

**“Re-conceptualising student resilience through the liminal space of university, from a non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care graduate perspective”**

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## Abstract

This thesis explores the unique recollections of non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care (n-tAHSC) graduates' experiences as n-tAHSC students in the liminal space of university. The literature reveals that non-traditional (n-t) students face multiple challenges in UK Higher Education (HE), such as limited knowledge of HE, balancing paid work and study and other responsibilities. These stressors are increased when n-t students study AHSC programmes owing to the interdisciplinary hazards, which include ambiguity around career trajectory, lack of discipline-specific codes of conduct and lack of preparation for stressful people facing roles. Yet these students still achieve successful outcomes. A potential facilitating cause of this success is resilience, identified as both a buffer against the stressors that instigate poor mental health and a catalyst for positive mental health and success in HE. To this end, this thesis conceptualises the articulations and practices (conditions, causes and contingencies) of resilience from the unique perspectives of successful non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care (Sn-tAHSC) graduates, a population that has been under-researched across n-t student resilience literature until now.

Using a constructivist approach a sample of 20 successful Sn-tAHSC graduates were interviewed via online video call using Microsoft Teams. Using both a Grounded Theory approach and a Bourdieusian lens to interpret and analyse new understandings from the opinions and views of successful Sn-tAHSC graduates, across domains of agency, habitus, field and capital. The outcomes of the study show that n-tAHSC students articulate resilience differently than their 'traditional' student counterparts. Building on a concept of bouncing forward the n-tAHSC student commences university with a repertoire of conditions and strategies for resilience, learned from overcoming previous unique challenges and adversities in their former habitus. These students believe resilience to be further bolstered in the liminal space of university (field) through growth mindsets, problem-focussed coping and social models of resilience where they develop self-efficacy, through sharing and exchanging

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capital for resilience through formal and informal social interactions with peers, staff and services.

This thesis makes an original contribution to the evidence by reconceptualising resilience and creating a unique toolkit for n-tAHSC student resilience.

Revealing distinct facilitating conditions, causes and contingencies for resilience where unique 'bouncing forward' resilience strategies enable n-tAHSC students to not only survive the challenges of HE, but flourish into successful AHSC graduates.

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## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>i</b>
<b>List of Figures and Tables</b> .....	<b>ix</b>
<b>List of Abbreviations</b> .....	<b>xi</b>
<b>Terms of Reference</b> .....	<b>xi</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>xii</b>
<b>Author's declaration:</b> .....	<b>xiii</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction and Background</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>1:1: Background</b> .....	<b>3</b>
1.1.1: Definitions of widening participation and the 'non-traditional' student .....	3
1.1.2: Risk factors for non-traditional applied health and social care students .....	4
1.1.3: Resilience in n-tAHSC students .....	5
1.1.4: Political landscape .....	9
<b>1.2: Personal rationale behind this research</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>1.3: Research questions, aims and objectives</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>1.4: Organisation of the thesis</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>Chapter 2: Literature Review</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>2.1: Definitions, measurements and characteristics of resilience</b> .....	<b>16</b>
2.1.1: Fixed agentic and intrapersonal definitions of resilience .....	16
2.1.2: Non-static evolutionary definitions of resilience .....	21
2.1.3: Resilience as a multi-dimensional, multi-factorial process .....	24

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2.1.4: Measurements of resilience.....	26
<b>2.2: Influences on resilience and academic resilience .....</b>	<b>27</b>
2.2.1: Risk factors for resilience and success in non-traditional students .....	27
2.2.2: Supporting mechanisms for resilience.....	29
<b>2.3: Consequences and outcomes of resilience and academic resilience .....</b>	<b>36</b>
2.3.1: Consequences and outcomes of resilience in non-traditional students.....	37
2.3.2: Success .....	38
2.3.3 Relationship between resilience, coping and success .....	40
<b>2.4: Summary .....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods .....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>3.1 Researcher positionality, insider research and reflexivity.....</b>	<b>42</b>
3.1.1: Reflexivity .....	43
<b>3.2: Philosophical perspectives: research paradigm, ontology, epistemology and theoretical perspectives .....</b>	<b>46</b>
3.2.1 Research paradigm and ontology.....	46
3.2.2 Epistemology .....	47
<b>3.3: Theoretical perspective .....</b>	<b>48</b>
3.3.1: Bourdieu's meta-theory framework.....	48
3.3.2: Components of Bourdieu's framework .....	48
<b>3.4 Research design.....</b>	<b>52</b>
3.4.1: Case study approach.....	52
3.4.2 Grounded theory approach.....	53

---

3.4.3 Limitations to grounded theory .....	54
<b>3.5 Research Methods.....</b>	<b>56</b>
3.5.1 Sampling and data collection processes .....	56
3.5.2 Data analysis .....	61
<b>3.6 Ethical considerations .....</b>	<b>66</b>
3.6.1: Consent .....	67
3.6.2: Confidentiality and anonymity.....	67
<b>3.7: Summary .....</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>Chapter 4: Findings.....</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>4.1: Successful Non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care graduates’ articulations of resilience .....</b>	<b>72</b>
4.1.1: Non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care students’ challenges to resilience .....	72
4.1.2: Successful Non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care graduates’ articulations of resilience .....	75
4.1.3: Summary – Successful non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care graduates’ articulations of resilience .....	81
<b>4.2: The conditions, causes and contingencies of non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care students resilience practice .....</b>	<b>83</b>
4.2.1: Agentic intrapersonal conditions for resilience in non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care students .....	84
4.2.2: Agentic intrapersonal contingency strategies for non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care student resilience.....	87
4.2.3: Agentic intrapersonal causes of resilience in non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care students .....	91

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4.2.4: Summary - The conditions, causes and contingencies of non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care students resilience .....	94
<b>4.3: Using Bourdieu’s meta-theory lenses to explain non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care students’ intrapersonal and interpersonal resilience actions.....</b>	<b>95</b>
4.3.1: The influence of habitus on non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care students’ resilience .....	96
4.3.2 Influences from the field on non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care student resilience.....	99
4.3.3: Building and exchanging capital for resilience and success.....	107
<b>4.4: Findings Summary .....</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>Chapter 5: Discussion .....</b>	<b>115</b>
<b>5.1: RQ1 How do Sn-tAHSC graduates articulate resilience?.....</b>	<b>118</b>
5.1.1: ‘Bouncing forward’ .....	118
5.1.2: ‘Growth on growth nuance’.....	120
5.1.3: Personal challenges faced by non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care students .....	121
5.1.4: Resilience as ‘more than coping’ .....	123
5.1.5: Discussion Summary- RQ1 .....	125
<b>5.2: RQ2: How do n-tAHSC students practice resilience? .....</b>	<b>125</b>
5.2.1: Causes beyond coping .....	125
5.2.2: Conditions.....	127
5.2.3: Contingencies .....	130
5.2.4: Discussion Summary- RQ2 .....	132

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<b>5.3: RQ3: How can the intrapersonal and interpersonal resilience actions of non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care students be explained using Bourdieu’s metatheory lenses of habitus, field, capital and agency. ....</b>	<b>133</b>
5.3.1: Habitus Factors .....	134
5.3.2: Factors from the field .....	139
5.3.3: Capital factors.....	141
5.3.4: Discussion Summary - RQ 3 .....	145
<b>Chapter 6: Conclusion .....</b>	<b>146</b>
<b>6.1: Implications for universities.....</b>	<b>146</b>
6.1.1: Facilitating conditions for resilience .....	146
6.1.2: Facilitating causes and contingencies for resilience.....	150
<b>6.2: Implications for policy and practice .....</b>	<b>151</b>
<b>6.3: Implication of results on personal practice .....</b>	<b>152</b>
<b>6.4: Limitations .....</b>	<b>153</b>
<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>154</b>
<b>Appendix 1 Interview Question Frame .....</b>	<b>154</b>
<b>Appendix 2 Participant Information Sheet (PIS).....</b>	<b>158</b>
Participant information sheet .....	158
<b>Appendix 3 Ethical Approval.....</b>	<b>162</b>
<b>Appendix 4 Recruitment Email and Poster to potential participants. ....</b>	<b>163</b>
<b>Appendix 5 Example of Initial Coding and Gerunds (Sample of Nodes taken from NVivo) .....</b>	<b>165</b>



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<b>Appendix 6 Example of instances of coding from NVivo Child Node – having a Positive Homelife.....</b>	<b>171</b>
<b>Appendix 7 Examples of Early Concept Mapping for N-tAHSC Graduates Articulations and N-tAHSC practices of Resilience Findings Theme 1 and Theme 2 .....</b>	<b>173</b>
<b>Appendix 8 Hierarchy of Parent and Child Nodes from Theoretical and Axial Coding .....</b>	<b>174</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>175</b>

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## List of Figures and Tables

### Figures

Figure 2:1:Venn diagram of proximal topic areas, with the current study as the central area showing non-traditional students' resilience and coping factors for success in HE. ....	15
Figure 3:1Consequential Matrix from Strauss and Corbin (1998) .....	65
Figure 3:2 Concept Mapping for N-tAHSC Students Resilience Practice through Bourdieusian lenses Findings Theme 3 .....	65
Figure 4:1 Conceptual map of the subthemes and subsequent sub-themes for Theme 1 n-t AHSC Students Articulations of Resilience .....	72
Figure 4:2 Conceptual diagram of the conditions, causes and contingencies for resilience in n-tAHSC students .....	84
Figure 4:3 Conceptual diagram of theme 3 using Bourdieu's metatheory lenses to explain n-tAHSC students intrapersonal and interpersonal resilience actions subthemes and subsequent sub-themes .....	96
Figure 5:1 Schematic summary of research findings .....	116
Figure 6:1Conceptual resilience toolkit for non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care students .....	148
Figure 7:1 Example of Early Concept Mapping for N-tAHSC Students Articulations of Resilience Findings Theme 1 .....	173
Figure 7:2 Concept Mapping for How N-tAHSC Students Practice Resilience Findings Theme 2 .....	173
Figure 7:3 Hierarchy of Parent and Child Nodes from Theoretical and Axial Coding .....	174

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**Tables**

Table 3:1 Participant Demographics .....	58
Table 0:1 Question frame for interviews.....	155
Table 0:2 Example of Initial Coding and Gerunds (Sample of Nodes taken from NVivo).....	165

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## List of Abbreviations

HE	Higher Education
AHSC	Applied Health and Social Care
n-t	Non-traditional
n-tAHSC student/s	Non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care Student/s
Sn-tAHSC student/s	Successful Non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care Student/s
n-tAHSC graduate/s	Non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care Graduate/s
Sn-tAHSC graduate/s	Successful Non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care Graduate/s

## Terms of Reference

Throughout this thesis participants are referred to as Sn-tAHSC graduates and n-tAHSC students interchangeably. The participants (recent Sn-tAHSC graduates) provided their articulations of resilience as Sn-tAHSC graduates and recollections of resilience practices as n-tAHSC students and ultimately Sn-tAHSC students. Therefore, RQ1 provides Sn-tAHSC graduate articulations, alongside presenting barriers for n-tAHSC students, whereas RQ2 and RQ3 provides Sn-tAHSC graduates' recollections of how they practiced resilience as n-tAHSC students.

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Finally, I would like to dedicate this work to my Mum, who I sadly lost along this PhD journey. You instilled the determination and self-belief that facilitated the resilience needed to complete this doctorate.

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**Author's declaration:**

This thesis results entirely from my own work and has not been offered previously for any other degree or diploma.

This thesis consists of 44877 words (excluding title page, abstract, contents table, list of tables and figures, acknowledgements, authors declaration references, glossary and appendices) and therefore does not exceed the permitted maximum word count of 45000.

Signature 

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## Chapter 1: Introduction and Background

UK universities continue to face dramatic rises in both the prevalence and severity of student mental health issues, with mental health being seen to impact student functioning, success and retention (Thorley, 2017; Baik, 2019). Distinctly, non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care (n-tAHSC) students are at even greater risk of stress and psychological distress than the general student population, owing to characteristics associated with non-traditional (n-t) students such as: limited knowledge of higher education (HE) policies and practice, financial difficulties, disabilities, parenting responsibilities, ethnic minority status and mental health issues (He et al., 2018; Hwang and Shin, 2018; Wong & Chiu, 2019). Alongside these stressors, the AHSC student population face the currently under reported and under researched psychosocial hazards of interdisciplinary health care discourses. These psychosocial hazards include: ambiguity around career trajectory; lack of discipline specific codes of conduct and ethical frameworks (Health and Care Professionals Council, 2014); lack of preparation for the stressful emotional impacts of people facing roles (Holt, 2016); unregulated placements across various disciplines and feeling less valued than their 'professional' counterparts (Kinder, 2020).

Applied Health and Social Care (AHSC) programmes at the case study university are distinct from other professional health programmes (nursing, social work, midwifery) where students follow a regulatory code of conduct, enlisting on a professional register such as the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) (NMC, 2017). Contrastingly, AHSC degree programmes provide theoretical knowledge of interdisciplinary health sectors such as, nutrition, children's health, mental health and wellbeing, counselling, offending behaviour and health and social care, often with un-prescribed career trajectories and a lack of discipline-specific codes of conduct. These students often go into front line patient facing health and/or social care roles as nutritionists, health care assistants or care workers. Others use these courses as springboards to more professional masters level qualifications such as teaching, social work nursing or mental health and psychotherapies. Alongside their studies, students are

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expected to partake in 120 hours of placement in front line health, social care or education across various disciplines. Notably, AHSC students generally receive less support with emotional stress (Holt, 2016), have longer contact time with patients and families and often feel less valued than their professional counterparts (Kinder, 2020) in their placements. Despite facing these additional burdens and challenges to that of professional healthcare students the AHSC programmes have a successful portfolio in the case study university. Where around 660 students graduate each year in an AHSC discipline, of which around 500 (76%) graduate with a 2.1 or 1<sup>st</sup> class honours degree (Departmental Head, 2022). A potential facilitating cause of this success is resilience.

Resilience has been identified as both a buffer against the stressors that instigate poor mental health and a catalyst for positive mental health, coping and academic success, across various disciplines in HE (Thorley, 2017; Baik, 2019; Brewer et al., 2019; Li & Hasson, 2020; Zarroti et al., 2020). However, resilience is far from a panacea, often portrayed as a contested nuance across contemporary literature owing to instances of victim-blaming, stigmatising and pathologising (Sims-Schouten and Gilbert, 2022), leading to institutional abdication of responsibility (McIntosh and Shaw, 2017). Ideas closely linked to neoliberalism and individual responsibility for mental health and wellbeing, that disregard the influence of environmental, cultural and societal factors (Hewitt, 2019). Comparatively, some authors state that universities should take responsibility for student resilience, teaching students the skills of resilience whilst fully supporting their mental health needs (Universities UK, 2021; Binnie, 2021). However, there are issues here around disempowerment and lack of student autonomy when placing responsibility for resilience with the university alone (Hughes & Spanner, 2019; McIntosh & Shaw, 2017). Overall, resilience is a complex multifaceted concept with often conflicting and ambiguous definitions, subjective to individual and contextual interpretations. Notably, both non-traditional and AHSC students are under researched populations with unique stressors and challenges that require unique counterbalancing resilience strategies.



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Unlike earlier work in this discourse, this study focusses on n-tAHSC students, whose unique views on resilience, until now, have been overlooked in favour of other health, social care or education professional's views. With previous health, social care and educational studies around this phenomenon focussing on professional HE students, understandings may not be applicable to the n-tAHSC student and the unique issues they face, when studying and ultimately delivering bespoke interdisciplinary health care. Therefore, there is an urgent need for an understanding of resilience in n-tAHSC students, that is sensitive to their unique training, future employment and practice.

In keeping with the constructivist paradigm, this research provides unique understandings of resilience from the specific perspective of successful non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care (Sn-tAHSC) graduates. These recent Sn-tAHSC graduates (having graduated less than 5 years prior to interview) were chosen as they have demonstrated resilience and successful outcomes final classifications (>2.1) on their Applied Health and Social Care degree programmes. Therefore, as past n-tAHSC students they are ideally placed to provide recollections of how they remained resilient and succeeded in their degree programme. It is believed that these findings will create a framework for resilience to support future practice and policy relating to n-tAHSC students.

## **1:1: Background**

### **1.1.1: Definitions of widening participation and the 'non-traditional' student**

HE student populations have increased in diversity over the past 50 years as university students move away from 'traditional' stereo typologies of privileged white middle-class individuals, who attend university straight after A level completion (around 18 years of age), (Holmegaard et al., 2017). An expediter for this is the 'widening participation agenda' orchestrated by political drivers for equality of opportunity to access and success in HE (Atkins and Ebdon, 2014), in order to foster social mobility, individuals achieving a better occupation and/or income than their parents (Social Mobility Commission, n.d.). Social mobility through education is seen as a way of narrowing socioeconomic gaps

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in society, by improving the status of socio-economically disadvantaged individuals through education and graduate employment (Mian and Richards, 2016; Maisuria and Cole, 2017). Although, Maisuria and Cole (2017) argue this is more likely a result of neoliberalism embroiling in HE, where the marketisation of universities has led to the need for increased numbers of consumers (students).

Widening participation strategies in the UK, seek to increase the number of under-represented students (those from low socio-economic backgrounds, disabled, minority ethnic, mature students), often referred to as 'non-traditional' (n-t) students, enrolling and succeeding in university degree programmes (Boliver et al., 2017). N-t students are typically defined as: first generation in their immediate family to attend university, students from low-income households, care leavers (Cotton et al., 2017), students from minority ethnic backgrounds (Gauntlett, 2018), mature students (Munro and Pooley, 2009; Cotton et al., 2017, Connell-Smith and Hubble, 2018) and students with disabilities (Connell-Smith and Hubble, 2018). These diverse characteristics of n-t students are associated with adversity and can present barriers to successful degree completion (Mian and Richards, 2016).

Whilst challenges and risk factors associated with n-t students have been frequently reported, to date, their resilience and coping abilities have received less consideration. This deficit research focus fails to consider the n-t student's strengths and abilities to successfully navigate university systems, illustrated through the steady increase in successful degree outcomes of n-t students (Mian and Richards, 2016), which is potentially enhanced through their resilience. Indeed, there is a considerable body of research on the concept of resilience as a bolster for academic success and coping in HE students (for example: Brewer et al., 2019; Li and Hasson, 2020; Zarroti et al., 2020). This highlights that further research into resilience and coping strategies adopted by successful n-t students is needed, in order to expatiate the success of this unique group.

### **1.1.2: Risk factors for non-traditional applied health and social care students**

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N-tAHSC students are seen to face even greater retention and wellbeing risks owing to the additional demands of placements and the emotional stress and demands of health and social care practice (Howat et al., 2015). AHSC programmes can have further financial and social implications for n-t students, owing to a lack of spare time for paid work, socialising and family duties (He et al., 2018; Hwang and Shin, 2018). In addition, n-tAHSC students who engage with placements have to cope with additional stressors, such as work overload and emotional exhaustion, whilst providing quality care for others, (Kinman, 2021). When everyday stressors are merged with other challenges and adversities the risk factors for poor mental health and wellbeing in this student population are magnified and the chances of success threatened.

Another generic reason for increased risk of poor outcomes in n-tAHSC students may be that health care courses attract more mature students than any other area of higher education (Holt, 2016; Office for Students, 2020). Indeed, AHSC degrees are particularly desirable to the n-t student, as they combine theoretical knowledge of interdisciplinary health subjects and real-world skills geared towards employability (Tilley, 2014; La Trobe University, 2020) with n-t students particularly motivated by career outcomes and vocational learning (Taylor and House, 2010; Treiniene, 2017). However, the varied nuance of AHSC programmes mean they are often un-prescriptive regarding career pathways. Thus, presenting a new liminal space for AHSC students once they graduate into the ambiguous world of AHSC employability. This concern has been given recent consideration by the Office for Students (OfS) (2018b) in their B3 standards, requiring all HE programmes to have clear graduate employability routes.

### **1.1.3: Resilience in n-tAHSC students**

Despite the potential risk factors for n-tAHSC students, there have been high levels of success across the general n-t student population (Chung et al., 2017). However, the literature on resilience has concentrated principally on the 'traditional' student body, who commence their studies after further education (usually A level studies) around the age of 18. These students tend to come from financially secure backgrounds, where parents are often graduates

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themselves, with minimum barriers to learning. Additionally, non-traditional health student research has predominately focussed on deficit attributes, such as financial hardship and higher stress levels, linked to managing family, work and school responsibilities (Hand et al., 2021). However, there is a growing body of more generalised literature around non-traditional students' resilience, that challenges the deficit model of research, viewing n-t students as resilient individuals capable of overcoming academic challenges and succeeding in HE (Cotton et al., 2017; Chung et al., 2017; Crosswell and Beautel, 2017; Gauntlett et al., 2018).

Specifically, within the field of healthcare, these studies are extremely limited, and predominately focus on professional courses, such as medicine, nursing midwifery and allied professions (Amsrud et al., 2019; Li and Hasson, 2020). Moreover, these studies are often secondary in nature (Sanderson and Brewer, 2017; Cotton et al., 2017; Clearly et al., 2018; Amsrud et al., 2019; Li and Hasson, 2020). Hence, there is very little empirical research from a n-t non-professional health perspective. This underrepresented group often have higher levels of psychological stress compared to the general student population, yet many successfully complete their studies (He et al., 2018). Consequently, Sn-tAHSC graduates can be viewed as particularly relevant participants for researching resilience strategies.

There has been much interest over the last 20 years in resilience as a protective factor for stress or adversity and a predictor of wellbeing (Stoffel and Cain, 2018). Indeed, resilience has become a dominant concept within HE students' mental health and wellbeing research (Kotouza et al., 2021), support agendas (Aranda, et al., 2012) and policy (Mguni and Bacon, 2010). As a result of contemporary research into student mental health, resilience and academic resilience are highlighted as essential attributes for buffering everyday academic stressors and enhancing successful outcomes for university students (Cotton et al., 2017; Azmatia et al., 2018). Within HE discourses, resilience is viewed as a graduate attribute that Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) should develop within their students (AdvanceHE, 2019). Furthermore,

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resilience is viewed as a protective factor to moderate the impact of risk (academic and personal stressors) in HE (Cassidy, 2015).

Across the n-t student literature, resilience definitions have evolved from trait-based definitions, where responsibility for resilience was placed solely with the individual, to more process-based definitions of resilience, where the individual draws upon protective resources to moderate the impact of risk and enhance their chances of success (Reed et al., 2019; Wolf et al., 2019; Ang et al., 2021). Additionally, there is a considerable body of research which suggests that resilience can be taught and learned by individuals, including n-t students (for example, Gauntlett, 2018; Haktanir et al., 2018). Moreover, literature from health professionals suggests that resilience and academic resilience are of considerable importance in relation to academic, career and life success (McAllister and McKinnon, 2009; Chung et al., 2017). Given these points it is ostensible that research into the optimal processes for n-tAHSC resilience should be conducted, owing to its apparent prominence to success in Higher Education (Sanderson and Brewer, 2017).

Structural considerations of student success in HE often draws upon Bourdieu's (1990) concepts of field, habitus and capital where n-t students are seen to be at a disadvantage in comparison to their 'traditional' student counterparts, owing to limited social and cultural capital, namely heritable knowledge of complex HE policies and practices passed on by graduate parents, which can impact on retention and success (Reay, 2005). This implies that university is an unknown entity for the n-tAHSC student, similar to a liminal space (Field and Morgan-Klein, 2010), which Blanchfield (2021) defines as a 'threshold' space where transformation occurs. Here the n-tAHSC student enters a new space (the university) and transitions into a precipice of something new. This new space will hopefully involve them graduating to a new liminal space with the knowledge and skill set of a health student graduate, although there are no guarantees. Rather, from an agency perspective, n-t students are considered to be more at risk of failing university owing to increased adversities they may face including, financial difficulties, disabilities, parenting responsibilities (Cotton et al., 2017) ethnic minority status (Wong and Chiu, 2019) and mental health

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issues (Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010). Markedly, being in a liminal space, suspended between habitats can potentiate mental health issues (Blanchfield, 2021), thus emphasising the importance of inculcating student resilience and support for this life course transition.

Alongside concerns for student resilience, there is a growing worry about levels of resilience amongst health, social care and education graduates. Consequently, employers are imploring universities to embed more opportunities for developing resilience in their curriculums (Scurry et al., 2020). In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has heightened issues of stress and burnout across health, social care and education sectors, where staff face excessive workloads and daily stressors, that can accumulate into psychosocial hazards, which often lead to poor wellbeing and mental health (Søvdal et al., 2021; The House of Commons, 2021). It is therefore essential that universities provide evidence-based resilience training, in order to produce work ready graduates who can access discipline, context and agency specific resources to cope in stressful environments.

Research into resilience is predominantly restricted to medical, social work or education professionals, however, reports into resilience and staff burnout from the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted how COVID-19 has placed a catastrophic strain across the entire NHS, education and social care workforce (Charles and Ewbank, 2021). Consequently, the UK workforce has experienced heightened levels of burn out and stress. This has implications for AHSC students who will need to develop resilience skills to buffer the stressors and pressures of the effects and aftermath of the pandemic. Whilst there is a growing concern for all frontline workers, AHSC graduates face their own unique challenges. The House of Commons (2021) report on 'resilience and burnout in the NHS and social care' demonstrates the shared responsibilities and stress of health and social care workers across all front-line roles. This report demonstrates that the AHSC workforce (including students in placement) face similar issues to professional staff (and students), with added pressures of longer hours, longer contact time with individual service users and families. Comparatively, AHSC practitioners generally receive less support with stressful

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emotional impacts of their role, are paid less, receive fewer holidays and often feel less valued than their professional counterparts (Johnson, 2021). This suggest that research into the resilience of AHSC graduates is extremely important, particularly in light of the added pressures the COVID-19 pandemic has brought and will continue to bring to this field for the foreseeable future.

This thesis explores the concept of resilience in HE from recent Sn-tAHSC graduate perspectives, graduates who have successfully completed a degree, made up of blended disciplines of health, social care and wellbeing (Case Study University, 2022), despite facing various adversities as n-t students. Typically, these Sn-tAHSC graduates, tend to seek employment or further study across health, social care or education. Thereby, working alongside professionally licenced (nurses, midwives, teachers, social workers) graduate counterparts.

#### **1.1.4: Political landscape**

In response to political, public and professional concern for student's mental health, in the UK, the University Mental Health Charter (Student Minds, 2020a; Kotouza et al., 2021), backed by then Universities Minister Sam Gyimah MP, forms a quality improvement scheme to promote exceptional approaches to supporting students' mental health and wellbeing. The charter recognises and rewards institutions that deliver improved mental health and wellbeing outcomes, thereby inculcating a whole university pro-active approach to mental health (Student Minds, 2020a). This pro-active approach includes a focal on supporting the wellbeing and resilience of students, with wellbeing seen as key to promoting positive mental health and preventing poor mental health (What Works Centre for Wellbeing, 2019; Baik, 2019; Houghton and Anderson, 2017; Universities UK, 2017) and resilience as a strategy for maintaining wellbeing (Thompson et al., 2016), academic performance and growth in learning (Byrom and Murphy, 2018).

The University Mental Health Charter draws on a number of theoretical frameworks, one of which is the conceptual model for mental health by Byrom and Murphy (2018). This model enhances approaches around the interplay of

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genetic and environmental influences on mental health to include the additional mediating factor of learning, whereby individuals can learn suitable strategies for supporting their wellbeing and resilience, considering their genetic characteristics and the social and structural environment they have come from/are currently operating within. In other words, learning is seen as a key facilitator for student resilience and wellbeing (Byrom and Murphy, 2018; Kahu and Nelson, 2018). Indeed, contemporary literature acknowledges that protective resilient behaviours can be learned, which in turn can improve outcomes for students (Keck and Sakdapolrak, 2013), even when faced with multiple academic and personal challenges, such as those of the n-t student (Chung et al., 2017). However, there is an apparent lack of strategic processes for the development of resilience in n-tAHSC students. Thus, further research into resilience development and its acquisition in this population is validated.

A potential issue with this approach is that moving to more proactive, prevention-based culture within universities could reduce resources and focus from responsive individualised clinical services to other less patient centred interventions (Hughes and Spanner, 2019). Meaning that, individual needs may not be met through the 'one size fits all' whole university approach. Similarly, Jones et al. (2019) raise concerns, around placing responsibility wholly on universities, which may disempower students from taking control of and managing their own mental health and wellbeing. Additionally, there are a number of factors that can impact on student's mental health outside of universities locus of control, such as the current labour market, the economy, student debts (Rauscher and Elliot, 2014), not to mention the implications of the current pandemic. Consequently, whole university strategies need to be mindful of this and should plan accordingly, focussing on embedding resilience skills into the curriculum, whilst developing strategies to enable diverse student populations to manage and maintain their own wellbeing (Hughes and Spanner, 2019).

## **1.2: Personal rationale behind this research**



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Having been an AHSC practitioner for over 20 years, a n-tAHSC student, graduate, personal tutor, programme lead and senior lecturer in the AHSC department of the case study university, I have a personal interest in the topic area of resilience around n-tAHSC students who persevere and continue their studies despite ongoing challenges and adversities. Moreover, as a personal tutor to n-tAHSC students, I am aware of the diverse challenges that they face, yet they continue to dedicate their time to their studies and strive for success. I am also becoming increasingly aware of the requirements of employers within AHSC and their need for resilient graduates (McCray et al., 2015; Burke and Scurry, 2019).

Within the field of health and social care, resilience is viewed as an important graduate attribute, seen as a protective factor for emotional and psychological wellbeing and shield against the risk of burnout across complex health care delivery systems (McCray et al., 2015). AHSC careers are spread across a number of disciplines, such as non-clinical health, social care, nutrition and health, counselling services and child health services, all of which are seen as highly stressful environments (Francis, 2013; Health and Safety Executive, 2013). As an AHSC employer myself, I was aware of how resilience enabled practitioners to manage stressful situations, supporting healthcare workers to maintain safety and high-quality care (McCray et al., 2015), none more than during the recent COVID-19 pandemic, where resilience resources have been put to the test across health, social care and education services (Søvold et al., 2021; The House of Commons, 2021). Despite sharing similar stressors to nurses, social workers, teachers and doctors there is little research into AHSC workers resilience. Additionally, there is an absence of codes of conduct or ethical frameworks to guide resilient practices in these areas, instead graduates are expected to come to the job with a ready developed resilient attitude to guide them in their conduct. As a programme leader for AHSC degrees, I am in an ideal position to take the findings of this research forward, alongside my contemporary experience in this discipline, to provide more training and guidance on resilience practices in the AHSC curriculum for future students and staff.

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The concept of resilience itself is a difficult subject to teach and measure owing to ambiguity around definitions and its contextual, situational and individualistic nature, with often contradicting influencing factors. This is an area of concern, as AHSC students face un-researched areas of stress and requirements, where there is no defined code of conduct to support their practice, despite growing levels of accountability and responsibility across health and social care disciplines. This demonstrates the importance of researching and conceptualising this phenomenon for n-tAHSC student wellbeing, coping and ultimately long-term success, in order to gain a deeper level of understanding of the unique challenges faced by these students and the strategies they adopt for successful outcomes.

### **1.3: Research questions, aims and objectives**

The aim of this research was to explore student resilience from a Sn-tAHSC graduate perspective, using the domains of habitus, capital and agency to explain how n-tAHSC students operationalise resilience. The research questions evolved throughout the research, consistent with a constructivist grounded theory approach, where initial explorations of the data can reform or reaffirm research aims and questions (Charmaz, 2014?).

**RQ1: How do Sn-tAHSC graduates articulate resilience?**

**RQ2: How do n-tAHSC students practice resilience?**

**RQ3: How can the intrapersonal and interpersonal resilience actions of n-tAHSC students be explained using Bourdieu's metatheory lenses of habitus, field, capital and agency.**

This study contributes to the existing knowledge base by providing an original perspective on resilience from an often-over-looked population. Applying a Bourdieusian lens, the study provides a conceptual framework for resilience from a n-tAHSC perspective to inform future curriculum design, policy and practice.

### **1.4: Organisation of the thesis**

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This thesis is divided into six chapters, commencing with an introduction. This introductory chapter provided an overview of the topic area, background to the study and the rationale behind this research. It explored details of the political backdrop to the study and an overview of the research questions, and the organisation of the thesis.

Chapter 2 provides a literature review of resilience as a factor for success amongst n-t students, presenting the current literature relating to the aims of the thesis. This review provided an up to date understanding of the subject, its significance and its structure (Gray, 2018). Additionally, a critical analysis of the gaps in knowledge in the existing literature is offered, highlighted the problems surrounding inconsistent definitions of resilience and a lack of research around n-t students' resilience and success. In keeping with a grounded theory approach the literature review was conducted at various points of the study commencing with an initial scoping review of the literature prior to data collection, which highlighted a lack of clarity in both terminology and definitions of resilience. The literature review evolved prior to, during and post data generation, ensuring the most relevant and current literature was included in the study.

Chapter 3 presents the research methodology, including an explanation and justification of the research design and methods used to generate, collect and analyse the data. Chapter 3 begins with an introduction to the researchers positioning within this research, considering reflexivity and the philosophical perspectives underpinning the research. This is followed by the research design methodology, including rationales for: the case study approach, interviews and a constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) approach to data analysis. This is followed by the research design outlining data collection processes, data analysis processes and methods. Finally, ethical implications relating to the study are presented.

Chapter 4 provides the findings of the research, where data has been analysed using a Constructivist Grounded Theory approach and Bourdieu's (1977b) meta-theory as a tool to both interpret and structure the findings into logical outcomes.

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Chapter 5 then draws together the findings, making comparisons to the existing knowledge base and positioning the research within the theoretical perspectives of Bourdieu's metatheory, whilst presenting the findings using a Constructivist Grounded Theory approach to create a conceptual framework for non- traditional student resilience.

In the final chapter conclusions are made in relation to the original contribution of the research and implications for universities, staff and policy creation are presented alongside a toolkit for n-tAHSC resilience support.

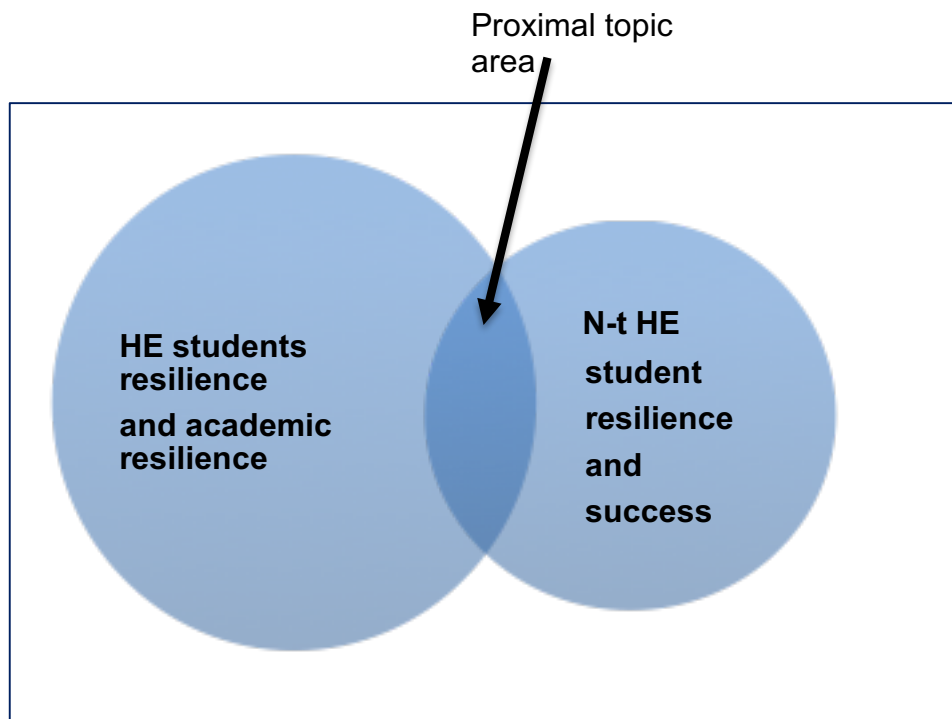
Recommendations are made and limitations of the study are critically considered.

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## Chapter 2: Literature Review

To gain further insight into higher education (HE) student resilience and coping strategies for success amongst non-traditional (n-t) students, the literature review critically examines the existing evidence base around n-t students' psychological and academic resilience within the context of HE. To facilitate this a review of existing literature was conducted across two proximate topic areas: 'HE student resilience and academic resilience' and 'n-t HE student resilience and success' (see Figure 2.1).



