Education policies in England:

exploring the relationship between the focus on attainment/achievement in the school/college-environment and adolescents' mental health

Danilo Di Emidio

Ph.D

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

2023

Acknowledgements

This is a tale of many tales, lasting five years, across two universities, including a school and a college, over 50 participants, four supervisors, consulting academics worldwide, think-tanks, charities, GOV.UK, publishing articles…and I must thank many then!

Forever thanks Ian (Prof. Tucker, first supervisor), for solidly supporting me over the years (and the lockdowns); for believing in my project and for your patience throughout. Knowing you were *there* made a difference; several PhD colleagues from other institutions were not as lucky.

Thanks Katie (Dr. Wright, second supervisor), for jumping on my 'PhD train' while in movement and replacing Dr Heather Price (whom I also thank). Your insights into my project's utility, contribution, and detailed comments won't be forgotten.

Thanks Ben (Dr. Gidley, third supervisor), as my MSc dissertation supervisor, you were the first to believe it could grow into a PhD; thank you for following it through.

Thanks Dr Sara Paparini and Prof. Corinne Squire, for facilitating the research proposal; without you this thesis would still be in dreamland. Thanks to Sara P. (the friend) for supporting and encouraging me and reminding me that it could be done – the sun rises for everyone!

Thanks Nick (AKA Nicola), my ex-PGCE colleague, friend and eventually fieldwork 'informant'; you kindly introduced me to your college and helped by offering precious insights throughout, much-much appreciated. Drink soon, finally!

Thanks 'PhD Survivors WhatsUp group' (Beth, Iaisha, Alice and Lemonia) for the banter and support. Questioning what/why/how we were doing a PhD was worthwhile and kept us going warmly. Thanks to Beth for the regular chats and drinks - 'subjectivity' never ceases to surprise!

Thanks Janice and Jill for the ongoing support during the first year, when our PhDs never seemed to take off, nor did they feel like a real thing - Janice, your turn now to crystalize it!

Thanks for the collegial support at UEL, especially from Prof. Gerry Czerniawski and Dr Angie Voela for your training and advice. Special thanks Cressida Campbell (Psychology Technician) for your practical support, the 'chat bits' and ongoing encouragement in difficult times. Special thanks to Ian Clark (Librarian for Psychology); sorry I never learned how to use Zotero!

Abstract

This study investigated the influence of the secondary school-environment on adolescent mental health (MH). Late adolescents (16-18 years old) experience multiple contributors to their MH, particularly the pressure of high-stakes examinations engendering an emotionally charged, performance-based learning environment. These pressures, associated with transitioning and the greater responsibility for the future, reflect prevailing neoliberal values of competition, responsibilization and individualism.

I studied the school-environment using Critical Theory and ethnographic and participatory methods. Student-participants from a sixth form college co-researched the study topic alongside teachers, parents, and college-leaders. This way, different 'roles' and lived experiences came together in a democratic platform to explore the relationship between education and MH critically.

The study shows that late adolescents are grappling with introspection (e.g., self-esteem, self-doubt) and managing different layers of recognition, including an 'intimate estrangement' that influences their well-being, subjectivity, and MH. Subjectivity, and modes of subjectivation, helped explain a complex relationship with the *self*, revealing the influence of compulsory education environments on MH. Co-produced findings provided reflexive opportunities for participants to reconsider their status as service-users and stakeholders in the school and mitigate a pervasive sense of 'crisis' through participatory action for change.

The study can help policymakers to (i) inform education policy for more precise definitions and inclusive approaches to defining MH; (ii) monitor how schools and colleges engage with young people's MH in the face of the school environment and policy demands; (iii) assess through participatory consultations how students perceive MH related policy to adjust in implementation.

The impact of educational policies on adolescent MH is critical as policies are often ideological, polyvalent and intersect with academic life during transition to adulthood. Policies constitute modalities of being (subjectivities) by imagining the 'good life' for all; they should thus also recognize students as stakeholders and service-users to be involved in their development, as people able to make authentic choices and hold critical views about educational success and failure.

Contents

List of tables

List of figures

Technical and organizations' abbreviations

BAME	Black, Asian and minority Ethnic
CATs	Cognitive Abilities Tests
CAMHS	Children And Mental Health Services

ECM	Every Child Matters
FSM	Free School Meal
GCSE	General Certificate in Secondary Education
IFS	Institute of Fiscal studies
MSc	Master of Science
NEU	National Education Union
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PP	Pupil Premium
PSHE,	Personal Social Health education
SEAL	Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OFS	Office for Students
ONS	Office for National Statistics
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education
UKRI	UK Research and Innovation
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
WHO	World Health Organization

Personal Abbreviations

Appx	Appendices
DDE	My name and surname in transcripts
Fig	Figure
MH&WBTeam	Mental Health and Well-being Team
MH	Mental Health
TA	Thematic analysis
RQ	Research Question

Ch.1 – Introduction

'...subjectivity is strictly related to the medicalization of our existence'

(Foucault, n.d.)[1]

'*Something has emerged from you, which surprises, which astonishes and denies everything which has made our society what it is today. That is what I would call the extension of the field of possibilities. Do not give up*'.

J.P. Sartre (1968, addressing the French students)

Introduction - the Quest for Formal Education (and my Quest)

Poverty, and the need for a specialized education sector to support the Industrial Revolution, were among the drivers for mass compulsory education in the UK in the 19th Century (1870 Education Act), alongside pressures of a philosophical nature stemming from the Enlightenment's focus on reason and universal liberating faculties.[2]

Whinge and Gingell, from the social sciences, argue that there is no consensus as to what the chief aims of education are. Some emphasize individualism and promote autonomy; others focus on the contribution education offers to societal purposes such as collectivism and cohesion (2008, pp.11-20). Bibby, from psychology, describes education as the creation, control and transmission of knowledge and facilitating child development (2011, p.16), while Jones (2021) reminds us that mass education has always been associated with progressive moves of fairness and justice to care

---

[1] Unfortunately, I lost the reference, however, later in the thesis I will expand the point through Hancock (2018) and Conrad's (2007) reference to Foucault's Birth of the Clinic.

[2] Education and learning can have far more reaching anthropological connotations related to the transmission of knowledge (Anderson-Levitt, 2012) and anthropological perspectives on the politics of possibilities (Stambach & Hall, 2016); however, throughout this thesis, formal, mass, compulsory, state education, and schooling, refer to the same thing and their usage varies for emphasis.

for the 'whole child', despite questionable governmental motives to discipline and control populations.

Discourses around the aim of formal education have been reconfigured in the past 40 years; yet change-and-continuity with every change of government seem to be the norm. As expressed through successive governments' educational policies (Close 2 - *1988 Education Reform Act*, in Crick, 1998, p.1.6; Chitty, 2014), education can be a (passive) process of knowledge and skills acquisition and a process of (active) engagement with the world. However, the Conservative party's most recent curriculum and assessment reforms in the UK (2013) have reduced the active element in the name of knowledge and *rigorous* (measurable) attainment/achievement,[3] although the active element has not been free of controversy. For example, Active Citizenship is still a central strand of the Citizenship curriculum in secondary schools, and New Labour (since roughly 2000) introduced a controversial syllabus on the individual rights and responsibility to attain the 'good life' for all. Currently, a focus on character and resilience education underpins a controversial 'whole child' education agenda, focused on blending academic learning with the MH and well-being as therapeutic duties of education, relying on emotive and moral guidelines of what it means to be human in our neoliberal times, under the imperatives of individualism, entrepreneurialism, profit, competition, and success (Jones, 2021). From the perspective of James and James (2012), the uncertainty is ambivalent and hinges on the *production* of children as social *objects* or the production of children as social *subjects* possessing agency (p. 40). In this thesis, though, I argue for the merger of these two approaches through what Lauder et al. (2006, in Brown, 2018, pp.42-44) refer to as 'the state theory of learning' and the associated metrics – more later.

Hence, in 2018, I started exploring the extent to which schools and colleges were *perfect* for children. Drawing from Donaldson's seminal work, 'Children's Minds' (1978), I asked whether institutionalized governance pre-determined individuals for utilitarian purposes or worked

---

[33] Attainment normally corresponds to reaching a benchmark, or level, which can go above or below the predictions made in year-2 and year-6's SATs; while achievement focuses on progress reflected in grades, somehow emphasizing any progress made – the recent GCSE measurements are called 'Progress 8' and consider any progress as added value to the student and the school.

progressively to nourish self-discovery and self-development with the intent to be 'good for' children's MH and well-being (p.13). Although by then, my 16-year teaching career was coming to a partial end (I carried on working part-time as a supply teacher, which I still do) to embark on this research, I wanted to step back and critically evaluate the influence of education on adolescent MH.

Furthermore, based on long-term experience with students, especially seven years as a school council leader, it seems that looking at the future it is not a good time to be an adolescent. Adolescents are likely be in debt in their early adulthood due to university fees, earning less than their parents, and having precarious jobs; many will struggle to find and keep affordable housing. The most disadvantaged and marginalized groups who have experienced the full force of austerity are worse off and asked to be creative; current policymaking in England seems concerned with *producing* 'creative neoliberal subjectivities' to achieve neoliberal dreams camouflaged as social investments to tackle poverty, inequality and social mobility.[4]

1.1 Topic and Broad Context – the Influence of Formal Education on MH

Using a participatory methodology to create an ethnographic case study, this thesis critically evaluates the influence of education on adolescent MH (and well-being) in and through the school/college-environment.[5] The policy context for education in the United Kingdom has evolved since Devolution;[6] in 1998–1999, powers over education and training were devolved from the UK

---

[4] This research started two years before the 2020's Covid19 SARs pandemic but, because of it, the ten-month fieldwork got reduced to seven-month. Hence, the consequences of the pandemic are not discussed except for chapter 9.

[5] From now, I refer to and hyphenate the school-environment and college-environment depending on the context: school-environment refers to secondary school (till 16 y/o); college-environment to the sixth form college (16-18 y/o). When I slash school/college-environment I am referring to thirteen years of compulsory education.

[6] Devolution is the transfer of powers and funding from the UK Parliament to the national parliaments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and to some local authorities in England.

Parliament at Westminster to the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland Assembly (Gallacher & Raffe, 2012), leading to differences in Education Policy and strategies relating to mental health (and well-being). These differences intensified since the 2010 Coalition Government came to power (Beauchamp et al., 2015), meaning that each nation can decide how to promote and support MH and well-being in schools and colleges, as well as how to measure and evaluate policy outcome/impact, depending on several factors: i) the aims and definition of MH and well-being in education; ii) ad hoc MH and well-being policies for schools and colleges, iii) allocation of fundings; iv) the role and involvement of stakeholders in relevant provision, and so forth. Therefore, given that my research took place in London, the context for this doctoral research is England.

Current scholarship overlooks the possibility of integrating the voices of several social actors implicated in sustaining adolescents' MH and, consequently, it omits the possibility for these voices to find common grounds to investigate worsening adolescent MH (Cosmo, 2022; Marlow, 2020; Millar, 2022; Patel et al., 2007; Knowles, 2021; PISA, 2018; Shaw et al., 2020; Thorley, 2016) at its roots. The results obtained indicate that triangulating the analytical and generative efforts of a group of participants offers valuable insights for policymaking, education practitioners, future research and key stakeholders such as parents, students and teachers.

Specifically, the thesis is concerned with the meaning of compulsory education for heterogeneous participants and the feasibility of assessing the influence of exam-focused college on adolescent MH. The national curricula have become increasingly target-driven since the advent of a neoliberally informed education (the 1980s onward), with a rise in the frequency of assessments, new exams challenges, regular reviews of students' and teachers' progress, and ever-increasing school accountability measures, seeing schools as part of a booming economy (Ball, 2011; 2012, 2017; Wilkins, 2017; Yusuf, 2019; Reay, 2018). For example, the academization of most British schools, based on the removal of schools from local authority governance and the formation of academies, gives greater autonomy and puts emphasis on exam results. This characterizes an administrative shift whose governmental features have increasingly become the 'new common sense', borrowing from Foucault, of schools/colleges as *dispositifs* (Ball, 2016; Bailey, 2015a; Jones, 2021).

The *dispositif* represents an administrative mechanism to enhance and maintain power in society by reinforcing a type of conduct. Foucault (1980) explains it as:

> A thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions–in short, the said as much as the unsaid (p.194).

The reference to discourses is vital because, as Bailey notes (2015a), discourses 'form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault, 1972, p. 49) by '… constituting and organizing what can be thought and what can be said, and hence soliciting the obvious, the sensible and the necessary' (Bailey, 2015, p.42).

As a result, scholars of education have long argued that not only do the schooling *dispositif reproduces* the status quo, but have promoted 'therapeutic education' (Ecclestone, 2017; Irisdotter-Aldenmyr & Olson, 2016; Gillies, 2017) as another move by successive governments to *engineer* next-generation citizens alongside enterprising discourses. While such a combination implicates ideological premises that warrant rigid measurements and a narrow pedagogy, following Gillies (2018), the 'yoking' of MH with well-being across educational policies seems a draconian move to conceal structural inequalities and implement a different 'individualized' schooling experience: i) by emphasizing the relationship between knowledge and learning as strictly measurable (Ball, 2017); ii) by lessening a pedagogy that focused on processes, skills development, critical thinking (Reay, 2013a; 2018); iii) by concentrating on 'whole child' policies (Jones, 2021; Green, H.M, 2011). Such policies are part of broader structural reforms that have added pressure on students with detrimental effects, paradoxically, on MH. Moreover, such pressures seem to have taken their toll as adverse societal ills have plagued students (e.g., threat of 'terrorism', austerity, Brexit, social media pressures, climate change) while undergoing critical psycho-developmental and neurological transitions (Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006; Blakemore, 2008; 2018, Greene, R.R., 2021; Malone et al., 2016).

Finally, because of my long-term experience as a social science and humanities teacher coinciding with fatherhood, I have become increasingly sensitive to child development as a process of *becoming* engendered by the dominant neoliberal discourses of performance, competition and success. Thus, I am interested in the school/college-environment as a place where well-being is

construed differently by different social actors to favour or not positive MH. Schools/colleges have increasingly become the place where students spend a large part of their existence (i.e., thirteen compulsory years, almost two hundred days per year, eight hrs per day plus afternoon clubs, school events, Saturday exam catch-up), trying to perform academically while managing peer-peer, peer-teacher and relationship with oneself. Making sense of their *becoming* in and through that institutional environment becomes challenging.

Consequently, through a Critical Theory approach, I evaluate the 'materiality of discourse' generated by such an institutional environment, how specific modalities of being might become more marginalized, and how this affects students. In my case, the materiality of discourse refers to how students entering the school/college-environment feel and experience their lives in and because of it; furthermore, this approach links to Foucault's governmentality (1991) and his definition of *dispositif* (1980, p.194) how power flows from a governmental orientation (or established 'conduct') to the people experiencing that orientation. It is essential, therefore, to investigate the concomitant forms of subjectification (subjection) as much as subjectivation (agency and resistance) resulting from the application of techniques of power/government. In the words of Frosh et al. (2003),

> It is a combination…between a rigorous awareness of the constructing activity of social processes and an equally potent analysis of the agentic struggles of individual subjects, that is needed…to explore how specific subject positions come to be held (p.41)…[w]hile culture makes available the subject positions we can inhabit, the 'investment' that people have in these subject positions is not necessarily captured by the articulation of the discourses themselves; rather, it may hinge on unspoken and at times unspeakable events… all of them 'cultural', but also deeply embedded in subjectivity (p.42).

Consequently, I explore not only how power impacts or influences but how power *circulates* and how student performance adapts to it by taking up (forcibly or voluntarily), including rejection and resistance, the available subject positions of transition to adulthood. To address the worsening adolescent MH phenomena through students' subject positions, I address the idea of *becoming* as

subjectivity-in-the-making by paying attention to how student-participants manage, understand, and give meaning to schooling experiences.[7]

1.2 Specific Context and Aims

I gradually embedded a participatory methodology (Participant Action Research - PAR) for my PHD following a six-week ethnographic study in a local primary school (Di Emidio, 2018). Drawing also from my personal experience as a teacher, I became aware that researching the influence of schooling on adolescent MH (PhD focus) would require insights into teaching-learning processes taking place within a high-stakes examination culture, embedded in an institutional environment, permeated in neoliberal policies.

As I witnessed first-hand in several educational settings, the neoliberal economic context of planning and intervention, in an ever-increasing climate of accountability measures, results in objective measurability of impact on students' progress in systematic ways that, I argue, clash with foundational pedagogical theories. Such dynamics require scrutiny from the social actors affected by educational policies, and, for this reason, I refer to 'our' research, including the pronouns 'we' or 'us', to emphasize the participatory approach; such methodological collective claims underline the type of participation as 'degrees of involvement' or 'degrees of PAR' without undermining the contribution of participant groups or individuals. By using the term 'degree', I want to explain that not all participants and participant groups contributed equally to data generation and analysis. The imbalance reflected contingencies, opportunities, expectations and time so that roles and positionalities vis-à-vis the research conducted in an enclosed institutional environment did not

---

[7] So far, I have used the noun participants to refer to 'all' participants, and I will do likewise throughout. However, slight variations will apply accordingly – e.g., **student-**participants as per the sixteen co-researchers, **adult-**participants as per parents and any other college-leaders who participated (teachers, career officer, counsellor, psychotherapist, inclusion manager, gatekeeper, informant).

conflict with the intimate views and stories of other people's MH and personal MH - anonymity and safeguarding protocols were at stake.

The fieldwork consisted of weekly enrichment sessions timetabled for two groups of student-participants; I also conducted participant and non-participant observations in key areas of the college (entrance, canteen, and library) over three/four days per week. This engagement enabled me to reach out to the college community, including teachers and other college-leaders (and eventually parents during parent evenings). Such widening became part of PAR's generative iterations between different interest groups, revealing PAR's 'messy' character as the main research methodology, a sort of constructive messiness for a messy and controversial issue like compulsory education's influence on MH. So, while the college-environment as a *dispositif* came under scrutiny, my teaching career indicated that schools/colleges find their ways to comply with statutory policies whilst seeing beyond narrow measurable outcomes. Consequently, I kept alert to idiosyncrasies, such as the college's geographical position and internal politics, to the broader student body and 'unpredicted' participants (Di Emidio, 2022), contributing to knowledge generation.

Furthermore, in sixth form, an age (16-18) where identity and subjectivity formation can be chaotic and unstable, I decided to employ a *participatory* approach for other reasons. First, because it was consistent with personal assumptions about the role of education and pedagogy as democratic enterprises; second, because only by examining perceived school/college experiences with crucial stakeholders, who were also service-users,[8] could we transpose the influence of such 'experiences as MH'.

I asked whether such experiences as MH were moulded by strategic educational policies, fostering a pedagogy and culture of intervention to secure a certain *kind* (Hacking, 2007; Jones, 2021) of child development under governmental logic of what made the 'good life' (Chitty, 2014;

---

[8] Service-users is a term I use alongside and interchangeably with social-actors, experts, stakeholders and participants. Service-users refer to parents and students using schools/colleges, but also to 'users' of my final research - e.g., those working in education policy, government officials or governors, whom Wright (2008, p.7) refers to as 'user communities', who are stakeholders but not strictly participants.

Ecclestone, 2017). The latter now espoused a revisionist view of justice and fairness operationalized through the pervasive 'state theory of learning' (Lauder et al., 2006 in Brown, 2018, p.42) which, according to Brown (2018, p.42), assumes that 'schools and teachers are judged by the way they 'buy in' to the system …and pursue financial rewards as entrepreneurs of themselves'. Consequently, I asked how progressive emancipatory ideals that had made an epoch (from the 18th Century) and included 'mass education' as one of its flagships could fit the current situation. Of course, the appraisal had to eventually include the contemporary challenges presented by local and national policies reflecting global economic dynamics now overseen by the OECD.

My main aim, therefore, was to identify and interrogate the relationship between MH and education through a participatory methodology and ethnographic methods. A sub-aim was to establish a shared learning platform where co-intention supported co-researching and knowledge generation by drawing from participants' 'lived experiences' and mobilizing their roles as stakeholders and service-users to inform further research and policymaking. More specifically, by assessing how, and if, educational policies influence MH at a specific stage of development, we could see how students develop a sense of *self* (Greene, 2021[9]) played out through schooling experiences of early successes/failures according to neoliberal precepts entrenched in standardization, and young adulthood (e.g., increased independence, aspirations, character formation). With these aims in mind, it is worth considering Jones' (2021) recent appraisal of neoliberal education vis-à-vis the 'whole child'. Young adulthood in transition (to legal adulthood) represents a period in which relationships and civic responsibilities, hailed by educational policies around the 'whole child' (Jones, 2021), call for proactive communal life where the individual functions for oneself and the group, regardless of personal circumstances of privilege, class, race, and gender. By interrogating these theoretical assumptions, I explore how educational policies enhance what Foucault referred to as 'technologies of the self',[10] to constitute neoliberal subjectivities and, in turn, their MH. Such understanding is pivotal to creating informed

---

[9] See also Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development in Exploring Your Mind (2020) and Child Development Institute (2020).

[10] A philosophical framework that appeared at the end of the 18th century, concerned with the question 'what are we in our actuality'? (Foucault, 1994, p.405) – more in chapter 2.

educational policies that take MH seriously into consideration and not 'yoked' (Gillies, 2018) with other fuzzy definitions or ideological tropes instrumentalizing MH for mobility and employment (Jones, 2021) and, in turn, improve attainment/achievement, guarantee success, secure employment (Gillies, D., 2011; Di Emidio, 2019).

I started referring to subjectivity as a heuristic (Goulart, 2019) following a previous study's findings (Di Emidio, 2018) in a primary school; these demonstrated that pre-adolescent well-being was contingent on agency/autonomy and provided identity markers. Indicatively, autonomy acquired 'analytic interest' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.6-12-16), which I interpreted as *agency*, amongst other possible interpretations.[11] However, my interpretation reflected primary school students' claims about the centrality of autonomy for well-being; perhaps, my interpretation resulted from the data generation activities we chose to do. For example, the identity maps and related activities (Appx. 1) inevitably resulted in self-centered positioning; additionally, the differential between year-5/year-6's engagement was influential in identifying the significance of agency: year-5s were less autonomous during participatory activities and claimed to be so in class, too, while the year-6's called for more independence and trust; however, it was not clear whether this represented individual needs or groups' necessities. Hence, for my PhD I searched for literature on agency from social sciences to grasp better what was unfolding. This proved both enlightening and overwhelming for the implications of children-agency on perceived well-being which, in retrospect, directed me to alternative ways of grasping adolescent MH (PhD focus) beyond definitions and medicalizing language.

Thus, throughout this thesis, I stress that subjectivity relies on agency and works as a heuristic that helps identify adolescent MH status. Subjectivity helped analyze participants' voices in depth, as things that appeared to be sayable, thinkable, and doable through the data co-generated.

---

[11]I considered multiple links between identity and autonomy through agency; from Bruner's psycho-philosophical definition linking agency to selfhood and intentionality (1996, p.35); to sociological definitions seeing the individual as engaged with institutions and *determined* by them (see Jenkins, 1992, Ch. 2-3 on Marx and Durkheim's influence); to psychological definitions focusing on the individual reactions to stimuli versus proactiveness and choice (Bandura, 1999).

Relatedly, this thesis magnifies the relevance of subjectivity and agency for two critical aspects: i) how late adolescents *become* productive and competitive subjects in the 'education economy' (Lundahl, 2012); ii) how late adolescents are governed in the name of education at a given place (sixth form college) and time (in transition to higher education, work, or career). It was vital, therefore, to consider how student-participants were doing identity work in and because of this contextualization; I construed subjectivity and identity as interrelated processes of *becoming*. Hence, it was not until I started my PhD fieldwork that I distinguished between late-adolescents (PhD) who linked MH in the college-environment to subjectivity and pre-adolescents who linked well-being in the school-environment to identity (Di Emidio, 2018). In other words, while primary school students seem to associate happiness/well-being with interpersonal experiences (Di Emidio, 2018), sixth formers seemed to associate their MH with intrapersonal experiences to configure their MH.

This elaboration echoes Wetherell's (2008) argument about private subjectivity vs public identity. In comparison, some argue that these dynamics are not casual for students but the result of the so called 'therapeutic turn' in education (Hayes & Ecclestone, 2008) that popularized 'character and resilience' policies as ambivalent 'technologies of the self' (Jones, 2021; Hancock, 2018), while others would see it as a truism. Such a truism could be because older students have increased awareness of their *becoming* and acquire different experiences and the language to generate meaning from subject positions. Therefore, I aimed to involve several participants as college stakeholders/service-users to evaluate how the college-environment *dispositif* influenced students' MH through the lenses of subjectivity. I collected first-hand experiences, critical reflections and meaning making of past, present, and future possibilities within and through thirteen years of compulsory schooling. Participatory research findings offered all participants guidelines to understand how compulsory education was helpful, what should change, and how each participant could negotiate less-desirable outcomes of the schooling *dispositif*.

1.3 Preliminary Literature - the Problem

According to the World Health Organization (2014; 2019), MH conditions account for 16% of the global burden of disease and injury in people aged 10–19 years: depression is one of the leading global causes of illness and disability among adolescents[12]and suicide is the third leading cause of death in 15-19-year-olds. Many adolescents around the world face challenges involving crime and violence (Children's Defense Fund, 1996), academic failure, underachievement, and drop-outs have been classified as 'risky behaviour' categories of adolescence, strongly linked to MH (Dryfoos, 1990, in Chow, 2016, p.43). Furthermore, the consequences of not addressing adolescent MH conditions extend to adulthood, impairing both physical and MH, and limiting opportunities to lead fulfilling lives as adults.

Recent years have seen a steady increase in MH problems in young people, especially those in their final years of compulsory education, undergoing a higher level of anxiety and depression, leading to self-harm. In the UK, Ball (2011; 2017), amongst many others, argues that since the 1988 Reform Act to raise education standards, neoliberal policies have employed privatizing management logic, negatively impacting the teaching profession and learning. Furthermore, in the past 40 years, national curricula across the globe have become increasingly target-driven, with a rise in the frequency of assessment of students' progress. Such increased focus has created significant pressure on young people, who are suffering from a steady increase in mental ill-health such as anxiety and depression (Bonell et al., 2011; 2012ab; 2013; Cosmo, 2022; DfE, 2018; Patel *et al.*, 2017; Thorley, 2016; UNICEF, 2018; WHO, 2004).

In the UK, Green Papers (2017; 2018) consultations and the Department of Health framework (DoH, 2017) for MH research, confirm that one in eight 5 to19 year-olds has a diagnosable MH

---

[12] I employ a broad definition of adolescence throughout my research, 'The period of transition between childhood and adulthood', covering the teenage years; at time I refer to early-adolescence (11-12) and other late-adolescence (17-18). Smith et al. (2015) suggest that, bbiologically, it is marked by the onset of puberty, while socially, it is marked by increased independence from parents and the importance of peer group, as the young person prepares to complete education, form sexual partnership and seek vocation/employment.

condition and 5 to 15-year-olds with a mental disorder have increased from 9.7% in 1999 and 10.1% in 2004 to 11.2% in 2017. Furthermore, a BBC podcast series (Marlow, 2020) shared similar data (a student-participant shared the podcast's eloquent title *Storm and Stress: New Ways to look at Adolescent MH*'' and we used it in enrichment sessions). Lastly, Burke (2014), Gorczynski (2018), and an article in *Nature* (2019) note how governmental agencies, academics and university students have argued that mental ill-health affects the life chances of individuals, including their physical health, education, and work prospects.

Since 2004, when I became a secondary school teacher in London, I have witnessed a steady deterioration of students' MH. So, in 2013/14, I informally investigated and involved young people, parents, teachers, and school leaders in gathering insights on the effects of academic attainment/achievement on MH and the broader experience of compulsory schooling. My role as a Humanities teacher (Citizenship and PSHE at KS3/4, Anthropology, Politics and Sociology at KS5) and Lead Teacher for Student Leadership gave me privileged access to school leaders such as governors, school counsellors and school psychologists (by then overwhelmed by MH referrals). However, I noticed disparate concerns were voiced, although colleagues and school leaders often perceived such 'problems' as individual rather than broader structural problems. Meantime, well-being, and MH have been ostensibly high on the Coalition government agenda since 2010 (Green, 2011, Yusuf, 2019, Jones, 2021) despite previous governments had already made worsening mental ill-health statistics at all levels of the population a cause for concern.[13] In short, successive governments have not hesitated to implicate schools and colleges in addressing the MH crisis bottom up, that is, starting from adolescents as the 'citizens of the future' (Gillies, 2018), developing controversial initiatives around the 'whole child' agenda (Jones, 2021), and instrumentalizing MH by addressing achievement/attainment (Gillies, 2018, Di Emidio, 2021a).

---

[13] I will be using mental ill-health as a broad reference for 'mental issues' or 'mental problems'. However, I am aware of the 1960-onward debate about the controversial reference to 'mental' to describe diagnosis and labelling in mental health research; it undermines mental illness as a subjective experience in favour of rigid diagnostics. Cromby et al. (2017) offer a succinct critique of the debate and explain how broader individual circumstances play in psychological well-being, critiquing the limitations of the biomedical model in psychological practice.

Hence, I extrapolated the overarching research question (RQ) from the thesis title/statement: 'To what extent does the education **policy** focus on achievement/attainment **influence** adolescent MH?' In addition, this question embeds further rhetorical sub-questions about the aim of compulsory education, which I started formulating in a previous study (Di Emidio, 2018):

Table 1: key sub-questions

a. Should learning in school/colleges support adolescents' positive MH?
b. Can learning be an end in/for itself, so that high-stake examinations and continuous testing are just aspects of learning and not proxies for it?
c. How do an exam-focused curriculum and pedagogy affect students' perception of themselves as learners, their subjectivities, and by extension their MH?
d. Should learning in school/colleges serve utilitarian (e.g. job search) or holistic purposes (e.g. love for learning, transferable skills, vocations)?
e. How could educators involve students to manage external pressures influencing their lives in the school/college-environment?
f. Are the public-health costs to promote and better manage adolescent MH justified?
g. (OR) Is it cost-effective to have a market-oriented education system, thriving on self-efficacy, when evidence suggests that adolescents' motivation is at its lowest and MH services over-stretched?
h. Could school/colleges compromise between a focus on tests/exams and a focus on well-rounded learning as ways to relieve exam pressure? How?
i. What are the implications for understanding the conditions that mitigate risk and at the same time enable resilience (within the college-environment)?

Such questioning underpins my constructivist ontology and interpretivist epistemology: they help identify 'the problem' and constitute what Wolcott (2005; 1992, pp.3-52 in Bell, 2014, p.101) calls theory-first or theory-verification. The sub-questions call for crossing disciplinary boundaries to study adolescent MH without losing sight of what is also intuitive. For example, students spend thirteen compulsory years in school/college and sociological, psychological, political and anthropological aspects are crucial to understand the influence of the school/college *dispositif*. Thus, new knowledge should result from cross-fertilization and coagulation of existing theories that have explored the effects of governmentality and governance on compulsory education.

I use governance and governmentality almost interchangeably because of the compulsory education focus. The concepts' distinction and consequent usage are essential though; supranational, national and subnational governments often use governance to refer to modes of

accountability and governing in a narrow instrumental sense (Wilkins and Olmedo, 2018ab). Wilkins and Olmedo (2018a, p.1) problematize the concept when linking it to education, seeing it as polyvalent and not having a precise meaning. Governance refers to techniques of governing 'at a distance', that is, how neoliberal discourses *of* governmentality influence student-participants' performance and transition to jobs/careers. Bailey (2015b) follows Amos to make an emphatic distinction without lessening their relatedness; governance as '…technical issues: with instruments and modes, procedures and actors, with constellations and their forms of cooperation', and governmentality as the '…generation of different subjectivities through techniques and modes of ruling and guiding' (Amos, 2010, p. 23 in Bailey, 2015b, p.234).

Furthermore, Constructivism, rather than Constructionism, underpins this thesis because, as Kim (2001) reminds us, Constructivism is a variant of (social) Constructionism that is interested in how·'…people create meaning through their *interactions* with each other and the objects in the environment' (p.7). This is unlike Constructionism's claims, Kim argues, that '…there is no meaning in the world until we construct it…we do not find meaning, we make it' (2001, p.7). Of course, the meaning we make is affected by our social interpretation of the thing, as a constructionist would put it, but as a researcher leading a participatory project, I am interested in the 'interaction' element, or the dialectic between people and events. In our case, the dialectic between myself and the participants I brought together, the 'us' as co-researchers and the participants' various relationships and personal events concerning education.

Finally, although I address the question in the table throughout, I partially answer them through three questions presented below; these will be operational throughout the thesis by borrowing concepts developed by disciplines that have already problematized education and MH. In this fashion, I respond to Bonell's (2013) call to employ '…sufficiently *complex* qualitative theories that are amenable, as opposed to quantitative research, to inform research on the complex causal pathways from school-environment to student health' (pp. 247-248). Only then could we better understand students´ reaction to academic pressure and associated stress,

reflection, and influence of stress, and suggest adequate policy approaches to Bonell's pathways as democratically informed and more likely to be effective.[14]

1.4 Research Design Rationale

1.4.1 Establishing conceptual threads

Adolescent MH's links to education became more explicit when I started considering historical, socioeconomic, and psychological aspects of the debate, that is, when compulsory education was about 'character formation' (Abbot, 2010) and 'selection' (Wells, 2015, p.92), slowly and controversially incorporating '...the damage the illusion of meritocracy inflicts' (Reay, 2020, pp.405-407). I realized that the research design had to embed ontological considerations regarding two distinct phenomena (worsening adolescent MH and compulsory education), which might not have necessarily correlated. Such phenomena and their relationship resonated with classic social sciences' concerns with the individual and society. For example, Wells (2015) reminds us that mass education in the 18th Century was to rescue children and impact the 'human capital' (p.23 and p.95), a theory developed by Becker (2009) in the 1960s and which was a prelude to challenge the welfare state. Additionally, mass education coincided with the Enlightenment period and ideals, which the Sociology of Education of the 1960-70s paired up with a narrow focus, namely, the support for the 18th century industrial revolution and, in turn, disciplinary power (Foucault, 1977) of newly formed nation-states. So, the psychological dimension, as much as the socio-political one, has the potential to unpack a complex relationship further.

For example, as I argued earlier, a dialectic compound between MH and education had partially emerged in a previous study via the well-being / education focus (Di Emidio, 2018), when

---

[14] To suggest 'adequate policy approaches' was a sub-aim of this research, included in the 'action research' part of this PAR research, further explained in chapter 3.

I co-researched *with* pre-adolescents (10-11 year-olds) and learned that the so-called 'stages of development' played out in identity formation.[15] The study explored the interplay between well-being and education without reducing the school/college-environment only to a 'technology of power' (Foucault, 1991; Jamal et al., 2013), but also a social space where strong friendships and nourishing experiences abounded, where formative experiences and secondary socialization occurred. What stood out amongst the findings, was the importance students placed on possessing, negotiating, and performing agency within the school-environment and how some students 'did' agency through resistance to cope with the impact of undesirable structural forces on their happiness/well-being.[16]

The study helped experiment with a multi-layered and transdisciplinary approach that bridged abstract theories of child development with the day-to-day. It also underlined the complexity of researcher/research<u>ed</u> relationships and the importance of considering 'unexpected participants' (Di Emidio, 2022), creating the foundation to use a participatory methodology in my PhD. Working with younger students than I had usually worked with hitherto, I noticed that identity seemed in flux, subject to physiological and social influences that marked a transition period. Searching for the best labels to associate with, and living up to those labels, is extensively explored in the Sociology of Education, especially about self-fulfilling prophecy or the 'Pygmalion effect' (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968 in Eden, 2003). In essence, student-participants in a primary school seemed 'preoccupied' with identity. This contrasted with my knowledge of late adolescents (16-18 year-olds) whom I taught for several years and whom I co-researched with in this study, often preoccupied with a search for authenticity and subjectivity, intrinsic to their *becoming*.

Put another way, I could not underestimate the concomitant anthropological relevance of identity processes in the realm of personhood, nor could I ignore the psychological factors that

---

[15] Piaget famously split development into stages, which has shaped pedagogy and curriculum worldwide; but see Walkerdine's critique about the insertion of Piagetian theories in early education as contributing to children's failure (in Henriques et al., 1998).

[16] This is an important point which I later develop and split in two parts: 1) the inevitability of neoliberal 'individualizing' forces inherent to the marketization of education; 2) the opportunities offered to certain groups to be pragmatic and creative – what I will call, 'the pragmatically positioned subject'.

come to determine subjectivity; hence, in this thesis, I paid extra attention to processes of subjectification and subjectivation to understand better adolescent MH. I established an analytical thread between pre-adolescents (10-11 year-olds) preoccupation with identity formation and late adolescents' (16-18 year-olds) preoccupation with processes of subjectivity formation, which influenced their MH and well-being and, accordingly, constituted a heuristic tool for analysis.

1.4.2 Three research questions- a genealogy

I employed three research questions (RQs) because of data collected during the 'explorative stage' (i.e., the first four months of the fieldwork). These questions reflected the iterations of participatory research within the boundaries of a doctoral thesis, whose product had to balance theoretical and practical claims, processes, supervisory advice, and handling of findings. Therefore, here 'genealogy' is used loosely to trace the non-linear history of the questions, which indirectly shows the impact of knowledge generation, referred to as *propositional knowing* (chapter 3).

Firstly, I had an overarching RQ in the first PhD year: *To what extent does a policy focus on achievement/attainment in the college-environment influence adolescent MH?* It assumed that a policy focus already *influenced* adolescent MH. My assumption was rooted in my positionalities; first, as a teacher-insider who enacted policies; second, as an 'organic intellectual' (Gramsci, 1971) who directly confronted the impact of neoliberal governance by engaging in '…practices of resistance and self-overcoming' (Ball and Olmedo, 2013, p.88). During this time, much as my school management strived to involve teachers in decision-making, the headship team and governors would inevitably decide which policy to follow through, at the expense of others, with the full backup of middle leaders. Hard decisions included: i) a questionable focus on 'pupil premium'[17] while maintaining achievement/attainment high on the agenda; ii) raising standards

---

[17] Pupil premium is funding to improve education outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in schools in England (DfE, 2022).

from the middle by raising the grades of borderline students (at the time, the C/D *kind* of students); iii) improving behaviour through 'behaviour for learning' (and more).

Secondly, I finalized the main RQ only at the end of my PhD's first year, after the literature review that stressed the relationship between education and MH through the *influence* (i.e., the power to control or manipulate) of schooling more than its *impact* (i.e., sudden, forceful and potentially measurable). Such semantics are important because they sustain the constructivist ontology of this research to unravel schooling's bio-political traits (see Foucault's *34ispositive*), their interplay with students' subjectivity and, in turn, their MH.

Thirdly, insisting on 'influence' rather than 'impact' as a critical guiding verb of the RQ was also down to student-participants' input during an enrichment session. While discussing my thesis' title, we agreed on the importance of keywords; for example, 'impact' meant the immediate and visible, somehow quantifiable investigation, while 'influence' required discursive argumentation based on persuasion and induction, reflexivity, and context. 'Influence' appealed to student-participants and supported my research, leaning against a *thick-and-broad* scrutiny of adolescent MH *with* the social actors concerned and in line with the interpretive and participatory epistemology employed.

Finally, by referring to 'policy', I could locate better the macrocosm in which this research was conceived. This is because the role of governance in educational matters has increasingly been reworked through neoliberal trends, specifically, policies making in neoliberal economic terms, as opposed to Keynesian-welfarist ones (Wilkins, 2012a). It is worth noting, despite its obviousness, that educational policies regulate the day-to-day of schools/colleges; however, there are stringent or flexible policies as well as variably effective leadership that enact such policies according to different political contexts, ethos, historical period and ideology.

1.4.2.1 Generating the three research questions (RQs)

I refined the overarching RQ at different stages leading to the selection of three final questions that nuanced my focus. This means that even though the overarching RQ guided the research group from the outset, two crucial aspects of my interpretivist epistemology had to be included: i) co-research's potential to generate knowledge from social actors as stakeholders/service-users; ii)

ethnography's potential to offer a platform where voices are *heard* and shared through reflexivity. Hence, the three RQs balanced out participants' input and the necessary boundaries that suited the final (PhD's) analysis. So, the following describes the generative process behind three RQs, 35ispositi at phases 4-5 of Reflexive thematic analysis (i.e., 'reviewing and naming' themes – Braun & Clarke, 2006) of interviews. In this iterative phase, I selected three questions that best unpicked the overarching RQ:

- RQ1. Does an exam-focused curriculum and pedagogy **INFLUENCE** adolescents' MH?
- RQ2. What **ROLE** could educators and students themselves play in managing adolescents' MH in the college-environment?
- RQ3. What **OTHER FACTORS/DRIVERS** influence adolescents' MH in the college-environment?

RQ1 drove my starting focus and attracted the college and participants' recruitment; it pointed straight at a significant aspect of schooling and adolescent MH – the effects of ongoing testing and high-stakes examination. This also meant that I started by investigating a problem that reflected my positionality as a teacher, and the ongoing literature review. The second and third questions emerged later, reflecting the participatory approach with social actors in the sixth form college.

As for RQ2, I stayed with 'role' even though subject positions (other than student ones) could have distracted the focus on adolescent MH and subjectivity (e.g., when analyzing students' roles, I switched to subject positions because 'role' seemed more appropriate for the assumed character of teachers, parents and other college-leaders).

RQ3, instead, emerged in the first few weeks of fieldwork when student-participants insisted on the multiple determinants external to the college-environment but still education-related, influencing MH. Other motives influencing the three questions' selection and refinement included: i) raking the data through Braun and Clarke's phases 4-5, offering details from my own engagement with the data; ii) continuing with a participative approach into my PhD had helped recognize its significance as both methodology and epistemology. For example, while research methods could corrupt findings and their potential to generate knowledge, a participative democratic ontology (Abma et al., 2019, CH-1) offered possibilities to mitigate and reduce 'confirmation bias' for all groups involved.

To sum up, the three RQs were relatively broad because mitigation was the only realistic aim of such a complex topic: while RQ1 was a truism, RQ2-3 involved participative co-generation and emerged gradually into the PhD. Moreover, they helped investigate both a process (schooling/education) and a problem (adolescent MH). The nine aforementioned (sub)questions, which I synthesized through the three RQs, were rhetorical and best suited at the discussion/conclusion point. I also considered them, however, as emerging from the research and essential, especially in the early explorative stage of the fieldwork, to stimulate debate with participants. Indeed, the three RQ provided an orientation to enrich my conceptual framework.

1.4.2.2 Why a policy focus?

Back to the overarching RQ, why did I include a policy focus? Policies permeate and regulate the life of schools/colleges and heavily influence educational journeys, trajectories and outcomes, including policies around MH (and well-being), for dubious ends (Gillies, 2018; Di Emidio, 2021a). For now, the language of policies and the 'psy' knowledge[18] they sustain are often elusive, following dogmatic scientism, convenient to address moral aspects of development while engendering a specific agenda, a 'whole child' agenda that may serve hegemonic neoliberal principles (Jones, 2021; Yusuf, 2019; Flew, 2014).

Policy making gets complex and paradoxical in neoliberal times (Jones, 2021). Institutions such as schools/colleges deliver statutory and non-statutory policies through the national curriculum and standardization practices, containing and limiting aspiration, while selling a vision of the 'good life, and trying not to limit adolescents' liberties to maximize 'possibilities', empower and reach a potential – all at once. This complexity is significant because it underpins this thesis: policies have, by definition, control over students' 'docile bodies' (Foucault, 1977; 2008), now construed along neoliberal possibilities (Brown, 2018), while resistance materializes in coping mechanisms such as submission. Nevertheless, is this the real empowerment or emancipation left

---

[18] Rose (2018) refers to psychiatry/psychology/psychoanalysis as 'psy' disciplines.

for students nowadays? One that is critical of educational policies? On a *broad* level of scrutiny, can compulsory education's visions adhere to standardization and optimization while controlling students? Moreover, on a *thick* level, what is the relationship between governmental guidelines and possible forms of empowerment that policies flirt with?

These are pertinent questions to bear in mind, but I concentrate on three aspects of policies: i) it is essential to know the policy status (statutory or non-statutory) and how policies are implemented; ii) the extent they are enforced in the hierarchical school/college structure; iii) how the student population perceives them in the school/college-environment. In our case, having a 'policy focus on achievement/attainment' in the main RQ became a catalyst for interrogations and understanding of the aim of neoliberal education shaped by 40 years of economic policies that narrowly concentrate on input-output criteria, outcome-focused, requiring specific academic skills and aptitudes (Brown, 2018, p.41).

1.4.3 The reflexive journey of a teacher-researcher – the 'positioned' researcher

The researcher's positionality (e.g., age, background, experience, roles, etc.) shapes the research, including the ways and the reasons specific questions are asked and answered, and vice versa. For example, I am a migrant worker with a multilingual family, researching a local college; I am a father of two primary/secondary school students; my job is in education (ex-teacher and now supply teacher), and I am conducting doctoral research about the influence of education on MH. Such positions impacted the phenomena I wanted to study and, inevitably, interplayed with research validity, whose relevance was limited by 'participant validation' or 'member checking' (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p.290) which are inherent to a participatory project using Reflexive Thematic Analysis. Consequently, I attempted to balance my various positionalities through ongoing reflexivity, a process which Bourdieu (in Jenkins, 1992, pp.61-68) best theorized as the 'objectification of objectification': a way to assess my practice and views critically.

Firstly, my role as a father carried anxieties and doubts. For example, the difficulty in balancing my children's homework engagement, SATs' high-stakes exam preparation, secondary school choice and what I believe my children could achieve/attain without compromising their MH and well-being.

Secondly, because of my quasi-insider status in education, the study easily incurred 'confirmation bias', thus affecting internal validity (Bryman, 2008). I spell out these two initial positions because their effect is more substantial for emotionally charged issues and deeply entrenched beliefs. However, being an insider also permitted a nuanced analysis of the rich data gathered, alongside my use of participatory methodology and thematic analysis, as means to address my aims.

Thirdly, my curiosity about the relationship between education and MH grew from my ongoing reflections as an educator and the most recent witnessing of students' MH deterioration due to schooling pressures. This offers additional insights and the risk of 'confirmation bias'; for example, I have always had a progressive yet critical approach in my ongoing teacher training, questioning the role of teachers and school/college-leaders as government's brokers between students and fast-changing societies. Hence, inspired by Gramsci's notion of the 'intellectual…as an organic category of every fundamental social group' (Gramsci, 1971, p.15; Humphrys, 2011)**,** my relentless call throughout my career to pay attention to the wants-and-needs of the raw material we work with, that is, students as psychological, socio-cultural beings. I have always seen students as 'defended subjects' (Bibby, 2011), as much as us teachers, to be equipped for both present *and* future life, not only through new procedural and pedagogical approaches but emancipatory democratic experiences (Dewey, 2015; Donaldson, 1978; Freire, 1970; 1974).

Fourthly, I have engaged with relevant literature to create my research lens (part of 'theory-first') to handle better the links between education/schooling and MH. Here, the organic intellectual takes the form of the 'critical ethnographer in education' to provide an approach to education and social change that includes both the technical and the political; I consulted literature from psychology, sociology, anthropology, philosophy and politics, to understand what shapes MH (and well-being) within the exam-focused school.

Finally, my social constructivist approach is rooted in my previous experience doing fieldwork (BA and a previous study – Di Emidio, 2018) and the anthropological tradition of ethnographic studies (BA Anthropology). I view theory and knowledge as mutually constitutive by the co-researchers' intellectual effort and I argue that theory 'emerges' from the field through the co-researchers' conceptualizations which inevitably include theoretical lenses given by 'lived experiences', prior research experiences and personal assumptions. Chapter 2 and 3 further

clarifies my epistemological stance by clarifying Wolcott's 'theory verification' (theory-first) vs 'theory generation' (theory-after), which blends with PAR's generative potential.

1.4.4 Preliminary explanation and potential of a critical transdisciplinary approach

There are aspects of this research endeavour which are complex because there are different parts to it; for example, different disciplines crossing conceptual boundaries, plenty of theories and concepts with heterogenous ideas and examples, a 'messy' participatory methodology striving for democracy but applied for doctoral (individualized) research. These aspects reflect, in hindsight, my positionalities as much as broad discourses reconfiguring education I epochal changes instantiated by globalization, climate change, social media, and, importantly, the role of governance and governmentality. Such an eclectic mix requires both breadth-and-depth and a transdisciplinary approach for theorizing psychological, socioeconomic, political, and cultural domains shaping the education of future generations.

Nonetheless, I am aware of the complexity and nuances that exist between a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach (Franks et al., 2007; Sinha, C., 2016). Therefore, I claim, following Choi and Pak (2006), that my approach is 'transdisciplinary' because I use several disciplinary lenses and (try to) integrate them holistically. Choi and Pak suggest that multi-disciplinarity draws on knowledge from different disciplines but stays within their boundaries, while inter-disciplinarity analyzes, synthesizes, and harmonizes links between disciplines into a coordinated and coherent whole. Transdisciplinarity integrates the natural, social and health sciences in a humanities context and transcends their traditional boundaries. This was a suitable conceptualization for my approach to nuance scholarly analysis of the relationships between MH drivers in and through the exam-focused school/college.

Taken together, the thesis problematizes the 'ends' of state education via schools/colleges and, in a critical commitment to *unmask* as well as *innovate* (Rebughini, 2018), proposes discipline and methodological border-crossings to generate constructive knowledge for a qualified understanding of paradoxical social phenomena – i.e., why would teaching and learning be so closely associated with worsening adolescent MH?

