

McAnulla, S. (2006). *British politics: A critical introduction.* London: Bloomsbury Academic.

McCaig, C. (2010). Access agreements, widening participation and market positionality: Enabling student choice. In M. Molesworth, R. Scullion, E. Nixon (Eds.) *The Marketisation of Higher Education and the Student as Consumer* (pp. 115–128) Oxon: Taylor & Francis.

McCaig, C., & Adnett, N. (2008). Variable tuition fees and widening participation: The marketing of English institutions through access agreements. In *Annual Conference of the British Educational Research Association,* Retrieved from http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/177823.pdf

McCaig, C, Adnett, N, Bowers-Brown, T and Slack, K (2011) "Achieving "Transparency, Consistency and Fairness" in English HE Admissions: Progress since Schwartz? *Higher Education Quarterly* (Higher Education Quarterly, Volume 65, Issue 1, pages 12–33

McCaig, C., & Bowers-Brown, T. (2007). Aimhigher: Achieving social justice? In *British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, Institute of Education, University of London*. Retrieved from http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/168534.htm

McCaig, C., Stevens, A., & Bowers-Brown, T. (2008). *Does Aimhigher work? Evidence from the national evaluation*. Retrieved from http://shura.shu.ac.uk/2382/1/Does_Aimhigher_work_CM_AS_TB_2007.pdf

McCoy, L. (2014). Producing "what the deans know": Cost acconting and the restructuring of post-secondary education. In D. E. Smith, & S. M. Turner (Eds.), *Incorporating texts into institutional ethnographies* Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

McDade, S. A., & Dannels, S. A. (2009). Shaping the work environment and family-friendly polices: A perspective from deans. In J. Lester & M. Sallee (Eds.), *Establishing the family-friendly campus: Models for effective practice* (pp. 105–124). Virginia: Stylus.

McKay, J. & Devlin, M. (2016) 'Low income doesn't mean stupid and destined for failure': challenging the deficit discourse around students from low SES backgrounds in higher education, International Journal of Inclusive Education, 20:4, 347-363

McLeod, J. (2011). *Qualitative research in counselling and psychotherapy* Sage.

Miller, J. (1995). Trick or treat? the autobiography of the question. *English Quarterly, 27*(3), 22–26.

Moreau, M. (2012). Student parents: What support should universities be providing? Guardian Higher Education Network. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/blog/2012/dec/13/student-parents-university-support-care

Moreau, M. (2016). Regulating the student body/ies: University policies and student parents. *British Educational Research Journal, 42*(5), 906–925.

Moreau, M., & Kerner, C. (2013). Care in academia: An exploration of student parents' experiences. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 36*(2), 215–233.

Morrison, A. (2015). Theorising inequality: Two-dimensional participatory justice and higher education research. In J. Huisman & M. Tight (Eds.), *Theory and method in higher education research volume 1* (pp. 257–276). Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Moss, D. (2004). Creating space for learning: Conceptualizing women and higher education through space and time. *Gender and Education, 16*(3), 283–302.

Moss, D. (2006). *Gender, space and time: Women and higher education.* Mayland: Lexington Books.

Mountford, J.F. (1966) British Universities' Oxford University Press

National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education. (1997). *The Dearing Report: Higher education in the learning society: Main report*. London: H. M. Stationary Office. Retrieved from http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/dearing1997/dearing1997.html#07

National Union of Students [NUS]. (2009). *Meet the parents: The experiences of students with children in further and higher education* (eds. Smith, G., & Wayman, S.). Retrieved from https://www.nus.org.uk/global/nus_sp_report_web.pdf/

National Union of Students [NUS]. (2014). Black history: More than just a month. Retrieved from http://www.nus.org.uk/en/news/black-history-more-than-just-a-month/

National Union of Students [NUS] (2015). Celebrating LGBT history month. Retrieved from http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/celebrating-lgbt-history-month

New Labour. (2001). *Ambitions for Britain – New Labour New Britain*. Retrieved from http://www.politicsresources.net/area/uk/e01/man/lab/ENG1.pdf

Nichols, N. E. (2008). Gimme shelter! investigating the social service interface from the standpoint of youth. *Journal of Youth Studies, 11*(6), 685–699.

Office for Fair Access. (2011). *How to produce an access agreement for 2012-13.* Retrieved from https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180511111617/https://www.offa.org.uk/universities-and-colleges/guidance/annual-guidance/

Office for Fair Access. (2014). *Annual report: Director of Fair Access calls for universities to do more to address disadvantage across student lifecycle.* Retrieved from https://www.offa.org.uk/press-releases/director-of-fair-access-calls-for-universities-to-do-more-to-address-disadvantage-across-student-lifecycle/

Office for Fair Access. (2016a). *History*. Retrieved from https://www.offa.org.uk/about/background/

Office for Fair Access. (2016b). *Glossary: Under-represented and disadvantaged groups*. Retrieved from https://www.offa.org.uk/glossary/#U