*Figure 2:1: Venn diagram of proximal topic areas, with the current study as the central area showing non-traditional students' resilience and coping factors for success in HE.*

Exploring the literature across these categories allowed for a greater general understanding of the concept of resilience and its purpose in HE, including how resilience can influence and impact on student wellbeing. Secondly, it compares the literature around a specific field of enquiry: n-t students' resilience and coping strategies for successful degree outcomes. Thereby connecting the narrow research topic with limited research to directly relevant concerns of the broader evidence base. Whilst some of this literature reviewed reflects the views of healthcare students, the subject of this thesis; Applied Health and Social Care (AHSC), is an extremely under researched multi-

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disciplinary discourse that covers health, social care, education, psychology and other human sciences. Therefore, a broader range of HE student literature was required, as oppose to health focussed research, which predominately explores medical, nursing and midwifery students.

The overall organisation of this literature review is thematic, where the discussions within each theme are presented using an organising principle from general to specific, excluding the first theme, which is presented chronologically to historically conceptualise definitions of resilience (Lynch, 2014). The three main themes that emerged were: **2.1: Definitions measurements and characteristics of resilience; 2.2: Influences on resilience and academic resilience; 2.3: Consequences and outcomes of resilience and academic resilience.**

### **2.1: Definitions, measurements and characteristics of resilience**

Across HE resilience literature, there was an abundance of conflicting definitions for resilience, from both psychological and academic trajectories. This highlights the fragmented and non-cumulative nature of resilience and academic resilience definitions, commencing with outcome focussed agentic definitions of resilience: subtheme 2.1.1: Fixed agentic and intrapersonal definitions of resilience (characteristics, traits, personal attributes and academic resilience), with an additional theme of 2.1.1.1: Academic resilience and academic buoyancy. These initial definitions evolved to more contemporary, non-static views in the literature, where resilience is developed and learned (Simons et al., 2018; Holdsworth et al., 2018): subtheme 2.1.2: Non-static evolutionary definitions of resilience, with a subtheme of 2.1.2.1: Defining resilience in non-traditional students. The third foci of resilience in the literature, reflected a multi-factorial process, where resilience was seen as a dynamic process, where individuals and organisations draw upon resources across and within systems (Turner et al., 2017; Ershardi et al., 2021): subtheme 2.1.3: Resilience as a multi-dimensional, multi-factorial process. The final subtheme looks at how resilience is measured, 2.1.4: Measurements of resilience.

#### **2.1.1: Fixed agentic and intrapersonal definitions of resilience**

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Resilience was regularly defined in the literature as an individual's capacity for adaptation and recovery in the face of adversity or ongoing challenge (Turner et al., 2016; Brewer et al., 2019; Ershardi et al., 2021). This is otherwise referred to as an ability to "bounce back" from stressful and negative emotional experiences (Stoffel & Cain, 2018; Denovan & Macskill, 2017). Similarly, authors claimed resilience to be the rapid recovery from adversity and difficult situations (Cotton et al. 2017; Denovan & Macaskill, 2018; Brewer et al., 2019; Turner et al., 2016; Sarrionandia et al., 2018; Ershardi et al., 2021, Simons et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2019; Walsh et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2020). Despite their popularity, a number of authors, for example Denovan & Macskill (2017) and Webster and Rivers (2018), condemn these definitions of resilience which imply a 'bounce back' nature as this emphasises a quick, effortless recovery from trauma or stressful events, instead believing resilience should be seen as a transition, which takes readjustment into account. This implies that resilient individuals have a capacity for growth and development following challenges, which is a key purpose of HE education.

Despite a growing number of critiques around these fixed agentic trait definitions of resilience and the aforementioned contested notion of a 'bounce back ability' (Denovan & Macskill, 2017; Webster and Rivers 2018), trait, rapid recovery, adaptability and 'bounce back' delineations were the most commonly presented across the resilience literature. Indeed, 21 of the 37 universal papers reviewed provided a fixed trait definition of resilience, with 5 directly alluding to the 'bounce back' nuance of resilience (Turner et al., 2016; Denovan & Macaskill, 2017; Holdsworth et al., 2018; Zarroti et al., 2020; Walsh et al., 2020). These bounce back definitions have been linked to several distinguishing characteristics, such as: coping (for example, Smith et al., 2020; Walsh et al., 2020), emotional regulation (for example, Zarroti et al., 2020; Ershardi et al., 2021), adaptability, maintaining perspective and prioritising (for example, Kim et al., 2019; Ershardi et al., 2021). The most frequently presented were coping, emotional regulation, and maintaining perspective.

**'Coping'** was identified across the resilience literature as both a facilitating cause and outcome of resilience (Turner et al., 2016; Denovan & Macaskill,

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2017; Holdsworth et al., 2018; Sarrionandia et al., 2018; Webster & Rivers, 2018; Kim et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2020; Walsh et al., 2020). Resilience, itself was defined as a coping mechanism to buffer stressors and burnout (Smith et al., 2020; Walsh et al., 2020; Ershardi et al., 2021). This definition is referred to as the 'psychoanalytic' approach, which considers person-based characteristic as the underpinning causation of coping efforts (personality, attitudinal and cognitive characteristics) (Freud, 2013, p.137). These habitual coping tendencies are seen as less effective than situational coping approaches, where individuals adapt their coping styles depending on the demands of the challenges or stressors they face (Freire et al., 2020). This suggests an adaptable situational coping approach is considered to be more desirable in HE students, which may be particularly relevant when considering coping capabilities of n-t students.

**'Emotional regulation'** was another identified characteristic of resilient HE students, which enabled the individual to regulate their emotions to facilitate recovery from stressful events (Turner et al., 2016; Denovan & Macaskill, 2017; Balgui, 2017; Holdsworth et al., 2018; Sarrionandia et al., 2018; Brewer et al., 2019; Zarroti et al., 2020; Ershardi et al., 2021). Results from Thomas and Zolkoski's (2020) quantitative study on 277 University students, using the Brief Emotional Intelligence Scale (BEIS), revealed that emotional regulation exerts an indirect influence on stress through cognitive reappraisal and resilience, implying that emotional intelligence is a facilitating contingency and condition for resilience, with resilience consequently being seen as a buffer against stress. However, within these fixed assets definitions of resilience, emotional regulation and emotional intelligence were not viewed as developable, thereby limiting these facilitating conditions to those individuals who possess the traits.

**'Maintaining perspective'** (Turner et al., 2017; Holdsworth et al., 2018; Simons et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2019; Ershardi et al., 2021) was seen as a central component of resilience, enabling individuals to reframe setbacks, maintain a solution-focus and manage negativity (Winwood et al. 2013). This attribute was seen as essential for reacting positively to and learning from feedback, personal growth after challenging experiences and a predictor for



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wellbeing. Turner et al. (2017) suggest, in their quantitative study of university students in the built environment, that this can be incorporated into the curriculum. This strategy could be particularly beneficial across health disciplines, where complexity and dealing with adversity are part of everyday practice, requiring individuals to maintain perspective to combat workplace stress and remain on task (Skills for Care, 2020). Further research around the resilience of n-tAHSC students could therefore highlight the relevance of these measures for this specific student population.

#### **2.1.1.1: Academic resilience & academic buoyancy**

Whilst there was a plethora of research around the general resilience of HE students, research around academic resilience was less abundant. Sometimes labelled as 'buoyancy' (Ramasubramanian, 2017) or 'grit' (Duckworth, 2018), academic resilience was defined as an agentic personal skill, ability, capacity or asset (Sanderson & Brewer et al., 2017; Turner et al., 2017; Sarrionandia et al., 2018; Clearly et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2020). It was highlighted that academic resilience enabled successful adaptation and recovery from academic challenges, threats or stress related to course completion (Clearly et al., 2018; Stoffel & Cain, 2018). Whilst other definitions referred to the student's ability to carry on towards their academic goals, despite continuing stress (Eaves & Payne, 2019; Smith et al., 2020), balancing risk factors and protective factors to effectively cope with challenges. This suggests students who build capacity for academic 'buoyancy', place themselves in a better place to cope with acute academic adversity and stress (Ramasubramanian, 2017; Wong & Chiu, 2019; Reed et al., 2019; Ang et al., 2021). Hence, academic resilience could potentially reverse academic failure, enabling students to flourish (succeed) (Chung et al., 2017, Hwang and Shin, 2018). These agentic definitions are criticised for their over-reliance on individual recovery and propositions of a fixed mindset regarding individual resilience capabilities. Adversely a fixed mindset disposition does not allow for growth and development, now seen as a key feature of resilience within higher education (Chung et al., 2017). This is particularly important for n-t students who may enter university with varied educational experiences and capabilities (Gauntlett, 2018), thereby

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necessitating more growth mindset approaches, where academic resilience development is tailored to bolster chances of successful outcomes for n-t students.

The above definitions all suggested that resilience is outcome-focused and the 'maintenance of functionality' (Olsson et al., 2003, p. 2). In other words, resilience is a behaviour adopted by individuals, which enables them to function even when exposed to challenges and adversity. This widely used definition in itself is problematic, implying that accountability and responsibility for resilient behaviour should lie solely with the individual, an overtly contested notion across student mental health research (Hewitt, 2019). Notably, there has been little research into what these behaviours might look like across diverse student populations.

Agency focussed definitions of resilience were also criticised from a political neoliberal perspective by Webster and Rivers (2018), who claim that resilience is a conservative government technique intended to strengthen individuals so they can take more pressure, seen as a strategy for compliance in the neoliberal workplace, rather than individual flourishing. These concerns have been expressed previously by National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) commissioned report, stating agentic definitions of resilience are 'victim blaming', used politically to justify limited efforts to tackle poverty and other societal deficits (Harrop et al., n.d, p. 5).

A final critique of the agentic definitions is that whilst they can be generally categorised as intrapersonal fixed trait concepts, these definitions all differed in terminology across the literature, which is seen as problematic, potentially leading to ambiguity around the topic area being researched (Gauntlett, 2018; Brewer et al., 2019). With discipline-specific resilience interventions being developed across universities to boost student wellbeing (Brewer et al., 2019), the need for gathering specific perspectives of unique groups such as n-tAHSC students becomes more ostensive. Thereby, potentiating the development of more circumstantial and context-specific articulations and definitions of resilience to inform interventions, which meet the needs of unique populations (Woolf et al., 2019; Burke & Scurry, 2019; Ang et al., 2021).

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### **2.1.2: Non-static evolutionary definitions of resilience**

Advances in research have led to alternative growth mindset type definitions of resilience across the literature, where resilience is seen as a complex capability which can be developed with life experience and continued education (Holdsworth et al., 2018). These definitions, whilst predominately outcome focussed, refer to individual development of positive adaptability to stress and adversity (Balgiu, 2017; Sarrionandia et al., 2018). Notwithstanding developing characteristics for coping, they also explored the concept of developing the self from a surviving stance to a more thriving nuance (Brewer, et al., 2019; Sanderson & Brewer, 2017). This was said to be achieved through learning from past adversities faced by the individual (Brewer et al., 2019; Amsrud et al., 2019; Zarroti et al., 2020).

The above resilience definitions demonstrated growth mindset potentials, where positive outcomes and growth can result from adversities. Despite this more positive shift towards learned resilience capabilities, the definitions were still predominately agency focused. In fact, only three of the papers, which considered growth mindsets for resilience, actually focussed on resource acquisition from the environment (Turner et al., 2016; Simons et al., 2018; Eaves & Payne, 2019), rather than the individual. The key characteristics for resilience as a growth mindset definition, most frequently identified were self-efficacy (Sanderson & Brewer, 2017; Zarroti et al., 2020; Brewer et al., 2019; Turner et al., 2016; Balgui, 2017), persistence (Sanderson & Brewer, 2017; Brewer et al. 2017; Turner et al., 2016; Amsrud et al., 2019; Balgui, 2017) and pursuing goals (Balgui, 2017; Sanderson & Brewer, 2017, Simons et al., 2018; Eaves & Payne, 2019). Thus, demonstrating an altered forward focussed nuance of resilience, endeavouring towards individual goals, persisting and developing self-efficacy, as opposed to the original trait based definitions of coping and managing stress, where the future self is not acknowledged.

Still withstanding the growth mindset designations, the academic resilience definitions propositioned that the individual could develop agentic resilient 'abilities', 'capacities', 'adjustments' or 'attributes' to support successful growth and achievement (Sanderson & Brewer, 2017; Ramasubramanian, 2017;

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Stoffel & Cain, 2018; Clearly et al., 2018; Vaccaro et al., 2018; Haktanir, et al., 2018; Kannangara, 2018; Holdsworth et al., 2018; Webster & Rivers, 2018; Eaves & Payne, 2019; Amsrud et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2020;). This turns challenges into opportunity (Amsrud et al., 2019), a notion seen to be linked to neo-liberal monocacy; “those who work hard enough, or are prepared to shoulder the most pressure, will eventually succeed...” (Webster & Rivers, 2018, p. 526). This implies that all students can learn the rules and strategies for HE success, regardless of their original dispositions if they work hard, further necessitating the need for empirical research into the contemporary needs of diverse student populations in order to develop appropriate interventions to bolster their resilience.

Additionally, there were references to grit and individual’s upholding passion for goal attainment, alongside maintenance of effort and interest, despite adversity, failures and plateaus in progress (Stoffel & Cain, 2018; Kannangara et al., 2018). All of which placed responsibility on the individual to develop this quality, with minimal regard for how one might achieve this, a deficit recognised across the literature (Turner et al. 2016; Cotton et al., 2017; Coghill and Coghill, 2018). Additionally, Sanderson and Brewer (2017) in their scoping review, referring specifically to health professional education, caution against compartmentalisation of resilience, as the individual should be in constant state of interaction with their context, indicating that resilience is multifaceted and should not be a binary notion, as it has been presented previously across the literature.

Across academic resilience definitions only 2 papers discussed resilience from a growth mindset perspective, with one stating that resilience was the capacity of students to adapt and grow in response to adverse events (Sanderson & Brewer, 2017), whilst Amsrud et al. (2019) referred to the ability to turn challenges into opportunities for learning. Whilst there was some movement in these definitions towards more growth mindset groundings, contemporary dynamic process related definitions were still lacking across the academic definitions. This is worrying as universities minister Michelle Donelan has asked all universities to sign up to Student Minds’ Mental Health Charter programme

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within five years (Dickinson, 2021; Department for Education, 2021), which places greater responsibility for student mental health and proactive strategies, such as resilience development, at the hands of the university. Unfortunately, there is still little evidence to demonstrate what a “whole university” response looks like in practice, with knowledge-based intervention processes still disjointed. This suggests that investigations into n-t AHSC student resilience will be useful for shaping educational services and developing student support practices in universities.

### **2.1.2.1: Defining resilience in non-traditional students**

Throughout the reviewed n-t student literature, resilience was conceptualised as a process, capacity or outcome from successful adaptation during and following risk exposure (Allan et al., 2014; Gauntlett, 2016). Similar to findings within the general student resilience literature, early research into resilience of n-t students primarily focused on resilience as a set of personal qualities or characteristics (Alonsa-Tapia et al., 2019, Konaszewski, et al., 2019), such as autonomy or high self-esteem (Cotton et al., 2017). However, more evolved theories of psychological resilience across the n-t student literature, reflects a shift in emphasis away from individual trait based definitions towards acknowledgments that resilience derives from both individual agency and structural factors. Subsequently, three sets of implicating factors for developing resilience: personal attributes, familial aspects, and characteristics of wider social environments were identified (Cotton et al., 2017; Chung et al., 2017; Reed et al., 2019). This suggests that resilience is fluid in nature and can be bolstered through intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural resources.

The literature suggests that a culture shift for n-t student resilience is required to steer universities into a more process focused mindset, where universities consider how they can best provide resources to support individual student mental health (Chung et al., 2017; Woolf et al., 2019; Jardim et al., 2021). Thereby ensuring that universities are adequately resourced, with accessible, proactive mental health services and resources for students (Department for Education: The Education Hub, 2021), to inculcate a more proactive culture for resilience and positive mental health. This highlights a need for more empirical

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research, from the n-t student perspective, to inform best practice for supporting resilience in n-t students. This demonstrates the importance of context specific research such as this thesis that asks n-tAHSC students who have demonstrated resilience and achieved success, what worked for them.

### **2.1.3: Resilience as a multi-dimensional, multi-factorial process**

Contemporary thinking on resilience conceptualises resilience as a dynamic process, where individuals draw upon protective factors from the family, organisations or ecosystems (Webster & Rivers, 2018). It is the capacity of the dynamic system which allows the individual to adapt successfully, thereby taking the responsibility from the individual to the environment, a similar stance as the social model of disability (French & Swaine, 2013), which proposes that it is the environment that makes someone disabled, allowing institutions to recognise barriers in the environment, removing these and providing resources to ease the individual academic journey.

Other contemporary thinking defines resilience as the reframing of burdensome experiences, through the recognition of resources to persevere, push through troubled times and recover (Amsrud et al., 2019). Ershardi et al., (2021) refers to resilience as a 'multidimensional capability', where the individual draws upon physical, intellectual and psychological assets, whilst seeking proactive support and building networks to support their resilience. These dynamic process definitions of resilience are likened to Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological model, where there are reciprocal relationships between the various resources available across systems to support resilience (Turner et al. 2017, Walsh et al, 2020). This concept can be aligned to Bourdieu's (1977) domains, which reinforce the interplay of structural (field, social structures) and individual resources (agency and habitus) in the process of resilience, making these definitions particularly relevant to the aims of this empirical study.

The defining attributes of systems process definitions of resilience within the literature were: Resourcefulness (Sanderson & Brewer 2017; Sarrionandia et al., 2018; Simons et al., 2018; Amsrud et al., 2019; Brewer et al., 2019; 34) where individuals were able to recognise resources to support their needs,

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where those resources were readily available within systems (eco, individual and organisation); Internal Locus of Control (Sanderson & Brewer 2017; Webster & Rivers, 2018), where individuals perceived themselves to have the internal power to manage situations and Positive reframing (Sanderson & Brewer 2017; Webster & Rivers, 2018; Amstrud et al, 2019; Robinson et al., 2021), where burdensome events were reframed into learning experiences.

These attributes demonstrate a shift in thinking towards resilience as a dynamic process (Amstrud et al, 2019; Robinson et al., 2021), seen as the utilisation of external supporting resources and individual personality traits to overcome challenges or adversity and succeed. Despite these attributes demonstrating a more process focussed approach, certain personality traits were still deemed essential for this transactional process to occur, where autonomy remained with the individual to engage with the available resources. These prerequisite personality traits and characteristics are discussed in more detail in the 2.2.2.1: 'Intrapersonal Supporting Factors for Resilience' sub theme below.

On the whole, process focussed definitions, concentrated on resourcefulness (Collis & Reed, 2016), where systemic resources can be acquired and developed in order to strengthen an individual's resilience to adversity and challenges (Wong & Chiu, 2019). Indeed, a plethora of factors both internal and external to the individual are seen to support individual resilience, through interactions with others and their environments (Ang et al., 2021). Thus, implying that a pool of resources should be readily available to suit individual needs and support situational resilience in university students.

There was an emergent link between experiencing previous triumphs to challenges and the development of resilience within the n-t literature (Woolf et al., 2019; Gauntlett, 2018). Moreover, Munroe and Pooley (2009) recognised that n-t students, particularly mature entry students, may have undergone more adversities in their lives, therefore developing coping strategies and the ability to be more resourceful in the face of adversity. Other research supports this belief that mature students (Cotton et al., 2017), students with caring responsibilities and those who had previously been or were still in employment may be more resourceful and therefore resilient (Munroe & Pooley, 2009;

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Chung et al., 2017). However, this was not always the case, with Cotton et al., (2017) referring to family commitments and employability as a constraining factor for resilience. Additionally, students from different backgrounds such as those from low income households, minority ethnic groups, 1<sup>st</sup> generation or disabled students may not have access to or knowledge of the necessary resources to support resilience to academic challenges (Gauntlett, 2018; Woolf et al., 2019). Yet these students often display resilience and succeed, once again highlighting the misunderstood and often contested understandings of n-t students' resilience.

Thankfully, there was a general consensus that resilience can be taught and developed (McAllister and McKinnon, 2009; Gauntlett, 2018; Haktanir et al., 2021), linking to the ambitions of the University Mental Health Charter (Student Minds, 2020a). Moreover, it is recommended that structural and agentic resilience strategies are taught in undergraduate programmes to develop n-t student knowledge of resources for resilience that go beyond individual traits (Hart et al., 2012; Richards et al., 2016). In relation to this, McIntosh and Shaw (2017) propose that the university can play a significant role in the development of student resilience. These ideas strengthen the rationale for this study, demonstrating the teachable nature of resilience and the potential feasibility of developing suitable resources to support resilience from a subject specific context. Therefore, this a relevant phenomenon to explore empirically from the n-tAHSC student perspective, using Bourdieu's (1977) meta theory to categorise research strategies into concepts of structure and agency in order to develop a framework for resilience that can support the n-tAHSC student and future policy development.

#### **2.1.4: Measurements of resilience**

There was a lack of measurements for resilience across the reviewed literature, with a small number of articles referring to resilience scales, such as the brief resilience scales (Turner et al., 2017; Stoffel & Cain, 2018; Brewer et al., 2019; Du et al., 2020). The remaining literature referred to the prevalent outcomes as methods for measuring resilience, proposing that resilience can be measured through the individuals ability to cope with stressful situations, such as exam



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pressure and assessment deadlines (Denovan & Macaskill, 2017; Sanderson & Brewer, 2017; Holdsworth et al., 2018; Eaves & Pain, 2019; Walsh et al., 2020; Robinson et al., 2021) and academic success as a measurement of resilience across the earlier literature (Cotton et al., 2017; Ainscough et al., 2017; Chung et al., 2017; Power, 2017; Vaccaro et al., 2018, Clearly et al., 2018; Kannangara et al., 2018; Simons et al., 2018; Webster & Rivers, 2018; Zarroti et al., 2020). Alongside success and achievement 3 papers discussed successful development of graduate attributes, where resilience itself was seen as a graduate attribute (Turner et al., 2018), alongside emotional intelligence (Sarrionandia et al., 2018) and leadership (Ershardi et al., 2021), suggesting that resilience can support intrinsic outcomes alongside more tangible qualifications.

Overall, there was an apparent gap around effective methods for measuring resilience, highlighting a need for more research in this area in order to effectively monitor interventions to support this phenomenon. Furthermore, the apparent immeasurable nature of this concept may be linked to the ambiguity around its definition making it a nebulous concept. This research uses the original articulations of successful n-tAHSC students to gauge effective resilience practices across this group.

## **2.2: Influences on resilience and academic resilience**

The literature identifies a number of influencing factors on resilience and academic resilience, presented below. Firstly, risk factors for resilience and success in n-t students are presented under subtheme 2.2.1, with an additional subtheme of 2.2.1.1: Mental health and resilience. Followed by subtheme 2.2.2: Supporting mechanisms for resilience, with additional themes of: 2.2.2.1: Intrapersonal supporting factors for resilience, 2.2.2.2: Intrapersonal factors that support resilience in non-traditional students, 2.2.2.3: Interpersonal supporting factors for resilience and 2.2.2.4: Habitus and interpersonal factors in non-traditional students. 2.2.2.5: Environmental supporting factors for resilience and 2.2.2.6: Environmental factors for n-t student resilience from the field.

### **2.2.1: Risk factors for resilience and success in non-traditional students**

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Similar to their 'traditional' counterparts, n-t students face everyday adversities within the field of university, such as multiple assessment deadlines, understanding learning outcomes, exam pressures and other academic challenges (Collis & Reed, 2016). However n-t students may also face several adversities in relation to higher education studies that are not always shared by the 'traditional' student body such as: financial struggles (Collis & Reed, 2016; Cotton et al., 2017; Azmatia et al., 2018; Gauntlett, 2018; Woolf et al., 2019; Reed et al., 2019; Ang et al., 2021), juggling work and study (Collis & Reed, 2016; Haktanir et al., 2018; Azmatia et al., 2018; Ang et al., 2021), parental or other caring responsibilities (Cotton et al., 2017), first generation unfamiliarity with HE (Cotton et al., 2017; Chung et al., 2017; Gauntlett, 2018; Huss-Keeler, 2019; Reed et al., 2019; Woolf et al., 2019; Wong & Chiu, 2019; Ang et al., 2021) and feelings of not belonging (Collis & Reed, 2016; Cotton et al., 2017; Azmatia et al., 2018).

Alongside these prevailing issues, several other constraining factors for resilience were highlighted in the n-t student resilience literature, including feeling unprepared for university (Azmatia et al., 2018; Ang et al., 2021) and juggling priorities (Azmatia et al., 2018; Haktanir et al., 2018; Woolf et al., 2019; Ang et al., 2021), often experienced by n-t students as they try to navigate studies alongside work commitments and/or caring duties. Another constraining factor for n-t student resilience was poor attendance, which again could be linked to other commitments clashing with lessons or low self-efficacy (Cotton et al., 2017; Gauntlett, 2018; Wong & Chiu, 2019).

As well as the above constraints, n-t students can have difficulty making friends and fitting in (Munro & Pooley, 2009; Cotton et al., 2017; Haktanir et al., 2018; Azmatia et al., 2018), this may be attributed to their perceived difference to other students, cultural barriers, language barriers (Huss-Keeler, 2019; Woolf et al., 2019), maturity (Chung et al., 2017; Woolf et al., 2019) and negative self-identity (Cotton et al., 2017). These perceived differences can lead to habitus conflicts, where n-t students experienced symbolic violence towards their different upbringings and educational experiences. This causes the n-t student to perceive their own habitus as alien, conflicting with the university field and its

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institutional requirements, which often leads to increased feelings of not belonging and fears of failure (Nairz-Wirth et al., 2017). Accordingly, being accustomed to different cultures makes it difficult for the n-t student to fit in to the new culture of HE, subsequently creating a culture clash (Azmatia et al., 2018; Wong & Chiu, 2019; Reed et al., 2019; Woolf et al., 2019; Ang et al., 2021). On top of this a lack of face-to-face sessions as a result of the global pandemic have also made it difficult for students to adjust, fit in and make friends (Ang et al., 2021). The findings of the literature suggest more research is required around how n-t students build their sense of belonging and adjust to HE cultures, to enable HEIs to plan activities and supporting environments to facilitate resilience for the unique challenges of n-t students across different disciplines.

#### **2.2.1.1: Mental health and resilience**

According to the literature, n-t students may be more susceptible to mental health issues, such as depression, anxiety and somatic problems (physical ailments, which can impact on psychological health and functioning, such as difficulties with breathing, pain management) (Munro & Pooley, 2009; Collis & Reed, 2016; Cotton et al., 2017; Haktanir et al., 2018). An added barrier linked to mental health needs of n-t students was reluctance to seek support (Cotton et al., 2017; Gauntlett, 2018; Wong & Chiu, 2019), often owing to feelings of non-entitlement or lack of knowledge of HE systems. These findings imply that early identification and remediation of mental health issues are important (Allan et al., 2014). Moreover, normalising of support through information sharing and embedding resilience in the curriculum may encourage more students to seek help, thereby promoting positive psychological health as a facilitating factor for resilience (Cotton et al., 2017; Azmatia et al., 2018). Developing appropriate strategies for inculcating positive mental health and wellbeing should therefore be a compulsory part of the HE curriculum to bolster resilience in all students.

#### **2.2.2: Supporting mechanisms for resilience**

The reviewed literature identified several supporting factors that should be in place, prior to the occurrence of resilience, referred to as conditions in

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grounded theory analysis (Charmaz, 2014). Across the n-t student resilience literature there was differentiation and often contradiction around supporting factors for resilience, nonetheless, there was a good level of consensus around resilience being closely linked to resourcefulness within the literature (Collis & Reed, 2016; Haktanir et al., 2018; Azmatia et al., 2018; Reed et al., 2019; Jardim et al., 2021). Thereby highlighting how resilient n-t students draw upon a wide variety of intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural resources to support adaptation to the challenges of HE for academic success. These resources varied across the literature demonstrating the subjective and individualised nature of resilience. The common conditions have been categorised into intrapersonal, interpersonal and strategic facilitating factors below.

### **2.2.2.1: Intrapersonal supporting factors for resilience**

A positive self-concept, including high self-esteem, was seen as an essential condition for resilience across the reviewed literature (Brewer et al., 2019; Cotton et al., 2017; Turner et al., 2016; Sanderson & Brewer 2017; Vaccaro, et al., 2018; Kannangara et al., 2018; Webster & Rivers, 2018; Helba & Yongson, 2020; Walsh et al., 2020). Thus, demonstrating the need for individual confidence and positive outlook to support resilience. This positivity was linked to optimism (Denovan & Macaskill, 2017; Brewer et al., 2019; Webster & Rivers, 2018), enabling the individual to picture positive outcomes and future prospects. Similarly, emotional intelligence was deemed a key determining factor for resilience (Sarrionandia et al., 2018; Clearly et al., 2018; Sanderson & Brewer 2017; Vaccaro, et al., 2018; Brewer et al., 2019; Zarroti et al., 2020; Walsh et al., 2020; Ershardi et al., 2021;), where individuals regulate their own emotions, whilst judging emotions in others. Seen as a key facilitating condition, that allows the individual to buffer the effects of challenges, through emotional self-awareness, self-expression and regulation of emotions (Armstrong et al., 2011) thereby bolstering resilience during challenging times.

High intrinsic motivation was also seen as a facilitating condition for resilience across the literature (Cotton et al., 2017; Denovan & Macaskill, 2017; Sanderson & Brewer 2017; Ainscough et al., 2017; Simons et al., 2018; Helba & Yongson, 2020; Walsh et al., 2020) with an apparent relationship between

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motivation and long-term career goals (Azmitia et al., 2018; Ainscough et al., 2017; Ershardi et al., 2021; Kannangara et al., 2018; Holdsworth et al., 2018), implying that being motivated and having long term goals can potentiate resilience. Self-efficacy (Stoffel & Cain, 2018; Sanderson & Brewer 2017) and academic efficacy (Li & Hasson, 2020; Ainscough et al., 2017; Kannangara et al., 2018; Simons et al., 2018; Holdsworth et al., 2018; Walsh et al., 2020) were also identified as facilitating conditions for resilience, where individuals possessed the necessary self-management and academic skills to navigate the demands of university. Time management & planning were seen as particularly beneficial self-efficacy skills for HE students (Simons et al., 2018; Holdsworth et al., 2018; Power, 2017), potentially owing to the demands of multiple academic deadlines and juggling of other commitments.

Individual coping styles were also identified within the literature as being a condition for resilience, namely problem focused coping (Denovan & Macaskill, 2017; Ershardi et al., 2021) and flexible coping styles (Turner et al., 2016; Vaccaro, et al., 2018; Robinson et al., 2021). Problem-focussed coping was seen to foster more resilient individuals, as students who engaged with problem-focussed coping were more likely to tackle underlying barriers to resilience, including seeking appropriate support for their mental health or academic struggles. Closely linked to the concept of coping was having previous triumphs over barriers (Chung et al., 2017; Turner et al., 2017; Vaccaro, et al., 2018; Holdsworth et al., 2018; Webster & Rivers, 2018; Power, 2017), this was seen to bolster coping in the individual, as the individual knew that they could overcome issues and thrive, thus enhancing resilience from mastery of coping.

These conditions all alluded to intrapersonal control and personal autonomy over resilient behaviours. Whilst these examples from the literature are not exhaustive, they summarise the most frequently identified characteristics and traits deemed to facilitate more resilient behaviour in students. These intrapersonal facilitating conditions are a useful starting point to inform universities of the key personality traits that could be developed to bolster resilience in n-t students.

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### **2.2.2.2: Intrapersonal factors that support resilience in non-traditional students**

In a qualitative American study investigating the resilience characteristics of 14 Hispanic early childhood students, Huss-Keeler (2019) identified characteristics of n-t students with high academic resilience, including: high levels of self-efficacy, effective communication skills and satisfaction with their degree. Similar findings were reported across other empirical studies of n-t students' resilience, with Jardim et al. (2021) identifying self-determination, adaptability and self-efficacy as key intrapersonal characteristics in Portuguese students. Notably, self-efficacy was seen as important for developing capability beliefs for success (Greene, 2018). This included judgments about individual skills, motivation, behaviour, feelings and thoughts about one's ability to tackle difficult tasks (Huss-Keeler, 2019). Moreover, individuals with perceived high cognitive self-efficacy, set more challenging goals, and worked harder to achieve them. This suggests self-efficacy can postulate motivation, providing a sense of control over challenging situations and support recovery from setbacks and failures.

In addition to the key intrapersonal characteristics highlighted above, the literature also considers positive self-esteem (Cotton et al., 2017; Gauntlett, 2018; Wong & Chiu, 2019; Woolf et al., 2019; Jardim et al., 2021; Ang et al., 2021), which strengthen self-confidence and belief in self (Collis & Reed, 2016; Jardim et al., 2018; Haktanir et al., 2018; Wong & Chiu, 2019; Ang et al., 2021), supporting engagement (Cotton et al., 2017; Wong Chiu, 2019). Having goals was also deemed important to enable students to visualise the future (Azmatia et al., 2018; Haktanir et al., 2018; Gauntlett, 2018; Reed et al., 2019; Ang et al., 2021), supported by high levels of intrinsic motivation (Cotton et al., 2017; Haktanir et al., 2018; Gauntlett, 2018; Reed et al., 2019; Woolf et al., 2019; Wong & Chiu, 2019; Jardim et al., 2021; Ang et al., 2021). Intrinsic motivation is believed to support continuation of studies and plays a prime role in student success (Woolf et al., 2019) by having an end goal in mind students are driven to succeed and overcome challenges, supported by positive attitudes (Reed et al., 2019; Ang et al., 2021).

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The literature advocates that n-t HE students can utilise individual 'coping styles' (Reed et al., 2019, p. 965), derived from individual dispositions, the student's habitus, prior academic coping, personal abilities and academic support to surpass the effect of difficult academic circumstances, adopting academic coping strategies (Banerjee et al., 2019). When problem-focused coping was used alongside other resources, results were multiplied, for example, engaging in problem-focused coping, extroversion and academic skills were found to be particularly influential on n-t student resilience (Munro & Pooley, 2009). Conversely, emotion focused coping includes strategies to minimise distress, such as rumination, repeatedly thinking about the problem, emotional expression, and self-blame, related to more negative psychological outcomes and lower resilience (Alonsa-Tapia et al., 2019). Avoidance focused coping utilises abandonment of control or escape strategies, seen to be counterproductive for individual resilience, when situations cannot be changed or where problems are uncontrollable (de la Fuente et al., 2017). An additional coping strategy introduced by Alonso-Tapia (2019) is social-focused coping, where individuals adopt help seeking strategies, however conflicting results have been reported in relation to its association with positive psychological outcomes and resilience. Thereby, demonstrating a gap in the existing literature around social coping and the benefits of support strategies, which Tilley (2014) claims to be particularly relevant when researching resilience.

### **2.2.2.3: Interpersonal supporting factors for resilience**

Alongside the aforementioned intrapersonal traits, key interpersonal conditions were identified in the literature as facilitating conditions for resilience, these included a good network of friends and family (Cotton et al., 2017; Turner et al., 2017; Ainscough et al., 2017; Power, 2017; Holdsworth et al., 2018; Azmitia et al., 2018; Webster & Rivers, 2018; Ershardi et al., 2021), viewed as part of the individuals habitus by Bourdieu (1984), supporting the individual emotionally, socially and academically. However, academic support was not always available from family networks, particularly when the student was the first generation to attend university, consequently social contact and activities were seen as an important bolster for resilience (Stoffel & Cain, 2018). Related to

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habitus, a positive upbringing (Stoffel & Cain, 2018; Helba & Yongson, 2020) was also identified as an influencing factor for resilience, further highlighting the influence of a positive habitus and family interactions on resilience. Negative family relations and upbringing could therefore be a constraining barrier to resilience.

#### **2.2.2.4: Habitus and interpersonal factors in non-traditional students**

Social dimensions of resilience were deemed particularly important for n-t students, as they were seen to support adaptation into the field of HE. In fact, Gauntlett (2018) reported that the majority of processes and factors enabling resilience and thriving in HE, had a social dimension. These social dimensions ranged from indirect influences of parents and the individual's habitus that shaped their coping abilities and social milieu, to sustained interactions with peers and tutors. Maintaining family connections was seen as a positive social dimension for supporting resilience (Cotton, et al., 2017; Haktanir et al., 2018; Azmatia et al., 2018; Woolf et al., 2019; Ang et al., 2021), with positive family relations seen to support emotional resilience, academic support and guidance. However, where family relations were strained, it was advised that students cut any negative ties (Cotton et al., 2017), which could add further stress to their academic journey.