Additionally, to my knowledge, no concrete attempts have been made to study adolescent MH in and through compulsory schooling by having students as co-researchers alongside parents, teachers, and school leaders. Conversely, crossing disciplinary boundaries and facilitating dialogue between disciplines is neither new nor recent. For example, most social sciences have been approached, and used, as converging disciplines, even though their historical trajectories are distinct. While they share similarities of intent, they also embody distinct disciplinary logics and practices which reflect each discipline's idiosyncrasies. While I felt confident in employing these social sciences and exploring areas I had just touched upon before, in other areas, I benefitted from supervisory guidance and additional self-teaching, especially regarding psychology-influenced literature. However, considering my passion for Anthropology and its methods, I was pleased to discover that most disciplines nowadays have embraced ethnographic work and its closest anthropological associate, 'participant observation', as a popular method of research: in fact, this research hinges on it, before incorporating a participatory methodology. In essence, in the past 20 years, most disciplines seem to have foreseen the benefits of the ethnographer's method of immersive fieldwork, his/her role as the sociopsychologist who listens and/or studies people's minds not as objective realities but in, and through, socio-cultural contexts and changing epochal paradigms, as the historian who is concerned with timeframes. These provide the reader with rich perspectives for theorizing the ongoing dialectic between past and present to envisage and inform the future.

1.5 Thesis Structure

Chapter 2 adds (to the above) background data and incorporates the 'research problem' in existing literature, consolidating the theoretical lenses that make up my deductive-inductive constructivist approach. Part 1 problematizes compulsory education I MH and subjectivity by looking at how the history/aims of education may sit alongside official MH definitions and measurements. Thus, the notion of subjectivity is introduced through a Foucauldian questioning of subject *production* that echoed the 'sociology of education' scholars (1970s) and the discursive effects on population control. Part 2 extends part 1's problematization by focusing on educational policies and their influence on the day-to-day of schooling. New policies have recently informed

the birth of an education defined as 'therapeutic education', offering plenty of implications for policy-as-discourse that instrumentalize concepts like MH and well-being to the point of 'yoking' them.

Chapter 3 finalizes background data through some theoretical grounding of the chosen methodology (PAR), accompanying methods (ethnographic) and their combination operating within a Critical Theory framework. Part 1 builds on existing literature of chapters 1 and 2 by contextualizing participants' engagement and 'stakes' while acknowledging their positionalities as service-users. Part 1 also questions notions of authorship in social research and exalts PAR's effectiveness as a 'messy' and yet effective methodology. Part 2 embeds the research design with PAR by explaining how standard ethnographic methods were adapted and applied with/in a participatory context, including specific ethical issues. Part 2 also addresses data analysis methods (Thematic Analysis and Nvivo software) in the context of a participatory research that further justifies their usage.

Chapter 4 introduces some preliminary and yet core data as enrichments and focus groups' findings, including the life-satisfaction questionnaire results. The chapter represents the exploratory analysis whereby enrichments, focus groups and questionnaire data grounds the influence of education on MH in the 'field', by creating six key themes. This exploratory stage of data generation also represents, borrowing from Schütz's (1962), a 1st order construction, or participants' 'commonsense' interpretation, as it emerged from enrichments, focus groups and routine meetings organized with adult-participants. This is where 'degrees of PAR' started unfolding as different participants got involved in different layers of analysis to avoid 'astroturfing' – i.e., fake participation (Abma et al, 2019, p.xi).

Chapter 5 provides additional core data through the interviews' task 1 (the interview is split into two tasks). Here, the analysis partially shifts the focus from participants as 'expert' co-researchers to participants as research<u>ed</u>. This shift is characterized by participants' voices resulting from increased understanding of their 'condition'. The latter is presented through one-to-one semi-structured interviews when group research pressures were left behind and student-participants could open up and illustrate their subject positions in and through the *41ispositive's* pressures. The chapter provides an 'orientation' regarding participants' perceived MH vis-à-vis available subject positions; this stage of data generation represents Schütz's 2nd order construction,

my analysis of participants' initial analysis of an overall perceived MH status (past/present/future projections).

Chapters 6, 7, 8 present additional core data produced via the interview's task 2, when participants ranked the themes. I then reorganize their ranking explanations under three 'new' overarching themes: 1) Responsibilization, 2) Performance, 3) Transition. For example, in chapter 6 I try to juxtapose and justify the theme of Motivation as underpinning students' **Responsibilization**; Motivation was a central theme influencing the remaining five themes and attracted various links to the expected 'role' students and parents had to play in the neoliberal educational arena. Chapter 7 addresses three other themes (External Factors, Money/Resources, and the College-environment) that seemed strongly predicated on **Performance**. Finally, chapter 8 addresses the remaining two themes, Exam Pressure and Relationships, under the lens of **Transition** to adulthood. The notion of transition attempts to cast light on the impact of 'worries' accompanying the coming of age, especially in the neoliberal world.

Chapter 9 works as an epilogue that recounts a final attempt, online, to conduct 'action research' and implement a crucial PAR aim that the lockdown impeded: to bring about a 'change-action' through college policies. Students could be 'heard' for one last time to strike a balance between 'expert' voices with 'lived experiences', and the voices of any stakeholders/service-users who might not always have a picture of the complexities at stake to indeed contribute through commensurate insights. While this section added new data, its timing and in-depth slant offered material to address the three RQs head-on, opening my conclusion.

In chapter 10, I look back at the research problem and aims, including final reflections on the impact of my positionalities and situatedness, which open a strategic and ethical obligation 'not to be certain' as part of fieldwork. I then suggest potential implications and related contributions (summarized below) and draw out the study's limitations, leading to further research. The implications, recommendations and limitations draw from crucial research findings and constitute a form of mitigation to do justice to the complexities at stake and the participatory nature of the research.

1.6 Main Contributions and Limitations

This thesis makes several contributions across the social sciences at both theoretical and methodological levels, despite inevitable limitations consequent to Covid-19 lockdowns, and limitations arising from research conducted in an institutional setting. However, the critical multimethod ethnographic approach in a participative context, despites its limitations too, helped address the primary limitations emerging from the fieldwork's premature ending and while work was in progress. One example stood out: the trustworthiness of focus group data worried me; however, widening participation and embedding iterations from day one and conducting semi-structured interviews with the same participants/co-researchers, helped redress my uncertainties or *hesitancies*. So, contributions and limitations intertwined, reflecting methods' choices, a participatory methodology employed in a public/educational setting and the Covid19 pandemic; they also reflected my positioned and situated researcher approach to manage heterogeneous participants who wanted to contribute to knowledge generation and 'truth' claims about *the dangers of the present history* – I am playing with Foucault's expression 'history is the history of the present' (1977, p.34). Hence, this thesis fills the gap in the rich literature of the 'Critical Ethnography in Education' and makes an original contribution by having students as co-researchers alongside other vital actors who drew from 'lived experiences' to inform analysis, critically exploring adolescent MH as the 'here and now', a phenomenon that interested them. Along with a democratically conceived participatory ethos, ethnographic methods ensured participants had the 'right closeness' and instruments to manage subjective experiences alongside objective duties as co-researchers, overseeing sensitive information about themselves and others.

My (final) analysis adds a unique contribution to Psychology, Sociology, and Policy Studies by explaining how students' coping mechanisms involve subject positions that temporarily place them on the MH spectrum instead of fully caging their MH conditions vis-à-vis official definitions or even confusing it with well-being. Acknowledging and understanding coping mechanisms, or lack thereof, contribute to understanding the impact of governance/governmentality and theories of subject formation. Using subjectivity as a heuristic to discern adolescent MH fills literature gaps generated by debates around identity and subjectivity. Subjectivity, broadly referring to the

formation of *the self*, works as a recipient where schooling stressors converge and therefore represents a platform for *struggle,* helping reveal the MH status of adolescents.

1.7 Initial Remarks

I gradually employed a participatory approach already used in my teaching experience. However, I was now entering uncharted territories and could not predict how much participation was feasible or how many types of participants I would get. Importantly, as a qualitative researcher, I was committed to reflexivity and asked: Why research? Why research young people? What role should they play in it? What made (their) MH conceivable knowledge? In whose interest were RQs being asked? How would the I, We, and They be separated and amalgamated to reach knowledge/truth? Such problematization was intended to enhance the investigation of students' MH 'lived experiences' in and through the education context with the support of students themselves as participants and those who shared such educational experiences. Furthermore, by gradually adding teachers, parents and college-leaders (support staff and headship team), I wanted to provoke the right tension between multiple perspectives that characterized critical co-researchers who came together with not necessarily the same values or intentions but converging enough (Abma et al., 2019, CH.3-4-5; Di Emidio, 2022).

An initial research epiphany had already occurred at the planning stage of a previous study (Di Emidio, 2018), when the headteacher suggested removing 'mental health' from the student recruitment process. The headteacher suggested that having well-being instead of MH was '*...less complicated for us all, sir'*. Even though it seemed inconvenient, I decided that such an occurrence constituted a starting finding to further into the PhD because it corroborated my experience about the ambiguous use of the terms in my ex-school. Furthermore, it made me query the extent strategic policies moulded MH and well-being, something I had ignored thus far, fostering a pedagogy and a culture of intervention securing a particular type of child development for a *kind* of child.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review: Reviewing Adolescent MH vis-à-vis Educational Policies

This chapter is made up of two parts which outline this thesis's heterogeneous and transdisciplinary approach within a reflexive methodology. I employed a transdisciplinary approach by integrating literature from the social sciences, combining analytical tools, and crossing disciplinary boundaries to check how tenable my epistemological and ontological positions were.

Therefore, I *integrate* literature from several disciplines to problematize compulsory education and MH (part 1) concerning educational policy as a discourse (part 2). Part 1 problematizes education by looking at scholarly debates that have addressed education and its influences on students' MH and (child) development. Part 2 appraises education through the notion of discourse of what makes the 'good life' (or the 'good school') through policies that shape schooling under the 'econocentric' (Morrisey, 2015, p. 629) neoliberal paradigm - an example of *governmentality* or schooling as *dispositif* (Jones, 2021, p.3).

Both parts question ambivalent educational aims to form, support, and *produce* specific neoliberal 'subject positions' available for the next generation of citizens/individuals. Finally, both parts foreground the rationalities of educational governance (Wilkins, 2016; Brown, 2018) and illustrate policy changes-and-continuities since the 1980s to identify the extent to which *schooling* as *dispositif* (Jones, 2021, p.3) influences adolescent MH.

Part 1

Introduction - 'Problematizing' Education vis-a-vis MH and Subjectivity

While chapter 1 presented the main aims of this thesis alongside some preliminary problematizations, Part 1 of this chapter explicitly explores the significance and implications of compulsory education. Although education systems have operated through policies about what makes 'the good life' for all, here I problematize schooling and the schooling environment as a

determinant or a driver influencing MH. Investigating institutional pressure may explain adolescent MH, as reflected in subject positions that play out through processes of subjectification and subjectivation inherent to school/college life.[19]

Section 2.1 presents a brief history of formal MH definitions and anticipates early student-participants' critique for a shared understanding of our key concept: MH; section 2.2 argues for a theoretical nexus between education and MH by building on the education and well-being nexus identified in a previous study (Di Emidio, 2018); section 2.3 looks at the 'Sociology of Education' to identify prior academic contribution about root-problems associated with schooling, the individual, society and MH; section 2.4 nuances and strengthens the relationship between Subjectivity and MH by, including the work of Foucault on 'The Subject of Power'; several sub-sections unpick the notion of Subjectivity as a complex concept that can work as a heuristic to discern MH; finally, section 2.5 looks at the school/college-environment as an example of Foucault's *dispositif,* an institutional and cultural space/practice constituting subjectivities in 'econocentric' terms. A brief conclusive summary prepares the ground for policy-as-discourse critique presented in part 2, which will demonstrate how school/colleges have incorporated the incongruency of a focus on achievement/attainment while 'caring' for the MH and well-being of students.

---

[19] To note, in Psychology, subjectivity is commonly used in relation to Foucauldian Discourse Analysis and leans on subjectification/subjection; this might leave me open to questions as to why that analytic approach was not used. My use of 'subject position' though reflects a Foucauldian interpretation of subjectivity through subjectification and subjectivation as references and which add fluidity to subject positions as opposed to a fixed/essential trait – see also McAvoy, 2009.

2.1. Mental Health - a Brief History

Adolescent MH is multifaceted, affected by neurological/cognitive, physiological/biological, and emotional changes due to puberty, peer and societal pressures and family breakdowns (Blackmore, 2018; Coleman, 2011; Chow, 2016; Knowles et al., 2021). These might reflect human development's multiple and integrated levels of organization and, as Chow highlights, '…no single influence acts alone or as the 'prime mover' of change during development' (2016, p. 41).

Adolescent MH often reflects cultural practices but also socio-political drivers such as precarious and competitive employment prospects, social media engagement, austerity measures, and school/college-environment pressures mirroring neoliberal ideological aspirations of what constitutes 'the good life' (Ball, 2011; Chitty, 2014; Hodgson & Spours, 2013; Jones, 2021; Rose, 2018). As a teacher, I regularly saw mood-disturbed students experience negative emotions due to their perceived inability to exercise mastery over their school/college lives (Chow, 2016, p.40). From neuroscience, Blackmore (2018) recently referred to the notion of 'pruning' as the first cerebral synaptic resetting that humans go through at around 16 y/o, accounting for one of the first 'crises' adolescents face because of its impact on perception, value judgment and, in turn, sense of *self*. However, Chow reminds us that, despite the challenges, adolescence is filled with opportunities too, building relationships, discoveries and dreams (2016, p.41). Finally, the discipline of anthropology, especially through the seminal work of Turner (1969) made the study of 'rites of passage' a sub-strand of the discipline to best study 'what-makes-us-human'; Turner introduced the notion of 'liminality' as central to the 'coming of age' which late adolescents experience and which influences their MH due to the perceived 'in-betweenness' of the stage.

Policy contexts in England and Wales define MH more specifically. For example, NICE (National Clinical Institute for Excellence) developed guidance on the effectiveness of treatments and, in 2009, described social and emotional well-being, increasingly used in education and with health professionals, as encompassing a mix of MH and well-being features: 1. emotional well-being: happiness, confidence and not feeling depressed; 2. 'psychological well-being': a feeling of autonomy and control over one's life, problem-solving skills, resilience, attentiveness and a sense of involvement with others; and 3. 'social well-being': the ability to have good relationships with others and to avoid disruptive behaviour, delinquency, violence or bullying (NICE, 2009).

While NICE's descriptions encompass a variety of determinants that constitutes positive MH, it also shows the complexity of explaining and linking concepts like MH and well-being, which help explain why specialist definitions can be a 'problem' in policymaking, and in enactment (Ford, 2018; Gillies 2018; Green, H.M., 2011; Jones, 2021) for several reasons. First, this could be because different 'psy disciplines' (Rose, 2018) scholars, charity commissions or think-tanks have adopted or adapted different definitions to suit discursive socio-political argumentations. Adoptions and adaptations may constitute a problem because definitions risk falling short of effectively identifying a 'shared' policy problem because they are likely to be stirred by hegemonic discourses (Davies & Saltmarsh, 2007) and/or become politically and ethically contentious during analysis and at the point of application.

According to Keyes (2007), until recently, MH remained undefined, unmeasured, and therefore unrecognized at the level of governments and non-governmental organizations. One of the first academic definitions dates back to Jahoda (1958): '(Positive) Mental health is a state of successful performance of psychological functions, resulting in productive activities, fulfilling relationships with people, and the ability to adapt to change and cope with stress'. Jahoda (1958) conducted a review of investigations into the psychological content of positive (or ideal) MH, which consisted of:

a. Attitudes of the individual toward himself (positive self-perception)
b. The degree to which a person realises his potential through action (good self-esteem)
c. Unification of function in the individual's personality (control over behaviour)
d. Individual's degree of independence of social influences (sustained relationships and affection)
e. How the individual sees the world around him (realistic perceptions)
f. Ability to take life as it comes and master it (perceived meaning in life)

In 1999, in the US, the Surgeon General, then David Satcher, took on board Jahoda's definition and made it a reference for policymaking (U.S. Public Health Service, 1999, p. 4, in Keyes, 2007, p.97). Likewise, the WHO's (2004; 2014) widely employed definition echoed Jahoda/Sathcer's; it conceptualized MH as not merely the absence of mental illness but the presence of:

A state of well-being in which **the individual** realizes his or her abilities, **can cope** with the normal stresses of life, **can work** productively and fruitfully and **is able to make a contribution to his or her community**' [emphases added in bold] (2004, p.12).

An academic variation of the above is provided by Frederickson, Dunsmuir and Baxter's (2009, in Green, H.M. 2011, p. xv), who claimed that MH problems are evident when individuals cannot cope emotionally with their experiences or when their reactions to their experiences become a problem. These experiences may favour withdrawn and challenging behaviour.

Keyes argues that these definitions '…affirm the existing behavioural and social scientific vision of MH as not merely the absence of mental illness but the presence of something positive' (2007, p.98). This is important as there seems to be a general mis/understanding amongst adolescents that MH, or 'having MH', means having MH issues. To seek a shared understanding of 'adolescent MH', its correlations and associations with well-being was central to achieving a 'change-action' through college policies.

2.1.1. From MH definitions to the MH continuum

As the leader of a participatory research team, I initially selected a broad working definition and then made, together with student-participants, *ad hoc* links to adolescents' MH, which required contextualisation and differentiation from a mental disorder. We kept our usage of MH under check by referencing the literature and realised that what constituted official definitions of MH at a scholarly, policy and medical level obscured a set of cultural and personal variables underlying the concept. Official and specialist MH definitions perpetuated visions of 'the good life' about the MH of the productive citizenry, intrinsically 'performative', seemingly representing utilitarian theorising which excluded *subaltern's voices* or saw them (the subalterns) as '…factors or statistical correlations of heterogeneous elements' (Foucault (1991, p.288) which amounted to little significance or manipulation. Thus, early discussions and web research around specialist terms vs dictionary definitions gradually helped student-participants establish themselves as co-researchers of a heterogeneous research group.

For example, ongoing discussions with the rest of the participants (apart from parents at this early stage) spelled out that definitions did not coalesce with the student-participants' 'lived

experiences'. This led me to search for a flexible stance and, again, Jahoda's point was useful, '…positive mental health could be viewed as an enduring personality characteristic or as a less permanent function of personality and the social situation' (1958, in Chowdhury, 2019). Such a view corroborated the MH spectrum/continuum student-participants preferred as a definition; the spectrum/continuum metaphor allowed two poles, positive mental health and mental illness (and anything in between), to sustain student-participants' sense-making of their MH. Under such participatory guidance, I came across Gordon Allport 'MH continuum', which offered a solid platform for participative discussion; according to Allport, (1937, in Chowdhury, 2019) a fully developed and 'well-functioning' individual manifested the following features:

- A variety of interests and **the zeal** to pursue them
- The ability **to accomplish** daily **responsibilities**, including self-care
- A **mature** insight into his/her internal and external world

Failure to perceive or **exhibit** any of the three qualities indicate a deviation from **optimal functioning** and would mark a shift from the 'healthy' end of the continuum to the 'unwell' end of it' (Frisch et al., 1992, in Chowdhury, 2019).

I put some keywords in bold to show that Allport's contribution was still too performance focused and perhaps not ideal for what student-participants were looking for. Antonovsky's Salutogenic[20] model also contested official MH definitions and offered an alternative view on the continuum. Antonovsky rationalized MH as going from extreme pathological conditions to more mundane situations and, therefore, not strictly dichotomized, and less value based. Antonovsky (1979, cited in Vinje et al., 2017, p.37) maintained that a dichotomized approach to MH opened to 'medical imperialism' and manipulations of what made good and bad health. Therefore, we (myself and the student-participants) agreed that explicating MH *within* those two ends would have been more suitable than the official definitions and would have contextualized the role of well-being in the definitions. This means that the analysis of adolescent MH included references to

---

[20] Salutogenesis developed in the 1970s as a reaction to the dominant Pathogenic model of health which focused on illness rather than health.

well-being and, consequently, MH could be likened to one dimension of well-being (the mental or psychological), as the official definition stated, and yet, we still maintained that well-being was a much broader concept (more in Part 2).

Thus, students preferred to picture their MH status through the criteria of a spectrum/continuum (Fig.1) rather than accepting the contentiousness of the definition. One student critically added that the continuum was 'a cage' too, but one that enabled a discursive approach through which students could explain their MH.

Figure 1: MH spectrum/continuum selected by students amongst several

Optimal mental well-being

Example: a person who experiences a high level of mental well-being despite being diagnosed with a mental illness

Example: a person who has a high level of mental well-being and who has no mental illness

Maximum mental illness

Minimum mental illness

Example: a person experiencing mental illness who has a low level of mental well-being

Example: a person who has no diagnosable mental illness who has a low level of mental well-being

Minimal mental well-being

2.2 Education and Mental Health (MH)

Several UK scholars have documented, through heterogeneous work across the social sciences, that schooling pressures interplay with adolescents' MH and subject formation (Ball, 2016; 2017; Ball & Olmedo, 2013; Bibby, 2011; G. Evans, 2006; K. Evans, 2008; Jones, 2021; Leonard et al., 2015; Kulz, 2017, Morrin, 2017; Reay, 2018; Wilkins, 2012ab), and, similarly, in studies elsewhere (Atasay, 2014; Chow, 2016; Harling, 2014; Stahl, 2018; Wiklund et al., 2012). These studies offer a nuanced understanding of policy impact (e.g., Jones' on the production of Neoliberal subjectivities), pedagogic implementations (e.g., Reay's on individualistic vs collaborative learning outcomes) and psychodynamic processes in the classroom between teacher and student and students themselves. For example, the implications of classroom 'emotional labour' mirror child development processes conditioned by parent-child, teacher-student and peer relationships, all potentially influencing adolescent MH (Bibby, 2011; Di Emidio, 2019; Green, H.M. 2011; Moore, 2018; Price, 2001; 2002).

Additionally, some commentators have argued that student lack of active participation in the school-environment (Bonell et al., 2011; Jamal et al., 2013), and the lack of *play* in the learning journey (Gray, 2013), seem to account for the lack of *intrinsic* goals (e.g., becoming competent in endeavours of students' choosing); in contrast with an emphasis on *extrinsic* goals (e.g., material reward or other peoples´ judgement), with consequent 'loss of autonomy' and the onset of psycho-affective problems. Similarly, Didau and Rose (2016, p.122) suggest that students' motivation and behaviour encompass several interwoven layers that emphasize the influence of *extrinsic and intrinsic* motivation in the constitution of MH through (i) students and teachers' beliefs in terms of perception of intelligence and expectation of engagement; (ii) values of rewards and sanctions; (iii) self-regulation and target setting.

These points bond well with Deci and Ryan's (2010, pp.4-5) theory of 'intrinsic and extrinsic' motivation; they argued that intrinsic motivation created possibilities for students to learn, grow and reach an optimal level of well-being because they could think for themselves. This argumentation echoed Gray's point about 'play and autonomy' that correlated degrees of independence with well-being, and, as Moore (2007) observed, drawing from Baumann et al. (1997, p.26), dependency on socio-cultural contexts could not oversimplify the two types of

motivations. Two interrelated points follow; i) while extrinsic and intrinsic motivation acquires significance within the curriculum, the pedagogy or the examination, ii) students are still disadvantaged by various stressors to conform, achieve/attain and 'being for others' (Shahjahan, (2020). Such stressors get magnified through 'responsibilization' and show how education and adolescent MH play out under neoliberal rationalities (Atasay, 2014; Harling, 2014) '…that constitute a governable form of subjectivity' (Lorenzini, 2018, p.254).

Henceforth, as Humphrey (2018, p.8) notes, the costs of education at the expense of students' mental ill-health need a justification; precisely because it provides a paradox that challenges the Neoliberal 'new common sense' that normalizes a questionable 'survival of the fittest' agenda on econocentric grounds (Davies & Saltmarsh, 2007, p.3). While such normalization is explicable and even plausible on ideological grounds, it is still controversial and philosophical if we think that compulsory schooling pursues such an agenda. However, the latter is a key feature of nation-states, which employs the highest number of people any enterprise has ever sustained (Abbot, 2010) and relies on the 'care' for the MH (and well-being) of its future citizens.

Finally, drawing from the growing field of 'occupational therapy', which asserts that there are real benefits to health and well-being by *engaging* in meaningful activities or *occupations* (Wilcock, 1999), it is plausible to argue that the reduction of playtime in schools/colleges resembles a form of 'occupational deprivation', a dysfunctional disruption for a happier/healthier development (Whiteford, 2000, p.200). For example, aspects of 'occupation' linked to intrinsic 'motivation' in school/colleges seem to have been exacerbated by the exclusion of Music, Art and Drama in the 2014's GCSE and A-Level exam reform and the tokenistic role allocated to student-voice in most schools (Charteris & Smardon, 2018; Fielding, 2004). Similarly, Bonell et al. (2013) argued that the decline of PSHE (Personal-Social-Health-Education), confined to drop-down days or tutor time, potentially contributed to mental ill-health amongst adolescents. As a Citizenship/PSHE, Anthropology, Politics, and Sociology teacher for 13 years, I advocated these subjects as curriculum areas where pupils gained a critical vantage point on their educational journey and what it meant for them, and the varying degrees those subjects positively influenced their '*self's* formation'. Under such circumstances, I have argued broadly that perception of the *self*, the world, and the future is essential for positive adolescent MH. However, it was not until I put forward my PhD proposal that I engaged with questions about what and who made the student

self, seemingly stretching the relevance of subjectivity (as an <u>intra</u>personal activity), and identity (as an <u>inter</u>personal activity).

So, there are outcomes of education policies which inevitably shape adolescents' identity and subjectivity formation and such arguments were explored in the 1970s by the Sociology of Education (next section).

2.3 Producing and Re-producing the Surveilled Subject

The New Sociology of education (Waller, 2011), as influenced by Marxist sociologists of the 1960s, focused on the structural function of schooling; also, as a sub-discipline of Sociology (Alexander, 2017), it explored two academic areas which are foundational for my exploration of adolescent MH: 1) *education as socialization; 2) schooling for capitalism* (Bowles and Gintis, 1976).

Therefore, this section recalls established 'Sociology of Education' topics that, according to Marshall (1989), resonate with Foucault's work about schooling as a mechanism for *producing* people to lead *docile lives*. Marshall suggests that Foucault is '...probably the first to locate the school in a theoretical matrix of disciplines in which similar power relationships exist and are used to govern and control outcomes' (1989, p.108). Schools, paraphrasing Marshall, emerged for negative reasons, either to neutralize danger (control of sexuality and abnormal/anti-social behaviour) or to maximize efficiency (reforming schools/colleges through technologies involving discipline and punishment). In short, through surveillance, discourses and practices, schools '…became attached to the most valuable and productive functions of society…assimilated by and improved upon capitalism' (Marshall, 1989, p.108). Consequently, the New Sociology of education readily indicated structural pressure on the student and *schooling for capitalism* portrayed schooling as key to cultural (re)production and invited psychological, sociological and philosophical explanations of its influence on adolescents' lives. However, here I use 'influence' broadly, referring to the conditioning of the human psyche without overlooking forms of resistance and agency as subjectivation.

By and large, Marxist sociologists looked at students' schooling experience as *alienation* experienced by the proletariat under capitalism. Hence, alienation's role in the production of subjectivities foregrounds scholarly concerns with adolescent MH even if they did not explicitly address it. The notion of *agency* played a crucial part in cultural 're-production' and in challenging hegemonic assumptions that re-produced the status quo (Bernstein, 1999; Bourdieu & Passeron, 2013; Gordon, 1991; Giddens, 2009, p.833-839; Willis, 1977; Simon, 1977; Giroux,1983; Brown & Laudel, 1997; Laurean, 2003, in Giddens 2009, p.847). The move towards agency is essential from my teacher 'positioned' perspective because it exposes the adolescent 'subject' as self-constituting. As we will see, the possibilities available in the *dispositif* consist of acting as 'double subject', being engaged in 'technologies of the self', considering 'de-subjectivation' or a will *not* to be (Butler, 1997, p.130 in Ong-Van-Cung, 2011, p.XII). Agency, choice, aspiration, and motivation would now intersect and inform agentic 'subject positions' (as voluntary take-ups) and alienating ones (as forced take-ups). Alexander (2017) notes, 'schools are.... profoundly future-oriented institutions in which students reconcile the privileging of imagined neoliberal futures with the often starkly different realities of their own experiences outside of school' (p.99). Alexander introduces a possible mismatch that anticipates some of the problems this thesis addresses concerning adolescent MH and precarious future opportunities. One, for example, refers to MH as part of an *infolding* (Rose, 1998, pp.37-189; Rose, 1996, p.142, in Barker & Jane, 2016) of a generalized exterior malaise, which, in later chapters, I will explain through Lacan's oxymoron '*extimite*', the 'intimate estrangement' experienced by those facing psychological and emotional conflicts.

2.3.1 Appraising the links between Marxist sociology, neoliberalism, and subjectivity

Marxist theoretical approaches found even more relevance under neoliberal education policies in vogue since the 1980s in most Anglo-Saxon countries that explicated certain aspects of students' life, especially notions of 'good education' with students' success. For example, students' experience of schooling in the UK has run parallel to a narrative of lack of social mobility, that schools are not meritocratic, and an ongoing gendered/raced/classed education since the 1970s, persisting in today's academies (see OECD data in Kulz, 2017, p.2). Marxist lenses sensitive to

education systems serving the capitalist need for profit in the economy remained valuable in the current neoliberal and econocentric (Morrisey, 2015) climate. The business/corporate industry has had even more excellent opportunities to influence in areas such as pedagogy, curriculum and the strategic running of schools as enterprises (Adonis, 2008, 2012 in Kulz, 2017, pp.1-7; Wilkins, 2012ab).

Therefore, while early Marxist sociologists saw people as being over-determined by society, others saw individuals' internal working and creations of meaning and *self*-concepts inside classrooms. Willis' (1977) approach represented a paradigmatic analytical shift[21] as alienation was reconsidered; he found out that working-class pupils actively resisted and rejected the bourgeois ideology of education through *self-elimination*, perhaps because they felt alienated. Nevertheless, their resistance to schooling condemned them to uncertain working-class futures. Therefore, *exam failure* and *self-elimination* (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979; Sullivan, 2002) are still significant because, to different extents and modalities, they still operate nowadays and implicate psychological/motivational reasons alongside identity and subjectivity processes, as several students' stories demonstrated. The entrenched and increasingly econocentric neoliberal education, '...functions as a key site for remaking and reshaping the field of human action in ways that benefit the powerful' (Kulz, 2017, p.10), while it gives the illusion of operating through choice and merit.[22] Hence, the renewed importance of education-related subjectivation and subjectification to discern adolescent MH. The influence of such processes may reveal the complexity of adolescent MH and requires a focus on what is meant by MH in and through the schooling *dispositif,* increasingly predicated on neoliberal values.

The following section introduces Foucault's concern with subjectivity via his article 'The Subject of Power' (1982), a 'late Foucault' who revealed that the fundamental preoccupation of

---

[21]But see McFarland and Cole (1988) who criticized Willis' work as marginalizing the interests of women and the possible neglect of race and gender when discussing unemployment.

[22] Currently (February 2022), the DfE's Augar review of higher education funding includes the minimum entry requirements for students to be eligible for government-backed loans for tuition and maintenance, affecting students from a poorer background and consolidating the so-called 'cycle of disadvantage' (Rutter & Madge, 1976).

his entire work, despite the prominence of his focus on Power-Knowledge, had been 'the subject', what/whom we have *become*. The section makes preliminary links between education, subjectivity and MH before I problematized further in the remaining two sections.

2.4 Foucault, Subjectivity and MH

My transdisciplinary approach develops alongside the Foucault-inspired analysis because his theoretical position is ubiquitous in the social sciences, and he would not fit into narrow categories (Marshall, 1989; Ball, 2016). Foucault also suggested using his concepts like a 'toolbox' (Bailey, 2015a), and such flexibility fit my Critical Theory framework, adopting a non-linear and rigorous genealogical analysis. Finally, Foucault's argument about 'subject formation' through discourses suits the core critical aspect of this thesis because '…discourses […] constitute the world in particular ways, with regimes of knowledge, which generate particular ways of doing things' (Foucault, 1961; 1973; in McAvoy, 2009, p.68). However, the later Foucault embedded resistance in philosophical and ethical terms (Bazzul, 2016; 2017; Di Emidio, 2021b; Stormzy, 2002), and the problem is to '...recognize when modern power is exercised and whether…resistance is the appropriate response' (Marshall, 1989, p.111). Marshall's point is crucial for extrapolating subject positions from the data and offers food for thought regarding vulnerability and coping as forms of resistance (final chapters).

I am familiar with Foucault's essay 'Subject of Power' (1982) and his seminal work. Foucault's genealogical methods to study the subject through processes of subjectification and subjectivation followed a philosophical trail that eventually went back to the Hellenic culture, stopped through Descartes and Kant and culminated with Nietzschean's speculations on what/how humans have become (Foucault, 1982; Strozier, 2002; Ball, 2016). Therefore, following Marshall (1989) and Ball (2016), I conceived of the concept 'subjectivity' as a tool that could help achieve three aims linked to the RQs:

i. To make meaning out of educationally related experiences which influenced students' MH (e.g.., exam pressure).

ii. To raise the profile of participants 'roles' and stories as 'subjective' (Gonzalez Rey, 2009) that oppose reductionist, overmedicalizing diagnosis.

iii. To make the dual nature of Subjectivity (subjectification and subjectivation) work as learning devices that unpacked adolescent MH in and through the college-environment.

Finally, following the critical approach of this thesis, I did not conceive of worsening adolescent MH as a measurable phenomenon to intervene on, as if it were easy to grasp from stats and 'fuzzy definitions' (Di Emidio, 2021a). Instead, I rationalized it through social actors' meaning making of circumstances and/or adverse experiences. Therefore, subjectivity worked as a 'configurational system' (Gonzalez Rey, 2017 in Goulart, 2019, p.57) that facilitated analysis of worsening MH, and as a 'generative system' that allowed students to emerge as subjects of human practice whereby '…the concept of [the] subject implies the idea of rupture and creative action within normative social instances' (Goulart, 2019, p.4). Though such an approach required that I 'heard' voices, my consequent analysis did not assume that subjectivity was now easier to associate with MH. Through the lenses of subjectification and subjectivation however, I could make the influence of the school/college-environment more visible to discern student-participants' MH status. I could also articulate subjectivity's relevance within the MH spectrum and identify the influence of 'subject positions' vis-a-vis modes of subjectivation.

2.4.1 Subjectification and subjectivation in neoliberal times

The double roots of the word 'subject' helped establish some of the complexities and nuances around such concepts: *subjectum* (subject to) and *subjectus* (the entity *in* itself and *for* itself) - (Balibar, & Végső, 2003; Oberprantacher, & Siclodi, 2017; Strozier, 2022). According to Oberprantacher and Siclodi (2017), this double etymological origin has created conceptual confusion and application around the notion of subjectivity, including later translation of *assujettisement* and *subjectivation* (which French dictionaries give as a neologism). Nevertheless, the two are key aspects of Foucault's analysis which Foucault himself did not antagonize (Hancock, 2018). For example, Oberprantacher and Siclodi (2017, p.18) capture, succinctly, the sentiments and technical/linguistic problems related to operationalizing the word 'subject':

> If Foucault's discussion of subjectivation as a (self)performance on the thresholds of subjection and subjectivity, power and truth, intimacy and company, politics and

ethics, economy and desire, has left traces.... then... it makes sense to argue that Foucault's efforts to comprehend subjectivation as a seminal moment in the subject's formative occasion, which cannot be separated from its *assujettissement*, remained *torso*, that is, fragmentary, suggestive, enigmatic. One may even say that any effort to come to terms with the twisted etymology of the (word) subject is required to remain *torso*, for it would amount to a problematic distortion of the polyvalent complexity of the subject's historical emergence if a final verdict were provided since 'subjectivation' is... a truly contorted subject.

Therefore, I considered subjectivity's *torso* as inherently valuable for understanding modes of subjectification and subjectivation to make my analysis of education and MH plausible enough before it got participative co-validation or questioning. This *torso* quality entailed that subjectivity could help grasp adolescent MH because of *becoming* under specific 'subjective configurations…a relatively stable organization of subjective senses related to a particular event, activity, or social production' (Gonzalez Rey, 2009b, p.218 in Goulart, 2019, p.57). For example, drawing from Chicchi's (2021) 'symptomatology as a field of struggle' and the Critical Psychology tradition, specific modes of subjectivation helped frame adolescent MH within reach of neoliberal performance requirements. It helped interrogate worsening MH due to the relationship between individuals and society.

This relationship reverberates with Freud's seminal work 'Civilization and its discontent' (1930) and similar contemporary insights from Ehrenberg (1996; 1999; 2010) and Han's (2015, 2017), who unpick modern psychopathologies like depression and anxiety vis-à-vis neoliberalism. Such framing partly contrasted with individualizing, psychic, and reductionist specialistic insights (Blackman et al., 2008, pp.12-13) or, as '...interiority which so many feel compelled to diagnose' (Rose, 1998, p. 37) but which reflect an *infolding* of the constructed medicalization of our existence, of our exteriority. This means that ''the 'inside' is formed by discourses that circulate on the 'outside''' (Barker & Jane, 2016, p.267).

Consequently, to increase the potential for subjectivity to capture how adolescents' MH is influenced by compulsory schooling *and* neoliberal times, I shift the analysis to an old education debate, namely, whether schooling was training for work or life (Abbott, 2010; Moore, 2007; Reay, 2018). This shift should not be confused with the introduction of the policy of 'lifelong learning'

(Barnes et al., 2016) but serves to achieve a synthesis that captures how the goals of mass education have become embedded in an economic model (Brown, 2018), in line with Thatcher (1981): 'Economics are the method; the object is to change the heart and soul'.

Hodgson and Spours (2013, p.24) argue that New Labour (1997) instrumentalized the education debate by having 'lifelong learning' in its significant education policies, a strategic response to issues of equity and social cohesion, resonating with, but also stretching, neoliberal rationalities of individualism, competition, profit and responsibilization. (Morrisey, 2015, p. 619; Wilkins, 2019).

2.4.2. Implementing subjectivity vis-a-vis MH and education

Davies, B. (2006) applies Butler's idea of the 'double subject' to tease out subjectivity; this approach may show how subjectivity could work as a heuristic to assess students' MH. Butler's 'double subject' in a school setting illustrates how the government's work in schools constructs the 'double subject'. The latter refers to the student who is the *master* of certain practices within schools and, simultaneously, the one that *submits* to those same practices (e.g., pedagogy, sitting exams, getting rewards, managing punishment); so:

> As the willed effect of the subject, subjection is a subordination that the subject brings on itself; yet, if subjection produces a subject and a subject is a precondition of agency, the subjection is the account by which a subject…becomes the guarantor of its resistance and opposition' (Butler, 1997, p.14 in Davies, B. 2006, p.429).[23]

This extract is essential because it acknowledges the environmental pressure to *become* with the intimate *forming* aspects of students' predisposition in and through the *dispositif.* Butler's 'double subject' also fits well with Hacking's (2007) 'looping effect' in classifying people, namely,

---

[23] Oberprantacher and Siclodi (2017) acknowledge the confusion with subjection/subjectification usage despite Butler's contribution to reading Foucault's *assujettisement* as powerful because '...it does not repress the complex logic of this term'(p.17).

'…how a classification can interact with classified people' (p. 286). Butler and Hacking's combined theories propose subject formation as externally determined without excluding the field of possibilities for a possible existence as autonomous individuals capable of functioning collectively. This theorizing represents a move away from the early Foucauldian notion of subjectification, a by-product of self-surveillance or 'technologies of the self' as 'regimes of the self', towards the later Foucauldian 'technology of the self' as subjectivation (Atasay, 2014; Bazzul, 2016; 2017; Harling, 2014; Hancock, 2018; Infinito, 2003; Leask, 2012). To explain the ways humans develop knowledge about themselves, Foucault (1988) suggests that 'technologies of the self' are those which

> Permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.

Allegedly, Butler indicates that it is plausible to assume that:

> The subject cannot quell the ambivalence by which it is constituted. Painful, dynamic and promising, this vacillation between the already-there and the yet-to-come is a crossroad that rejoins every step by which it is traversed, a reiterated ambivalence at the heart of agency (1997, pp.17-18).

This argument does not diminish the importance of Foucauldian 'subjection' (i.e., subjects complicit to their objectification), but includes the *possibilities* opened by available subject positions in the school/college-environment. For example, Morrin's ethnography in a secondary school (2017) refers to the development of subjectivity through *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1977) in the school-environment to discern forms of resistance denied to working-class adolescents. Such denial shows how adolescents can be, symbolically, stripped of microforms of empowerment in the very confinement they inhabit on average 40 hours per week, over nine months, with significant influence on their MH. Morrin (2017) suggests that these concepts have the power to '…explain how, even with agency in the world, individuals *become* [emphasis added] locked in cycles of symbolic dominations and inequalities' (p.61) but can also reveal forms of resistance and non-compliance by employing the symbols or language used to subjectify them (Davies, B., 2006; Morrin, 2017; Youdell, 2006). Thus, to operationalize subjectivity with MH, I turn to Bonell et

al. (2012ab), who suggest that MH in schools/colleges requires an in-depth analysis of processes embedded in the (school/college) culture. These include 'subject positions' (as processes) that can be analyzed concerning neoliberal policies about empowerment or 'realizing their potential' (Rose, 2018, p.65).

Following Bonell et al. (2012ab), I borrow from Gillian Evans' (2006) inspirational ethnographic study about *'educational failure and working-class white children in Britain'.* Gillian Evans' offers several insights on how to proceed with qualitative social research in education. I endorse her call for '…the social scientist's task to theorize the person by accounting for gender, race, ethnicity, class and culture as inseparable and embodied aspects of what it means to *become* British nowadays. Gillian Evans (2006) argues that such a theory of *becoming* [emphasis added] should explain what it means to become a particular kind of person and develop a specific way of being with others. In Gillian Evans' words, '…by conducting studies of how, through learning in childhood, people come to take their way of being in the world for granted' (p.187).

Gillian Evans' argument is essential for this research because if acquiring an education entails two binary processes and expectations (*educare* and *educere*), then we have an ontological problem, easy to be instrumentalized at the policy level. According to Bass and Good (2004, p.161), Craft (1984) highlighted the double root of the word education which, I think, carries profound implications for policy making when stretched to both broad and narrow aims of compulsory education: i) *educare*, which means to train or to mould, and ii) *educere*, meaning to lead out (possibly a talent, potential). While the two meanings are different, the word 'education' represents them. So, we have an etymological basis for many debates about education today where the same word denotes two different concepts. Bass and Good (2004) remind us that

> One side uses education to mean the preservation and passing down of knowledge and the shaping of youths in the image of their parents. The other side sees education as preparing a new generation for the changes to come—readying them to create solutions to unknown problems. One calls for rote memorization and becoming good workers. The other requires questioning, thinking, and creating (p.162)

In short, *educare* echoes the 1970s sociology of education Marxist critique (Bowles & Gintis, 2003) against schooling 'for' capitalism' as alienating, while *educere* requires critical thinking *a la* Freire.[24]

To further complicate matters, Bass and Good (2004) suggest that some expect schooling to fulfil both functions but allow to use only those activities promoting *educare*, as a process in which the young's knowledge, character and behaviour are shaped and moulded.

Therefore, inspired by Bonell's call to analyze schooling processes and practices that make certain subject positions available and Gillian Evans' calls to analyze the implications of *becoming* in and through schooling nowadays, my qualitative approach searched for the 'local meanings' (McAvoy, 2009, p.84) that schooling held, not only for students but also parents, teachers and school leaders.

In conclusion, the links between subjectivity and MH emerged from the research field in several guises, hence the several explicatory angles. Importantly, I do not suggest that subjectivity is concomitant with MH. However, suppose we conceive of MH beyond the constraints of pathology, intervention and medicalization. In that case, discursive mechanisms facilitate, as far as the research is concerned, participants' 'subjective configurations' or subjective productions that '…may also sustain processes of resistance and alternatives to the dominant forms of institutionalization in which individuals and groups are embedded (Goulart 2019, p.55).

The following final section consolidates the school/college-environment as a Foucauldian *dispositif* that frames childhood MH within a neoliberal framework and where subjectivity, MH and education are likely to coagulate.

---

[24] Freire (1974) identified two poles, respectively, the 'banking notion of education and education through 'conscientization', whereby individuals and communities develop a critical understanding of 'reality' through praxis - i.e., reflection and action on the causes of oppression.

2.5 The Relevance of the School/College-Environment

Bonell et al. (2011; 2013) draw from Rutter's (1979) work on 'school effects' and Markham and Aveyard's (2003) theory of human functioning and organization to conceptualize the school/college-environment as '…an assemblage of behaviour policies, physical spaces, curricula, school ethos, teaching and learning practices'. Relatedly, Jones (2021) qualifies Foucault's *dispositif* as a 'useful model...that conveys how neoliberal tropes span multiple policy processes through legislation, classroom practices, inspection regimes, self-reflection and encompasses discourses, concepts, and systems' (p.97*)*. Accordingly, the school/college-environment as a *dispositif* resonates with Deleuze's critique of prisons, schools, and any other institutionalized apparatuses Deleuze referred to as 'environments of enclosure' as having been in a state of crisis since their inception, which never ceases to announce necessary reforms (1992, pp.3-4, in Pongratz, 2011, p.163).

Such dynamic connotations of practices and reforms make schools/colleges easy targets for governmental interventions, under the assumption that we all are 'entrepreneurs of ourselves', what Brown defines as 'the centrepiece of neoliberal policy in education' (2018, in Gilbert, 2018, p.42). Brown draws on Lauder's et al. '' 'state theory of learning'… a highly regulated system in which performance can be measured quantitatively by test results. The attendant theory of motivation is that teachers and students will be driven to improve against the state-determined performance target'' (2006, p.200).

As a result, Bonell's definition of the school/college-environment, Foucault's *dispositif* and Lauder's 'state theory of learning' reinforced my research lenses to identify disparate elements interacting with students' MH at a markedly complex age. These included physical and mental well-being initiatives and normative practices related to curriculum implementation, assessment, and pedagogy, which harness 'neoliberal subjectivities' (Ball, 2017; Bailey, 2015b; Henriques et

al., 1998; Lorenzini, 2018; Stahl, 2018; Wilkins, 2012ab) inextricable from psychological well-being. [25]

Market-oriented education initiatives explained Bonell's contention that the school/college-environment policies directly impacted students' MH (and well-being) due to the internalization of expectations that emerged from a competitive culture in schools (Bonell, 2012ab) by i) the acquisition of knowledge and skills that could be measured (Ball, 2012; Wilkins, 2017, Yusuf, 2019); ii) increased parental expectations (Sotardi, 2017; Wit et al., 2011); iii) teacher pressure as a result of the neoliberal 'responsibilization' agenda (Ball & Olmedo, 2013; McLeod, 2017). The Lacanian psychotherapist Recalcati (2014) captures such an evolution of the 21st-century education agenda by defining it as *hyper*-cognitive, part of embedded narcissistic schooling, at the expense of creativity and emotional intelligence associated with less cognitive 'soft' subjects, and the self-interested ethos of our neoliberal times.

Finally, academic material on adolescent MH and concomitant governmental guidance in UK schools/colleges helped gather insights into the effects of the school/college-environment during such a developmental stage. However, despite the extensive literature that pointed at the negative influence of school pressure, a clear gap showed that student voices and other service users' voices were neither fully contextualized nor put to the test in a democratic, participatory way, therefore, not *heard.*

2.5.1 Implications of the college-environment for subjectification and subjectivation

The centrality of the school/college-environment in the studies of adolescent MH takes shape through the 'institutional habitus' that, according to Bourdieu (1992, cited in Stahl 2018, p. 159),

---

[25] The reference here to psychological well-being is not casual but for emphasis. Policy usage of psychological well-being, emotional well-being and subjective well-being as synonymous with MH seems the norm. However, as explained in part 2, the use of well-being by itself to replace MH can be a problem; I found it viable though to use well-being alongside MH and other terms like 'psychological' or 'emotional' because well-being by itself carries too many implications.

generates student *dispositions* or *modes of being* in line with compliance to authority, and hard-work. The institutional habitus, Stahl argues, can work as a conceptual attempt to discern school life and its consequences (2018, p. 16), whereby *habitus* becomes a *reflex*, structured by life experiences, but only offering little awareness for independent thought and action (praxis). This process may result in diminished *conscientization* (Freire, 1970; 1974), reduced awareness of the conditions that negatively affect one's life, and diminished effect of praxis warranting the precondition of mental ill-health amongst adolescents.

As an illustration, official data[26] (Campbell et al., 2021; Cosmo, 2022; Knowles, 2021; PISA, 2018; Thorley, 2016) about worsening adolescent mental ill-health in UK's schools/colleges and universities (well before the pandemic) show that mental ill-health hinders a praxis that could enable an 'active' individual, able 'to function' collectively (in inverted commas, respectively, a descriptive adjective and a verb taken from the WHO definition). These aspects of the official MH definition presuppose that good MH is related not just to the absence of illness but to mental and psychological well-being, which does not discriminate across age groups. Fine (2012, p.173 in Stahl, 2018, p.166) suggested that school-environments' pressures had been internalized by adolescents, leading to mental ill-health caused by the intrinsically *competitive* school culture. Smith et al. (2015) added parental expectations and peer pressures as equal stressors. These presuppositions reflect research on the detrimental effects of the school/college-environment; these include the area of vulnerability in high-achieving student populations (Feld & Shusterman, 2015), long-established working-class educational failures (Reay, 2018; Willis, 1977; Ball, 2017; Stahl, 2018; Gilbert, 2018), and contemporary disadvantaged groups classified as BAME (British Asian Ethnic Minority) through current race relation directives (Gilroy, 2013).