Office for Students [OFS]. (2018a). Access and participation data dashboard. Retrieved from https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/access-and-participation-data-dashboard/

Office for Students [OFS]. (2018b). A new approach to regulating access and participation in English higher education. Retrieved from https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/546d1a52-5ba7-4d70-8ce7-c7a936aa3997/ofs2018_53.pdf

Office for Students [OFS] (2018c), OfS invites tenders for Evidence and Impact Exchange, Retried from: https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/our-news-and-blog/ofs-invites-tenders-for-evidence-and-impact-exchange/

O'Shea, S. Lysaght, S. Roberts, J & Harwood, V. (2016) Shifting the blame in higher education – social inclusion and deficit discourses, Higher Education Research & Development, 35:2, 322-336,

Osborne, M., Marks, A. & Taylor, E. (2004), "Becoming a mature student: How adult applicants weigh the advantages and disadvantages of higher education" in Higher Education 48 pp.291

Page, R. N. (1997). Teaching about validity. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 10*(2), 145–156.

Perry, W. (1976). *Open University: A personal account*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

Phiri, A, (2015) Critical Spaces: Processes of Othering in British Institutions of Higher Education Journal of Feminist Scholarship. 2015;(7/8):13-27

Quinn, J. (2003). The dynamics of the protected space: Spatial concepts and women students. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 24*(4), 449–461.

Quinn, K., & Shapiro, R. (2009). BALANCE@UW: Work-family cultural change at the University of Washington. In J. Lester & M. Sallee (Eds.), *Establishing the family-friendly campus: Models for effective practice* (pp. 18–36). Virginia: Stylus.

Radice, H. (2013). How we got here: UK higher education under neoliberalism. *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies, 12*(3), 407–418.

Reay, D., David, M. E., & Ball, S. J. (2005). *Degrees of choice: Class, race, gender and higher education* Trentham.

Reay, D. (2001) Finding or losing yourself?: working-class relationships to education, Journal of Education Policy, 16:4, 333-346

Rawls, J. (2009). *A theory of justice* Harvard University Press.

Reay, D., Ball, S., & David, M. (2002). 'It's taking me a long time but I'll get there in the end': Mature students on access courses and higher education choice. *British Educational Research Journal, 28*(1), 5–19.

Reid, L. (2016). Navigating the secular: Religious students' experiences of attending a red-brick university. In K. Aune & J. Stevenson (Eds.), *Religion and higher education in Europe and North America* (pp. 149–162). Oxon: Taylor & Francis.

Sanchez, M. C., & Schlossberg, L. (2001). Passing: Identity and interpretation in sexuality, race, and religion NYU Press.

Schlossberg, L. (2001). Rites of Passage, IN Sanchez, M. C., & Schlossberg, L. (2001). Passing: Identity and interpretation in sexuality, race, and religion (pp. 1-12). New York. NYU Press.

Scott, P. (1995). *The meanings of mass higher education*. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill Education.

Scott, P. (2014). Robbins, the binary policy and mass higher education. *Higher Education Quarterly, 68*(2), 147-163.

Schwartz, S. (2004). Fair admissions to higher education: Recommendations for good practice. Retrieved from https://www.spa.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Admissions-review-Schwartz-2004.pdf

Shira Schallie, C. (2016). 'My horns come out in my attitude!' Negotiating Jewish student identity and the politics of identification in Canada. In K. Aune & J. Stevenson (Eds.), *Religion and higher education in Europe and North America* (pp. 109–122). Oxon: Taylor & Francis.

Smit, R (2012) Towards a clearer understanding of student disadvantage in higher education: problematising deficit thinking, Higher Education Research & Development,31:3, 369-380,

Smith, D. E. (2002). Institutional ethnography. In T. May (Ed.), *Qualitative research in action* London: SAGE Publications.

Smith, D. E. (2005). *Institutional ethnography: A sociology for people* AltaMira Press.

Smith, D. E. (2006). *Institutional ethnography as practice* Rowman & Littlefield.

Smith, D. E., & Turner, S. M. (2014). *Incorporating texts into institutional ethnographies* University of Toronto Press.

Springer, K. W., Parker, B. K., & Leviten-Reid, C. (2009). Making space for graduate student parents: Practice and politics. *Journal of Family Issues, 30*(4), 435–457.

Stevenson, J. (2014). Internationalization and religious inclusion in United Kingdom higher education. *Higher Education Quarterly, 68*(1), 46–64.

Stevenson, J., Clegg, S., & Lefever, R. (2010). The discourse of widening participation and its critics: An institutional case study. *London Review of Education, 8*(2), 105–115.

Stonewall. (2016). Global diversity champions – education. *Online* Retrieved from http://www.stonewall.org.uk/get-involved/workplace/global-diversity-champions-members

Thomas, K. C. (2019). Rethinking student belonging in higher education: From bourdieu to borderlands Taylor & Francis.