Networking with peers and tutors was highlighted across the literature as an effective way to develop social and cultural capital, allowing students to share challenges, sustain interactions with tutors, whilst providing opportunities to ask questions (Cotton et al., 2017; Gauntlett, 2018; Reed et al., 2019; Wolf et al., 2019; Ang et al., 2021). These findings can be related to the work of Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1986) where the individual draws upon and acquires resources from their micro-systems (family, school experience, friends, neighbourhoods) and wider meso systems (culture, laws and policies, historical contexts). The acquisition of social and cultural capital was linked to developing a sense of belongingness, indeed the more social and cultural capital an individual acquired the more they felt they fitted in with the HE environment (Ivemark and Ambrose, 2021). Thus, opportunities to develop social and



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cultural capital should be fortified within HE curriculum to support students' sense of belongingness.

#### **2.2.2.5: Environmental supporting factors for resilience**

Universities who had a holistic concern for students and monitored students' mental health were deemed more likely to cultivate a resilient culture, where individual need was recognised and supported appropriately (Cotton et al., 2017; Brewer et al., 2019; Robinson et al., 2021). This was augmented where policies and procedures also supported the development of resilience (Turner et al., 2017; Cotton et al., 2017; Webster & Rivers, 2018). This included personal tutor support and a safe space to disclose issues (Cotton et al., 2017), alongside more targeted support for mental health and wellbeing, financial management, academic issues (Cotton et al., 2017; Stoffel & Cain, 2018; Li & Hasson, 2020; Power, 2017; Helba & Yongson, 2020; Galente et al., 2020) and academic support (Stoffel & Cain, 2018; Simons et al., 2018; Gelante et al., 2018).

Alongside wellbeing and academic support, social and academic integration was deemed an important facilitating condition for cultivating resilience in students (Cotton et al., 2017; Brewer et al., 2019; Ainscough et al., 2017). A nuance supported by the World Health Organisation (2020) who discuss social health as the 3<sup>rd</sup> determinant of overall health and wellbeing. This suggests that universities should take on the role of facilitators for social integration, deemed a key factor in student belongingness. Indeed, Eaves and Paine (2019) proclaim that HE institutions have a duty of care for student resilience and social milieu. However, the question of how best universities can foster social integration to meet the needs of all students was not addressed across the reviewed evidence base.

#### **2.2.2.6: Environmental factors for non-traditional student resilience from the field**

Similar to the universal HE student resilience literature, supportive socio-environmental interventions were identified across the n-t student resilience

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literature, including online resilience enhancement interventions, positive relationships, with supportive approachable teachers (Cotton et al., 2017, Arat & Wong, 2017), which in turn encouraged more engagement with the field (Cotton, 2017; Wong & Chiu, 2019). Additionally, access to and willingness to seek more professional support was deemed an important factor, this support materialised as financial, where sufficient financial support and management of finances was important (Cotton et al., 2017; Ang et al., 2021), academic support (Cotton et al., 2017; Gauntlett, 2018; Ang et al., 2021) and ability to access student support for wellbeing (Cotton et al., 2017; Haktanir et al., 2018; Gauntlett, 2018; Wong & Chiu, 2019; Woolf et al., 2019 and Ang et al., 2021).

Whilst it was recognised that a systems approach towards resilience, integrating individual, social and environmental supportive factors, should be incorporated across universities (Burke & Scurry, 2019, Woolf et al., 2019), there was a lack of evidence around explicit environmental resources, to support the unique needs of n-t students from specific discourses. Therefore, more discipline-specific research on resilience from an n-t perspective is needed to inform universities on how best to deploy support services and other resources across different faculties and programmes.

### **2.3: Consequences and outcomes of resilience and academic resilience**

The consequences of having resilience and academic resilience are ambiguously highlighted across the literature. However, there was some general consensus that resilience has a positive impact on health and wellbeing (Denovan and Macaskill 2017; Chung et al., 2017; Turner et al., 2017; Ainscough et al., 2017; Vaccaro et al., 2018; Kannangara et al., 2018; Sarrionandia et al., 2018; Azmitia et al., 2018; Clearly et al., 2018; Amsrud et al., 2019; Brewer et al., 2019; Zarroti et al., 2020; Li & Hasson, 2020; Walsh et al., 2020; Robinson et al., 2021; Ershardi et al., 2021). Likewise, positive adaptation to stressful events was considered an outcome of resilience by a number of authors (Balgui, 2017; Stainton et al., 2018; Eaves & Payne, 2019; Walsh et al., 2020; Robinson et al., 2021), although this outcome in some instances reverted back to contested fixed agentic trait definitions of resilience.

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Stainton et al. (2018) discussed how positive adaptation can be developed through experience and exposure to challenge, therefore positive adaptation can be seen as both a condition for resilience and an outcome of resilience.

An increased level of life satisfaction was viewed as a key consequence of general resilience (Cotton et al., 2017; Sanderson & Brewer, 2017; Stoffel & Cain, 2018; Sarrionandia et al., 2018; Robinson et al., 2021) as was maintaining perspective and sustainability (Turner et al., 2017; Holdsworth et al. 2018; Kannangara et al., 2018). In these examples resilience was seen as transferable to future situations and employability, demonstrating longer term outcomes of learned academic and psychological resilience.

A predominant outcome of academic resilience across the literature was professional and personal growth (Turner et al., 2016; Chung et al., 2017; Sanderson & Brewer, 2017; Stoffel & Cain, 2018; Kannangara et al., 2018; Webster & Rivers, 2018; Simons et al., 2018; Walsh et al., 2020; Robinson et al., 2021), a concept identified across the growth mindset definitions of resilience, whereby individuals grow and develop as a result of resilient behaviours during challenging times. Again, this highlighted a relationship between exposure to challenge and positive outcomes, such as growth.

The consequences and outcomes for resilience and academic resilience are discussed across this theme with subthemes of: 2.3.1: Consequences and outcomes of resilience in non-traditional students, 2.3.2: Success, with an additional subtheme of 2.3.2.1: Success of non-traditional HE students. 2.3.3: Relationship between resilience, coping and success.

### **2.3.1: Consequences and outcomes of resilience in non-traditional students**

Resilience was deemed particularly important for n-t students in the literature, as it supported adjustment and adaptation to the often-challenging environment of HE (Wong & Chiu, 2019; Reed et al., 2019), supported through resistance to and recovery from academic disappointments (Collis & Reed, 2016), coping (Collis & Reed, 2016; Haktanir et al., 2018) and negating the impact of stress

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(Huss- Keeler, 2019; Jardim et al., 2021; Ang et al., 2021). Resilience was seen as a mediator for positive wellbeing in n-t students (Collis & Reed, 2016; Chung et al., 2017; Haktanir et al., 2018; Ang et al., 2021), supporting re-evaluation of student identity through the development of self-efficacy (Wong & Chiu, 2019; Reed et al., 2019) and self-esteem (Cotton et al., 2017; Azmatia et al., 2018). Notably, resilience was deemed a mechanism for social mobility, which was seen to bolster the individual's sense of belonging (Azmatia et al., 2018).

Another outcome of resilience was career actualisation (Gauntlett, 2018), particularly amongst goal driven n-t students, where degree completion was seen as an essential means to upward mobility. This suggests that n-t students are more goal and vocation orientated, with resilience safeguarding a return on their investment. Career visualisation is seen as a motivator, coping strategy and facilitating mechanism for resilience, aiding n-t students to overcome challenges in academia (Cotton et al., 2017; Gauntlett, 2018). Regardless of the ambiguity around agreed specific outcomes throughout the literature, resilience was ultimately found to promote academic success (Chung et al., 2017; Gauntlett, 2018; Reed et al., 2019; Ang et al., 2021).

### **2.3.2: Success**

Notably, in relation to academic resilience academic success was a predominant outcome across the literature (Turner et al., 2016; Cotton et al., 2017; Turner et al., 2017; Chung et al., 2017; Ainscough et al., 2017; Clearly et al., 2018; Simons et al., 2018; Holdsworth et al., 2018; Kannangara et al., 2018; Vaccaro et al., 2018; Stoffel & Cain, 2018; Brewer et al., 2019; Zarroti et al., 2020; Robinson et al., 2021), with ability to cope with academic challenges an additional prevalent outcome (Denovan & Macaskill, 2017; Chung et al., 2017; Sanderson & Brewer, 2017; Vaccaro et al., 2018; Webster & Rivers, 2018; Holdsworth et al., 2018; Simons et al., 2018; Clearly et al., 2018; Brewer et al., 2019; Johnson et al., 2020; Li & Hassan, 2020; Robinson et al., 2021; Ershardi et al., 2021).

#### **2.3.2.1: Success of non-traditional HE students**

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Success in n-t students is categorised in a similar manner to success of general student populations, identified in the literature as a 2:1 or 1<sup>st</sup> class degree, owing to pre-requisites of post graduate studies (Gauntlett, 2018; Gaskell & Lingwood, 2019), and graduate employment (Smith & White, 2015; Marshall, 2013; Gauntlett, 2018). However, there was some apparent tension in the literature around researcher bias, as success from the n-t student perspective may differ. It was noted that, success for the n-t student may not take into account degree classification, attaining a degree of any classification could symbolise success, with the n-t student viewing HE as a privilege rather than a given (Gauntlett, 2018). This suggests that more empirical research would be beneficial around n-t graduate opinions on what success looks like and what strategies were adopted to bolster that success from different discourses.

Despite the aforementioned tension, success is still valorised as a good degree (2:1 or above) (Smith & White, 2015; Gauntlett, 2018), providing a parity of attainment, where comparisons can be made across diverse student bodies. In 2018/2019 424,540 students graduated in the UK, of which 76% (n= 322,650) completed their undergraduate studies to a successful level. Ninety-five per cent of students who entered university from 'traditional' A-level backgrounds with A\*A\*A\* achieved a 2:1 or first-class degree, compared to 71 percent of students from non-traditional BTEC (D\*D\*D\*) backgrounds (Office for Students, 2018a). The above data demonstrates that despite lower percentages of 2:1 and 1<sup>st</sup> class awards compared to 'traditional' student types, the majority of n-t students are able to cope and succeed in their undergraduate studies. This validates the need for more research into the factors that contribute to the success of n-t students in order to develop supportive environments which bolster their success.

Overall, it is clear success is possible for n-t students, with a multiplicity of supportive factors that can potentially mediate successful student outcomes. What is less clear is how universities can capitalise on this for n-t students. It is anticipated that this research will provide more clarity by conceptualising Sn-tAHSC graduate perspectives on resilience and success, including the impact of organisational and environmental strategies

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### **2.3.3 Relationship between resilience, coping and success**

Throughout the literature, resilience is correlated with academic success, achievement, retention and student satisfaction (Allan et al, 2014; de la Fuente et al., 2017; Haktanir et al., 2018). In educational contexts resilience is valued for its links to protective qualities that bolster academic success (Allan et al., 2014; Ang et al., 2021). In the same manner, resilience is positively correlated with wellbeing and positive mental health (Collis & Reed, 2016; Chung et al., 2017; Haktanir et al., 2018; Ang et al., 2021). Indeed, resilient students were reported to experience lower levels of academic stress, particularly stress caused by the burden of academic tasks (Huss-Keeler, 2019; Jardim et al., 2021; Ang et al., 2021). In De la Fuente et al's. (2017) study of medical students they conclude there is a positive and linear correlation between students who adopt a deeper learning approach and demonstrate higher levels of resilience. Suggesting that those students who adopted more problem-focussed coping strategies had better resilience levels than those utilising more emotion focussed coping methods, thus leading to more successful outcomes. Similarly, studies by Denovan & Macaskill (2017) concluded that more problem focused coping strategies and positive adaption led to better wellbeing, resilience and success overall. All in all, both psychological resilience and academic resilience enables students to overcome barriers for learning, with contemporary literature advocating that coping strategies and resilience are interrelated and teachable skills, thus, demonstrating that resilience can be developed and learned (Ungar et al., 2017, Arat and Wong, 2019). Overall, resilience building is seen as essential to ensure retention of students both on their course and in the workplace. However, appreciation of how resilience is constituted from the HE student perspective is lacking, particularly the experiences of n-t students (Ang et al., 2021). From this, it may be concluded that empirical investigations into resilience will be useful for framing educational services and for developing student support practices in HE, particularly for the n-t student.

### **2.4: Summary**

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This review of the literature around resilience and academic resilience highlighted ambiguity around agreed definitions and articulations of the concept. Indeed, there were multiple, often conflicting, terms and definitions of resilience. This is known as 'jangle fallacy' (Kannangara et al., 2018), where existing definitions of resilience provided a variety of meanings depending on subjects, contexts and experiences. This absence of an agreed definition is seen as a limitation for previous, present and future studies, owing to inconsistencies in terminology, which can limit the researcher's capacity to build knowledge (Turner et al., 2016). This highlights the need for further conceptual research into this phenomenon.

Alongside ambiguous definitions of resilience, there are limitations in the existing literature around the resilience factors and coping strategies of n-t health students and the views of n-t graduates on resilience and success. It will therefore be interesting to gather the views of n-t graduates who have demonstrated academic resilience. This doctoral thesis aims to extend on the resilience evidence base, by exploring Sn-tAHSC graduate perspectives on resilience and coping mechanisms for successful degree completion, drawing upon Bourdieu's theoretical- methodological approach to explore this phenomenon, through concepts of 'habitus' 'capital', and 'field'. Thus, providing a conceptual framework for resilience from the n-t student perspective, exploring antecedents/ conditions, contingencies, causes, barriers to and outcomes of resilience under the domains of agency, habitus, field and capital. This conceptual framework will be used to develop a toolkit for n-t AHSC student resilience.

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## **Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods**

This research examines how n-tAHSC students articulate and develop academic resilience for successful outcomes on their undergraduate degree, exploring lived experiences of resilience and success at university through a Bourdieusian lens. Utilising these lived experiences to create a practical toolkit to support n-tAHSC resilience.

This chapter provides a rationale for the chosen methodology and methods used to address the aims of this study and research questions, including a justification of the underpinning research paradigm, the doctoral researcher's positioning and its relevance to this study.

The research questions that underpin this study are:

- RQ1:           How do Sn-tAHSC graduates articulate resilience?
- RQ2:           How do n-tAHSC students practice resilience?
- RQ3:           How can the intrapersonal and interpersonal resilience actions of n-tAHSC students be explained using Bourdieu's metatheory lenses of Habitus, field, capital and agency.

### **3.1 Researcher positionality, insider research and reflexivity**

I entered university as a non-traditional, first-generation, mature student and hence have a personal interest in this topic. Additionally, I am a senior lecturer in the AHSC department at the case study university and so my research provided further professional and academic interest. As I am employed at the case study university this research is classed as 'insider research' (Trowler, 2014). Being an insider researcher allowed for easy access to a unique group of past students, who openly discussed sensitive issues, such as resilience and coping to produce rich data. This openness occurred as a result of the trust and familiarity with the researcher. Additionally, having a case study site was advantageous for both access and hospitality (Crowe et al., 2011), for



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example, gatekeeper access was easily obtained, potentially through familiarity and trust in myself as the researcher.

Another benefit as an insider researcher was familiarity with the group's language and norms (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007). Having underpinning knowledge of the subject areas studied by the graduates enabled me to talk their language more freely, whilst appreciating general issues and struggles related to studying within an AHSC field, such as attrition and reasons for discontinuation. This produced additional benefits, as I could contribute knowledge and valuable insights back to the field, whilst applying this learning to my own studies. Hence, choosing a topic I was familiar with was advantageous for myself, the organisation and the department (McClintock, et al., 2003). As this thesis focused on resilience building for successful degree completion, the data provided transferable strategies for other programmes and indeed levels, such as resilience strategies for undergraduate level 4 students through to level 8 doctoral studies.

As well as knowledge of the degree programmes, as an AHSC lecturer I had a number of 'pre-understandings' of resilience, academic resilience and coping, viewed by Brannick and Coghlan (2007) as beneficial for developing research questions. My research questions were based on my understandings of the issues needing investigating in relation to n-tAHSC student resilience and the type of issues relevant to the case study university. Indeed, the pre-understandings which I had about the individual nature of student resilience and the uniqueness of AHSC students, enabled me to develop appropriate questions that challenged the 'one size fits all approach' of existing policy and processes, reflected in the Student Mental Health Charter (Student Minds, 2020a).

### **3.1.1: Reflexivity**

Despite 'insider research' having several benefits there were potential limitations to this approach, such as: researcher bias, role ambiguity, power differentials, influence over participants and implicit coercion, creating both ethical and methodological challenges for this research (Fleming, 2018). For

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example, Chavez (2008) advises caution in relation to potential researcher bias, where researcher's knowledge, experience and values could influence the research questions, design and data collection procedures. This has been reduced in this thesis through methodological rigour and transparency. Firstly, ensuring that the research questions were generated from both theory and practice was achieved by using the literature review and researcher knowledge, identifying limitations in the existing evidence base to inform the research questions. In turn giving this process more rigour, transparency and transferability to other contexts (Fleming, 2018). Additionally, Bourdieu's meta-theory thinking tool, allowed for more objectivity, where the data offered new insights far beyond existing knowledge and understandings of resilience and coping, providing a tool to deduct contextual, conditional and causal factors for n-tAHSC students' resilience and coping (see interview question frame in Appendix 1).

However, being both lecturer and researcher poses a number of challenges, as dual positioning can instigate role ambiguity for both students and researcher, which can create asymmetrical power relations and influence over participants decisions, often linked to implicit coercion (Fleming, 2018). Notably, as a lecturer in the university it could be perceived that the students lacked power in relation to myself. Consequently, for this thesis, past students were recruited, who were no longer reliant on myself for assignment support, marking or teaching, therefore negating some of the potential researcher power. Additionally, recruiting some students through Alumni services, helped to further alleviate potential coercion and selection bias.

In essence, having an existing rapport with the participants led to greater trust and acceptance of the researcher, which encouraged a willingness to share and provide rich data (Berger, 2013) However, there was a potential risk that this could have led to issues of role ambiguity and blurred lines of consent (Hinai, 2015). This arises when the researcher has existing knowledge of the participants backgrounds and makes assumptions relating to consent, based on information that has previously been shared between the researcher and the participant. Nunkoosing (2005) refers to this as 'the (im)possibility of consent

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when knowing is a problem'. However, this was managed through a 'no prior knowledge pretence' and informal member checking throughout the interview to ensure accuracy, explicit consent and continual monitoring of ethical practices by the researcher (Parsell et al., 2014). Furthermore, dependability has been increased through reflexivity and a disclosure of positioning as the insider researcher, acknowledging researcher assumptions, thus providing transparency and a deeper level of awareness of researcher views, values and potential bias and influence (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009).

Another ethical challenge arising from researcher and participant familiarity, is the potential for 'informant bias', where participants may overshare owing to the trust and rapport developed with the researcher. Similarly, there may be issues between truth and authenticity, where the participant may want to please the researcher and say what they think they want to hear or when the research may know different information to what the participant provides. Realistically, insider knowledge enabled authentic interpretation of what the participants said in relation to the situated nature of their individual experiences (Fleming, 2018). This meant what the participants said was less likely to be misunderstood or taken out of context. Furthermore, frequent member checking for ongoing consent ensured that participants were continuously aware of what they were sharing for this research project.

Additionally, there was risk that some things may have been left unsaid by the participants, owing to participants expectation that this would already be known. This was counterbalanced by reminding the participants of my capacity as a researcher, using a disclaimer similar to one described in a study by Chavez (2008) that encouraged participants to respond as if they were discussing the topics for the first time, allowing a more complete story to emerge (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). This was done at the beginning of the interview, where participants were asked to answer as authentically as possible and to forget their familiarity with the researcher.

Any concerns relating to researcher bias or blurred lines of consent have been managed through systematic methodological techniques and epistemological grounding (Bennett and Elman, 2006) discussed in more detail below.

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Moreover, reflexivity ensured transparency of the researcher's own values and beliefs to support the management of any researcher bias. Above all, the insider researcher 'pre-understandings' supported the generation of findings that were directly applicable to practice, whilst considering the implications of policy, thereby providing benefit for future students, alongside the wider university and beyond.

### **3.2: Philosophical perspectives: research paradigm, ontology, epistemology and theoretical perspectives**

#### **3.2.1 Research paradigm and ontology**

The ontological beliefs relating to this research project were shaped around philosophical assumptions that knowledge around n-tAHSC students should be derived from the lived experiences of individuals. Knowledge is socially constructed and formed by the individuals within that phenomenon, thus in order to understand it better one must consider the standpoint of the individuals involved (Bryman, 2004). Therefore, the ontological positioning of this thesis sits within the constructionism paradigm, where 'meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting' (Crotty, 2015, p. 43).

Constructionism allowed the objectivity of what was already known about academic resilience to be brought together with the subjectivity of the interpretations of the participants lived phenomena, something that Crotty (2015, p.52) refers to as reckoning with 'the social origin of meaning and the social character with which it is inevitably stamped'. Notably, social constructionism outlines the importance of social interactions and the interpretations made by human actors interacting in these social worlds, allowing individuals to enter a social 'milieu' where one inherits a 'system of significant symbols', thereby viewing the world through cultural lenses (Crotty, 2015). A notion in keeping with Bourdieu's epistemology and theoretical perspective of interpretivism, where reality needs to be interpreted through a number of lenses to discover underlying meaning (Maton, 2005).

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Whilst the constructionism paradigm provides appropriate approaches for addressing this research phenomena, constructionism itself is often criticised as being overly subjective, where 'social dimension of meaning is a centre stage (Crotty, 2015). Notably, the 'Constructivist grounded theory' approach meant this research could adopt a more inductive, comparative and emergent method (Chamaz, 2014), allowing the researcher to make sense of the meanings of others, whilst recognising their background as a 'successful n-t graduate and former student' shaped interpretations (Creswell, 2013).

Using both a 'grounded theory' approach (Charmaz, 2014, p. 113) and a Bourdieusian lens to interpret and analyse the findings, this constructivist approach enabled the construction of knowledge from the opinions and views of real people (Sn-tAHSC graduates who have achieved >2.2 classification in their undergraduate degree) asking 'what worked' (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003, p. 713) for resilience and coping from a field, habitus, capital and agentic perspective (Ormerod, 2006, Crotty, 2015). This thesis addresses a recognised void in research around resilience of n-tAHSC students (Wong and Chiu, 2019).

### **3.2.2 Epistemology**

In keeping with the constructivist paradigm, the epistemological positioning interprets the underlying meaning of events and activities that have led to successful degree outcomes for Sn-tAHSC graduates. Therefore, rejecting the notion that people should be studied like objects and involving the researcher with participants to develop unique understandings of the phenomena in their contexts (Sn-tAHSC graduates) (Rehman, 2016). By way of development towards a purer constructivist approach, where objective knowledge results from perspective (Charmaz, 2014), this thesis utilises Bourdieu's (1977b) Meta-Theory Framework to sort and organise data around the key contexts of agency, habitus, field and capital, exploring what works for whom and why. Thus, addressing the subjective limitations of constructionism by moving towards a more constructivist approach, where new theory is generated exploring contexts, conditions, causes and contingencies for n-tAHSC student resilience and success.

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### **3.3: Theoretical perspective**

#### **3.3.1: Bourdieu's meta-theory framework**

Meta-theory is a type of meta-analysis, a higher-order theory, which investigates, analyses, compares and evaluates other theories and ideas, allowing theory to evolve from other theory, otherwise known as the philosophy behind theory (Williamson, 2018). Bourdieu's meta-theory (1998) provided a frame for exploring, testing and structuring ideas within the phenomena of interest (Williamson, 2018). This research examines n-tAHSC students coping and resiliency strategies for success through Bourdieusian lenses, providing a theory-method tool for analysis of resilience and coping factors, identifying dialectical relationship between structure and agency from a Sn-tAHSC graduate perspective (Costa and Murphy, 2015).

Considering contemporary resilience theory alongside Bourdieu's approach counterbalanced some of Bourdieu's lack of attribution to agency (Sullivan, 2002; Cotton et al., 2017). As discussed in the literature review, contemporary research highlights that n-t students with limited educational and cultural capital can indeed thrive and flourish at university (Martin et al, 2013; Ungar et al., 2017). Therefore, utilising both resilience theory and Bourdieu's social perspective provided a more nuanced understanding of n-tAHSC students relationships with their institutions and the interplay of student agentic attributes such as psychological and familial dimensions on resilience and success (West, 2014). Thereby, generating new theories of resilience for n-tAHSC students.

#### **3.3.2: Components of Bourdieu's framework**

##### **3.3.2.1: Field**

The 'field' in Bourdieu's framework, is seen as the social space, where individuals struggle for positions and the integration of educational practice and objective structures (Harker et al., 1990). Notably, the university's disciplines or social arrangements consisted of social fields, each with their own logics of practice. In other words, a configuration of positions comprising various agents

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(individuals or groups) all struggling for positions of power within the field (Maton, 2005). Often referred to by Bourdieu as 'the game' (Lingard et al., 2005). Maton (2005) highlights how n-t students often struggle with the unfamiliar rules of the HE environment in comparison to their more 'traditional' peers, with HE educated parents who provide a knowledgeable reference for academic policies and processes (rules). This research acknowledges challenges that n-tAHSC students may face when navigating their way within the field, whilst considering the agentic properties of the n-t student that can factor in their success. Further, identifying potential barriers and enablers linked to the field, including power imbalances, economic positioning, structural context and environmental influences and how these can potentially constrain n-t students' ability to succeed in academia (Cotton et al., 2017; Azmitia et al., 2018; Woolf et al., 2019; Ang et al., 2021). Therefore, the concept of field was used as a thinking tool to appraise the supporting strategies and influences the institution may have over students' success and resilience. Whilst also considering the unique intrapersonal and interpersonal issues that a n-tAHSC student carries, alongside the structural barriers/ enablers of the field, such as the effects of policy, academic deadlines, curriculum/extra-curricular activities and services available to n-t students and how these impact resilience and success.

### **3.3.2.2: Habitus**

Bourdieu (1993) refers to habitus as an individual's history, with the habitus being both permeable and responsive to the actions going on around them (Reay et al., 2005). This means that although habitus is linked to early childhood experiences and socialisation within the family, it evolves with the individual's encounters with new environments. For this reason, n-t students are often reported to feel out of place in a HE environment, having a different habitus to the more 'traditional' A level route, middle class student, whose parents are also scholars, seen to have a more positive disposition towards education, through a more cultured habitus (Bourdieu, 1977a). Bourdieu believes this to be one of the reasons why n-t students can eliminate themselves from HE altogether (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). However, the

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notion of this deterministic cultured habitus' is being disproven with more students from n-t backgrounds entering HE and succeeding (Reay et al., 2005), demonstrating how adaptation and resilience can be mastered and nurtured by these students in unfamiliar fields. Indeed, King and Bruner (2000) criticise the lack of autonomy, agency and individual consciousness in deterministic habitus, even Bourdieu (1990) himself proposes that the habitus can be changed by circumstances.

The above implies that individuals from n-t backgrounds can learn to play the rules of academia and change predetermined dispositions to more positive views of academia and outcomes. Indeed, self-motivation, self-belief, self-scrutiny and self-improvement are seen as key factors for academic success throughout the contemporary literature (Cotton et al.; 2017; Smith et al., 2020). Using notions of habitus as a 'thinking tool' to understand the lived experience of non-traditional students, this research provides a better understanding of the underpinning actions of n-tAHSC student in the HE field, which contribute to their resilience and success capabilities.

### **3.3.2.3: Cultural capital**

Bourdieu's (1986) theory of Cultural Capital highlights many of the issues around n-t students and academic success. Linked to issues of inequality, students who are first in the family to go to university and of working-class origin (Maton, 2005), are seen to have limited cultural capital, including low levels of confidence in engaging with the language and rituals of HE such as academic writing ambiguity and conduct in seminars and professional placements (West, 2014). Although this theory is often contested (Calhoun et al., 1993; Sullivan, 2002), owing to its generalisations and lack of agency. Using a cultural capital lens, this thesis will explore the principle of cultural relativity, considering the cultural specific context of resilience (Ungar et al., 2017). Thus, developing an understanding of accepted cultural norms (capital) and legitimate forms of navigation and negotiation between individual agency and access to resources that support nt-AHSC students' resilience and their development of cultural capital in HE.



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#### **3.3.2.4: Social capital**

Social capital is often described as an individual's accumulation or network of institutional relationships, in other words membership of 'homogenous groups' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 88). This membership bolsters a sense of belongingness in the institution, seen as a key facilitating contingency for resilience in the literature (Chung et al., 2017; Azmatia, et al., 2018; Brewer et al., 2019). This indicates that social engagement and relationships within the institution may be a factor for resilience and ultimately academic success. Social capital was used as a tool to understand how n-t health students' social networks provided a way of fitting in and progressing their position in the field of HE, bolstering their resilience, leading to successful outcomes.

#### **3.3.2.5: Economic capital**

Economic capital refers to material assets and resources (namely financial resources for students). The impact of economic capital from a psychosocial interpretation emphasises the social meaning of economic difference and how limited economic capital can impact on stress levels and feelings of powerlessness (Pinxtens and Lievens, 2014). Accordingly, n-t students are more likely to face financial challenges inflated by other economic commitments, such as rent, mortgages and/or childcare costs (Macqueen, 2012). Applying economic capital as a 'thinking tool' allowed for deeper understanding around n-t health students' economic capital requirements to support resilience and success.

#### **3.3.2.6: Symbolic capital**

This fourth form of capital considered how the actors (n-t students) within the university field strived to improve their academic positioning in relation to other actors (Bourdieu, 1986) where a more favourable status was gained through the acquisition of symbolic capital. Akin to social recognition or reputation, symbolic capital is seen as the acquisition of the most worthy and beneficial other forms (social, cultural, economic) of capital from the field. Perceived and recognised as 'legitimate' by the actors within that field (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 17).

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This 'symbolic capital' amongst n-t students was recognised as knowledge of the university systems and processes that cultivated success, in other words having good academic writing, referencing and researching skills, good mental health, good relations with lecturers and peers, good study skills, being able to fully engage in learning and learning enhancement opportunities and/ or knowing where to seek support and help to develop these competencies.

Unfortunately, one of the limitations of Bourdieu's (1977b) meta theory is the overemphasis on structure, which can dilute the role of the individual (Burke and Scurry, 2019), however, knowing this limitation enabled a more unbiased approach to the data analysis. By using Bourdieu's meta theory alongside a Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2014) approach, new theories were generated, providing insight into n-tAHSC students coping and resiliency habits from an agency, habitus, field and capital context.

### **3.4 Research design**

The overall research aim was to gather Sn-tAHSC graduates' articulations and understandings of resilience, whilst exploring their views on factors and strategies that support resilience and success in HE. Therefore, the research questions required a qualitative approach in order to gain in-depth understandings of the factors that support resilience and success of n-tAHSC students from the recollections of recent Sn-tAHSC graduates. Qualitative research makes a substantial contribution to the understandings of resilience, where it has been utilised to explore the socio-cultural context in which resilience occurs (Ungar, et al., 2017). This makes it particularly relevant to holistic understandings of resilience from agentic, field, habitus, social, cultural, economic and cultural capital contexts (Bourdieu, 1990). This qualitative research design developed understandings of resilience-related phenomenon in specific contexts, which added power to the 'minority' voices (Ungar, et al., 2017) of recent Sn-tAHSC graduates' original recollections on coping, resilience and success as n-tAHSC students in the field of HE.

#### **3.4.1: Case study approach**

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As this research aimed to gather an in-depth appreciation of resilience and coping from a specific population (Sn-tAHSC graduates), a case study approach was deemed useful (Crowe et al., 2011) owing to its 'naturalistic design' allowing the phenomenon of n-tAHSC student resilience and success to be explored in its natural context. The case study's ultimate goal was to, 'uncover patterns, determine meanings, construct conclusions and build theory.' (Pattern & Appelboom, 2003, p. 67). Utilising an intrinsic (Stake, 1995) case study approach allowed an in-depth investigation of resilience strategies of past n-tAHSC students from one particular site (Yin, 1999; Green and Thorogood, 2009). This is seen as a particularly beneficial way of gathering data from relevant participants from a homogeneous group, which enabled the identification of causal processes to develop theory (Pearson et al., 2010). The case study university offers some of the best facilities for AHSC students in the country. Additionally, it has a large AHSC department with over 700 undergraduate students, many of whom enter university under non-traditional classifications, making this an ideal case study university for researching resilience needs of n-tAHSC students, as other institutions could have lacked some of these features.

### **3.4.2 Grounded theory approach**

Grounded Theory (GT) is a widely used qualitative method of social analysis that generates theory that is grounded in the data, in both health and educational fields (Thomas and James, 2006). The GT approach was deemed appropriate for this research as there was limited research around the phenomenon of n-t students' resilience and coping strategies in HE. Hence the aim was to produce a conceptual framework that identified resilience strategies of n-tAHSC students for success in Higher Education.

Constructivist GT's methodological approach focusses on how participants' construct meaning in relation to the area of inquiry. With the ontological positioning of this thesis lying within the constructionism paradigm, where 'meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting' (Crotty, 2015), Charmaz's (2006) Constructivist GT was deemed as the most suitable data analysis method as it allowed the creation of

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conceptual frameworks and theories, through building 'inductive analysis from the data' (Charmaz, 2006, p. 187).

This constructivist data analysis approach enabled knowledge construction from the opinions and views of real people (successful n-t graduates) asking 'what worked' (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003, p. 713). Furthermore, using a GT approach to analyse the data from the Sn-tAHSC graduate interviews, allowed for "initial coding" involving the identification of actions, feelings and descriptions of events (Charmaz, 2011, p. 173), where many codes were inductively generated and those that denoted actions transformed into gerunds (verbs ending in 'ing') (Saldana, 2014) (further details of the data analysis process can be found below in section 3.5.3 Data Analysis and examples of initial coding and gerunds can be found in Appendix 5). Initial coding allowed questions to be asked of the data such as: what does the data assume, suggest or pronounce? and what collectively might it represent? This allowed 'bracketing' (Tufford and Newman, 2012, p.80) of insider researcher bias and assumptions, by allowing more authentic inductive findings to emerge from the data. Indeed, it was this initial coding that generated intrapersonal agentic factors for resilience and coping to emerge from the participants' accounts.

From these initial codes more focussed coding transpired, where more abstract concepts were generated, allowing core categories to emerge through redefined categories that linked fragmented initial codes. Moreover, 'concept mapping' enabled analysis of the relationships between core categories to provide theoretical coding (Charmaz, 2014) (an example of concept mapping can be viewed in Appendix 7). Theoretical coding integrated and synthesised the categories derived from initial and focused coding to create a theory (Clarke, 2005). This new theory conceptualised resilience from the n-t student perspective, across domains of agency, habitus field and capital, eventually leading to the creating of a toolkit which could be used to support n-tAHSC student resilience.

### **3.4.3 Limitations to grounded theory**

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Despite the alleged panacea of alignment to the study's philosophical underpinnings and methodology, a number of limitations to GT data analysis approach were considered, prior to and during the data analysis phase. Firstly, G.T can oversimplify complex meanings and inter-relationships in the data (Thomas and James, 2006). To counterbalance this issue, the GT approach was used to elaborate on emerging concepts in the data, helping the researcher to develop understanding about the complex relationships, by asking the data "what is going on here?", "what are the major patterns?" and "what explains them?" (Conlon et al., 2015). Therefore, in the current study, analysing the data using a GT approach, enabled discovery of new meaning. Furthermore, revisiting the data over and over enabled patterns and relationships within and across the data to be recognised, resulting in interpretation and new insights into the field of resilience from a n-tAHSC student perspective.

A second concern presented by Thomas and James (2006) is that the complicated process of GT can constrain analysis, this is contested by Chun Tie et al. (2019) who argue that using the GT framework to make constant comparative analysis between codes and categories develops an iterative process involving inductive and deductive thinking, therefore providing a more epistemologically secure method than descriptive analysis (Thomas and James, 2006, Chamberlain-Salaun et al., 2013). This highlights the relevance of using the adapted axial coding framework, which guided the data analysis process (Charmaz, 2014) alongside Bourdieu's (1977) meta-theory framework. This allowed sorting and categorising of the data into relevant contexts (deductive approach), whilst still adopting an inductive approach where findings were led by the data. Additionally, using NVivo12 (QSR International Pty Ltd., 2018) to manage the data set supported the generating and organising of codes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Correspondingly, a final consideration for effective use of GT in this study was ensuring the appropriateness of GT methods, that aligned to the paradigm and methodology (Chun Tie et al., 2019). In other words, selecting the right GT genre (constructivist) and corresponding coding methods for the constructivist research paradigm (Birks and Mills, 2015). A constructivist GT approach aligned to the aims, ontology and iterative data

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analysis methods of this research, allowing the generation of new theory constructed from the opinions and views of successful n-t graduates.