Additionally, several studies focused on gendered perceptions of stress and anxiety within the school/college environment (Davies & Saltmarsh, 2007; Wiklund et al., 2012; Reay, 2018) in the formation of subjectivities in the classroom. Similarly, Wilkins' (2012ab) '''gender complications'

---

[26] See also Gov.UK Policy paper (2010), and DfE and DoH reports between 2015 and 2021.

slippery dynamics'' in the classroom suggested why girls suffered more than boys from mental ill-health in a competitive, pro-masculine school/college-environment.

The literature strongly suggests that adolescent MH, as a perceived and experience-based construction, is influenced by context-bound, socio-historical, politicized influences that reflect the diverse manifestations of MH in any given raced, gendered, and classed individual. These manifestations echo Rose's idea of *infolding* and Gonzalez Rey's 'subjective configuration' as frames to understand MH.

Conclusion

Part 1 of this literature review shows that the influence of schooling on adolescent MH is multi-layered and necessarily relies on the 'subject formation', and available subject positions taken up in the college-environment and that, taken together, underline processes of *becoming*. To illuminate such a phenomenon, I have problematized schooling as a 'determinant', without ignoring the possibilities of agency/subjectivation, because it affects education through policies. Hence, Part 2 of this chapter addresses the theoretical implications of educational policies. At the same time, I look at the critical policies that have shaped school/college-environments: one interpretation praises the progressive steps taken by the policy to support positive MH, while the other is suspicious of the motives, implementation and results of these policies. It is, therefore, crucial to first understand the use of key terms in the policy that confuse rather than inform service-users.

Part 2

Introduction: Educational Policies-as-Discourse

Part 2 complements the problematization of education concerning adolescent MH by looking at education policies that dubiously link performance with MH and well-being politics. First, the chapter draws on Gillies (2018) and my earlier critique (2020). While Gillies critiqued the politics of well-being policy language and its links to MH, I have extended Gillies' argument by referring to 'add-ons' such as character and resilience that are deployed in and through school/college-environments. Second, I incorporate Jones' (2021) recent comprehensive summary of policies aimed at creating a mentally healthy child (a 'whole child') by referring to the notion of 'character'. Thirdly, I argue that while education policy embeds progressive steps to support a positive MH through the well-being agenda, the same policy instrumentalizes concepts of MH and well-being. Therefore, this chapter points to policy-as-discourse to expose the impact of language that shapes the processes of students' becoming in and through school/college-environments.

Section 2.6 begins by contextualizing how and why I am interested in policies-as-discourse; section 2.7 introduces the contested notion of 'therapeutic education' by assessing the MH /well-being pairing in policy documents; section 2.8 builds on this controversy to show how policy- as-discourse advances the neoliberal ideological agenda. Finally, section 2.9 appraises policy-as-discourse to ground it in neoliberalism and link education policy to the next frontier of education: the development of 'human capital' (Becker, 2009; Pongratz, 2011, p.150). This link explains neoliberalism's influence on adolescent MH via psychopathologies associated with the 'symptomology of the performance society' (Chicchi, 2021), which questionably aims to shape the 'whole child' (Jones, 2021).

2.6 Contextualizing policy and Discourse within the MH and Well-being Education Agenda

The importance of key terminology in educational policymaking has come to the attention of several scholars. Some argue that concepts like well-being are to be framed within the 'ebbs-and-flow' of life, whose management characterized people's happiness in the life course (Ceislik, 2019); others offer a more politicized view. For example, Gillies[27] (2018) appraises well-being by, firstly, reminding us why children came to assume greater significance in policymaking because:

> The state enables rather than supports people... by investing in the population so they develop the skills to flourish independently from the welfare state. But just as with financial stock and shares, you need to start early to get the best return on government investment.

Secondly, Gillies unpacks the MH-well-being relationship in policymaking, showing the intricacies of such 'yoking' as an ambivalence which simultaneously justifies and disputes the pairing in policymaking. Gillies' points inspired a previous study's (Di Emidio, 2018) analysis by including concepts such as 'character' and 'resilience' into the equation (see also Di Emidio, 2019; 2021a). The focus on policy terminology was relevant to this work, which focused on MH but also sought to understand well-being's role – in hindsight, such concerns began as a teacher when colleagues and I questioned the usage of the two terms in the school/college-environment.

For example, since around 2010, MH and well-being have increasingly been prominent in departmental meetings, assemblies, morning briefings, and school council meetings. Prior to that, the terms had featured in SEAL[28] and ECM[29] interventions that exemplified 'whole child' policies

---

[27] Prof. Gillies kindly sent me her presentation (Investing, Preventing and Normalizing: Wellbeing and Young Minds in UK Policy) following a conference held at Westminster University (London, W1B 2HW) on 18/05/2018 - 'What Future in Mind? Critical Perspectives on Youth Wellbeing and Mental Health'.

[28] 'Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning' Programme (DfES, 2007) was a curriculum based whole school approach, used since 2004 with individuals and groups of children to develop their social, emotional and behavioural skills.

[29] 'Every Child Matters' Labour's initiative in 2004 (DfES, 2003) covered children and young adults up to the age of 19, or 24 for those with disabilities. The aim of the initiative was for every child, whatever their

to revive the Conservative's 'character education' as either an extension or a reinterpretation of New Labour's focus on well-being, underpinning the parties' narratives of what made the 'good life' (Jones, 2021). Clearly, from a teacher's perspective, the professional excitement to positively contribute to students' MH and well-being was countered by confusion because the relentless focus on attainment/achievement could not marry the pervasive level of 'care' that policies expected schools/colleges to embed. Moreover, most teachers assumed that teaching-and-learning relationships with students would intrinsically 'do' the well-being of students to secure a good level of MH, both short and long-term.

However, a closer look at MH and well-being in educational policy showed that the terms' pairing achieved, dubiously, more than the sum of their parts. Schools/colleges were asked to incorporate the pairing and their interchangeability in day-to-day schooling as part of policy enactment, which, I argue, is in line with more comprehensive policy-as-discourse theories (Ball, 1993; 2015; Bacchi, 2010; Chitty, 2014; Shaw, 2010; Shaw & Russell, 2012;). Among theories, Ball's (1993, p.14) exhortation "...we do not speak a discourse, it speaks us" provides a fitting lens through which to discern the discursive implications of terms, which is consistent with Foucault's view (2019) that discourse is implicated in the unilateral production of 'knowledge' *and* 'truth'.

Therefore, I borrowed the scholarly notion of policy-as-discourse because it drew from Foucault's view on discourse as the interplay of 'regimes of truth', 'technologies of power', and 'technologies of the self' constituting the possibilities for 'subject' formation (Oberprantacher & Siclodi, 2017) and, in turn, influencing MH. Furthermore, through policy-as-discourse, the relationship between identity and subjectivity became more visible because, as Malson put it (2003, p. 26), 'discourses do not simply reflect individual identities; they offer up a variety of *subject positions* [emphasis added] ... Subjectivity does not come from within but is constituted and reconstituted in texts and talk'.

---

background or circumstances, to have the support they need to: 1) Be healthy; 2) Stay safe; 3) Enjoy and achieve; 5) Make a positive contribution; 6) Achieve economic well-being.

Two key Foucauldian governmentality implications arise from Malson's; on the one hand, the constitution of people as governed 'selves' become more subtle, discursive and entrenched (i.e., subjectification); on the other, the constitution of people as eventually 'agentic selves' who determine future outcomes with heightened degrees of intentionality (subjectivation). As part 1 showed, and later chapters illustrate, a binary distinction is hazardous because subjectivity is complex and contradictory due to etymological tensions and varying philosophical views on 'free will' for *dependent* adolescents (Oberprantacher & Siclodi, 2017).[30] However, for now, let us focus policy-as-discourse. Ball emphasized that:

> The effect of policy is primarily discursive; it changes the possibilities we have for thinking 'otherwise'. Thus, it limits our responses to change, and leads us to misunderstand what policy *is* by misunderstanding what it *does*. Further, policy as discourse may have the effect of redistributing *voice*. So that it does not matter what some people say or think, only certain voices can be heard as meaningful or authoritative' [emphases added] (1993, p.15).

This citation reverberates with Foucault's famous quote and illustrates the ambiguous impact of policies in the school/college-*environment,* 'People know what they do; frequently they know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what what they do does' (2003). For example, early participatory analysis about compulsory education's influence on MH, exposed the confusion caused by statutory policy requirements to raise academic standards while 'caring' for the MH and well-being of adolescents. I argue that such disparaging and inconsistent policy narratives that add 'care' to students' education have intensified in the past 10/15 years through policymakers and think-tanks (Green, H.M. 2011; Yusuf, 2019) because of implicit 'performance' demands (Exley & Ball, 2014; Morrisey, 2015). These demands are bound up to high-stake

---

[30] I am aware that the implications of 'free will' with subjectivity call into question the notion of agency (Rebughini, 2014; Hancock, 2018). As argued elsewhere though (Di Emidio, 2021b), the question of agency helps address a Kantian-inspired question ('Who am I?') and a Nietzschean one ('How am I becoming'?) as avenues that embed the extent individuals' free will underlines their MH. While I consider agency throughout, for the sake of brevity, I will not address free will *per se*, i.e., whether there is such a possibility within the agency/structure debate (Giddens, 2009, Rebughini, 2018). Instead, I emphasise the extent to which students exercise agency/autonomy with the resulting MH outcomes within certain boundaries.

examinations and MH/well-being policies. Such points inevitably warrant divergent views of participants about compulsory education's priorities, often putting students and teachers against parents and school leaders (Di Emidio, 2019).

Additionally, as far as my school experience was concerned, the aims of using terms such as MH and well-being in school parlance were not always clear from a teacher's perspective; it was as if '…MH is always an after-thought in our internal application of policies, am not sure what the difference with well-being is…' (ex-teacher colleague, now school manager). Though anecdotal, the statement illustrates how school practitioners may feel and the flimsiness of policy implementation, regardless of the original intent, statutory or non- statutory.

In retrospect, the wide-ranging and dubious usage of MH and well-being in policymaking represented a platform to see how policy and neoliberal discourse combined to influence students' MH. I could now build on Gillies' (2018) and my earlier work (2019; 2021a), which problematized key terminology within the Neoliberal paradigm[31] and framed the MH / well-being distinction in dialectical terms. However, considering well-being as befitting the aim of this study (i.e., the relationship between education and MH), I could not set aside well-being altogether (hence, well-being follows MH in brackets throughout most of the thesis). Only by understanding the usage of these key terms in policy making and their influence on participants could I/we critique them. Such causal understanding would have sustained research validity in terms of what MH (really) meant to the participants and what role well-being (really) played in the constitution of students' MH, above and beyond their definitions and measurements.

---

[31] Rait et al. (2010, in Green, H.M. 2011, p.25) attempted similar arguments by looking at mental disorders' stigma and the impact of language.

2.7 'Therapeutic Education' and the Influence of MH and Well-being in Educational Policy Discourses

Most academic literature on adolescent MH (and well-being) depicts the school/college-environment as a *dispositif,* a cultural space bearing varying pressures and few benefits unless one is privileged (Reay et al., 2011). The introduction of 'therapeutic education' (Irisdotter-Aldenmyr & Olson, 2016; Ecclestone & Hayes, 2019) in the school/college-environment through the curriculum represent a 'turn' in curriculum development over the past 20 years amongst OECD countries. However, several scholars have criticized it as tightening the MH/well-being-Education relationship through new pastoral initiatives (ECM, 2003 and SEAL, 2004, in Green 2011, p.16-18). For example, Irisdotter-Aldenmyr and Olson's (2016) point about the recent individualistic 'inward turn' of 'therapeutic education' warns against the potential danger of policies that neglect collective well-being at the expense of an individual one, with repercussions on adolescent MH. Ecclestone and Hayes (2019) and Furedi (2010) demonstrate, through a wealth of examples from different schools, how the 'therapeutic turn' has turned adolescents into anxious and self-preoccupied individuals rather than aspiring, motivated and optimistic learners who embrace cooperation. This criticism resonates with the critique of 'education governance' (Stahl, 2018; Wilkins & Olmedo, 2018ab) and an ever-present individualistic pedagogy (Reay, 2018, p.188), as opposed to a collaborative one which is likely to foster empathy and cooperation, in turn enhancing psychological and emotional well-being. It also bonds with literature that condemns neoliberalism in all its facets, from Ehrenberg's (1996) Le Cult de la Performance, via Han's (2015) Burnout Society, to Chicchi's (2021) Symptomatology of the Performance Society.

Connectedly, Exley and Ball (2014), Ball (2017) and Reay (2013b; 2018) argued that individualistic pedagogy, hinged on competition, increases school capital via improved exam results in the name of meritocracy and social mobility, relinquishing responsibilities to students,

parents, and schools, in tune with neoliberal 'responsibilization'.[32] Likewise, attractive policy terminology through concepts such as 'character', 'resilience', 'success' or 'growth mindset' have been instrumentalized (Di Emidio, 2021a; Gillies, 2018; Jerome & Kisby, 2019; Jones, 2021) in education policy to increase economic efficiency and legitimize the marketization of politics through performance measurements (Murphy, 2016) and *datafication* (Jones, 2021), primarily when the concepts are geared towards educational achievement/attainment. Put differently, the neoliberal ethos secures its pervasive ideological status through policy language and initiatives that would enter the curriculum and the education debate in different guises; for example, to name a few, through Citizenship Education (2002), drop-down 'Character and PSHE'[33] days, employing educational psychologists (Rai et al. in Green, H.M. 2011, p.5) and the categorization of Teachers as CAMH's level 1 intervention (Green, H.M. 2011). Pertinently, Gillies (2018) used the 'Future in Mind' (2015) policy produced by a parliamentary task force that starts with an open letter to young people (see extract in Fig.2):

---

[32] Responsibilization is '…a term developed in the governmentality literature to refer to the process whereby subjects are rendered individually responsible for a task which previously would have been the duty of another – usually a state agency (The SAGE Dictionary of Policing, 2018).

[33] Personal Social Health Education. Also, interestingly, under strict DfE policy guidance, from September 2020 schools/ colleges will have to address MH as part of a series of measures to tackle post Covid-19 mental ill-health.

Figure 2: slide from Gillies' PowerPoint presentation

Gillies argues that such a statement is:

> indicative of the way the well-being has been entirely detached from broader social and structural factors. But it also seems to have become detached from any notion of happiness. Instead, it's *conflated with mental health* [emphasis added]. The two terms mental health and well-being have become *yoked* [emphasis added] together more generally in policy - you rarely see one now without the other. So, well-being becomes little more than not being mentally ill. And that's associated with psychological resilience and positive thinking skills rather than any vision of a better world. And, following this logic, low well-being is viewed as a risk factor for mental illness. So, unhappiness with your lot becomes a kind of psychological problem. If you're dissatisfied with the world around you - or resistant to the future that the government has in mind– you're on the slippery slope to illness.

Such policy initiatives underpinned policy interventions as prevention since the New Labour victory in 1997, symptomatic of overt psy-chiatrizations (Rose, 2018) and therapization

(Ecclestone, 2007) of child development through the 'enterprising schooling' (Reay et al., 2011), far from the progressive promises that well-being was supposed to fabricate.

The 'turn' echoed the last 50 years' attempt to solve the 'problems of childhood' through *ad hoc* policing. Aries' (1962) seminal work, 'Centuries of Childhood', suggested that childhood was a recent phenomenon in human history, including 'all' children, not only the upper classes. Therefore, once the institution of childhood emerged in the 19th century, the situation of young people changed through labels such as 'children' and 'innocent', implying that children were to be protected (see also the 1967 UN's Rights of Children declaration). However, Gillies (2018) rightly notices that '....concerns around well-being are relatively recent. From the turn of the (20th) century, we started to see policy constructions of well-being as an individual property that can be maximized in children'. Therefore, even though medical and/or 'psy' terminologies in educational policies are not new (Jones, 2021), the late 1990s is when their usage intensified among health practitioners, academic disciplines, and academics (Green, 2011) who applied the terms varyingly.

Thus, if adolescents were to benefit from the rise of 'emotional well-being' as a political concern (Ecclestone, 2007, p.457), then an agreed MH definition, underpinned by breadth and depth but also by its limitations and any limitations which come with having a guiding definition, could have benefitted school/colleges' actors. However, in the last decade, as Gillies noted (2018), successive governments in the UK have *laudably* advanced the notion of MH in official education policies whilst instrumentalizing it for questionable social engineering by closely linking it to the notion of well-being. Gillies (2018) notes that well-being starts to be described as an indicator, as the principal cause of 'problems', assumed to be psychological rather than a consequence of adverse circumstances.

> Low well-being could be an important indicator of longer-term repercussions in people's lives. If this is the case then focusing on subjective well-being, and particularly on children who experience low well-being, offers opportunities for early intervention which could substantially improve these children's life chances (The Children's Society, 2012, p.6)

Gillies argues that low well-being is the risk factor while early intervention is the solution and '... just to be clear, the early intervention that's being advocated here is to strengthen the mind rather than make life more pleasant (2018).

Gillies' argument shows how policy-as-discourse and enactment contribute to 'processes of subjugation' (Ball, 1993, p.14) by shaping the availability of subject positions, take-up and resistance. Following Gillies, I addressed (Di Emidio, 2021a) how the constant juxtaposition of students' MH <u>with</u> well-being has been instrumentalized through education policies that favour 'education governance' (Wilkins & Olmedo, 2018a, p.1) as a mode of intervention. An expression of neoliberal 'governmentality' or 'governability' (Foucault, 1991, pp. 88/169) that exploits 'therapeutic education' as a producer of the 'whole child' (Jones, 2021) by moving away from well-being policies and (re)concentrating on 'character' education.

So, the following section presents the idiosyncrasies of MH and well-being while highlighting their relationship; it also interrogates the application of MH, well-being and other associate terms in educational policies of the past decade. Finally, it concludes by discussing the implication of language in policies, which I elaborate through the idea of 'fuzzy definitions' and ´policy meandering´ (Di Emidio, 2021a) for adolescent MH.

2.8 Policy-as-Discourse through Slippery Definitions

The headteacher in a previous study strongly suggested we removed 'mental health' from the participant recruitment process and replace it with well-being. As she put it, *'...less compromising these days sir*!' and later explained she was concerned that parents would have questioned 'MH', affecting recruitment (Di Emidio, 2018). Whereas the request was symptomatic of the stigma customarily attached to 'having MH', it was also a productive turning point, indeed, the first research finding; it brought to my attention the scholarly importance of grasping any tangible differences between the terms, as Gillies (2018) had hinted to without unpicking semantic peculiarities. By chance, I had to start my research focusing on the influence of education on well-being, which primary children translated into 'happiness' despite their constant interchange with 'bad MH sir!'. I had to compromise and see both terms as slippery definitions that turned even more slippery when applied to policy.[34]

For example, the definition of MH in the national '2011- No Health without Mental Health' policy is that it is a '... positive state of mind and body, feeling safe and able to cope, with a sense of connection with people, communities and the wider environment'. Similarly, according to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2019), '.... good MH is related to mental and psychological well-being', and MH is:

> A state of well-being in which every individual realizes their potential, can cope with the everyday stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and can contribute to their community.

Even though supranational bodies like the WHO work to improve MH by including the promotion of mental well-being and the prevention of mental disorders, Chicchi (2021) regards the definition as '.... appropriate for our performance society, a society where life, work and health seem one thing' (p.79). Chicchi's point suggests that such a definition disregards the impact of

---

[34] See Appx 2 for a list of key policies.

inequalities or adverse experiences, speaking volumes of policies that use similar terminologies uncritically. This criticism addresses the definition's terminology and, as I argue elsewhere (Di Emidio, 2021a), the word 'well-being' underpins MH's definitions and correlates with positive MH, a causal relationship that too hastily informs policymaking. In essence, no official governmental body, neither national nor supranational, has fully engaged with well-being as both a subjective and culturally specific concept. Hence, following the headteacher's suggestion, we (my primary school student-participants and I) agreed that to investigate well-being and education, we needed one working definition despite personal/cultural variations. A quick google search (Oxford dictionary, 2018) took us to '…a good or satisfactory condition of existence; a state characterized by health, happiness, and prosperity', or '…the state of being comfortable, healthy or happy'. We established that well-being and happiness could be treated synonymously despite the caveats.[35]

Therefore, the research design evolved from focusing on high-stakes SATs exams and their influence on students' well-being in a primary school (Di Emidio, 2018) to later exploring the extent educational policies´ focus on achievement/attainment influenced adolescent MH (and well-being) in a sixth form college (2019/20 – PhD). Such a progression was unplanned, contingent and iterative; firstly, it emerged from the participatory nature of the research; secondly, it was further motivated by my teaching experience of key policy terminology usage. Furthermore, it was consolidated through academic and policy literature; finally, it was galvanized by Gillies' argument about terminology usage in policies.

2.8.1 Tactically embedding MH and well-being into compulsory education

Improving the state of mind of adolescents has become a preoccupation of major economies, as shown by OECD/PISA reports (Cosmo, 2022) and OFSTED (see Jones, 2021). As a teacher

---

[35] See Di Emidio (2019; 2021a) for a full elaboration on the semantics and complexities of well-being as a definition.

educated in another country, I was amazed by some UK schools' formative initiatives and practices, yet, baffled by the language used and the discourse it generated around teaching/learning and education success, and how students and teachers felt disenfranchised. This perception became a 'fact' when in 2018, I attended the conference 'Future in Mind? A Critical Perspective on Youth Well-being and MH', when Gillies spelt out the relationship between adolescent MH and well-being - i.e., how it played out in policy documents. My research adds to how the relationship is enacted and impacts students.

In the UK, celebrities and members of the monarchy have campaigned on MH (and well-being) issues, demanding earlier intervention to support well-being, resilience and positive mental health in schools. However, critical voices like Balls, Gillies and Reay have pointed to the structural conditions which affect well-being. For example, Gillies (2018) argued that '...the problematization of personal development deflects from the politics of distress in a context of brutal austerity and rising levels of poverty and inequality'. Gillies identified the uneasiness I experienced during school-council meetings when students regularly and critically assessed their education vis-à-vis their psychological well-being.

Enthusiasm for classroom-based interventions (PSHE, SEAL, ECM) has been evident in many other national contexts, spanning a range of political and economic frameworks. Jones (2021) has recently analyzed the impact of Neoliberal policies, which could, on the one hand, be laudable, on the other, raise many questions about the 'real' intent of such programs as 'technology of power' to be employed with adolescents who can be exercised, examined and normalized in the pursuit of governance (Marshall, 1989, p.109).

Thus, to examine how concepts of well-being and MH have been applied, Gillies critically explored how policymakers have envisaged positive minds and futures. Gillies discussed:

1. Why is state intervention in the social and emotional lives of children and young people increasing in these regions?

2. Can it improve lives and increase happiness, or does it instead seek to foreclose the future for the next generation, securing a problematic (unhappy) status quo?

3. As global economic crises buffet late capitalism, are the minds of the young increasingly coveted as key sites to anchor and stabilize market-based rationality?

4. Can well-being be reclaimed as a 'socially located experience', or is it necessarily a personalised, psychological variable?

5. What alternative ways are there to understand and support the best interests and well-being of young people?

Before I fully formulate Gillies' and my own earlier analyses of some policies, it is essential to premise the following: schools/colleges currently employ several counsellors, educational psychologists, safeguarding protocols and staff up to 6-7 members who concentrate on the MH and well-being of students despite lack of cohesion or shared understanding of adolescent MH and well-being. In addition, charities supporting adolescent MH and well-being in schools/colleges have proliferated (MIND, Charlie Waller Trust, Place2b); stigma has to be tackled (NICEimpact, 2019), but, as Gillies (2018) aptly questioned:

a) Is it a progressive drive to tackle discrimination or an attempt to **normalize and then manage** the poor MH that late capitalism produces?

b) Should acceptance of distress and poor MH be wholly **expected**?

c) How can the **psychological injuries of inequality** and insecurity that appear to be accumulating in the young be addressed without recourse to **individualizing and medicalized language of MH**?'

d) Is it possible to reclaim the concept of well-being and **foreground a more transformative vision of public good**? Or is it too slippery and too easily conflated with the interests of the powerful?

I used Gillies' questions as guidance because they matched my Critical Theory approach, reflected my experience of a changing educational landscape, and increasingly focused on measurable outcomes that engendered peculiar management. For example, from fiddling with school data, through increased pressure on teachers (Ball & Olmedo, 2013; Moore, 2018), to instilling a pedagogy for testing (Reay, 2018; Murphy, 2016; Stahl, 2018;) while simultaneously doing the MH and well-being 'bits'.

Gillies (2018) argued that UK policies concerning adolescent MH 'yoke' MH with well-being, therefore, a highly instrumentalized view of well-being was propelling policy's preoccupations with adolescents' MH in which the language of prevention and state de-responsibilization invalidated unhappiness as a human emotion:

It turns it into a risk factor, and early intervention does not mean making tangible improvements to children's lives. Instead, it almost always means heavy surveillance and some psychological initiative, e.g., resilience training or character education.[36]

With the help of Gillies, I have interpreted how the policy guidelines have used the term MH alongside well-being through language, phrases, definitions or lack thereof, and assessed how these guidelines have been integrated into the school/college environment through safeguarding, assessment practices, curriculum development, behavioural strategies, teaching and learning (Di Emidio, 2021a).

For example, the '2011 - No Health without mental health – delivering better mental health outcomes for people of all ages' document outlines the 2010 Coalition government's objective to improve MH outcomes, in line with the commitment to the 'Big Society' (Cameron, 2011), to transform public MH and MH services. The document's general aims were: 'to improve the MH and well-being of the UK population and keep people well, and to improve outcomes for people's MH problems through high-quality services accessible to all'. The policy offered some key definitions, for example, 'Mental well-being' (presented as related to the absence of mental ill-health): the ability to cope with life problems and seize opportunities, about feeling good and functioning well, individually and collectively; it is independent of MH status, that is, people with MH problems can still enjoy good well-being; therefore, people with mental well-being are less at risk of developing MH problems. Interestingly, as in many other policies (Di Emidio, 2021a) the performance 'spin' of the WHO's definition, as Chicchi (2021) suggested, is pervasive and, not surprisingly, an *ad hoc* reference to resilience is given: 'the capacity of individuals and communities to deal with stress and adversities' which does not capture pertinent values of resilience as a result of the 'mentoring factor'.[37]

---

[36] Ecclestone (2017) and Furedi (2010) make parallel points about governmental preoccupations with 'emotional wellbeing'.

[37] See Di Emidio (2021a) for a developed argumentation on the use and misuse of resilience in policy documents. In essence, the 'mentoring factor' stretches the notion of resilience through certain relationships and social conditions, but not as a skill or trait.

So, the document establishes that well-being, resilience, and prevention of MH problems are distinct but interlinked, and yet well-being remains undefined and, following Gillies, yoked with MH. Poor or ill MH is associated with social determinants such as socio-economics deprivation and social isolation, but it is also linked to physical health; this means that MH is an intrinsic factor of health and well-being, but, in essence, what 'well-being' entails is not clear.

In summary, the link between MH and well-being and its implications were necessary for my research because they drew my attention to the successive government policies I had observed in the school/college-environment. While there are practical and pragmatic reasons to pay attention to MH on a broad scale, the well-being factor seems to be integrated alongside neoliberal jargon for government purposes.

2.8.2 Implication of policy-as-discourse: instrumentalizing more concepts

I unpacked the singularities of the two terms and suggested that the terms were 'different' because they comprised different registers but also overlapped. For example, a previous study (Di Emidio, 2018) highlighted the dialectic between the terms and the possibility to '…draw out a correlation, that an increase in positive well-being *promoted* MH or could *prevent* mental ill-health, but not a causation - i.e., that well-being caused positive MH' (Di Emidio, 2021a, p.12). It is precisely in such a correlational hypothesis, extensively played out in education policies, that the causes of adolescent mental ill-health get either overlooked or manipulated by predicting their solution on improving students' achievement/attainment. Most policies I analyzed suggested that poor MH in schools/colleges could improve if academic performance improved (Di Emidio, 2021a, p.13), a rhetoric which echoed Layard's 2006 report on the MH state of the nation, which unconditionally advocated 'therapeutic education' (Green, 2011; Jones, 2021) to an end.

So, there is complexity and tension when policies activate definitions, but the differences between MH and well-being should not obscure their relatedness.[38] For example, several MH definitions employed by the WHO and DfE refer to 'possessing' or 'acquiring' a state of 'mental, emotional and psychological wellbeing', whilst well-being definitions (and rhetoric of 'the well-being' or 'happiness industry') seem to require the individual's engagement not to fall behind, to ensure the 'good life' (Chitty, 2014; Ecclestone, 2017).

In neoliberal jargon, the 'good life' implies responsible action 'to do' the well-being; therefore, if well-being aims to ameliorate the global wellness of the person, including their MH, then MH and well-being should be paired up. However, though the terms share several traits, the pairing also lends to simplifications, confusion and paradoxical outcomes, as Gillies suggests, and I added evidence to, depending on the context in which the concepts are utilized and who utilizes them (next section develops the point). So, both terms and their distinction held analytical importance as formative theory (theory-first) and increased my research expertise around a contentious concept such as MH to which well-being was attached. Furthermore, addressing similarities and differences between the terms at the start of the PhD research was imperative and welcomed by student-participants because it increased their researcher expertise.

I fully endorsed Gillies' argument about the terms' yoking as misleading or even detrimental to effective school practices because of further yoking of terms like character and resilience in educational practice that addressed the 'whole child' (Jones, 2021) as a way to address adolescents' MH in, and through, the school/college-environment.

Thus, it was through such analysis that MH and well-being (and their relationship) acquired heuristic value because I could see the work of policy-as-discourse through add-ons (or more yoking) to MH and well-being in policy documents, through terms such as 'character' and 'resilience'. For example, several policies call for students' resilience to mitigate mental ill-health (Di Emidio 2021a) and yet, no clear explanation of what resilience entails was proposed in the documents, further suggesting that policy 'meandering' (Di Emidio, 2021a) is systematic,

---

[38] See also Levecque and Mortier (2018) for further insights into such complexity.

doctrinaire and paradoxically principled. The 'yoking' practice seems integral to educational policies that promote and instrumentalize well-intentioned concepts not many would argue against, but which have implications for concepts like 'performance' and its influence on adolescent MH (chapter 7).

In sum, the most recent government guidance between 2016-18 (Appx. 2) showed that, on the one hand, there was an effort to objectively evaluate what constitutes MH, on the other, the 'yoking' of disparate concepts into MH and well-being policies endured through the inclusion of 'behaviour' and 'resilience' because they helped build 'character'. This means that policy 'meandering', primarily through unfocused interventions, seemed to sabotage the intrinsic policy analysis of worsening adolescent mental ill-health because of the policies' double bind 'care/achievement' of the students. The documents pointed at correlations and causal relationships between MH and well-being, resilience and behaviour, but with no explicit evidence, apart from a suspicion, that they produced *kind* (Hacking, 2007) of neoliberal subjects through ambivalent 'technologies of the self' (Marshal, 1989). Gillies' argument also adds to the return or revival of subjectivity as a scholarly interest (Henriques et al.,1998; Lara et al., 2017); however, I am interested in Gillies' thesis that leans on the constitution of a 'subject', meant to be 'ready', either for the challenges presented by the neoliberal, econocentric, marketized society or, excluded from it altogether and therefore in need of (more) intervention.

This section has offered an interpretation of policy-as-discourse by building on the MH / well-being definitions and a dialectic which deserves attention by policymakers (Di Emidio, 2021a; Green, H.M. 2011); I referred to policy terms such as character/behaviour and resilience as working towards 'human capital' and related 'performance' as influencing adolescent MH through the constitution of neoliberal subjectivities (see chapter 7).

2.9 Policy-as-Discourse: an Appraisal

Despite the terminology's contentious usage, I assumed throughout the research that MH and well-being were two sides of the same coin used to support the student; I also assumed that the concepts had intuitive reasons to be paired up in policies. I finally assumed that some prefer 'psychological/mental well-being' or 'emotional well-being' to MH (Green, H.M. 2011, p. xvi), and this should have sufficed to understand the two terms as 'yoked' in policies.[39]

Furthermore, Ford (2018, p.25), discussing the relationship and prominence of well-being and MH in relation to education, points to the uncertainty of current definitions and the measurements of well-being compared to MH, suggesting that if the intent is to avoid stigma, the use of well-being and related concepts often increase stigma by introducing confusion, marginalising those most at risk.[40] Hence, Ford (2018) suggests, 'We need to make greater effort to unify language and approaches to avoid undermining the adoption of what we know works as well as a clear framework that helps us see where we need to generate new knowledge' (p.25). Similarly, Nash (2018), debating the same topic, focuses on the ambiguity and confusion of language used to describe and characterize adolescent MH: 'Without a clearer mutually agreed terminology, there will continue to be ambiguity as to how to support children … and indeed what to support in the first place' (p.35).

However, MH and well-being policy implementation seem linked to the dangers and proliferation of 'therapeutic education' discussed earlier, which have grown alongside the broader societal 'palliative society' phenomena (Han, 2021) concerned with a contemporary fear of pain and the 'happiness industry' (Davies, W., 2015), concerned with humans' social and physical optimization as a proxy for success, growth and therefore good MH. Building 'human capital' is the latest 'turn' (Pongratz, 2011, p.225) that drives neoliberal schooling or the enterprising

---

[39] However, see Chow (2016, p.44) for a critique on the restrictive and culture-bound limitations of 'psychological/mental well-being' and 'emotional well-being' as components of MH, preferring Galderisi's (2015) more inclusive definition.

[40] See ONS, 2022 update statistics about well-being measurements.

school/college that produces subjects as 'entrepreneurs of themselves' (Han, 2021; Jones, 2021). Therefore, if we consider MH as a state of well-being and therefore accept and implement educational policies that:

i) do not distinguish between the two terms,

ii) that normalize medicalizing language,

iii) that yoke and/or instrumentalize more terms,

iv) that are not informed by 'lived experiences',

v) that do not fully acknowledge socio-economic aspects that influence adolescent MH, then the MH and well-being relationship confound the educational policy agenda (see Gillies) and turn 'policies into sublime objects' of desire (M. Clarke, 2014). Matthew Clarke suggests that educational policies have become illusory instances with not-real influence or, at their best, with calculated impact and additional concepts for the same ends.

Therefore, following Ball's point on educational policies (1993), the government's agenda should be to use policy analyses to '…ask critical/theoretical questions, rather than simple problem-solving ones' (p.16), about those policies connected to the influence of education on adolescent MH; terms such as MH and well-being influence relationships, roles, duties, job descriptions, objectives, subjectivities, curriculum and pedagogy, within, and through, the school/college-environment *dispositif.*

Pertinently, Shaw (2010) argues that a policy-as-discourse approach has relevance for those seeking to shape health policy because it acknowledges that the activities of different interest groups (clinicians, managers and patients) should identify and address social problems. Paying attention to the language and arguments used by groups encourage public health practitioners and researchers to consider how policy problems are framed, by whom and why. A policy-as-discourse approach also encourages practitioners and researchers to consider their language and how they might productively use it to challenge public health policies and open up possibilities for social change.

Thus, a PAR methodology suited and provided a 'democratic enough' platform to question the influence of compulsory education via six themes selected by student-participants, providing analytic insight grounded in pupils' understanding and experiences. Consequently, I

contextualized and contested the use of the terms MH and well-being and their associates, character/behaviour and resilience in neoliberal educational policies-as-discourse, which sustain market-oriented, individualistic and measurable educational outcomes. Ethnographic and participative methodologies (next chapter) helped capture social actors' meaning-making of the practical implications and emotional weight of key terms as applied in the school/college-environment, and how they shaped students' conception of the self through subjectification and subjectivation processes.

Part 1 and 2's Conclusion

This literature review has offered a clue to how school/college-environments influence adolescents' subjectivities and, by extension, their MH - already susceptible to societal and private pressures. It has opened the *possibilities* for an education that influences adolescent MH negatively, but also to the field of possibilities for resistance and positive MH.

In part 1, the literature around adolescent MH focused on the school/college-environment *dispositif* as the locus of power production and resistance between institutions and students' subjectivities. The latter's bifurcation, subjectivation/subjectification, influences adolescents' MH when seen as a continuum rather than a good/bad binary. In addition, the notion of subjectivity was implicated as the by-product of interpersonal processes, responsive and adaptive to structural forces – this is an area I further explore through the empirical chapters concerning students' motivation, a key theme selected by the student-participants as influencing '*self's* formation' and their MH.

In part 2, I contextualized MH and well-being to contest their usage and accepted definitions in ideologically driven policies and practices through a neoliberal agenda. I argued that policy literature did not address the issue of adolescent mental ill-health at its core, neither as a clinical condition impacting on the body and subjectivity nor as a result of socio-political influence. The 'yoking' of several vital concepts became de-politicized and therefore constituted a significant area for reflection, which I put to the test with participants; it problematized mental ill-health as understood and experienced by all participants because of politicized maneuvering. It exposed 'voices' that inform what adolescent MH entails in the context of education, better identified

through 'subjective configurations' because they reflexively contextualized students' MH and helped figure out the implications of subjectification and subjectivation process on such configurations.

Finally, drawing attention to adolescence as a developmental opportunity and not a menace to the adolescent or society, we can look at it for what it is, in 'transition' to adulthood in a heavily 'performative' neoliberal economy, which calls for 'responsibilization'. The required and specified resilient attitude shows that adolescent mental ill-health can be managed differently. Such management was picked up and elaborated in part 2 by arguing that the critical issue of adolescent MH is only partially covered in policy documents and calls for better definitions and/or understanding of MH that guide policy.

The next chapter explores how we created solid and flexible methodological foundations commensurate to the research context, diverse social actors, and ambitious aims.

Chapter 3 – Methodology: Doing PAR *and* Ethnography in An Educational Setting

Part 1

Introduction

Three interrelated areas summarize the debate surrounding worsening MH amongst adolescents: (i) the inevitable impact of adolescents' brain development and hormonal changes; (ii) the competitive culture of schools and society at large; (iii) the expectations of adolescents themselves. Such social and psychological *complexity* requires a methodology that captures the everyday experiences of people and active participants.[41] Thus, a Critical Theory related reason for choosing a participatory methodology (Participant Action Research – PAR) is that PAR allows the space for democratic research, plus reflexive considerations about the choice of methods, the process of analysis, and the place of the researcher and participants in any research project that they carry out together (Abma et al., 2019). Furthermore, such a methodology embedded (many) iterative processes and a log of impressions through fieldnotes on my part, the lead researcher, and some ethnographic methods, which I explain in part 2.

The previous chapter explored the literature to problematize education vis-a-vis MH and analyze policy-as-discourse as a starting rationale to explain policies that seem to 'produce' individualized and competitive students (neoliberal subjects) - attributes which seem at odds with varying school/college practices and progressive claims of education about the 'whole child'. The chapter raised questions about 'educational' policies, flagging their duplicitous intents. I considered it necessary, therefore, to contextualize such reviews through the participative methodology and ethnographic methods employed in this research.

Section 3.1 unpacks PAR as the methodology that operationalized the above theories and advocated social actors as co-researchers. I appraise the inherent complexity of PAR, starting with

---

[41] See Appx-21 for three examples of how my planning articulated the *complexity.*

its links to Action Research through the work of Kemmis and Whitehead, including the politics and limitations of PAR at both practical and theoretical levels. Section 3.2 sets up how Foucauldian and Bordieuan lenses facilitate Critical Ethnography in Education. Section 3.3 completes the literature review by connecting the practical challenges with the opportunities of a multi-layered methodological approach. It condenses my broad theoretical approach in the Critical Theory and Critical Ethnography in Education traditions, two interrelated traditions that give voice to social actors and aim to 'speak truth' to power. Section 3.4 presents the theoretical backbone of ethnography and its potential to combine (with) PAR's principle and Critical Theory to generate knowledge with/in a participative context. Finally, I conclude Part 1 by bridging the literature and methodological approach's key point with the methods employed (part 2).

3.1 Participant Action Research (PAR)

3.1.1 From action research to participatory action research

'Those involved in action research nevertheless rightly aim for improved understanding [emphasis added] of themselves, their practices, and the situations in which their practice is carried out'.

(Kemmis, 2010, p.423)

The principles and specific approach for my PAR design are rooted in my work and volunteering experiences, when I engaged in community projects with young people (Italy's 1992) and refugees (Barcelona/Spain, 2002), as well as teaching-based work (my profession for 20 years). Recently, in my PhD scholarship, I added solid theoretical foundations premised on qualitative participatory processes of data generation.

As an ex-teacher who embraced the idea of being a social scientist for the benefit of the student population and the local community/ies, I developed and conducted practice-based research which, according to Whitehead and McNiff (2017), has been an ongoing valuable form of professional development since the 1990s, to share ideas and learn from one another within a context of shared

collegiality (pp.2-3 – Chapter 1), echoing the starting quote of this section. For example, within my teaching remits, the Student Leadership programme and the Citizenship curriculum, were driving forces providing ad hoc school-based experiences, not only to work with grassroot charities in the community/ies, but also with teacher colleagues keen to put their practice to the test of 'student as lesson observers' - as Kurt Lewin would put it, '…an action research that allows workers to have a greater say in their work context' (Whitehead & McNiff, 2017, p.14 - Chapter 1).

Therefore, my teaching practice's priorities were always about enacting 'change' and evaluating its effects, such as: i) equipping participants (students, teachers, and school leaders) with the open-mindedness and willingness to participate both within the school and its community/ies; ii) choosing a variety of research foci that met multiple participants' needs; iii) co-producing and carrying out projects that were practical, inclusive, and addressing inequalities or power unbalances. In short, my priorities as a teacher-researcher partly reflected what Whitehead and McNiff (2017) saw as a new approach to Action Research within school settings, where teachers were '…perfectly capable of generating their personal theories by systematically studying their practice' (p.15 – Chapter 1) to improve it, through democratic partnership '….in which all participated in a dialogue of equals, to learn and grow together' (p.15 – Chapter 1).

Our projects ranged from sustainable gardening to support young males with anger management, to supporting elderly physical and MH in underserved local areas, to identifying students as caretakers, or to train and involve students as 'lesson observers'. We always focused on the health and well-being of the school and community members, spurred by shared democratic impulses and the awareness of providing transformational experiences for all participants through 'generative transformational processes' (Whitehead & McNiff, 2017, pp. 12-14 – Chapter 3) rather than measurable ones. This would avoid a technical rational approach to Action Research that Carr and Kemmis (1986) criticized and which Whitehead and McNiff (2017) considered it could lead to technical expertise that threatens to turn Action Research into a form of performance management (p.15 – Chapter 1), at the expense of humanitarian values of care and compassion, freedom, and rights (pp.16-18 – Chapter 1). Put differently, Kemmis (2010) referred to it as 'Action Research understood as…a process that helps lead good lives and achieve a better world' (p.419), beyond research as empirical analytical science, but more focused on '…*what happens* [original emphasis] in some particular place and time as a result of the action research' (p.425).

Hence, below, I develop my approach to PAR building on the above's Action Research premises, whereby PAR is close to a lifestyle, a belief, a practice, that focuses on participants taking a more active role as a member of a community and *what happens* in the here-and-now to manage, critically, 'truth claims' without being blinded by *our knowledge* (Kemmis, 2010, p.423) of them.

3.1.2 The participative climate

From the late 1960s, research evidence shows that the 'participative climate' (Gidley, 2019) fortified by the UNCRC (1989) has seen an explosion of qualitative research done *with* students *for* students.[42] This trend means that children have been seen more as agents shaping their lives (Hill, 2006, p.72). Influential in disseminating such a qualitative outlook was the Brazilian educationalist Paulo Freire, whose work significantly impacted PAR methodology, especially within the educational field. Freire brought into the debate questions about students' agency and subjectivity.

> Education must begin with solving the **teacher-student contradiction**… by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously students and teachers… to deal critically with reality and discover how to **participate in the transformation** of their world (Freire, 1970, my emphases).

The subsequent analysis of findings was co-produced to adhere to such a methodological shift that promotes co-enquiry and co-generation (Abma et al., 2019, CH 4-5-6) because inclusiveness would add credibility to the PAR's ethos and yield answers to the three RQs. Analysis was layered and iterative, involving student-participants and college-leaders, and focused on six themes that student-participants had identified through their initial problematization of adolescent MH.

---

[42] Article 12 affirms children's entitlement to express their views on matters affecting them, and such a crucial point was recently reviewed by UNICEF Connect (Shaw et al., 2020) with regards to adolescent MH and participatory research, further illustrating the relevance of my methodological choice.

However, I kept analyzing the themes retrospectively, more concerned with patterns across my four-year scholarship, 'emerging' themes, 'analytic interest', 'frequency' and 'keyness' (see Part 2 of this chapter). I anticipated such multi-layered findings to the first gatekeeper, and later the rest of the participants, to show how juxtaposing PAR's findings and evaluations with the perceived effectiveness of PAR would enhance understanding of adolescent MH. A convergence of multiple hermeneutics and epistemics would stress what I initially called 'process knowledge', that is, temporary knowledge emerging from ongoing, steadily consolidating, iterations.

Thus, to emphasize 'process knowledge', I borrowed Heron and Reason's (2008) reference to an 'extended epistemology'. The latter captures group members' type of engagement in a participatory project and comprises: 1. experiential, 2. presentational, 3. propositional and 4. practical *ways of knowing*. Heron and Reason (2008) argue that, while these ways of knowing are intuitive and everyone interweaves them in our day-to-day, cooperative enquiry, they become intentional and add to more *valid knowing* if the four are congruent. Out of the four, *propositional knowing* is the closest to (my) 'process knowledge'. In Heron and Reason's words, ''*Propositional knowing* 'about' [original emphases] something is intellectual knowing of ideas and theories. Its product is the informative spoken or written statement'' (2008, p. 366). This characteristic reflected participative engagement, which generated the intellectual 'knowing' of ideas and theories that explained adolescent MH through lived experiences and active research. Such ways of knowing supplied relevant knowledge (or *propositional knowing*) at different stages of data generation/collection; it was dynamic, reflexive, and cyclical and informed the different stages of data analysis.

3.1.3 PAR: methodology or epistemology?

PAR has enormous relevance in research philosophy as it questions conventional, adult-led research notions. Kellet (2006) notes that, too often, adult-led research has been *about* youngsters, while PAR research is *with them*. Such dichotomizing, Kellet argues, carries epistemological and ontological implications where participants' *positionalities* affect validity and reliability. In my case, it drew my attention to ethical grey areas due to the dissolving of researcher/student boundaries. Additionally, participatory research offers the main social actors, and their

relationships, the opportunity to mobilize and make available *expert* knowledge to stimulate problem-solving. Therefore, in line with most PAR projects (Abma et al., 2019, pp.2-6; Gelling, 2013, p.6;), our bottom-up approach is aimed at critiquing and possibly modifying college practices while engaging students and other college practitioners as both service-users and stakeholders.

Primarily, existing literature on PAR as a methodological paradigm recognizes it as hybridized research (Elliot, 1991; McTaggart, 1997; Whyte, 1989), participative and action-based:

1. Participative research looks at the participation of interest groups leading to knowledge co-creation; it also creates an environment and process from which knowledge emerges to develop a 'local theory' that is understandable and actionable.

2. Action research looks at participation to change personal circumstances; the researcher and the 'actors' act together to transform reality, diagnose problems and find solutions.

Although the distinction between *participatory* research and *action* research was essential to delve into, for this research, I was guided by Whyte (1989), McTaggart (1997), and Elliot (1991). Their argument in favour of participation and action supported my aim to encompass: i) action and change-production (action research) through the college's policies; ii) co-production of new knowledge (participative research) about education's influence on MH, by involving several social actors. However, the risk was, as Bergold and Thomas note, that '…not all participations produce change, only knowledge' (2012, section 2);[43] therefore, a PAR approach had to be systematic if, as McTaggart (1997, CH. 2&7) suggests, PAR is to guarantee the exploration and generation of 'new' knowledge and the potential of an intervention/action to improve the reality of those implicated. Greenwood (2008) reinforces my point by hailing PAR because '…it produces results that are more likely to be valid precisely because they are engaged in transformations of the phenomena they study' (p.320).

---

[43] No pages available, only 'sections'.

During my teaching career, I benefitted from PAR types of consultations or projects which I created while responsible for 'Student Leadership' and helping organize the School Council, acquiring a comprehensive understanding of the methodology. PAR provided a platform for *experts* (myself, teachers, students, parents, and school leaders) to locate themselves at the heart of the policy debate about the effectiveness of educational experiences within the school/college-environment, and how such experiences influenced students' MH. PAR also aligned with my social constructivist ontology and interpretivist epistemology, '…asserting that social phenomena and their meaning are continually being accomplished by social actors' (Bryman, 2008, p.19). Such 'accomplishments' had positive implications for choosing PAR because one of its theoretical pillars reflected it - 'generating' knowledge (Abma et al., 2019) - or what Jerome (2008) calls 'constructivist pedagogy approach', where the teacher/researcher takes on the role of the facilitator, where knowledge is created *with* the participants (p.14).

Thus, by employing PAR for its epistemological potential, I was advocating a 'new commonsense'[44] (Harling, 2014) to counter any established 'reality'; through PAR, I developed a democratic research design by mobilizing connectivity and knowledge generation, spurring reflexivity and initiating change-actions to ameliorate adolescents' lives (Abma et al., 2019). This process included participatory and ethnographic methods such as focus groups, interviews, photovoice and participant observation, which were equally reliant on informal networking and formal consultations. Such a range of methods depended on both group and individual reflexivity[45] operating in combination with my 'critical theory/agency' approach; the combination enhanced rigour because we aimed to appraise the influence of the school/college-environment on adolescent MH to hold the institutions which made the policies to account. As a research leader, I could reflect on the 'confirmation bias' that came with the interplay between my positionalities and situatedness.