Trow, M., & Burrage, M. (2010). *Twentieth-century higher education: Elite to mass to universal*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Trowler, V. (2015). Negotiating contestations and 'Chaotic conceptions': Engaging 'non-traditional' students in higher education. *Higher Education Quarterly, 69*(3), 295–310.

University and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). (2017). Mature undergraduate students. Retried from https://www.ucas.com/ucas/undergraduate/getting-started/mature-undergraduate-students

Wainwright, E., & Marandet, E. (2010). Parents in higher education: Impacts of university learning on the self and the family. *Educational Review, 62*(4), 449–465.

Weller, P., & Hooley, T. (2016). How religion or belief frame participation and access in UK higher education. In K. Aune & J. Stevenson (Eds.), *Religion and higher education in Europe and North America* (pp. 39–54). Oxon: Taylor & Francis.

Wenger, E. (1998). Communities of Practice: Learning: Meaning: Identity. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press

Williams, J. (1997). Institutional rhetoric and realities. In J. Williams (Ed.), *Negotiating access to higher education: The discourse of selectivity and equity* (pp. 87–107). Buckingham: Society for Research into Higher Education/Open University Press.

Wolcott, H. F. (1990). On seeking - and rejecting - validity in qualitative research. In E. Eisner, & A. Peshkin (Eds.), Qualitative inquiry in education : The continuing debate (pp. 121-152). New York ; London : Teachers College Press.

Wolcott, H. F. (2002). *Sneaky kid and its aftermath : Ethics and intimacy in fieldwork*; Oxford : AltaMira.

List of abbreviations

APP – Access and Participation Plans

AUA – Association of University Administrators

BIS – Department for Business, Innovation and Skills [UK Government Department]

BME – Black and Minority Ethnic

BSA - British Sociological Association

CCS students – Students who Care for Children while Studying

CoHE – Committee on Higher Education (1963) [aka the Robbins Report]

DDA – Disability Discrimination Act 1995

HEFCE – Higher Education Funding Council for England

HoCL – House of Commons Library

HEPI – Higher Education Policy Institute

HESA – Higher Education Statistics Agency

IE – Institutional Ethnography

LGBT – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender

NCIHE – National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (1997) [aka the Dearing
  Report]

NCOP – National Collaborative Outreach Programme

NHS – National Health Service

NNCO – National Networks for Collaborative Outreach

NUS – National Union of Students

OFFA – Office for Fair Accesses

OU – Open University

RRA – Race Relations Act 1976

SFE – Student Finance England

SRHE – Society for Research into Higher Education

UCAS – University and College Admissions Service

WP – Widening Participation

WP students – students targeted by WP initiatives

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Prompt sheets for student and staff interviews
Appendix 2 – Email to seek student participants
Appendix 3 – Participant demographics table
Appendix 4 – Extract and example of analysis/annotations and coding
Appendix 5 – Informed consent document & information sheet (students)
Appendix 6 – Informed consent document & information sheet (staff)

Appendix 1 - Prompt sheets for student and staff interviews

This appendix includes typed up versions of the notes made in preparation for facilitating semi-structured interviews which were discussed with my supervisory team before the interviews took place.

Key prompts for Student Interviews

Conversations are to be guided largely by the student and the experiences they want to share with the research. The following are some key notes for prompts and aspects that ideally the conversations would cover – in the format of semi-structured interview some of these questions will be asked directly, but generally this is a guide for the kind of area a participant would explore in their accounts if they feel comfortable.

Be careful not to be too active in shaping the participants account. Remember to remain open to aspects of the participants experiences not on the prompts below, or aspects which you hadn't thought of previously but the participant is keen to highlight or emphasise.

Encourage participants to talk about;
- Ask them to tell you about themselves - seek a description of their family, number of children, where and who do they live with
- How did they come to be in the course they are, what motivated them, how did they get there, what was the experience of applying and joining like?
- Find out what their daily lives are like in detail in a typical day, week, month (what's it like for them from getting up to going to bed?)
- Does this change a lot or do they have a regular routine? What factors mean it's like that and how would does it make them feel?
- What kinds of processes and administration practice have these students experienced? What were the results of these and how did they make the student feel?
- Are there specific times in their journey when they feel they have been really supported well by their institution? What happened, and what aspects made them feel particularly supported?
- Are there specific times in their journey when they feel they have not been supported? What happened and what aspects made them feel this way?
- Has anything changed in these two cases, does one dominate the other as most significant and shape the way the student feels about being at university?
- What kind of documents or texts are appearing in these student's accounts, and how have they been utilised in their accounts?
- What are the main barriers for the student experiences, and how do they prioritise them – ask them explicitly if it isn't clear from how they convey their experiences.
- Present them with a hypothetical – If resources were not a concern what would be the things they could change about their institution? Or is there nothing they would change? Do they believe that the institution should change even if it could?

Remember to ask the students how they felt when they recall a particular event, what did the process or experience mean for them and make them feel like. Recap and clarify points after long periods of students talking to make sure that you have fully understood their meaning, and are summarising effectively.