### **3.5 Research Methods**

#### **3.5.1 Sampling and data collection processes**

##### **3.5.1.1: Sampling/ recruitment strategy**

The initial recruitment and sampling strategy implemented a non-probability, purposive convenience sampling method (Gray, 2018), recruiting Sn-tAHSC graduates via the university Alumni social media platform. Purposive sampling was deemed an appropriate method for qualitative research to identify and select knowledgeable individuals to provide information-rich cases, related to the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas et al., 2015). However, Alumni calls for participants only generated 5 volunteers. Subsequently an alternative purposive recruitment method was utilised. The researcher contacted Sn-tAHSC graduates through the ‘LinkedIn’ social media platform, where contacts had been maintained, thus providing an alternative ‘convenience’ sampling method (Gray, 2018) where n-t AHSC participants who fitted the inclusion criteria for the study were easily accessible to the researcher (Palinkas, et al., 2015).

All participants had shared knowledge and experience of undergraduate study and met specific inclusion and exclusion criteria in line with the research questions (Breckenridge and Jones, 2009). Relevant participants (n=40) were messaged through the researcher’s LinkedIn account, inviting them to voluntarily respond via email, should they wish to partake in the study, with an aim of recruiting a further 15 participants for optimal numbers (Rowley, 2012; Palinkas et al. 2015). The study was advertised to perspective participants via email, with a recruitment poster attached (see Appendix 4). Volunteers were asked to email if they were interested in taking part. A mutually convenient time for the 45 minute interview was agreed between participants and the researcher, prior to which participants were asked to read the participant information sheet (see Appendix 2) and sign and return the consent form.

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Participant Inclusion Criteria:

- AHSC graduates with a 2:1 or First-class honours degree.
- Graduated within 4 years of commencement of studies.
- Been a non-traditional (first-generation in family to go to university OR students from low-income households OR mature students 21years+ on entry to university OR disabled students OR students from minority ethnic/racial groups) AHSC student.

Overall, 20 n-tAHSC students were recruited via the University Alumni and Linked in social media platforms. These participants had successfully completed either nutrition and health, child health and wellbeing or health and social wellbeing AHSC degrees. These courses allow students to explore health in social, cultural, political and economic contexts, gaining an interdisciplinary perspective of the study of health whilst drawing on the disciplines of biology, sociology, psychology, social policy and nutrition (Case Study University, 2022). Predominately classroom based the programmes follow a unique pedagogy which includes: group working, lectures, classroom debate and discussion, problem-based learning. Outside of the classroom students undertake 120 hours of work-based learning (placement) to enhance employability, with additional fieldwork opportunities. All learning is supported and enhanced by a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) (Case Study University, 2022).

The table below (Table 3.1) provides an overview of each participant's reported demographical profile, including their undergraduate programme of study, awarded classification, age when they started their undergraduate degree, gender, identified non- traditional characteristics from the research participation information sheet and any other characteristics the participant identified with.

Table 3:1 Participant Demographics

Participant	AHSC Programmes studied at case study university	Classification	Age when started	Gender	Non-Traditional Student Characteristics	Other characteristics identified by participant
P1	BSc Child Health and Wellbeing MSc Child and Adolescent Mental Health and Wellbeing	1 <sup>st</sup> class honours	50	Female	Mature Student First generation student	Fast track entry A Parent Losing a close family member
P2	BSc Child Health and Wellbeing	2:1	47	Female	First generation student Student from low-income Mature Student	Fast track entry Dyslexia Single parent Physical health issues
P3	BSc Child Health and Wellbeing	1 <sup>st</sup> class honours	49	Female	First generation student Mature Student	Physical health issues Experiencing personal issues
P4	BSc Nutrition and Health	1 <sup>st</sup> class honours	30	Female	First generation student Mature Student	Working student parent
P5	BA Health and Social Wellbeing	1 <sup>st</sup> class honours	19	Female	First generation student	Experienced mental health issues at University
P6	BSc Health and Social Care for Individual Families and Communities (Not EHU)	2:1	22	Female	First generation student Mature Student	Working student
P7	BSc Child Health and Wellbeing	2:1	18	Female	First generation student Student from low-income	Working student Experienced mental health issues at University
P8	BSc Child Health and Wellbeing	1st	21 ½	Female	Mature Student Disabled student	Long term health issues Losing a close family member Experienced mental health issues at University homesick
P9	BSc Nutrition and Health	2:1	19	Female	Student from Minority Ethnic/ Racial Group	English is an additional language
P10	BSc Child Health and Wellbeing	1 <sup>st</sup> class honours	19	Female	First generation student	Experienced mental health issues at University
P11	BSc BioChemistry MSc Public Health Nutrition	1 <sup>st</sup> class honours	16 (Non UK Undergraduate )	Female	Student from Minority Ethnic/ Racial Group	Non UK University for undergrad study
P12	BSc Child Health and Wellbeing	1 <sup>st</sup> class honours	21	Female	First generation student	Dyslexia and Dyspraxia



Participant	AHSC Programmes studied at case study university	Classification	Age when started	Gender	Non-Traditional Student Characteristics	Other characteristics identified by participant
					Student from low-income Mature Student	Single Parent
P13	BSc Child Health and Wellbeing	1 <sup>st</sup> class honours	34	Female	First generation student Student from low-income Mature Student	Single Parent
P14	BSc Child Health and Wellbeing	1 <sup>st</sup> Class honours	28	Female	First generation student Mature Student	Single Parent
P15	BSc Child Health and Wellbeing	1 <sup>st</sup> Class honours	21	Female	Disabled student Mature Student	
P16	BSc Child Health and Wellbeing	2:1	24	Female	Mature Student First generation student Student from low-income	Single parent
P17	BSc Nutrition and Health	1 <sup>st</sup> Class honours	45	Male	First generation student Mature Student	Physical Health Issues
P18	BSc Nutrition and Health	1 <sup>st</sup> Class honours	41	Female	First generation student Student from low-income Mature Student	Did Access course Single Parent
P19	BSc Child Health and Wellbeing	1 <sup>st</sup> Class honours	18	Female	Disabled student	homesick
P20	BSc Nutrition and Health	1 <sup>st</sup> Class honours	28	Female	First generation student Student from low-income Mature Student Student from Minority Ethnic/ Racial Group	Financial challenges

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### 3.5.1.2: Data collection process

As data was collected during COVID-19 (coronavirus) lockdowns, where contact was restricted to individual households (GOV.UK, 2021), online 'Microsoft Teams' interviews were arranged with Sn-tAHSC graduate volunteers. The semi-structured online interviews allowed for open discussion of thoughts by participants and provided rich data, which is often not possible when using other research methods, such as questionnaires which can restrict participant responses (Mitchell and Chaboyer, 2010). Originally, telephone interviews were considered for safe data collection, as participants would feel more relaxed and able to speak openly about issues, owing to the perceived anonymity and increased privacy for respondents (Drabble et al., 2016). However, a potential limitation of telephone interviews was that they only provided audio communication, hence body language and other visual cues that indicate confusion or irritability could have been missed (Carr and Worth, 2001 cited in Musselwhite et al., 2007). Visual cues in communication were of particular relevance to this study exploring personal resilience, recognised as a sensitive topic area (Mealer and Jones, 2013). Therefore, using 'Microsoft Teams' videoconferencing platform, allowed for real-time interaction involving sound and video, providing multiple communication methods (Archibald et al., 2019), allowing visibility of the participants reactions and body language, in order to support the detection of any distress (discussed below under ethical considerations).

Overall, the online interviews were selected to minimise inconveniences, associated with in-person interviewing (Musselwhite et al., 2007), increasing interviewer and participant safety during Government restrictions for COVID-19 (coronavirus) social distancing (GOV.UK, 2021) and allowing greater flexibility for scheduling (Drabble et al., 2016).

Semi-structured interview questions were created using the existing student resilience literature and knowledge from the case study university resilience policy and practice. A frame was used to organise the research questions, where Bourdieu's meta-theory was used to structure the questions into agentic,

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habitus, field and capital considerations (Bourdieu, 1990) (see Appendix 1). Utilising theory and practice to inform questions allowed identification of gaps in existing knowledge, in order to examine n-tAHSC students 'lived experience' from a less biased perspective (Bryman, 2016). The semi-structured interviews consisted of multiple open ended 'main' questions (Bryman, 2001), supported by probes and prompts to enable the researcher to dig deeper and extract rich and more in-depth data. Thus, allowing unanticipated material to emerge during the interview, drawing out perceived causal factors and barriers to academic success, coping and resilience, addressing RQ 1-3 (Charmaz, 2014). The researcher conducted 20 interviews, which both Rowley (2012) and Guest et al. (2006) advocate as an optimal number when the aim is to understand common perceptions amongst a group of relatively homogenous individuals (Gray, 2018).

### **3.5.2 Data analysis**

According to Jorgenson (1989, p. 107) data analysis starts with "...breaking up, separating, or disassembling of research materials into pieces, parts, elements, or units". The overall aim is to reconstruct the data in a meaningful way to generate research driven theories (Hartley, 2004). Qualitative data from the interviews was analysed using a GT approach, using NVivo12 to organise the data and support the generating of initial codes from the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

#### **3.5.2.1: Transcribing and cleaning the data**

The audio recorded student interview data was transcribed verbatim, through Artificial Intelligence (AI) 'Microsoft Teams' and 'Otter' transcribing and recording applications. The data was then 'cleaned' (Chu and Ilylas, 2016, p. 1605) by checking transcripts against audio recordings and editing any misinterpreted data. Once cleaned these transcripts were imported in to NVivo12 (QSR International Pty Ltd., 2018) to organise and manage the data allowing codes to emerge (The Academic Triangle, 2015). Additionally, the use of NVivo 12 allowed safe management of the transcribed files, providing a

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forum for storage, structured analysis and interpretation of the data (Spencer et al., 2014).

### **3.5.2.2: Initial coding**

The “initial grounded theory coding” phase (Charmaz, 2011, p. 173) involved the identification of factors and strategies that according to the participants directly or indirectly promoted or inhibited resilience and success. This entailed reading the transcripts closely and coding line-by-line (by hand and in NVivo12- see Appendix 6) any emerging meaningful words, adopting an abstract, inductive method allowing the data to talk. Thereby remaining open to the data to reduce researcher bias, by refraining from inputting preconceived ideas into the analysis (Jackson and Bazely, 2019). A ‘gerund’ principle (Charmaz, 2014, p. 120) was used to initially code the data, where ‘action words’ were created by adding ‘ing’ to create ‘nodes’. Knowledge from new interviews was compared with existing codes to identify similarities and differences. These nodes were inputted and later organised in NVivo12 (examples of nodes can be viewed in Appendix 5).

### **3.5.2.3: Focused and Axial coding approach**

The next stage of coding involved more focused coding, which adopted two stages: sorting and recognising links in the initial codes, followed by an Axial coding approach, allowing honing of the analytical sense-making of the data, towards a more conceptual analysis. Here more frequently appearing codes were categorised, recognising patterns and links between initial codes and identifying the codes which were more significant to the research aims and questions. In NVivo12 (QSR International Pty Ltd., 2018) this involved merging initial codes into ‘child nodes’ (sub-categories) and categorising of initial codes and child nodes into top-level/ parent categories. This allowed condensing of the initial analysis into a more focused, synthesised analysis, thereby advancing the theoretical direction and conceptualisation of the data (Charmaz, 2014) (see hierarchical charts in Appendix 8).

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An Axial coding approach, adopted from Strauss and Corbin's (1998) 6 C's, allowed further analysis of the data, where relationships between conditions, processes (causes and contingencies) and outcomes were analysed. Utilising the 'coding stripes' function in NVivo 12 (QSR International Pty Ltd., 2018), segments of texts were examined to compare related categories and subcategories and concepts (Jakson and Bazeley, 2019). This provided a visual tool for exploring emergent concepts and clusters within categories and sub-categories (nodes), relating to one another and various participant demographics. Thus, allowing the data to be brought back together, whilst answering questions around the phenomena of resilience, such as when, why, who, how and what (Straus and Corbin, 1998). Thereby creating conceptual links around the conditions, causes and contingencies for resilience in n-tAHSC students. Moreover, the abduction of conditions, causes, contingencies and consequences allowed the data analysis to move beyond coding and themes to abductive reasoning, which provided a foundation for new hypotheses to emerge (Kelle, 2014). At times this process was daunting, particularly when assigning factors to causes, contingencies or even conditions. However, using the research literature to justify these decisions, whilst revisiting the data several times, resulted in new discoveries and inferences about subjective meanings of resilience and success. At this point the research felt unresolved and 'messy', which Law (2004) states is a normal part of the data analysis process, therefore at this point the data required further theoretical coding and organising.

#### **3.5.2.4: Theoretical coding**

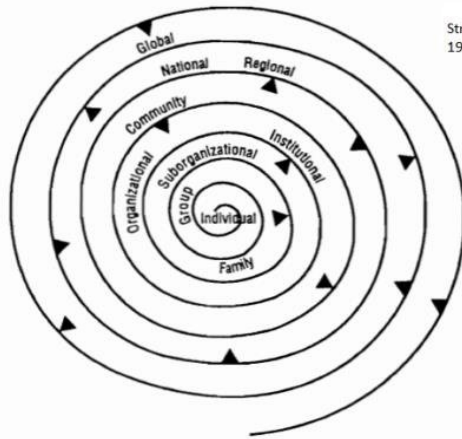
The final stage of coding involved abductive reasoning to look for theoretical explanations, using Bourdieu's (1990) metatheory lenses as a 'thinking tool', to further categorise and order the data into contexts (Charmaz, 2014). Caution was applied at this stage in order to prevent imposing of Bourdieu's lenses on the data, rather Bourdieu's meta-theory framework was used to organise and present a narrative of the conceptual relationships in the data in a theoretical manner. Thus, allowing more theoretical codes to breathe through the analysis rather than directly applying the framework to the data. Having insider

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knowledge of the relevant theories associated with resilience allowed appropriate selection of Bourdieu's (1990) thinking tool to allow relevant conditions, causes and contingencies relevant to n-tAHSC student resilience to emerge. Moreover, earlier 'concept mapping' enabled visual analysis of the relationships between various causes, contingencies and conditions for successful student outcomes, identifying causations within the data (Charmaz, 2014). This method was crucial in creating theoretical arguments from the unresolved 'messy' data (Law, 2004).

Insider status and knowledge of resilience proved to be beneficial during the abduction phase, enabling the creation of new knowledge from old knowledge (Kelle, 2014). Theoretical sorting allowed strengthening of the analysis further, by organising the data into emergent categories under Bourdieu's (1990) pillars of habitus, field and capital, alongside the 'agency' category that emerged independently through the data. These became the main contextual themes within the data, where more abstract thinking further developed a conceptual analysis of the conditions, causes and contingencies transpiring across agency, habitus, field and capital contexts. This conceptual thinking was aided by Strauss and Corbin's (1998) consequential matrix (Figure 3:1 below), used as a visual tool to guide diagrams and prompt considerations of the relationships between the macro and micro influences on n-tAHSC students' resilience. Applying Strauss and Corbin's (1998) matrix moved the data from describing phenomena through Bourdieu's lenses, to a more in-depth interpretive theoretical analysis.



Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 184

dark lines = evolving interaction  
 spaces between = sources of conditions/consequences which make up structure or context  
 arrows = intersection structure with process

Figure 12.1. The Conditional/Consequential Matrix (Represents constant interplay inter/action [process] with conditions/consequences [structure] and the dynamic evolving nature of events.)

Figure 3:1 Consequential Matrix from Strauss and Corbin (1998)

The consequential matrix was particularly useful for identifying the interplay between conditions, causes and contingencies for resilience in relation to n-tAHSC student resilience (figure 3.2 below).

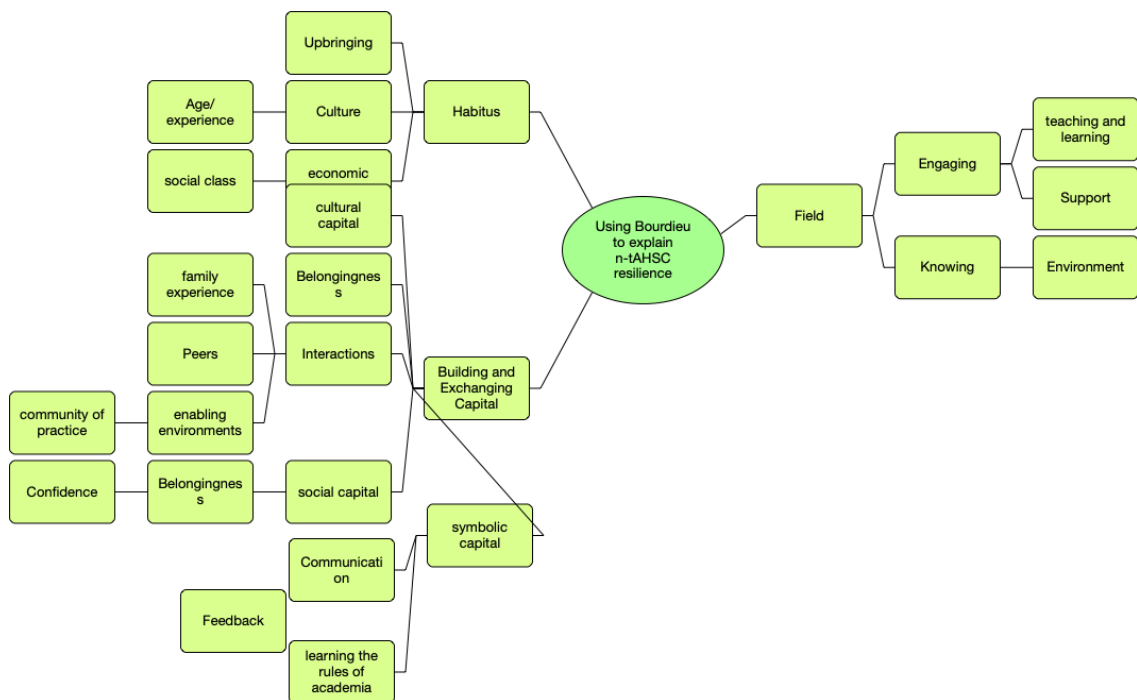


Figure 3:2 Concept Mapping for N-tAHSC Students Resilience Practice through Bourdieusian lenses Findings Theme 3

### 3.5.2.5: Recording and presenting the findings

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Throughout the study a researcher journal was kept, where case-based memos were recorded after each interview, highlighting initial impressions and key findings. Comparisons were then made between interviews and similarities/ discrepancies noted in the generated data. Conceptual memos were also created around the emerging initial codes and focussed coding decisions, here comparisons were made across the data, cases and codes, this in turn led to new questions to ask of the remaining participants, allowing emerging theoretical ideas to be tested (Charmaz, 2006).

The majority of findings are presented as a thematic narrative which includes the most relevant verbatim quotes for each theoretical concept. Diagrams taken from concept mapping during the data analysis provided a visual tool for explaining processes, decisions made and theoretical concepts. These diagrams are described by Williams and Keady (2012, p. 224) as the 'centre stage storyline' in a studied phenomenon, Urquhart (2013) extends this stating that diagrams/ tables of code groupings can act as a framework to guide readers and/ or researchers.

### **3.6 Ethical considerations**

In line with the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011), ethical approval for this research was sought from Lancaster University and registered with the case study university, prior to the collecting of data (see Appendix 3). Additionally, written gatekeeper permission was gained from the case study university's AHSC department.

As the research topic explored concepts of resilience and coping, it was recognised that participants may discuss sensitive issues, such as adversities they may have encountered prior to or during their academic journey and personal experiences/ disadvantages from being a n-t student. All of which, may have been distressing during the interview or afterwards. Therefore, participants' wellbeing was checked at regular intervals during the interviews and participants were observed for any signs of distress, asking if they wished to stop. Additionally, the participant information sheet (see Appendix 2) was circulated with a consent form prior to data collection. The participant



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information sheet included a link to online mental health and counselling support, [NHS mental helpline](#).

### **3.6.1: Consent**

A fundamental ethical consideration for the interviews was consent (Gray, 2018). Formal consent was sought prior to interview, where participants were emailed a copy of the participant information sheet (see Appendix 2) and consent form for perusal, 2 weeks prior to the interview taking place. Participants were asked to electronically sign or initial the consent form once they had read and understood the participant information sheet and agreed to take part in the research, returning the consent form prior to interview. Before the interview commenced on Microsoft Teams, participants were again asked to verbally consent to the interviews and the audio and video recording of the interview.

### **3.6.2: Confidentiality and anonymity**

Careful consideration was given to the extent to which confidentiality could be met in this study (Gray, 2018). It was decided that total anonymity may not be possible as lecturers from the case study university's AHSC department may read this thesis and possibly recognise issues related to former students. Therefore, total anonymity was not promised to participants, instead de-identification through the use of participant numbers was assured.

As interviews were recorded using video (Microsoft Teams) and audio mechanisms (Otter app on mobile phone), once transcribed all audio and video recordings were permanently deleted. Prior to transcription video files were stored on Microsoft Teams via a password protected account. All information collected in relation to this research will be destroyed within 10 years after the successful completion of the PhD *Viva* as per Lancaster University requirements.

### **3.7: Summary**

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This chapter provided a justification for the research design and its alignment to the research aims and questions. Reflexivity outlined the strengths and limitations of the researcher's position in relation to this research. The methodology and theoretical perspectives have also been examined, justifying the constructivist approach. Data analysis processes were discussed and ethical considerations outlined. The following chapters present the findings and outcomes of this qualitative study.

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## Chapter 4: Findings

This findings from this study conceptualise how n-tAHSC students articulate and develop academic resilience for successful outcomes on their undergraduate AHSC degree, exploring lived experiences of resilience and success at university through a Bourdieusian lens. These findings answer research questions 1-3:

RQ1 How do n-t AHSC graduates articulate resilience?

RQ2 How do n-t AHSC students practice resilience?

RQ3 How can the intrapersonal and interpersonal resilience actions of n-t AHSC students be explained using Bourdieu's metatheory lenses of Habitus, field, capital and agency.

In order to address RQ 1, the first section of these findings '4.1: Successful non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care graduates' articulations of resilience' provided data on students' initial articulations of resilience. Here 2 subthemes emerged: '4.1.1: Non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care students' challenges to resilience', '4.1.2: Successful non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care graduates' articulations of resilience'. With subsequent sub-themes of 4.1.2.1: Links between resilience, agency and coping from successful non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care graduate perspectives and '4.1.2.2: Coping styles and strategies.

RQ 2 is addressed in the second section of the findings '4.2: The conditions, causes and contingencies of non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care students resilience practice. In this section the contextual practice of n-tAHSC students' resilience is conceptualised into the agentic conditions, causes and contingencies. Here 3 main themes emerged: '4.2.1 Agentic intrapersonal conditions for resilience in non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care students', with two subthemes of: '4.2.1.1: Personality traits' (being stubborn, effective communicator, being motivated). The second theme, '4.2.2 Agentic intrapersonal contingency strategies for non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care student resilience', presents 2 sub-themes of '4.2.2.1: Developing a

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positive self-concept' and '4.2.2.2: Growth and development mindsets'. The final theme '4.2.3: Agentic intrapersonal causes of resilience in non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care students' had the subthemes of '4,2,3,1: Achieving goals' and 'Developing academic skills, achievement and overcoming challenges'.

RQ3 follows on from RQ2 and is addressed in the third section of the findings 4.3: Using Bourdieu's meta-theory lenses to explain non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care students intrapersonal and interpersonal resilience actions. Here Bourdieu's (1990) meta-theory framework provided a relevant sorting tool for analysing the data, where a relational and dualistic analysis was conducted, mapping relations within domains, as well as across domains of agency, habitus, field and capital (Swartz, 2008, Mohr, 2013). Supported by the application of Glaser's (1978) adapted 6 C's Axial coding to theoretically interpret and sort these findings into the conditions, causes and contingencies associated with n-tAHSC resilience. Three main themes emerged from the data: '4.3.1: The influence of habitus on non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care student resilience', with subthemes of '4.3.1.1: Upbringing, social class and culture', '4.3.1.2: Economic status', and '4.3.1.3: Age versus experience'. The second theme to emerge from RQ3 was '4.3.2: Influences from the field on non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care student resilience', where subthemes '4.3.2.1: Engaging with teaching and learning activities', '4.3.2.2: Support from the field' and '4.3.2.3: Knowing university' emerged. The final theme emerged from students' discussions around capital '4.3.3: Building and exchanging capital for resilience and success' where 3 sub-themes emerged: 4.3.3.1: Building and exchanging cultural capital as a facilitating contingency for resilience and success; '4.3.3.2: Building and exchanging social capital as a facilitating contingency for resilience and success' and 4.3.3.3: Building and exchanging symbolic capital as a facilitating contingency for resilience and success. Concept maps of the final categories/themes which emerged from the data can be viewed in Appendix 9.

Participants in this study were AHSC graduates from 4 different degree programmes Health and Social Wellbeing (2), Child Health and Wellbeing (12),

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Nutrition and Health (5) and Other (1). They identified as either mature (14), 1<sup>st</sup> generation students (14), low socioeconomic status (7), having disabilities (3) or minority ethnic (3) in line with the non-traditional categories provided. The full table of participants' demographic profiles (table 3:1) can be viewed in Chapter 3 Methodology, page 57.

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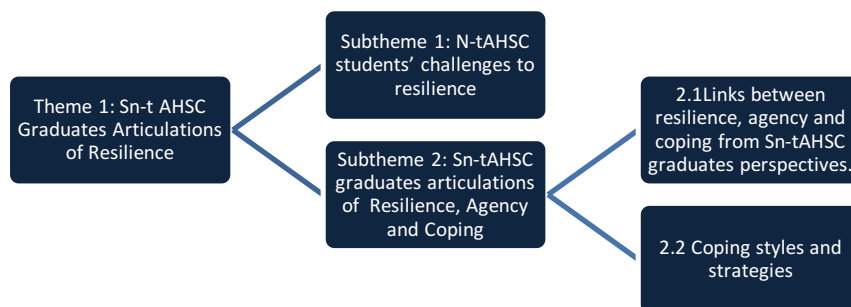
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## 4:1: Successful Non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care graduates' articulations of resilience

This first theme provides an analysis of the Sn-tAHSC graduate's definitions and articulations of resilience, particularly academic resilience, and coping, addressing research question 1:

RQ1: How do Sn-tAHSC graduates articulate resilience?

Figure 4:1 below provides a conceptual map of the subthemes and subsequent sub-themes for theme 1 Sn-t AHSC graduates articulations of resilience.



*Figure 4:1 Conceptual map of the subthemes and subsequent sub-themes for Theme 1 n-t AHSC Students Articulations of Resilience*

### 4.1.1: Non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care students' challenges to resilience

In their recollections, the Sn-tAHSC graduates openly discussed the constraining personal adversities and academic challenges they faced prior to and during their AHSC studies as n-tAHSC students. Whilst these issues presented challenges, participants discussed various strategies for overcoming and accepting these adversities.

Six participants disclosed personal adversities and challenges, including personal issues, such as relationship breakdowns, which had to either be accepted or ignored by the n-t AHSC student in order to progress in their

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studies or overcome in order to keep moving forward. For example, participant 3 disclosed how they continued to function through relationship issues:

...even though, you know there's stuff that goes on in my life that hasn't been easy to live with. I've still been able to function (P3).

This demonstrated an accepting/ persevering approach to coping in order to sustain academic resilience and success.

Wellbeing issues were also identified as constraining conditions, such as grieving, which was identified as an agentic constraining condition and mental health issues. These wellbeing issues were presented as agentic constraining causes that developed during university, often owing to the stress of university life and processes. For example, homesickness was identified as a constraining cause from the field as the act of going to university often triggered this wellbeing issue, as stated by participant 8:

To start off with I was very homesick at university, and struggled with that for about the first six to eight weeks (P8).

The next AHSC graduates also discussed agentic constraining conditions which students entered university with such as mental health issues.

Physical health issues (illness, disability) were also highlighted as personal agentic challenges by 6 participants, who spoke of physical ailments restricting their capacity to study. Consequences of physical health issues such as pain and lethargy were seen as barriers to engagement, whereas hospital admissions and procedures were viewed as time related constraining contingencies to academic resilience and success, which resulted in additional time being required for catch up study, expressed below by participant 17:

I had to go into hospital for about 10 days.... I.. miss[ed] graduating with my friends in the July, but..[I got] some extension time...I kept in contact with my tutors ..and I finished the modules...I got an extension on my dissertation I finished that, and...graduated in December... (P17).

This quote and other similar responses showed that whilst time in hospital added to length of study, students could still remain resilient and succeed by keeping communication channels open with lecturers and engaging with

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extensions and Exceptional Mitigating Circumstances (EMC) processes (facilitating contingencies). Extensions provide two additional weeks to complete the assessment, they are granted by module leads or personal tutors and require minimal evidence, whereas EMC processes at the case study university allow students to resubmit their work for uncapped grading at the next assessment point, these appeal decisions go to a panel and require extensive evidence.

Other personal challenges, such as financial issues, were highlighted as constraining conditions/causes, the implications of this ranged in severity from students experiencing food poverty, to students not feeling as well equipped for study, for example, having poorer specification laptops as their more affluent counterparts, or having to share electronic devices with other household members. This challenge was exacerbated during COVID-19 lockdowns and home schooling (Holmes and Burgess, 2021), conveyed by participant 2 when asked about the most stressful events at university:

I suppose working from home. Studying from home should I say, at the time I was home schooling \*\*\*\* my youngest son. He was sharing my laptop as well (P2).

The interview data highlighted how a lack of financial security was also a cause for 5 students needing to undertake paid work alongside study, a key risk factor for academic resilience in the literature (He et al., 2018; Hwang and Shin, 2018) and a constraining contingency on study time capacity. Participant 6 provided an example of this:

... in the final year when writing the dissertation. It was a lot of work alongside working part time as well. So, I did have to take some time off [from paid work]. To be able to do it (P6).

The final personal challenge discussed in the data was parenting, expressed by 7 participants as a constraining condition on study time capacity. Participants discussed issues with juggling childcare, part time work, university study and placement, in the example below participant 4 referred to all of these constraints:



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I worked evenings rather than days... giving me time while my children were at school, I had days to either attend university or do study during the day and on my nights off, I studied of an evening when the [children were] in bed. I secured volunteer work in Liverpool so it was sort of 45 minute to an hour drive, it was in a school, which made it difficult to...get back in time to pick my own children up. That was a little bit stressful trying to work around that but obviously I did it (P4).

Counterbalancing contingencies to support the childcare barrier included: time management strategies (similar to those mentioned above by participant 4); having good support networks; talking to lecturers and flexibility of the course, including not being timetabled for 5 days.

Academic challenges were discussed by 10 participants and included changes, poor academic outcomes, lack of confidence using technology and no prior knowledge of HE. These constraining conditions were overcome by participants exchanging knowledge with and gaining capital from peers or lecturers through social interactions as illustrated by participant 7:

...with the academic writing, you know, I might see [my lecturers] a lot. And I emailed them constantly asking for advice on it and the odd paragraph like how do I make this better...I believe...that was helpful, I constantly didn't mind asking for help (P7).

This highlighted how interpersonal interactions and communications can counterbalance academic barriers to academic resilience and success, through the development of knowledge of the university. The participant also broaches the subject of asking to gain additional knowledge, a strategy linked to confidence and extroversion in the literature (Power, 2017). This suggests a facilitating condition of extroversion is required for effective communication, a potential contingency for inculcating social capital and support from the field.

Additional learning needs, dyslexia, dyspraxia and English as an additional language were also identified as academic challenges, with the majority of students accessing effective support available from the university. This further demonstrates that accessing relevant support for academic challenges is a counterbalancing contingency for resilience and success.

#### **4.1.2: Successful Non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care graduates' articulations of resilience**

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Out of the 20 student participants, only 7 defined academic resilience as 'bouncing back', a phrase often associated with psychological resilience (Denovan and Macaskill, 2017; Smith et al., 2020), aligning with dictionary definitions from Latin origin *resilio*, meaning to 'jump back' (Mohaupt, 2009, p. 63).

This is highlighted below in Participant 2's interpretation of academic resilience:

...it's bouncing back from something that you found difficult, not letting it get the better over you, so to speak (P2).

This response was reflected in six other students' definitions of resilience as a universal agentic capability to overcome adversities, correspondingly, Participant 18 indirectly referred to the nuance of bouncing back by stating:

...it's getting back up when you've been knocked down (P18).

The data highlighted that slightly less than half of the participants with mature characteristics (6/14) and two thirds of those with disabled characteristics (2/3) referred to resilience as overcoming adversities, which often reflected their own experiences of overcoming challenges. Early definitions pertain to beliefs that resilience is an agentic operational function (Olsson et al., 2003), which enables the individual to function after experiencing adversities. This implies that mature and disabled n-tAHSC students' previous experiences of overcoming adversities and challenges is a facilitating condition for overcoming constraining adversities and challenges to academic success.

Two mature 1<sup>st</sup> generation Sn-tAHSC graduates, who had experienced personal relationship adversities, altered the bouncing back definition to a bouncing forward concept, where they stated that they did not necessarily want to go back, to where they were before any adversity/challenge, instead they wanted to move forward and progress. Thereby, addressing adversities or accepting difficult situations and persevering with studies, in order to progress and achieve.

...bouncing forward" (in-Vivo code) almost you're not actually bouncing back because I don't necessarily want to go back, I want to keep.... I ... want to stand still for a bit and then move forward... (P3).

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This corresponded with other 'growth' type definitions from 5 participants (with mature, 1<sup>st</sup> generation, low income and/or minority ethnic characteristics), where resilience was seen as progressing forwards towards goals, for example P16 commented:

...if I start something I've got to finish it, it's like a personal goal for me. So, once I put my mind to something I'll carry on (P16).

This growth mindset view of resilience supports the views of Garrett (2015), where achievement and working towards goals provide counterbalancing mechanisms (facilitating contingencies) to deal with adversities. This was conveyed in participant 11's response as she highlighted the relationship between the university, setting goals for herself, and achieving, indicating how a developing sense of agency and independence can support resilience and goal attainment:

[The university] ...made me be more goal oriented too. So yeah, like I could set goals for myself and meet it because, you know, nobody's going to chase you to submit your assignments or you know come for lectures, but you knew you had to do that, like you have to .... you have to do that to achieve something, so I think University made me more responsible (P11).

These early articulations highlighted the interrelatedness of having a growth mindset and being goal orientated, where students with a positive self-concept (facilitating condition) and a growth mindset (facilitating cause) had a goal orientated consequence. This suggests goal orientation and growth mindsets can be seen as both consequences and facilitating causes for resilience and success.

Corresponding with this achievement orientated resilience, participant 17 advocated that the end goal should take precedence over other matters, implying that sacrifice is a facilitating contingency of goal/achievement orientated resilience.

This is the goal now (the degree programme) this is the most important thing, and [I'll have to make] sacrifices to achieve it (P17).

This notion is explored in more depth in subsequent themes.

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#### **4.1.2.1: Links between resilience, agency and coping from successful non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care graduates' perspectives**

This subtheme emerged from the participants definitions of resilience, in which they discussed the interrelated nature of coping and resilience. Within this subtheme coping styles and strategies most suited to n-tAHSC students emerged from the data.

In keeping with goal achievement, 55 percent (n=11) of the participants characterised resilience as perseverance and carrying on, these definitions were often linked to finding strength and keeping fighting, despite challenges or adversities. Here persevering is classed as a facilitating cause of resilience and finding strength a facilitating contingency for perseverance, articulated concisely by participant 11:

I think resilience is finding the strength to continue on something, even when it's not looking good. Or it's tough and difficult (P11).

These notions of resilience as a functional skill were linked to an implicit sense of agency, where the individual felt a sense of control over their reactions to challenges and an ability to cope and overcome difficulty (Moore et al, 2012). Indeed, in their initial definitions of resilience 6 participants (30%) identified an association between resilience and coping, a well know interrelated concept within psychology (Van der Hallen et al., 2020). An example of this interrelated resilience and coping definition is provided by participant 7 below:

...how you deal with things like how well you cope, like in stressful situations more so, like when you feel under pressure. When you say someone's resilient, it's kind of like they cope more than someone who isn't (P7).

Thereby recognising coping as both a cause of resilience (being able to cope) and a consequence of resilience (coping). Similarly, 25% (n=5) participants defined resilience as an ability to overcome or deal with adversities/challenging situations for example:

...being able to overcome barriers that you may face when doing things (P6).