---

[44] We can see this at play with meritocracy, whereby the ruling class remains hegemonic despite educational policies' equity claims. But see Maisuria (2018) and Canaan et al., (2013, p.20) for an in-depth discussion on Gramsci's *good sense* vis-à-vis hegemonic 'reality'.
[45] See Appx-18 as an example of quarterly individual reflections sheets – quarterly diary entry.

From a practical standpoint, drawing on several PAR projects I had carried out in a school setting, and on an extensive literature review on PAR, several theoretical and practical issues arose:[46]

- Did participants offer reliable *expertise* on teaching and learning that exposed/explained the school/college-environment's influence on students' MH?
- To what extent was their *expertise* 'qualified'?
- What constituted qualified participants' voices and leadership?
- What if participants' knowledge was *used* by school/college-leaders to control them further?
- Could adolescents speak?[47] Or were adolescent voices being heard?
- What did 'lived experience' mean to adolescents?

These critical questions did not overshadow critical PAR qualities as epistemological stances on where knowledge 'lived' and who had the 'right to research' [original emphases] (Fine, 2015, p.13). PAR qualities that, I argue, advocated social constructivism's assumptions about reality, knowledge and learning resulting from different encounters or integrations: i) that 'reality' is constructed and cannot be discovered; ii) that 'knowledge' is a human product and individuals create meaning through interactions with each other and the environment; iii) that 'learning' is a social process that does not occur only within an individual, nor is it a passive development (Kim, 2011, p.4). Hence, PAR helped channel unmitigated pressures by offering teachers, students, college-leaders, and parents new (head)spaces to understand education's influence on MH.

---

[46] I later discovered that these questions echo several criticisms moved at PAR, especially the neoliberal critique (Participation: The New Tyranny? By Cooke and Kothari, 2001, cited in Fine, 2015, p.10).

[47] I am drawing from Gramsci's theorization of the 'subalterns' and the seminal post-colonial essay by Spivak (2003), 'Can the subaltern speak?'

Finally, PAR is often *messy*[48] because of its iterations, attracting participants with competing agendas yet committed to dynamic and democratic consultations. However, such messiness contributes to scientific and ethical rigour by generating developmental and transformational experiences for all in a safe space, where 'dissenting views' (Bergold & Thomas, 2012, section 3.2) become central to knowledge co-production.[49]

So, to emphasize PAR's epistemological potential, the following section unpicks specific PAR precepts as applied to this research by examining the methodology (the theory) and methods (the practice); this brief and focused consideration anticipates a final appraisal of PAR's contribution to *propositional knowing* and the politics behind it.

3.1.4 Between PAR theory and PAR practice

PAR helps actualize the need for 'action and change' while generating new knowledge (about adolescent MH). Again, following Bergold and Thomas (2012, section 2), every type of research calls for social conditions that are conducive to the topic and the epistemological approach in question (interpretivist in our case); so, our PAR approach required a political framework that allowed such conditions (Bergold & Thomas, 2012, section 3) but that did not interfere with results. We operated within the freedoms and constraints of the college's code of conduct, yet we were still at the bottom of the college decisions-making hierarchy, and we knew that our position would hinder any change-action.

However, Bergold and Thomas refer to 'role distribution' in participatory research as non-static (2012, section 4.2); indeed, the sixteen student-participants were integrated with the research design as co-researchers to reduce the risks of tokenism. Firstly, the gatekeeper and I recognized

---

[48] See Sarah Banks (presentation at the annual PAR conference I attended at Durham University, July 2019), a co-author of Abma et al. (2019, p. xix).

[49] For instance, making the questionnaire tested PAR's principles of co-researching; when the headship team contested three questions, student-participants rephrased them, without backing down.

student-participants as intrinsically competent in adolescent MH because they had 'lived experience' or knew peers who had it; second, the enrichment sessions strengthened their competencies as experts.[50] For example, in one session, the student-participants engaged in a grassroots programme on youth advocacy MH, putting their position and increased expertise to the test; third, they participated in *ad hoc* enrichments, focus groups and interviews as key data generation stages. During interviews, student-participants stressed the value of participation as a holistic experience, giving credit to PAR as a transformative process that made them feel '…taken seriously throughout' (Bergold & Thomas, 2012, section 4.2). This perception might also be because they developed standpoints of their own which often differed from 'us', the 'expert adults'.[51]

Finally, Bergold and Thomas note, drawing from Wadsworth (1998, p.5 in Bergold & Thomas, 2012, section 4.8), that participatory research can fall into the traps of inevitable value-driven research, whose action effects include:

1. raising some questions and not others
2. involving some people and not others
3. observing some phenomena and not others
4. making this sense and not an alternative sense

In hindsight, PAR's collaborative ethos and foundational concepts, such as *conscientization* (Freire, 1975), helped minimize the impact of 1-4 through the reflexive attitude embedded in the theories and practices underpinning the production of *propositional knowing.* Additionally, weekly meetings with the gatekeeper and the informant ensured I contained the 'confirmation bias' implicit to 1-4. Therefore, I argue that PAR's commitment to democratic research shined throughout; firstly, PAR provided a platform for all participants to be at the heart of the debate on

---

[50] Enrichments consisted of weekly, topic based, workshops. On Tuesdays I had six student-participants and on Wednesdays' ten; however, the overall circulation over seven months was of twenty-five students (i.e., some started and attended for a few weeks but then left). NB: The seven focus groups took place during enrichment sessions.

[51] The notion of expertise within a PAR context is contentious and will be discussed throughout in relation to a 'unified expertise' resulting from PAR.

what constituted teaching and learning and how this may have influenced adolescent MH. As argued elsewhere (Di Emidio, 2022), participatory opportunities arose for other staff members, like the MH&WBTeam, the Career officer or outside members of the community who had not been included in the research design. Secondly, following Bibby (2011), who grounds education in the relationship between teachers and students based on complex psychosocial dynamics in the classroom, power relations, anxieties and questionable processes of identity and subjectivity formation in learning environments (p.31), I thought it proper to channel these pressures/anxieties by providing participants with new (head) spaces for understanding and analyzing MH.

3.1.5 The politics of PAR

Let us now consider the usefulness of participation as a framework for research with children. Gallagher and Gallagher (2008) point out that participation has become both a goal and a tool in an ethical quest to empower children (pp.501-502). While acknowledging the crucial benefits of PAR for inclusive research, the authors also argue that participatory approaches that involve children can become processes that 'regulate' them and, therefore, question the extent to which such methods have been necessary to exercise agency in research encounters. Gallagher and Gallagher conclude that such modes of researching could benefit from methodological 'immaturity', which admits to vulnerability and fallibility (2008, pp.499-500). Therefore, a constructive appraisal that considers the politics of PAR in the context of neoliberal education and the politics of PAR within the school/college-environment can add insights about its utility (and limitations) in an educational context.

Firstly, drawing from Rose (1999) and Foucault (1977), Gallagher and Gallagher argued that research 'on' children reflect adult's anxieties on how to make them healthier, more productive, and more employable, but also how to encourage them to be *ideal* future citizens by encouraging and regulating their moral *conduct,* and to participate in democratic politics (2008, p.504). This insight applied to our research for good-and-bad; for example, there was an air of intervention around the project, part of a top-down fixing-a-problem approach which seemed to motivate the first college contacts and followed up by the appointed gatekeeper. In time, however, the sincere attempt by all participants of the college-leadership to understand adolescent MH better was

pervasive. As a result, the short- and long-term benefits of PAR (for different actors at different times) could not be measured but lay in the purposeful behaviour of the participants according to PAR principles.

Secondly, starting from the 1990s Childhood Studies premise that children are 'social actors in their own rights rather than pre-adult-becoming' (Holloway & Valentine in Gallagher & Gallagher, 2008, p.500); Gallagher and Gallagher argued that children have come to be seen as 'experts' in their lives and their identities constituted knowledge through a logic whereby '...people with a certain identity are best placed to produce knowledge about others with a similar identity: children are better placed to know about childhood than adults' (2008, p.502). This epistemological quest was always in balance during my fieldwork. For example, during enrichment sessions activities (which included focus groups, workshops, etc.), student-participants disagreed, but some did not feel that confident to express their views or judgment in public. Some were too keen to be nice to each other and missed out on criticality; others, much as they offered constructive insights, or reached considerably articulated conclusions, were still too facilitated by me in the exploratory stage of data collection.[52] This facilitation exposed my positionalities and situatedness because I never knew how much to 'push' student-participants and if the push would intrinsically cloud their judgement. Even playing the devil's advocate in the early stages could unsettle student-participants and their involvement/contribution, casting doubts on the validity and reliability of *propositional knowing*. Additionally, our multiple roles (co-researchers, students, research leader) interfered with our relationships and could expose power relationships.

Thus, considering these broad participatory/epistemological issues, Gallagher and Gallagher suggest that theoretical and practical participatory problems reside in the power relationships surrounding the research 'encounter'. They argue, for example, that despite the empowering positions offered to children, the very act of empowerment implies that children must be empowered to 'act and be actors', certainly through participatory methods developed by adults. Therefore, there is a danger that the rationale for participatory methods perpetuates the model they

---

[52] Adult participants, apart from parents, had a lesser emotional involvement because their insights drew from 'average students', while parents referred to their children and occasionally children's friends.

purport to combat (2008, p.503). Although our research could not avoid this problem, we worked around it as creatively, inclusively, and critically as possible through productive collaborations that celebrated the meaning of PAR, its embedded reflexivity and its commitment to critical enquiry as a transformational enterprise, which we (re)visited again and again. Importantly, PAR's commitment to critical enquiry became more pronounced through my theoretical and ethical commitments to Critical Ethnography in Education, to *unmask* education as a state institution and hold its regulatory and normative powers to account by putting student-participants in the best possible research position. Only in this way could I harmonize power relationships, especially those that tended to exploit PAR to 'regulate' students even further. One good example of this was my alertness to include instances that celebrated compulsory education, which provided nourishing and developmental experiences despite its inherent challenges.

In summary, Gallagher and Gallagher's argument, while not directed against PAR per se, nevertheless resonated as a warning, namely that we hierarchize research models by viewing PAR as foolproof technology – i.e., participatory methods are no less problematic or ethically dubious than others. What mattered, they argued, was the methodological *attitude* that acknowledged the unpredictability of *good* research and called for elements of methodological immaturity that favoured open processes over predefined techniques and offered experimentation, innovation and 'making do' (2008, p. 513 – original emphasis). While such assertions are essential and helped me/us to recognize the inherent limitations of the methodology in comparison to knowledge production, we should acknowledge the consistent involvement of the student participants over seven months, their evolution from initial hesitation to increasingly reflexive and outspoken involvement. Moreover, this attitude summed up the longer-term and unquantifiable goals and values of PAR (Abma et al., 2019, Ch. 8-10) and underpinned its status as more than a methodology by drawing our attention to the benefits of *propositional knowing.*

The following section integrates some theoretical tenets of ethnography with/in PAR; this combination is also a popular approach to Public Anthropology, which shows how PAR appears uniquely compatible with the goals of Critical Ethnography (Hemment, 2007).

3.2 Critical Ethnography in Education

I approached the fieldwork from a Critical Theory perspective, which draws on the Frankfurt School to consider the potential for critical approaches to challenge power structures inherent to the education system and to uncover the assumptions that prevent a complete understanding of how compulsory education works. The work of Bourdieu (1986), Reay (2018) and Bernstein (1999) stand out in what could be called 'Critical Theory in Education' tradition, enriched by the Foucauldian work of Ball (1990; 2013; 2016). Therefore, inspired by these authors and drawing on Rebughini's view of Critical Theory as a Critical Agency, my enquiry attempts to *unmask* and *innovate* (2018) through the participation of the social actors involved, through transdisciplinarity and through an ethical commitment to reducing 'confirmation bias'.

Next to Critical Theory, I adopted Critical Ethnography in Education (Anderson, 1989; Flyvbjerg, 2006) as developed from the 1960-70s in most anglophone countries (e.g., Bowles & Gintis, 2003 in the USA or Willis, 1977 in the UK); it complemented my positionalities as a teacher of Citizenship Education engaged as an activist/intellectual and as a father of school-aged children. Critical Ethnography in Education also helped address how institutions shape classed experience of the mundane, already shaped by the capitalist context in which learners' experiences and concomitant MH outcomes reside (see G. Evans, 2006; Gilbert, 2018; Kulz, 2017; Reay's work plus James, 2015; Jenkins, 2014 and Sullivan, 2002 on Bourdieu's work; Neilson, 2015).

Additionally, I incorporated ethnography in the tradition of reflexive Social Anthropology, which is 'critical' due to the full involvement of the researcher in the constitution of knowledge, requiring reflexivity and commitment to truth-making. Bourdieu (in Jenkins, 2014) likened Berger's (2004) popularized phrase "seeing the strange in the familiar" to the anthropologist's endeavour to make the exotic (the strange) familiar (the mundane); Geertz (1967; 1973) too inspired a generation of anthropologists in the interpretive tradition suggesting that anthropologists

should '...read culture as a text'.[53] Hoffman unpacks such a peculiar methodological position by mentioning Geertz's 'thick descriptions' and how Geertz commented on these 'texts': 'What we call our data are our constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to ....' (Geertz 1973b, p. 9 in Hoffman, 2009, p.417).

Morrin's, drawing on H.S. Becker, critiques 'thickness' in favour of 'breadth' in her ethnography of a secondary academy because '…a better goal than 'thickness'…is 'breadth' '' (Becker, 1996, p.65 in Morrin, 2017, p.77). Morrin's 'breadth' includes accounting for structures, praxis and detailed individual accounts and reading these for modes of symbolic domination and forms of everyday resistance and individual 'struggle' (2017, p.77). In addition, Morrin extended the research field beyond the academy wall to include participants' perceptions about where/how they were situated and positioned in the local and national discourse.

Consequently, through 'thickness and breadth', I took on the critical ethnographic approach as '…a method of analysis that could link structure and practice, between the macro and the micro…everyday interaction to history, economics, politics and wider cultural formations…' (Skeggs, 1994, p. 74, in Morrin, 2017, p.78). Notably, the implications of such epistemology acquired complexity because, to an extent, we studied ourselves 'at home' and not at an exotic/faraway place. Such complexity even became evident through PAR's iterations, which implicated Hartel's (2010) notions of the *emic* (insider) and *etic* (outsider) perspectives. As a community of researchers, we critically offered such perspectives, which problematized the notion of expertise in an ethnographic *and* PAR research context (more in section 3.4 below).

Thus, equipped with a *broad-and-thick* approach, I argue that Critical Ethnography in Education involves the researcher establishing the 'right closeness' to the people and phenomena researched as a method of being critical. My choice of 'right closeness' was also inspired by Haraway's (1988) notion of 'objective criticality' (i.e., situated knowledges) as politically informed and coming from a standpoint, which this qualitative study treated in two ways. First, by

---

[53] 'The culture of a people is an ensemble of texts, themselves ensembles, which the anthropologist strains to read over the shoulders of those to whom they properly belong' (Geertz 1973, p. 452).

considering positionality vs situatedness (explained below); second, by offering the co-researchers a platform to speak and be *heard* whilst being participatively trained as researchers.

The following section integrates the 'critical' work of Foucault and how it contributes to the Critical Ethnography in Education tradition by raising questions about the role of schooling in *producing* 'docile lives', in line, according to Marshall, with (re)production theorists of the 1970s (1989, p.107).

3.3 Towards Consolidating Broad-and-Thick Theoretical Lenses

This section explores some controversial questions about compulsory education to contextualize the discussion about the aims (as *hopes)* and objectives (as *means*) of education within a critical framework. This contextualization provides a broad and transdisciplinary explanation to frame students' MH within the post-Enlightenment period, which informed the philosophical grounding of mass education and grew alongside the development of 19th Century Psychology (Jones, 2021). Finally, the section explains my interpretative epistemology by considering the interplay between 'socially constituted knowledge' (inductive) and emerging knowledge (deductive). Such a dynamic view on knowledge constitution, inspired by Wolcott's theory-verification (theory-first) and theory-generation (theory-after), should characterize the scientific endeavour (1992, p.3-52 in Bell, 2014, p.101). This double take suited my approach; I did not want to oppose theory-driven with enquiry-driven approaches in social sciences (deductive and inductive, respectively – Bryman, 2008) but wanted to integrate them.

For example, I followed Flyvbjerg's (2006) theorizing of case study, in which if the researcher's goal is to understand and *learn* about social phenomena, then research is simply a form of learning, achieved when the researchers place themselves within the context under study (p.20). In my case, I 'placed' myself in two ways; first, in terms of positionalities (i.e., ex-teacher, father, researcher) and second, in terms of situatedness (i.e., the researcher only), which mediated the way people in the field formally saw me. Through simultaneous immersion and distance, at the start of my fieldwork and later at the analysis stage, I asked some navigational questions: which one of my positionalities was more robust or 'too strong'? How did my situatedness impact how I

was 'seen'? Whose voice amongst participants was the stronger? Why? Why were some groups more silent than others about specific themes? How could I differentiate between noise and voice?

Rebughini's (2018) take on Critical Theory inspired my reflexive engagement with knowledge and practice, which involved a turn to Critical Agency, performed by the researcher, engaged with 'the researched' (people and concepts) in the field, an arena in which to *unmask* abuse and domination but also *innovate* by suggesting alternatives. For example, throughout the thesis, the three RQs are broadly addressed through Foucauldian's and Bordieuan lenses (part of theory-first) alongside other theories and the current research. The aim is to foreground 'thick' (i.e., structural) and agentic drivers that shape students' education and their MH, considering the utilitarian demands of today's schools/colleges to produce results. Measuring learning, I argue, pushes holistic purposes of education aside, constituting a societal phenomenon that demands an explanation because of increasing incongruencies between safeguarding the health and safety of the child (short-term) while *producing* measurable students (long-term). The critical questions are: producing what and who? For what ends? At what level? And how? A Critical Theory framework, therefore, supports such ontological and epistemological endeavour.

Lapping (2011) pertinently notes that '…one of the main arguments of Foucault is that within the modern state, the body and *subject* are no longer unified as the object of punishment' (p.83); this point entails a shift from public bodily punishment to prisons' rehabilitation, especially with juvenile prisons. This framework is still relevant today; rehabilitation resonates with school/college's insistence to intervene on students at the expense of the collective and represents a key trait of 'therapeutic education' which, in turn, tangles MH, well-being, character and resilience, for governmental purposes to produce 'the whole' child (Jones, 2021). Relatedly, R. Jones, (1990) notes that '...for Foucault, the *humble* nature of hierarchical observations, normalizing judgements and school examinations ensured that 'disciplinary' power was able to invade the traditional procedures of sovereign power' (p.95, my emphasis). And, to round it all up, Rose notes that '...education is meant to be a liberating factor, or... a conditioning one that *catches*

lives of young citizens into psychological machines that operate…to instruct in *conduct* and to supervise… and rectify childhood pathologies' (1989, pp.123-124, my emphasis).[54]

Several current policies illustrate how such engineering works, and part 2 will focus on policies. Meantime, to consolidate my thick-and-broad lenses, I refer to the September 2021's introduction of the RBA (Reception Baseline Assessment, 2022), a recent policy that makes testing mathematics, language, communication, and literacy for four-year-olds a statutory requirement for primaries. The policy *unmasks* the UK's state of education because the RBA is a bold governmental move to *catch lives* earlier. In essence, after exhausting any arguments in favour of SATs in year-2 (eventually scrapped under the pressure of teacher unions and parents' campaigns), the government introduced a new measurement that took place earlier and claims to ensure progress. This u-turn emphasizes how performance analysis via examinations' measurement ostensibly leads the way, either unashamedly or by mingling policies with progressive pedagogies.[55]

The following section explains PAR's epistemological relevance as a methodological tool in this research in a Sixth Form college; it also introduces the notion of *'propositional knowing'* as a constitutive part of PAR. The aim is to lead by presenting PAR as a methodology and contextualizing it within 'our' research and my epistemological stance.

---

[54]See also Kulz's (2017) critical ethnography in education which applied Foucauldian lenses to a London academy as a *producer* of new 'governable individualities'.

[55] The recent Schools White Paper (March 2022) confirms the academization of all UK schools by 2030, which seems to reinforce such a duplicitous approach.

3.4 Ethnography and PAR

The prevailing theoretical assumption is that PAR is a methodology which often dismisses the range of methodologies and methods used in PAR work and the politics of PAR in terms of its relationship to knowledge (how it is made, what it does, etc.). However, considering these theoretical and practical challenges regarding knowledge raises PAR's status as a philosophy about knowing before it is associated with methods and methodologies. This is because, while different PAR projects may deploy analyses that use different epistemologies, these need to align with the overarching PAR commitment to mobilize knowledge and promote change.

Therefore, a PAR methodology complements ethnographic methods because ethnographies have an inherent 'problematic' as a genre intended to give voice to and represent 'the real'. A similar critique of ethnography as the 'partial truth' of post-structural research is articulated by Britzman (1995). Therefore, PAR has the potential to compensate for such partiality because, through co-generation and dialogue, participants can increase awareness about what is at stake when representing something that claims to offer 'cultural originality' - PAR worked as an entry point to discern adolescent MH.

In essence, PAR's epistemological potential during my fieldwork was made more visible through ethnographic methods, which I borrowed from the anthropological tradition. It is worth highlighting that fieldwork entails, in its strict anthropological tradition, first-hand involvement, observation, and write-up of human environments and behaviours, a process known as ethnography (Wilson, 1977). Ethnographic techniques are part of a research tradition helpful in gathering information about human behaviours that often escape quantitative measurements (Wilson, 1977). For example, observable and recordable random exchanges through vernacular expressions, group alliances, utterances, and reciprocity behaviours may disclose partial and yet original knowledge in the form of meaning-making by individuals and groups and facilitate understanding of the influence of education on MH.

Therefore, ethnographic methods enhanced scientific rigour with/in our PAR context by reconciling the ontological quests of positioned research. Additionally, the combination PAR-Ethnography helped explore the intersection of the college-environment with participants' involvement and value to produce original knowledge. As noted earlier, ethnography's

contribution to my epistemology became pronounced through techniques such as participant-observation because it required absorption in the field (going native), through which the researcher-observer '…*makes the mundane exotic and the exotic mundane*' (Bourdieu, 1989, in Jenkins, 1992, p.47), *'...reads culture as a text'* (Geertz, 1973), and embeds rich data through '*thick descriptions'* (Geertz, 1968). For example, through fieldnotes, I captured and 'thick-described' random observations made by student-participants during enrichment sessions which I revisited with them at interview time to generate reflexivity. Because of the time lag between these different data collection stages, student-participants needed to reflect on things they had stated months earlier with specific themes and compare them with current views/feelings, potentially more informed and increasing expertise. I also shared fieldnotes at the start of enrichment sessions, mainly reflections about what 'I' saw around the college-environment which students might have taken for granted and which might have provided new insights - one amongst many examples was my descriptions of the building, how students occupied it, habits of certain friendship groups and how decoration changed.[56]

In short, ethnography and PAR blended well because my understanding of school/college life developed alongside the culture taking place in the field. Also, by considering culture as simultaneously bounded and permeable, intertwined with structures that determine its social actors, I learned that schools/colleges are places where social actors can produce 'meaning' that negotiates how much one is determined – i.e., subjectivation. Max Weber's Social-Action and Structuration theories employed the term '*verstehen*' to refer to the social scientist's attempt to understand the intention and context of human action from the actor's perspective (Elwell, 1996), resonating with the anthropological tradition where '…the role of a researcher is to become embedded within a culture to draw out, understand and interpret meanings within the structures and practices of those being studied' (Morrin, 2017, p.77).

Therefore, to realize my *verstehen* (i.e., understanding), I went into a school/college as a researcher, used my previous experience of schooling and its functioning, questioned it to reduce

---

[56] Noteworthy was me flagging up new signs displayed after a non-successful OFSTED inspection - see Appx-11.

confirmation bias and used ethnographic methods that are agreed and/or feasible in a participatory context. For example, the use of enrichment activities (including focus groups),[57] *ad hoc* life-satisfaction questionnaire with college life and in-depth semi-structured interviews supported the critical aspect of my epistemology, namely interpretivism through 'double' constitution of knowledge, constructed through participants' involvement in 'meaning-making'. The latter contributed to Wolcott's (2005) idea of theory-verification (theory-first) and theory-generation (theory-after), which are central to the scientific endeavour. In other words, I considered knowledge as equally *generated* and, to varying degrees and caveats, *emerging* from the research field alongside the meaning-making of all participants and my interpretations - a convergence of multiple hermeneutics facilitated by PAR and ethnography.

The layered construction of knowledge was productively *messy*, iterative, and part of my commitment to managing multiple voices. In this regard, inspired by Walker and Boni's (2020) search for 'epistemic justice' through PAR ('Even in participatory research we need to be vigilant about how power relations work' - p.3), I simplified the cacophony amplified by the act of transcription through what I call 'three epistemic levels': 1) 'my' voice - I wanted my positionality to be relevant to the other participants without overstepping my professional role; 2) 'our' voices - the participants' voices and mine alone as a doctoral student; 3) 'their' voices - when the different groups of participants talked about other groups. Level 3 allowed the group (e.g., teachers) to express their views about other groups (e.g., parents or students), and I was able to contribute in my role as a doctoral student and with my experiences as a (former) teacher.

Thus, through a participatory and ethnographic approach, I learned that multiple epistemic levels could do justice to knowledge production and answer complex RQs. Such points exemplify fundamental ethnographic tenets I put to the test alongside PAR, a combination that helped reconcile the social actors' *emic* perspectives with the researchers' *etic* view (Hartel, 2010, p.852) to *unmask* the influence of schooling on adolescent MH.

---

[57] For further clarity: weekly enrichment sessions included various activities, and focus groups were part of them. Focus groups were more 'formal', in circle, with a recorder, a microphone and a specific topic to discuss, normally for 45 min. It was a way to wrap up several enrichment sessions.

Part 2 builds on part 1's Critical Theory' approach and PAR's epistemological potential by presenting the research design; it comprised methodological practices that constituted 'my' Critical Ethnography in Education seen as systematic reflexivity and the collaborative relationship with informants (Anderson, 1989, pp.259-263) by employing ethnographic methods that complemented my participatory interpretivist epistemology.

Part 2

Introduction

Part 1 presented my theoretical/conceptual framework; it added to the chapter's 2 literature by establishing how participatory research and the multiple levels of analysis it generates are ideal for MH-related research. I stressed that we investigated adolescent MH as a socio-political and psychological whole that requires the contribution of eclectic research lenses and social actors to capture it in order to 'solve' it when it represents a problem. Therefore, the everyday of schools/colleges practitioners with vested interests and their involved participation could generate 'expertise' of MH lived experiences resulting from democratic and dialogical processes which did not avoid medicalized views but critically embedded them. Such views could inform the status of adolescent MH in and through the college-environment and help produce a change-action via internal college policies. Thus, while part 1 acknowledged that PAR was not straightforward but 'messy', it also laid the foundation to justify 'why research' *in group* and *with that* group to get the right closeness to the phenomena.

In part 2, I spell out how the research was done. I organized and carried out the following PAR-related activities between February 2019 (college approached) and March 2020 (fieldwork ended due to Covid19) as parts of the research design. Table 2's activities also comprised ethnographic methods that I will clarify later.

Table 2: chronological summary of key research activities

Time	Activity
Jan / Feb 2019:	I contacted a secondary school where I personally knew several members of staff and a sixth form college where I knew one teacher to request access to, respectively, research with year-10-11 and year12-13. The aim was to continue from my MSc project which took place with year-6s. The secondary school could not eventually accommodate me while the sixth form welcomed the invite. The college's age range 16-18 also matched the literature indicating it as a central age for adolescent MH.
June 2019:	Two face-to-face meetings with two key leaders of the college and several email exchanges to finalize aims and objectives.
End August 2019	Headship appointed a 'gatekeeper'.
Begin Sept 2019	Student-participants recruitment and start of weekly 'enrichment sessions'[1] (1.5 hrs long) with two groups of students (N6 and N10).
From mid-Sept 2019 till March 2020	Fieldwork three days per week when I did the following: • Established rapport with the college, especially with the Mental Health and Well-being Team (MH&WBTeam), the Career officer and teachers. • Held regular meeting with the 'gatekeeper' and 'informant' to share findings, impressions, getting ideas etc. • Widening participation 1: regular meeting with 3x members of the MH&WBTeam. • Widening participation 2: recruited 4x teachers whom I interviewed between February and March 2020 (9 more teachers had signed up to be interviewed after Easter 2020, which was not doable anymore due to the lockdown). • Widening participation 3: I recruited 10x parents whom I interviewed between March and July 2020. • Research methods: weekly enrichment/thematic workshops; participant observation around the college; focus-groups; whole college life-satisfaction questionnaire; interviews; student-participants' termly diary reflections; fieldnotes.

In a previous study fieldwork (Di Emidio, 2018), I led into the field with ethnographic methods to research students and made my way into the 'problem'; participation widened organically, with students taking on more active research roles and other school actors 'unexpectedly' joining in (Di Emidio, 2022). Therefore, the build-up to PAR activities exemplified by Table 2 above, aims to add to part 1 by locating the reader further into PAR practices, their establishment and how the logic of participation became our navigator. Conversely, during the PhD, I led into the field with PAR and then used different ethnographic methods based on participants' insights into age and suitable methods – e.g., drama and photovoice with 10-11 y/o vs debates and presentations with 16-18 y/o.

In order to address the challenges and possibilities of such a multi-layered and iterative approach, section 3.5 presents the research design, which theoretically and methodologically builds on a previous study (Di Emidio, 2018) and PAR literature. Section 3.6 sets out the rationale for the choice of methods, focusing (again) on ethnography in a PAR context; section 3.7 provides an overview of general research ethics issues, followed by an ad hoc assessment of the ethical issues associated with PAR; section 3.8 describes the multiple method of analysis consisting of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) plus two more thematic analysis approaches – Codebook and Coding Reliability (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p.236-248) and the associated use of NVivo12 Pro software.

3.5 The Research Design with/in a PAR Methodology

My PhD proposal rested on three interrelated factors which shaped my design: 1) research evidence suggesting that increased focus on academic achievement/attainment was detrimental to MH; 2) informal investigation, which I carried out amongst school practitioners in my former school and student-councilors whom I worked with for seven years as Lead Teacher of school council; 3) personal assumptions I constructed as a teacher in the UK (I was born and educated in a different country up to the age of 18).

Therefore, my design interrogated the policies and practices entrenched in the school/college-environment and their influence on the lived experiences of adolescents and those that mentored

them in various roles. Put differently, even though 'MH lived experience' was not a recruitment prerequisite (Appx-19), I stretched the technical term 'lived experience research' to include those with mental ill-health experience. Pertinently, van Manen (2016) suggests that 'lived experience research' is conducted by people who have experienced mental ill-health issues and are better placed than more traditional research to explain participants' experiences. While this may seem intuitive, others could question the lack of neutrality, tokenism and bias that comes with such a term (Gray, B., 2022) or argue that 'lived experience research' is often difficult to find, access and interpret (Honey et al., 2020). Bourdieu identified similar problems when he argued that the 'natives' of a society/culture were not always best placed 'to see' their culture/society. 'To see' was left to the role of the sociologist/anthropologist (see Jenkins 2014). This ambiguity, challenging to solve here, is more fruitful if we juxtapose it with 'expertise' because I envisaged a PAR context, where expertise is never final but democratic, propositional, critical and generative (Abma et al., 2019). Additionally, I borrow from Kvale's 'miner vs traveler' research metaphor (1994) to clarify further my researcher positionality and my qualitative approach; while the miner digs for data, the purity of which is determined by its ability to correlate with an external 'real' world, the traveler looks for the stories told by the social actors and is prepared to be affected by such processes. I consider myself a 'miner' and 'traveler' because of my deductive-inductive interpretative epistemology.

Through a qualitative approach, 'we' could identify possible subtleties that linked education policies and adolescent MH, something that this project brought forward by building upon a previous study (Di Emidio, 2018) in a primary school. The following section presents the ethnographic methods to negotiate a range of perspectives on education and MH with/in a participative context; by examining the methods, I will also address method-related ethics of 'confirmation bias'.

3.6 Methods

Some of the strengths of this study developed alongside PAR epistemological potentials to generate knowledge while embracing the 'messiness'; in our instance, it comes with heterogeneous groups of participants engaging through a facilitator (DDE), with varying expectations, commitments, times ('degrees of PAR'). In addition, through PAR-related ethics, ongoing data triangulation, enhanced research ethics compliance (because working with minors) and, importantly, several ethnographic methods of data collection blended with PAR at two essential levels.

Firstly, to contextualize the data in the field, I ensured that I went as 'native' as possible to work with the college ethos and mitigate the impact of my experience in education, key literature and standardized expectations. For example, my daily presence around the college outside the enrichment sessions, three days per week, facilitated rapport-building; during a previous study (Di Emidio, 2018), I learned that heterogeneous participants and forms of participation required such engagements to buy into PAR's values, especially for teachers and students; also, embedding new contributors to the research design was key (Di Emidio, 2022). However, my presence around the college always seemed 'unusual', mainly because I was not part of the staff and adults operated in a hectic place where performance/accountability measures dictated the tempo (J. Clarke, 2005; Murphy, 2016). Overall, research engagement was evident in the particular interest the research generated - e.g., the high number of recruits, the high attendance, the enrichment popularity, the tutors who asked me to support their pastoral work, the unexpected involvement of the MH&WBTeam and the Career Officer, and three librarians who offered logistical support and insights into students' behaviour and routines.

Secondly, employing ethnography in the anthropological tradition facilitated the use of 'thick descriptions' of environments and situations involving participants, capturing 'force and emotions' in the field (Rosaldo, 1993). Ethnography as a data collection method includes many techniques and approaches that support both ontological reasons for doing research and PAR as a 'learning and problem solving' enterprise (Tamboukou & Ball, 2003; Britzman, 1995).

Finally, while PAR represented my methodological approach across the stages, in terms of methods, I employed various ethnographic techniques across the two stages of data generation and

collection (Explorative and Primary - Fig.3). After presenting the techniques, I added sampling and recruitment criteria that sustained the PAR approach and related remarks on research rigour.

Figure 3: two stages of data generation and collection with sub-stages
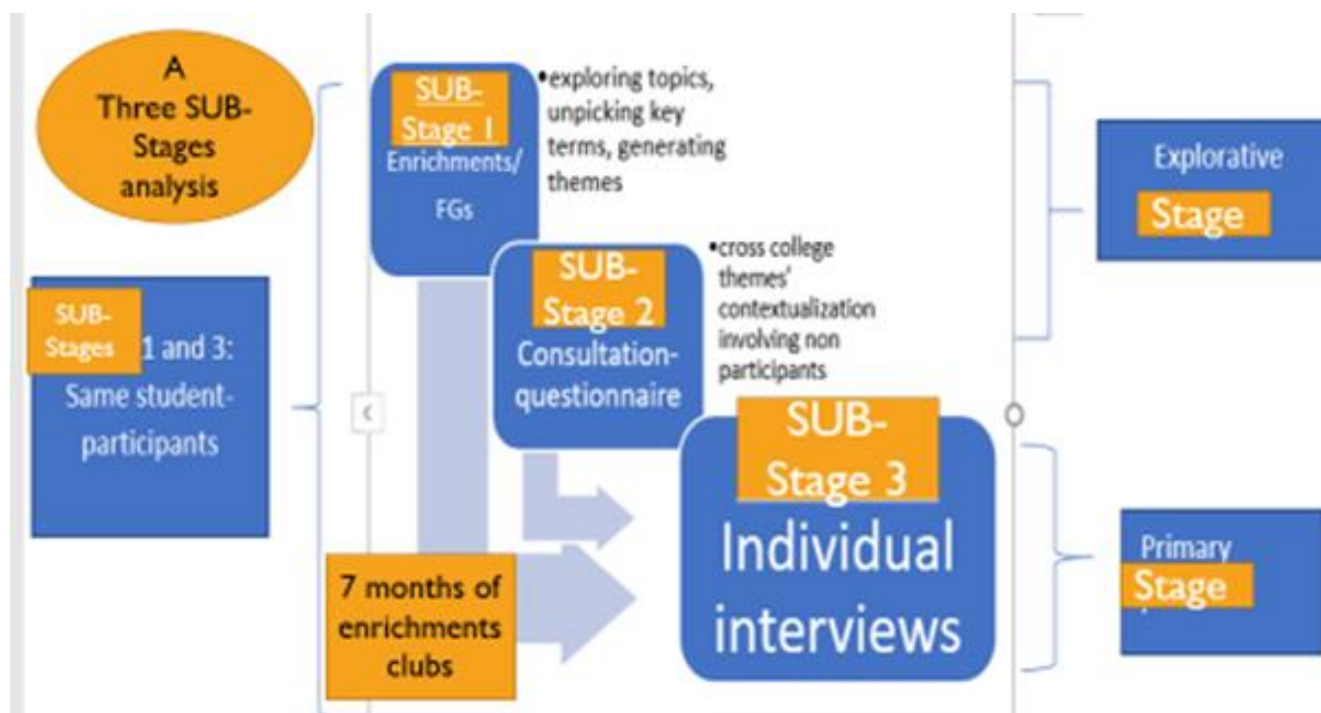
3.6.1 Data collection rationale

According to Fattore et al. (2012), the dominant research on adults' MH has been through self-reporting mechanisms; however, whenever this was tried with children, they usually opened the possibility of getting children more involved with research strategies. Therefore, I asked student-participants what they wanted to do to generate data (e.g., extended writing, drawing, mapping, discussions, interviewing), and then I told them how their ideas could merge with my overall design without affecting ethics clearance. For example, they included short group presentations, listening and discussing podcasts, watching and discussing documentaries, and inviting relevant guests, with MH and education 'problem solving' at their core.

Interview tasks 1 and 2 ('primary stage' of data collection, see Appx-3) were co-produced with student-participants and in consultation with teachers and the gatekeeper - such an inclusive

approach to determining such a pivotal stage showed the strong participative intent behind the research, adding credibility to the PAR's ethos to yield democratic answers to the RQs.

Student-participants performed an initial data generation (explorative) through focused spider-diagrams that followed agreed enrichment sessions. Therefore, initial data collection led to three intertwined outcomes that emphasized PAR's *propositional knowing:* (outcome 1) the first thematic creation of six themes, which were elaborated via (outcome 2) the making of the whole-college questionnaire and (outcome 3) the questionnaire results' analysis.[58] The three outcomes were held together through the first data triangulation amongst several participants; for example, the starting 100 questions of the questionnaire were reduced to 47 by an iterative exercise which took three weeks, sought teachers' approval and suggestions, was enriched by ideas from the MH&WBTeam, and was handed over to the gatekeeper who consulted the headship team. The latter asked for three questions to change because the answers could have unfairly attracted college-specific answers when they addressed broader educational issues; student-participants agreed.

Focus groups were, alongside daily fieldnotes, the primary data collection methods of the first four months with student-participants only. Wellington provides three main purposes of focus groups (2015, p.241):

a) To teach and promote self-generating learning.
b) To raise awareness of debates, a political-end result.
c) To inquire and research.

To meet such guidelines, we held focus groups every two-three weeks that also worked as 'appreciative enquiry' (Abma et al., 2019); the latter helped contextualize the six themes vis-à-vis what the college had to offer to create a better future (Preskill, & Catsambas, 2006). Unlike enrichments, focus groups were recorded and were central to the explorative stage for two reasons: firstly, student-participants contributed with personal or others' lived experiences, where possible;

---

[58] We used Qualtrics Statistical Software, provided by the Psychology department at UEL.

secondly, focus groups added a research *feel* that helped to '… fill in the knowledge gap, to draw out nuances, build solidarity and lead to action' (Wellington, 2015, p.241), blending with the PAR approach. Interestingly, focus-group dynamics presented a student-participant façade which contrasted with the seeming openness of one-to-one interviews (months later), when they had consolidated expertise and/or research competence and would not feel judged by peers. Nevertheless, the seven focus groups carried out in the first four months constituted invaluable reflection that fed into forming 'a community of experts' (Abma et al., 2019).

The ethnographic methods employed in the 'explorative stage' produced exploratory data, underlined by the participative ethos:

Table 3: main data collection methods

A. Fieldnotes (daily reflections, drawing from informal conversations and post more formal sessions listed below)
B. **Enrichment** sessions (creating a community of 'experts')
C. Whole-college student **questionnaire** (widening 'participation')
D. Student **focus-groups** (dialogical and reflexive)
E. Termly **Diary entries** (a mix of lyrical and objective reflections to consolidate knowledge and understanding of research outcomes)
F. Cyclical **consultation** with gatekeeper, informant, MH&WBTeam
G. **Non-Participant-Observation** (ongoing/daily engagement in the field, recorded in diary fieldnotes)
H. **Participant-Observation** (to explore the 'critical pedagogy' aspect of the research, especially psych-dynamics of learning) – planned but not completed

There was another different stage of data generation, post-fieldwork, resulting from the last PAR-oriented data analysis. It consisted of online focus groups with students and teachers. Even though these were not part of the design, they replaced the planned focus-group plenaries with representatives of each group.

3.6.2 Data collection technique

I had initially planned ten months of fieldwork between September 2019 and July 2020 with ten year-12 and ten year-13 student-participants, but mainly recruited year-12 because the college preferred year-13s focused on exams; a total of sixteen regular students took part, split into two groups attending in different days, with nine more who partly attended (see Appx-4 for attendance register). Recruitment took place in the first week of September, attracting new year-12s and only one year-13 who regularly attended (three more attended discontinuously). Data-collection and analysis adhered to the following plan (Table 4) with slight adjustments and some omissions due to ethics barriers and Covid19's unforeseen circumstances:[59]

---

[59] For further context about the next table: enrichment sessions were weekly and ongoing between September 2019 and March 2020; the questionnaire took place around November 2019; the seven focus groups were parts of enrichment sessions and took place between October and December 2019; interviews took place between January and March 2020.

Table 4: detailed data collection methods

Recruitment:	September 2019
Enrichment:	Two weekly 1.5hrs sessions focused on research skills and knowledge acquisition, co-planning, consultation-questionnaire construction, and co-analysis. These participatory activities encouraged student-participants to get beyond the researched status and therefore embrace a more proactive demeanour.
Students' focus-groups:	Student-participants carried out seven focus groups to evaluate enrichments' input. These were chaired by myself and some by the students themselves. It provided focus and reflection to add to the enrichment sessions.
Consultation questionnaire:	Three months into the research, student-participants designed a life-satisfaction questionnaire (see Appx-5 for a summary of common answers). This was good PAR practice and helped unpick the six themes through 47 questions. The 500 students from the Social Sciences block completed it.
Diary entries:	Thought out as weekly actions, but only one entry was carried out at the end of term 1, an opportunity (for me) to appreciate how far student-participants had grown in reflexivity/expertise.
Students' interviews:	All student-participants, apart from two, attended one-to-one semi-structured interviews in January/February 2020. Student-participants nuanced the six themes through 'lived experience'.
Parents' interviews and focus-groups:	Student-participants invited parents to participate. Two parents responded, and I recruited seven outside the research group, including year-13 parents. The aim was to improve parental understanding of students' college lives through a structured platform.
Teachers' interviews and focus-groups:	I established rapport with several teachers and invited them to become alternatively involved in students' education, with a focus on how a relentless exam-focus was counter-productive to teacher-student relationships and more holistic learning. By March 2020, the beginning of lockdown 1, I had interviewed four teachers and had to cancel eight more after Easter due to Covid19 lockdown. However, I was able to catch up online with the four teachers in June 2020 and share initial findings.
School leaders' interviews:	These comprised two members of the MW&WBTeam, a career officer, an assistant head (my gatekeeper). In addition to the interviews, I met with them regularly to learn more about the college/cohorts, get some existing MH data and trends, and share ongoing enrichments and focus groups' findings.
Fieldnotes and non-participant observations:	These were a mix of systematic daily reflections to grasp impressions of the day-to-day, which I would cross-check over time. Fieldnotes also facilitated 'thick description' to capture key data and 'make meaning' around the thematic areas. I used the six themes as my reflection criteria, including ramifications and implications.
Planned but uncompleted:	
Class (participant) observations:	'Participant observation' was ongoing and overt. I 'lived' between the canteen/restaurant, the staff office and the library; however, I had planned to collect insights into teaching and learning straight from the classroom. I was interested in the psychodynamics of learning (Price, 2001 and 2002; Bibby, 2011) and how these could nuance the six themes. However, I could not do it due to teacher unions' related matters.

3.6.3 Sampling and recruitment

After considering different school and college options (year-10/11 and year-12/13, respectively), I simultaneously approached a secondary and sixth form college where I had personal contacts. The school was initially interested but was unable to commit fully; however, the sixth form college (where an ex-colleague had been teaching for ten years) was keen to sit

down and plan. This was perhaps the best outcome as year-12/13 were, following the literature and stats, a suitable age target.

The college allocated two starting gatekeepers, one from the inclusion team and one from the headship team, with whom I liaised for over four months. We set up the project both in-person and via email; first, sharing each other's expectations and what we could offer each other; second, sharing critical data about MH amongst students; finally, to get the formal ethical clearance and DBS. The college is part of an extensive education provider, including other FE (Further Education) colleges, an employer training provider and an entrepreneurship/social enterprise, mixed-gender, 60% girls average, and mixed ethnic background.

It catered for 16-18-year-old children and offered a range of academic and technical subjects. On their website, they state that they focus on training and education that i) create the best outcomes, ii) encourage ambition, go beyond qualifications through skills and qualities for long terms success in the global economy, and are linked to employment that suits community and employers' needs.

The college welcomed students from all faiths and London boroughs, with no catchment areas limitations. It held a reputation for progressive teaching and used to offer the International Baccalaureate for a long time, attracting students from nearby affluent neighborhoods. However, it has recently 'adjusted' to policies that reduce FE college funding; therefore, strikes have been recurrent. In terms of year group selection, I recruited at the annual 'enrichment fair' in the second week of September; that was when students signed up for an 'enrichment session', a requirement to support tutors' references (UCAS).[60] A record fifty-six students signed up, well beyond the twenty targets. However, the overall circulation was twenty-five student-participants over seven months (Appx-4) - the core attendants were sixteen, twelve girls and four boys, all year-12 except one year-13 (three more year-13s participated, but, despite their outstanding contributions, their attendance was discontinuous and faded after three months).

---

[60] The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service is a UK-based independent charity that since 1992 manages university applications.

3.6.4 Research rigour

The researcher's use of *self* as a research tool is a defining characteristic of qualitative research (Miles et al., 2014), which I used alongside the PAR approach to increase awareness of personal views in our multi-layered, iterative and multivocal research process. It invited reflexivity, an essential element of credible and trustworthy data collection (Finlay, 1998) and analysis, '…where researchers engage in explicit self-aware meta-analysis' (Finlay, 2002, p. 209); a sort of 'objectification of objectification' to use a Bordieuan expression (in Jenkins, 2014, p.61) that I used to establish the 'right closeness' with the research.

There were also elements of auto-ethnography, as recorded in fieldnotes and NVivo's interview transcriptions through a dedicated thematic area which I used, reflexively, at the start of the interview process to monitor my bias; I engaged in participant and non-participant observations keeping diary-fieldnotes, which contributed to my commitment to heuristic enquiry, rooted in my professional approach as a teacher. Additionally, reflexive supervision of the data being generated as *propositional knowing* took place through four teachers and several school leaders during data collection, which also worked as 'appreciative enquiry'. For example, as a pseudo-insider researcher, constantly in conversation with different college-leaders, I explored and tested my preconceptions about schooling and what might be found in the educational field through systematic reflections, part of the auto-ethnographic approach. It increased my awareness to manage 'confirmation bias' - playing the devil's advocate helped manage such a process too.

Overall, the PAR-ethnography pairing presented challenges and epistemological opportunities supporting research rigour. First, PAR required the active participation of all members; therefore, my role as research leader was ambivalent because it could compromise PAR's commitments to democratic and inclusive research. I managed such commitments by appreciating groups and individuals involved with varying 'degrees of PAR'. Second, my role was situated in the college-environment (i.e., researcher), but my role also involved different positions that I had to deal with reflexively to reduce 'confirmation bias'. Thirdly, I had to be mindful of different group dynamics, preferences and priorities based on age, availability, and status, which made me sensitive to specific group needs. Fourth, I had to pay special attention to how PAR influences the construction of *propositional knowing*, which was helpful in the 'exploratory phase' of data generation under

reflexive control. Finally, 16 of the 34 participants were minors, which added an extra layer to the research ethics that deserves its section.

3.7 Ethical Consideration

I approached this study with a solid commitment to ethical research principles outlined by the British Psychological Society (BPS, 2018), British Sociological Association (BSA, 2017) and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI, 2021),[61] hinged round transparency of the research process and a recognition of the responsibility involved in engaging with and interpreting participants' experiences. Such engagements and interpretations carried ethical challenges that my teaching profession had already prepared me for and which I had to detail through a formal ethics clearance. For example, i) working with (voluntary and appropriately informed) minors; ii) power relations in institutions; iii) issues of confidentiality/trust; iv) managing expectations, responsibilities, and accountabilities agreed upon during the fieldwork set up stages. These specific criteria underpinned my researcher mindset before considering broader criteria such as participants' and college anonymity, beneficial vs detrimental research outcomes for both participants and the college, and whether my positionalities were too politicized to sustain research rigour. PAR, though, added an extra layer of complexity.