Key prompts for Staff Interviews

Conversations are to be guided largely by the staff, seeking their experience of working with students who care for children, and the kind of culture and environment, and how the university provides for these students, if at all. The aim is not to verify or corroborate stories but add colour and detail to the institutional context in which students who care for children at this institution are navigating.

The following are some key notes for prompts and aspects that ideally the conversations would cover – in the format of semi-structured interview some of these questions will be asked directly.

Encourage participants to talk about;
- Their role, background and experience of working at the university, who are these staff what do they do, why were they interested in participating?
- How have they experienced working with students who care for children if at all? Does their role support these students directly or indirectly? Have they been students who care for children?
- Do they think the needs of students who care for children are unique? Is that a personal perspective or taken from the way they are encouraged to go about their work at their university?
- Can they think of specific examples when they recount these thoughts and feelings about their institution and work with students who care for children?
- What kind of things would they do to support a student who cares for children?
- Do they think they the university should actively support these students, and provide services for these students, if so/not, why? Can they think of examples to inform these opinions?
- What do they see the role of 'support' is in the university how does it relate to them and the students they work with? Do they think about 'care' in this role, how do they see support and pastoral care as different?
- How do they respond to the notions developed in literature and students account of barriers and the web of barriers to these student's participation: time and space to study, financial support, personal relationships, childcare, health and mental wellbeing, and systemic invisibility – Do they recognise them in their experience?
- Does this relationship with support affect how they think and work with students who care for children?
- How do they think students who care for children fit into the university and campus life – what do they think the barriers might be?
- What is their understanding of the forms of support available for these students, in the broadest term, financial, personal, pedagogical/on-course teaching?
- What kind of documents or texts are appearing in these accounts, and how have they been utilised in their accounts?
- What if anything would staff change about the university in relation to the provision for these students?

Appendix 2 - Example of email bulletin seeking student participants

A study is about to commence on campus into the experiences of students who have primary caring responsibilities for children while completing their studies. The research aims to gain a more nuanced understanding of the experiences of students who care for children (of any age under 18), and is also seeking to explore how Higher Education Institutions could or do, offer support.

Interviews:
The research involves participating in interviews on campus at a mutually convenient time and location, and will seek to gain insight into your experiences, but also discuss and develop recommendations for student support practice. Participation is completely voluntary, anonymous, and you can withdraw at any time during the study. If you are interested in participating in the research (or for more information) please email Sam Dent: S.Dent2444@student.leedsmet.ac.uk.

Appendix 3 - Participant demographics table

Student Participants

Participant	Age	Gender	Race	Number of Children	Relationship to Child	Age of Children	Full time or Part Time Student	Qualification Level (Bachelors/ Masters/Doctoral)	Subject Area
Student 1 Claire	28	F	Black British	1	Mother	6	FT	Doctoral	Health
Student 2 Ellen	34	F	Asian British	1	Mother	7	PT	Bachelors	Business (WP)
Student 3 Fiona	45	F	White British	2	Mother	3 & 6	PT	Masters	Education
Student 4 Martin	52	M	White British	1	Grandfather	7	FT	Doctoral	Arts & Humanities
Student 5 Rebecca	33	F	Black British	1	Mother	4	FT	Doctoral	Health
Student 6 Sue	42	F	White British	3	Mother	8, 10 &16	PT	Bachelor	WP Access Programme
Student 7 Emma	32	F	White British	1	Mother	7	FT	Bachelor	Health
Student 8 Arthur	22	M	White British	1	Farther	4	FT	Doctoral	Arts & Humanities
Student 9 Eliana	38	F	Other Ethnic Background	1	Mother	3	FT	Doctoral	Physical Sciences & Environment
Student 10 Douglas	34	M	White British	2	Father	5 & 6	FT	Doctoral	Business

Student 11 Richard	35	M	White British	2	Father	6 & 8	FT	Doctoral	Arts & Humanities
Student 12 Sarah	27	F	White British	1	Mother	7	FT	Bachelor	Social Science
Student 13 Catherine	36	F	White British	1	Mother	6	FT	Doctoral	Health
Student 14 Emily	24	F	White British	1	Mother	4	FT	Bachelor	Health
Student 15 Nicole	23	F	White British	1	Mother	1	FT -> PT	Doctoral	Social Science
Student 16 Rita	34	F	White British	1	Mother	8	PT	Doctoral	Social Science

Staff Participants

Participant	Age	Gender	Race	Role Descriptor	Academic/Professional
Staff Member 1 - Peter	28	M	White British	Student Support	Professional
Staff Member 2 - Diana	54	F	White British	Employability	Professional
Staff Member 3 - Jools	45	F	White British	Tutor	Academic
Staff Member 4 - Steven	42	M	White British	Tutor	Academic
Staff Member 5 - Jo	44	F	White British	Tutor	Academic
Staff Member 6 - Leo	Not given	M	White British	Senior Managerial (WP)	Professional

Appendix 4 - Extract and example of analysis/annotations and coding

Student 1

Claire

Q1 Q3
Q2 Q4

↳ Phone interview – Did it want to meet on campus.
– concerned about reputation.