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This strongly correlates with a problem-focussed style of coping detailed below.

#### **4.1.2.2: Coping styles and strategies**

Coping is conceptualised generically as both an intentional and automatic response to stress (Skinner and Wellborn, 1994) and coping strategies are seen as, “cognitive, emotional or behavioural response to stress associated with a particular function, e.g., calming down or solving the problem” (Stanislawski, 2019, p. 5). Coping styles reflect the preferred coping strategies typically used by an individual in stressful situations (Carver, et al., 1989; Endler & Parker, 1999). From the data three main classifications of coping styles and strategies used by the Sn-tAHSC graduates emerged, ‘taking action and adapting’, ‘avoidance, distraction and acceptance’ and ‘supported coping’.

The resilience definitions of overcoming/dealing with challenges can be linked to ‘Problem-focussed Coping’ (PFC) strategies (facilitating contingencies) for resilience (Carver et al., 1989), where nt-AHSC students developed problem-focussed coping strategies to overcome personal adversities and/or academic challenges. One pertinent example of this came from Sn-tAHSC graduate 15’s account of their problem-focussed coping as a way of overcoming lower than anticipated grades:

...and, you know, if you do get a not so good grade, okay well I'm not happy with that and I'm going to be determined enough to think okay well how can I improve it? and improve it...(P15).

Here the participant moves beyond acceptance of the set-back, considering strategies for growth and development, a facilitating condition for resilience, (Howell, et al., 2018). This ability to tolerate feedback alongside having the capacity and tenacity to carry on and grow from an experience demonstrated an active growth type of resilience, allowing for continuation of learning despite barriers (Vaccaro et al., 2018; Lutovac, 2019).

The majority of participants adopted taking action and adapting strategies to overcome issues, resonating with problem focused coping (PFC) theory (Carver et al., 1989; Stanisławski, 2019; Alonsa-Tapia et al., 2019). For example, working strategically, seeking appropriate support for challenges or academic

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issues and adapting in response to the support offered. Under the emergent nuance of taking action and adapting, causal relationships were identified around students who sought support for challenges and adversities and continuing to work towards goals. Thus, this highlights the interrelated nature of intrapersonal conditions and interpersonal contingencies adopted by n-t students for resilience and success.

### ***Avoidance, distraction and acceptance coping***

Other emergent resiliency definitions demonstrated a more accepting/persevering approach to coping and managing adversities/challenges, similar to definitions from Carver et al.'s (1989) COPE model of 'Emotion-Focussed coping – acceptance' style of coping.

Here participants either avoided thinking about the issue, prioritised other things or accepted difficulties or challenges and moved on. There is much debate around whether this type of coping is actually emotion-focused avoidance coping or is itself a problem-focussed solution (Stanisławski, 2019), as finding distractions, taking a break from learning and/or accepting uncontrollable situations and moving on are often seen as problem-focussed solutions. Skinner et al. (2003), p. 227 stated that "most ways of coping can serve both functions and thus could fit into both categories". This was apparent within the data as participants talked about how they overcame challenges by taking time out and then going back to their studies with a fresh mindset, such as participant 1:

...knowing when to take a break, when to go out, get some fresh air and the simple things... Escape when I need to get away and clear my head definitely (P1).

Other participants discussed how they would accept situations that they did not have control over, an example of this type of response in the data, is given below from participant 14:

...you know, rub it off and keep going, just, you know, accept what's happened, but don't let it stop you (P14).

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However, this type of coping did not remove, reduce or address the challenge, instead n-tAHSC students became distracted from the challenges with course work and other goals. This type of coping is viewed as harmful in the literature as individuals do not resolve the emotional turmoil from the challenges (Carver et al., 1989). Instead, they prioritise other things, often leaving the issue to manifest in the background, which can cause later problems (Parker and Endler, 1992).

### ***Supported coping***

Supported coping was seen as an emotion focussed type of coping, where participants diverged from previous examples of problem focussed coping that involved seeking appropriate support, such as counselling or academic guidance, to more emotion focussed support strategies such as sharing burdens with friends or family, crying and breaking down. This style of coping was not seen as helpful, instead presenting constraining barriers to resilience and interpersonal support:

...and it got to the point where they just, they just kind of got disinterested, because I was moaning about the same thing and crying about the same thing every day that they couldn't fix, because I wasn't taking action (P14).

Here the participant openly admitted that friends were unable able to 'fix' her issues and yet she still persisted in approaching them with her problem. This type of coping can be related to Parker and Endler's (1992, p. 326) social diversion coping, where the individual tries to "lose himself or herself" by being with other persons rather than confronting the stressful situational task".

### **4.1.3: Summary – Successful non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care graduates' articulations of resilience**

In keeping with the resilience literature this research has demonstrated how n-tAHSC students adopt different coping strategies for various situations, the literature emphasises that coping effectiveness depends on the intensity of an experience, the individuals' skill set and developmental consequences (Vaccaro et al, 2018). In order to fully analyse these coping styles details of the varying

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degrees and severity of adversities, need to be accounted with individual regard for socio-political contexts, such as economic positioning, family structures/upbringing, social networks and political landscapes (Ungar, 2015). These authentic accounts in the data suggest that the individual could shut out their emotional, social self and remain unaffected by adversities. Yet, these students had all discussed struggles and challenges that they had experienced alongside their studies, suggesting that n-tAHSC students have high levels of personal resilience which is impactful on their academic resilience, success and coping.

These definitions of agentic intrapersonal resilience factors provided a conflicting notion with earlier Bourdieusian (1974) thinking, that according to Sullivan (2002) fails to attribute agency as a facilitating factor for acquiring educational capital. However, as the interviews progressed participants alluded to more interpersonal strategies from habitus, field and capital concepts, alongside agentic intrapersonal factors for supporting resilience. Thereby indicating a more interrelated nuance of interpersonal and intrapersonal influences on resilience across the domains of agency, habitus, field and capital.



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## **4.2: The conditions, causes and contingencies of non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care students resilience practice**

In relation to research question 2, the Sn-tAHSC graduates provided their authentic perspectives on how they as n-tAHSC students practiced resilience. These agentic actions were coded in NVivo under intrapersonal conditions, causes and contingency for n-tAHSC student resilience. Agency is characterised within the resilience literature as, “the personal initiative needed to acquire knowledge and to develop skill” (Reeve, Cheon & Yu, 2020). The 20 Sn-tAHSC graduates all discussed concepts of agency in relation to their resilience and success, with subthemes emerging: ‘Agentic Intrapersonal Conditions for Resilience in n-tAHSC students’, ‘Agentic Intrapersonal Contingency Strategies for Resilience in n-tAHSC Students’, and ‘Agentic Intrapersonal Causes of Resilience in n-tAHSC Students’.

Figure 4:2 below provides a conceptual diagram of the subthemes and subsequent sub-themes for theme 2 showing the conditions, contingencies and causes for resilience in n-tAHSC students.

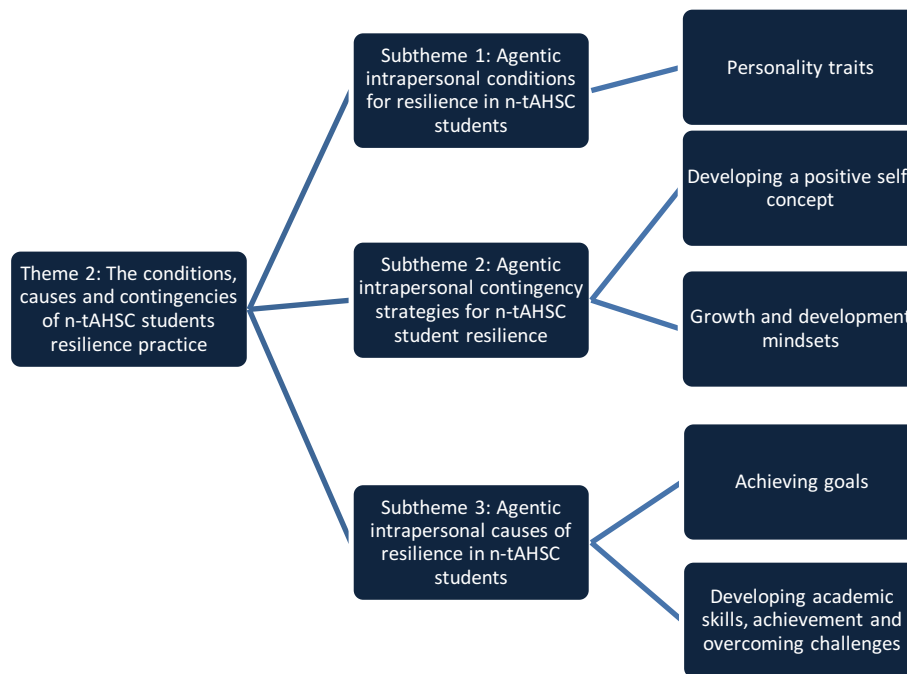


Figure 4:2 Conceptual diagram of the conditions, causes and contingencies for resilience in n-tAHSC students

#### 4.2.1: Agentic intrapersonal conditions for resilience in non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care students

Agentic intrapersonal resilience is defined as internal perceptions and/or characteristics that allow the individual to believe in/ have the ability to cope with stress, enabling them to persevere and continue with life tasks, even in the face of adversity (Schaffner, 2021). Within the data certain personality traits, positive self-concepts and growth mindsets were seen as facilitating conditions of resilience.

##### 4.2.1.1: Personality traits

Sixteen participants indicated relationships between certain personality traits and resilience in their definitions, highlighting a link between one's operational abilities and personality characteristics. These personality traits are labelled here as intrapersonal conditions as they are agentic antecedent behaviours for resilience. The first personality trait identified by the participants was being stubborn, where participants discussed their stubborn natures as key to their resilience and success:

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...I think because like I'm quite stubborn. I don't really like giving up on things (P7).

The stubborn nature of these participants was seen as a key driver for remaining on course with academic tasks and goals, as this personality trait did not allow them to give up on their goal or be dissuaded or distracted from completing the programme.

A subsequent personality trait (condition) of 'being an effective communicator' also emerged from the data, discussed by 8 participants, in similar ways to participant 15 below:

[resilience strategies] ...obviously communicating with the lecturers.... or, you know, speaking to other people as well I found worked with me, you know, just kind of like sharing ideas...(P15).

This suggestion of sharing ideas with peers is linked to interpersonal connections (discussed in more detail below) and the relational recurrent theme of being an effective communicator as an agentic condition. Thereby demonstrating that the intrapersonal condition of 'effective communicator' supports student interactions, where individuals can share ideas, which can be seen as a precursor to exchanging capital and seeking support. A potential limitation of this theory is the need for confidence to potentiate effective communication, as without confidence and a certain amount of extroversion communication can be internally stifled by the sender (Power, 2017).

A third personality quality was being motivated, where 9 participants vocalised their feelings about having an inner drive and motivation to succeed, expressed succinctly by participant 1 below:

...it [resilience] needs motivation and staying power (P1).

Here motivation was seen as both a facilitating condition and contingency for resilience, indeed the literature highlights motivation can direct and encourage resilience as well as support resilient persistence and sustainability (Woolfolk, 2019). Intrinsic motivation, where participants were completing tasks for enjoyment and pleasure to satisfy their own wishes (Cerasoli, et al., 2014), were referred to less frequently in the data. Actually, intrinsic motivation was

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only discussed by participants 1, 13 and 18, who revealed a genuine interest in the degree subject, wanting to complete the degree for themselves, with no external pressures of employment. In fact, participant 1 was looking for self-actualisation prior to retirement and participants 13 and 18 left their job to study:

It was lovely to feel like I was with people that understood, and, you know, and to be actually studying the subject was mind blowing I used to be, you know, and I still do think I'm incredibly lucky to be studying the thing that I'm most passionate about (P18).

Self-motivation was also stated as a contingency strategy to support resilience by participants 15 and 18:

...you just have to get on with it but that's self-motivation, so I just used to say, so just go and do 100 words. (P18).

I just think, to me it [self-motivation] comes naturally...I've gone on about this a lot but you've got to want it yourself (P15).

The distinction between self-motivation and extrinsic motivation, was often blurred as participants often discussed grade outcomes and attainment as the motivational factor, an example of this is given by participant 15:

I think mainly for me, it was once I had that feedback from the draft, that was my, you know, my like determination and then .... it can come together and it is possible...it's what helped me really. So, I wouldn't say specifically within me, but obviously events that happened, like...staying in touch and having that draft date, you know, having a final deadline so to speak. Sort of give you that, inner motivation and determination to continue really (P15).

Here motivation is described as an intrinsic concept, yet the student is motivated by an external output, where their behaviour is intended to produce a desired outcome, in this instance achievement (Karlen et al., 2019). One might question here whether all motivation in higher education must therefore be extrinsic. This phenomenon is explained by Biggs (1987) who states that when students are studying to achieve grade outcomes, they are indeed demonstrating extrinsic motivational behaviour, whereas when a student is studying to develop their knowledge of a subject and satisfy their inner desires for competence in a particular subject, it can be seen as intrinsic motivation. Thus, this supports earlier analysis within the data that only those students wishing to further their knowledge about the subject are truly intrinsically

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motivated. However, with the majority of the participants striving for successful degree outcomes, it is suggested that the original facilitating condition was intrinsic motivation, which then developed into a facilitating contingency of extrinsic motivation towards achievement goals. Therefore, these findings demonstrate the interrelationship between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, determination and academic resilience and success.

#### **4.2.2: Agentic intrapersonal contingency strategies for non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care student resilience**

The above resilience conditions were expressed alongside facilitating resilience strategies, where a number of agentic contingencies were suggested for overcoming challenges and barriers, including developing positive self-concepts, reflecting and addressing issues, working harder and pushing self, developing self-awareness and managing own mental health.

##### **4.2.2.1: Developing a positive self-concept**

Self-concept emerged as an intrapersonal agentic contingency for resilience and success, owing to its broad conceptual construct encompassing learner behaviours, beliefs and motivations. Self-concept has been researched across diverse learning environments, where an individual's self-belief drives learner engagement, motivation, attitudes and ultimately success (Jaap et al., 2007; Mercer, 2011). It is defined across the literature as ones' self-perception, having both negative and positive associations with willingness to communicate, anxiety, imposter syndrome, self-esteem and self-image. A positive self-concept can develop and grow over time with the right conditioning, consequently positive self-concept was presented in the data as both a facilitating contingency and condition for resilience.

In the interviews 7 out of the 14 mature participants advocated the benefits of a positive mindset as a key driver for resilience, coping and success. Discussing positive self-concept as a precursor for "bounce back ability", participant 15 provided a pertinent example:

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...having that...determination and, you know, willing to think... actually it's not bad always, I would say definitely...[supports] a bounce back ability (p15).

Similarly, determination was proposed as a motivator for resilience, amongst 5 of the mature Sn-tAHSC graduates, 7 first-generation n-tAHSC graduate participants and 2 Sn-tAHSC graduates with disabilities, stating how they were determined not to give up as they really wanted the degree, similar to participant 19:

I think I was quite determined, I didn't want to give up and...I knew that I wanted to get a degree...I was determined to see the three years through, that helped me keep going (P19).

Here positive mindset is seen as a concept that can be self-governed by the individual, this was affirmed by participant 14:

You need to take this action by yourself (P14).

Suggesting that a positive self-concept, motivation and determination are intrapersonal facilitating contingencies for resilience. An example of the interrelatedness of the positive mindset as a facilitating condition for resilience and contingencies of reflection, making sense, addressing issues and the facilitating cause of continuing to work towards goals (goal orientation) for academic resilience and success consequences was given by participant 3:

...having that ability to be able to stop and reflect ... and then make sense of whatever might be troubling you, or causing the issue...Finding ways of being able to address whatever those issues are. so that they don't become debilitating in any way, so that you can still move on with your, you know towards your goal (P3).

Again, the facilitating condition to support these causes and conditions was having a positive mindset. Four participants highlighted how this facilitating nuance could be developed through self-awareness and motivation (example from participant 9 below):

I think it's a matter of self- awareness and motivation from others as well, in keeping a positive mind regardless (P9).

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This suggests a positive mindset can be developed through self-awareness and motivation from self and others, providing a relational model of positive mindset as both a condition and contingency for intrapersonal resilience.

#### **4.2.2.2: Growth and development mindsets**

The growth and development theory emerged from the data as a potential contingency strategy for overcoming self-doubt and other barriers, where a positive growth mindset was advocated as a self-regulating mechanism for resilience and success. Often referred to as the concept of 'possible selves', defined by Bak (2015, p. 650) as 'an element of self-knowledge', where individuals develop a perception of their possible future selves and potential. This is advocated across the resilience literature as a positive resource for optimising student resilience and ultimately success, as belief in self can optimise achievement (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). This concept differs to the aforementioned positive self- concept as it considers beyond the present self to the future self. Participant 14 articulated how this positive growth mindset allowed them to overcome barriers and drove them towards their success:

...and then just kind of my...my dedication to just... or my commitment maybe to know where I want to go and achieve as best I can, not let anything get in the way though. Whatever obstacles kind of get in my way, I'll just make sure that, like I jump through hoops to get past them (P14).

Seven Sn-tAHSC graduates (mature, first generation, minority ethnic), who advocated a growth mindset as a key driver for resilience and success, were able to appreciate future opportunities that their degree might bring, thus providing a strong sense of purpose for their studies, for example, participant 13 stated:

...it was much bigger than that because I wanted to, I want to and I am...helping families (P13).

Additionally, 4 participants expressed how having an interest in the course topic and enjoying learning further supported a growth mindset, implying that interest in the course is another key factor for resilience. Whilst participant 5, 9 and 20 appreciated the universality of AHSC degrees and their applicability to various

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fields, providing open ended growth potential, example from participant 5 below:

The degree itself is applicable to so many different fields it has taught me a foundation of knowledge that I could take to so many different fields. Well, you could pretty much go anywhere in health and social care, and to me that's a real asset for the course (P5).

However, this open-ended growth could potentially impact negatively on the n-tAHSC students' identity, according to Lave and Wenger (1991) a student develops their identity through learning and through the learning process the student identity shifts and realigns. The concern here lies with the open nature of the programme and whether this could cause ambiguity in relation to the student identity. These findings can also be linked to liminal space theory (van-Gennep, 1960; Turner, 1969), where the n-tAHSC student enters the liminal space of university in order to grow and develop their knowledge and skills and enter the new space of an n-tAHSC graduate in the world of multi-disciplinary work (Field & Morgan-Klein, 2010; Blanchfield, 2021). Within this liminal space of AHSC discourse and discipline the n-tAHSC student develops new knowledge, thus transforming from their prior self to the new n-tAHSC graduate (Meyer and Land, 2005). During this transition, the student must shed their old identity in order to take on their new form, the period where the student is between forms is called the 'liminal state' (Goethe, 2003). This 'liminal state' can be problematic for students when there are barriers or uncertainty around progression and final destinations. This is of particular concern in this study owing to the 'liquid' space of AHSC, where destinies are shaped and transformed by the learner (Meyer and Land, 2005) It is therefore important that students are supported to develop clear academic and career goals, through knowledge of the course and career pathways available to Sn-tAHSC graduates.

Being goal orientated was seen as a facilitating cause for resilience and a growth mindset by participants, with participant 9 explaining the interrelatedness of having goals, perseverance, growth mindsets and resilience:



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...having the goal in mind in the end, you know, the end picture in mind... It helped as well...being visual about why I'm here in the first place, kept me going in spite of the challenges (P9).

This suggests that the growth mindset can also reduce imposter syndrome mindsets, a concept discussed within the literature, which often affects n-t students, where an individual feels out of place in an environment, owing to feelings of incompetence, which can manifest into a fear of how others might judge their academic capabilities (Haktanir et al., 2018). Imposter syndrome is also linked to symbolic violence (Foster and Spencer, 2010; Folleso, 2015 & Nairz-Wirth et al., 2017), where individuals are made to feel incompetent by their peers, teacher or self-view of their capabilities. A sense of belonging can counteract these feelings, which can be strengthened through social integration; however, socialisation can be difficult for the n-tAHSC student, especially those with caring responsibilities or work commitments (Chapman, et al., 2015). Here future hopes provided grounding for participant 9, allowing the vision of her future self to drive her towards completion, despite challenges. This coincides with ideas from the literature, where individuals build resilience through a more positive academic self-concept, resulting in better adjustment to university (Haktanir et al., 2018). This idea was confirmed by participant 17 who discussed how academic achievement in their second year fed their growth mindset:

So, when I went to uni, I never for one minute thought I'd get a first, but my target was a two, one. And then as I got going on the second year I thought I think I can do a first, if I keep going (P17).

This further demonstrated the relationship between growth mindset, achievement and resilience and successful outcomes.

#### **4.2.3: Agentic intrapersonal causes of resilience in non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care students**

The agentic causes of n-tAHSC resilience that emerged from the data, included: achieving goals, development of academic skills, achievement and overcoming challenges.

##### **4.2.3.1: Achieving goals**

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A number of participants discussed the driving factors for achieving goals, for example, the university environment, giving up paid work and having children. Participant 11 discussed how university itself made her more goal orientated and in return more responsible for her own destiny:

It made me be more goal oriented too. So yeah, like I could set goals for myself and meet it because, you know, nobody's going to chase you to submit your assignments or you know come for lectures, but you knew you had to do that, like you have to...you have to do that to achieve something so I think university made me more responsible (P11).

Whilst participant 17 discussed how giving up paid work made him more goal orientated:

You drive yourself as well I didn't want to be, you know at the back of your mind you think I've left a well-paid job, and if I don't do it now it's a failure. It's what have I done it for (17).

Additionally, planning and organising were seen as important contingency strategies for goal attainment, for two mature participants with children, participant 13 elaborated:

...planning my time. So that I could dedicate time to study and then obviously dedicate time to being a parent, and not having to worry or stress thinking, whilst I'm trying to do things with my son I've got a million things in my mind (P13).

Where there were barriers to goal attainment, 6 participants discussed the need to address these issues, participant 3 expressed this succinctly:

Finding ways of being able to address whatever those issues are so that they don't become debilitating in any way so that you can still move on with your, you know towards your goal...(P3).

#### **4.2.3.2: Developing academic skills, achievement and overcoming challenges**

The development of academic skills was highlighted as an agentic cause of resilience and a contingency to support growth, resilience and ultimately success, such as: proofreading; researching; referencing; academic writing and time management. University itself was also seen as a key driver for resilience, through successfully managing challenges by 4 of the participants.

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Half of the participants (n=10) recognised achievement and completing as positive outcomes of developing academic skills, consequently these outcomes could also be viewed as facilitating causes for resilience and success.

Participant 3 described this as “seeing the fruits” of their strategies. Similarly, another stated:

...[achieving] helps with your resilience actually, because when you see that it's kind of like a belief in yourself that you can do it (P18).

Drafts were seen as an additional mechanism for supporting the achievement cause by fourteen participants, as was fear of failure, a negative concept across most disciplines, expressed by 3 participants, as a positive driver for resilience and success, stated below by participant 17:

So really, a lot of things that drives me is that fear of failing really, once I start something. Whatever it takes, I've got to get to the end of it (P17).

Similarly, participant 5 expressed her dislike of submitting substandard work as an innate drive for optimal achievement:

I don't like submitting things that are kind of below my normal standard or if I don't feel happy with something or if I don't feel like I fully understood something...then I'm not happy submitting it or I feel very, very uneasy until...I understand sort of what's going on (P5).

All of these responses implied that barriers could be addressed by the individual, thus suggesting resilience is an adaptive activity performed when needed at the micro (individual) level. This was affirmed by participant 9 and 13's blasé comments, which implied that overcoming challenges as an individual is an everyday part of university life:

...the challenge will pass it's just, it's part of the phase you have to go through (P9).

...resilience is completely not allowing something to affect you in a physical or mental way, but I think it's being able to deal with it and saying right okay yeah that was really hard. I'm going to be sad for a day or I'm gonna be in a strop for a day, but then I'm going to pick myself up and get back on with it (P13).

Indeed participant 9 believed that resilience itself is built through these challenges:

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...and [through] the challenges, the resilience cues are built (P9).

These responses implied that whilst challenges can be constraining barriers to resilience, overcoming them can be a facilitating cause of resilience, particularly when conquered with facilitating conditions, causes, contingencies of a positive concept, positive growth mindset and academic skills.

#### **4.2.4: Summary - The conditions, causes and contingencies of non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care students resilience**

These resilience practices all placed agentic responsibility on the individual to deal with challenges and adversities, with the goal being to keep going, progress and achieve, regardless of any constraining issues. This is in keeping with a functional concept of resilience linked to positive psychology theory, where individuals develop personal attributes to cope with adversities (Seligman, 2002). In answering research question 2 the data shows how n-tAHSC students agentially practice resilience, conceptualised under conditions, causes and contingencies. Within the n-tAHSC perceptions there were emerging causal and relational ideas between personality traits, students' motivation, communication skills, willingness to seek support and coping strategies and resilience. There were also relationships between goals, drive and ability to envisage the future. However, these agentic binary accounts of resilience fail to acknowledge interrelated interpersonal factors from more meso and macro levels. Therefore, the next research question (RQ3) below provides a more systemic view of n-tAHSC students resilience practice, explained using Bourdieu's metatheory, which explores the interpersonal factors of resilience under domains of habitus, field and acquirable capital perspectives.

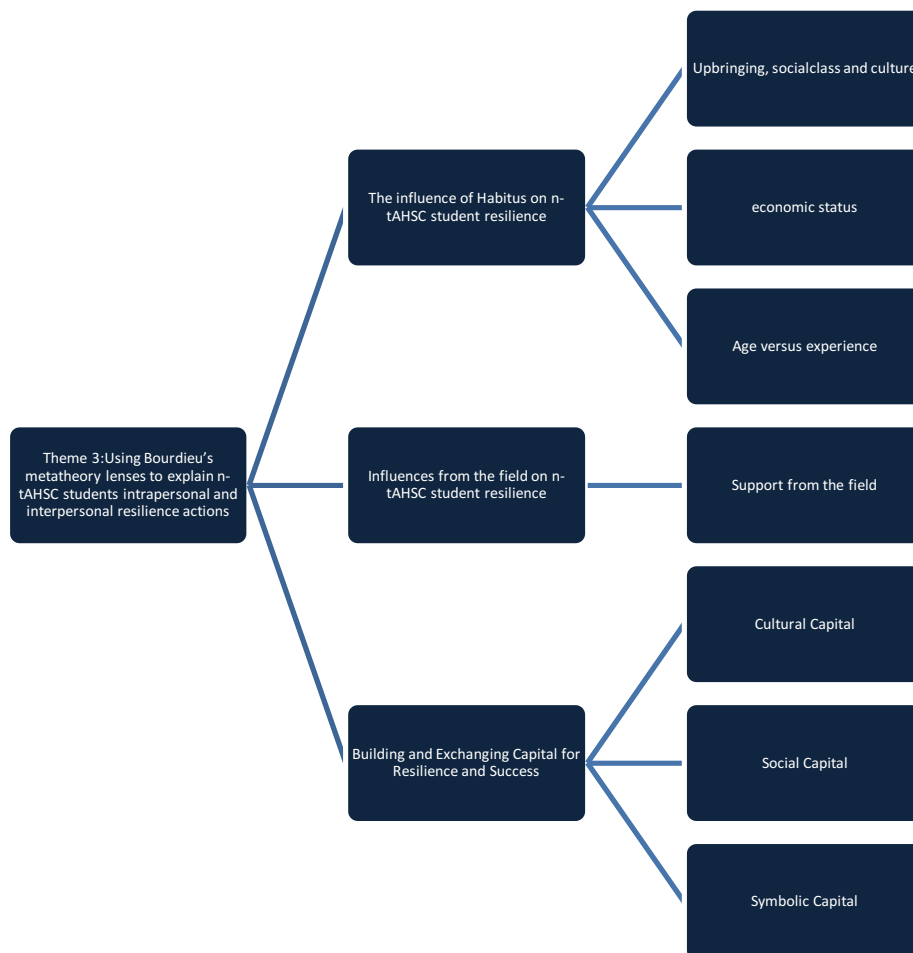
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### 4.3: Using Bourdieu's meta-theory lenses to explain non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care students' intrapersonal and interpersonal resilience actions.

In relation to research question 3, Bourdieu's meta-theory lenses have been used to explain how n-tAHSC student's practiced resilience. Here the resilience actions of n-tAHSC students have been explained using Bourdieu's domains of habitus, field and capital. Figure 4:3 below provides a conceptual diagram of the subthemes and subsequent sub-themes for theme 3 using Bourdieu's metatheory lenses to explain n-tAHSC students intrapersonal and interpersonal resilience actions.

RQ3: How can the intrapersonal and interpersonal resilience actions of n-t AHSC students be explained, using Bourdieu's metatheory lenses of habitus, field, capital and agency?



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*Figure 4:3 Conceptual diagram of theme 3 using Bourdieu's metatheory lenses to explain n-tAHSC students intrapersonal and interpersonal resilience actions subthemes and subsequent sub-themes*

### **4.3.1: The influence of habitus on non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care students' resilience**

Habitus is central to Bourdieu's theoretical framework, associating individual agentic actions to their historical social structures, for example class, gender, education, historical time period, culture and ethnicity. Whilst these social structures do not necessarily determine an individual's behaviour, the individual acts in accordance with their inculcated habitus, particularly their primary childhood habitus (Reay, 1995). Within the data references were made to upbringing, social class, culture, economic status and age, highlighting how these factors facilitated or constrained the participant's resilience, reaffirming how habitus is both a product of social structure and the producer of practice and reproducer of structure (Bourdieu, 1979).

#### **4.3.1.1: Upbringing, social class and culture**

When participants felt their upbringing was too strict or over protective, this was recognised as a barrier to resilience and facing challenges at university, as the n-tAHSC student was not exposed to risks in childhood. Thus, implying that resilience can be developed and learned through experiences prior to university. This was reaffirmed in a positive manner by 11 participants, who highlighted positive upbringings as a resilience builder. An example of this was given by participant 2, who expressed how her resilient attitude had been passed down from her father:

I remember my Dad used to always say to me.... Brush yourself up...pull your socks up and tell yourself you can do it. That's always stuck with me, and even now with my children if they say they can't do it. I'll say you can do it. You don't know until you try (P2).

Social class emerged as both a facilitator and a constraint to resilience, coping and success within the data, with 5 participants reflecting on how their middle-class habitus provided a driving force for their success. Interestingly there was a divide of opinions from students from a working-class background, where half

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(n=4) felt this was a driver for improving their own fortunes through education, whilst others, believed low socioeconomic status was a barrier to a positive self-concept and growth mindset.

Culture was seen as a positive condition for resilience by 3 of the students, who identified as minority ethnic students. These students felt that living a soberer life allowed for less socialising and more time to study. Correspondingly religion was seen as a facilitating contingency, where 4 students found solace during challenging times, through prayer. Thus, suggesting that religion itself can be a strategy for resilience as it provides coping mechanisms such as prayer, alongside a sense of community. Participant 9 advocated how the church provided her with a sense of community membership, a facilitating contingency for resilience:

To me, church as well because that's where I connect and meet people it stopped me from like thinking..I haven't got my family here, because I, I kind of like moved like four hours away from home. So it was smart, you know, keeping in touch with people I share similar views...beat and things like that, you know really helped (P9).

These findings showed that culture and religion are viewed as coping strategies by n-t AHSC students, where prayer can be a coping strategy and individuals can find community support to strengthen their resilience. Therefore, universities should inculcate environments that facilitate religion and cultural activities for n-tAHSC students.

#### **4.3.1.2: Economic status**

Economic status was identified in the data as both a facilitating condition, where students entered university with sufficient funds/ economic support mechanisms and a facilitating contingency, where finances could be earned or claimed. Economic security came from both the individual's habitus, students with supportive families and existing part time jobs, and support from the field such as student funding, finance and benefits or opportunities to work at the university. Regardless of where this capital came from, 8 students, who were in a financially secure position, could access extra-curricular opportunities and

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resources to support their learning more freely, participant 1 emphasised how their financial position influenced their decision to come to university:

...from a financial perspective. I had no problems. You know, money's never been a worry... I wouldn't have done it [the degree] otherwise (P1).

While participant 7 discussed how being from a low economic household meant she had to work through university, which was a barrier to extra-curricular activities such as placement. This barrier was often overlooked in placement and programme expectations and policies as highlighted in her response below:

I feel like, yeah, maybe understanding finances a bit better for some students and that some may need to work... stuff like that can be better (P7).

These findings suggest that financial security is an enabler for academic resilience and engagement and that more regard for students' financial situations should be considered in programme design and implementation, particularly for programmes with a placement element.

#### **4.3.1.3: Age versus experience**

In relation to age, the majority of mature participants (n=13) discussed advantages of being older and knowing what they wanted from university in terms of careers and/or a springboard for professional status (teaching, nursing, midwifery, social work). Out of the total number of successful n-tAHSC participants (n=20), fifteen were mature entry students. Over half of the mature participants (n=9) proclaimed to have a growth mindset, where they could picture their future self and success, this in turn provided clear expectations for themselves as students. Both of these factors can be seen as facilitating contingencies for academic resilience. Therefore, maturity itself can be seen as a facilitating condition for academic resilience and success.

Alongside these positive facilitations, 7 participants discussed negative age constraints on resilience and success, such as family structure and juggling childcare and university. Additionally, 3 participants discussed discrimination in



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the form of ageism, with participant 3 and 1 experiencing ageism from peers.

Participant 3 explains this below:

...the only negative thing that could be classed as possibly being a barrier was the attitudes of some of the younger students...that if I'd really taken it to heart, may have encouraged me to ... not to turn up to lectures, but I had to, I suppose I was conscious of having to rise above it (P3).

This highlights how covert discrimination in the university classroom can be a potential barrier to engagement and academic resilience and success, highlighting the need for skilled and observant pedagogues who can challenge discrimination.

Whilst habitus and agency are central to Bourdieu's (1990) meta theory, an individual's practice (in this instance successful nt-AHSC university students learning, resilience and achievement) was seen throughout the data as the outcome of the interrelationship between enabling factors from individual agency, habitus, capital and field (Swartz, 2008). The other two themes that emerged from the data in relation to RQ3 'Influences from the field on n-tAHSC student resilience' and 'Building and exchanging capital for resilience and success' demonstrate this relationship in more detail.

#### **4.3.2 Influences from the field on non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care student resilience**

At the macro level,

*'Fields denote arenas of production, circulation, and appropriation of goods, services, knowledge or status, and the competitive positions held by actors in their struggle to accumulate and monopolise these different kinds of capital'* (Swartz, 1997, p. 117).

The wider field of this research is HE, with the researched field being the case study university itself and its activities and services. The AHSC department is an arena within the case study university. This theme emerged through linking nodes (Engaging in learning, Accessing support and Knowing university) pertaining to interpersonal resilience building strategies from within the

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university environment itself, these nodes are encompassed in the sub-themes below.

#### **4.3.2.1: Engaging with teaching and learning activities**

Engagement in university activities was seen as a key influence on academic resilience and success overall by 70 % (n=14) of the participants of which 71% (n=10) participants were mature students. The data implies that mature students are more likely to attend lectures, possibly owing to their heightened level of motivation and 'last chance attitude'. This was discussed by participant 17 (mature student):

You drive yourself as well I didn't want to be, you know at the back of your mind you think I've left a well-paid job, and if I don't do it now it's a failure. It's what have I done it for (P17).

Engagement activities included attending and engaging in lectures, reading and researching, attending meetings with lecturers and engaging with feedback.

Participant 18 discussed the benefits of engaging in lectures:

...for me I treated it like a full-time job and I accessed everything and engaged with all the sessions... I think as a mature student, I realised that this was going to be an important opportunity...when I got the first-class honours. I think it proved to everyone that actually what I did was, was right, you know, so, because it's like I said, you get the opportunity once for a lot of people anyway (P18).

Contrastingly, participant 15 highlighted the constraints which discouraged them from attending certain lectures more than others:

Sometimes, lectures that I think, you know... [have too] much academic tone it's I don't know [off putting] and someone puts it in a tone, that you know is more friendly and on a more personal level, you're going to want to listen to that more (P15).

A more personal, less academic tone of lecture was seen to develop confidence more, leading to increased enjoyment of the module. This was reaffirmed by participant 5 who struggled to understand one particular module that she claimed was, 'taught at a very high standard' (P5), possibly at too high a level for a first- year undergraduate course, which affected her enjoyment of learning and thus impacted on her grade for that particular module. This

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suggests an interrelationship between enjoyment, understanding and achieving, with enjoyment being a facilitating contingency for engagement - a facilitating cause for academic resilience and success.