While PAR-related research ethics conundrums increased by having minors, some solutions were intrinsic to the methodology. For example, PAR helped overcome the inhibitions of sociological theories and practices, especially in the context of what Sinha and Back (2014) referred to as 'ethical hypochondria', inherent to the researcher-researched relationship. Sinha and Back (2014) argued for fostering 'sociable forms of dialogue' in qualitative research to counter conventional research's invasive and judicial modes of enquiry. They opposed the 'ethical hypochondria' characterizing qualitative research culture where automatic anonymity limits the

---

[61] Ethical approval was given by the UEL ethical board (Appx-20).

potential of research to connect people and engage the public imagination (p.473). Therefore, Sinha and Back promoted more dialogue that reworked the relationship between observer and observed, data and analysis, participants and authors, or, as Cornwall and Jewkes (1995) put it, '…researchers become learners and facilitators, catalysts in a process which takes on its momentum as people come together to analyse and discuss' (p.1668). This process materialized through our concerted PAR efforts to ensure democratic research, ongoing dialogue, reflexivity, and negotiation, which helped meet several research ethics criteria; I could have addressed these criteria differently had minors not been as involved or had only minors been researched. For example, the headship team opposed student-participants as interviewers of other students, something that student-participants and I had not configured in terms of safeguarding – the interviews entailed sensitive questions about MH and the practicalities of in-college interviewing.

Furthermore, drawing again from Sinha and Back's argument, when our PAR approach did not meet research ethics criteria, it was often related to structural/institutional limitations. For example, Sinha and Back stress that participant choice of what to observe and record remain key to participative research, choices that our research partially permitted due to structural constraints related to safeguarding, as explained above. This limitation exposed issues of validity and reliability concerning my insider-teacher-researcher positionalities, affecting design, intentions, data collection, data analysis, maintaining professional integrity, relationship with participants and research with vulnerable people (BPS, 2018; BSA, 2017; UKRI, 2021). However, a PAR approach comprises checks-and-balances including the Research Ethics Board approval (Appx-20), whose painstaking process increased my awareness as a researcher with minors; furthermore, the notion of participation, regardless of the research task, eventually alerted me of the impact of my positionalities.

Relatedly, my *facilitator* role during early enrichment sessions and focus groups tested my set of positionalities and the intrinsic power relationship they entailed, especially because I was, also, a gatekeeper; clearly, playing the 'devil's advocate (i.e., simultaneously taking the side of each participant group) was functional in the heat of the moment, but I ensured I also stepped out of the role-play that enacted the (changing) positionalities. For example, in the set-up process, given the range of student-participants' ages (some early 17 y/o and some almost 18) and academic abilities, I had to manage behaviour, engagement and focus. This kind of gatekeeping made me in charge, teacher-like, of the 'dialogue' agenda I progressively handed over, and student-participants made

the most of it by chairing focus groups and choosing enrichment session topics. A contrasting example came from my 'dialogue' with parents and teachers when I could signal that I was one of 'them' and not necessarily facilitating as per 'dictating' the agenda.

As for the ethics related to participatory data analysis, I referred to Wood's (2016) recommendation to avoid 'cherry-picking' perspectives to prove a predetermined point as, on ethical grounds, we risked incurring 'confirmation bias'. Furthermore, each group and individual had their own 'lived experiences', perceived through their sense-making; hence, the risk of participants excluding available/valuable data was high (Wood, 2016, pp.50-120). Such was the case with our participants' stories and rich perspectives on the six themes, but there were limitations too. For example, while the initial reflexive thematization of data collection (Appx-6) helped minimize (my) 'confirmation bias' because I ensured minimal input, later, NVivo and *ad hoc* thematic analysis were mainly mine, and participants' input was limited to consultations. While such dynamics reflected the 'degrees of PAR' I had to manage, I claim that the lockdown impeded more proactive group analysis, which would have informed policy influence and 'change-action'.

On reflection, I had to embrace new ethical insights about PAR's limitations in an educational setting. For example, while the common goal enhanced participants' reflexivity to unravel adolescent MH in and through the school/college-environment, some student-participants (or me) initially found it hard to speak up, too often consenting to what the majority argued (fieldnotes). This trend reversed during interviews. Also, during analytical 'moments' inherent to my transcriptions, I could *hear myself* re-directing students to meet my research agenda; for instance, if the focus group analysis steered away from MH, or if the interviews were losing momentum, I would dramatize the process by recalling our positionalities or reminding us of our 'critical researcher' duty[62]. This reflection shows how difficult it was to strike a balance between what concerned such a variety of participants who engaged to variable degrees and what concerned me as facilitator (fieldnotes); however, our PAR *attitude*, dialogical and democratic, always realigned

---

[62] See Appx. 7 for an explanation of the interview criteria.

the research/ers as we all strived to reduce 'confirmation bias' and attended to each other's role. As a result, PAR converged quite systematically with research ethics and rigour throughout the research.

Having detailed the main ethical issues generated by the research, I now detail the three analytical approaches to the thematic analysis I used: 1) Reflexive; 2) Coding reliability; 3) Codebook. While Braun and Clarke (2006) systematized thematic analysis through a distinct six-phase reflexive approach, they also incorporated other thematic analyses (Coding Reliability by Boyatzis, 1998, and Codebook or Template analysis by King, 2012 - see Braun and Clarke, 2022, p.236-248).

3.8 Data Analysis[63] through Thematic Analysis (<u>TA from now on</u>) and NVivo

This research has several layers of analysis that reflect feasible 'degrees of PAR' permitted in schools/colleges, where access and safeguarding are the priority and teachers/school leaders are on extremely tight schedules. Moreover, reaching out to parents added more participatory complexity, especially in a college where no one was local. Nevertheless, once I established the research group, I conducted iterative consultations to share enrichments outcomes and which exposed, for the first time, the 'three levels of epistemic' explained above as 'order constructs'. I borrow the notion of constructs from Schütz's theory of 'order constructs' (1962, cited in Toye et al., 2014, p.7):

> Schütz makes a distinction between *1ˢᵗorder constructs* (the participants' 'common sense' interpretations in their own words) and *2ⁿᵈorder constructs* (the researchers' interpretations based on first-order constructs) …these 2ⁿᵈorder constructs are then further abstracted to develop *3ʳᵈorder constructs* (the researchers' interpretations of the original authors' interpretations). However, the distinction between 1ˢᵗ and 2ⁿᵈorder constructs is not always

---

[63] See Appx 6 and 9 as examples of the first stage of data collection and later thematic analysis.

straightforward, as the author chooses participants' narratives as exemplars of their 2nd order interpretation.

Adapting Schütz's notion of order constructs (adapted from Mertens et al., 2015 - see further illustration in Table 5) served two purposes: i) to stress that our participative analysis was inherent to the ongoing iterations amongst the participant groups; ii) to keep 'confirmation bias' under check:

Table 5: Schütz's 1st 2nd 3rd order constructs definitions.

1st order construct	Participants' experiences of schooling as stakeholders and service users, 'common sense' views.	Interpretation of experience
2nd order construct	My interpretation of participants' views expressed through the six themes.	Interpretation of interpretation of
3rd order construct	The views and interpretation of the research group, expressed through the six themes and key concepts	Interpretation of Interpretation of interpretation of

Fieldnotes were necessary to record such analytical iterations, which happened both formally and informally. This 'messy' preliminary/generative analysis became embedded in the research and materialized in the final analysis of focus groups, the questionnaire, and interviews.[64]

After this premise, the following sub-sections explore the reasons for choosing TA and then detail the analysis through the three approaches that also entail Schütz's model. Reflexive TA, carried out with student-participants as part of the enrichment sessions and focus groups, represented a 1st order construct; however, a multiple TA carried out by me, through NVivo 12 software, mixing the three approaches, represented a 2nd and 3rd order construct. These multi-layers of research/analysis were inevitably affected by Covid19; firstly, because I could not complete the fieldwork and, therefore, the analytical iterations; second, because of the nature of a PhD, a piece of research written by one person.

3.8.1 Reasons for choosing Thematic Analysis and NVivo

I chose and conducted TA, as theorized by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019, 2020, 2022), for several practical and epistemological reasons. First, Braun and Clarke revitalized an analytical tradition and approach that goes back to the 1930s by adding the 'reflexive' element, which could be added to more standard TAs like Codebook and Coding Reliability (2019; 2022). The authors offered a more systematized approach that improved the validity and reliability of claims. For example, I found their six-parts analysis practical and 'constructivist'. In particular, I found it helpful that the authors took from the tradition of TA the relevance of 'thematic patterns' that not only captured something important about the data but also brought in concepts such as 'analytic interest' and 'keyness' (more than 'frequency'). These concepts also connected my social

---

[64] While student-participants and I analysed the enrichment sessions, I analysed the focus-group discussions (explorative stage 1) - I had one chance to make my analysis more participatory online in: October 2020 (student-participants), in June 2020 (teachers) and in July 2020 (gatekeeper). Additionally, the college life-satisfaction questionnaire was created and submitted within four weeks and analysed twice; first, by myself with student-participants and then by myself with teachers, and later by myself only.

constructivist ontology and interpretivist epistemology and helped embed the notion of 'emergence' in my deductive-inductive approach.

Therefore, Braun and Clarke theorized the connections between three main TA approaches, which fit with my multi-layered analysis taking place through PAR. For example, Reflexive TA facilitated our preliminary coding process in enrichment sessions and enabled initial knowledge generation (or *propositional knowing*). This was in line with PAR's democratic decision-making principles (Abma et al., 2019) and with Braun and Clarke's suggestion that Reflexive TA work well with social justice motivation – be it 'giving voice' to a socially marginalized group or a group rarely allowed to speak or be heard in a particular context, or a more radical agenda of social critique or change (2019). Later, post fieldwork, I used Codebook TA through NVivo to access massive interview data with six pre-established main themes. Such versatility of TA further explained below, added more scope for creativity and intuition while reinforcing rigour (more of this later).

TA's methodological underpinning stood out when I trained to use NVivo12 software with a specialist.[65] NVivo software handles a considerable quantity of data through several features that facilitated Braun and Clarke's TA approach and enabled me to i) handle word document data of over 100000 words of interview transcripts; ii) make 'memos' to keep track of analytical decision-making over time; iii) organize Braun and Clarke's six-steps or phases TA; iv) have data collected over four years all in one place – Fig.4 below. These characteristics suited TA as a foundational qualitative method, possessing practical and theoretical flexibility, adapting to diverse research settings and epistemological/ontological positions, including constructionism/constructivism (2006, pp.1-5-9; 2022). Such eclecticism blended with this research's constructivist ontology and highlighted PAR's generative and productive potential through multi-layered analysis of different groups.

---

[65] I also accessed online material from their website. NVivo-related YouTube clips were also a great learning source.

Figure 4: NVivo screenshot overview of data collection folders, Reflexive TA phases and Memos' record

Quick Access

Data
  Files
    0. Previous Study
    1. School Leaders Interviews
    2a. Focus Group 1
    2b. Focus Group 2
    3. Questionnaire Results
    4. Students Interview
    5. Teachers Interviews
    6. Parents Interviews
    7. FG PAR wrap ups
    Fieldnotes
    MH & WB published article
    Mini publication
  File Classifications
  Externals

Codes
  Nodes
    Phase 1 TranscrFamiliarization
    Phase 2 Coding
    Phase 3 Search Themes
    Phase 4 Review Themes x 3
    Phase 5a Name Themes
    Phase 5b with T&P&SL
    Phase 6 Report

Memos

Name
A. 2016 old school counsellor conversation-interview
B. 2017 FINAL UBEL-DTP Ph.D proposal
C. 2018 Previous study in Primary School
D. 2019 summer - Ph.D Focus 1 & RQ
e. 2019 September - Recruitment PAR
F. 2019 PAR Initial reflection on MH issues
G. PAR 1st DIARY Termly reflection - Jan 2020
H. FROM Key fieldnotes collection - Nov 2019
K. FG & Questionnaire Results - Nov 2019
L. Retro-flection on PHD aims & obj - Dec 2019
m. Frequency of themes for Interv task 2 - March 2020
n. Interv & FG infosharing participants - October 2020
o. NVivo tutorial summary notes - Nov 2020
p1. Mix of TA (thematic analysis) - Nov 2020
P2. Mix of TA - Nov 2020
Q1. Ph.D Re-Focus 2 - Dec 2020
Q2. Re-focus 3 plus Genealogy of RQs - Jan 2021
R. From phase 1 to phase 2 of Thematic Aanalysis - March 2021
S. From phase 2 to phase 3
T. From phase 3 to phase 4
U. From phase 4 to phase 5
V. From phase 5a to 5B - July 2021
Z. Miscellaneous

Finally, my doctoral research developed the TA approach already employed in a previous study (Di Emidio, 2018) because it had proved a valuable means to address similar data. However, that is when I learned first-hand that TA involved carving out information, selecting, and editing to support an argument, inevitably incurring researcher 'confirmation bias'. Therefore, the abrupt end of the project was problematic, not only for the action-research part to produce a 'change' but also for the final analysis, raising ethical issues of authorship. Therefore, I had to stretch even further 'degrees of PAR' to mitigate participants' reduced involvement; furthermore, the initial selection of six themes constituted the main bulk of our shared TA, and I ensured to stick to it through NVivo when I embarked on my (solo) analysis of interviews.

The final analysis was shared with some participants online to help make decisions about 'keyness' and consolidate my 'analytic interest' (i.e., schooling/education and MH - later broken down into the six themes by the student-participants and reworked by myself through three RQs). I also created three new umbrella themes that captured the six themes around 'performance', 'resilience' and 'progression' because, as Braun and Clarke suggest, '...the keyness of a theme is not necessarily dependent on quantifiable measures – but rather on whether it captures something important about the overall research question' (2006, p.82). This suggestion also means that as a lead researcher coming to grips with time and access issues, I had to judge what constituted relevant themes or essential meanings in the data and be flexible about the labels. Thus, my final TA through NVivo, multi-layered and multi-staged, was reviewed to maximize participation with student-participants and later with teachers and the gatekeeper – 3[rd]order construct.

3.8.2 Standards of Reflexive TA – a six-phase approach

To better understand and apply Schütz's three-order constructs vis-à-vis the different participant groups, I start by introducing the core practice of Braun and Clarke's Reflexive TA, with examples of how I applied it through NVivo:

Phase 1: familiarising with my data:

Phase 2: generating initial codes

Phase 3: searching for themes

Phase 4: reviewing themes

Phase 5: defining and naming themes

Phase 6: producing the report - a final summary of the six themes, part of a starting analytic process which I tightened up through NVivo, and later supported this thesis' write-up.

These phases did not necessarily entail a linear process, as Braun and Clarke suggest (2006 but '…. moved back-and-forth, as needed, throughout the phases' (2006, p.16). Also, they recommend identifying an 'analytic interest' beforehand (2006, p.6), which we initially found in 'schooling/education and MH'; it guided our data items extraction and the creation of six related themes (see phase 5). As the research continued, this implied an evolution of our 'analytic interest' alongside the notion of 'emergence', a crucial feature of Reflexive TA due to the dialogical and generative nature of interviews. Emergence implicated and sustained my constructivist ontology and interpretivist epistemology; constructivism is inherent to knowledge generation and identification, '...where patterns are identified as socially produced' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.8).

This theoretical positioning aligns with Braun and Clarke's critique of the notion of emergence and its 'dangers' because themes require (re)interpretation and creation, nonetheless, to capture something important about the data concerning the RQs, which, in turn, acquires 'analytic interest' (2006, pp.6-10). However, such a critique of emergence is complex because, while emergence may mirror the assumptions and motives of the researcher, it also reflects the

critical approach of this thesis, which spurred participants' critical thinking as inherently practical, creative and reflexive.[66]

Finally, Alhojailan's review of TA adds a constructive antithetical element to Braun and Clarke's six-phases approach. He argues that Reflexive TA provides a systematic element to data analysis, allowing the researcher to associate analysis of the *frequency* [emphasis added] of a theme with the whole content (2012, pp.39-41). On the other hand, Braun and Clarke suggest that, while a researcher's judgment is necessary to determine what a theme is, *frequency* does not entail importance; as they put it, the *keyness* of a theme is not necessarily dependent on quantifiable measures, but in terms of whether it captures something important (2006, p.10). This theorizing supports Wood's recommendation to report the most common themes while not losing sight of idiosyncratic stories (2016, p.125). For example, when I embarked on my final analysis, I started 'seeing' the six themes under the lenses of 'progression' in terms of 'transition' to university, 'resilience' in terms of 'motivation and responsibilization', and optimal 'performance' in high-stake examinations as underpinning 'success' and therefore acquiring an education.

3.8.2.1 Reflexive TA of 'explorative' and 'primary' data

The initial analysis of the 'explorative' stage (Fig.5 below) took place with student-participants and was a straight Reflexive TA of data produced during enrichment and focus groups; it produced six main themes that answered broad RQs (i.e., What influences adolescent MH in school/college? Or, Does education influence adolescent MH?). Later analysis of the 'primary' stage was mine only; it drew from the 'explorative' stage (next chapter) and culminated in my analysis of semi-structured interviews, which I analyzed by using a multiple TA approach – again, I shared the findings with several participants post-fieldwork, online, to test 'my side' of the analysis (chapter 9).

---

[66] I had to contextualize emergence within the circumstances surrounding the research design, its Covid19 related adaptations, the sensitive topic, the time of certain research methods and the ongoing literature.

Figure 5: two main stages of data with sub-stages
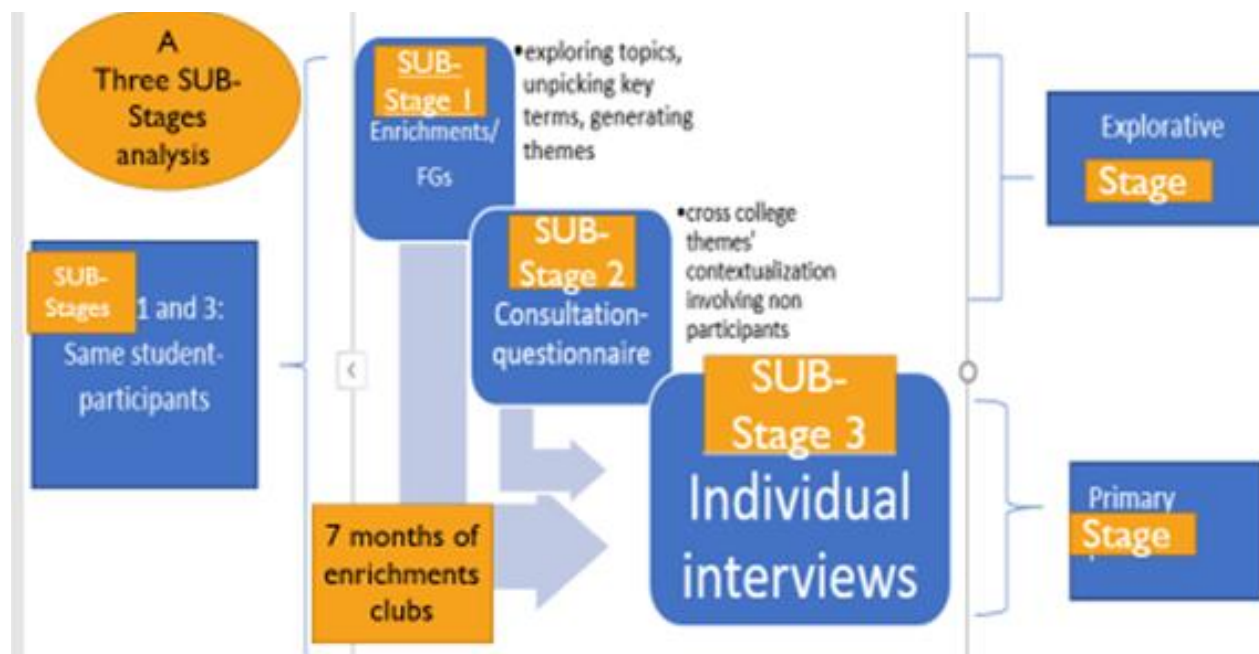
In the 'explorative stage', we gathered data through sugar paper, whiteboard brainstorms/spiderdiagrams (Appx-6 and 9) and analyzed it over two focus groups; earlier, I had trained student-participants on a more accessible version of Braun and Clarke's six-steps approach that identified patterns to generate themes, without necessarily producing a report. Next, through colour-coding and post-it notes, student-participants identified the 'frequency' and assessed the significance of initial codes that later became themes – this was a productive visual re-presentation of data to match with school/college risk factors identified in the literature (Wood, 2016, p.121), such as the relevance of un/motivation, relationships and exam pressure for MH. Finally, we identified repetitions and variations of similar themes through colorful annotations, complying with Braun and Clarke's Phase 1: familiarizing with data.

To conclude, the 'explorative stage' enabled a rigorous interpretation of the 'primary' one. In turn, primary data, like interviews, permitted alternative readings of the six themes, enabling the same voices to find lines of arguments that challenged or built on the 'explorative' stage, which they contributed to.

3.8.3 Three main TA approaches: multiple approaches

While I used Reflexive TA for the explorative stage (focus groups), I used a combination of the three for the primary one (interviews); here, I outline the three approaches and describe how I applied them almost simultaneously to the interviews' task 1 (the 'orientation') and task 2 (the themes' ranking). Braun and Clarke's TA approaches stress the generation of codes and themes (Reflexive TA), the use of pre-established themes/codes (Coding Reliability), and a mix between the first two (Codebook TA).

I illustrate how I operationalized these analytical tools through four overarching themed areas (Fig.6), which offered me an overview of the ground I would cover:

Figure 6: NVivo screenshot of the themed overview

Name	Files	References
Area 0. Positional & Situated Reflexivity	26	211
Area 1. Interview TASK 1 - coping with stressors	31	265
Area 2. Interview TASK 2 - theme ranking	31	977
Area 3. Post Fieldwork PAR analysis	3	119

If Area 0 refers to my positionalities, Area 1 refers to task 1's interview, an 'orientation' about the general MH status; Area 2, instead, refers to task 2's interview, the six themes' ranking; finally, Area 3 refers to the three RQs, addressed post fieldwork, a final attempt to involve student-participants.[67] I will explain the three approaches by linking them to each thematic area.

---

[67] Area 3's close looks at the three RQs did not mean that I had ignored the questions in preceding Areas, but Area 3 was my final chance to keep PAR and the evolved 'analytic interest' alive notwithstanding the lockdown.

Area 0:

I used 'Coding Reliability' TA for Area 0 because it is a method based on the early choice of codes/themes, which allowed me to capture my multi-positionality as a researcher, ex-teacher, father, activist/intellectual, and how these played out during interviews. I took a 'positioned approach', which I considered different from how I was situated in the college-environment. This distinction is important because my situatedness (or expected role: lead-researcher) could have clouded my commitment to an ongoing, PAR-inflected, reflexive approach that did not sideline my positionalities; instead, they could be used as 'reflexivities of discomfort' (Pillow, 2003), to '…highlight the messiness of engaged, qualitative research by focusing on particular moments of disruption which prompted reflexivity within discomfort' (Baker et al., 2018, p.197); affect, power, research ethics, my scholarship terms, my assumptions, the research design, etc., converged all-at-once in this thematic area while I strived to lead as democratically as I could; therefore, from the very analytical start (i.e., transcription) I had to distinguish (my) noise from (my) voice, accordingly.

For example, (a) my interviewer's voice, as well as opinions, changed according to whom I was interviewing, intending to reduce ingrained biases; (b) I often played the devil's advocate (well-rehearsed in my teaching career) to enrich the interview dialogue; (c) such chameleonic approach supported PAR's principles that are predicated on construing the participants as a co-researcher and not mere researched, actively involving them (Abma et al., 2019) by provoking or over empathizing with them.

Through NVivo's multiple options to sift-and-sort the data, I was able to unpick my voice/s into a patterned approach that captured my three main positionalities (Fig.7 below); notably, even though I did carry out a systematic analysis starting with three main positionalities broken down into patterns (codes of child codes). Area 0's utility rested on reflexivity to critique social reality and power relationships inherent to the interviewer-interviewee dialogue, as it were, engaging in productive 'reflexivity of discomfort'.

Figure 7: NVivo screenshot of Area 0 analysis

Phase 5b with TPSL	Files	References
Area 0. Positional & Situated Reflexivity	26	211
TeacherResearcherIntellectual	26	164
intellectual-activist	20	43
researcher	15	69
teacher	13	27
Personal Past exp	9	16
autonomy-agency	4	5
educational choices	2	3
with my parents	3	3
Fatherhood	12	31
relationship	3	3
worries	11	24

<u>**Area 1**</u>

I used Coding Reliability for Area 1, starting with 'familiarization' with the data generated from task 1 (Appx-3), interviews which had a ready-made framework facilitated by the task 1's four statements:

Table 6: task 1's statements

S1. My general mental health .... a problem.   • is not at all   • is not much of   • is sometimes   • is mostly   • is very much
S2. My general mental health .... limit my SOCIAL college life.   • does not   • does sometimes   • does very much
S3. My general mental health .... limit my ACADEMIC college life.   • does not   • does sometimes   • does very much
S4. Overall, I feel ....confident about my future mental health.   • not at all   • not much   • sometimes   • mostly   • very much

The interview's task 1 statements were taken from the life-satisfaction questionnaire because student-participants saw them as 'icebreakers', inviting holistic reflections on past, present, and future events concerning their MH within education (likewise, parents would fill this section linking it to their children, while teachers would link it to their 'average' students). In addition, the statements captured how the events shaped their understanding of MH (a. comprehensibility), how they had managed such events and through available resources (b. manageability), and, finally, how they made sense of those events as stimuli worth engaging with for further personal development (c. meaningfulness) – see Fig 8:

Figure 8: NVivo screenshot of Area 1 analysis

Area 1. Interview TASK 1 - coping with stressors	31	265
a. Manageability - handle stimuli with resources	26	70
b. Comprehensibility - underst and integrate stimuli	19	42
c. Meaningfulness - make sense of stimuli as challenges and worth investing-engaging	23	49

Additionally, as shown by the codes' breakdown (Fig.9), an XQ code was added because the question captured students' life satisfaction with compulsory education; the question was initially used in the questionnaire (Q46 – Appx-10), became a standard question to end the interview, and offered relevant responses for Area 1.[68]

Figure 9: NVivo screenshot breakdown of Area 1

Area 1. Interview TASK 1 - coping with stressors	31	265
a. Manageability - handle stimuli with resources	26	70
S1 General MH Task 1	26	70
b. Comprehensibility - underst and integrate stimuli	19	42
S2 MH and social life Task 1	18	26
S3 MH and academic life Task 1	13	16
c. Meaningfulness - make sense of stimuli as challenges and worth investing-engaging	23	49
S4 MH and the future Task 1	15	26
XQ. Edu Satisfaction (Q46 of Questionnaire)	15	20

.

---

[68] In the 'spirit' of PAR, I owe this insight to a student-participant who saw the link between task 1's statements and Q46.

Area 2[69]

I used the Codebook TA for Area 2 because it contained six pre-established themes that enabled me to look at task 2 data (deductively) while prompting reflexivity (inductively). Braun and Clarke (2022) describe it as a mix of 'Coding Reliability' and 'Reflexive' TA, which was applied through the structured part of the semi-structured interviews, in my case, organised through the two interview tasks. Codebook TA suited my PAR's circumstances for Area 2 because, even though it built on thematic decisions made as a research team, I also added three new analytical categories (Fig.10 below: T07/08/09) reflecting the debates in my literature review and further tweaking of original codes - indeed, a subjective and interpretive Reflexive TA. This way, I could embed existing scholarly conceptualizations while still focusing on the evolving 'analytics interest' and/or the three RQs.

---

[69] In some instances, the 'references' (i.e., the number of statements making up the code) moved across the themes as much as the thematic areas, especially for AREA 1 and 2 because of their multiple applicability/interpretations.

Figure 10: NVivo screenshot of Area 2 with breakdowns of themes

Area 2. Interview TASK 2 - theme ranking	31	97
T01. Motivation	29	326
Extrinsic M	19	62
Intrinsic M	18	36
Neolib Aspirations	18	34
Parental implication	18	44
Peers implication	10	14
Responsibilization Accountability	20	61
Subject implication	15	31
Teacher implication	12	23
T02. Relationships	29	136
with Parents	17	39
with Peers	18	27
with Self-Subjectivity	19	39
with Teachers	18	26
T03. Exam Pressure	30	122
College pressure	20	44
Good Pressure	11	15
Neutral Pressure	9	10
Self made Pressure	13	29
T04. College-environment	27	87
Attitude towards the college-environment	24	42
Conduct of Conduct - activity to control people's conduct	15	33
T05. External Factors	24	49
Relating to family and friends	17	26
Sleep deprivation	11	12
Time constrains	7	8
T06. Money-Resources	12	23
T07. NEW. Edu Progression	21	83
T08. NEW. Performance	23	67
T09. NEW. Resilience	25	84

I used the six main themes (T01 to T06) as 'lenses' to extract meaning from the interview data. Task 2 consisted of the participants ranking the themes and discussing their choices while I probed accordingly (Appx-7). As shown above, in Fig.10, I added three new themes because the three played out across T01 and T06 and helped address the evolving 'analytic interest' through the three RQs – i.e., I realized that their high *frequency* and, more importantly, *keyness,* secured them the status of 'theme' instead of a sub-category.

Codebook TA enables such creative analysis because it incorporates Reflexive TA and, therefore, elements of inductivity with deductivity. For example, my 'familiarization' with the data involved confirmation and refinement of the themes created by the student-participants, but also adding new codes which captured my understanding of the issues, reflecting both frequency and *keyness* of themes/codes vis-a-vis the RQs. The three new themes represented my 'analytic interest' evolution and later informed the corresponding empirical chapters. Such analytical processes were critical for two reasons; first, because student-participants original codes/themes could better match the overarching RQ ('Does compulsory education influence adolescent MH?') before I decomposed them into three questions; second, because working with a narrower iterative focus allowed me to refine, inductively, the three RQs without losing sight of the theoretical assumptions that linked the data to them - i.e., the deductive element of my epistemological approach.

Such a back-and-forth code formation made the three RQs operational; it confirmed Braun and Clarke's predicament of TA as a creative and rigorous approach - see for example item Q2 in the Memos (Fig.11 below), an example of my ongoing re-focus of the RQs; the re-focus addressed the evolution of each theme at each stage of data collection and analysis and helped monitor my increased understanding of the thematic areas, themes and codes at each stage of analysis. This understanding was inevitably a subjective process which I wanted to remit to PAR's principles - i.e., share and agree with participants.

Figure 11: NVivo screenshot of Memos

Memos

✦	Name
📒	A. 2016 old school counsellor conversation-interview
📒	B. 2017 FINAL UBEL-DTP Ph.D proposal
📒	C. 2018 Previous study in Primary School
📒	D. 2019 summer - Ph.D Focus 1 & RQ
📒	e. 2019 September - Recruitment PAR
📒	F. 2019 PAR Initial reflection on MH issues
📒	G. PAR 1st DIARY Termly reflection - Jan 2020
📒	H. FROM Key fieldnotes collection - Nov 2019
📒	K. FG & Questionnaire Results - Nov 2019
📒	L. Retro-flection on PHD aims & obj - Dec 2019
📒	m. Frequency of themes for Interv task 2 - March 2020
📒	n. Interv & FG infosharing participants - October 2020
📒	o. NVivo tutorial summary notes - Nov 2020
📒	p1. Mix of TA (thematic analysis) - Nov 2020
📒	P2. Mix of TA - Nov 2020
📒	Q1. Ph.D Re-Focus 2 - Dec 2020
📒	Q2. Re-focus 3 plus Genealogy of RQs - Jan 2021
📒	R. From phase 1 to phase 2 of Thematic Aanalysis - March 2021
📒	S. From phase 2 to phase 3
📒	T. From phase 3 to phase 4
📒	U. From phase 4 to phase 5
📒	V. From phase 5a to 5B - July 2021
📒	Z. Miscellaneous

Area 3:

As for thematic Area 3 (Fig.12), I used Reflexive TA for the online focus group and Codebook TA for the email. This mix was due to context and contingencies regarding data collected from i) a final online focus group with student-participants when I shared my final analysis; ii) an email response following the focus group to specific questions. In the latter case, I used the three RQs as a thematic framework to look at the email responses (Coding Reliability - deductive) while at the same time inviting reflexivity (Reflexive TA - inductive). As Fig.12 shows, the online focus group data were 'collected' as a single data item consisting of a direct transcription (Team's chat recording) and contained responses to my final analysis presentation – my last participative effort. Instead, the email responses were applied to the three RQs more closely, and I added a further code reflexively that responded to the literature review and my evolving analytical reasoning (see Subjectivation/Subjectification codes and 'resistance/'conduct of conduct' child codes' – Fig.12):

Figure 12: NVivo screenshot of Area 3 with breakdowns (see Appx-11 for a full breakdown of RQ1/2/3)

Name	Files	Reference
Area 3. Post Fieldwork PAR analysis	3	119
1 - ONLINE Focus Group	2	2
Subjectivation-Subjectification	1	18
resistance	1	5
conduct of conduct	1	12
2 - EMAIL	1	99
RQ1. Does an exam-focused curriculum and pedagogy affect adolescents' MH	1	22
RQ3. What other factors and events influence adolescents MH in the schoolcollege-environment	1	28
RQ2. What role could educators, and students themselves, play to manage adolescents' MH in the college-e	1	49

Finally, the NVivo's Memo feature was instrumental in tracking the evolution of my three RQs; memos helped the RQs work thematically and create *ad hoc* sub-themes reflexively.

Conclusion

In part 1, I looked at the Critical Ethnography in Education approach in the anthropological tradition and, with a Foucauldian undertone, stressed both the determined and the self-made subject. As Kulz (2017) noted in her ethnographic work in a London academy, her participation in the social world she gazed into did not 'devalue (critical) empirical research' (p.33). Kulz argued that, by employing description and analysis to work together, an emphasis on the art-of-listening, harnessed to the art-of-description, could only support the making of case studies. Kulz follows Back's, '…*theorizing as they describe and describing as they theorize (*2007, p.21 in Kulz, 2017, p.21) to illustrate the work of the critical ethnographer.

Therefore, by leading into the field with PAR, the Critical Ethnography in Education approach acquired rigour because the analysis was participative to different degrees. Furthermore, part 1 showed how a Critical Theory approach got going methodologically to (re)present participants' voices and analytical contributions as reasonably, critically and effectively as possible – i.e., through 'degrees of PAR' due to: i) safeguarding issues; ii) tight timetabling; iii) bustling school/college environments; iv) the college not attached to a local community, hence far away parents. Through PAR and ethnographic methods, participants had an opportunity to 'extend the field of possibilities' by conceiving the college-environment as a seasonal process in their lives, albeit a central one, to challenge possible theorizing of adolescents as passively *becoming*. McAvoy (2009) calls it 'The Dialogical Subject: Negotiated Selves' to '…explain the performance of actions such as thinking, arguing, positioning, resisting…to illustrate understandings of how subject practices take on particular subject meaning, worked up at the moment' (pp.84-85). Such *practices and meanings* represent the expertise of student-participants I was interested in leading out through PAR and which PAR helped triangulate with my expertise (the insider-outsider), the

parents, teachers and college-leaders' expertise and finally, all of the above participants' expertise as a generative unit that guaranteed qualified knowledge and understanding of adolescent MH.[70]

Part 2, more descriptively, presented the research design as underpinned by a previous study (Di Emidio, 2018) and which I built on in my PhD; for example, I referred to the methods' selection and exclusion vis-a-vis- the new set of participants as well as the varying ethical matters arising in an educational context, working with minors and with/in a PAR framework. I argued that participation is a tool that increases ethical conundrums and that inherently reduces them because of PAR's strict tenets, such as democratic decision-making, fostering research dialogue and diminishing power relationships.

Finally, part 2 also presented how Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2022) TA orientations added rigour and credibility to qualitative analysis. Not only did Braun and Clarke systematize TA through six detailed phases, but they also refined two existing approaches with their systematic phases: this invited creativity and structuredness, inductively and deductively, fitting with my ontological and epistemological claims and the contingencies of long-term research. Therefore, the following empirical chapters present the findings following the analysis for each thematic area. They add, build, and sometimes challenge the analytic NVivo memos I uploaded alongside the thematic phases. In this way, I could keep track of the developments of each theme during an iterative, process-focused analysis applied to each data collection stage and transcription. Such focus highlighted our participative constructs, operationalized the literature and demonstrated how we had been conceiving the themes.

---

[70] However, due to Covid-19 lockdowns, this research could not gather representatives of those groups, as planned, to acquire cumulative insights and become a final piece of *expertise*, the *corpus* that could inform change.

Chapter 4 – Towards Generating Key Themes and Co-Constructing Analysis

Introduction

The first three chapters presented 'background data' that problematised MH and education through the literature and the methodology to investigate such a sensitive and topical phenomenon. This chapter instead offers preliminary core data collected during the explorative stage of data generation (Fig.13 below). These data (re)present the participants' 1storder construction and different types of participants' expert knowledge through iterative 'appreciative enquiry'. For example, adult participants consistently offered feedback on the data generated by the student-participants and their feedback was also included as data. The 'explorative stage' was also foundational and consisted of two interleaved sub-stages (Sub-Stage 1: Enrichment and Focus Groups and Sub-Stage 2: Consultation-questionnaire) that would inform the 'primary stage' -

Figure 13: two main stages of data with sub-stages.(repeated)
interviews.
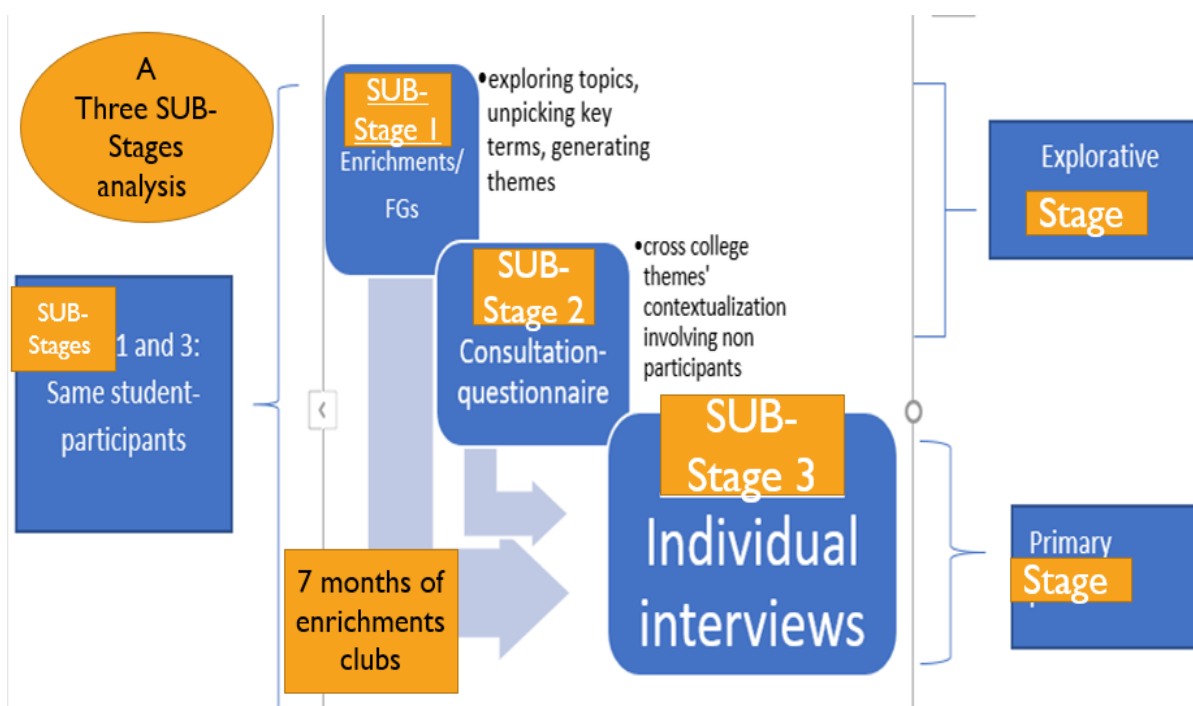
This chapter also contextualises the 'creation' of six main themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006), and their usage in the questionnaire. Finally, it describes the making of PAR 'co-intention' (Abma et al., 2019, CH. 3-4-5) despite the heterogeneous interests of individuals and groups. Establishing 'co-intention' among participants helped narrow a broad 'analytic interests' (Education/Schooling and MH) down to six interconnected themes without ignoring idiosyncrasies.[71] Furthermore, the refinement of the three RQs runs parallel to the themes' creation, adding rigour and credibility to the process.

Overall, the chapter captures student-participants' initial meaning-making of their schooling experience concerning the chosen RQ ('Does education/schooling influence adolescent MH?') before I gradually broke it down into three questions.

4.1 Stage 1 – Enrichments and Focus Groups: Framing into PAR

I used early enrichments to present my project and the issues it raised, in addition to what I had already shared at the recruitment fair. The aim was to get students' insight and have shared research intent. I selected some of the 'problems' from my literature review (e.g., the distinction between MH and well-being, statistical evidence of worsening MH among adolescents), while the group participants tried to personalize the problems (e.g., the purpose of education and the role it played in their lives; to gain a better understanding of MH, and the extent to which 'material deprivation' was a determinant). Most enrichments followed the same pattern: following the topic presentation (a clip, a documentary, my presentation, their presentation), student-participants worked in pairs or groups before offering feedback in focus groups. That was when we juxtaposed

---

[71] For example, student-participants' intentions to participate varied, from those who wanted to stretch themselves to others who wanted to understand their own and their friends' MH. Teachers and the careers officer wanted to 'hear' and involve students to inform their practice, while the headship team and MHWBTeam to inform future internal policies.

the topic to our context - namely, the aims of state education (from both a personal and institutionalized perspective) and its relationships with adolescent MH.

I envisaged enrichments' data generation to involve only student-participants, but we agreed to be as inclusive as possible by creating a whole-college questionnaire for the student cohort. So, stage 1 (enrichment sessions plus focus groups) and stage 2 (questionnaire) became interleaved during a couple of months process that enhanced group reflexivity around the six themes, and which structured the questionnaire making:

1. **Money/resources**
2. **External factors**
3. **Exam pressure**
4. **Relationships**
5. **College-environment**
6. **Motivation**[72]

Hence, the next section and sub-sections focus on student contributions as *propositional knowing*: student-participants conducted Reflexive TA to create the themes, which I then shared with other college-leaders and, eventually, I conducted a 'preliminary final' analysis which I shared back again (3rd-order construct). These layers of analysis were also part-and-parcel of 'degrees of PAR', meaning that I embedded iterations and reflexive consultations with participants who engaged in various ways.

---

[72] From now on I will capitalize the six themes when referred to as 'themes;' however, when I refer to them as simple nouns, I will not capitalize them. For example, 'The theme of Motivation…, or 'Relationships was ranked high…' but: 'Students' motivation seemed low…' or, 'Parents did not mention external factors as problems'.

4.1.1 Early findings and impact of 'propositional knowing'[73]

The enrichment sessions' discussions generated what I referred to in chapter three as *propositional knowing* (Heron & Reason, 2008), an 'extended epistemology' that added to valid knowing drawn from lived experiences. Student-participants identified patterns of shared lived experiences (personal or others'), produced the questionnaire and analysed results. The initial focus groups presented a limitation for my analysis because the microphone initially inhibited student-participants. This inhibition contrasted the enrichment sessions with no microphone, meaning discussions were livelier and more inclusive. The themes' formation included a comprehensive range of codes which addressed the broad RQ; in turn, naming the themes' added a productive insight into the theme 'External Factors', seen as critical factors influencing MH, inseparable from the College-Environment theme - something which my research proposal had not fully considered.

The sub-sections below overview the seven focus groups which explored: i) the MH-well-being distinction; ii) MH and Education; iii) MH in college; iv) a MH Podcast; v) the six themes across three focus groups. In some cases, I refer to the Tuesday group and/or the Wednesday group, whilst at other times, I merge both groups' responses for emphasis. The sub-sections constitute my analysis of preliminary student-participants' analysis (a 2^{nd}order construct).

4.1.1.1 MH-Wellbeing distinction

The first formal focus group took place after three weeks of fieldwork and addressed enrichments that focused on key terminology - i.e., if MH was our focus, then we needed to share a mutual understanding of it. I chaired the session, and we looked at the MH/well-being distinction,

---

[73] To manage and 'hear' so many student-participants voices, spread over two enrichments per week, the following analytical style is somewhat chronological and descriptive, with analysis drawn out of discussions. This is unlike the other chapters that will analyse interviews in no chronological order.

making links to a previous study's findings (Di Emidio, 2018). I shared the findings by not critiquing the definitions and without singling one out, although I pointed out that the notion of well-being could, as it were, interfere with MH. By showing some policy language, I broadly suggested that the MH-well-being pairing was contentious, and I needed 'their help' to make sense of it. I explained that I wanted to understand the pairing in addition to the precise meaning of the concepts and their implications in day-to-day schooling - educational policies are usually explicit about the two terms as critical for 'success'.

Mickey and Rina[74] made two connected points about adolescents' MH and the language used. First, Mickey referred to depression rates, citing an article she had read in a magazine focused on adolescent MH, then referred to the article's argument that policymakers were not considering well-being research in primary schools. I replied: '...oh yeah, there is a headteacher in a Panorama episode calling for a specific MH task force in primaries...corroborating Mikey's point...so there is renewed MH focus by the government, and from 2022, all school must appoint a MH expert'. Rina, responded: '...I question the extent to which schools and certain appointed teachers, or leaders can address students' issues'.

While Mickey illustrated 'the problem' broadly by pointing at the MH and well-being usage, Rina's point was more pertinent and raised other problems with regards to the controversial rise of 'therapeutic education' as a Foucauldian 'technology of power' and how it is instrumentalized with 'performance' and 'transition' to adulthood (coming chapter 7-8). At this point, I put the MH and well-being definitions on the whiteboard (Fig.14-15-16 below) and invited student-participants to share their group/pair discussions. However, I insisted they maintained the focus on the aims of education vis-a-vis MH.

---

[74] I use pseudonyms throughout the thesis for all participants. The college is never named. Transcription conventions: '….' indicates brief pause; [ ] indicates my interpretive/clarification comment.

Figure 14: slide 1a - MH definition

Slide 1a:

- The WHO (2014) defines MH as

'a state of **wellbeing** in which every individual **realizes** his/her own potential, **can** cope with the normal stresses of life, **can** work productively and fruitfully, and **is able to** make a contribution to her or his community'

Figure 15: slide 1b - well-being definition

Slide 1b:

- Several dictionaries define well-being as:

'a good or satisfactory condition of existence; a state characterized by **health**, happiness, and prosperity',

This is in line with the UK's Office National Statistics which defines well-being as "'how we are doing' as individuals, communities and as a nation and how sustainable this is for the future''.

- https://www.dictionary.com/browse/well-being and the Oxford dictionary respectively.

I also added Slide 2 to show variations of key terms:

Slide 2:

Figure 16: differentiation between mental ill-health and mental well-being

Two aspects of mental health are generally recognised: mental illness or ill-health, and psychological well-being. The Office for National Statistics (2015) defines them as the following:

Mental ill-health concerns clinically diagnosable illness, and covers conditions that affect mood, thinking or behaviour. Examples include depression, anxiety disorders, eating disorder and addictive behaviours. Mental ill-health may manifest differently in children than in adults, resulting, for example, in behavioural and conduct problems, as well as emotional problems, environmental problems or difficulties, as well as developmental problems, may give rise to these symptoms.

Mental well-being is concerned with how people feel about their lives and whether their lives are worthwhile – it is not just the absence of mental health problems. It has been described as a state whereby an individual is able to develop their potential, work productively and creatively, build strong and positive relationships with others, and contribute to their community.

Kelly (who left the research group on mental ill-health grounds by Christmas) picked the word 'potential': '...the word potential in the Mental well-being definition is unclear if one thinks about education, how can you know it for sure when potential develops or start?' Kelly extended the point to her GCSE experience of the subjects' pathway system (or 'option blocks'); such a system was too restrictive, she claimed, with caging potential. Kelly's claim suggests that students' mental well-being would be affected if told that, at 13-14 y/o, they had no possibility (i.e., no potential) to achieve in a subject, obliging students into pathways that guaranteed (the school) success.

However, Ash reminded us that '...this college opens up opportunities and tries to create flexible pathways', which was received positively by the group.[75] David (who also lasted a few weeks and left college on mental ill-health grounds) nuanced the analysis, keen to draw in: '...puberty, parents, peers ...things which one doesn't have much control of, [that are] external,

---

[75] Unfortunately, in September 2021, even this college went for rigid 'option blocks'.

affect[ing] young people'. Though not related to the definitions, Divvy's intervention helped keep the conversation going. Divvy qualified David's point by referring to the relativism of MH, depending on culture/location, family - '...yes, it is complex, many factors coming together'. Meantime, Pablo, seemingly inspired by David and Divvy's points, claimed: 'I think it's the stress of education...SATs, GCSE, mocks, ongoing testing, it just doesn't stop!...and now A-Levels' [Pablo sounded worn out, he was repeating year-12 due to MH issues and subsequently left college after two months].

Kelly, David, and Pablo's voices sounded dejected; they turned to the research enrichments to get different perspectives and reflect on what had gone wrong in their (educational) lives; they fit the category of 'impossible subjects' (as student subjects) which I introduce in Chapter 5. 'Impossible subjects' are a burden on the college because they are at risk of dropping out and/or need consistent attention and intervention.

Interestingly, they were the first to react to the definitions' connection to education, as if it annoyed them. The following fieldnote extract, one of my first reflections from the Tuesday smaller group, highlights the usefulness of concentrating on definitions like MH and well-being, opening to themes' formation:

> This is a smaller group, and no one knows each other; there are two year-13 students, and, overall, students make relevant points despite some hesitation – public speaking? Talking about MH in the first person is too much? Yet, some of the voices break because they seem angry! Two girls stress the positive experience of education/schooling, one is neutral, and the rest are negative. Year-13 Mickey makes links to the enrichment, stretching the group through ad hoc reflections, clearly questioning 'mass education'. Other students do not hesitate to talk about stress or exam stress experienced in GCSE; yet, what transpires is also a sense of existential malaise (external to schooling) transferred to their mundane – college life. I/We should start thinking that 'studying' is also external to the college building. Hence a mixture of internal and external factors influencing MH due to education get blurred. Interesting!