1 << Introduction to research>>
2 SD: So to start off at first could you tell me a bit about yourself, your course, and
3 why you came to Leeds?
4 P; So I'm 35, and I have 2 children, one at secondary school and one at primary
5 school, I had my children when I was 19, and the second when I was about
6 21/21, so very young, and erm I did medicine as my second degree, because my
7 first was nursing, and being in nursing made me think about medicine seriously.
8 I'm from a disadvantaged background, I don't have any a-levels to my name, so I
9 did an access course to get into medical school, and I got 3 offers out of 4, and so I
10 chose Leeds because its my local medical school.
11 SD: so was locality one of the main factors for choosing Leeds, what did you
12 prioritise when you were making that decisions?
13 P: Yeah well I found Manchester a lot more approachable to be honest, but if id
14 had to move, or commute to Manchester, that would have been absolute
15 nightmare. But luckily I got an offer from Leeds, which I hadn't anticipated at all
16 because they weren't particularly welcoming, they didn't always reply when I
17 sent emails to them, so I got an offer from Leeds, and that just made everything a
18 whole lot easier, and obviously accepted on the basis of logistics really.

work
✳ Leeds.
Comms.

19 SD: So at the time of making that decision did you talk to them about your
20 childcare responsibilities?
21 P: Nooo not at all! Shocked L'd Suggest otherwise
22 SD: Not at all? Find it funny.
23 P: No not at all, I didn't want my name to be linked to the ideas that I might be a
24 difficult student or I might have additional needs, erm…

time space.
Othering

25 SD: was that something very much in your mind; was there something that had
26 inspired those thoughts?
27 P: I think that's probably my self, well my own negative feelings and experiences
28 towards them, I'm already against all the odds having no A-Levels, I'm already
29 against all the odds coming from an access course, I'm older than the traditional
30 students, I'm not from a wealthy background, I'm going to require a lot of finical
31 help to get through the course. So I already ticked a number of the equal
32 opportunities boxes, I ticked all those, I ticked all the disadvantaged boxes, and I
33 felt the less I told them about my particular circumstances the better. I was quite
34 cautious in my emails to them, and kind of just emailed them about open days
35 and entry requirements, and sending tentative emails just to see if they would
36 consider me, from my background and experience.

Othering
Texts
Posi
Texts

37 SD: So how was it when you actually made that transition of starting?
38 P: Yeah it was really difficult actually, and tough from a personal point of view
39 juggling the course, the lectures, and the work, as well as trying to be a mum at
40 home and trying to kind of finance things, finance was a really difficult thing in
41 the first year especially. But in terms of my domina on campus I was reserved, I
42 was quite, and kept myself to myself, if I'm honest I was quite isolated, I didn't
43 really have a lot in common with the students.

work
Individualis
ing.

44 SD: So was there a point, having talked about at admissions and that you didn't
45 feel comfortable talking to them about your caring responsibilities. Was there a
46 point that you broke that barrier and sought support?
47 P: Oh yeah absolutely, I obviously while you send emails early on trying to find
48 out if you've got a chance of getting into medical school when there's thousands
49 of other applicants, it's a lot more different to contacting people who are heads of

Texts
Entering
as other.

Student 1

50 department etc. When you are actually on the course. They are two completely
51 different things...kind of... because erm obviously when you are a medical
52 student you are in there, its not like they are going to throw you out if you cause
53 a problem? Well that's the wrong way of putting it, they are not going to throw
54 you out if you are having difficulties, but if before you start you out in an
55 application, and then you send an email with your name on it, saying oh I might
56 have problems what are your policies on if I can't make it to placement on time
57 because I have to look after my children after school. So its like the they are going
58 to look at my name, and look at my application, and they, you know, their going
59 to think oh well there's not much point actually shortlisting this applicant, who
60 can't do the course, you know?
61 SD: so its almost like for you once you've got your foot in the door, and you are
62 actually there, then the support you may need is just something they are going to
63 have to deal with?
64 P: yeah absolutely...
65 SD: and so did it make you more comfortable then once you were there to talk
66 about your care responsibilities?
67 P: well I wouldn't say comfortable, I think its only now when I've been in my
68 penultimate year, and then hopefully I've just passed finals, its only now that I've
69 been able to send emails and feel comfortable expressing ... but again I still feel
70 quite awkward, but I think that's probably because I feel quite awkward anyway
71 expressing a request for support in society, because things a bit more difficult for
72 me and my family. But yeah your right, once you've got your foot in the door, I
73 wouldn't say I felt comfortable, but there was very little that I could actually
74 loose, I mean they weren't going to kick me out, the worst they could say is no,
75 but at least they weren't going to say they weren't going to give me a place. They
76 had invested in me I was there, I was one of the students, so, they would be
77 loosing a doctor...
78 SD: was there a particular trigger, and event, or piece of work, or day, which
79 broke that barrier you mentioned having at admissions once you arrived?
80 P: Erm...Its difficult to go back five years, but personal tutor, I had a really really
81 supportive personal tutor, and I think he was responsible for giving me a bit
82 more confidence and he was responsible for actually saying to me, you've done
83 really really well just getting here, so there's no reason why you can't complete it,
84 and I'll support you. And I think because I had him behind me saying those words
85 to me I had the confidence to speak to necessary people about certain
86 placements, and speak to people about exams, about difficulties, whereas before
87 I just kind of struggled on, and the university had no idea what I was going
88 through. In my first year I was working as a nurse Saturdays and Sundays every
89 single week, because I had to pay my own tuition fees, and you can imagine, I
90 can't even believe I did it, I very nearly burnt out I was an absolute mess, without
91 telling the university I was doing any of it, without asking for any help, erm... any
92 leeway, because they can make adjustments to my study, and my requirements,
93 and I've realised that over the five years that they have made a lot of
94 adjustments. I just wish I'd asked sooner to be honest,
95 SD: So when you talk about support, you mentioned your personal tutor, but
96 where else in the university have you gained support from?
97 P well as you know there is the lifelong learning centre, mature students advice
98 across the university, however being in the school of medicine its quite isolated,