Whilst participants recognised the benefits of engaging in lectures, many discussed the constraining barriers to engagement. These included negative lecturer attitudes, personal adversities and health issues, discrimination, COVID-19, travel implications, placements and work constraints, negative self-concept and under achieving.

Negative lecturer attitudes were discussed by 4 participants as barriers to engaging with academic support, with some lecturers working differently to others. For example, Participant 13 highlighted differences in lecturer attitude in relation to feedback and support:

...they [certain lecturers] weren't as encouraging and they were quite harsh at times (P13).

Correspondingly, a constraining factor of judgemental attitude from certain lecturers was highlighted. Participant 7 and 12 discussed how they would feel more at ease approaching lecturers who were more in tune with the needs of the students and possibly trained in Mental Health First Aid, with reasons being articulated by participant 7:

...have more teachers trained in Mental Health First Aid... I know some tutors .. as soon as a student mentions anxiety they get that stereotypical mindset sometimes and, you know, straight away when someone's judging you, and they'll just look at you sometimes like you're lazy and that's why you need an extension (p7).

Other individual and environmental challenges to engagement emerged from the data, demonstrating the interrelated nature of intrapersonal constraining factors and interpersonal environmental influences from the field. For example, intrapersonal issues such as bereavement, homesickness, single parenting/parenting responsibilities and divorce/relationship issues, were highlighted as barriers to engagement, which in turn were seen as barriers to academic resilience and success. Additionally, the emotive nature of some of the topics studied in the applied degree were also seen as a trigger for evoking

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3 participants own mental health issues. Financial challenges were discussed by 9 Sn-tAHSC graduates, with participant 20 highlighting that financial issues are often a part of n-tAHSC student life:

...financial struggles are always going to be, you know, there for most students (P20).

Negative self-concept regarding academic capabilities and struggling with academic content at times were highlighted as constraining conditions and causes for resilience and success by 6 participants. Participant 1 disclosed how she struggled to cope with the academic challenges at times and would often cry about this:

I was struggling so much. I'm literally just sat at home Monday and cried and cried and cried...Erm and that would be a real challenge then if I was already struggling with [other aspects of the degree (P1).

Other participants discussed struggling with low marks during their course, falling behind with studies, transitioning between levels, presentations and deadlines. For example, participant 5 expressed that they were 'panicking a week before deadlines'. Whilst participant 18 highlighted the impact of low marks during her second year of undergraduate study:

...when we went back after second year. I remember in the January where I cried for about two days I got the lowest mark I've ever got. ...and I just suddenly thought I'm done I can't do it, I cried for two days, and then I kind of pulled myself together and I was just was like okay, it doesn't actually matter what you get, just do it, just prove to yourself that you can do it. So, I did it (p18).

The data revealed how different environmental factors provided different barriers to engagement, with COVID-19 and missing face-to-face sessions, alongside feeling isolated and home schooling, emerging as environmental constraining barriers to engagement. Technical issues were also identified as a constraining condition/contingency by 4 students, ranging from lack of IT knowledge to technical breakdowns and having to share laptops. Prior to COVID-19, 4 participants discussed travel issues, with two students having to get 2 or more trains or busses to university and another student having to drive 45 minutes to 1 hour for a volunteering/ placement opportunity. This

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environmental constraint impacted on student's time and independent study capacity, compared to their more local counterparts. Indeed, placements were another constraining factor for engagement, causing additional stress for 7 students particularly those with children (n=4). Participant 4 and 7 expressed this as juggling:

...[doing placement] while fitting in sort of work and childcare and juggling everything around it (P4).

These issues were seen as barriers to learning, however owing to the resilient nature of successful nt-AHSC students these became challenges that the student overcame through facilitating counterbalancing strategies (developing academic skills, making positive peer relations, engaging with feedback, seeking support for academic work or mental health issues and effective support from the field, either through personal tutor/ lecturer support, library services, wellbeing or counselling services or careers. This was articulated succinctly by participant 19:

...and I had quite a difficult family circumstance while I was at uni, so I accesses the counselling support as well [as personal tutor], which was really, really good (P19).

This demonstrates that successful students know how and where to access support.

#### **4.3.2.2: Support from the field**

Support for resilience and overcoming aforementioned constraining causes and conditions was discussed by all participants, whether they had personally accessed formal support services, such as wellbeing (n=4), learning support (n=3), library services (n=4), student services (n=4) or engaged with more informal support from lecturers and personal tutors (n=12), family and friends (n=14), or peers (n=10). The majority of participants felt that formal university support for wellbeing and mental health was easy to access (n=12) as was academic and financial support. Although participant 5 felt that more frequent reminders about how to access various services would have been beneficial:

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We're told about everything that's available on day one, and then you know in year two we've completely forgotten that little booklet that we were given about wellbeing or whatever (P5).

Thus, services were not as visual or well-advertised as they should have been.

In relation to accessing wellbeing or other support, 14 participants discussed how the personal tutor or lecturer was seen as a starting point for support or a sign posting resource, often enabled by open door procedures, for example participant 10 stated:

I spoke to tutors and they sign posted me to counselling (P10).

This implies that students may not feel confident in approaching the services directly, conflicting with student autonomy, which was recognised in the data (theme 2) as a key facilitator of agency in resilience and success. Two students felt that varying tutor support could be a constraining variance to this resilience mechanism and seeking support for wellbeing:

I've not always felt as supported at times as at other times, think it very much depends on the tutors that you're dealing with (P1).

This thereby highlights the need for consistent support and advice from all tutors.

Interestingly 5 participants felt that services for mental health/ wellbeing and library support were well advertised around campus and via email. This may be reflective of the period which students studied, as mental health has been brought to the forefront of university agendas over the past five years. Another constraining mechanism was highlighted by students who approached wellbeing services and were often faced with long waiting lists:

...the health and wellbeing team..is packed and always like jammed up. It was very.. hard to get to see them. I think I tried to go and see them once and they told me it was gonna (sic) be like three months, wait (P10).

This negative experience may have occurred owing to a particularly busy period for the wellbeing team, an idea reaffirmed in the data by participant 10, who discussed another student's experience with wellbeing service:

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...[perhaps] it was a busier time when they went for support or if counselling wasn't the right thing for them (P10).

Similarly, there was a negative response regarding learning services support from participant 12 who talked about the service being out of touch with current affairs in her discipline:

I don't know just out of touch I think...I'll never forget it...she told me to put this word and I remember thinking, I'm sure that words not right. And I remember [my tutor] pulling me on it and it was like, a word that shouldn't be used anymore (P12).

Participants 5, 10 and 12 suggested a more person-centred approach was needed, that adapted to the diverse needs of students to counterbalance some of these constraints, expressed by participant 5:

I suppose just a more person-centred approach [to services] you know, not everything fits everybody (P5).

These findings allude to a more social model for resilience, with a focus on connectedness and community support from the field, a notion in keeping with recommendations for a more social prescribing approach (Bostock, 2018; Shaddick, 2019). This move would take universities away from the traditional one size fits all model of reactive student mental health support services, to a more proactive student led focus on social prescribing and wellbeing. Here the use of student voice would be essential for the success of more holistic student-centred support, where students engage with wellbeing services most suited to their needs, for example chaplains, residential hubs, career development and social groups.

The university environment itself was seen as a resilience facilitator by 16 participants, articulated in detail by participant 15, a student with disabilities:

...going to university was a different world, because it was very much like you can do it and we will get through it. So, I'd say, not so much in terms of social or cultural, but I'd say definitely for me personally, you know, in terms of my background and my needs and things it was just, just I'd say a different world and a different way of looking at it, definitely, because it wasn't, you can't. It was like okay, you can (P15).

Flexible understanding from the university was seen as a facilitating cause of this resilience mechanism by participant 4 and having a sense of belonging was

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highlighted as a facilitating contingency by participant 20, despite living off campus. They attributed this to being involved with the university, thereby having more of an insight into available services (belongingness is discussed in more detail in subtheme 4.3).

#### **4.3.2.3: Knowing university**

This subcategory of 'knowing university' emerged from the data as participants discussed the relationship between knowledge of the university and resilience (He et al., 2018; Hwang and Shin, 2018). In keeping with Bourdieu's (1979) concept of knowledge and power, a key habitus builder, where habitus can be created and reproduced unconsciously through social processes and the structure of the specific context of the university (field). Within the data participants highlighted how knowing the services, activities and products of the university was a key facilitator for building resilience. This in turn developed their social, cultural and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986, 1989).

Participants discussed the importance of understanding the systems in place and navigating these systems, alongside the importance of having clear expectations of university life and study. Correspondingly, participants 3 and 6 highlighted the importance of knowing what to expect and knowing the timetable, enabling deadlines to be met thorough careful planning:

What was really important was that I had...a clear understanding of the timetable (P3).

Additionally, participants 9 and 20 advocated how working on campus developed their 'insider knowledge' about the university:

Well I knew because of my jobs on campus I knew a lot of people that were not in my erm, you know, were not studying my course, across the three years at university even knew some Masters students, from my jobs, so I've heard about it and I knew how to access it from other people so it would have been very easy for me to do that if I needed to (P20).

Participants 7 and 9 also advocated the connecting benefits of participating in societies to develop knowledge of the university, a facilitating contingency in keeping with the social prescribing model for wellbeing, discussed earlier.



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Contrastingly first-generation participants commented that a lack of knowledge about the field was a constraint to their resilience, as did participant 8 who highlighted an additional constraint of being out of education system for a period of time, a notion expressed by 6 other mature participants. However, lack of knowledge of the field was not an exclusive concept to first-generation or mature students, as participants 9 and 11 (minority ethnic students) also discussed the barrier of ‘feeling unprepared for university life’:

So, my course was for four years. In my...first year, it was just trying to figure out what's going on. Because it's never done before and everything is just trying to navigate through erm...university life and everything... You know you are kind of really independent, you are in charge of feeding yourself...I had this sense of independence. So, trying to navigate that, you know, trying to just be an independent person and also reading your books and you know, trying to also meet and erm mix with friends and make new friends, all these things. So yeah, it was, it was a lot first year (P11).

This suggests that there is uncertainty around becoming an independent adult and learner in the first year, which appears to be both a time consuming and stressful barrier to academic resilience and success, resonating with earlier findings in the literature (Azmatia et al., 2018; Ang et al., 2021). This suggests preparation for university could be a precursory activity for potential students wanting to go to university, in other words a facilitating condition for academic resilience and success prior to entry.

It was evident within the data that knowledge about the field can be gained through social interaction, the final theme, ‘Building and Exchanging Capital for Resilience and Success’, below, further addresses how nt-AHSC students developed both knowledge and resilience through collaboration with others in the university and wider community.

#### **4.3.3: Building and exchanging capital for resilience and success**

In Bourdieu’s terms, there is an ongoing tension between the individual, field and habitus, represented as a struggle by individuals for different forms of capital, that give them a position, increased knowledge or place in the social structure of the university. Linked to issues of inequality non-traditional students; typically, those first in the family to go to university and of working-

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class origin (Maton, 2005), often struggle for these positions as they have little prior knowledge of academia. In the data, exchanging and building capital was a facilitating mechanism for resilience and success at university, referring predominately to the development of social, cultural and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986), through effective interpersonal exchanges with peers and lecturers.

#### **4.3.3.1: Building and exchanging cultural capital as a facilitating contingency for resilience and success**

Cultural capital is the linguistics and knowledge of educational processes and systems required to navigate successfully through university, which can be developed through interactions with knowledgeable others (Bourdieu, 1986). The transmission of cultural capital can begin within the family unit, particularly when parents have graduated through the university system (Reay et al., 2005; Maton, 2005), however this study reveals that cultural capital can also be developed and exchanged within the university itself, through peer to peer and student to lecturer or lecturer to student interactions.

Within the data this building and exchanging of cultural capital occurred across formal and informal interactions between family and students, students and peers, lecturers, personal tutors and students. In line with the literature, family influences on cultural capital occurred when parents had successfully completed university, prior to the participant commencing their studies (Cotton, et al., 2017; Azmatia et al., 2018; Woolf et al., 2019; Ang et al., 2021). Participant 16 discussed how they would ask their parent for advice on assessments and receive general support for their studies and how this built their confidence in academic writing:

I felt more confident, sending something to my tutor once my Mum had looked over it. Because I know she would criticise it if it needed criticising and she'd always you know, say oh we could add this or what about this, so that really helped me (P16).

This demonstrated how having family members who are familiar with the functions of university can build students cultural capital, prior to and during their time at university. This may be by providing knowledge of academic

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practices and functions, providing the capital required to fit in, thereby affirming the n-tAHSC students' belongingness, whilst counterbalancing imposter syndrome feelings.

Peer interactions provided a mechanism for developing and exchanging cultural capital, where students could gain knowledge on university systems, learning and assessment processes and content. Fifteen participants discussed how they built and exchanged capital with a familiar peer group with various competencies in academia and practice within the AHSC field. These peer groups exhibited similar forms to a community of practice, a notion first presented by Wenger in 1998 to account for the complex relationships built across landscapes, where knowledgeability is both claimed, developed and exchanged (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2014). Four participants expressed how the university environment inculcated a community of practice, where students and staff could exchange knowledge and develop practice, stating similar views to participant 19:

...a nice university campus and a nice kind of community feel. Where people could bounce ideas off each other (P19).

Participant 5 recognised the diverse experience and skills that each individual brings to the degree programme and how this could build different forms of capital:

...some of us were able to help others to get a voluntary placement for a bit. Or, you know, we would help each other with essay writing...there was like myself and maybe a couple of the older ladies who weren't that bothered about presentations. We didn't really get that nervous, but then there were others...who really did...so we would have like a little bit of a workshop day where we would...present to the group of us. Rather than just going in blind kind of thing (P5).

This suggests that there was an exchange of cultural and symbolic capital occurring between peers, as a facilitating contingency for academic resilience and success. As explained by Bourdieu (1986), peer interactions can bolster individual knowledge of the university, where students can gain knowledge on university systems, learning and assessment. Thus, making the liminal space less clandestine to the n-tAHSC student.

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#### **4.3.3.2: Building and exchanging social capital as a facilitating contingency for resilience and success**

Social capital is believed to be the capital of belonging, recognition, and authentication received from members of a particular group (Nalaskowski and Dejna, 2015). In the field of HE, belongingness is being viewed as a more socially just concept than inclusion, with inclusion merely permitting access, whereas belonging fosters emotive feelings of permanence, acceptance and fitting (University College London, 2020; Pathak, 2021). Within the data participants disclosed how social capital was bolstered through interactions with peers in the university, providing a sense of belonging to nt-AHSC students, explained below by participant 11:

I think my friends, my friends, just talking, I mean, you know, when you have people that are going through the same thing you're going through. Yes, easier to find like solace with them...you can connect with on different levels. So, yeah, spending time with my friends and my course mates was really like good for me, so we could talk about things [where] we feel no judgement (P11).

Participant 16 discussed how social capital provided a motivation for continuation, resilience and success:

...you know when you've got good friendship groups on the course as well. It helps you to keep, you know, keep each other going, doesn't it (P16)?

This provided another facilitating contingency for resilience, as these social connections could counterbalance feelings of isolation and heighten levels of confidence and belongingness, supporting both academic and emotional resilience and wellbeing, articulated below by participant 15:

I think speaking to my peers, is probably the easiest, and probably the most overlooked thing as well I think most students do it without really realising and I think if you utilise the other students in your class or in your cohort or whatever, then...the effect that that can have positively on...feeling less isolated...feeling like somebody else is confused with you sometimes makes you feel a lot lot better (P15).

This indicates that peer interactions have multifactorial benefits, supporting academic, social and emotional resilience, therefore developing students social

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and cultural capital. Participant 5 continued to discuss how these exchanges could influence practice and in turn praxis:

...we were able to have...communication and...discussion about the skills that we were using...maybe...experiences, where communication hadn't gone well and why that was the case. So, I think there was...one instance with one of the girls who had just started working...as a TA...with a student who had autism. And we'd been talking about how. People that I've been working with dementia and people that she's been working with autism seem to get really frustrated when we were communicating with them and just couldn't figure out why. Between us we created strategies that could be used across our placements to communicate more effectively (P5).

This demonstrates the interrelatedness of different forms of capital, particularly how cultural and symbolic capital could be developed and exchanged through the development of social capital through peer interactions.

#### **4.3.3.3: Building and exchanging symbolic capital as a facilitating contingency for resilience and success**

Symbolic capital is defined as the accumulation of the most valued social, economic and cultural capital recognised within the field, to maximise power of the individual operating within that field (Bourdieu, 1987, Lebaron, 2014).

Throughout the data symbolic capital was identified as productive scholarly activities, which bolstered academic resilience and success, such as:

- learning the rules of academic writing,
- developing critical reading and writing skills,
- learning how to reference (in keeping with the preferred style of the institution),
- understanding learning outcomes and assessment questions,
- producing work of a high standard worthy of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> class grades
- delivering effective presentations.

Participants advocated how scholarly symbolic capital could be acquired through interactions with lecturers, engaging with draft policies and receiving feedback, asking questions of lecturers and regular personal tutor meetings.

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Receiving feedback was seen as a facilitating cause/contingency mechanism for building cultural and symbolic capital, which ultimately was a causation of resilience and success, where feedback was seen to support momentum and completion of assessments, expressed below by participant 15:

...the feedback from, you know, other submissions, draft submissions and things like that. It just puts you in good stead to continue your piece of work really. And I think mainly for me, it was once I had that feedback from the draft, that was my, you know, my like determination (P15).

Despite mostly positive views of feedback within the data, 5 participants discussed the impact overly negative feedback could have on their wellbeing, the example given below from participant 13 emphasises this:

I think it really destroyed, not destroyed us, obviously because we were resilient but affected a couple of us we were really upset by it, and how it was just how it was managed, I guess (P13).

Participant 2 further explained how overly critical feedback was unhelpful:

Some lecturers will give a bit more feedback in a way that's useful and understandable, whereas there has been some feedback, which hasn't really been useful. It just told me all the bad points (P2).

This highlighted the need for structured and consistent feedback between lecturers with equal regard to positive and constructive feedback comments, in line with feedback recommendations from the Higher Education Academy (2013), to support students' future achievement and development, whilst ensuring their self-efficacy is not negatively impacted.

Additionally, maintaining regular communication with lecturers was seen as a facilitating mechanism for resilience and success and asking lecturers questions about the assessment was deemed advantageous, presented below by participant 15:

So just that regular, you know, communication, and knowing that the lecturers were open to me coming in at any time it wasn't a meeting, you know, it was at the end of the session, or something like that or just email me or, you know, however it worked for me (P15).

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Participants also highlighted how asking was a key strategy for developing symbolic capital, especially asking the person who would be marking the piece of work, a notion in keeping with learning the rules of the field (Bourdieu, 1998):

...and again, just asking...I think, a lot...of assignments are subjective to whoever's delivering...one tutor might like something set out one way and one another... So it's finding how that person would like to, you know, like tailoring that piece of work to that tutor lecturer if that fits (P13).

To embolden students to ask questions, participants felt that having lecturers and students on an equal level was a key facilitating mechanism for effective capital exchange, Participant 17 discussed how mature students may feel more confident approaching lecturers on an equal level:

...when you're a mature student, you see your lecturers just as adults like you are rather than, teachers, and not being scared to go and ask for help and speaking to them on one to one (P17).

Similarly, participant 20 praised the case study university for their seemingly unique approach to this equal environment:

I think [lecturer support] is very unique to \*\*\*\* [case study university], because my friends have told me about totally different experiences, where lecturers weren't, you know, it's not like you could ever turn up at their office or ask for anything...off course, So I had a really good experience of...support from my lecturers (P20).

This highlighted how lecturer open-door policies are seen as a facilitating contingency for building symbolic capital and ultimately academic resilience and success.

#### **4.4: Findings Summary**

Analysis of the data provided a number of unique theories for resilience and success in n-tAHSC students. Firstly, in relation to research question 1, contextually this research provided an original contribution to the existing knowledge base, providing unique n-t AHSC student articulations of resilience. The work revealed novel concepts such as “Bouncing Forward” and collective growth and development nuances for resilience, as well as more complex multifactorial definitions that reflect unique ideologies of n-tAHSC students. It

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conceptualised the specific, often unique barriers to success and adversities faced by the n-tAHSC student and the authentic coping mechanisms and resilience strategies specific to these participants.

Data for research question 2 showed that successful n-tAHSC students possessed their own unique set of qualities and traits which supported their resilient behaviours. The analysis further highlighted the interrelated nature of key intrapersonal agentic factors that could formulate optimal resilient outcomes providing theories on conditions, causes, contingencies and outcomes of resilience for this unique group. These included the facilitating condition of positive self-concept, twinned with the facilitating cause of being goal orientated, can produce the consequence of a growth mindset, which in turn can bolster academic resilience and facilitate success in the n-tAHSC student.

Data collected in relation to research question 3 explained the unique practice of nt-AHSC students' resilience through Bourdieu's lenses of habitus, field and capital, revealing facilitating conditions, causes and contingencies, within and across each domain. By applying these lenses, a more systemic approach to resilience practice was considered. Here social integration, exchanging and developing cultural capital and engagement were identified as important causes of resilience.

Together these findings provided a relational and dualistic analysis of intra and interpersonal facilitating and constraining factors (causes, conditions and contingencies) for resilience and success for n-tAHSC students, within and across the domains of agency, habitus, field and capital.



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## Chapter 5: Discussion

This research provides exclusive articulations of resilience from successful n-tAHSC graduate perspectives, providing new understanding around their development and application of resilience, including the contributing factors to this phenomenon, prior to and during their academic journeys. One of the major findings of this research was that n-tAHSC students already have an existing higher level of resilience than that previously considered in research around other n-t students or health and social care students (Stoffel and Caine, 2018, Davis, 2019). This means that how n-tAHSC students articulate and exercise both psychological and academic resilience is different compared to students from other disciplines and their more 'traditional' counterparts.

Previous studies have predominately reflected on the difficulties n-t students encounter on entry and during their university journey, often based on adversities and socio-economic disadvantages (Wong, 2018; Sapir, 2021). These often lead to recommendations for developing interventions which teach and cultivate resilience as part of the university curriculum. Here this research shows that previous experiences and triumphs over challenges, in previous habitats by the n-tAHSC students, such as family/ carer duties, work and life experiences (He et al., 2018; Hwang and Shin, 2018), fundamentally frame distinctive resiliency strategies and coping mechanisms. This implies that previous validations of resilience and coping provide a springboard for the future resilience practice of n-tAHSC students, thereby demonstrating a paradigm shift in the way resilience is viewed by the n-tAHSC student, where resilience is more than just coping with adversities, instead the n-tAHSC student thrives and grows as a result of adversity. Thus, this highlights the need to capture not only the resilience building resources and strategies of this group, but the self-development growth mind set of this unique population, in order to cultivate this paradigm shift for future generations of n-tAHSC students. The findings of this research are presented below in a schematic diagram (see figure 5.1)

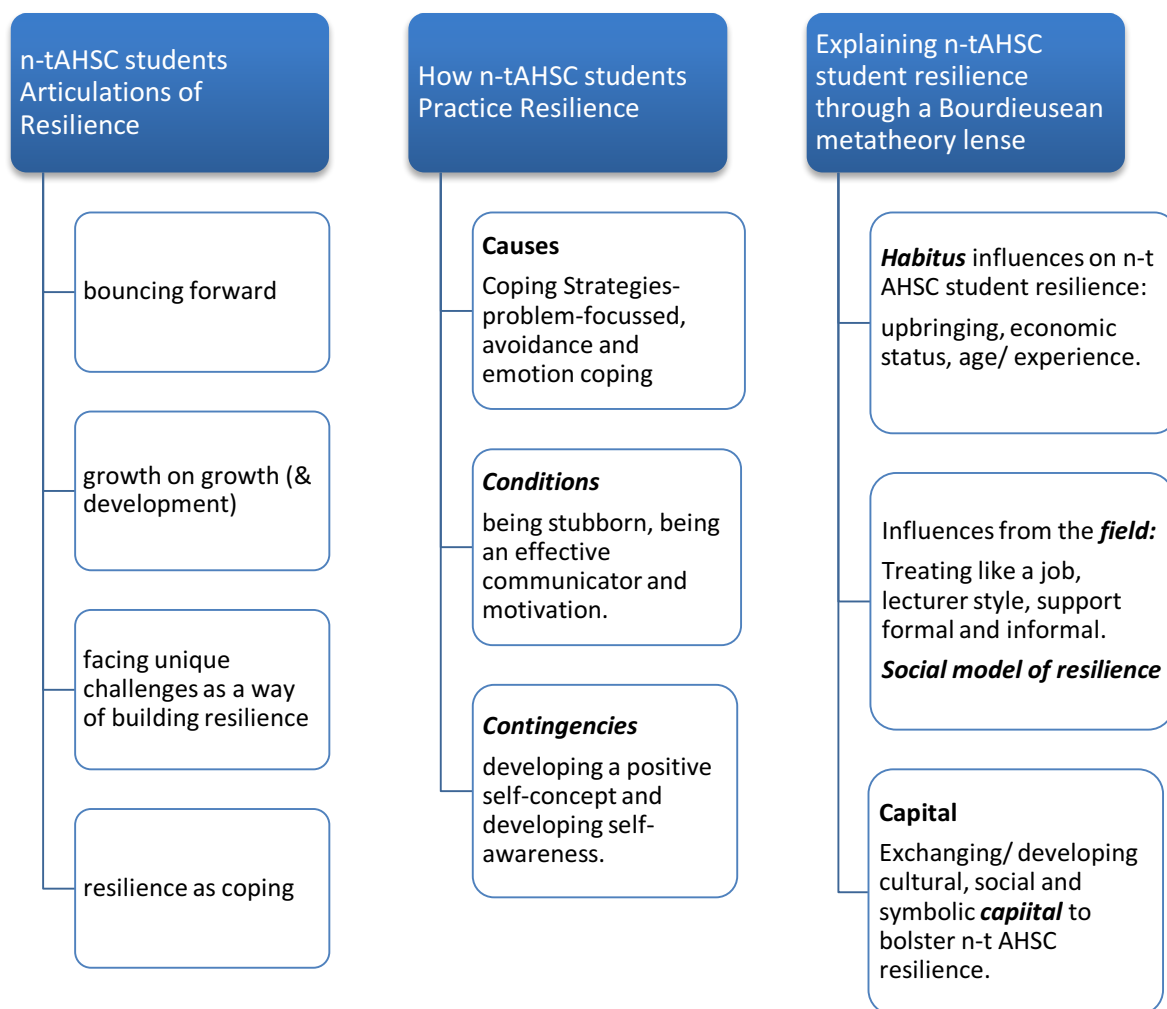


Figure 5:1 Schematic summary of research findings

Building on a unique notion of bouncing forward, these findings show n-tAHSC students possess higher levels of understandings of resilience, including knowledge of resilience resources on entry to university, ideas which differ to those previously brought to the forefront of this discourse by other researchers, around bouncing back from adversity (for example: Walsh et al, 2020; Zarroti et al., 2020) and developing resilience through university experience. Notably, n-tAHSC students have already overcome difficulties in their plight for a better self, they therefore do not wish to return to their pre-challenge state as this would be seen as a backwards step. This shows that the n-tAHSC student does not need to learn about resilience and resilience strategies from a bouncing back perspective, instead they need to maintain and build upon their existing resilience strategies to optimise their success and growth. In other words, these

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students continue to build upon their already heightened baseline resilience and coping levels, furthering their resilience, consequently developing their personal and professional n-tAHSC self. This uniquely positions these students to deploy the necessary levels of resilience required within a turbulent health and social care working space, as a result of both their academic learning, practical experiences and positive growth mindsets (Stoffel and Caine, 2018; Leistikow, 2019).

When looking at this heightened level of resilience through Bourdieu's (1977b) lenses of habitus, capital and field, it was found that n-tAHSC students have often developed psychological resilience strategies and indeed resilience capital through their unique habitus experiences, which they then transfer into their understandings and demonstrations of academic and psychological resilience in the field of HE. Exclusively, this research has revealed that the n-tAHSC student exchanges cultural, symbolic and social capital and knowledge of academic and AHSC practices through social interactions with peers, collectively enriching their knowledge of the field of AHSC. Through this knowledge exchange the liminal space of AHSC degree programmes and indeed AHSC practice becomes less clandestine through collaborative exchanges of capital, which further develop n-tAHSC student resilience. Thus, this emphasises the importance of factoring time to foster social relationships within an AHSC curriculum. Consequently, n-tAHSC graduate's articulations of resilience switched from the micro individual level to a more meso communal nuance.

The empirical research questions provide a logical framework for presenting these discussions, beginning with the unique n-tAHSC students' articulations and definitions of resilience and coping. By addressing the second research question, a relational and dualistic analysis of the intrapersonal and interpersonal facilitating and constraining factors for resilience and success for n-tAHSC students are presented. Finally applying Bourdieu's metatheory lenses conceptualised the contextual conditions, causes, contingencies and outcomes for resilience, within and across the domains of agency, habitus, field

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and capital in an original manner that has not been done before across n-t student resilience literature.

### **5.1: RQ1 How do Sn-tAHSC graduates articulate resilience?**

This study primarily shows that n-tAHSC students have unique views and definitions of resilience when compared to general non-traditional, 'traditional' or health and social care student counterparts. This is owing to the unique blended identity of the n-tAHSC student, who share similar adversities to other n-t students, whilst also experiencing unique challenges of AHSC discourse and practice. These unique challenges are discussed below alongside the articulations of n-tAHSC students, which include the unique concepts of 'Bouncing Forward' and 'Growth on Growth', alongside expressions of unique challenges and relational links between resilience, agency and coping from the n-tAHSC perspective.

#### **5.1.1: 'Bouncing forward'**

The findings of this study show that Sn-tAHSC graduates' have a higher level of understanding of resilience definitions, expressed through novel concepts, such as 'bouncing forward' (in-Vivo code). This metaphor, of 'bouncing forward' (Walsh et al., 2002) was particularly important to the n-tAHSC students who did not wish to 'bounce back' to previous states, prior to adversity or challenge. This context specific definition contests earlier definitions of resilience within the literature, that allude to 'bouncing back from adversities' a psychological resilience notion (Holdsworth et al., 2018; Walsh et al, 2020; Zarroti et al., 2020). The bouncing back concept implies that individuals will recover from trauma and challenges to a pre-challenged state (Denovan and Macaskill, 2017; Smith et al., 2020), whereas the 'bouncing forward' concept allows the individual to grow from the experience to a better state than pre-challenge, in other words thriving. Therefore, this shows a paradigm shift from resilience as merely surviving and coping in the face of adversity to resilience as thriving and personal growth because of adversity.

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These findings show n-tAHSC student's plight to continually learn and move forward from any challenges or adversities, predominately turning such challenges into opportunities, where they can learn and grow from demanding situations. Thus, this implies that the n-tAHSC student is prepared for and actively cultivates an identity shift during their university journey, as they transition from their previous experiences to a perceived better state of being, potentially leaving their non-traditional self behind. This concept is similar to the processes in Van Gennep's (1960) theory on liminality, where individuals change their identity, whilst transitioning through a liminal (unknown) space, not dissimilar to the experience of nursing students 'rite of passage' (Crane & Abbottt, 2021).

The research presented several examples of prior identity shifting through liminal spaces by a number of Sn-tAHSC graduates who had transitioned either through personal separations, pregnancy/ parenthood or bereavement/ loss either prior to or during their university experience. Therefore, students moved through an unknown 'rite of passage' from previous state to new unknown identities. These transitions were similar to that required for the AHSC degree programmes, where the n-tAHSC student transitions through a difficult space in order to debark at the other side as their new and thriving better self; an n-tAHSC graduate. Having successfully transitioned through one liminal space, provided the n-tAHSC students with lived experience of transition through a liminal space, which their more 'traditional' counterparts may have never experienced. Therefore, this shows that n-tAHSC students are potentially more prepared to transition through another unknown space, in order to shed their n-tAHSC student identity to become AHSC graduates. These findings can be related to Amsrud et al's. (2019) theory around academic resilience and the university serving as a springboard for problem-solving and personal growth from challenges, suggesting a need for individuals to pass through liminal spaces in order to develop resilience, preferably prior to their commencement of university. Therefore, this new found knowledge is also useful for further education colleges and sixth forms, who initially support transitions to university in young people.

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### 5.1.2: 'Growth on growth nuance'

The 'bounce forward' notion complimented n-tAHSC students' articulations of growth and development nuances in the research, where achievement and working towards goals were seen as counterbalancing mechanisms (facilitating contingencies) for n-tAHSC students to cope with adversities (Garrett, 2015). Whilst 'bounce forward' resilience in n-tAHSC students enabled the student to overcome hurdles adapt and grow, continuing to work towards their goals and goal orientation were reported as facilitating contingencies for resilience and thriving. This continual 'growth on growth' nuance created an increased probability of academic success (flourishing), despite the stressful conditions or events faced by the n-tAHSC student (Stoffel and Caine, 2018) in their liminal spaces of university and placement. This concept is seen as particularly beneficial in the context of health and social care practice, where growth mindsets are key facilitators to support students through challenges of placements (Leistikow, 2019).

Interestingly, these findings highlight the interrelatedness of having a growth mindset and being goal orientated, where n-tAHSC students with a positive self-concept (facilitating condition) and a growth mindset (facilitating cause) had a goal orientated consequence, which in turn showed the need to support and encourage growth mindsets in n-tAHSC students as a facilitating cause for academic resilience and achievement.

These findings can be affirmed by other theories of positive cognitive affectiveness for psychological growth (Martin and Marsh, 2009), such as the 'broaden and build' theory (Fredrickson, 2001), where enhancing ones positive emotions and processes provides opportunity to broaden thought-action repertoires, increasing individuals' capacity to enhance personal resources. A notion further explored by Chung et al (2017) in their scoping review of resilience in HE students, where they advocate for resilience interventions that target individual students growth mindset, alongside environmental strategies to foster self-efficacy and counterbalance adversity. This offers a conceptual and empirical fusion between this study and the literature were a harmonious concept emerged: Successful n-tAHSC students should be supported to

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develop a positive self-concept as a facilitating condition for a growth mindset, which in turn bolsters academic resilience and success. This conceptual formula is therefore deemed important for future practice, particularly when considering designing HE curriculum to support n-tAHSC students' resilience development. Indeed, the HE environment has been described as a locus for self-development and self-recognition (West, 2014). Hence, universities are ideal environments for fostering personal growth and resilience for n-tAHSC students.

### **5.1.3: Personal challenges faced by non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care students**

This research has brought to light the exclusive constraining personal adversities and academic challenges faced by n-tAHSC students prior to and during their studies. The most common personal challenges revealed by the Sn-tAHSC graduates were long term relationship breakdowns, personal bereavement, mental health issues, including bereavement and homesickness, physical health conditions and disabilities, financial issues and parenting responsibilities.

Whilst some of these barriers and adversities such as financial challenges (Denovan & Macaskill, 2017), mental health issues (Brewer et al., 2019) and physical health and disabilities (Vaccaro, et al., 2019) were discussed across the student resilience literature, the findings from this study show that n-tAHSC students face additional inimitable challenges. These additional challenges included parenting responsibilities and financial liability issues, which lead to engagement in increased amounts of paid work. This is comparable to earlier findings from Cotton et al's. (2017, p. 69) framework for resilience, where personal risk factors for resilience for n-t students were seen to outweigh those of their 'traditional' student counterparts. The identified barriers disrupted study time and in some cases attendance and engagement, which were viewed as key drivers for resilience and success in n-t students across both the literature and the research data.

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Notwithstanding the afore mentioned n-t student challenges, this research revealed added stressors exclusive to the n-tAHSC student. These additional stressors included greater retention risks, owing to the additional demands of placements and the emotional stress and demands more generally placed on health and social care students (Francis, 2013; Health & Safety Executive, 2013), ambiguity around employment opportunities (Holt, 2016) and lack of professional guidelines and codes of practice for the discourse (Care England, 2020). These findings highlighted the multifactorial risks that n-tAHSC students must mitigate in order to succeed in HE, demonstrating the importance of nurturing specific resilient strategies to counterpoise these risks.

Alongside personal adversities and challenges, this research found that n-t students also had to contend with distinctive academic challenges such as 'poorer than expected academic outcomes' and/ or 'having no prior knowledge of HE', struggling with academic content, managing multiple deadlines and transitions between levels. These findings correspond with Cotton et al.'s (2017) and Azmitia et al.'s. (2018) risks of first generation HE students that include poor academic skills, which could lead to failing modules or whole years at university and being academically unprepared for university demands.