The day after, with the broader group, we started similarly. Again, student-participants initially looked hesitant after a lively 45 min enrichment but gradually engaged:

(Ellinois) 'The reference to *normal stresses of life* from the definition, emmmm...I can think of exam stress but also the stress of not fitting in with…. whereas *contributing to the community* -clearly schools are the communities!

(Saddy) 'Academic potential'…ill MH surely doesn't help to fulfil one's potential'

(Juss) 'Academic potential' gets confused with getting the grade… therefore the issue of mental ill-health gets tackled from the wrong side'.

(Mollica) 'Able to contribute'…well, clearly if one suffers from MH, or is stressed… then they can't contribute to class discussion'.

(Vanni) 'Realise your own potential'…some students are constantly told to challenge themselves, also being compared and/or comparing themselves when facing the issue of 'own potential', which doesn't lead to positive MH'.

The extracts anticipate some key codes that made the six themes and, in hindsight, anticipate aspects of my later/final analysis when I look at 'responsibilisation, performance and transition'. My fieldnote extract adds and builds on the students' voices,

Despite the lively enrichment, today seemed a quiet focus group session (recorded). Focus groups make them shy (the circle time element? The microphone?); however, I was impressed by the unpacking of MH and well-being definitions and by students' dissatisfaction with the definitions and giving reasons. They seemed engaged but also detached – embracing their researcher/objective role? Incapable of relating to the definitions? Indeed, they offer intuitive reasons to challenge the definitions from schooling experiences. Such inputs reinforce the point about policy language instrumentalizing key concepts.

My fieldnote remarks how MH and well-being can become incongruent with the process of education/schooling; I selected the fieldnote to show how students' common-sense analysis (1st order construct) constituted informed insight that emerged participatively. My fieldnote was a first-hand impression which attempted to draw out the significance of students' contributions (2nd order). While 'confirmation bias' was at play, I made sure to let the slide on the board do the talk; I took student-participant responses at face value as an instant reaction to be unpicked further through Reflexive TA (3rd order construct because of PAR's iterations).

4.1.1.2 MH and education

The following exchange (Tuesday session) highlighted how students returned to the previous week's topic on terminology to make more links to education. Mickey's contribution initiated it:

I see education as a way to behold myself…I use school as a way to open the door to knowledge, hence inform me of what is interesting…so I take it further as I wish, for example, I've self-taught myself a lot instead of studying just for the exam, for example, I study philosophy, and recently we did consciousness…not much time in class to deepen but I went further by myself.

(DDE – <u>my initials from now on</u>) 'Any negative experiences?'

(Mickey) 'Some of my friends did not have the inspiration or motivation to pursue their interests through schools'

(DDE) 'What about the rest?'

(Rina) 'My experience has been about stress; during exams, I was stressed because of self-pressure, like two of my friends. We were obsessed with not making mistakes to reach the top-top grade'.

I ask why and offer examples of some ex-students of mine obsessed with extra marks though the grade boundary would not change. Rina: 'That was me! …and I didn't have parental pressure at all, they didn't even have a clue about my exam date, but they knew I was doing well'. Here Rina introduces a critical theme closely related to 'performance and transition'; I, therefore, decided to share self-made personal pressures, mainly because at sixteen, I dreaded being denied football because of college underachievement. I asked if the new linear and grading systems were reasons for additional self-made pressure to get top grades.

Rina did not respond directly but instead spoke of the broader aims of education: 'My teacher asked what I thought about education and…it's tough to measure life skills, or emotional qualities that are valuable [but] aren't encouraged by schools'. This response was necessary since it questioned the extent students pay attention to these aspects of (therapeutic) education and their effectiveness. Pablo echoed Rina:

I had a horrible experience throughout education, I even felt teachers did not want me there for my GCSE… looking back...all that knowledge has not got me anywhere with regards to life skills…now I live by myself and I have had to learn fast about paying bills, sorting things out.

While Pablo referred to teacher-student relationships, I was struck by how students in 'transition' to adulthood became excessively conscious of possessing life-skills and of life's practicalities. Overall, it seems that recognisable factors affecting MH (external or internal to the college), as much as inter-relational (parents, friends, teachers) and intra-relational (self, conduct) factors emerge and become key *propositional knowing* to understand agency/subjectivity for a better understanding of adolescent MH.

4.1.1.3 MH in college

In the enrichments and focus groups looking at 'What makes MH in school/college life?', student-participants of the Wednesday group seemed to underplay the role of friendship and the college-environment; I encouraged them to think about wider relationships, and invited them to think of anything that affected their experience of education, perhaps as a way to bridge any external/internal divide or show that 'studying matters' were multifaceted and ubiquitous:

(Teocoli) '.... some teachers act as if there is no life outside the classroom…plus they cut you off easily…'

(DDE) '...yes, I agree, I did it myself but not on purpose, I felt responsible for students' results'

(Alby) '...school hours are demanding; sleep is a problem…'

(David) '…can I add? we said exam pressure, fear of failures is always looming, you want the best for yourself so that you also feel you have to live up to the predicted grades as that's created by you…'

I addressed Teocoli's point by referring to past SAT and CAT score predictors of educational attainment as guidance for success that weighs heavily on teachers, their pedagogy and their relationship with students. Student-participants appreciated it but did not rebut my point in terms

of questioning the *dispositif* or including wider elements of social justice and equity, which was my intention.

Ellinois broke the moment of silence by referring to another key theme: '...money can be an issue because it affects several aspects of college life, such as the way you look and the academic resources to get higher grades such as tuition fees'. This was corroborated by Vanni, who suggested: '...yes, there is more pressure to look good, but one has to learn to make an effort…'.

These responses show the range of topics that students' responses had addressed broadly in the enrichment tasks, but no examples or lived experiences were offered. Overall, most tended to agree and avoided challenging each other, happy with the novel college life and therefore finding it hard to address the focus group topic, despite the extensive enrichment material. Only one student-participant, Juss, stressed that secondary school lessons were more fun; she said: 'Now I'm mostly bored, [before] in secondary there were loads of jokes passing around including the teachers'. Most student-participants agreed, adding that the college timetable - involving entering and leaving at various times - did not help create an environment where relationships could be nurtured, neither for students nor teachers. Matty added that '...also, having ability sets in secondary school helped create a sense of group belonging, as these involved revision sessions after school creating more bonding... not possible here'. At this point, I played devil's advocate by making student-participants notice that as a supply teacher, I usually hear comments such as:

'We are not seen as grown-up if we have to be stuck in school in year-13 until lunch and must attend early registration (my old school requirement) …we should choose, including revision, it should not be compulsory'.

(Saddy) '…yes, there is no winning, before we complained for being stuck in school at lunch, now we have more freedoms… and still complain!'

(Alby) Yes, we did complain but now, thinking of it, secondary school was actually fun, whereas now there isn't much to look forward to, especially the 1.5 hr lesson…it is really long! You don't look forward to the jokes and relationships as here you don't know anyone.

(Ellinois) Now not knowing many people in your year group can make things easier though, more than 600 here in a year, which can be easier because in sec school the year group was always a close knit (around 180), especially if you spend 5 years together,

mostly…but news about you spread around like [wild]fire if something happened, even if small.

The comparison with secondary school seemed to attract rich responses, showing how transitioning to sixth form was not straight-forward and a sense of uncertainty transpired. Conversely, the Tuesday focus group seemed less concerned about the past, and the comparison was not picked up in the same vein. The following fieldnote summarises the Wednesday focus group and anticipates some codes and themes of the final six themes:

> A lively enrichment today but the focus group session was hard going, the microphone freezes them! Anyway, students touch on relevant points that resonate with earlier discussions: 1) 'relationships' with teacher and peers, 2) 'material deprivation', 3) 'sleep' as MH stressors related to schooling experiences while having a personal/home life. Some appreciate the new college's novelty/anonymity, starting afresh, feeling reinvigorate – this reminds me of my old school, we used to have external students who joined sixth form due to bad experiences in secondaries where they had felt stuck for years. Others miss secondary school and did not expect it!

Despite my little frustration at the decreased level of engagement between the enrichment and the focus group, this fieldnote acknowledged student-participants' contributions (1[st]order construct) and anticipated several themes and codes the student-participants would eventually select.

4.1.1.4 MH podcast reflections

We listened to three podcasts, parts of a series (Marlow, 2020), about adolescent MH in successive enrichment sessions; student-participants worked in pairs or groups to share what had caught their attention. The focus group was about sharing impressions and any specific data, or the language used to address MH. Juss started: '…some of the percentages between the amount of investment they [the government] make on MH and the number of people who need it…adolescent represent 20% of that population but get only 5%'. These stats were vital, relating to the public cost of MH, government investment in prevention and intervention, and how financial terms explain poor MH. I found the reference to CAMHS intervention suddenly stopping at 18 y/o and

the family/child struggle in transitioning to a GP interesting, but no one picked that up.[76] I elicited some summative analysis of the podcast to assess whether the podcasts had gone to the root of the problem, whether MH was distinguished from a mental disorder, and whether the adolescents' voices they heard were relatable. The responses were brief and hesitant, but then Ellinois made an incisive point which inspired others:

(Ellinois) '…every generation must have it [MH] and it might get worse with time…now we give more titles to every feeling…and you could be feeling upset but you call it 'depression' and perhaps one is just upset…'

(DDE) '…sure, but somehow labels can be important to address the problem…for example, [as a researcher] I'm interested in terms like vulnerability, as opposed to resilience, as a virtue…so, language and terminology are important…I see resilience signs everywhere around schools when I do supply teaching, but no one contextualizes it, explains it…'

(Juss) '...I think boys struggle too…if a male friend comes to see you to talk about their MH it's strange…'

(DDE) '...yeah…boys are stigmatised a lot due to masculinity…and funnily enough, male suicide is higher than women between 20 and 40'

(Juss) '...yeah, the leading cause of death for that age group'

(DDE) '...did your schools emphasise 'how' to help or be helped?

(Vanni) In my school…because we were all stressed about GCSE... we had several systems to talk about MH to an adult…but it felt like you were forced to go to get help even if you were unsure about it…Many did not know whether they had 'issues', and such forcing to talk was …I don't know…perhaps it was to ensure no one suffered in silence?

---

[76] CAMHS' support ends one month after someone turns 18 and the now 'adult' patient cannot benefit from CAHMS' *ad hoc* MH service.

(Juss): '…whereas my school had a school counsellor…a referral system…and so many kids asking for it…you could get one per week or two weeks visits.

Despite some disjointed and yet relevant 'lived experiences' reported in the third person, flagging up different facets of MH and ways to manage it, I found it interesting we were considering what constituted mental ill-health.[77] I asked if they knew anyone with serious MH issues, and most students nodded or put their hands up. I shouted: 'whaau!…I see you all have one…school-related? …what kind of MH? Does it affect you?' - no answers. My fieldnote captures my disappointment but acknowledges the importance of their partial voices:

> In a less proactive focus group today, most seemed too shy. Several excellent points were made, though: 1) MH issues as widely spread in secondary, related to gender too; 2) the controversy of feeling 'pushed' to disclose MH problems (the same issue came up in discussion with my students' school-counsellors in my old school, the feel of having to find a diagnosis for feeling in specific ways despite undefined or undefinable symptoms); 3) hence, the issue of what constitutes mental health, mental ill-health and mental disorder – the documentary should have touched on this.

This fieldnote synthesises how focus groups provided rich *propositional knowing,* but the method-related limitations could not be undermined; focus groups were less valuable to identify MH in participants' terms of 'lived experiences'.

---

[77] That day, in my fieldnotes, I asked: ''How many students 'with lived experiences' will fill the college life-satisfaction questionnaire compared to those who would associate mental ill-health with the recurring 'feeling blue' day?''

4.1.1.5 The six themes

Two months into the fieldwork, I trained each group on the 6-phase Reflexive TA; the groups commenced analyzing the data consisting of written material. I also summarized impressions from my fieldnotes, including comments from college-leaders. The analysis was fun and, in PAR terms, significant because student-participants realized the volume of data they had generated. Eventually, both groups created codes that captured specific data segments, and two representatives from each group met over two lunchtimes to generate themes. Finally, the themes returned to each group, and Phase 5 (defining and naming themes) achieved consensus; we were ready to use them to construct the questionnaire and as focus group topics.

Around mid-November, one focus group session (Wednesdays) was very productive because we returned to the questionnaire for one last time; unfortunately, the recording failed. However, from my post-focus group fieldnotes, I recalled that student-participants regarded the six themes as comprehensive, and constructing the questionnaire helped them further comprehend the theme. Also, they suggested that they had enjoyed elaborating/explaining the themes when helping friends fill out the questionnaire, enhancing participation. Therefore, this section summarizes the key points made during three focus groups when we looked at the six themes, by covering the intersection between the themes, the common-sensical links between the themes and MH, and giving a sense of their complexity.

For example, Alby says, '…lack of sleep affects you in the long run, simple things like not being able to find a book can become stressful, bringing you down. Divvy, '…well going to school just gets you tired, especially long hrs like here 1.5 hrs lessons…'.

Here, I raise the point about transitioning to a new college, urging students to put things into context. Ellinois takes the cue suggesting: '…well, actually, I feel we have more freedom now, so I can easily procrastinate…so we may push ourselves on different things that may not be educationally related'. At this point, I draw on my PhD experience to show how I balance self-motivation and self-conduct with other priorities like my young family and working part-time. My point was that sleep deprivation is a constant threat, a signal that well-being is always at stake, and here I invite more personalized examples. Four of the ten participants put their hands up. And Gabs suggested:

> Well… it [sleep deprivation] just started to happen…there is a lot to balance right now, I'm from far away, coming from a girls' school…got to balance education demands and social life, wanting to build one here…so I believe a lot is happening right now.

In support, I stressed that change was their normal or 'new normal' in life from then on, hoping they saw that 'they' had a part to play. The following quotes, however, show some perceived doubts about priorities, how to proceed and obstacles:

> (Ellinois) Well, the college expects us to make friends when we have no time to do so, we have 15hrs to study/revise so where is the time? …so, we need more intro stuff before jumping on the stress of the curriculum and lessons.

> (Alby) '...but also like…the pressures to get a job, coming here is expensive, fitting [in] a job then upsets all the things like studying and making friends, socialise'

In response, I purposefully gave the impression I was not convinced; their legitimate responses seemed to focus on college obstacles rather than opportunities; even though I empathised with students working Friday-Sunday affecting their overall 'performance', I called for more evidence that justified, as it were, less agentic thinking:

> (Ellinois) I think we're thrown onto the deep end…metaphorically…as you try to keep afloat, other things pull you down…so like…imagine if you got your mental difficulties, then that's an extra weight…school doesn't teach you the basics, they expect us to cope with it all…so if you're not used to the new environment then…like time management's not taught!

> (Vanni) 'And there's like… counsellors and MH advisers, but no one checks daily…like secondary school tutors or close friends, now you get to get help if needed…we see tutors once per week with little relationships'.

Given the public nature of a focus group, I perceived student participants' voices mixed with general accounts; some seemed genuinely concerned, and others joked about just being lazy or having lazy friends who found excuses to raise issues related to MH. Even the last two responses were 'general' but essential. I tried to keep the conversation going without questioning their arguments.

I turned to Izzie, subdued, asking how things were going and what she thought about in-college 'relationships' (the last student had mentioned 'relationships'). Izzie responded: '...it's more work to do now, and that's stress on you…I mean... not many teachers like in secondary school, I mean, only the three [A-Levels] teachers, but it's still a lot'. Next, Ellinois intervened, suggesting '…you know now teachers come in, power-point on, teach, go…no relationships which is crucial to express yourself or build the confidence to do so in the new environment'. I next stressed Ellinois' indirect reference to motivation which could result from subject inspiration linked to relationships with teachers. Juss elaborated: '…well, about relationships…teachers I've had don't ask if you need help…they just say, 'do it next time' if you don't do homework, there's no detention, chase…they may not have time, there is no time to relax as a whole…'. I suggest that getting organised with study groups and sharing experiences could help, attracting Alby's comment, '…the thing with it though is that it's too early, revision for what? Plus, relationships do need time'! I share my recent experience with peer relationships through the current PhD, highlighting the importance of networking and peer support via a WhatsUp group chat, joking about how we called the group 'PhD Survivors' Silence followed until Izzie made a brief relevant point '…sir, sometimes it's too many things to juggle with, and one thing can pull you down and...'.

This comment echoed Ellinois' earlier general remarks and clearly illustrated the multiple college-life demands in a new environment, the perception that there are, suddenly, 'too many things'. In addition, some unconscious pressure related to time underpinned students' wide range of responses, inevitable for sixth formers in transition to adulthood (which may not compare with my situation). Therefore, I tried to steer the conversation towards other themes, so I asked if 'exam pressure' was the 'elephant in the room'. Only Ellinois was keen to respond:

> Well, yes…there is already, we're reminded of the 15hrs of study commitment …so if you don't do that, it's frowned upon and maybe passed on to your parents, who get annoyed…yes, I know it's only two years, but you know …there should be some relaxation.

Having only one student reacting to my (kind of) provocation about 'exam pressure' was ambivalent, maybe justified by the fact that year-12 do not sit exams and yet, having just finished GCSE, another set of high-stake examinations were only a year and a half ahead. Was it avoidance?

Unawareness? Or fear of showing fear for exams? Therefore, I turned to 'perfectionism' because Mickey (the other group) had mentioned it in earlier sessions and linked it to exam pressure, competition and aspiration. I asked the group what they thought Mickey referred to; some guessed it was college work-related, others about being 'the best', others about looking good; Saddy, who used to wear a hijab and removed it in year-9 (more later), was surprised by the college's feel: '…this college is ok with body image'. No others brought in personal experiences.

I turned to the theme Motivation, and here things were more personalized:

(Alby) '...to survive well daily is my motivation and also for the future''

(Ellinois) '…well no, I don't think like that…I think about what has to be done now,

like HW for tomorrow'.

Though these sounded positive, as it were, where they should have been in terms of perception, Vic's critical interjection struck as unfavourable - Vic: '…there is nothing to drive us out of that situation…I'm doing it because I have to do it!'. Therefore, I linked Vic's point to increased responsibilities and higher expectations from education and society *writ large*; I did so not to pressurise them, but, sensing a slight malaise through the silence, I suggested that we would pick up these points during interviews. One of my fieldnotes captures some key discussion points.

> Livelier focus group today, though only a few spoke regularly! Some exciting implications between relationships and motivation: the tutor role's perception seems different compared to secondary school tutors due to the new setting? This insight matches my informant and gatekeeper's chats; **it seems complicated for teachers/tutors to establish rapport, and the psychotherapist flagged this up too**. Students do not seem to understand the reasons why tutors are 'less caring' while in transition to university; **plus, having fewer sanctions and fewer rewards by their tutors seems to confuse their 'conduct'** – i.e., rewards seem ways to check on themselves and assess how they are performing? Find out! **Finally, 'motivation' was not picked up as vigorously as in the enrichment, and the literature suggests motivation is vital.** Several indirect references to subjectivity and agency were made in the form of more intimate reflections, interesting!

4.1.1.6 Conclusion: consolidating 'propositional knowing'

The focus groups offered initial nuance or *propositional knowing* about the six themes. For example, in addition to 'exam pressure' and 'external factors', student-participants insisted on 'material deprivation' as a significant cause for adolescent MH. Secondly, student-participants were keen to draw in generalised views and experiences of friends and relatives affected by mental ill-health due to financial deprivation without detailed references to personal experiences. Finally, they questioned widely used MH definitions as not representing their views or experiences. This disagreement led to exploring alternative definitions and/or argumentation about health and MH, which they could identify with (see chapter 6). Thus, we came up with our own 'definition' of MH (i.e., the spectrum as a framework), which helped at interview time to contextualise: i) a broad and perhaps inadequate notion of MH; ii) personal 'lived experiences' or those of peers; iii) those MH issues which we had learned about in documentaries and podcasts. These three points relate to the 'subjective configuration' concept (Gonzalez Rey, 2009) to contextualise student-participants' MH – further unpicked in chapter 5.

Undoubtedly, the issue of establishing what constituted positive MH and mental ill-health vis-a-vis education and college life was a crucial overarching finding of focus groups, opening broader ontological and rhetorical questions about the meaning and aims of education. Other key preliminary findings included the reference to 'material deprivation' (later themed as 'Money/Resources') and 'exam pressure' as possible poles representing the external vs internal factors influencing MH. The 'relationships' with teachers/tutors and peers developed around the increased demands of attending college, both academic and social; the 'college- environment' *per se* and 'motivation' were mentioned but rarely elaborated.

Overall, my summary of focus groups' impressions and preliminary findings was welcomed by most participants and the MH&WB Team, mainly because there was nothing definitive about the findings. Instead, they represented *propositional knowing*, to be tested later at interviews and further triangulated. The findings also suggest that students were refining their 'expertise', drawing from enrichment sessions and proposing some key analytical points. Therefore, the next section elaborates on the focus group findings generated from (selected) questionnaire results.

4.2 Stage 2 – Consultation-Questionnaire: The Generative Impact of PAR

As noted earlier, the materials we generated during enrichment and focus groups, ongoing reflections in the form of PAR's 'appreciative inquiries', including how to improve the sessions, helped cement the 'PAR spirit' despite initial (constructive) disagreements.

Excellent examples of the 'generative' impact of PAR as a democratic platform were offered by the selection process of the 47 questions for the questionnaire. About 100 questions were reviewed; first, with the four teachers and the MH&WBTeam, who helped improve the wording and eliminate some repetitive questions, then the headship team, who contested some questions. The headship team felt that some questions unfairly singled out the college while others addressed previous educational experiences. The gatekeeper mediated the iterative back-and-forth discussion process between the student-participants and the headship team. Such a mediation illustrated how Stage 2 widened bottom-up participation and, once finalised, reached the wider college population. Some questions were more of a concern to one year group than the other – e.g., exam pressure for year-13s. Taken together, making the questionnaire and analysing results worked as preliminary findings to 'think with' during interviews (i.e., critical to the generative potential of participative enquiry). Interviews (Stage 3) gave student-participants the advantage of building on focus group topics by commenting on the questionnaire results, offering me 'actionable' insights when interviewing the more comprehensive research group.

These processes helped form a community of researchers, although the seven focus groups did not always draw on personal lived experiences. For example, some student-participants suggested that the presence of the microphone and sitting in a circle were too much of a change compared to less formal enrichments, which put them at ease. However, interviews played out precisely in the opposite way as students personalised their responses.

4.2.1 PAR in action: developing the questionnaire

The student-participants (N16) constructed the questionnaire and made it available to the student population online (about N500) through Qualtrics software. We designed it as a 'life-satisfaction' consultation questionnaire after two months of fieldwork. It took three weeks to complete the process, that is, to make the questionnaire, reach 500 students, and collect and analyse the responses. In week one, 74 responses were obtained which, according to my gatekeeper, was the highest student-consultation response ever obtained in one week. The questionnaire aimed to break down the six themes and make them accessible through questions for the broader student population while keeping in mind the research focus.

The questionnaire involved attaching a set of questions for each theme that further unpacked the theme, drawing from the expertise generated through the enrichments and focus groups and systematically referring to the broad research question. For example, in one enrichment session, student-participants got into pairs or small groups and created a set of questions which we eventually collected for a total of about 100 questions across the two groups. One student from each group typed all the questions, and in another enrichment session, each group made an initial selection of questions by eliminating similar or repetitive ones to reach about 50. Then, the gatekeeper discussed them with the headship team, and I also consulted the teachers and the MH&WBTeam. While some participants suggested that some questions were too specific, the headship team argued that the questions were more general and about the schooling journey. After a brief iterative exchange which involved rephrasing the questions and agreeing to eliminate some, 47 final questions were agreed upon and approved.

The exercise in breaking down the themes via a set of questions was important because student-participants had noted that even if the six themes were comprehensive, they were too broad. Attaching a set of questions to each theme helped me comprehend, working backwards, the coding process better. The usefulness of such iteration was made more explicit later on, at the questionnaire analysis point (below), when analysing the questionnaire results provided: (1) tighter focus on each theme as a consequence of having widened participation; (2) more reflexive opportunities; (3) a mid-term checkpoint to test student-participants knowledge and understanding and application of essential vocabulary; (4) critical thinking opportunities through the questions' selection process and the questionnaire data results.

4.2.2 Questionnaire's findings: first layer of analysis

Two layers of analysis were undertaken - first, when we co-analysed all the answers, and second when we decided to analyse three specific sections of the questionnaire.

85% of respondents were female, in line with the research's student-participants ratio, while the year-to-year comparison was more balanced than the student-participants take-up (i.e., 43% of respondents were year-13, while only two student-participants were year-13). In this section, I present a small summary of each theme's response to questions that addressed the theme's codes (as listed below), and I compare the focus groups' findings, even though the two influenced each other because of the stages' interleaving.

1. **Money/resources –** material deprivation linked to lack of success, no extra tuition to succeed, limited access to resources;

2. **External factors** – lack of time for homework/revision, less freedom for personal growth and exploration, physical stress, poor sleep, living in a 'performance' culture/society;

3. **Exam pressure –** revision and more revision, fear of failure, parental and teacher pressures affecting the enjoyment of learning;

4. **Relationships**– peer pressure, competition, appearance, perfectionism, impact on authenticity, constant comparisons/judgment, fear of being excluded;

5. **College-environment** – ethos/culture, atmosphere, physical structure, types of rules, and expectations in and outside classrooms;

6. **Motivation** – subject inspiration, everyone must fit the same schooling system, having to please others at the expense of oneself (Intrinsic or hidden theme: feeling overburdened by responsibilities).

'Money/Resources' was divided into six questions, and responses were mixed, with only 27% saying that they did have part-time work, only 7% having a private tutor and 78% having a quiet place to study and access to a computer, with 55% claiming that such resources had made a positive difference in their education and overall MH. As Fig.17 below shows, the relevance and ranking of this theme, top of the ranking in the focus group discussions, was inverted in the consultation

questionnaire (re-addressed later). However, 'relationships' and 'external factors' were relatively stable in both stages and revealed how closely related they were.

Figure 17: screenshot of focus group and questionnaire's ranking of six main themes
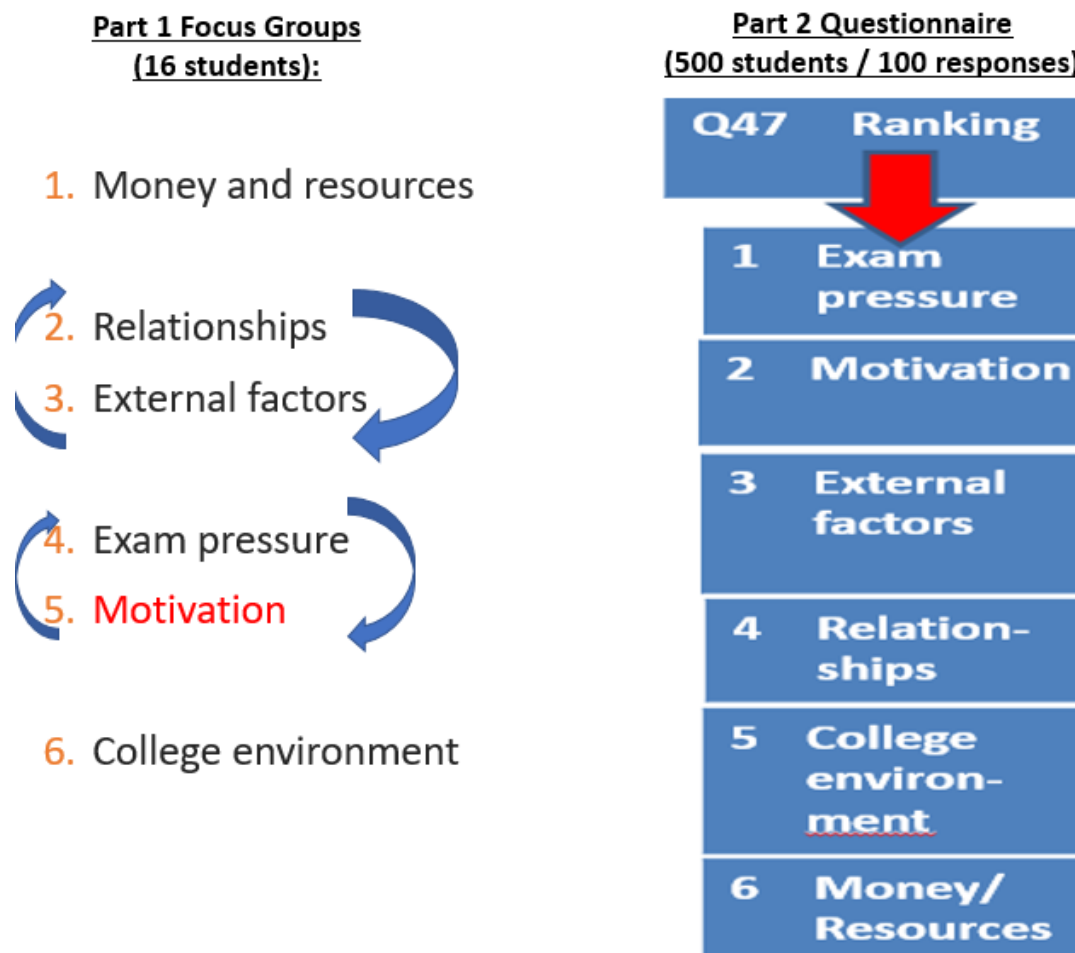
'Relationships' was divided into four questions, and most responses were positive about establishing good relationships in college; however, the importance of peers' opinions (i.e., pressure) slightly dropped at A-Level. 'External factors' was divided into eight questions, and responses pointed to a significant negative influence of drivers on MH, such as family and peer (i.e., external to college) relationships. This point was partially evident by the open-ended answers (analyzed separately below), where the negative influence of living in a 'performance society' stood out, and 'poor sleep' strongly affected 66% of respondents.

As for 'Exam Pressure' and 'Motivation', the two stages offered a strong inversion, too, like 'Money/Resources' (Fig.16 above). The fourth and fifth positions they held in stage 1 got inverted to 1st and 2nd for stage 2. As explained earlier, having more year-13s answering the questionnaire might have impacted such a trend change.

'Exam Pressure' was divided into twelve questions, ranging widely from exam preparation to parental and teacher pressure and the relationship between learning and passing exams. The meaningful results were unequivocal, as shown by general discontent, with 81% strongly admitting that the prospect of exam failure negatively influenced their MH, and 64% felt that compulsory education had put them under unnecessary pressure to improve their exam results. Interestingly, parental pressure to succeed in exams increased by 12% from GCSE to A-Level.

Similarly, the questions on 'Motivation' (seven) ranged widely between intrinsic and extrinsic focus, which paired motivation with: education, teachers, subjects, the future, the self, and responsibility. The perceived general motivation was low for the time of the year (October) for 24% of respondents, alongside low self-motivation for 25%; however, only 28% said that teachers had motivated them, and only 37% said that A-Level subjects had been motivational. Thus, the schooling journey was only motivational for 31% of respondents. Conversely, the future seemed to motivate over 50% strongly. Interestingly, the link between motivation and a sense of responsibility was extrapolated from one final question, asking if students felt responsible for their achievement, receiving one of the highest % responses in the questionnaire, 91%, which resonated with the literature about the notion of 'responsibilisation' (see Chapter 6).

Finally, 'School/College-environment' was divided into three questions about the ethos/culture (developed through assemblies, the pedagogy, and the curriculum), the built environment (not just the structure and spaces but also guidelines on how to occupy them) and the general atmosphere ('feel' and 'buzz' of the college). Such a key theme (for me), even though students themselves identified it, was consistently regarded 'less' in terms of influence on MH; nonetheless, though, only 30% felt that, over the years, educational environments had had a direct positive influence on their MH, and 37% saw rules and expectations as creating unnecessary stress. These percentages mean that students themselves could capture the theme's implications but, perhaps, did not see its centrality (see Chapter 7).

4.2.3 Second layer of analysis – 'grouped' findings

The following findings, which I labelled 'Grouped Findings' 1, 2, and 3, looked at the three most popular sections of the questionnaire. These were 'popular' in my eyes and those of the student-participants, who analysed the questionnaire's responses and identified those three areas as offering a comprehensive analytical scenario (fieldnotes). Not only did the 'Grouped findings' address the broad research question comprehensively but facilitated discussions involving the six themes. My informant (a teacher), the gatekeeper (assistant headteacher) and the counsellor checked the grouping criteria to ensure PAR's consistency through co-intention and 'confirmation bias' mitigation. However, while ethical considerations of transparency and coherence with the methodology supported rigour and credibility, and even though I included student-participants' analysis and the feedback to my analysis, the final interpretation of this part of the data is mine, in line with 'degrees of PAR' and unavoidable limitations of doing PAR through a PhD. [78]

Thus, the focus on the selected three groups of questions resulted from analysis/review/discussion of the whole questionnaire, a productive reflexive and participative exercise for three reasons: i) the groupings reflected our critique of the initial 100 questions by cutting them to 47 with the contribution of the headship team; ii) extensive discussions in enrichment sessions and focus groups clarified further how the six themes overlapped; iii) a questionnaire only could not represent students' full views (here a specific criticism was raised against the Likert scale – i.e. the middle range 'sometimes' could have been changed into 'not sure'). Thus, I am reporting the findings through a similar analytical scheme employed in the enrichment sessions, which identified the three grouped findings. I then analyse their significance by also going back to fieldnotes and focus group discussion transcripts on extrapolating what counts as 'our' analysis:

---

[78] Having said this, other participants like parents and teachers were able to contribute ('member checking' or 'participant validation') to 'my' findings of stage 1 and 2.

(I)   The first four statements (see S1-S4 Table 7), whose results offered an 'orientation' about students' MH.

(II)   Q12/13 from the 'external factors' theme; these questions were the only open-ended questions of the questionnaire and worked well for Reflexive TA, which is best suited to inductivity and requires more developed answers.

(III)   Q46/47 were different, but both synoptic types of questions, hence their pairing to emphasise the findings – i.e., while Q46 was a zooming-out of the educational journey, Q47 zoomed in the six themes.

4.2.3.1 Grouped findings (i) – S1-S4

Table 7: questionnaire's starting statement summary

SUMMARY results of the 4 statements		%
S1. My general mental health is a problem.		83
S2. My general mental health does limit my SOCIAL college life		73
S3. My general mental health does limit my ACADEMIC college life.		75
S4. Overall, I feel confident about my future mental health.		31

The four statements, later re-used for the interviews, invited student-participants to expand and talk through their MH at the interview instead of seeing MH as a categorical good/lousy diagnostic. However, as questionnaire responses, the statements had a limitation implicit to the Likert scale, as the student-participants acknowledged. The statements' result (Table 7 above) suggested an overall malaise amongst respondents, with 83% being negative about their perceived

(current) MH - as shown below (Fig.18) we summed up 'sometimes/mostly/very much' as unfavorable:[79]

Figure 18: Qualtrics screenshot of the questionnaire's Q1 results

Q1. My general mental health .... a problem.

#	Answer	%	Count
1	is not at all	4.05%	3
2	is not much of	12.16%	9
3	is sometimes	51.35%	38
4	is mostly	17.57%	13
5	is very much	14.86%	11
	Total	100%	74

S1 became more visible through S2 and S3 by showing how respondents' current MH negatively influenced SOCIAL (73% - the sum of 'does sometimes' and 'does very much'):

---

[79] The screenshot from Qualtrics shows Q1 instead of S1. This is something I could not rectify as Qualtrics did not offer the option to change it.

Figure 19: Qualtrics screenshot of the questionnaire's Q2 results

Q2 - My general mental health .... limit my SOCIAL college life.

#	Answer	%	Count
1	does not	27.03%	20
2	does sometimes	59.46%	44
3	does very much	13.51%	10
	Total	100%	74

And ACADEMIC lives (76% - the sum of 'does sometimes' and 'does very much'):

Figure 20: Qualtrics screenshot of the questionnaire's Q3 results

Q3 - My general mental health .... limit my ACADEMIC college life.

#	Answer	%	Count
1	does not	24.32%	18
2	does sometimes	37.84%	28
3	does very much	37.84%	28
	Total	100%	74

However, a combined 71% (sum of 'extremely', 'moderately' and 'slightly' <u>easy</u>) felt confident[80] about their future MH, as opposed to a combined 29% (sum of 'neither …nor' and 'slightly' <u>difficult</u>) feeling not that confident:

Figure 21: Qualtrics screenshot of the questionnaire's Q4 results

Q4 - Overall, I feel ………………confident about my future mental health.

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Extremely easy	4.05%	3
2	Moderately easy	27.03%	20
3	Slightly easy	39.19%	29
4	Neither easy nor difficult	24.32%	18
5	Slightly difficult	5.41%	4
	Total	100%	74

---

[80]The Q4 slide from Qualtrics contains a mistake with the additional use of the word '<u>easy</u> and <u>difficult</u>'. This was rectified on the Qualtrics questionnaire's instruction, and an email was sent to the student population to focus on the qualifiers (extremely, moderately, etc.) plus the word 'confident' only. To make the correction and re-send a new Qualtrics link would have been confusing.

4.2.3.2 Grouped findings (ii) – Q12/13 from 'external factors' theme

We created the following table to collect and organise responses which ranged from one-word answers to short statements. Here are the two questions:

Q12. Which **other** external factors may affect your mental health <u>negatively</u> at college? Add a minimum of one or up to three, separated by a comma:

Q13. Which **other** external factors may affect your mental health <u>positively</u> at college? Add a minimum of one or up to three, separated by a comma:

(To note: in Table 8 below, see in grey the 'internal factors' [to the college] that were not technically supposed to be there because we were looking at external factors. However, the student-participants wanted to include them regardless, showing that the internal/external separation was difficult. See also, in light blue, the three major grouping themes. The rest in yellow are codes I report as they came up in the responses).

Table 8: questionnaire's grouped finding (ii) response

Global theme	Organising theme	Basic themes (codes)	Frequency
The relationship between education and adolescent MH	What students have control of: e.g. ''I'm scared of failing and disappoint my parents/ I feel alone in college''	Motivation	6
		Priorities differ between teachers and parents	2
		Deadlines	2
		Diet	3
		Stress/Worry	18
		Sleep	4
		Social media	2
		Friendship	26
		Hobbies	3
	Not control of: parents too, the society too''	Homework/workload	5
		Subject choice	4
		People no honest	1
		Lack of time for tasks and HW	2
		Lack of time for myself	4
		Teachers' expectations	13
		Negative people	
		Societal pressures to perform 24/7	4
		Financial situation at home	5
		Responsibilities	1
		Interesting/boring lessons	1
		Good world views	1
		Praise	1
		Being listened to	1
	A mix of both: e.g. ''being listened to helps/ bad grades put me down''	Family	23
		Bad grades	2
		Crowds	1
		Relationships	6
		Past events	1
		Counseling	4

4.2.3.3 Grouped findings (iii): Q46/47

Q46: during the focus group, student-participants suggested that Q46 (Fig.22) invited reflexive and instinctive responses (as shown during interviews later), of which 43% were negative (combining 'not at all' and 'not much') and representing a trend across other quantifiable negative responses. This initially indicated how the research focus (i.e., the relationship between education and adolescent MH) was negatively perceived:

Figure 22: Qualtrics screenshot of the questionnaire's Q46 results

Q46 - Do you feel the education system has served you well in the past 12 years?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	not at all	13.51%	10
2	not much	29.73%	22
3	sometimes	37.84%	28
4	mostly	14.86%	11
5	very much so	4.05%	3
	Total	100%	74

Q47: (see Fig.23 below for a summary slide) Q47 asked to rank the six themes in order of importance. 'Exam pressure' came at the very top, explained by the high number of year-13s preparing for final exams and responding to the questionnaire; this may suggest a similar correlation for year-12 who do not sit any exams, though it is hazardous to assume an equation with no exam worries. However, as Fig.23 shows, 'Motivation' is higher on the ranking too, just 1% below 'Exam Pressure', a dominant theme too during interviews, but of a lesser status during focus groups.

Figure 23: Qualtrics screenshot of the questionnaire's Q47 results

Q47 Ranking		1	2	3	% first 3 choices
			First 3 choices		
1	Exam pressure	36.99%	16.44%	20.55%	Approx 74%
2	Motivation	19.18%	39.73%	12.33%	Approx 73%
3	External factors	27.40%	20.55%	20.55%	Approx 69%
4	Relation-ships	8.22%	12.33%	21.92%	Approx 42%
5	College environ-ment	4.11%	4.11%	15.07%	Approx 23%
6	Money/ Resources	4.11%	6.85%	10.96%	Approx 22%

4.2.3.4 Discussion of grouped finding

<u>*Significance of the starting four Statements **and Q46**:*</u>

The four statements in this grouping required a degree of retrospection due to explicit references to past experiences; hence, as far as the student-participants were concerned, to group in Q46 with the four Statements made sense (a great insight I applied to my final analysis). In this way, Q47's ranking analysis acquired more significance because the question required sorting six main themes and a more developed argumentation.

Student-participants tended to associate the 'negative' perception of their current MH with gender; thus, they suggested that 85% of female respondents and the associated worsening MH amongst that group would be reflected in internalised schooling issues that made them perceive

the present negatively, hence such a high score. Conversely, we argued that girls were more ready, or prone, than boys to embrace resilience to sustain their outlook into the future, benefitting from 'opening up' about MH compared to boys and, therefore, a better future MH-wise. A student-participant (Juss) backed the claim by referring to the increase in the suicide rate amongst 20-40-year-old males (fieldnotes). Similarly, most agreed that a generally negative MH perception affected respondents' academic and social life in college, keeping the negative trend in line with the broad first question.

Finally, the low 'confidence about their future MH' (31% only) did not corroborate student-participants' claim that having more girls participate in the consultation questionnaire would have meant a better perception of the future.

Significance of Q12/13:

I carried out Coding Reliability TA (a deductive approach, coming to the data with the pre-established six themes) of Q12/13's open-ended answers that drew in the influence of 'external factors' on MH. I reported through Table 8 above the same analytical criteria or 'organizing themes' employed in the focus group discussions of the questionnaire where the 'external factors' were classified as '*what students have control of - no control of - a mix of both*'.

The most popular responses were grouped under 'stress/worry', 'family', and 'friendship', while 'teacher expectations' (an 'internal factor') attracted several mentions. Even though respondents should have focused on 'external factors', the mistake (or misinterpretation) with 'internal' might be expected - i.e., I noticed the mistake throughout my teaching career, and the gatekeeper told me it was a widespread practice mistake when they carried out whole-college surveys. Notably, the mistake indicated how difficult it was for students to separate stress/worry from specific life stressors, such as parents' and teachers' expectations, for whom exam failure often meant failure in life.

Finally, when comparing GCSE results with long-term out-of-school friends, several student-participants cited un/success as leading to breaking relationships. Relationship breakup was a significant finding as it matched other results from the questionnaire, matching precisely with the theme 'Relationship', and was associated with worsening MH during such critical transition times.

Significance of Q47's ranking:

One explanation for 'Motivation' being high up in the ranking could have been the consultation timing, beginning of November, when students were typically still motivated to engage in learning. I deduced this based on my experience as a teacher and in consultation with other adult participants. However, motivation was also a 'rich' concept, so while Q42 ('do your A-Level subjects motivate you?) showed that 32% of respondents were keen on their subjects (Fig.24), it was not the same at the interview time, which took place from mid-January, when I had to add new layers of analysis to explain perceived lack of motivation.

Figure 24: Qualtrics screenshot of the questionnaire's Q42 results

Q42 - Do your A-Level subjects motivate you?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	not at all	8.11%	6
2	not much	24.32%	18
3	sometimes	31.08%	23
4	mostly	27.03%	20
5	very much so	9.46%	7
	Total	100%	74

Overall, 'exam pressure', 'motivation' and specific 'external factors' were the first three life stressors for the questionnaire's respondents, as opposed to 'money and resources' (bottom of the ranking). However, as explained earlier, during the enrichments and focus groups, 'money/resources' often translated into 'material deprivation' and was a recurrent topic that student-participants used to explain poor MH. Such divergent findings between stages 1 and 2 represented an interesting area to explore at interview time and were going to be important finally.

The relevance of 'material deprivation' was also ranked low at interview time, but that could be because student-participants were not fully aware of the links of their lives to Bourdieu's 'capitals'.

As for the 'School/College-environment' theme, most participants underplayed the literature review's emphasis on its multifaceted impact; only 4% chose it as first in the ranking. Again, it was productive to unpack this response at interview time and see that I could have phrased the question differently or added additional questions.

Finally, 'external factors' were a large and heterogeneous collection and, as we learned from Table 8, tended to include the negative influence of (bad) 'relationships' (parent/peers') on attainment/achievement and their MH.

Conclusion: Discussion of Preliminary Findings within a PAR Framework

The six themes generated by student-participants through Reflexive TA underwent further scrutiny through focus groups. My first preliminary data analysis of focus group transcripts included triangulation between i) focus group findings, ii) questionnaire results analysis, and iii) the fieldnotes, which interleaved during the first two months. Reflexive TA criteria such as *frequency* and *keyness* (Braun and Clarke, 2006; 2022) of themes unlocked the 'explorative stage' for the research group and my *solo* PhD requirements. This unlocking means I had to start making the fairest distinction between the 'signals and noise' of data.

After two months of fieldwork, two interleaved stages of data collection produced results that fed into each other and worked as preliminary analyses before I conducted my analysis. The latter would substantiate new layers of interpretation despite the peculiarity of each method. Although, for example, the student-participants were mainly year-12, and only two were year-13, at analysis points, the year-12s had to step into the shoes of what it meant to be year-13 and have more pressing concerns regarding coming up exams, which they did not seem to have. Mickey, the only year-13 who stayed till the end of the research, was pivotal to the group because her commitment and acumen helped capture the year-13s' mood. Furthermore, stages 1 and 2 produced a constructive conflict of interest between me, college-leaders and students-participants, followed by a reflexive mitigation stage, leading to a balancing act between i) student-participants' focus on college life rather than the prior experience of schooling, ii) college-leaders preoccupied with

the prospect of decontextualized results if the questionnaire focused only on college life; iii) my personal interest to gain perspectives on past schooling experiences as well as the current ones, helpful to unpick at interview time with ALL participants and map out patterns of experiential meaning-making.

By eventually agreeing on the final questions of the questionnaire, we coalesced with the 'PAR spirit', instantiating inclusive, informed, iterative, rigorous, and insightful knowledge generation, mitigating each participant's 'confirmation bias' further. Such productive processes fed into focus groups which addressed the six themes (and the questionnaire's results) as *propositional knowing* to further unpick at interviews.

In sum, following the enrichment sessions, the questionnaire, and the focus groups, it had become apparent that perceived lack of time and uncertainties stemming from subject choices at GCSE and A-Level, impending university choices through UCAS applications, career prospects, employability and work-passion got manifested in often unmanageable feelings. The most lamented one was that GCSE and A-Level subject choices were too close timewise, and most student-participants indicated that they had been 'pushed' rather than having made independent choices via the 'option blocks' schools provided. This point was explored by Abrahams (2018) in a paper that highlighted, through the play on words '*option blocks that block options*', the inequalities in GCSE and A-Level options in England. Consequently, the lack of trust in their university's subject choice (i.e., year-12s were starting to prepare their UCAS application with their tutors) seemed to be a stressor.

'Motivation' was a significant theme from day one, but it never took off in focus groups. Following the questionnaire, Motivation had become more visible within the other themes, casting further light on them. For example, 'Money/Resources' and parental 'Relationships' became more prominent as motivational factors; how to manage 'exam pressure' was now a un/motivational factor, and 'External Factors' brought forward societal expectations as motivational, amongst others.

A sense of extra responsibility became prominent too as influencing MH, due to increasing teachers' and parents' expectations, as much as indirect parental pressure – i.e., not wanting to disappoint those parents who were hard-working, undemanding, kind and lovely. A growing sense of 'responsibility', part of a growing neoliberal 'responsibilisation' agenda, opened up to greater

emotional involvement during a time of more intrapersonal and existential turmoil caused by society. Feeling guilty for not having the motivation and lack of clarity about the near future were common, and I will unpick them in chapter 6.

Finally, I searched for related literature (J. Clarke, 2005; Fine et al., 2003; McLeod, 2017; Reay, 2018; Rose & Lentzos, 2017) that responded to these preliminary findings; the literature pointed directly at the impact of participants' heterogeneous positionalities. For example, college-leaders (the gatekeeper, the MH&WBTeam, the Career officer and teachers) seemed caught in administrative vs psychological traps that came with their 'roles' (McAvoy, 2009), while an existential malaise across student-participants and the student population prevailed (still no parents' involvement at this stage). This malaise was shown gradually and differently through the two stages. The activities in stage 1 were the first means to Heron and Reason's (2008) *propositional knowing* because participant engagement produced the intellectual knowledge of ideas or theories that began to explain MH in and through the college-environment. Stage 2 worked inclusively and reflexively, nuancing the initial insights of stage 1 and challenging them, further preparing 'us' for the primary stage of data collection, the interviews, the analysis of which follows in the next four chapters.

Chapter 5 – Subject Positions and the MH spectrum: a Starting Orientation

Introduction

The previous chapter presented the co-analysis of core explorative data generated through a layered and interleaved stage, lasting about four months, with plenty of iterations across participants; the stage prepared the ground for the 'primary stage' of data collection and generation through an interview comprising two tasks. This chapter presents my analysis of the interview's task 1, which offered an 'orientation'[81] about the student-participants MH and how their stories illuminated the 'subject positions' available in the college-environment. While initially presenting subject positions that may seem 'fixed', I gradually introduce their fluidity, with examples further analyzed in the following chapters.