Student 1

99	so looking into things like the student parent society etc., it doesn't fit into my
100	schedule, so I tend to have limited it to the school of medicine. IE administrative
101	staff, and my supervisors, there's lots of example is could tell you about, but in
102	general on the course there have been administrative staff who are responsible
103	for placements, which can be anywhere with the district they can be as far away
104	as Harrogate, Ilkley, Airedale, so all over the local area. I've had some problems
105	with them and some people more accommodating, I've tended to find overall hat
106	the louder you shout the more things get done. And I just wish id had a bit more
107	confidence, and a bit more assertiveness to ask for help sooner. And not
108	tolerated people who have not done their jobs properly, if I can be so …
109	SD: You can be as open as you want, and feel comfortable to… maybe you can
110	think of an example to illustrate your point?
111	<<Background noise>>
112	P: Can I just put you on hold a second….
113	<<Pause>>
114	P: Hi sorry about that…
115	SD its alright…
116	P Erm there's been quite a few incidents where people have been funny, not
117	funny humours obviously, One that's stands out the most to be honest is in 4th
118	year where, actually third year, the university seemed to get their foot on the ball
119	as I progressed, and I think that's because there were people like us on the
120	course, and realised that the demographic of medical students had changed
121	somewhat. So by the end of third year they emailed everybody and said 4th year
122	placements are going to start being organised if anybody has got, we've got a
123	policy on this, any health reasons or caring responsibilities, and cant travel to
124	other area let us know. Fill in your form express your preferences and let us
125	know. You will be given priority if you've got a valid reason and can give us
126	evidence. And so in the third year I completed the form as quickly as possible
127	and sent it back, and I didn't hear anything back from it, and it was sent to an
128	administrator, and to be honest with you out of the 2 different groups of people
129	at medical school you've got administrative staff, and then doctors and clinicians.
130	And the administrative staff have been most difficult, in other areas of life as well
131	to be honest. I didn't get an email back but I just assumed that id filled the form
132	in, sent it back and done what was expected, or needed from me. But then it came
133	to fourth year and when I got my placements they were actually the most far
134	away regions possible, so obviously I started panicking, and I contacted the lady
135	who had received all these forms and had started to do all the allocations, didn't
136	get a reply. To cut a long story short she actually reported me to the university
137	for bullying and harassment, and this is on the belief that I had been bullying and
138	harassing her, but the reality was that she refused to answer my emails, and I
139	didn't send lots of bullying and harassing email, I probably sent about three
140	emails, but she actually checked her emails at home, and sent me back like a one
141	word reply, or one sentence saying I'll look into it, without actually addressing
142	the distress in my emails. And I was like I've got these placements, I'm really
143	worried, I can't even travel there, because they were expecting me to be in ▮▮▮▮
144	for one placement, for 9.00 o'clock, and so id be battling the rush hour traffic, and
145	they also wanted me to be in ▮▮▮▮ or ▮▮▮▮, I can't remember which one. And I
146	said looks its an absolute impossibility, to get there even for 10am bearing in
147	mind all the traffic, and I can't even guarantee 10am. And I was like this is just

Student 1

[handwritten top right: Audibly angry/ Frustrated during this account]