In addition, to these congruent findings, a distinctive contribution of this research are the reported barriers of 'additional learning needs, dyslexia, dyspraxia' and 'having English as an additional language'. English as an additional language was briefly explored in the international resilience literature under the collective umbrella of 'acculturation' (Barry, 2005; Kim et al., 2019), a dynamic process of adaptation, where international students experience stress as they adapt to the primary language, norms and values of the host university. Notably, the n-t student is often already faced with uncertainty around cultural norms, processes and belongingness, particularly those students who are first generation in their family to go to university (Azmittia et al., 2018). Thereby, these additional stressors for n-tAHSC students add to the burdens already faced by a 'traditional' university student. Thus, this contests the ideas of Cotton et al. (2017) who stress that 'n-t students do not necessarily encounter greater difficulties than 'traditional' students, the students present with multifaceted



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non-traditional and AHSC discourse hindrances, alongside more generic issues faced by the overall student population. This research suggests that more person-centred and targeted interventions are required to support resilience, coping and positive adaptation from the diverse issues faced by n-t students, in order to augment their success. Therefore, universities should move away from blanket macro developing resilience policies to more micro and individual resilience strengthening approaches.

#### **5.1.4: Resilience as ‘more than coping’**

Despite the complex and multifaceted challenges of the n-tAHSC student, this research demonstrated how graduates articulate resilience as taking control and coping. Here resilience is characterised as perseverance and carrying on. These resilient qualities in n-t students once again are believed to evolve from previous successful adaptations to complex adversity and/or challenge (Chung et al., 2017). This implies the more adversity, stress and challenging situations the resilient n-tAHSC student has faced, the more likely they were to take control of the situation in hand and develop agentic advanced coping strategies to overcome and flourish in university. The data demonstrated how n-tAHSC students articulate the interrelated nature of resilience and coping, a well-known concept within psychology (Van der Hallen et al., 2020). Here it was found that participants compared levels of resilience to how well individuals coped and thrived in stressful situations. The participants articulated that resilient individuals coped more than non-resilient individuals. Likewise, they discussed how actively coping developed increased levels of resilience, which led to more personal growth and development.

Generally coping was recognised as both a cause of resilience (being able to cope) and a consequence of resilience (the act of coping). The research showed that n-tAHSC participants articulated 3 main coping strategies: problem-focussed style of coping, distinctively described in the research as ‘taking action and adapting’, and two emotion focused styles of coping described as ‘avoidance, distraction or acceptance’ coping and ‘supported coping’. With situational coping being viewed across the literature as favourable for bolstering students’ resilience (Turner et al., 2016; Vaccaro, et al., 2018;

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Robinson et al., 2021), these findings show that n-tAHSC students draw upon different coping strategies, therefore demonstrating flexible coping to support their resilience, potentially owing to the challenges they have previously faced.

Interestingly, n-tAHSC students were seen as having overcome more adversities than their 'traditional' counterparts owing to maturity, being a carer and/or work commitments and experiences, findings similar to other studies on n-t students (Azmitia, et al., 2018; Chung et al., 2017). In addition to these n-t concepts, AHSC courses critically explore wellbeing and resilience strategies across various discourses (including nutrition, health and social care, child health and wellbeing, counselling). Therefore, the n-tAHSC student not only comes to the course with prior knowledge of and strategies for resilience, acquired through previous experiences, the course itself allows for further exploration and consolidation of this knowledge through an applied lens. This highlighted opportunities n-tAHSC students have for recognising the transferability of pre-acquired resilience knowledge and strategies to further develop counterbalancing tactics for academic stressors. It is recommended that universities further explore these opportunities in order to support other students who may not have faced the same adversities prior to their university journey, nor been given opportunity to explore resilience and wellbeing in their curriculums.

These exclusive notions of resilience as a functional skill are linked to an implicit sense of agency, where the n-tAHSC student possesses a sense of control over their reactions to challenges and ability to cope and overcome difficulties. Conversely to these findings a lack of agentic consideration has been a reoccurring concern of Bourdieu's theory around resilience and the non-traditional student (West et al., 2013), where little regard has been given to n-t learners agentic capabilities for navigating university, bolstering their own resilience, social and cultural capital. This research is different as it conceptualised the agentic views of n-tAHSC students as a *prima focus*, demonstrating how the n-tAHSC student articulates and indeed practices academic resilience for success, whilst taking advantage of available resources

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from the field, habitus and capital to bolster both academic and psychological resilience. These are discussed more in relation to research question 2 below.

### **5.1.5: Discussion Summary- RQ1**

These answers to research question 1 provided a thriving nuance of resilience from a n-t graduate perspective, providing insightful knowledge into the way n-tAHSC graduates articulate resilience and academic resilience. The research shows that n-tAHSC students and graduates develop unique resilience articulations through their lived experiences of coping, flourishing and thriving as a result of overcoming multi-faceted adversities and challenges. These articulations provide understandings of how n-tAHSC students enter the liminal space of university, where their previous habitus provides them with life experiences, which frames both their outlook and practice of resilience. In other words, n-tAHSC students already possess tools and knowledge to productively manage challenges and adversities, developed in other fields. Therefore, universities should acknowledge and capture the transferable nature of resilience and learning from these unique individuals, who already possess the tools to succeed in order to support other students, inculcating these ideas into resilience training and wellbeing support agendas in HE.

### **5.2: RQ2: How do n-tAHSC students practice resilience?**

In answering research question 2 this research shows how n-tAHSC students demonstrate unique intrapersonal agentic resilience strategies, when facing both academic and life challenges. Here findings revealed productive coping strategies alongside various conditions that supported the n-tAHSC student's resilience and unique thriving resilience practices (causes and contingencies).

#### **5.2.1: Causes beyond coping**

This thesis shows that when n-tAHSC students are faced with challenges and adversities they predominately practice problem focused coping strategies, such as, 'seeking appropriate professional support', 'acting on feedback', 'utilising available resources', 'taking action' and 'asking lecturers to explain

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things'. These findings were similar to Vaccaro & Ramirez's (2018) qualitative case study with '18 non-traditional age undergraduate Women of Color' and Vaccaro et al.'s, (2018) constructivist grounded theory study with 59 students with diverse disabilities. However for the n-tAHSC students' resilience went beyond coping, to thriving because of adversity, where students developed through finding appropriate support, problem solving, thereby growing and evolving as a result of challenge.

Novel findings from this research revealed the agentic actions of n-tAHSC students, where the participants believed they should take ownership for their issues and act upon things like disappointing feedback, asking the appropriate lecturer for further clarity on issues. For example, n-tAHSC students take action when receiving lower than anticipated grades, by considering feedback and ways to improve, seeking additional feedback from lecturers and learning services. This showed a preference for problem solving coping tendencies of n-tAHSC students, as oppose to other more hostile reactions to disappointing feedback from other 'traditional' students, such as emotional snapping (Johnson and Connelly, 2014) or giving up on studies (Wright, 2013). These problem-focussed coping strategies were linked to both the maturity of n-tAHSC students and their life experiences, which promoted a sense of equilibrium between themselves and their lecturers, as opposed to a more hierarchal 'teacher' status that many 'traditional' students associate with their lecturers (Tormey, 2021). This made the lecturers seem more approachable to the n-tAHSC student, enabling them to seek additional support. This feeling of egalitarianism (Vangelova, 2013) was seen as an important factor for engagement and resilience, as it fostered positive self-esteem, belongingness and counterbalanced power struggles, which foster imposter syndrome mentalities.

Similar to the literature on emotional coping 'support style' of coping was seen as the least effective coping strategy in this research cognisant with the literature (Parker and Endler, 1992; Stanislawski, 2019). Despite participants recognising emotional focussed support from peers as less effective, they still utilised this at times, rather than seeking appropriate professional support for

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emotional distress. This highlighted a conflicting issue with n-tAHSC students who felt they could overcome adversities through 'inner strength' and projecting their struggles to friends or peers. However, Vaccaro et al (2018) argues that various coping strategies should be adopted for different situations, for example withdrawal can be effective in the short term, but not in the long term.

The flexible coping styles identified in this research are deemed to be a key resource for resilience and thriving (Turner et al., 2016), with Skinner and Zimmer-Gembeck (2007) stating there is no one best way to cope. Therefore, individuals need to adopt creative styles of coping based on the impact of the stressor and/or resources available to them and what had worked for them in the past. This is significant to this research as it shows that nt-AHSC students have unique stressors, which differ between individuals, thus indicating that "one size fits all" theories are not viable for the multi-faceted needs of diverse student bodies. Additionally, the constant growth and thriving resilience paradigm of n-tAHSC students suggests these students are reluctant to admit to not coping, an attitude required for acceptance and seeking of professional mental health support (Cohut, 2021). This could be problematic in relation to seeking appropriate support for mental health issues and early intervention strategies, thereby putting n-tAHSC students at risk of exacerbating mental health issues through professional support avoidance. These findings therefore show tension between advanced coping strategies of resilient n-tAHSC students, coupled with a reluctance to admit to not coping and accessing appropriate support for mental health, which potentially leads to an overreliance on informal support and saturation of existing strategies for resilience.

### **5.2.2: Conditions**

Findings from this study revealed intrapersonal conditions for resilience in the form of three key personality traits: being stubborn, being an effective communicator and being motivated, alongside facilitating contingencies of developing a positive self-concept and developing self-awareness. Interestingly, a stubborn personality was an antecedent for remaining on track with academic tasks and goals, disallowing nt-AHSC students to give up on their degree programme/future plans. This is a similar notion to tenacity, perseverance and

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persistence (see Webster and Rivers, 2018; Vaccaro et al., 2018; Kannagara et al., 2018). These findings show a more definitive personality type for the n-tAHSC student compared to other studies, that differentiated between conscientious and cooperative personality type (Balgui, 2017; Stoffel & Cain, 2018), optimism (Webster & Rivers, 2018; Vaccaro et al., 2018) or self-confidence (Turner et al., 2017; Amsrud et al., 2019).

Participants indicated two facilitating conditions that supported their stubborn nature: being an effective communicator and having motivation. The n-tAHSC students saw these conditions as enablers for resilient practices of seeking appropriate support and remaining on task, by continually setting independent goals. This showed that the agentic beliefs of n-tAHSC students, driven by their motivation to succeed in their degree programmes provided facilitating conditions for setting and achieving goals. This was a strong driver for the n-tAHSC student's resilient practice, with references made in the data to making sacrifices and doing whatever it took to reach their goals. Effective communication was highlighted as a key facilitating condition for resilience in this research, findings in contrast with the literature, where only one qualitative study, on student midwives' narratives, discussed effective communication as an antecedent to resilient practice (Power, 2017). Thus, this highlights the individualistic and context specific nature of resilience and its components (Chung et al., 2017). The current research showed that n-tAHSC students believed confidence and extroversion were precursors to their effective communication. This again adds to the argument that resilience is a subjective, circumstantial concept, where individuals involved in the phenomenon have a better understanding of the factors which contribute to their resilience (Jones, et al., 2021). Therefore, this makes the n-tAHSC student better placed than experts to evaluate their resilience capabilities and needs. This is relational to Stainton et al. (2018) who talk about situational approaches to resilience, where the individual must select and draw upon the most useful protective factors and how and when to use them. It also supports Southwick (2018) who states that resilience evolves along a continuum across various domains in life, changing over time as a result of one's interactions with various environments.

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The present findings imply that instead of the university offering blanket macro “one size fits all” strategies for cultivating resilience, the n-tAHSC student should be supported by the institution to develop and utilise person-centred strategies (Vaccaro, et al., 2018), where they select and draw upon the most suitable resources to bolster their resilience. However, as indicated earlier, when an individual’s mental health is compromised, they may no longer be able to make reasoned judgements (Grant et al. 2014), an example of this was given by the students who persistently used emotion coping, despite its lack of resolve. This means that universities should exercise caution around the level of resilience autonomy of students who may be experiencing mental health difficulties, thereby strengthening the argument for student-centred approaches as opposed to “one size fits all” blanket macro policies (Student Mental Health Charter, 2019). Thus, adding to the case for regular monitoring of students’ mental health to be considered as part of a university-wide resilience strategy.

Within the present study motivation was seen as both a facilitating condition and a facilitating contingency for resilience. Extrinsic motivation was the predominant type of motivation identified in this research and the literature base (Cotton et al., 2017; Simons et al., 2018), where students had motives to avoid failure, achieve and get a good career. Comparatively, intrinsic motivation, seeking competence in a particular subject, was the least identified type of motivation in the data. These findings were similar to the resilience literature, where extrinsic motivation is frequently cited (Simons et al., 2018; Walsh et al., 2020). This was interesting as extrinsic motivation in undergraduate degrees usually comes from career certainty (Kotera et al., 2019), yet AHSC degrees do not have a prescribed career trajectory. Once again this indicates unique levels of resilience displayed by the n-tAHSC student in the absence of career certainty. Therefore, degree status may be sufficient extrinsic motivation for the n-tAHSC student, expressed through the apparent desire to bounce forward from their previous n-t state to their new AHSC graduate identity. Essentially, the degree itself will be the opening to better career trajectories. Indeed, some participants found the fluid nature of the AHSC degree’s career trajectory beneficial, providing more scope and choice for them in the future. Therefore, these findings challenge blanket governmental policies around more prescribed

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progression routes to graduate employment and professional jobs for every degree programme as the B3 conditions suggest (Office for Students, 2019 & 2021).

### **5.2.3: Contingencies**

The Sn-tAHSC graduates acknowledged a 'positive self-concept' as an agentic facilitating contingency for resilience and success, defined in the literature as one's self-perception, having both negative and positive associations with willingness to communicate, self-esteem and self-image. This concept is linked to the nuance of positive psychology and the 'broaden and build' theory of psychology (Fredrickson, 2001), where positive emotions and processes are used to develop one's personal resources, thereby utilising proactive strategies to manage stress, rather than reactive processes to manage challenges (Martin & Marsh, 2009). This study showed that n-tAHSC students practiced self-governing positive mindsets, where self-belief in their capabilities was part of their resilient practice, a notion that can be likened to self-efficacy a key characteristic of thriving resilient behaviour (Taylor and Reyes, 2012). It was found that the n-tAHSC students either entered HE studies with a good level of self-belief or developed this through achievement and positive reaffirmation from significant others in the university, thus, demonstrating the interrelationship between intrapersonal resources and how these can be affirmed through interpersonal interaction.

The research findings highlighted how the positive influence of self-awareness and motivation from others to maintain a positive mindset, increased levels of motivation, optimism and dedication in the n-tAHSC student, resulting in the practice of resilience and success (Chen, Yeh, Hwang, & Lin, 2013).

Additionally, a positive self-concept was found to bolster confident mood and resilience, particularly after positive feedback (Weidinger et al., 2016). Likewise, a positive self-concept can be developed over time, through a positive mindset and personal belief, alongside the right conditioning, which can in itself become a motivator for success and indeed resilience. However, there was occasional tension here in relation to the n-tAHSC students' self-beliefs and developing a positive self-concept. As indicated previously in this research the n-tAHSC



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student can struggle with belongingness and their rights to be at university, particularly those students who have entered through access courses and less 'traditional' routes. With n-t students reporting feelings of imposter syndrome (Haktanir et al., 2018) in the unknown liminal space of the university (Field & Morgan-Klein, 2010; Blanchfield, 2021). Therefore, it is recommended that universities support students' development of positive self-concept, through facilitating activities such as, reflective practice, problem based learning and experiential learning (Walsh et al., 2020), thereby making n-tAHSC students more aware of their capabilities and strengths as early as possible, in order to foster a more positive self-concept to bolster their resilience.

The growth mindset nuance (Dweck, 2017) in this research, builds upon the aforementioned positive self-concept, where participants considered beyond their present self to their future self. A growth mindset was found to develop n-tAHSC students' ability to embrace challenges and endure obstacles, in the belief they could alter their destiny, through growth and development and the right support to succeed.

Notably, initial summative assessments were reported as problematic, as n-t AHSC students may not necessarily have the academic skill set to pass assessments at first attempt, or the same free time for study as their 'traditional' counterparts suggesting more formative assessment methods would be beneficial for diverse student populations in their first year. According to Chapman et al. (2015) initial student assessments are often seen as 'rites of passage' on the journey of 'belonging' in the liminal space of HE, therefore universities should adopt interventions that support successful outcomes for students, as they commence their learning journeys. In keeping with these findings Haktanir et al, (2018) discussed how success for early submissions can be supported through providing workshops on realistic expectations regarding academic work and strategies for developing higher level cognition. A combination of academic skills workshops and more formative assessments in the first year would therefore support resilience and success in n-tAHSC students.

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Certainly, within this empirical research n-tAHSC students advocated submitting drafts as a facilitating mechanism for resilience and success, alongside the development of academic skills, such as proof reading, researching and referencing, academic writing sessions and time management. Participants also demonstrated self-awareness of their learning needs, indicating the n-tAHSC graduate had developed awareness of the expectations of HE, alongside self-awareness of their own capabilities, recognised throughout the literature as another mechanism for resilience (Webster & Rivers, 2018; Kannangara, et al., 2018).

The growth mindset concept was presented in the findings as a facilitating contingency for resilience and overcoming self-doubt and other barriers to a positive mindset. The 'possible selves' (Bak, 2015, p. 650) concept was discussed on several occasions where Sn-tAHSC graduates affirmed that a growth mindset bolstered resilience and successful outcomes, as it provided a counterbalancing mechanism for self-doubt. Moreover, where students declared an ability to visualise their future self, this provided the n-tAHSC graduate with a sense of purpose, which allowed them to claim a sense of belonging at the university, with belongingness being seen as a key feature for resilience and success, which can be developed through social integration and academic success.

Neoliberal stances have led to the ideology of the university as a producer of work-ready graduates, a catalyst for promoting growth mindsets of n-tAHSC students in HE (Maisuria & Cole, 2017). However, this could be problematic if the n-tAHSC student does not have the required capabilities for academia. Therefore, developing academic skills for early success could facilitate the development of a growth mindset. This implies that n-tAHSC students need to both know their destiny and experience early academic successes, to visualise their future selves and maintain necessary levels of motivation. Therefore, clear career pathways and guidance, alongside academic support are seen as paramount to facilitate growth mindsets to bolster n-tAHSC student resilience.

#### **5.2.4: Discussion Summary- RQ2**

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Whilst the agentic practices for resilience of n-tAHSC students presented under research question 2 are useful for understanding the resilience practices of this unique student population, they place responsibility for success predominately at the hands of the individual. These binary agentic definitions of resilience are dated, with contemporary research favouring a more system focussed approach as a way of moving away from dated neoliberalist ideas (Maisuria & Cole, 2017; Webster & Rivers, 2019). Through exploring n-tAHSC resilience practices through a Bourdieusian lens a more systems focused framework for resilience is presented, incorporating agentic and structural attributes and resources. Thus, providing a deeper understanding of this phenomena from the lived experiences of n-tAHSC students perspective, which can be used to inform and replicate resilience support strategies for other students.

**5.3: RQ3: How can the intrapersonal and interpersonal resilience actions of non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care students be explained using Bourdieu's metatheory lenses of habitus, field, capital and agency.**

In answering research question 3 this research uses Bourdieu's meta-theory lens to present relational and dualistic considerations of the intrapersonal and interpersonal facilitating and constraining factors (conditions, causes and contingencies) of resilient practices in n-tAHSC students. Here the phenomenon of n-tAHSC resilience practice is explained within and across the domains of agency, habitus, field and capital.

Although agentic antecedents (conditions) provide intrapsychic resources (protective factors) for resilience (Brewer et al., 2019), the findings from this study indicate that interpersonal and co-agency factors are fundamental contingencies for bolstering resilience. Complimenting existing literature that propagates the dynamic contextual process definition of resilience, where resilience is viewed as a process, in which individuals draw upon personal, social and environmental resources (Stainton et al., 2018; Brewer et al., 2019). The concept of resilience as a process has been compared to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological system theory, where resources from the individual, their life and environment facilitate capacity for adaptation and bouncing back (Turner et

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al., 2017). Three key microsystems are identified in the literature as playing a key part in students' lives: home, work and university. The interaction and relationship between these microsystems creates meso-systems, where students participate. For the n-tAHSC student these were recognised as: 1) university and home, 2) university and work and 3) work and home. This research conceptualises the interplay of the intrapersonal, interpersonal, structural and policy factors within these systems under the domains of habitus, field and capital. By applying these lenses, a more systemic approach to resilience development was considered, thereby making recommendations for socially constructed interventions for resilience support, which will enable n-tAHSC students and potentially other diverse student populations to manage their unique stressors and risks for resilience, promoting positive wellbeing and protective resilience strategies.

### **5.3.1: Habitus Factors**

Habitus according to Bourdieu's (1977) theory is at the epicentre of human conduct, reflecting attitudes, values, behaviours and habits embodied in the individual, gained through their prior experiences of the social world, through family, culture and the milieu of education (James, 2016). In this research habitus influenced the n-tAHSC students' perceptions, conceptions and action in relation to resilience. Moreover, n-tAHSC students were seen to develop a particular habitus from their previous experiences of education, which may or may not be compatible with the field of HE, creating a 'dialectical confrontation' (Bourdieu, 2002, p. 31). This dialectical confrontation either bolstered or hindered resilience in the n-t AHSC student (James, 2016). Surprisingly, even when previous habitus hindered the n-tAHSC student's transition to university, the unique resilience of these students enabled them to successfully evolve and cope with abrasive changes.

The findings showed that n-tAHSC students viewed habitus as a key facilitating and constricting condition and cause of academic resilience, with references being made relating to upbringing, social class, culture, economic status and age in the Teams interviews. The interplay of home and university mesosystem was highlighted through the perceived influence of upbringing, social class and

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culture. Whilst socio-economic status was seen to create additional meso-systems of university and work and home and work.

### **5.3.1.1: Upbringing**

In relation to habitus, a strict upbringing was viewed as a barrier to resilience, a notion in keeping with previous literary findings, relating to certain habitus being a constraining factor for risk taking in students (Holton, 2015). This was particularly evident with commuting students, where strict upbringings created tensions with the associated risks of being an n-t HE student (Chapman et al., 2015) and the ambiguous risks associated with AHSC students, such as unknown career trajectories and ambiguous identities. This is because, an individual's habitus curtails a psychological stability and environmental fit by encouraging the individual to remain in a social world familiar to that which they are accustomed, like a 'fish in water'" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 127). This goes some way towards explaining the internal conflict which the n-t student faced, particularly where there was a disjunction between habitus (the known educational culture of the individual) and field (the new educational culture of the university), which Bourdieu called 'hysteresis' (Ivemark and Ambrose, 2014, p. 193).

In the current research hysteresis, was further aggravated for the n-tAHSC student by the liminal space of universities and the unknown trajectory of the AHSC discipline itself, which in turn further exacerbated the ambiguous transitional space of AHSC (Thomassen, 2016). Consequently, when risk taking behaviour was minimalised through strict upbringing the n-tAHSC student found adjustment to the unknown liminality of AHSC university life harder to adjust to. Cumulatively these entities of the unknown and misfit were seen to provoke imposter syndrome in the n-tAHSC student. This is a common phenomenon amongst successful health care students and early career health practitioners (Davis, 2019), who doubt their capabilities despite ongoing achievement. However, the participants in this study were able to subvert the risks and uncertainty hazard of their discourse by adopting resilient strategies, such as gaining career advice and support for learning and wellbeing. Therefore, this demonstrates a need for the n-tAHSC student to accept risk and uncertainty as

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a hazard of their discipline, to enable them to seek appropriate support for resilience and success. This supports Hoelterhoff's (2022) idea that resilience is more than just coping with adversities, rather it is a paradigm shift to thriving because of adversities. A concept particularly relevant to this study which shows that n-t-AHSC students who access formal support for their mental health, coupled with a bouncing forward and growth mindset towards resilience, succeed and overcome challenges more readily in their studies.

Additional findings from this research showed how n-t-AHSC students developed their own identities during and after their degree as a counterbalancing resilience strategy for overcoming the ambiguous challenge of liminality. How the n-t-AHSC students dealt with ambiguities in order to make sense of the AHSC liminal space was a matter of interest, where their reinventing of identity linked to the unique 'bouncing forward' nuance. Notably n-t-AHSC students strived towards successful transformation from n-t-AHSC student to AHSC graduate, shedding parts of their former n-t selves, a notion in keeping with Turner's (1970) third step of transition through a liminal space, where the individual returns to society in the new role and status acquired through the university journey. Uniquely this new role is not always clear to the n-t-AHSC student and is often coupled with self-discovery and a developed awareness of their own transferable skills that can be applied to the ambiguous roles of the AHSC workplace. This matches Turner's (1970, p.97) thoughts around the creative side of liminality as a "realm of pure possibility whence novel configuration of ideas and relations may arise". However, there is a tension here around ambiguous employability possibilities and the Government's agenda for graduate destinations from undergraduate degrees (Office for Students, 2019 and 2021), particularly problematic when students do not have knowledge and understanding of suitable graduate careers open to AHSC students. Here the need for clearer pathways for AHSC graduates is recognised, thus specific career support and advice should be embedded into AHSC degrees.

### **5.3.1.2: Socio-economic Factors**

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Another consideration of habitus was social class, portrayed as both a facilitating and constraining condition for resilience in the research, where middle-class and some working-class n-tAHSC students felt driven towards success, yet others from working class backgrounds felt their socio-economic status was a barrier to a positive self-concept and growth mindset. These findings coincided with those of Ivemark and Ambrose (2021) who noted that socioeconomic advantage may be an important, but not necessary, criterion for adjustment in HE, highlighting that whilst socioeconomic advantage can be beneficial to the n-tAHSC student it is not an essential factor for resilience and success owing to the robust and resourceful nature of this group.

In a similar vein to social class, economic status was identified, in the data, as both a facilitating condition, where students entered university with sufficient funds/financial support mechanisms and a facilitating contingency, where finances could be earned or claimed in order to bolster n-tAHSC student's socio-economic status and consequently resilience. While other n-tAHSC students discussed how being from a low economic household meant having to work through university, which was a barrier to study time and extra-curricular activities such as placement, thus creating additional meso-systems of university and work and work and home for these students to navigate in their resilience practice for successful degree outcomes. This implies that financial support is an important facilitating factor for resilience in n-tAHSC students, which Universities recognise when planning curriculums and support.

### **5.3.1.3: Age**

Age was seen as another key facilitating condition for resilience and success in n-tAHSC students, a notion in keeping with the resilience literature, where mature students accelerate in their studies, owing to second chance mentalities and greater growth mindsets, informed by experience (Cotton et al., 2017; Chung et al., 2017).

Alongside revealing the positive factors associated with maturity this research also reveals age-related constraining forces to resilience, such as family structure and juggling childcare and studies. A further startling finding here was

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the concept of covert discrimination towards n-tAHSC students in relation to maturity, portrayed as a potential barrier to engagement, academic resilience and success. This original negative finding is one that cannot be overlooked, especially in relation to 'imposter syndrome' tendencies and 'belongingness' issues already imperious to n-t student's resilience. Bourdieu (1999) used the controversial term of 'cleft habitus', where the habitus can become divided or fractured against itself in the individual's quest for upward mobility. Within this research tensions were highlighted between younger n-tAHSC students and their mature counterparts, possibly owing to the experience mature students brought to the classroom, which was seen to further exacerbate the younger students' feelings of inferiority and ambiguity. This experience is viewed as knowledge of the discourse referred to as symbolic capital, which was successfully exchanged between mature n-tAHSC students in less formal social interactions (discussed in more detail below), however this was not always welcomed by younger students in the formal classroom environment. Therefore, this demonstrates that informal opportunities for social exchanges of symbolic and cultural capital between students are important facilitating factors for resilience and knowledge exchange. More informal exchanges of capital can bolster tolerance and acceptance of different knowledge levels. A notion illustrated in the research, when younger n-tAHSC students formed positive alliances with older more experienced students and successfully exchanged a range of symbolic and cultural capital.

This research's findings are related to earlier work by Folleso (2015) and Nairz-Wirth et al., (2017) around the concept of 'symbolic violence' where individuals are made to feel incompetent by their peers, teacher or self-view of their capabilities. 'Symbolic violence' requires careful classroom management, therefore it is recommended that the case study university develops zero tolerance policies to discrimination of any kind, which should be upheld by the forward-facing academics in the classroom. This could be supported with classroom activities that support peer learning, where mature students work alongside younger students to exchange practice expertise, whilst younger students could offer academic skill support. This would require a certain level of



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pedagogy that can support students to find their own unique strengths in a non-biased manner.

Whilst the n-tAHSC student may have to face hysteresis, habitus is constantly remade and responsive to the environment that individuals operate within and the individual experiences (including successes or failures of previous actions). Therefore, this research suggests that institutions should consider how adjustment to HE can be supported for the n-tAHSC student, from a financial, cultural and social perspective. In particular, considering financial security as an enabler for academic resilience and engagement. Namely, more regard for students' financial situations should be considered in programme design and implementation, particularly for programmes with a placement element, where the n-t students time is compromised. Social integration should also be a key consideration for bolstering resilience, creating more tolerant cultures in the HE environment and a more collegial approach to tackling the challenges of liminality for all AHSC students not just non-traditional learners.

### **5.3.2: Factors from the field**

Ideally, an individual's habitus should align with the field that they are operating within, this means that the student's life history (culture, upbringing, gender, class, socioeconomic positioning, prior education) fits with the processes and practice of the university, thus giving the 'fish in water' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 127) sensation. As indicated in this research, when n-t students enter the field of university there is often tension between their previous habitus and adjustment to the field of HE, where there is a risk that these students will feel like cultural outsiders (Nairz-Wirth, et al., 2016) or 'fish out of water' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 96-97). As the number of n-t students increase, there is a growing urgency for interventions in the field that support n-t student adjustment to their new arenas in order to support their adaptation, bolster their resilience and ultimately success at university.

This research makes a substantial contribution to the plethora of knowledge around n-t students' navigations of the field of higher education providing authentic accounts of the facilitating and constraining factors from the field that

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influence resilience in the n-tAHSC student. Engaging with the activity of the field is a key facilitating factor for n-tAHSC student resilience and success. The participants described engagement as attending lectures, reading and researching, attending meetings with lecturers and engaging with feedback. Notably, mature students found engagement particularly beneficial. Facilitating contingencies for engagement, particularly with lectures, was enjoyment and understanding, which encouraged the n-tAHSC students to attend and engage.

A facilitating factor for engagement was the lecturers' style and tone of delivery, where the n-tAHSC student preferred a more informal tone, as opposed to the use of overly academic language in lectures. These findings are consistent with Foster and Spencer (2010) on how language may be seen as a form of 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu, 1999), where terminology can keep students trapped within predetermined perceptions, particularly when they feel excluded from the habitus group, through lack of understanding of this language. Here this is multiplied for the n-tAHSC student through the increased liminality of their field. These findings relate back to the alignment between habitus and field, demonstrating the central part pedagogy plays in the organisational culture and individual understanding of the field. This is relative to the work by Nairz-Wirth et al. (2016) regarding pedagogical assumptions of HE, that all students are equipped with the learning capabilities for undergraduate study. This research therefore recommends that universities support n-tAHSC students' resilience by designing curriculums that are not only interesting and enjoyable but can be understood by a wider audience than the 'traditional' student alone, ensuring that content and terminology is fully understood by all learners. Additionally, opportunities for social interaction should be inculcated to encourage more collegial resilience building strategies, where the environment becomes less alien through shared capital and awareness of available support in the unfamiliar space of AHSC learning.

#### **5.3.2.1: Structural support from the field**

Within the research participants advocated that support for resilience from the field, was seen as easy to access, this included: wellbeing and mental health

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support; financial support; library services; learning support; academic support; student services; lecturer support and interpersonal support from family, friends and peers. This was seen as knowing the university, including its services, activities and products, seen as a key facilitator for building resilience across the literature (Bourdieu, 1986; Nairz-Wirth et al., 2016). Interestingly, whilst these formal services were easy to access the n-tAHSC students showed preference for seeking initial support from less formal services in the university, such as personal tutors, lecturers or peers, who may then signpost to more formal support. These findings are interesting as they show that despite services for mental health and academic support being readily available in the field, the n-tAHSC students prefer to seek informal support for resilience, in the first instance, through lecturers and peers. This concept relates to developing social capital, discussed below. Participants also felt that services, whilst easy to access, were not necessarily offering the right support to cater for individual needs, consequently, highlighting the need for more person-centred support for n-t students. This alludes to a more social model for resilience, with a focus on social prescribing (Boyd and George, 2021), where services are tailored to the wellbeing needs of the students, as oppose to one size fits all reactive, blanket mental health support strategies.

### **5.3.3: Capital factors**

As indicated above the n-tAHSC students demonstrated a good level of knowledge of the university, which supports the development of social, cultural and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). However, this knowledge was accumulated over the 3 or more years at university, with lower levels of knowledge being apparent in the first year of study, suggesting that the first year of study is an optimum time to boost the n-t students' knowledge of the field, an idea supported in the literature (Nairz-Wirth et al., 2016).

Correspondingly, this research suggests that one way of boosting n-t students' knowledge of university and academia is through the acquisition and development of capital. Capital is presented by Bourdieu (1986) as either: embodied dispositions of the mind and body; objectified tangible objects such as books, pictures or instruments or institutionalised principles or regularities of

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the social world and described by others as the resources that can support integration and success in higher education (Nairz-Wirth et al., 2016). In this study three main forms of capital emerged: cultural capital, social capital and symbolic capital.

### **5.3.3.1: Cultural capital**

Cultural capital is the linguistics and knowledge of educational processes and systems required to navigate successfully through university, which can be developed through interactions with knowledgeable others (Bourdieu, 1986). The transmission of cultural capital can begin within the family unit, namely, when parents have graduated through the university system, however, with the majority of the participants in this study being the first in their family to go to university, this transmission was often absent. Interestingly this research shows that cultural capital can be developed and exchanged by the n-tAHSC student, within the field itself. Within this study, this building and exchanging of cultural capital occurred across formal and informal interactions between, students and peers, lecturers/ tutors and students.

A unique phenomenon in this research was the peer to peer exchanging of cultural capital, where students gained knowledge on university systems, learning and assessment processes and content. Participants built and exchanged capital with a familiar peer group, all with various competencies in academia and practice within the AHSC field. These peer groups exhibited similar form to a community of practice, a notion first presented by Wenger (1998) to account for the complex relationships built across landscapes, where knowledgeability is both claimed, developed and exchanged (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2014). This unique exchange of capital allowed the n-t students to trade their own capital and knowledge of the university systems, processes and artefacts for experience and AHSC skills of other n-t students. This community of practice amongst undergraduate students is rare, a phenomenon seen in more experienced academics (Tight, 2015; Wilson et al., 2020). Once again, this research demonstrates the unique resilience strategies of the n-tAHSC students, which may have been learned from previous habitus and capital acquisitions in the workplace.

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This research suggests that there was an exchange of cultural and symbolic capital occurring between peers, as a facilitating contingency for academic resilience and success. As explained by Bourdieu (1986), peer interactions can bolster individual knowledge of the university, where students can gain knowledge of university systems, learning and assessment. This knowledge and skill exchange was seen as a facilitating contingency for resilience and a way of counterbalancing barriers to resilience and success, such as complex academic concepts and lecturers who were difficult to understand. The students learned the 'rules of the game' of HE from one another (Watson et al., 2009; Reay et al., 2010), thereby making the liminal space less alien to all.

### **5.3.3.2: Social capital**

The phenomenon of exchanging capital in the current research went beyond the contextual knowledge of university and academic competencies to include peer support for mental health, through the development of social capital. This is the capital of belonging, recognition, and authentication received from members of a particular group (Nalaskowski and Dejna, 2015). Within the research, participants disclosed how social capital was bolstered through interactions with peers in the university, providing a sense of belonging to nt-AHSC students, where they could also receive informal wellbeing support. This connection between social capital and wellbeing support is apparent in the literature as a method for mitigating coping amongst stereotyped groups (Derks et al. 2006) therefore, highlighting how informal networks have an important role in student resilience and can be an effective preliminary to more formal mental health and wellbeing support. Although caution should be exercised around boundaries to this informal support, particularly for mental health, where saturation of this contingency needs to be recognised, allowing more formal channels of support to occur. Peer mentoring and mental health first aid training for students may be a way to manage the limitations of informal mental health and wellbeing support, to encourage signposting to formal support when needed (Mental Health First Aid England 2022).