I introduce the rationale behind task 1 to draw out participants' responses that best expressed the subjectivity-MH link through 'subject positions', a link which I illustrate through how student-participants cope with schooling-related stressors. Through a three-part subject position typology (Peruzzo, 2020) and task 1, I tried to understand the orientation by looking at schooling stressors and how participants' responses showed the influence of schooling on MH without excluding 'external factors'. This orientation was essential to show that Peruzzo's categories were fluid, how students managed them through various coping mechanisms and that any references to 'resources' included people, material and lived experiences of MH as determinants of subject positions.

Finally, I address the three RQs by starting to look at: i) the influence of a 'testing' culture (RQ1), ii) 'roles' of social actors (RQ2), and iii) whatever other factors come to influence adolescent MH in and through the school/college-environment (RQ3). A diary entry task helped refine the questions.

---

[81] I borrowed the idea of 'orientation' from Antonovsky (1987; 1996) which uses Salutogenesis theories (i.e., why people are healthy) to assess one's MH.

5.1 A 'DIARY' Entry (08 January 2020, afternoon)

Just after Christmas, student-participants decided to carry out the 'DIARY entry' (Appx-18) after missed attempts to make it a weekly routine and part of the 'explorative stage' of data collection. So, in January 2021, students re-engaged with the research through individual reflections by commenting on the first four months at college and in preparation for the interview.[82]

Once I collected, collated and photocopied their responses, I handed them back for group feedback, consisting of comparisons and contrasts; students used two coloured highlighters to interrogate the data's similarities and differences. In the following enrichment session, I created a summary presentation as 'my analysis' (2nd order construct) of 'their' analysis (1st order), which I presented in bullet points format. Here, student-participants offered feedback on my analysis and added/built/challenged accordingly. They made me notice (further) the *keyness* (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.10) of Motivation and the pressure of UCAS applications through the EBIs (Even-Better-If), which I had not fully considered till then.

The agreed EBIs of the first four months were:

- <u>reducing fear of failure</u> (i.e., students wished they had been more 'capable', especially at GCSE, but also now at the start of their A-Levels, to reduce their fear of failure, which, at times, was paralysing)

- <u>reducing exam pressure</u> (i.e., reducing the way they had experienced the pressure but also the wish that their teachers or schools had been softer with regards to exam preparation)

- <u>increasing motivation</u> (i.e., despite some who felt motivated back in Sept/Oct and/or by some subjects, there was a shared sense of increasing lack of motivation to engage in college)

---

[82] Students used a popular self-reflection activity they were familiar with: (EBIs - even-better-if, and WWW - what-went-well).

- reducing the college focus on 'what is next' in terms of choice of university (i.e., many lamented the pressure to start thinking about UCAS applications).
- improving sleep
- having more time for HW (i.e., several students had started working part-time in December).

These agreed EBIs resonated with most focus groups carried out hitherto but were also opportunities to see 'lack of motivation' taking hold as the months went by and consider new entries like 'UCAS application pressure'. The EBIs also worked towards establishing RQ3, which was about the influence of 'external factors'.

As for WWW (What-Went-Well), we agreed:

- the positive college-environment for most (i.e., most students enjoyed the transition to a new building and learning environment).
- the availability of resources to study (i.e., suitable library spaces and computer access).
- more perceived freedoms compared to school/GCSE, which increased autonomy and self-esteem (though several struggled with the new freedoms).

These WWWs pointed unequivocally at the benefits of 'change' from secondary that most had purposefully looked for, and the new learning environment's structures and dynamics. Importantly, these points made me reconsider how and why the college-environment, a key concept from the literature, was partly underrated by student-participants (and later some parents); something to unpick when sharing the findings at interviews.

5.2 Interviews' rationale

5.2.1 Giving or hearing voices?

The interview's task 1 statements (Fig. 25) worked as icebreakers and allowed student-participants to offer an 'orientation' about their MH status concerning education/schooling, while parents referred to their children, teachers, and various college while leaders referred to their average student.

Figure 25: task 1's instructions

TASK 1: *Similarly to the questionnaire, would you like to share your choice for the 4 statements?*

There is no agreed Mental Health definition, some argue that it is about a spectrum, this means that humans may go from total emotional pain (when they cannot function and help themselves and others) to blissful moments of wellbeing (when they can fully function for themselves and others). **Based on such descriptions, please** fill in the gap in the following three sentences using one of the options given:

S1. a. My general mental health .... a problem.

    is not at all   is not much of   is sometimes   is mostly   is very much

S2 b. My general mental health .... limit my SOCIAL college life.

    does not   does sometimes   does very much

S3 c. My general mental health .... limit my ACADEMIC college life.

    does not   does sometimes   does very much

S4. d. I feel ....confident about my future mental health.

    not at all   not much   sometimes   mostly   very much

(Me: Ok, would you explain your choices Q1-4?)

The rationale for splitting the interview into two tasks rested on two interrelated factors that student-participants had made me aware of: i) familiarity with Task 1 because student-participants had created and carried it out for the whole-college questionnaire; ii) repeating and

talking through the task offered broader perspectives than the Likert scale used in the questionnaire. I saw these suggestions reinforcing PAR's epistemological status because, by then, student-participants had improved their 'expert voice,' enabling them to offer plausible overviews of MH; besides, 'hearing' such voices seemed more critical than 'giving voice' because tuned to our PAR endeavour which focused on ongoing feedback[83]. As an ex-school-council leader in charge of 'student voice', I learned first-hand that headship teams become too preoccupied with participating students (an OFSTED requirement) and therefore 'giving voice', which often translates to treating them as pawns, frustrating for students because only partially 'heard'. Therefore, the following interview/methodological question arose:

i. Would student-participants automatically present their voices (i.e., subjective, intimate, authentic, honest, as it were, centralizing)?

ii. Did student-participants keep the third person more active during focus groups to hide the compromising 'I', likely to make them vulnerable to the eyes of peers?

iii. Nevertheless, could not their voices be 'we' and 'I'? Mainly when forming sub-cultures?

iv. And what about the rest of the participants? Would they offer just accounts (i.e., objective, detached, de-personalized facts) of their 'average student' and therefore de-centralizing them?

The distinction between voice/accounts did not become significant until I drew out (i.e., constructed) subject positions from the transcripts; these were context-laden subject positions that exposed the MH status of student-participants not necessarily as fixed identities resulting from essentializing analytical practice but dynamic and fluid. Furthermore, my use of specific subject positions (deductive) resulted from the triangulations of participants' voices and accounts that emerged from the field (inductive); therefore, strictly distinguishing voices from accounts became analytically redundant.

---

[83] My experience as Lead teacher of School Council for seven years, plus Lundy (2007) and Frosh et al. (2017) helped me articulate this point about 'voice'.

To bring the point home, I refer to rhetorical questions such as: 'Who speaks? According to which value-judgment?' These questions implicate the notion of 'subalternity' (*a la* Gramsci, 1971; Spivak, 2003) and 'discourse' (*a la* Foucault, 1972; 1980a; Wandel, 2001), which deserve little unpacking to understand voice and accounts further.

While Gramsci and Spivak refer to those who can or cannot speak because of their position in society, power relations, and according to the truth they produce, Foucault sees discourse as cultural constructs of reality that 'govern' through the invention of categories of knowledge - reproducing both power *and* knowledge. This way, discourse produces subject positions as available ontologies to be taken up, either obliged or rejected/resisted[84]. Also, because power is capillary and circulates (Foucault, 1980a), including from the bottom-up (Hancock, 2018), it is feasible to unload schooling as an ensemble of 'regimes of power/government' which create meaning through discourse and, therefore, 'truths' (Foucault, 1972; 1980a) which 'we' had to contextualize.

Foucault's take on discourse initially made me consider the distinction between voice and account to identify subject positions that represented either the 'truth' or those that represented the norm. Afterwards, I would critique my subject positions' constructions by referring to who played a role in their constructions, including the levels of pathologizing attached to them. Foucault's quote about subjectivity and medicalization was active in my mind because medicalization serves to adjust subjects, a singling-out that justifies their condition, de-politicizing it.

In practice, distinguishing between student-participants' voices and accounts was difficult, while referring to adult participants' contributions as accounts was easier. This phenomenon might be because student-participants stepped in-and-out of their researcher role because of the multiple methods of data-generation, offering personal views as both their voices and MH-related views on adolescents – i.e., accounts that included their voices too. From now on, therefore, I assume that voices are not only personal views and participants' responses worked as both voices and accounts,

---

[84] For example, looking back into my teaching career, and based on what I see supply-teaching in over 40 London schools, I argue that nowadays educational 'success and failure' represent the ultimate 'available' positions for adolescents – more of these examples later.

which are too challenging to distinguish systematically, especially when certain accounts seemed internalized - indeed, when the 'we' worked as 'I'.

So, while student voices may have constituted authentic perceptions stemming from lived experiences, they sometimes sounded like accounts that clouded the discourse that constituted them. Therefore, the two are undoubtedly operating; sometimes, I hear one or the other, and my research tools give more space to one or the other, but could I always declare which one I had? On what basis? The claim to avoid, on ethics grounds and drawing on my school council leadership experiences, is that the research is 'giving voice' because that can be tokenistic and instrumentalized by college-leaders; instead, there can be space for voices to be heard, shared, found even, or amplified in the PAR context aiming at a change-action.

Standard interview responses included participants' retrospective analysis about what to keep, ignore or modify about educational experiences privy to a generalizable positive MH perception (S1 – Fig.26) and one that is forward-looking (S4). In between the two, participants could draw examples of social (S2) and academic (S3) lives that shaped their 'lived experiences'. Overall, participants approached Task 1 differently as there was no prescribed approach to the interview format; some spent over half of the interview discussing the four statements, and others no more than five minutes. Others were able to balance and connect tasks 1 and 2 accordingly. These variations in approach explain the possible unbalance of group (re)presentation in each of the sections below.

Figure 26: NVivo's screenshot of task 1's statements

Area 1. Interview TASK 1 - coping with stressors	31	265
a. Manageability - handle stimuli with resources	26	70
S1 General MH Task 1	26	70
b. Comprehensibility - underst and integrate stimuli	19	42
S2 MH and social life Task 1	18	26
S3 MH and academic life Task 1	13	16
c. Meaningfulness - make sense of stimuli as challenges and worth investing-engaging	23	49
S4 MH and the future Task 1	15	26
XQ. Edu Satisfaction (Q46 of Questionnaire)	15	20

Finally, the interview's Task 1 provided the matrix for 'Coding Reliability' TA because the statements worked as codes to catch relevant data segments that described meaningful facts, people and experiences. Later, S1-to-S4 responses allowed me to start the analysis on a broad footing (S1= general MH considering the past), then narrow it down (S2-S3= current MH through academic and social life) and finally reopen it through reflexive/intuitive insights that looked forward to future possibilities (S4= future MH). I added XQ's responses ('*Has the education system served you well in the past 13 years"*?) as an add-on to Task 1's analysis because, even though the question took place at the end of the interview, I realized that its backwards, inquisitive and summative potential offered future-oriented responses.

The following two sections critically assess another interview tool, the MH spectrum, and the 'subject positions' student-participants might have taken up or rejected/resisted.

5.2.2 The MH spectrum

The framing of MH through a spectrum (Fig.27) helped challenge the 'materiality of discourse' (Cloud, 1994) inherent to the WHO's definition, a materiality we all perceived from the re-use and paraphrasing of the DfE, ONS, NHS's MH definitions.

Figure 27: one example of the MH spectrums
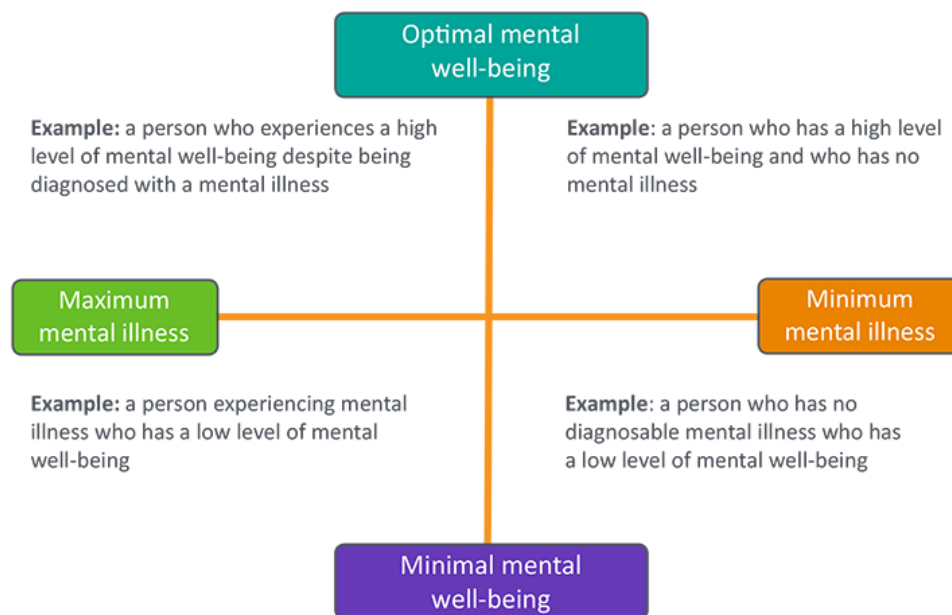
Personally, I wanted to get closer to the stories that represented students' MH status. We had established that official MH definitions and applications were too performance-leaning; words like cope, ability, work productively, or functioning echoed educational policies that took care of the 'whole child' (Jones, 2021) in ambiguous ways (more of this later).

Although the WHO recognizes that MH is more than the absence of a mental disorder influenced by socioeconomic, biological, and environmental factors (WHO, 2019), student-participants argued (previous chapter) that it still leans against individualization and is too focused on 'production', visible at every level of policy that focuses on performance as a measure of success. This is an example of policy-as-discourse, hinting at ableism and coping as defining traits of good health. Such critique of the MH definition, in line with the critique of neoliberalism as an oppressive psychic force (Dean, M., 2010; Han, 2017), offered us a rationale to reject the definition for the spectrum's options partly.

Furthermore, in my review of educational policies (Di Emidio, 2021a), I argued that policies promote mental ill-health in a very prescriptive way that constructs subjectivities through a constellation of practices. These are also referred to as 'regimes of practices' that relate to discourse and 'truth' (Rose, 1989; 2014; 2018) that reduces students' MH to very narrow sets of behaviors and modern pathologies (Chicchi, 2021; Recalcati, 2014; Rose, 2013; 2018). Therefore, overcoming MH definitions that shaped policy was a significant result of PAR *praxis* (*a la* Freire, 1970) that led to a grouped consensus through *conscientization*. This phenomenon occurred in two initial enrichment sessions when student-participants, who hardly knew each other, agreed to resist official definitions and applications because of their technical, individualizing, and medicalizing overtone. It did not reflect how their MH came about or manifested in and through the *dispositif.*

For instance, in the context of the influences of schooling, the definitions entailed the pathologizing and the medicalization of student behaviour as something that required intervention but never to be understood through context, as several students claimed (fieldnotes). Put differently, the tendency of medicalization to 'adjust the subjects' justified their condition, de-politicizing it (Chicchi, 2021; Furedi, 2010; Mills, 2015), which seemed even more pernicious to

student-participants. By engaging with the spectrum, though, MH was more productive than a diagnostic definition and would have received enough support from the well-being context.[85]

The breadth of the spectrum helped expose 'available' subject positions that student-participants were subjected to (i.e., subjectifying) and those they had taken up or rejected/resisted (i.e., subjectivizing) as coping mechanisms. Whether or not student-participants problematized such positions, subject positions represented 'subjective configurations' (Gonzalez Rey, 2009) which contextualized student-participants' MH. Notably, following Butler's link of subjectification with agency ('subjectification is the precondition of agency' - Butler, 1997, p.14 in Davies, B. 2006, p.429), such a link deserved further attention because it illuminated Foucault's claim '…subjectivity is closely linked to the medicalization of our existence' (n.d).

For example, according to Hancock (2018, p.440) and his reference to Foucault's Birth of the Clinic, Conrad (2007) argues that the medicalization thesis as it is constituted today—through which a human condition becomes defined as a problem in medical terms and requires medical intervention to treat—has a dual emphasis on both medical professionals/medical knowledge and the subjectivity of the population. As Conrad (2007) put it: 'Medicalization . . . examines how medicine and the emerging engines of medicalization develop and apply medical categories, and to a lesser degree it focuses on how the populace has internalized medical and therapeutic perspectives as a taken-for-granted subjectivity' (Conrad, 2007, p.14).

---

[85] Unfortunately, while the spectrum helped contextualize individual cases, I could not share my final findings as a coherent whole with representatives of each participant group coming together for a final PAR activity. Such an accomplishment would have gleaned further 'expert' insight to determine a change-action through college policies. The latter increasingly perpetrated the ethos of exam success and 'work hard' (see Appx-12).

5.2.3 Subject Positions

The spectrum helped scrutinize life events that caused tensions, manageable through available resources (including people). During task 1, the psycho-discursive practices of MH concerning participants' subject position came to life. Wetherell (2008) refers to psycho-discursive practices to include, amongst others, '…recognizable, conventional, collective and social procedures through which character, self, identity, are performed, formulated and constituted' (p.73). Therefore, task 1 enabled certain voices to emerge as subjective configurations that considered the spur of the interview 'moment' as much as the intensity of past events, coming together under the 'interpretative moment' (Sheurich, 1997, p.73). The idea of 'voices' centralized them so long as they felt heard; this means that I tried to lose the analysis of the discourse that *produced* the subject in the first place and, therefore, offer authentic material for well-intentioned policymakers who want to 'hear', and not just 'give voice', to students.

Student-participants saw the continuum as offering a less diagnostic evaluation of their MH, including (their) contextualization, despite it still being a 'cage' - as one student-participant remarked. This insight proved fruitful because it served to reinforce my understanding of subjectivity as a heuristic to learn about the relationship between MH and education; any MH symptom presented by participants became a 'battlefield' (Chicchi, 2021, p.71), a more humane space where individual personal stories, to paraphrase Rovatti (2013, p.165), 'returned the true subjectivity' of each student. For example, students' voices would now reflect more 'subjective configurations' than the possibilities offered by referring to a standard definition like the WHO, which is extensively used in diagnostic manuals and policies. Instead, drawing out 'subject positions' as subjectification or subjectivation, and distinguishing between these categories without separating them, was crucial for refining the influence of schooling on adolescent MH as both cause and effect of power.

I turned to Peruzzo's (2020) 'Model of Becoming Aware' (Fig.28 below) because, even though the model seemed to essentialise and determined students as almost agency-less, it also

showed how/why some students subvert specific categories, unfixing them, echoing Butler's double subject and Hacking 'looping effect'.[86]

Figure 28: 'Model of Becoming Aware'

Model of Becoming Aware (modality of governmentalisation of the subject of deficit)

Ars arrangiarsi (art of making do with what you have)

Technology of Sensitivity

Impossible subject

Acceptable subject

Proactive subject

Technology of Autonomy

---
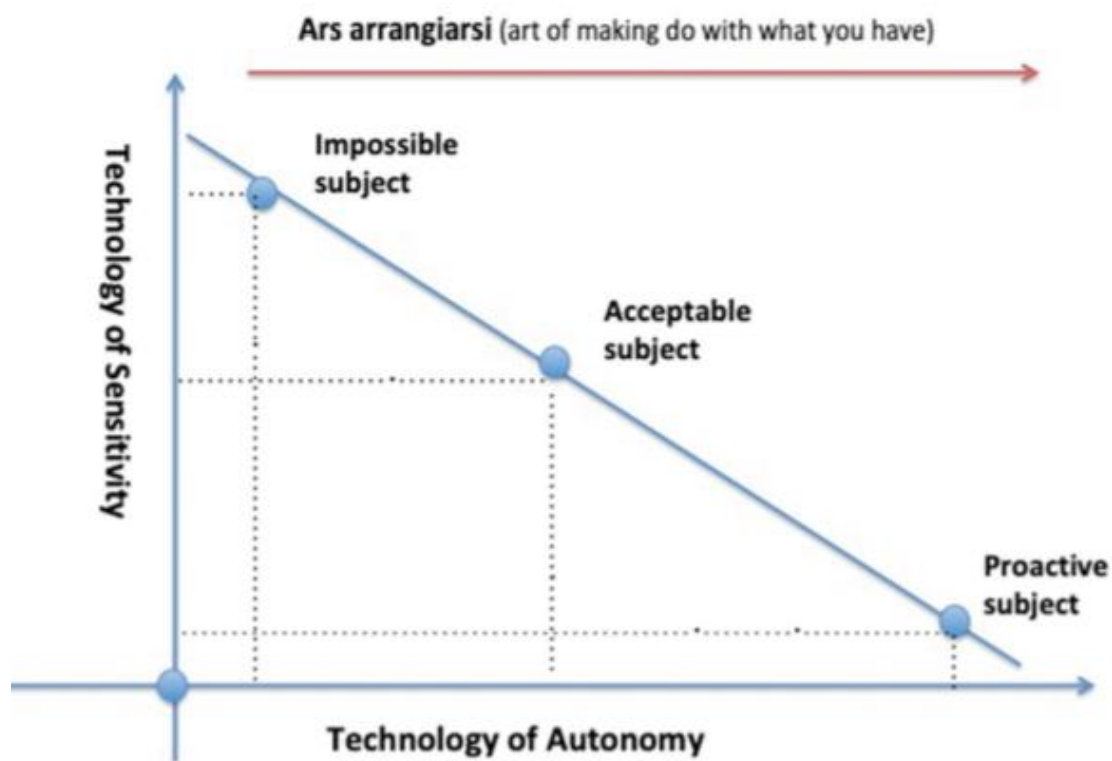
[86] This conceptual framing, already developed in chapter 2, borrows from the late Foucault's (1983; 1987) notion of the 'culture of the self'; it is underpinned by modes of subjectivation which do not dichotomize Foucault's earlier focus on *assujettisement*/subjectification (Hancock, 2018). This means that Foucault's stress on the historically constituted subject, as opposed to an ahistorical, foundational, Kantian subject (Strozier, 2002), is not agent-less, but still engaged in self-formation.

5.3 Managing, Understanding, and Making Sense of Schooling

S1: My general mental health .... a problem:

is not at all   is not much of   is sometimes   is mostly   is very much

	is not at all	is not much of	is sometimes	is mostly	is very much
a. Manageability - handle stimuli with resources				26	70
○ S1 General MH Task 1				26	70

S1's responses referred to handling schooling experiences/events through any available resources. So, for example, when I invited participants to expand on their responses, explaining how/who/what had contributed to managing educational pressures, they often referred to coping resources:

    i.   Any reference to friendships (both inside and outside college).

    ii.   Supportive parents who had a balanced view of compulsory education, so long as it sustained their children's development.

    iii.   Any 'capital' (cultural, financial, social) that helped manage the influence of education on their MH.

I probed into S1 responses to determine the perceived level of control student-participants had over their lives and what abilities they had or what support and resources they thought were necessary to take care of things in their specific circumstances. First, as the following extracts show, the MH&WBTeam confirmed that, increasingly, students went to see them, not shying away from showing their 'vulnerabilities', a joint indictment circulating across participants for those '*who had MH*'.[87]

    (Janna/Psychotherapist) Errrmm…I'd say what I do… I do some psycho-educational

---

[87] '*To have MH*' is, often, the short version of '*to have MH issues*' amongst students; this shows the stigma attached to the words 'mental' and 'health' together.

practical strategies…which they like…some acceptance of issues that affect them…some…'learn not to judge yourself'…ermmm, and it's fruitful for them to be heard, obviously.

(DDE) More person-centred or existential?

(Janna) Well, I'm more person-centred….I mean…with some students we do get into philosophical issues about…for example…a young man last year, the way of learning did not suit him whatsoever, he did have MH issues, he had serious depression, suicidal ideation, under CAMHS, he didn't fit…so, we agreed to do the best he could at college and move then to the next stage where he could learn in a way that was more fruitful for him…AND HE DID…he went and did a foundation degree!

Another member of the MH&WBTeam, the inclusion coordinator, added a valuable insight which associated with manageability:

(Davvy) I mean… we sometimes have students who say they don't have any friends… but they're also very good at masking their difficulties so they can adapt to the social college life DESPITE their mental difficulties…. from what I've observed (long pause)…..I'd be interested to know what they do when they go back into their social group because I've seen students here who've had suicidal thoughts…we've had to call safeguarding teams …it's been quite serious…and then we would see the same students out there laughing with their friends the next day…and also… some of these students are forming close relationship BECAUSE of their MH difficulties, and I think they start supporting each other so…one may be feeling bad one day…the other one is feeling bad too…they are texting each other…I think their friendship group is strong…but I don't know whether some students may be going out and masking things to fit with other students… a lot of the time, students don't realise other people feel the same…they feel they are the only ones.

These responses indicate that some students managed college-life well and benefitted from the resources available, including social life. However, such coping mechanisms had to be deconstructed if we wanted to understand the influence of the college-environment *dispositif* on MH. Therefore, I applied Peruzzo's (2020) 'Model of Becoming Aware'.

For example, Divvy and Mickey stood out as 'proactive subjects', generally positive about their past and present schooling experiences, looking forward to new challenges despite some stressful personal circumstances; Divvy with immigration/Brexit issues, while Mickey with the college's performance expectations, yet, she claimed to be managing well:

> For the first statement (S1), my average is 'sometimes', but I'm not very emotional...I mean… I used to, but now I'm kind of …I don't care!! …I used to overthink, but now it doesn't get processed…I like philosophy which helps…I prefer to overthink that… that is small social stuff. As for S2 (social life and MH) is the same, but I don't care…I'm…I get along with most… I'd say that I need to do something about myself, and I don't care about others…but I do care about how that transcends into how others react…others as parents…like…most of the time if I want to do something, I'll try to get them to like it…so kind of finding the common boundaries so that everyone understands what I want so I can move forward.

Mickey and Divvy seem 'proactive subjects', not a burden to the school/college's resources, 'responsibilised' citizens; this means that the two students are likely not to be 'intervened on' and likely to succeed according to broad categories of success which are not necessarily theirs but work as theirs (i.e., as agentic). However, while Mickey negotiated available subject positions as part of voluntary take-up, Divvy's take-up seemed obliged by performance *per* se, as the natural extension of education/schooling, alongside her family values. This family link means that there was always a sense of self-made pressure in Divvy, coupled with the pressure of 'being for others' (Shahjahan, 2020), which might have been unsustainable for her MH.

Saddy and Vanni, too, found their ways to manage through some resources; however, they came closer to the 'acceptable subject' than the proactive one:

> (Saddy) I think self-growth and exploration interest me... I think I'm exploring myself…I am still finding out what is me and not me…and....self-growth and exploration…that's what I have to do on my own, and…schools don't help much as much in that.

Even though this statement indicated that Saddy was aware of being a work-in-progress, capable of assessing potential stressors, overall, she came across as unsettled and therefore risking dropping out, getting low grades, which would require extra support (i.e., intervention), hence become a burden at different levels. However, she would also fit the 'acceptable subject' because

she swung between rebelliousness that fitted her demeanour and some sort of withdrawal and vulnerability due to her ability to negotiate between obliged and voluntary take-ups. Put differently, Saddy managed the 'availability' of certain subject positions well, despite a complex family situation. The following note or 'thick description' in my post-interview fieldnotes may illustrate my point further:

> Saddy seems caught in a tempest of emotions about who comes first, herself or those around her, perhaps standard for her age? Body image and other existential matters overwhelm her, so she 'blocks', as she put it, things like exam pressure as her coping mechanism. She feels alienated from who or what she'd like to be, and she protests against the 'linear', as she calls it, journey planned by the education system that doesn't match with her life experiences, nor with her wants/needs (i.e., sport/dance). Saddy's annoyed by how sport/dance is seen as less compared to more sophisticated subjects – oh! How interesting! Does this echo ex-education minister M.Gove's rigorous dichotomy of hard vs soft subjects in the 2013 reshuffling of the exam system in the UK - a policy with 'consequences'?

In hindsight, re-reading my note reflexively, I was perhaps portraying a 'proactive subject', convinced she was not going to succumb by getting around circumstances beyond her control (e.g., the pressures of removing the hijab, a single mother, her sisters' atheism and, temporarily, hers). However, Saddy seemed nearer the 'acceptable subjects' because she was still not yet a burden to the college; she had not visited the MH&WBTeam, was getting on with the day-to-day, was resilient as per coping, but 'at a cost', as she put it.

Similarly, the following exchange from Vanni's interview showed that some had more challenging times concerning MH but still seemed 'acceptable subjects' who managed somewhat:

> (Vanni) Errmmm…. I used to be…I mean… my MH used to be REALLY bad…up till 2/3 years ago…I used to be really down all the time…I used to tell myself…I'm not gonna get out of this…like…I cannot be helped as it's so bad….it was bad!…this low feeling was following me around…even when I was happy or loved…I felt it in the back of my head.
>
> (DDE) '…I see…and it's brave of you to share this …may I ask how you came out of it?

(Vanni) '…I think it was a mix of my family like…verbal abuse and stuff…I just felt really excluded …(from)…parents and sisters…youngers than me…so I could not share the same as them, I felt I was being excluded by my parents (in year-9)…also…I had a boyfriend at the time, and he broke up with me for another girl, which made me upset…like…I'm not good enough…'

(DDE) '…ok…and why or how have things improved?'

(Vanni) I addressed it all with my dad…ermmm my mum…I don't really get on talking to her, she works full-time…so I talked to dad as it was really getting bad…I talked to my friends as well…I also tried to help myself too…ok, well…I felt like…suicidal…of course, it's better now…anyway, I used to go to the school's nurse and talk about my problems…and then she referred me to the school counsellor.

Vanni managed and used all resources available at home and school. She showed resilience and willingness to manage different life stressors, being a 'proactive subject' in her private life but more of an 'acceptable subject' now in college – i.e., she implied she had burdened the equivalent of the MH&WBTeam in her secondary school but eventually succeeded because, she argued, 'the education system has served me well'. Vanni seemed to attribute her MH success to her positive mindset; she seemed likely not to drop out before year-13, enjoyed her subjects and knew what to do with them career-wise.

Thus, Mickey, Saddy and Vanni managed their MH through varying degrees of subjectivation, made visible by 'subjective configurations' that included degrees of agency and resilience as well-being factors. Here, 'subjective configurations' worked as 'subjective productions' that sustained resistance (Goulart 2019, p.55) and included references to i) the role of the curriculum (Philosophy helps Mickey) and a pragmatic take on the usage of compulsory education; ii) strong resistance to accepting the status-quo (Saddy insisted that self-exploration led her to remove the hijab in year-9 and feel, initially, empowered); iii) use of college and home resources (Vanni asked her school MH professionals and her father for help). The three looked forward to the future and new possibilities, showing the 'capacity to aspire' (Appadurai, 2013, in Stambach & Hall, 2016). However, even though other student-participants were in similar circumstances, they were more upfront about their poor MH and the resources that helped to cope. Ellinois and Vic seemed representative cases of 'acceptable subjects' at risk of turning 'impossible':

(Ellinois) Well, MH… just being a teenager, I'd always feel insecure as it's all hormones…but especially with my boyfriend, the stress and anxiety part is quite... like... difficult! I feel I put it all on him…then my parents… so… I also try to keep it inside, and it makes it worst…but in school, I feel more distracted, am more focused on school life, and I like coming to school.

I reminded her about the MH spectrum/continuum as a tool to address her MH status through S1-S4 responses:

(Ellinois) Well…. I've been talking to my parents about stress and anxiety, so these only come in certain moments, it's not always affecting my life, I can get on ok but would have little bursts of stressful time…

(DDE) '…related to?'

(Ellinois) Well… that's the problem, I don't really know…I didn't speak for a long time as I didn't really know what it was, but now, I feel it's getting a bit more like…I should sort it out…sometimes I get stressed, and I blame it on one thing, so if I sort that out, it will help like…cleaning my room and temporarily feeling better, but not sorting it out at the root.

Vic, too, presented a 'subjective configuration' of anxiety through poor communication and diminished trust when initially sharing personal feelings with others, like Ellinois, but for different reasons:

Sometimes I just put too much pressure on myself, even if small…I just keep it to myself, with the fear of having someone else feel the same, so it eventually adds up to too much….I think I've always been that way…I was bullied for a long time in my country... and mum would get upset, so I stopped telling them…so that way of dealing with it stuck with me…and this's what usually happens…I eventually downloaded everything…but before that, I kept a low profile.

For Ellinois and Vic, parental support, as much as college life and self-help, work as coping resources, which made them 'acceptable subjects' who eventually managed and did not become a burden to the college and could achieve/attain. Instead, those who 'drowned' came across as dejected figures most of the time and could constitute 'impossible subjects', who struggled

through-and-through – e.g., Mollica, Rina, Ash and two more student-participants who had left college half-way through the year on mental ill-health grounds. They would easily cite lack of parental support, self-esteem, motivation, academic ability and social awkwardness as influencing their MH, hardly citing the *dispositif* [88] as the cause. Peruzzo (2020, p.14) would portray them as:

> Lost, adrift, disoriented in university [college in our case] contexts and on the verge of exclusion. They disrupt the academic order and risk becoming an expense, a burden, rather than a resource.

Though such a description cannot fully apply to Mollica, Rina and Ash, the 'impossible subject' still exerts degrees of agency. However, labels such as 'vulnerable' may apply because they are always on the verge of excluding themselves, echoing Bourdieu and Passeron (1979, in Reay, 2022), through 'subject positions' that expose the failure of the institution and/or social injustice. Such self-exclusion may morph into delayed educational failure (e.g., dropping out of university, affecting public health costs later on in life, and unpaid university student loans. Conversely, the 'acceptable subject', the one who would say that '…limitations in my autonomy probably derive only from me' (Peruzzo, 2020, p.12), takes up a 'subject position' that is located at the point of equilibrium between autonomy and sensitivity and illustrates a '...modality of governmentalization of the subject of deficit' (2020, p.10). The latter indicates short-term survival or coping but cannot guarantee a long-lasting 'subject position' that supports positive MH.

As for other participants' responses, the range reflected specific roles and interpretations of those roles. While a teacher, Evie, was not concerned and was convinced that there was not a MH epidemic as the media portrayed, another teacher, Nicola, pointed out that the discourse about MH had changed over the years. It had increasingly focused on diagnosis and intervention due to the increase of students who had left college because of mental ill-health caused by college pressures.

---

[88] However, one boy who had left the research group after the first half-term, and soon after left the college, was very vocal against 'the system', as he called it, feeling paralised by the idea of exams and failing, something which he got from his year-6 SATs (fieldnotes).

Another teacher, Riccardo, seemed unsure whether students would reveal the full extent of their mental ill-health because of the stigma around MH.

However, Jo (humanities teacher with MH and well-being duties) offered a layer of complexity which destabilized the categories of 'impossible and acceptable' subjects. The latter could be initially classified, respectively, as those at the mercy of the *dispositif,* subjectified, and those that subjectivized themselves by negotiating voluntary and obliged take-ups as 'technology of the self' (Foucault, 1988; Marshall, 1989):

> (Jo) The students I see suffer from MH…so none of them will say 'not at all' to S1…I think all students are aware of MH issues now, so that's the first thing…what MH means…what it looks like…I think you've got two ends of the spectrum…lots of students believe they're suffering from MH issues….some are diagnosed, and some are SELF-diagnosed, and that's the concern!… Then you've got some who know they are struggling, and they have labelled it themselves that THAT'S the way they think it is…and then others who're genuinely quiet... but …you know…teenagers at that age... their hormones…their moods are so up and down anyway, and they struggle with deciphering what MH issue is and what is normal 'teenage'.

Jo touched on four interrelated points: i) the notion of MH seemed now in-built in students' lives as a discourse, that is, as a 'technology of power' that produced modalities of being through 'technologies of the self'; however, borrowing from Hancock's interpretation (2018), the discourse also represented an opportunity to 'care' for themselves;[89] ii) some students grabbed opportunities to categorize themselves as mentally ill, almost as a coping mechanism, an act of subjectivation; iii) all participants could address MH only from their roles, with implications of bias; iv) teachers and college-leaders struggled to underpin the causes of exclusion, students' self-exclusion and exam failure.

Alionka (my 'critical friend') put things into context from a leadership perspective by showing

---

[89] Foucault's 'care of the self' infiltrates and disrupts 'technologies of the self' as they were initially conceived, see early and late Foucault in Hancock (2018).

how schools and colleges could be both a resource and also the place where MH worsened; her frankness was uncharacteristic of any standard corporate leadership of most schools/colleges I have worked for:

> (Alionka) Ok, for S1, I put 'My general MH is sometimes a problem'…because I think for most of my interactions, it was often ….well, students felt that it was certain situations that triggered their emotions, their MH, and that's what they would describe as affecting their MH, rather than it being a constant state, so …for example, it may have been about a particular thing around exam or relationships, it had to be something specific…triggered.

> (DDE) '…and was it a main concern for the school?'

> (Alionka) Yes, it was for a certain number of students for which we had all sorts of measures in place, counselling… we had lots of very vulnerable students, for which MH was severe, but there was also a huge number of students for which it was hardly ever an issue…we thought of MH a lot, but we knew it meant different things to different sections of the student body.

> (DDE) '…numbers?'

> (Alionka) I'd say that out of the 180 (students) in the year-11 cohort, I'd say there would have been 20-30 to whom we would talk about MH a lot, you probably have ten very-very severe cases…struggling being in school…but then you would have half of the year group who would say that MH WAS an issue.

Alionka spoke as a secondary school leader, and a complete picture of figures would have helped situate her point; she pointed at secondary schools where one got stuck within their cohort group, the compulsory uniform, the daily attendance, the rewards/punishments that triggered behaviour and provoked stressful situations. Alionka insisted on looking at MH through those triggering situations, which did not necessarily mean that MH issues were crippling. In other words, the distinction between situational and contingent MH vs MH as a repeated pattern of behaviour, a 'conduct disorder' (RC-PSYCH, 2019), matched the distinction between the blue-day and depression. This dynamic is essential to understand how students (should) manage their MH at all levels if we want to understand 'subjective configurations' associated with mental ill-health cases, which, in turn, could inform effective intervention '…nudging closer to…a nuanced

and evidence-based, psycho-social, trauma-informed approach (Read & Masson, 2022). First, for the students to ignite an empowering 'subjectivation' process that draws from their circumstances; second, for the professionals to better assess MH; and third, for the parents to enhance their mentoring role.

Finally, most parents said their children were doing 'okay' because of parental commitment, which included professional expertise in anxiety and performance. However, managing the 16-18 age range as a critical transition period concerned parents, as Victoire illustrated:

> So, S1, as a parent, I'm not too worried about my son's MH, but I've observed that there're tensions.... motivation, anxiety...concentration… the number of contingent pressures to do other things is affecting his ability to perform…at the end of the day, I'd say that his results are better than expected, so there's a compensation element…. But, NOW, I'm also aware that this's a moment of testing… in terms of understanding relationships, what he wants to do in his life…a transition period, and I think that it's perfectly natural for these changes to have a repercussion on behaviour and MH.

This parent echoed other parents who recognized adolescence as a complex transient process to approach with a degree of 'commonsense' (several parents used it – fieldnotes). All parents who signed up for the project were concerned, wanted to know more about MH, and added their perspectives in managing adolescent MH as 'commonsense'. Parents came across as consistent role models, mentoring their children day-in-day-out, children that were to a certain extent 'at risk' but could be 'acceptable subject' that did not weigh on the *dispositif* - in essence, actual beneficiaries of schooling.

Overall, participants' perceptions of the general MH status varied significantly. While college-leaders from the MH&WBTeam had witnessed students' MH worsening for example, they also spoke of students who would use some of the resources available through the college, showing students' 'manageability' at play. Hence, the focus on the 'management' of MH through subject positions offered the first orientation to understand what was at stake with adolescent MH and showed the extent to which some students had unfavourable conditions to make the schooling journey unscathed; some had precisely the opposite, and some got the necessary help to cope. The interventions of parents, teachers and school leaders constituted those examples whereby '...the theme of resilience met that of the 'mentoring factor', of the educational relationships, showing

the biographical knots that connected different worlds with that of 'formation' (Garista, 2021, p.117, drawing from Massa, 1997 - my translation). Trust and support, more than responsibilisation, could tip the balance in favour of positive MH alongside school success.

5.4 Understanding and Integrating Resources

S2.   <u>My general mental health .... limit my SOCIAL college life.</u>

does not   does sometimes   very much

b. Comprehensibility - underst and integrate stimuli	19	42
S2 MH and social life Task 1	18	26
S3 MH and academic life Task 1	13	16

Two statements addressed how student-participants held social and academic lives together and why. The statements offered an avenue to evaluate the MH challenges presented by these close poles.

In terms of social life, first, several college-leaders indicated that students used friendship groups (in or out of college) to sustain their MH. For example, teacher Jo and the Inclusion manager Davvy's previous examples of students who bonded because of their shared poor MH illustrated how some students integrated, and therefore coped with, their social college lives. Even though evaluating how effectively they coped is difficult, it reminds us that schools/colleges can be places for social interaction where 'like people' are likely to meet or where nourishing experiences outnumber negative ones (Di Emidio, 2019). Student-participants' depictions, instead, ranged from i) those who thrived on social lives both in and out of college; ii) those who claimed to benefit from the distraction and motivation college social life provided while living in challenging homes; iii) those who were happy to keep the two spheres separate, which was their way of integrating resources in a structured, predictable and explicable way.

Albi, Saddy and Ash, amongst others, for example, showed how they coped through reflexivity and agency; they integrated their views on MH by engaging in the analysis of unique

circumstances, pasts events, key people, and notably, themselves as both constituted subjects by obliged subject positions but also self-constituting subjects who voluntarily took up 'available' ones. These showed, respectively, subjectification and subjectivation at play, making them 'acceptable subjects':

> (DDE) We've discussed that being part of a research group on MH…may be seen as a weakness, whereas I think you see it as an enrichment to your understanding of yourself...so...why so?'

> (Alby) I think probably because I never pretty much fit in with the crowd very much... I was always very different to everyone else, so... I embraced it more!.... it shaped who I'm a lot more..... but at the same time, it does kind of limit it occasionally… I struggled to socialise with guys ....am very different!

Saddy was always keen to remind everyone in the research group, as she did in the interview, that MH had a new profile nowadays to be weary of: '…Yeah, it's so glamorised right now…it's so bad…at the first moment …''I have anxiety'' ''I have this that''…NO YOU DON''T…I say…'.

Ash instead had to come to terms with her inability to make new friends: '…I mean…I can talk to people, but you know… making friends, it's difficult, unlike primary and secondary…but making other friends is hard for me'…it's a bit different…in secondary people stick with their group...'.

The three student-participants understand and integrate their views of themselves (and others) based on what they know about themselves. Their views represented the majority, witnessing their development (or *becoming*) rather than holding on to a given or fixed identity.[90] Therefore, Albi, Saddy and Ash tried to reconcile perceived contradictions inherent to the 'transition' to adulthood by incorporating subjectivation in their resistances (Saddy) or vulnerabilities (Alby and Ash). Students showed inner resilient attitudes in the interview context and often suggested how

---

[90] This coheres with subject positions which are further unpacked in later chapters, still keeping the three subject positions based on Peruzzo's categories but categorizing against subject positions in other places.

beneficial the interview had been to understand and sustain their positive MH.

As for parents, Victoire, Pinto, and Nayak reported how their children came to terms with their social anxieties, which could be spurred or mitigated by college life. For example, in the case of Izzie, I managed to get her parents' views (Pinto and Nayak) on how and why college social life ignited anxiety:

> (Nayak) As for S2 about social life, she's worried…she wasn't before! She was always introverted with adults and teachers, but overall, she always had fun with her [school] friends. From sixth form …a new environment, she wanted to change and try something new, she loved the choice but …she said: 'I don't want to go there every day', she felt attendance as a pressure, so, because of that it has limited her social life in college, she spends lunch and breaks ringing me to have company...she got used to it, but I can imagine it was very stressful.

Her husband added more context:

> (Pinto) She has a history of losing close friends from primary school and not being so over-sociable, then losing the close group [in secondary] has been a struggle; hence the struggle in September [start of year-12], so, social relations come to the foreground…but going back to the initial question, it's a mix of good and bad periods, it's not always there… the social aspect of the external environment is always an issue, peer pressure, competition, all of these things.

By contrast, Victoire (I never met his son) referred to relationships outside college/school as influencing his son's learning negatively, which was not the case with Pinto and Nayak's daughter, who was affected but not in terms of achievement/attainment, adding a layer of complexity about what ignited anxiety:

> Well… MH, college-specific social life is 'sometimes'…not major, but his way of communicating is usually…long periods of NO communication and then bursts of it; in those moments, he needs to share external to college [stuff], so relationships factors have definitely influenced his MH!

The complexity of analysis here revolves around persistent vs intermittent MH issues, internal vs external factors influencing MH, and internal vs external factors helping MH. Both parents drew

from outside college social life to explain how their children's approach to social college life influenced MH, with varying degrees of impact on academic life. However, they also acknowledged that despite the unpredictability of such challenges, their children's approach showed an understanding and integration of personal stories in a structured, predictable and explicable way to hold things together. I never interviewed Victoire's son, but I did interview Pinto and Nayak's daughter, Izzie, and I was impressed (during enrichment sessions, too) by Izzie's ability to understand and integrate her 'becoming'. According to her parents, she was friendly and bubbly with close friends but found it challenging to start new relationships in school/college because of her fear, perhaps, of losing friends at the end of A-level, just as it had happened in the transition to secondary and to the sixth form . While my and the parents' views remain at the 'speculation' level, they show how specific 'subjective configurations' could contribute to *and* explain one's poor MH claim.

To conclude, the parental stories mentioned above were not different from Kyriakos, Juss's mother, who rated her daughter's social life in college as the best place where her daughter had been able to comprehend and integrate resources: '…S2, I'd say that her social life (in college) is what has got her back on track, she has used her social life to cope with her general anxiety'. In addition, Juss's bubbly personality shone during enrichment sessions, and she showed a good understanding of the challenges presented by adolescence, proving she coped well.

These examples show the importance of parental support, support that several student-participants did not have. The S2 statement offered an orientation about students' MH as a process vis-a-vis subjectivity that conceived and integrated the college's social life circumstances, personalities, peer relationships and college-leaders/parental support to sustain MH long-term.

S3. <u>My general mental health .... limit my ACADEMIC college life</u>.

does not   does sometimes   very much

b. Comprehensibility - underst and integrate stimuli	19	42
S2 MH and social life Task 1	18	26
S3 MH and academic life Task 1	13	16

Academic life followed the same pattern as college social life, with the MH&WBTeam unequivocally pointing at the influence of academic pressure, especially in the year-13s. Davvy (inclusion manager) noted:

> Certainly, for me, MH is very much impacting their academic life to the point where they can't finish…they're not coming in…I'm usually involved in meetings when there're many other people there…talking about the seriousness of the situation so yeah…very much so!

However, without underestimating Davvy's point, my reading of what seemed a 'MH epidemic' amongst adolescents was that many students approached the MH&WBTeam as their only resource to cope, through which understanding and integration operated by activating a pivotal moment of subjectivation as take-up.

Let us take Janna's (psychotherapist) point made at the start about the boy who struggled academically but went on to do a foundation degree. Janna 'nudged' the student by offering a moment of reflection, showing strategies to cope, and what seemed an 'impossible subject' was integrated and engaged with a process of becoming, which implied a mediation between subjectification (i.e., the imperative of academic success) and subjectivation (the student's need to cope). Interestingly, when going through S3, Janna did mention 'fear of making mistakes' as one of the major issues students encountered 'in themselves', but, as she passionately stressed '…making mistakes is part of growth and…it's a big thing…IT'S NOT ACCEPTABLE!'. She added another point that blended well with the 'fear of making mistakes. She said: '... where is the interest in education and learning and exploration…personal development…that's the big missing'.

Janna hinted at two key points: first, about the potential negligence of the education system that still embeds success/failure (Clarke, M., 2014) as evaluation <u>of</u> learning through exams, even if that manifests itself through a ranking system; second, about the student who makes do with the

resources available and can channel a crisis moment, with the help of the 'mentoring factor' (Garista, 2018), perhaps helping the student move from the 'impossible' to the 'acceptable' subject, who may require no more intervention.

Teachers, too, echoed the MH&WBTeam regarding increased academic complexity and demotivational workload characterizing the transition from GCSE to A-Levels; this may account for students' reduced understanding of their condition because of decreased intrinsic motivation - as Riccardo put it:

> When checking the amount of work, they would mention the lack of motivation to do things; they know in the abstract what to do but, in the concrete, end up playing with their phone instead of looking at revision papers, so then they beat themselves up for lack of work.

Not surprisingly, students face several stressors which may explain such demeanor. As I point out in the following chapters addressing 'responsibilisation', 'performance' and 'transition', year-12s starting in September are students who have just sat GCSE exams between May and June of the same year and, by December, their tutors start flagging up the UCAS application process starting in the coming January. However, during task 1, most responses viewed academic life as problematic; instead, it was parental accounts of academic life that foregrounded the complexities of late adolescence facing motivational issues – either because students change environments (from school to sixth form college) or because they are *becoming* what they did not expect. Nayak and Rebby exemplified these two 'available' subject positions:

> (Nayak) As for S3, it's fascinating what happened because she closed off her social life and focused (on her academic life) ... the first year I saw her, I mean, she always did fine, GCSE good, not excellent, but good, but now she became SO studious…so…the MH issue pushed her to something else, to focus on being more academic, I think now she was able to define the problem more, and she took that action.

> (Rebby) He's managed his GCSE, but…he was one of those really bright kids, and suddenly…it stopped! He coasts through things... I mean…maybe he's just lazy, or he's not ambitious, maybe he's found other exciting things in life, but maybe there's an element of that he was very OCD during that time when he was on the top of everything, and perhaps taking away that pressure improved his OCD?... and he said it once ''I'm happier

now! I might not be getting great grades, but…I'm happier now!''…what can you say?…can't argue with that!?