148 not acceptable for a GP placement, I can't role into a GP's surgery at 9.30-10am
149 and say oh I'm a student can I sit in when they have already started to see
150 patients, it's just not on at all. Erm… anyway she didn't respond to my emails,
151 even though I knew she was reading them, but basically copied and pasted my
152 emails, deleting the ones the she had sent back to me so it looked like I was
153 sending a load of emails back to back. So she distorted everything, and didn't
154 address anything, and also I don't know what she said to other admin staff
155 related to placements thought, but she communicated, but they started being
156 really funny with me. Backing her up. Its I found that quite bulling actually. Erm
157 so one of the doctors who looks after the module, I had to contact the head of
158 year, and say this is actually what happened, this is the actual reality, but he said
159 to me that they can't be seen to support students at the expense of the support
160 for their administrative staff, so he basically said… erm… there's ways of
161 apologising in the NHS, as a doctor, there's ways of apologising without accepting
162 any responsibility, or liability. And he said you need to apologise, even when
163 your not in the wrong. and to me that was basically saying to me that I believe
164 you and support you, but you need to be quite diplomatic about this. And so I did
165 that and it was fine, and I'm glad I learnt that lesson then rather than in the
166 future. But it was just things like that, people like that which, who were not doing
167 their jobs properly, and making the lives of other people difficult that… and also
168 these people these individuals are absolutely notorious in the medical school for
169 really humiliating students, and being really nasty and having a bit of a power
170 trip over students, because they have got the power to make your lives very
171 difficult by sending us to the opposite to were we want to go, and then on the
172 other hand I found out that one student who lives in Huddersfield. He doesn't
173 have any children, or caring responsibilities, but he through he'd try his luck and
174 fill out one of the forms anyway. And say oh I live in *****, I commute to ***, but
175 if I can have my placement in *** that would be great, and so lo and behold he
176 was actually given a *** placement. Not that I, I'm glad he did, but if his form was
177 listened to, why wasn't somebody else's, especially when they fit the criteria to
178 be considered.
179 SD: You just talked about how you needed to provide evidence? What did this
180 involve, did he need to provide evidence?
181 P: Well he just didn't meet the criteria, well the criteria were caring
182 responsibilities, I mean I may not know I may be wrong he might have said he'd
183 been caring for his grandma or something, and I don't know the full details.
184 However I know that he hasn't got children.
185 SD: Did you have to provide evidence to support your application?
186 P: Well they said that but I just wrote on the application that I'd got children, and
187 if they wanted birth certificates, or proof that they are on the school role here
188 then I could provide it, but I knew that they weren't going to be that pedantic,
189 because you know all they have to do is speak to student finance to know that
190 I'm getting maintenance loans. I think it was a given that I've got children, no one
191 was disputing that I've got children or anything.
192 SD: So when you've had difficult situations like that to deal with, you mentioned
193 that you went to the head of year for support. Have you ever sought support
194 outside the school or faculty, like the students union or the life long learning
195 centre?

[handwritten left margin, top to bottom:] Othering / individus. problems Defferen Discoss Passive encour I support othering Blaming Individ Inconsisten recognsh Both– Lwosnt Passing But passed as more acceptable.

[handwritten right margin, top to bottom:] them vs. us Misrecog invo as sush as Ivalid concern —male vs female divisions. Misrecognition, internalise replicates othering Othering & homog. Maldistrib Textually Mediat. subjective inconsists Misrecognsh +Maldistribts Texts lack of Joined up thinking Misrecognsy sidlined Difficult/ unwelcome

[handwritten bottom:] Note these policies are not The institutional policy ⇒ But School faculty level policy–unseen…

Appendix 5 - Informed consent document & information sheet (students)

Title of Study; Care in Higher Education: The Experiences of Students who care for children
Samuel Dent Email: Samuel.R.Dent@student.shu.ac.uk

I am seeking participants in a research project and would like to invite you to contribute.

Background information
I am a doctoral student at Sheffield Hallam University studying for a PhD in Education. For my doctorate I am undertaking a research project on the experiences of students who care for children in higher education. The project will involve students and staff from across the university, the data collection is taking place between October 2014 and April 2015. This information sheet explains participants' rights, and how I will ensure these are observed. It has been devised to enable participants to make an informed decision whether or not to participate.

Purpose of the study
My study seeks to gain a more nuanced understanding of the Experiences of students who care for children under 18, in Higher Education. To do this this research is seeking also explore how Higher Education Institutions could or do, support these students.

How will I be involved?
You are being asked to participate in up to three one-hour interviews which will take place at a time and setting of your convenience. The interviews will be recorded and will help me to gain greater insight into your experiences of being a parent/carer at university.

Participation in this study is voluntary, and un-related to your programme of study and academic progression. Participation, or withdrawal from this study will not influence any processes involved in your study or role as a student at the university.

What happens if I want to withdraw from the research?
If you change your mind about participating you may withdraw at any time prior to publication and without giving a reason. All information you have provided up to that time will be destroyed.

How will the information be used?
The information from the observations and interviews will be used primarily in my doctoral theses, but may also be used in the production of journal articles, teaching and training resources, or conference materials.

All personal details and information will be removed from the data or made anonymous before use. No personal details or information will be kept on computer or in paper records.

The identity of the University, Faculty, or School and all participants will be protected by removing any information which could identify people or places.