Overall, the research indicates that peer interactions have multifactorial benefits, supporting academic, social and emotional resilience and increasing

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students social and cultural capital. The findings of the study resound with existing resilience theory around supportive social relationships acting as protective processes for resilience, by augmenting the individuals' sense of belongingness and self-efficacy (Cotton et al., 2017; Chung et al., 2017; Brewer et al., 2019), thereby reducing the alien paradigm of n-t students in HE. This crucial form of social capital can be seen as a form of symbolic capital, explained below.

### **5.3.3.3: Symbolic capital**

Symbolic capital is defined in the literature as the accumulation of the most valued social, economic and cultural capital recognised within the field, to maximise the power of the individual operating within that field (Bourdieu, 1987, Lebaron, 2014). Throughout this research symbolic capital was closely related to cultural capital, identified as productive scholarly activities, which bolstered academic resilience and success, such as: learning the rules of academic writing, developing critical reading and writing skills, learning how to reference (in keeping with the preferred style of the institution), understanding learning outcomes and assessment questions, producing work of a high standard worthy of >2.2 class grades and delivering effective presentations. The Sn-tAHSC graduates informed how their symbolic capital was bolstered through developing social capital, particularly through peer exchanges and interactions with lecturers, through engaging with draft policies, receiving feedback, asking lecturers questions and regular personal tutor meetings. Feedback was a controversial factor with the majority of students finding it supportive, whilst a small number of participants raised issues around overly critical feedback being counterproductive. These findings suggest that lecturers should ensure their feedback is productive including feedback and feedforward comments, in line with recommendations from The Higher Education Academy (2013), to support students' future achievement and development, whilst ensuring their self-efficacy is not negatively impacted.

Having lecturers and students on an equal level was seen as a key facilitating mechanism for effective capital exchange, with mature students feeling more confident approaching lecturers on an equal level. When students approached

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lecturers for support, they were able to gain knowledge. Again, this is a pedagogical issue that institutions should explore with their academics, linked to accessible language use (discussed above) and making sure that lecturers treat all students equally and respectfully.

#### **5.3.4: Discussion Summary - RQ 3**

In relation to research question 3, this research builds upon Bourdieu's methodological theory of field, habitus and capital by presenting real-life solutions for cultivating n-tAHSC student resilience, considering resources from the field, individual habitus and capital. By providing a conceptual framework of the conditions, causes and contingencies for n-tAHSC students' resilience, with reference to each domain. This research can be used as a springboard in universities for future programme development, policy creation and transition interventions and wellbeing services to support resilience and successful experiences of n-tAHSC students and the wider student body. The recommendations from this section, which included more accessible pedagogy for n-tAHSC students, balanced feedback, environments which foster peer interactions and more tailored support for n-tAHSC students have been used to inform the conclusions, generating a toolkit for n-tAHSC student resilience.

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## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

The results of this thesis demonstrate several implications for planning university wide resilience support strategies. Firstly, this research shows that not all students enter university with the same knowledge or experience of resilience, demonstrating that Sn-tAHSC students transition to university with advanced understandings of resilience and unique resilience strategies. Secondly Sn-tAHSC students/graduates articulate resilience in a unique way, such as the ‘bouncing forward notion’ showing that Sn-tAHSC students want to continue to develop and grow their resilience. Thirdly Sn-tAHSC students have and continue to develop relevant discipline resilience strategies for conquering the unique challenges of their chosen field of practice (AHSC). Thus, showing that resilience strategies need to be tailored to the unique abilities and needs of the student rather than a one size fits all concept. The following sections will explore what these implications are for universities, policy and practice, and the implication of these results on personal practice.

### **6.1: Implications for universities**

The toolkit illustrated in figure 6.1 below was developed on the basis of the results from this research. The toolkit conceptualises the facilitating conditions, causes and contingencies for resilience for n-tAHSC students, with suggested interventions and actions to support these factors, providing a toolkit to support student resilience in universities.

#### **6.1.1: Facilitating conditions for resilience**

This research suggests that n-tAHSC students should be supported to develop situational approaches to resilience, based on their already mastered strategies from previous habitus. Therefore, it is recommended that individual stories of nt-AHSC resilience are shared between students (‘traditional’ and non-traditional) through formal and informal networking opportunities. This can occur formally through face-to-face classroom activities for problem focussed learning, sharing learned resilience resources or via the programme’s formal online learning area (e.g. Blackboard) or Facebook page. Informally the



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university should encourage students to join societies and groups or online WhatsApp or Instagram groups to share their resilience tips. At induction and transition, students should be given opportunity to create a resilience toolkit, where they can identify what works for them in relation to resilience and where to seek further support, this can be developed and shared during future transitions.



Figure 6:1 Conceptual resilience toolkit for non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care students

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Other conditions for bolstering resilience included the development of key agentic traits, such as self-efficacy and growth mindsets. Growth mindsets were seen as important for goal-orientated AHSC practice and challenge. Therefore, it is recommended that universities support students' self-efficacy and growth mindsets through personal and professional development portfolios (PDPs), which support students to set personal and professional goals, whilst encouraging information gathering relating to support services (careers, wellbeing). Here personal reflection tasks and action planning should be encouraged at regular intervals to develop self-efficacy and self-awareness.

The research highlighted the link between risk-taking and resilience, as beneficial for developing problem-solving skills in ambiguous AHSC practice. Therefore, opportunities for developing risk-taking should be integrated through classroom activities, where students take managed risks through simulated learning experiences and problem-based learning exercises. Additionally, risk should be readily accepted as part of AHSC, supported through guest lecturers, providing work-related and work-based learning experiences. Where work placements can provide real risk experiences, managed through placement supervision

It was found that universities should have regard for the financial needs of n-tAHSC students when planning curriculums, particularly those with a placement element, to support the student's meso-systems. Financial services should work closely with academic development and wellbeing services to ensure timetabled hours and placement expectations are compatible with part-time working requirements of students.

Alongside habitus factors, clear expectations were identified as facilitating conditions for n-tAHSC student resilience. Whilst clear expectations around HE study can be communicated through induction and transition (Payne and Mearman, 2022), this study recommends that students are also given information on how to obtain financial, well-being, learning and other university support to meet these expectations. This can be delivered through induction, transitions and peer mentoring programmes. This study has also shown how Alumni are a key resource for sharing expert resilience knowledge. Therefore,

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Alumni should be encouraged more to facilitate taught sessions, possibly through financial incentives.

### **6.1.2: Facilitating causes and contingencies for resilience**

By adopting a qualitative approach this study provided authentic evidence that n-tAHSC students use a more social model of resilience, enabling sharing of successful strategies for resilience through social networking and exchanging capital, supporting a sense of belonging, motivation from others and interactions with knowledgeable others. Therefore, acknowledging that social integration should be encouraged within the curriculum and extra-curricular activities, to infiltrate communities of practice, where cultural, social and symbolic capital can be freely exchanged and gathered between diverse groups of students. This can be achieved through formal classroom groupings and informal groups such as journal clubs, knowledge exchange sessions and up to date classroom availability for students to study together over lunch.

The findings from this study propose that informal networks, such as communities of practice, have an important role in student resilience, where peer support complemented formal wellbeing and learning support from the field. Therefore, for institutions to capitalise on this informal well-being support, mental health first aid training should be provided, where students learn to recognise the boundaries of peer support and the need for more specialist interventions. Students should also receive adequate knowledge of the university and available environmental resources for resilience, facilitated through existing peer mentoring and personal tutoring systems, induction and transitions.

This research provided unique evidence from the n-tAHSC student voices, that universities can support student engagement and resilience through approachable lecturers who make learning accessible to all, providing understandable content and treating students with equal regard. This was seen as key to enjoyment, understanding, development of a positive self-concept and ultimately motivated n-tAHSC students to succeed. Therefore, it is critical that lectures should be pitched at an appropriate level for the diverse learning needs

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of all students in order to eliminate 'symbolic violence' from overly complex language. Having a student-centred curriculum, informed by practice and regularly evaluated by students, can support enjoyment. Developing glossaries of complex terms and linking lecture content to learning outcomes can support understanding.

Another point of significance in this research was positive interactions with lecturers (knowledgeable others), which supported the development of symbolic and cultural capital. This supported students to learn the 'rules of the game' further bolstering n-tAHSC student resilience through the development of knowledge. Additionally, lecturer support was often the first step for seeking more formal support from university services. Therefore, this study argues that lecturers need to be approachable to ensure students voice their needs, to support effective interventions for resilience. An open office drop-in system can support student access to lecturers, as can timetabling support sessions for personal tutor contact and academic tutor support.

By employing a grounded theory approach new theory was generated, where the data illustrated that early assessments should be predominately formative, implying there should be more options for correcting work and resubmitting. By doing this the student will be provided with opportunities to gain first-hand knowledge of expectations, correct early writing errors and reduce the liminality of university. Additionally, the students would benefit from other identified causes of resilience: receiving positive feedback, taking ownership of issues, taking agentic action, succeeding and developing academic skills in a supportive manner. All of which enable the development of self-efficacy and help to eliminate issues around 'symbolic violence'.

## **6.2: Implications for policy and practice**

This research is particularly relevant in light of the Governments Office for Students (2022) recent launch of the B3 Conditions, namely 'Student Outcomes' and the monitoring of providers' performance in terms of the percentage of students who: continue from year 1 to year 2; the percentage who complete their programme and the percentage who go on to 'graduate-

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level' employment. A key benefit of employing a qualitative approach was that it allowed the discovery of unique groups, which are frequently missed in quantitative studies (Austin and Sutton, 2014). As this was the first known study on n-tAHSC student resilience it makes an original contribution to the empirical evidence base, where awareness has been raised around the liminality of AHSC degree programmes and the additional ambiguity this poses for n-t students. It is critical to take note that these types of students exist, as they have been found to be an exception to the rule, revealing new insight into the phenomenon of resilience. Therefore, further research is recommended around the AHSC discourse and career opportunities for AHSC graduates to ensure compliance with Government agendas around graduate career transparency and support future student resilience.

In relation to the Student Mental Health Charter (2019), this research provides counterarguments against a "one size fits all" blanket policy for student resilience, providing evidence that resilience is an individual dynamic contextual process. The study provides a conceptual framework of the conditions, causes and contingencies for n-tAHSC students' resilience, thereby providing a toolkit for resilience which universities can adopt to support the needs of n-t AHSC and other students.

### **6.3: Implication of results on personal practice**

Being uniquely positioned as an AHSC employer, lecturer, programme leader and researcher has enabled the researcher to see how the objectives of education should be matched to the needs of AHSC practice. Within AHSC programmes personal development portfolios provide a tool for effectively linking learning and development from the AHSC degree to employability. Transition and induction activities, building communities and having approachable lecturers further support student resilience. It is anticipated that future allegiances with wellbeing and learning services will further support resilience strategies (Houghton and Anderson, 2017). This research has impacted on the researcher's beliefs that resilience packages can be shoehorned to fit all students, which will inevitably influence future practice. By

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ensuring minority voices are heard and catered for in relation to embedding resilience development across curriculums. Therefore, it is suggested that further research on the suggested interventions be conducted later to evaluate their effectiveness for other students.

#### **6.4: Limitations**

This study provides new insights into student resilience through the unique views of n-tAHSC students, resulting in the findings being somewhat limited to this unique population group. Therefore, these findings may not be generalisable across other disciplines, likewise, it cannot be determined whether these strategies are relevant to all n-t students. However, this research is reflective of a grounded theory approach where an underrepresented population have been researched to provide new knowledge around the n-tAHSC perspectives on resilience.

Using a case study university for this research also provided limitations regarding transferability (Floyd and Arthur, 2012). However, as suggested above this research sits within the constructivist paradigm and therefore does not intend to offer generalisation. The methods adopted provided transparency to this research by clearly describing the steps involved in case selection, data collection, rationale for method choice, and explicit descriptions of the processes and how the researcher's background has influenced data collection and interpretation. Thus, this case study approach may be thought of as trustworthy and could therefore be applied to other disciplines or student groups.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1 Interview Question Frame

#### **Non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care (AHSC) Graduates perspectives on success, resilience and coping.**

##### **Overview of project aims**

This project aims to determine if current UK University Mental Health and Resilience policies and frameworks are appropriate for non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care students. It does so by exploring successful non-traditional AHSC Graduates views and experiences of resilience and coping mechanisms adopted during their undergraduate degrees, making comparisons to the ambitions of policy. It is envisaged that insight into non-traditional students' resilience and coping strategies can recommend ways to improve current resilience practices and frameworks in the case study university, if required.

##### **About the interview**

1. **Ethics.** I have a consent form we need you to sign. Please take a moment to look at the information sheet before you do.
2. **Anonymity.** All quotes will be de-identified.
3. **Interview style.** For some questions the answer may seem obvious, however I want to understand your perspective without making assumptions.



Table 0:1 Question frame for interviews

	<b>Questions and Prompts</b>	<b>Focus</b>
1	<p><b>These first set of questions ask you about your background as a successful non-traditional AHSC student</b></p> <p><b>1a)</b> Can you tell me about your academic background /name of degree studied and final classification achieved?</p> <p><i>(Which degree programme? What degree classification did you/ will you graduate with?)</i></p> <p><b>1b)</b> Can you identify which characteristics from the list provided in the Participant Information Sheet make you a non- traditional student?</p> <p><i>(first-generation in family to go to university OR students from low-income households OR mature students 21years+ on entry to university OR disabled students OR students from minority ethnic/racial groups.)</i></p> <p><b>1c)</b> What age were you when you started your studies?</p>	Participant's background
2.	<p><b>These questions ask you about becoming a successful student/ graduate and any potential barriers you may have had to overcome</b></p> <p><b>2a)</b> How did you become a successful graduate? <i>(what did success look like for you?)</i></p> <p><b>2b)</b> What barriers did you face/ overcome whilst at university?</p>	Views on becoming a successful student and any potential barriers to this.

	<p><i>(academically, personally)</i></p> <p><b>2c) What were the most stressful events/ issues for you, whilst at university?</b></p> <p><i>(what were the most significant academic challenges?)</i></p>	
3.	<p><b>Resilience</b></p> <p><b>These questions ask you about overcoming any previously mentioned challenges or barriers.</b></p> <p><b>3) How did you overcome any challenges/ barriers to your success?</b></p> <p><i>(What coping strategies did you use to help you manage university life and demands?)</i></p>	Views on coping strategies and overcoming barriers to success
4.	<p><b>These questions ask you about resilience and resilience strategies you may have adopted</b></p> <p><b>4a) How do you describe/ define resilience? <i>(why?)</i></b></p> <p><b>4b) What resilience strategies did you adopt whilst at university? <i>(How? Why? If appropriate)</i></b></p>	Views on resilience
5.	<p><b>The next set of questions will ask about your own experiences of resilience and the factors which contributed to this from the university (field), your background (habitus), social interactions, economic positioning, interactions/ knowledge of the university/</b></p>	Factors that supported resilience from a field, habitus, capital and psychological perspective.

	<p><b>others (social, economic and cultural capital) and your own characteristics/ personality (agentic) perspective.</b></p> <p><b>5a)</b> How (if at all) did the university support your resilience? (Field)</p> <p><i>(What resources, if any, did you access to support your resilience and success at the university? How easy did you find accessing these?)</i></p> <p><b>5b)</b> How did you manage your own resilience? (Agency)</p> <p><i>(What factors from a personal perspective contributed to your resilience?)</i></p> <p><b>5c)</b> What other factors contributed to your success and resilience? (habitus/ capital)</p> <p><i>(How did your relations with others contribute to your success and resilience? how did you manage financially? How did your upbringing contribute to your resilience?)</i></p> <p><b>5d)</b> Was institutional support easy to access/ readily available?</p> <p><i>(How did you find the support?)</i></p>	
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## Appendix 2 Participant Information Sheet (PIS)



### Participant information sheet

Title: Critically Analysing a Whole University Approach to Resilience, Coping and Mental Health: Successful non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care (AHSC) Graduates perspectives on coping and resilience.

For further information about how Lancaster University processes personal data for research purposes and your data rights please visit our webpage:

[www.lancaster.ac.uk/research/data-protection](http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/research/data-protection)

I am a PhD student at Lancaster University and I would like to invite you to take part in a research study about: Successful non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care (Sn-tAHSC) graduates perspectives on coping and resilience.

Please take time to read the following information carefully before you decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the study about?

This study aims to explore the views and experiences of non-traditional AHSC graduates on resilience and coping during their undergraduate studies.

Why have I been invited?

I have approached you because I am interested in understanding the factors that support resilience and coping in successful (Graduates with a 2:1 or First Class Honours Degree) non-traditional (first-generation in family to go to university OR students from low-income households OR mature students 21years+ on entry to university OR disabled students OR students from minority ethnic/racial groups) AHSC students.

I would be very grateful if you would agree to take part in this study.

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### **What will I be asked to do if I take part?**

If you decided to take part, this would involve an online (Microsoft Teams) interview with myself, which will seek answers to questions on resilience, coping and any barriers you encountered to success and overcame during your undergraduate degree. It is anticipated that this interview will take no longer than 45 minutes.

### **What are the possible benefits from taking part?**

Taking part in this study will allow you to share your experiences of coping and resilience, your insights will contribute to the understanding of this phenomena for the non-traditional student. In turn this may help to influence policy for similar students.

### **Do I have to take part?**

No. It's completely up to you to decide whether or not you take part. Your participation is voluntary. If you decide not to take part in this study, this will not affect your relations with myself or the university as a past student.

### **What if I change my mind?**

If you change your mind, you are free to withdraw at any time during your participation in this study. If you want to withdraw, please let me know, and I will extract any ideas or information (=data) you contributed to the study and destroy them. However, it is difficult and often impossible to take out data from one specific participant when this has already been anonymised or pooled together with other people's data. Therefore, you can only withdraw up to 2 weeks after taking part in the interviews.

### **What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

It is unlikely that there will be any major disadvantages to taking part. Taking part will mean investing 30-45 minutes of your time for the interview.

### **Will my data be identifiable?**

After the interview), only I, the researcher conducting this study and my PhD supervisor will have access to the ideas you share with me.

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I will keep all personal information about you (e.g. your name and other information about you that can identify you) confidential, that is I will not share it with others. I will remove any personal information from the written record of your contribution. All reasonable steps will be taken to protect the anonymity of the participants involved in this project. For this reason, I will be using pseudonyms.

How will we use the information you have shared with us and what will happen to the results of the research study?

I will use the information you have shared with me only in the following ways:

It will be used for research purposes only. This will include my PhD thesis and other publications, for example journal articles. I may also present the results of my study at academic conferences and/or use it to inform policy makers.

When writing up the findings from this study, I would like to reproduce some of the views and ideas you shared with me. I will only use anonymised quotes (e.g. from my interview with you), so that although I will use your exact words, all reasonable steps will be taken to protect your anonymity in any publications.

If anything you tell me in the interview suggests that you or somebody else might be at risk of harm, I will be obliged to share this information with my supervisor and possibly the police/ social services. If possible, I will inform you of this breach of confidentiality.

How my data will be stored

Your data will be stored in encrypted files (that is no-one other than me, the researcher will be able to access them) and on password-protected computers. I will store hard copies of any data securely in locked cabinets in my office. I will keep data that can identify you separately from non-personal information (e.g. your views on a specific topic). In accordance with University guidelines, I will keep the data securely for a minimum of ten years.

What if I have a question or concern?

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If you have any queries or if you are unhappy with anything that happens concerning your participation in the study, please contact myself

Hayley McKenzie – [mckenzi@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:mckenzi@lancaster.ac.uk)

Or my Supervisor

Dr Gemma Derrick - [g.derrick@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:g.derrick@lancaster.ac.uk)

Telephone - +44 1524 595016

Address - Educational Research  
Lancaster University  
Lancaster  
United Kingdom  
LA1 4YW

If you have any concerns or complaints that you wish to discuss with a person who is not directly involved in the research, you can also contact:

### **Sources of support**

As this research explores resilience and coping sensitive and potentially distressing topics may be discussed as part of the research. If you are affected by these discussions there are a number of organisations that can help you:  
such as the NHS Mental Health Helplines [nhs support for stress, anxiety, depression, mental health helpline](#) OR [The Samaritans](#)

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and Lancaster Management School's Research Ethics Committee.
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**Thank you for considering your participation in this project.**

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## Appendix 3 Ethical Approval

Educational  
Research

Lancaster  
University



31<sup>st</sup> July 2020

Dear Hayley McKenzie,

Thank you for submitting your ethics application and additional information for

The information you provided has been reviewed by Dr Gemma Derrick and I can confirm that approval has been granted for this project.

As principal investigator your responsibilities include:

- ensuring that (where applicable) all the necessary legal and regulatory requirements in order to conduct the research are met, and the necessary licenses and approvals have been obtained;
- reporting any ethics-related issues that occur during the course of the research or arising from the research (e.g. unforeseen ethical issues, complaints about the conduct of the research, adverse reactions such as extreme distress) to the Research Ethics Officer (Dr Murat Oztok or Dr Natasa Lackovic).
- submitting details of proposed substantive amendments to the protocol to Dr Gemma Derrick (spvr) for approval.

Please do not hesitate to contact your supervisor if you require further information about this. Kind regards,

***Whole University Approach to Mental Health: From a Non-Traditional Applied Health and Social Care***

***'Critically Analysing a Graduates Perspective'***

Alison Sedgwick

Programme Administrator  
Doctoral Programme in Educational Research

Head of Department  
**Professor Paul Ashwin**, BA, MSc, PhD Professors  
**Carolyn Jackson**, BSc, PhD  
**Don Passey**, BSc, MA, PhD  
**Murray Saunders**, BA, MA, PhD **Malcolm Tight**, BSc, PhD  
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#### **Appendix 4 Recruitment Email and Poster to potential participants.**

Dear Successful Graduate,

I would like to ask for your help in my PhD thesis on resilience and coping strategies of non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care students.

UK universities have seen a dramatic rise in both the prevalence and severity of student mental health issues, with implications on student functioning, success and retention (Baik et al., 2019). In response to these political, public and professional concern, the UK University Mental Health Charter provides a set of 6 guiding principles for inculcating a 'whole university approach' to mental health and resilience building strategies (Student Minds, 2020). A potential issue with this policy is that individual student needs may not be met through a 'one size fits all' whole university approach. The aim of my doctoral thesis will be to analyse non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care (AHSC) graduates perspectives on resilience and coping mechanisms, for successful degree completion.

This would be via a short 30-45 minute online interview with myself. Please note participation is voluntary and you are under no obligation to participate in this research. I would just be extremely grateful if you could spare the time to participate.

I have attached the participation information sheet and consent form for your information should you wish to participate/ find out more about my study. If you have any questions about my research please email be on [h.mckenzie@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:h.mckenzie@lancaster.ac.uk).

Kind Regards

Hayley

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Participants needed for PhD study investigating resilience and coping strategies of successful non-traditional graduates



**I am a senior lecturer in the faculty of health, doing my PhD thesis around successful non-traditional Applied Health and Social Care graduates resilience and coping mechanisms.**

I would like to recruit:

Successful Applied Health and Social Care Graduates with a 2:1 or First Class Honours Degree.

Must be from a non-traditional student background (first-generation in family to go to university OR students from low-income households OR mature students 21years+ on entry to university OR disabled students OR students from minority ethnic/racial groups).

You will be required to complete an online Microsoft Teams interview with myself lasting about 30 to 45 minutes.

Your views and experiences will be compared to whole university policies on resilience and coping, to ensure the voice of the non-traditional student is heard.

Your help will be greatly appreciated, please email me on [mckenzieh@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:mckenzieh@lancaster.ac.uk) if you would like to participate or for further information.

Many thanks *Hayley McKenzie*

## Appendix 5 Example of Initial Coding and Gerunds (Sample of Nodes taken from NVivo)

PhD Student Resilience

Nodes

Table 0:2 Example of Initial Coding and Gerunds (Sample of Nodes taken from NVivo)

Name	Description	Files	References
Agency + Habitus		0	0
Coping		10	16
avoidance, distraction and acceptance'	Seeing it all in	10	16
accepting uncontrollable situations	Surrendering control	3	4
Acknowledging Difference to A levels		1	1
Apply some mature thinking	In Vivo code rising above the situation when younger students were being difficult.	1	2
Avoidance, distraction and acceptance coping mechanism		1	1
loosing sleep		2	2
reading for pleasure		2	2
taking breaks – avoidance		12	25

Name	Description	Files	References
being encouraged to take a break		3	3
eating oranges		1	1
eating takeaways		1	1
Exercising		1	1
going to the gym		3	8
going outdoors		6	9
going to church		3	3
having something to look forward to		4	4
having that ability to be able to stop and reflect		1	1
I have to turn it off		1	1
knowing when to take a break		3	4
Praying		1	1
realising when unproductive		1	1
returning to studies with clearer mindset		1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
Smoking		1	1
stand still		1	1
staring at the laptop screen		1	1
brushing or rubbing things off		1	1
Disengaging		2	2
procrastinating		2	2
Don't let it get the better of you		1	1
finding the strength to continue on something, even when it's not looking good		1	1
having uni as a distraction		1	1
making sacrifices		3	7
Persevering		7	9
being able to overcome barriers		1	1
being determined		9	17
being strong		1	1
being stubborn		4	4

Name	Description	Files	References
being tenacious		1	2
bouncing forward		1	2
bouncing back from something that you found difficult		6	7
carrying on		5	5
catching up		1	1
fighting for what I wanted		2	3
finding a way		1	1
getting on with it		12	15
getting self back on track		1	1
got back on my feet.		1	1
just crack on with		1	1
keeping going		11	17
being able to keep on going		1	1
keep fighting		1	1
not giving up		9	16
staying on track		2	4

Name	Description	Files	References
you start something you finish it		2	2
thinking it's ok		1	1
Taking Action and Adapting		13	28
Apply some mature thinking	In Vivo code rising above the situation when younger students were being difficult.	1	2
awareness,		1	1
became aware that there was counseling available		1	1
being resilient		8	9
managing own mental health		2	4
managing stress		2	2
dealing with situations		8	15
awareness,		1	1
became aware that there was counseling available		1	1
Finding ways of being able to address whatever those issues are		1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
fitting in		1	1
learnt how to deal with challenging situation		1	1
making sense of issues		1	1
managing change		1	3
managing own mental health		2	4
managing stress		2	2
not wanting to go back		1	1
overcoming obstacles		4	4



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## Appendix 6 Example of instances of coding from NVivo Child Node – having a Positive Homelife

Files\\P12 Original Interview Transcript - § 1 reference coded [ 0.81%  
Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.81% Coverage

Thank you. And then just add a bit about your upbringing, so how your parents raised you did that help you to be more resilient.

P12: Yeah, definitely. I think so, yeah.

Files\\P18 Original Interview Transcript - § 1 reference coded [ 1.47%  
Coverage]

Reference 1 - 1.47% Coverage

He's and my Mum and Dad obviously been absolutely instrumental My dad always said to us the job comes first, and Mum and Dad have given us some really, really, all four of us strong work ethics, and he, you know dad used to say to mom, you know, is our \*\*\*\* actually doing this is \*\*\*\*., and he knows the reason, he knows that you know that the reason why I'm doing this. He just always used to say, the job was fairness and he definitely instilled that in, you know, all three of my brothers are doing, very well for themselves

Files\\P3 Original Interview Transcript - § 1 reference coded [ 0.23% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.23% Coverage

probably because I found my upbringing was really quite solid

Files\\P4 Original Interview Transcript - § 1 reference coded [ 0.91% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.91% Coverage

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I think I suppose obviously erm upbringing does probably have a lot to do with it, and I was probably brought with that matter of fact,

Files\\P5 Original Interview Transcript - § 1 reference coded [ 0.64% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.64% Coverage

I'm going to suppose my whole background really my. I come from, kind of, not traditional working class, and, you know, my mom and dad have always been on a relatively good wage and you know we live in ...a you know they they own their own house we lived in a semi-detached with a nice big garden. And so we, you know, we've never.

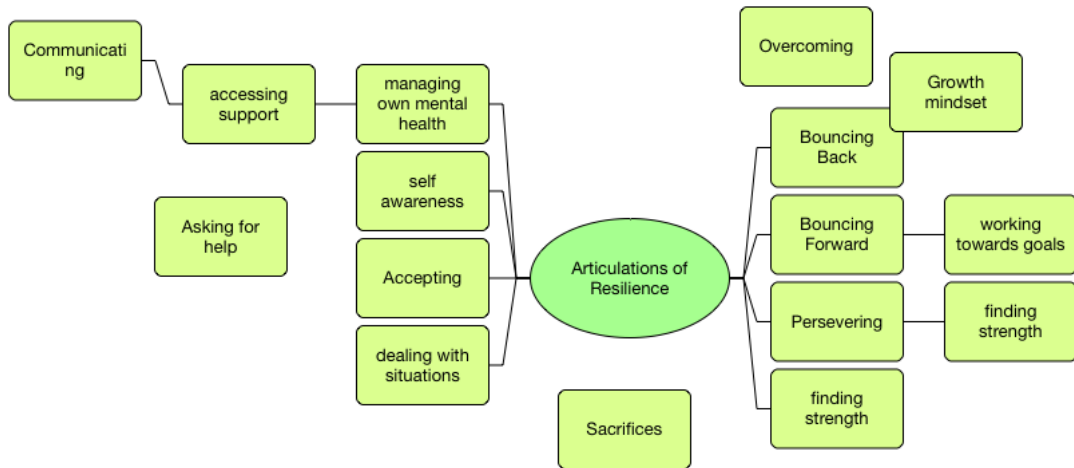
Erm we're kind of middling really,

Files\\P6 Original Interview Transcript - § 1 reference coded [ 0.61% Coverage]

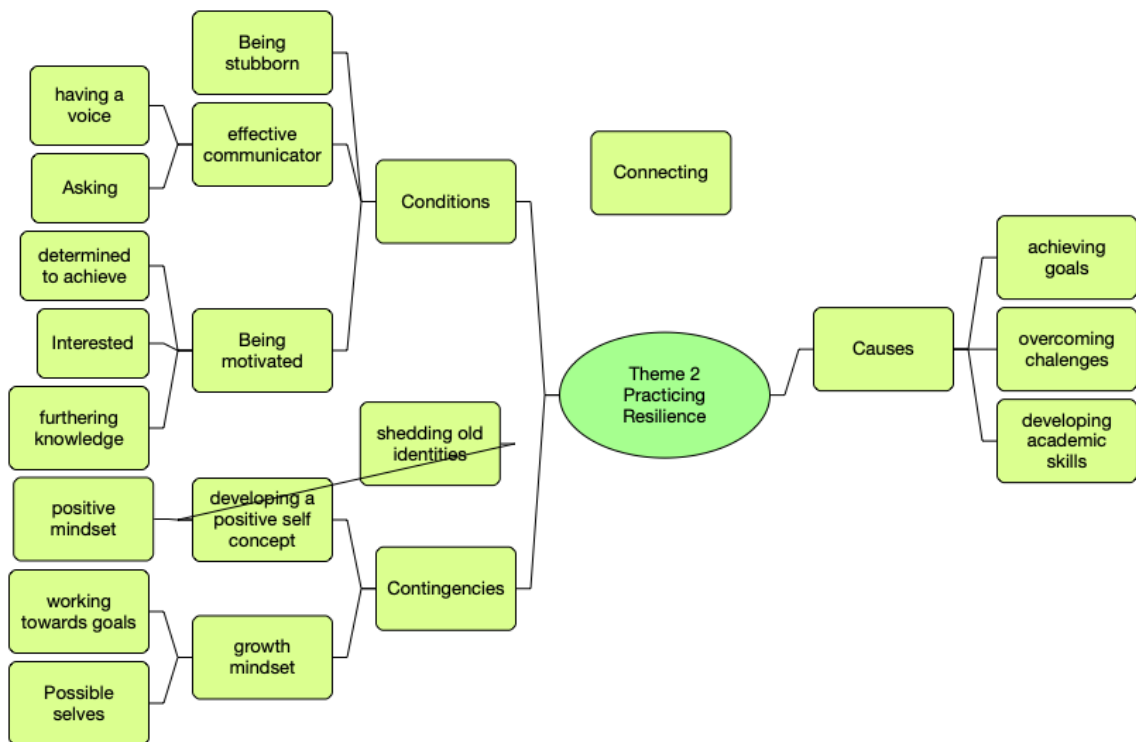
Reference 1 - 0.61% Coverage

Yes, they always make sure that I'm doing my best at school and school work is a priority and.

**Appendix 7 Examples of Early Concept Mapping for N-tAHSC Graduates Articulations and N-tAHSC practices of Resilience Findings Theme 1 and Theme 2**



*Figure 7:1 Example of Early Concept Mapping for N-tAHSC Students Articulations of Resilience Findings Theme 1*



*Figure 7:2 Concept Mapping for How N-tAHSC Students Practice Resilience Findings Theme 2*

## Appendix 8 Hierarchy of Parent and Child Nodes from Theoretical and Axial Coding

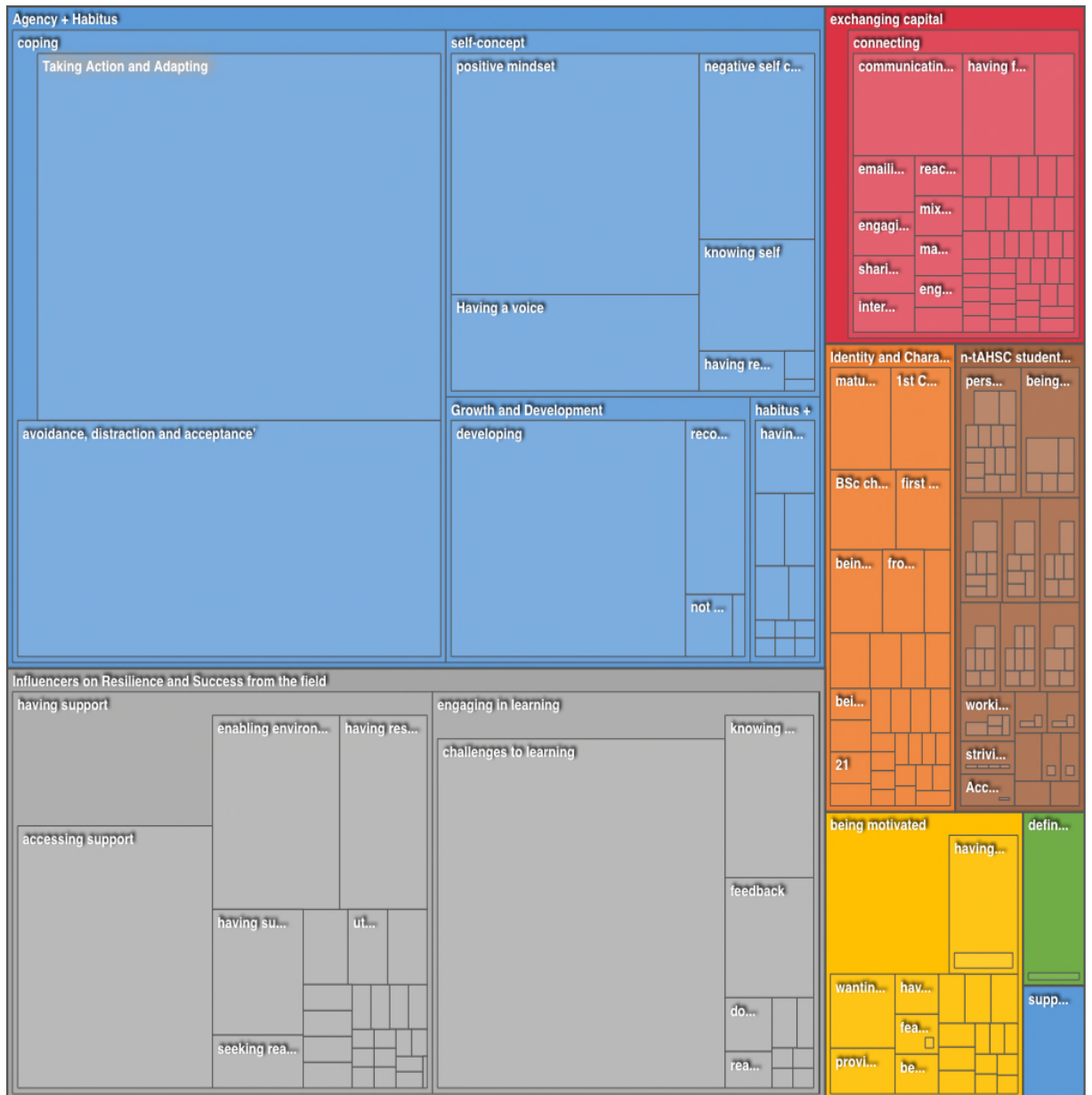


Figure 7:3 Hierarchy of Parent and Child Nodes from Theoretical and Axial Coding

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