Further information

If you would like any other information about this research, or if you have any questions about the information I have given, please contact me.

If you would like to speak report any concerns about research or conduct please contact:

Professor Jacqueline Stevenson
Tel. +44 (0)114 225 3805 Email jacqueline.stevenson@shu.ac.uk

Informed Consent
Title: Care in Higher Education: The Experiences of Students Who Care For Children

Please indicate your agreement with each of the statements below. You can delete sections which do not apply, or with which you do not agree;

1. I have read the Research Information Sheet written by *Samuel* and have been provided with a copy to keep.
Yes/No*
2. I have had the opportunity to ask *Samuel* questions.
Yes/No*
3. I consent to participating in this research according to the information and principles described in the Research Information Sheet.
Yes/No*
4. I understand I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time, without giving a reason, and that all information I have given will be destroyed.
Yes/No*
5. I understand my identity will be protected by treating the information I provide anonymously, and it will be used only by *Samuel* for the purposes of writing a dissertation.
Yes/No*
6. I understand the information I provide will be kept securely, will not be revealed to any other person, and will be destroyed at the conclusion of the project.		**Yes/No***
7. I understand if I have any questions or concerns about how this research is being conducted I can contact the independent person named in the Research Information Sheet.
Yes/No*
8. I agree that data collected during my participation may be used anonymously in publication such as Journal articles, teaching resources and conference papers, as well as in the production of an doctoral thesis. **Yes/No***

Signed _____
Print _____
Date _____
Thank you. Samuel Dent
Lead Researcher, PhD Candidate Sheffield Hallam University
Samuel.R.Dent@student.shu.ac.uk

Appendix 6 - Informed consent document & information sheet (staff)

Title of Study; Care in Higher Education: The Experiences of Student Who Care For Children
Samuel Dent Email: Samuel.R.Dent@student.shu.ac.uk

I am seeking participants in a research project and would like to invite you to contribute.

Background information
I am a doctoral student at Sheffield Hallam University studying for a PhD in Education. For my doctorate I am undertaking a research project on the experiences of students who care for children in higher education. The project will involve students and staff from across the university, the data collection is taking place between October 2014 and April 2015. This information sheet explains participants' rights, and how I will ensure these are observed. It has been devised to enable participants to make an informed decision whether or not to participate.

Purpose of the study
My study seeks to gain a more nuanced understanding of the Experiences of students who care for children under 18, in Higher Education. To do this this research is seeking also explore how Higher Education Institutions could or do, support these students.

How will I be involved?
You are being asked to participate in an interview, which will take up to one hour, at a time and place of your convenience. The interviews will be recorded and will help me to gain greater insight into your experiences of working with and supporting students who care for children under 18 years old.

Participation in this study is voluntary, and un-related to your employment. Participation, or withdrawal from this study will not influence any processes involved in your employment or career at the university.

What happens if I want to withdraw from the research?
If you change your mind about participating you may withdraw at any time prior to publication and without giving a reason. All information you have provided up to that time will be destroyed.

How will the information be used?
The information from the observations and interviews will be used primarily in my doctoral theses, but may also be used in the production of journal articles, teaching and training resources, or conference materials.

All personal details and information will be removed from the data or made anonymous before use. No personal details or information will be kept on computer or in paper records.

The identity of the University, Faculty, or School and all participants will be protected by removing any information which could identify people or places.

Further information

If you would like any other information about this research, or if you have any questions about the information I have given, please contact me.

If you would like to speak report any concerns about research or conduct, please contact:

Professor Jacqueline Stevenson
Tel. +44 (0)114 225 3805
Email jacqueline.stevenson@shu.ac.uk

Informed Consent
Title: Care in Higher Education: The Experiences of Students Who Care For Children
Please indicate your agreement with each of the statements below. You can delete sections which do not apply, or with which you do not agree;

1. I have read the Research Information Sheet written by *Samuel* and have been provided with a copy to keep.
        Yes/No*
2. I have had the opportunity to ask *Samuel* questions.
        Yes/No*
3. I consent to participating in this research according to the information and principles described in the Research Information Sheet.
        Yes/No*
4. I understand I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time, without giving a reason, and that all information I have given will be destroyed.
        Yes/No*
5. I understand my identity will be protected by treating the information I provide anonymously, and it will be used only by *Samuel* for the purposes of writing a dissertation.
        Yes/No*
6. I understand the information I provide will be kept securely, will not be revealed to any other person, and will be destroyed at the conclusion of the project.   **Yes/No***
7. I understand if I have any questions or concerns about how this research is being conducted I can contact the independent person named in the Research Information Sheet.
        Yes/No*
8. I agree that data collected during my participation may be used anonymously in publication such as Journal articles, teaching resources and conference papers, as well as in the production of an doctoral thesis. **Yes/No***

Signed _____
Print _____
Date _____
Thank you. Samuel Dent
Lead Researcher, PhD Candidate Sheffield Hallam University
Samuel.R.Dent@student.shu.ac.uk