These two examples struck me as they resonated with my experience working in the same school/college for 14 years when I taught two cohorts across the age range of 11-18. In informal discussions with colleagues, as well as internal professional developments, we agreed that, for most students, academic life could be something to turn to comprehend one's life at a time of change, but it could also be the thing students gave up on as subjectivation, as Rebby's example showed. Bringing in an entire gendered perspective is not the aim of this study; however, we should consider specific trends that girls increasingly out-perform boys at GCSE since the 1980s and now at A-Level (Thompson, 2015). Other parents, like Nayak's, talked about their daughter's turn to becoming studious once reaching the sixth form. Conversely, the boy's risk-taking could explain Rebby's point. Only one parent mentioned that her daughter's MH could influence her academic life, either because her MH was already poor or because the academic challenges generated the MH issue. For example, Kiriakou noted her daughter's self-made pressure to perform despite the non-parental pressure:

> As for S3, I'd say 'sometimes' it's limited her academic life; she doesn't react positively when she gets things wrong, pretty catastrophic about it and …well, she got better, but when she feels very down then….

Here, we could factor in girls being pressured to perform highly in a male-dominated economy. Nevertheless, Rebby's son seemed to have blocked out what had become a prophecy (the successful student), which he eventually felt incapable of fulfilling but still knew he could manage. As a sociable boy, thus described by his parents, it was not difficult for him to take schooling easy, to comprehend and integrate his 'change', and move on, lowering academic expectations but, perhaps, more safely for his long-term MH. Rebby had suggested that her boy was also 'playing the game' (the academically successful and also sporty boy) up until year-9. After that, however, he increasingly drifted until, in the sixth form, he ultimately took up the lazy boy stereotype as a possibly empowering 'technology of the self' to manage his MH and was happier. So, subjectivation seemed at play as a form of de-subjectification.

Therefore, to make more sense of how students understand and integrate resources vis-à-vis MH, we should look at broader education policies and how college-leaders impose a culture of

achievement, questionably tied to exam success, while expecting the balancing act between academic success, MH and well-being. Moreover, this is where students may fail to integrate and, importantly, engage in a way that makes sense to them. I explain. Alionka ('critical friend'), despite her sensibility towards students' poor MH and the educational pressure causing it, saw the existing problematics of MH as limiting academic life:

> I put 'My MH <u>very much limits</u> my academic life'… and this reflects [the average student of] the school I was in… we were trying to move rapidly toward improvement, so we were working with a group of students who had unstructured situations [school and home] which were not result-driven, moving to situations where achievement was to become part of the study culture, as opposed to before, even though that was not our only focus of course!…For example, my work involved creating a culture of achievement in students who'd not had much of that because of no academic family background… some kids were the first generation in terms of aspiring for academic achievements, so, we dealt with different complex situations at home and so... how do you get someone driven to study when their family at home don't? So, when MH issues were flagged…. students weren't generally able to maintain that drive with academic achievement. So, that would be the first one to go.

Alionka's point is relevant as many student-participants came from similar schooling backgrounds, and the 'available' culture of achievement could have been pressurized in their schooling lives through endless ethos-building interventions using disparaging ingredients: i) telling students they were not just a number/grade despite the entrenched measurable rewards and punishments systems; ii) over-responsibilizing them for *doing* the MH while instilling a work-hard culture to achieve/attain high no-matter-what; iii) being creative and risk-takers despite the prescriptive nature of ongoing testing; iv) be resilient, show character and a positive mindset as the only road to 'success'.

Such statements are relevant when analyzing students' voices that tried to comprehend academic life alongside their MH. It is here that take up of available subject positions such as successful, failure, in/competent, average, resilient, and vulnerable, must be seized to make sense of themselves and may represent moments of subject positioning as 'subject formation' or 'becoming', while in transition to adulthood. These 'subject formation' dynamics, I argue, built

on, but also challenged, identity formation experienced as younger students. Put differently, students in the transition to a career (University or work) seem caught in discursive practices of obedience and acceptance (subjectifications) to the college-environment as well as agentic impulses of resistance, playing the system, grabbing opportunities, etc., or, as Rebby's son did, '*caring less and living it*' (subjectivation).

In conclusion, responses to S3 demonstrated, on the one hand, participants' understanding and integration of social and academic lives as constituted by critical events, people, etc., and on the other, how student-participants understood and integrated the two as opportunities for subjectivation. In some cases, student-participants' voices demonstrated understanding and integration of resources that separated the academic and the social, whereby both offered reasons to hold things together to support MH. Therefore, S2 and S3 offered orientation as a way-in to evaluate the challenges of academic and social life regarding MH; it revealed aspects of the 'acceptable and proactive' subjects necessary to follow up in task 2's interviews. Furthermore, S2 and S3 built on S1 by showing understanding and integration of life events in a structured, predictable and explicable way because student-participants reflected on life events as stimuli and, therefore, as resources (i.e., protective factors) that had helped mitigate the challenges presented by schooling. Importantly, S1 and S2 nuanced the notion of 'subjective configuration' as an explicative tool for MH analysis because students could contextualize their 'subjective senses' (Gonzalez Rey, 2016a, p.13, in Goulart, 2019, p.54) related to particular events which helped configure their MH.

5.5 Making Sense of 'Stimuli' as Worthy Challenges

Through the S4 statement, student-participants made sense of past schooling experiences and current perceptions of events as challenges worthy of investment and engagement to serve future possibilities. My probing of 'subjective configurations' would generally refer to the worthiness of things, whether there were good reasons 'to care' about what happened (or not) and was happening in school/college.

Next to S4's discussions, I included answers to XQ (i.e., 'Has the education system served you well in the past 13 years?', already in the questionnaire and which I re-used to close the interviews). Two reasons justified this unorthodox inclusion; first, while S4 stressed the future from a present perspective, XQ required the student-participants to be more retrospective; second, the S4-XQ combination seemed to corroborate students and parents meaning-making because the sense of disappointment (emanated through XQ responses) got balanced out by a positive outlook (S4). Teachers and school leaders, instead, were cautious about optimistic future projections.

<u>S4. I feel ....confident about my future mental health.</u>

not at all   not much   sometimes   mostly   very much

c. Meaningfulness - make sense of stimuli as challenges and worth investing-engaging	23	49
S4 MH and the future Task 1	15	26
XQ. Edu Satisfaction (Q46 of Questionnaire)	15	20

Student-participants' responses to S4 showed that they envisaged a positive future regarding their MH; even if they had been disappointed by education in several instances, most voices and accounts showed that they managed schooling challenges through various resources. Also, several student-participants exhibited resilient attitudes and the ability to embed MH experiences as 'lived experiences' whose contextualization helped student-participants (and parents) move on positively. The following four extracts illustrate the point, two of which (Vic and Ash) tended to have a hostile demeanor throughout the fieldwork:

(Divvy) 'Yeah… I think I'll feel more comfortable once I'm there at Uni…now I ask myself too many questions and have to deal with so many doubts...'

(Ash) '…yeah... and especially in the long term, I don't fear it's going to be a problem to be worried about...'

(Vic) '...I think I can influence the world…'

(Teocoli) '...quite the opposite, there are many opportunities for me …. writing, acting…'

While Divvy and Teocoli sounded convinced and convincing, and their views matched other student-participants' responses, Vic and Ash's represented those few who hoped for a better future outcome despite their disappointing schooling experiences. However, when I explored S4 with the MH&WBTeam, I received deviating responses, one of which I found insightful. For example, the inclusion manager, Davvy, suggested

> I don't know what they feel about their future MH…I don't think they really think about it… emmm…you know…it's very much to do with their age group…they don't know how to manage their MH…YET! And maybe that's because of their age, and therefore I wonder whether they think about their future…I mean...I have had students in very …quite serious situations…talking about all these things they want to go and do and …you think, that doesn't quite make sense with how you're feeling NOW…How will you cope with that if that's how you feel when that happens?…and they are not really able to make those connections?

Davvy's point about students' panic about the future requires unpacking; it touches on discussions about adult perception of adolescent aspiration and motivation. I first encountered such points as a school-council leader and now, in this fieldwork. In both instances, the future 'annoyed' students and left them powerless because they could not see any alternatives (no 'capacity to aspire'?). So, I wrote a long fieldnote, post-interview where I argued that:

i. By simultaneously addressing achievement/attainment and MH, educational policies confuse and instrumentalize students' future priorities.

ii. Different adults in this PAR venture projected different future expectations. For example, some adults wanted students to relax (the MH&WBTeam), others wanted them to have an education FOR careers and/or work (i.e., most parents, the career officer),

others want them to succeed short-term (in exams - teachers and the assistant headteacher).

iii.   These adult expectations either clashed with student-participants' future projections, or they could not make certain connections (as Davvy said).

After revisiting the fieldnote extract, I asked some rhetorical questions as guidance for the remaining section: do students (really) aspire to something? Is there a 'capacity to aspire', as Appadurai (2013, p.289, in Stambach & Hall, 2016) called it, genuinely nurtured in school/college and society?

In short, students' future projections exist within the economic focus of state education that expects high-performance no-matter-what; perhaps, XQ's responses (following sub-section) illustrate my point. It elicited either semi-convinced 'yes' answers enriched by nostalgia for the old school/college days or resigned 'no' enriched by accusations of an unfair education system that left students with little aspiration. Nevertheless, all participants offered emotive reflections to draw closure to thirteen compulsory years of schooling.

XQ. 'Has the education system served you well in the past 13 years?'

T6. Meaningfulness - make sense of stimuli as challe	23	49
S4 MH and the future Task 1	15	26
XQ. Edu Satisfaction (Q46 of Questionnaire)	15	20

XQ's responses ranged widely, in some instances echoing S4's positive student responses and others indicating disappointment and hopelessness. Before participants responded to XQ, I would broadly model the answer by referring to the influence of my education/schooling experiences. I also stressed that XQ could include references to contexts, influential people and whatever personalization as resources. These resources worked to construct 'subjective configurations', which I later analyzed to make sense of voices that targeted schooling as a *dispositif* that influenced MH. Perhaps, I should have asked participants how much of themselves had been agentic or autonomous enough during 13 years of compulsory education to obtain a concise response about

subjectivation; however, my modelling was to acknowledge the past, one's roles in it, and build on it towards the future. I would typically expand by adding the following questions:

i. Would there be a different (student) had you not gone through this education system?

ii. How much has the experience of this education system shaped you?

iii. How much of it have you used to your advantage?

iv. How do you feel about where you are now due to the education system?

RQ2 inspired these questions to get participants to explicate the 'roles' they played in the processes as subjects who took up (in both voluntary and obliged sense) or rejected/resisted available subject positions. Responses ranged from *ad hoc* references to subject choices and related career prospects certain academic subjects offered, or, likewise, to the missed opportunities due to low unsettling grades. The future reflexively came into play, either as a challenge to prove that schooling was wrong or to use it as an excuse for lack of aspiration.

Most praised the social aspects of schooling, including the formative challenges and nourishing experiences:

(Gabs) I think it has been quite positive to an extent; obviously, there're days when you're not doing well in school, but overall, it's getting to where I want to go; my secondary got me where I'm now…so positive for me.

(Vanni) I feel in primary, it did…I liked it…it was good…plus, I had great friends…secondary…No, really, as explained…college? I don't know yet…right now is ok; I like it but…still…so…I feel I'd be VERY different, actually YEAH…you see…actually it's not been a waste of time as I felt that what I wanted to do in the future I'd then benefit from it…but some don't feel that way…perhaps they did not make the right (subject) choices.

(DDE) '...so you know those who haven't enjoyed it?'

(Vanni) '…OH YEAH…they don't see it as useful…but me and others think that it CAN…CAN be beneficial…for example I know I want to be a social worker and school/college have helped somehow to get there'.

Alby and Ellinois added similar points but complained about the limited curriculum:

(Alby) The benefits of the education system's obviously that it's free education... Plus, you're always learning, I think it also teaches you about diversity within society, how to get on with people. But some of the knowledge which you gained from it?... I do not think it's practical. I think there're some things which the system should integrate... tax...mortgages.... because I think now it mainly focuses on what you need to get into a profession.

(Ellinois) (hesitant) NO…I think for me as an individual, it hasn't…obviously, it's served me well as… I HAVE an education…BUT, probably, not served me well for like…the life I want to lead when I'm older! … The issue is that education is directed towards making kids one THING…so like …if you are good at passing a test, you'll do well…but those kids might not be able to relate to people...have the confidence about workplace…so I've benefitted...ermmm... in case I want a job but still I don't know what I want to do.

(DDE) 'But your reflection's overall positive…you still have time to make yourself who and what you want to be…'

(Ellinois) I like school…I don't hate it…I think a lot could be changed that would've made my outcomes better… but if we'd to change, then we'd to change how we got jobs; you just had to change everything… so overall, I think the system's failed everyone! Even the kids who're good at exams…just basic life skills…I know little about taxes, bank accounts, payslips, and deposits to buy a house.

The references to Ellinois' latter points were popular topics during enrichment and informal chats, indicating how students felt about growing up and becoming, legally, adults. Importantly, to call for skills/knowledges and regard them highly while in transition testified that a culture of qualified progression was a life-stressor. Also, the nature of XQ and its timing (end of the interview) required students to take stock of life and offered a research 'moment' for us as co-researchers, often followed by a silence which seemed to re-organize interviewees' thoughts before they responded by referencing both present and future possibilities.

Other student-participants were exclusively positive, like Matty and Juss:

(Matty) Well, I'd say school/college has affected me positively…I mean…there've been things I'd not agree with, but overall… socializing's been good, the way that schools put you in place…like sets/classes…setting's a good system to motivate everyone.

(Juss) I think it served me well... I do well in exams and can-do with the system…as opposed to some of my friends who suffer…like my dyslexic friend…he's disadvantaged … he sees no point…so, clearly, the system hasn't served him well, and other friends and…I'm glad of the schools I went to as they made me like a nicer person…but if I'd gone to a secondary school for smart kids?... I don't think I would have been!

Matty and Juss' voices show 'proactive subjects' through different available take-ups. Matty accepted and welcomed the conditions made available and yet obliged by the system. He did not question subject settings as subjectifying practices (i.e., making him or hailing him as the average or bottom-set student); on the contrary, Matty seemed to live the neoliberal ideal of social justice, made through inequality, an ideal that pushed people to aspire and achieve, regardless of context. Juss, instead, seems a 'proactive subject' because, though critical, she understands how to navigate the system, voluntarily taking up available developmental opportunities (resources) which may compensate for the risk of underachievement/underattainment, all through the guidance and support of a teacher-mother who mitigated school/college pressures.

Others' voices were just negative, like Ash and Saddy (and Teocoli too, who, despite an overall positive interview, made a U-turn through XQ):

(Ash)'...no! I don't…I think I'd have been a better me if the education system was more considerate to students and the fact that we're still young and they did not expect so much'.

(Ash) '… it all kicked in secondary…but times have changed, and primary kids may feel more pressure and feel it's tougher now…I'd have been happier, really…'

(Saddy) I feel I'd be a different person…I'd have done what I love more… sports or something…because you know how sport's looked down on…you have to be the brightest of the brightest to go far…but sport's not part of it…I feel this linear pathway -secondary-college-uni-job - is so glamorised right now that you're not encouraged to have a gap year or so.

Both seemed 'acceptable subjects'; for now, they did not weigh much on the college finance and could succeed unscathed, at the least short-term. Teocoli, who seemed the in-between 'acceptable and proactive' subject, offered a similar negative final view, but his criticism seemed 'empowering':

> I was thinking... I'd say NO! As a person, I'd always thought I'd not be naturally gifted at something….I've always had to work hard for stuff…especially with academic subjects…but take this friend, a good writer; exams don't always correlate to being a good writer, he writes very well, but his GCSE English weren't good…especially with the English test, the way they structure…with restricted time, how can they expect to write a story?...well it's very formulaic!

Teocoli described aspects of schooling that undermined his creativity and critical thinking. Interestingly, after he had praised education/schooling on several occasions, he wanted to go back to XQ, and I could hear his voice (tone, pitch, strength, decisiveness) differently. For example, his last point above encapsulated Teocoli's potential for i) resilience as a coping mechanism; ii) agency and/or the necessary subjectivation to cope with schooling's subjectifying practices. Therefore, one could argue that 'the subject had understood', as expressed through Teocoli's U-turn, and his critically stated subject position may serve him well in both the long- and short-term.

Overall, student-participants' sense-making of past schooling experiences was constructive when they embedded the challenges of schooling that may have served university choices or careers. Other times a sense of defeat or dissatisfaction transpired as if they had missed out on something. Perhaps the latter reflects the missed (or taken away) subjectivizing opportunities to be more authentic 'agentic selves'. The XQ retrospection left students in limbo about their future, beginning with unconvincing university choices reflecting inherently precarious and often obliged subject positions linked to undefinable careers. XQ's student-participants responses seem inconsistent with their S4 voices, which is undoubtedly an effect of the broadness of the questions.

As for parents, they mostly offered negative responses, 'thinking of' their children's schooling journey; all, apart from one parent, undermined the worthiness of the compulsory education system.[91] For example:

> (Anri) Yes and no…if we go back to his sixth form experience, I think that sometimes the teachers and the system were not as supportive; for example, he'd load of supply teachers…he was let down by a teacher stereotyping, that affected him for a whole of an entire term.

> (Victoire) A tough question…ermmm, and the answer is …in general, I don't think the education system serves well; it seems that the English system wants to produce experts, so selective…and I worry that this kind of education is creating people who will have difficulty to relate to society and challenges because they haven't been fully exposed.

> (Rebby) Big sigh…I think I've got to say NO, the education system as it is, the testing system, the target system, that does NOT serve ANYONE well, that's my broader belief, than necessarily looking at how he's managed…for example, when I asked him about the secondary school choice, he said it was a great choice but…educationally? Naah…look at some of the stuff they learn…oh my god! I mean, he had a couple of inspiring teachers, and some of the stuff they learn is ok, but …I do wonder about the people who work out the curriculum!... So, I got to say NO…he has had a much wider experience with us, going abroad every year.

> (Kiriakou) I'd say that the general education system's not set up to meet the needs of children, including my daughter, but I'd say that the schools that she's attended have served her well, she's benefitted from her background, enabling her to navigate through the system well, but that isn't to say that she hasn't encountered problems. I think that within the

---

[91] A direct triangulation which included student-participants' views and student-participants' views of parents' views on the XQ question (to weigh things up) would have been an ideal, end of the project, PAR scenario informing a change-action.

current system, she's had a pretty good shot at education, both in primary and secondary, (with) rich experiences.

Parents' opinions, more than other adult participants, can be informed by bias. However, such heterogeneous solid views would have acquired added value had the fieldwork not stopped. The cancelled PAR's change-action opportunities would have engaged different participants as stakeholders, service-users and professionals to reach democratic solutions to inform the college's internal policies to support MH.

Overall, in this final sub-section, we have seen that student-participants' attempt to generate meaning over time is a crucial component of students' MH status; likewise, to juxtapose adolescent MH analysis to what participants recalled of 'that' school/college experience was my way of operationalizing participants' 'subjective configurations' as personal narratives that contextualized their MH. The subsequent chapters follow this premise by exploring the notions of Responsibilization, Performance and Transition, as they emerged through task 2's interview – further illustrating student-participants' negotiation with their subject positions as filters, catalysts and magnifiers of adolescent MH.

Conclusion

Interview task 1 consisted of participants completing four statements multiple choices, taken from the college life-satisfaction questionnaire and discussing them. Not only did the discussion work as an icebreaker, but they offered an overall orientation of the MH status; this was important if I wanted to 'hear' their voices and put them to use for the interview's task 2 analysis. In addition, I included the responses to the XQ question because their retrospective look acquired more meaning when juxtaposed to S4 (the future).

Overall, the application of the four statements indirectly addressed the notion of 'optimal performance' (Atasay, 2014; Morrissey, 2015), underscoring policy-as-discourse in contrasting ways. On the one hand, because an education supposedly guarantees progression/transition into a job/career while safeguarding students' MH (and well-being); on the other, the college-environment *dispositif* exercised unavoidable pressure on participants whereby

'responsibilisation' and 'performance' operated in neoliberal terms such as taking ownership and being productive. Neoliberal education has tested adolescents' stress levels which are not solely school/college related but, as per data collected, externally driven because 'studying' does not happen only within the boundaries of school/college. Therefore, through the MH orientation assigned to task 1, we saw how certain (external) factors functioned as resources that protected students from experiencing mental ill-health or remaining relatively well despite adverse circumstances. I tried to draw out participants' sense and level of confidence as a MH (and well-being) indicator that married Peruzzo's three subject positions (i.e., proactive, acceptable and impossible subject). The latter implicated the MH status of student-participants through the axis 'autonomy and sensitivity', which I applied according to broad parameters that considered my student-participants as 'subjects' of/in compulsory education (and not at the University, like in Peruzzo's case).

This means that, through the three 'subject positions' categories, I nuanced the *keyness* of participants' voices as 'subjective configurations' – i.e., retrospections that helped assess facts, people, and events to have an overall MH orientation.

Finally, by combining Peruzzo's typology, the four statements, and XQ, I tried to understand the orientation by i) unpicking schooling stressors that influenced MH, ii) identifying how participants constructed their voices/accounts and linking them to MH, iii) evaluating how students perceived themselves and their MH *because of* schooling, without excluding the relevance of 'external factors'. This orientation was essential to show the three categories' fluidity and how students managed and negotiated subject positions as coping mechanisms.

For example, task 1 presented students' orientation towards healing and/or good health, which could be interpreted as coping with life stressors. The four statements helped to qualify the student-participants' self-confidence, and lack thereof, which could be explained in broader participatory terms and through ad hoc politicized concerns regarding social justice. In this way, on the one hand, those 'vulnerable' and at risk of failing could put such possibilities into perspective and feel less overwhelmed by them; on the other hand, those who were confident and likely to succeed could show how they coped with life/school's stressors and use any available resources (people or material resources), conducive to better MH. In essence, the responses I selected helped capture the increasing student-participants' self-awareness concerning their past and current situations,

likely to influence the future. Participants provided critical insights that I could decode further using the six themes' ranking of the interview's task 2 (in the following chapters).

Chapter 6 – Responsibilization and Adolescent MH through Motivational Factors

Introduction

The previous chapter, chapter 5, looked at two critical preliminaries for this chapter and the chapters to come that look at interview's task 2 analysis (i.e., chapter 6-7-8). First, the previous chapter analyzed task1's interviews providing an 'orientation' about the six themes, generating core data in the form of more personalized voices than did the focus groups. Second, it conceptualized 'subject positions' as instruments for observing subjectification and subjectivation at work via ambivalent and questionable "technologies of the self" (Hancock et al., 2018) as coping mechanisms.

This chapter, therefore, develops on the previous one by presenting Motivation as the theme that reverberates across the other five and elicits student-participants' sense of responsibility towards themselves and others. Such perceived responsibility seemed to drive student-participants' motivation and make it so prominent. Accordingly, I turned to the sociological concept of 'responsibilization' to operationalize motivation about schooling/education. The link motivation-responsibilization is pertinent because the *dispositif's* pressure on stakeholders to take responsibility for formal education, had to be heard through participants' voices; the latter could illustrate what a contemporary 'responsibilized' approach concerning education entailed for both positive and mental ill-health. Furthermore, drawing on Harling (2014), I refer to ideas about "stakeholder" or "interest-group-society" elaborated by Simons and Masschelein (2010). Harling suggests that the authors describe stakeholding based on ''…the assumption that democracy and participation can be obtained only if different groups and individuals take responsibility for and articulate their 'parts', 'stakes' or 'interests'" (2014, p.62). Such views, I argue, have implications for individual freedom vis-à-vis the construction of entrepreneurial relations to oneself, which starts in school/college.

Parents, teachers and various college-leaders' contributions enriched Task 2 data and provided valuable points and counterpoints for *my* final analysis. I used fieldnote references to retrieve participants' 'degrees of PAR' because participation went beyond more formal engagements with

the research. Thus, this and the following two chapters present my final (Codebook) TA of participants' interviews task 2; to do so, I partly renamed and clustered students' codes that made the six themes.

I start below with a brief explanation of responsibilisation, starting from the SAGE dictionary of policing that helps contextualize the issue of motivation versus responsibilisation. Then I nuance the terms through several pairings involving other themes (see sub-sections 'with'); finally, I consider the impact of responsibilization on motivation to explain how motivation and MH relate under the schooling *dispositif.*

6.1 Motivation and Responsibilization as Ambivalent 'Technologies of the Self'

Some student participants felt that talking publicly about a lack of motivation in September/October may have been entirely self-defeating (fieldnotes). Hence the reduced emphasis on lack of motivation at the outset, peaking at the time of the interviews. However, the college-life satisfaction questionnaire (November 2019) had already presented this as an issue across the student population – see Fig.29 below, showing motivation at different phases of data collection.

Figure 29: screenshot of themes' ranking per phase

The changed Motivation ranking across different data collection phases helps make the first link with Responsibilization. The SAGE dictionary of Policing (Wakefield & Fleming, 2008) defines 'Responsibilization' as a term developed in the governmentality literature (the 1990s) to refer to:

> The process whereby subjects are rendered individually RESPONSIBLE for a task which previously would have been the duty of another – usually a STATE AGENCY - or would not have been recognized as a responsibility at all. The process is strongly associated with NEO-LIBERAL political discourses, where it takes on the IMPLICATION that THE SUBJECT being responsibilized has AVOIDED this duty or the responsibility has been taken away from them in the WELFARE STATE era and managed by an expert or GOVERNMENT AGENCY' (my emphases).

My various emphases illustrate the renewed governmental expectations required of individuals to perform in the post-welfarist era (the 1980s) where moral responsibility is associated with responsibility to the market (see Morrisey 2015, p.615); in the case of education, the 1967

Plowden report (1967) had already called for parents' increased involvement with their children's education as an example of responsibilization. What seemed questionable was that students' education and related 'subject formation' became implicated regardless of students' life chances starting points. On the contrary, such expectations underpinned the way forward to break the endemic 'cycle of disadvantage' (Rutter& Madge, 1976) that had crept over Britain and the western world, which decreased people's aspirations and performance – Thatcher's (1981) (in)famous dictum '*the aim is to change their soul*' underpinned the New Right's policies' overhauling to end the cycle of poverty associate with disadvantage.

Responsibilization had come up in my literature review as shaping educational policies of the past 40 years (Chitty, 2014; Torrance, 2017) and, in the context of our research, it mirrored students' motivation and ambivalent practices such as 'technologies of the self' (Foucault, 1988; Hancock, 2018) which became more explicit as the research unfolded (again, see Fig.28 above). To make sense of such technologies, I turned to psychological motivation theories about drive, expectancy, and incentive theories (Kanfer, 1990; Peters, 2015); these theories tended to claim that individuals are empowered and agentic regardless of power, unbalanced structural constraints, and cultural diversity. However, since not all student-participants had access to the well-being that would engender positive psychological health, I was interested in what triggered such ambivalent technologies as coping mechanisms.

Thus, the theme of Motivation addressed the first research question closely (RQ1, about the influence of exams on MH) because, by definition, motivation should guide students to achieve/attain. Hence, motivation status amongst the six themes grew as an overarching theme rather than a psychological trait *per se*, or, a 'topic summary' providing contextualizing information, but more as a fully realized theme (Braun & Clarke, 2020, p.18). In addition, this approach helped explore other drivers not strictly related to the college-environment, but still linked to education – e.g., broader 'external factors' including societal and parental relationships.

6.1.1 Motivation recoded [92]

Despite relative excitement about being at college, by November, several student-participants explained that college life generated intrinsic pressure through tutor time, assemblies and visitors that reminded students about the future, taking for granted that schooling funneled them into work (fieldnotes). These multiple pressures are controversial because, drawing on my long-term teaching experience, I realize that even though discussing future possibilities through career fairs or subject choice is common practice, such discussions condense to applying for a university or apprenticeship course that leads to employment, *sold as* a career. Therefore, the excitement of dreaming about future possibilities turns into performance-related pressure, narrowly converging in a de-motivating way for the majority, as confirmed by participants who struggled to combine motivation with being responsible, creative, resilient, risk-taker, entrepreneurial, successful, independent and driven.

For example, as part of enrichment sessions, students-participants coded Motivation through 1) subject inspiration, 2) being demotivated by having to fit into the standardized education system, and 3) pressure to perform and please others (teachers, parents, and close friends). In my recoding of student-participants' codes, I kept the content of the codes but dissembled, reassembled, and renamed them – i.e., a balancing act between original codes and relevant literature. For example, increased accountability measures shifted the focus on performance that, alongside the required resilience, would have supported my critique of the thin line between intrinsic and extrinsic Motivation.[93] Instead, the analysis started with 'extrinsic' and 'intrinsic' Motivation (Deci & Ryan,

---

[92] In this and the next chapters I re-check and re-align the codes with each of the six themes; this operation is in line with Codebook TA. Recoding was consistent throughout task 2's analysis (mine) even though I aimed at keeping the nature of original students' codes - the adjustments facilitated analysis and operationalized further my deductive-inductive approach.

[93] The binary intrinsic vs extrinsic reflected student-participants' perceived motivation through a blend of responses referring to: i) parental care and pressures to succeed, or, societal expectations in terms of career aspirations; ii) peer support but also competition, teacher care but also standard requirements; iii) responsibility towards themselves, parents and teachers. These three points, by implication, called for enhanced performance and concomitant resilience as indispensable to cope (next chapter).

2010) codes, a distinction that student-participants had already made. Next, however, I broke it into codes implicating responsibilization, aspiration, parents/peers' relationships, and subject area/teacher specific motivation (in a mixed order, see Fig.30):

Figure 30: NVivo screenshot - Motivation's codes

	Files	References
T01. Motivation	29	326
Responsibilization Accountability	20	61
Extrinsic M	19	62
Parental implication	18	44
Intrinsic M	18	36
Neolib Aspirations	18	34
Subject implication	15	31
Teacher implication	12	23
Peers implication	10	14

Such deductive-inductive work was to harmonize the data with the three RQs and the literature review but was also to work creatively (in line with Codebook TA) while still being rigorous and faithful to the data and the participative spirit of the research design. In other words, upon Codebook TA, I recoded student-participants' codes without excluding their initial codes' rationale but simply unpacking them further.

Thus, to demonstrate how motivation became a rich theme to explore MH, I present it by considering the often unquestioned 'responsibilization' agenda perpetrated through educational policies. Point i) below is intended to show the interdependence between Motivation <u>and</u> Responsibilization, an interdependence which I then carry forward <u>with</u> the other codes' analysis.

i. Motivation <u>and</u> Responsibilization
ii. Motivation/Responsibilization <u>with</u> parental relationship

 iii. Motivation/Responsibilization <u>with</u> aspiration

 iv. Motivation/Responsibilization <u>with</u> peer implications

 v. Motivation/Responsibilization <u>with</u> subject areas

 vi. Motivation/Responsibilization <u>with</u> teacher relationships

6.2 Motivation <u>and</u> Responsibilization

Recoding Motivation vis-a-vis 'responsibilization' made it easier to identify the pressure of responsibilization regarding performance outcomes. Performance frames students as the sole ones responsible for his/her success/failure, and educational pressure-management gets normalized despite increased (1) academic pressure, (2) fear of failure and (3) prospect of unemployment. Participants claimed that the three could not separate from the impact of -and on- parental relationship, engagement in learning, and peer and teacher relationships, nor could the three be separated by an inward look into oneself in terms of aspiration and motivation. While I will address such ramifications separately, this baseline section addresses Motivation vis-à-vis Responsibilization to show how student-participants could not separate them and which other participants regarded as significant too. For example, Jo (a teacher) was surprised when I told her about the popularity of Motivation among students:

> I'm surprised they said motivation …because I think it's one of the biggest things, but I didn't think they'd identify that… because… we know they're demotivated, but they don't always accept that THAT is what it is…they always…''it's this''…''it's that''… when actually it's THEIR motivation!

To ground the point further, one of the college psychotherapists, Janna, was surprised at students' lack of interest in exercising agency, which she saw as a sign of lacking personal responsibility, signaling those students who visited her as procrastinators. This surprise resonated with two teachers, Evie and Jo (humanities teachers, with Jo's added leadership duties to manage students' MH). Both offered examples of students' irresponsible behaviour and poor engagement in learning, ignoring possible more comprehensive socio-economic pictures. While both portrayed stereotypical teenage demeanour, student-participants argued that students' lack of engagement resulted from educational processes implemented before the sixth form; the recurrent claim

(fieldnotes) was that they had been spoon-fed to pass exams - i.e., paradoxically de-responsibilized by internal policies that tried to enact those of the government. It all sounded familiar; in my experience, schools/colleges cannot afford the 'production' of underachieving students, which negatively impacts the finances and league tables.

Another teacher offered a deeper insight into Motivation, making me think of its versatility as an analytical tool. Nicola thought that Motivation was important in his relationship with students but also irrelevant as it played out intrinsically throughout other themes; this meant that we should also look beyond the implicit value of motivation (i.e., perhaps less psychologized and more politicized) and see it more 'performatively' or, in the act of relating responsibly or not:

> Yeah, I put [motivation] at the end of the ranking…in some ways, IT IS intrinsic to anything else; it's difficult to talk about it on its own, it's almost that …for me….motivation isn't something external that sits on its own, I feel like that those who're doing well and trying…it's because I've developed a strong relationship and they're responding to that…whereas this idea of motivation is like something …abstract?

The career officer (Giovanna) indirectly backed Nicola's point by nuancing Motivation with career prospects. She ranked students' poor motivation as the first problem of career choice and noted that it cut across the other themes; when I asked her to expand, she said:

> It's usually hard for students to stay motivated when they see uncertainty in their next steps. Some commonly struggle with making university decisions and now even more under the pandemic… Some make wrong choices in their A-level subjects and want to start again, but that's difficult.

The critical point here could be that reaching a new school/college at sixteen, removing the uniform, having a flexible timetable and starting to make career choices reveal the expectation placed on adolescents entering pre-adulthood; hence, stepping up and deciding becomes too much for some, possibly because they did not feel 'trusted' by adults. For example, the orientation of task 1 pointed at the role of relationships in making student-participants sense of resilience and engagement in previous years (as Saddy, Ash, Vic, Rina, and Izzie noted). Others, like Ellinois and Juss still felt responsible for potentially disappointing their parents if they failed, even when the parent had not explicitly put pressure.

A different approach to Motivation that embraced full responsibility was presented by Divvy and Mickey. Divvy, for example, was shocked by '…oh my god, the amount of sugar-coating I see in the UK by teachers, who advise to start revising, do this, do that…which was a constant reminder to be responsible'. Mickey, too, was already sure that:

> I need to do something about myself, and I don't care about other people…but I do care about how that transcends into how others react…others as parents…like…most of the time, if I want to do something, I'll try to get them [parents] to like it…so kind of finding the common boundaries…so that everyone understands what I want so I can move forward.

As we shall see later, some were unable to establish close relationships between teachers and student-peers in the new educational environment; others found the relationships too 'responsibilizing', especially towards their parents; a few claimed their autonomy as a 'technology of the self' (Foucault, 1988; Gros, 2005), making choices and implementing them, with or without the support or conditioning of family and friends.[94]

Instead, Ricardo (teacher) offered a different view of the impact of responsibilization on motivation; as a Politics teacher, he used the political agenda behind education to make his point. First, he talked about the high expectations put on students (by social media, parents and teachers) and then:

> The expectation that students put on themselves…they compete for more than we did for those desirable outcomes, like for certain jobs…. while these days we're told it's 'meritocracy', and therefore anybody has these opportunities… and that puts expectations on students who may want instead a normal job…but that would be seen as 'failure'... So I feel conflicted about this idea of high expectations because, on the one hand, it does lead to better performance, but equally, high expectations can lead students to see themselves as a failure, in terms of A-level grades…. but also, in terms of future careers or

---

[94] Whether such a technology was driven by the 'normalizing gaze' (Foucault, 1977, p.184), that is a subjugating force reflecting dominant neoliberal discourses of 'success', or, a subjectivizing force, agentic, is to bear in mind for an in-depth assessment of subjectivity as a heuristic to MH.

university…for example, everyone wants to go to Russel group Unis, and there aren't many places available out there.

Ricardo's response added excellent links between motivation, responsibilization, performance and mental ill-health, drawing on those students employing avoidance habits (playing with their phone!) that, sadly, precede students' realization of unproductivity. As Ricardo argued, '…. such a reality-check becomes more pronounced around under-achievement in mock-exams, and, often, the expectation of achieving [pre]placed over them, somehow paralyses them'.

Next section nuances aspects of Motivation and Responsibilization regarding the 'relationship <u>with</u> parents'.

6.2.1 Motivation/Responsibilization <u>with</u> parental relationship

Parents and student-participants offered mixed views regarding responsibilization and its link to Motivation. However, a student-participant, Saddy, was very vocal about this in three separate instances:

1. 'Yeah…I think I'm exploring myself…I am still finding out what is me and not me…and I think external factors affect me more than internal factors of college…'

2. Ok…right… teachers in college…no…no real relationship and that's weird because I relied on my relationship with teachers so much in school (secondary) and I had a better one but because I saw them every day for many years… same routine…so I HAD TO build a relationship…I could go and talk to them…but right here…it's like…come in, up the ppoint...whatever…it's weird!

3. 'My teachers [in secondary] expected certain grades from me as I was doing well in lessons …and …because also I wanted to impress my teachers and wanted to be the best, impress and all that'.

Saddy's responses showcase widespread uneasiness among student-participants about feeling responsible when managing relationships. Saddy made direct links to other themes to explain her stance on Motivation, that is, having to please people all the time while being judged by her mum and friends *in primis*. Such pleasing was performative, too, as it required the capacity to perform

a being that she felt she was not. These perceptions shaped future visions, hence her hesitation to commit to the world or society (apathy) as a 'technology of the self', alongside her need/want to look good and capable as a form of resistance. Saddy seemed to lack intrinsic motivation, though post-interview, she claimed, '...it's inside sir, somewhere…and where it should be' (fieldnotes).

As for parents, their picture reflected gendered expectations, with girls being more motivated than boys. In addition, some parents commented on overbearing parenting and its negative influence vs the parents who 'showed up once in a while' (Leeno), causing other types of issues, as noted in this exchange:

> (DDE) you make me think about my ex-middle/upper-class students with Cultural Capital, similar to those I now meet during supply teaching in private schools; clearly not all of them… but several were under parental and societal pressure to perform…to get into the best Universities etc…well, we had severe self-harm cases and call of suicide.

> (Leeno) '…yeah, depression gets to them …one of the boys I coach, 9-10 years old, goes to a private school …and his dad is a neurosurgeon and… he is a sensitive kid and just breaks down every other session'.

Such ambivalences burden parents and students, resulting in some parents over-responsibilizing their children at the expense of motivation, especially when I consider that most students seem committed. I continue to be caught between a desire for my two kids not to be traumatized by schooling, and therefore adopt a pragmatic approach to the schooling experience (i.e., get the certification) to a more noble and holistic approach, where schooling is a formative period beyond the grades.

Additional student insights varied and illuminated some of the issues presented by the parents, depending on how supportive or disruptive parents were, but also on specific family narratives related to migration, privilege and deprivation. A predominant issue was presented by year-12 students who faced the pressures to 'know' about their university choice and a future career/job within a few months into the academic year. Vic put it bluntly: '…last week in tutor time, we'd this special meeting where you're supposed to know where you're going…subject choice for university, which university…possible apprenticeship…job opportunities etc., but… I was lost!'. Other student-participants presented similar perceived pressure. Ellinois:

The pressure to perform is ongoing and can come from teachers too who tell you about the next step,…''if you don't do this, you won't be able to do this''… but also, I have my parents who went back to night-school when they were working so they know how hard it is…so they would want me not to go through the same as them'.

Ellinois, from a British white working-class background, felt responsible towards her parents as none in her immediate family went to university, so, it was her responsibility to succeed academically, she claimed. She was grateful but not always convincingly motivated, often stressed by parental support, which did not translate into guidance. As I described post-interview (fieldnotes), ''...though Ellinois' perception was that 'all my parents want from me is to try my hardest, so I don't have too much parental pressure'', her perception contrasts her view about feeling responsibilized to perform', it seems that Ellinois' parents lack of expectation ended up pressurizing her. So, in addition to the challenges associated with adolescence, Ellinois' preoccupation stemmed from indirect parental preoccupation. She kept repeating, '…I just want to reach my potential, I…guess…but I'm just not being the best at being motivated [voice lowers] …putting my mind to it…but yeah, I just want to reach my potential'.

Thus, the compounding force of academic performance requirements with direct/indirect parental expectations seems to shape students' sense of motivation vis-à-vis responsibilization. Ash, from a Muslim heritage, was straight forward about how relationships and responsibility came to influence Motivation:

I didn't deal well with GCSE pressure last year…if I could go back, I'd change something, like subject-choice, revise more, and stop getting stressed… I wasn't happy with the results…you know, my sister now at Uni did well at GCSE, so…. my parents wanted me to do well too, so …. I felt the pressure…also, they are immigrants, so I felt responsible for making it work for them.

Similarly, Vic, from eastern Europe, talked about aspiration through the lens of motivation, that is, as a response to her parents' sacrifice to reunite in the UK and get their children a better education – Vic cried: '…the ONLY thing I can do is to get the education!'. Again, this shows how intrinsic and extrinsic motivation get blurred; Vic can 'only' see the education factor, facilitated by her parents' efforts, as a motivator but which was a stressor. Rina, too, presented a similar dynamic; from an Asian background, Rina felt the conflict between personal wants/needs

(she informally told me that painting was her passion) and her parents' educational wishes despite the minimal support they offered:

> They want me to go to Uni and do stereotypically challenging subjects or careers like high earning…like doctoral stuff…but I don't see myself going down that route… at the same time, I don't want to disappoint them.

Unlike the examples offered so far, Vanni offered another angle, perhaps justifying those who may portray themselves as 'irresponsible' through a lack of motivation to engage in college. She highlighted:

> Motivation and a sense of responsibility depend on the mental state…or the persons one is dealing with…the situation…I mean, loads of my motivation links to external factors…if there is too much going on at home, you may feel not really motivated…I mean, when stuff was going on at home recently, I thought…I can't be bothered!'.

This insight anticipates the causal relationship between MH and Motivation, which participants developed with aspiration (next section); in essence, relationships and motivation correlated and reflected direct/indirect emotional blackmailing that touched profound aspects of kin relations, such as honour and responsibility or 'survival of the clan'. For example, Vanni's love for her dog vs her mum and grandmother's rejection of the dog, unbalanced their relationship, and Vanni did not exclude it as demotivating for college matters. Hence, perceptions of Motivation/Responsibilization varied and shifted dramatically, depending on the mundane (short-term) to long-term motivations, including career and university choices which depended on education success at GCSE and A-Level.

Overall, the above accounts work as 'subjective configurations' (Gonzalez Rey, 2009b) and explain the conflicts experienced by parents and students but were likely to generate angst amongst students. They seemed caught in a balancing act between roles and societal responsibilization as expressed through independence, employability or any other expected future possibility. This balancing was a point they did not explicitly raise but had implications for their MH. Therefore, the following section presents students' inability to see the difference between aspiration and inspiration and educators' (parents and teachers') inability to separate them from expectations; this tension added a new twist to the motivation-responsibilization pairing because it cast further light on the causes/effects of adolescent MH vis-a-vis performance (next chapter).

6.2.2 Motivation/Responsibilization <u>with</u> aspiration

Student-participants created the initial code as 'subject inspiration' to identify personal reasons adolescents chose to occupy themselves beyond compulsory learning (fieldnotes). Student-participants spent significant time (see Appx-13 for enrichment topics breakdown) dissecting concepts such as formal education, learning, schooling, and examination/assessment, and how these shaped the identity of the 'inspired' student who would then 'aspire'. The latter would then shape transition and progress (i.e., improve) to the next stage of life, linking motivation to positive MH. However, it was not until interviews that aspiration illuminated the theme of Motivation and located it within a causal relationship with MH, whereby subjectification and subjectivation became more pronounced. Also, aspiration freed motivation from a reductive binary framework (extrinsic vs intrinsic) to consider it within a spectrum/continuum that facilitated 'subjective configurations' of students' MH.

6.2.2.1 The intrinsically motivated: more aspirational

Most student-participants believed that teachers could be, as it were, inspirational to aspire; however, some student-participants embraced aspiration differently to make sense of 'their' motivations instead of being driven by teachers' input or perceived parental demands to succeed. They saw themselves as agentic selves and showed agency through resistance – i.e., subjectivation through degrees of non-compliance as a 'technology of the self'. For example, some student-participants expressed concerns about the efficacy of the education system, and teachers' methods and expectations as detrimental to their long-term aspirations. For example, Divvy stated that teachers were not strict:

> In my country, they [teachers] banged you on till you get it, over here …well, at GCSE, the teacher told me that level 4 was my target but also said 'I can see you need to do better, but really… don't worry'.

Divvy saw her British teachers as setting her up to fail long-term and understood, she argued, that she had to push herself. She additionally drew from her recent A-LEVEL experience where

she identified 'Loads of sugar coating… teachers should go harder instead… not sure the students are being made fully aware…for me…I need to do better, that's it!'. Divvy, brought up in an EU country but of other economic-migrant origins, seemed intrinsically motivated. She also used past educational experiences as motivational because she did not feel motivated to perform and succeed; however, from a teaching perspective, she seemed unaware of teachers' agenda to manage to teach and learn over time to serve diverse individuals. Notably, she stressed that her motivation was not related to responsibility towards her parents but about:

> Taking your steps… I'm often reminded to become independent by my parents…so that's it, maybe…but in terms of choosing my career, it didn't come from my family…all were surprised about clinical psychology or psychiatry as my Uni and career choices, they are into math or law.

Divvy's voice presented the 'available' aspirational subject position she willingly took up, potentially contributing to her positive MH. Nevertheless, conversely, she could have been duped into a culture of aspiration and success by her family, making her the independent neoliberal subject, complicit to her subjection to aspire, work hard, and achieve as 'technology of the self' (Hancock, 2018; Spoherer, 2018).

Conversely, Mickey, from eastern Europe, perceived her (intrinsic) motivation to choose as a degree of independence from her family. She would repeatedly assert her autonomy and take whatever risk because she claimed the UK's exam-driven system made students pretty much the same. Mickey noted, '…you have to…in a kind of way… sacrifice the time you spend into the system to kind of…make time for YOUR interests…it's kind…one way or the other'. Mickey's critical insight opens up another potentially liberating and subjectivizing 'technology of the self'.

Deferred gratification underpins Mickey and Divvy's aspirations and shows student-participants potential to think, negotiate or compromise independently, find inspiration and be responsible as much responsibilized subjects. Both student-participants epitomised neoliberal aspirational subjectivities that compress being responsible in the eyes of the family and being responsibilized in the eyes of the state. Put differently, they had NOT avoided duties (see Reay et al., 2009), ideologically fitting as aspirational neoliberal citizens, what Peruzzo (2020) called 'proactive subjects', and Morrissey '…optimal individuals in and for a performing institution (2015, p.615).

6.2.2.2 The extrinsically motivated: less motivated

Conversely, others articulated aspiration/inspiration through a sense of 'responsibilization' to please parents as their primary drive, stripping motivation of more profound, self-actualizing aspirations. For example, Vic, who had also migrated from eastern Europe at the end of primary school, asserted:

> I want to make something out-of-myself….I don't wanna rely on anyone…I just want to be independent, but at the same time, I wanna please my parents, and I want to do it for them even if they don't pressure me…you know… they sacrificed so much to be here…the only thing I can do is… to get the education!

Vic's point seems widely representative and shows how some could not find personal motives and could not handle others', opting for short-term gratifications. For many, educational success became 'the aim' to please parents. Mickey portrayed the attitude of her current peers as, '…it is mainly parental pressure rather than exam… really, loads of pressure for the students here, they have to do well BECAUSE of their parents'. Such a remark echoed Saddy's:

> Last year, at GCSE, my mum put so much pressure…comparing me with others and telling me about others' top results….I was so stressed during my GCSE about what my mum would think about my results, not WHAT I WOULD….I remember I was on the verge of a breakdown'.

Parental pressure, direct (Saddy's) or indirect (Vic's), seemed inevitable and was also felt in subtle ways by Ash:

> Yeah, it's not a daily thing but…well…mum tends to query my Uni's choice in relation to my current subject choices…and I DON'T KNOW!!… how am I supposed to know?…if I did science, maths, then they could push for let's say doctor…you know… but my subjects don't really help…and I don't think too far ahead to be able to give her an answer.

Students faced dilemmas and responsibilities, whether to prioritize their selves or 'be for others' (Shahjahan, 2020), or, as I noted during an interview reflection with the college psychotherapist:

(DDE) During interviews, students reveal how motivation is a BIG thing; they admit that …and… it's easy to work out that they don't fully understand what motivates them or even if they are motivated!'

(Janna) To add to that… those students who claim to have MH issues… that's why they've got low motivation… [voice lowers] …they've got MH issues! Does that make sense? [i.e. mental ill-health caused a lack of motivation].

Student-participants seemingly saw a correlation between their lack of motivation and mental ill-health, and grappling with extrinsic affective factors, such as parental relationship, seemed a protective mechanism to co-opt their lack of intrinsic motivation. Unfortunately, this assumption reinforced, as far as Motivation was concerned, the limitation of an intrinsic vs extrinsic analytical model. The inability to own intrinsic motivations due to shaky future possibilities seemed to represent a deficit they did not want to face, blaming lack of motivation for adolescents' mental ill-health.

So, the *thin* separation between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation became pronounced when participants discussed motivation through aspiration, that is, when the possibility of a net separation between the two collapsed. Aspiration, instead, helped capture both student-participants association of (intrinsic) motivation with desirable future possibilities and their willingness to please parents as the only (extrinsic) motivation. This means that while intrinsic motivation showed that the 'responsibilized' students had not avoided duties towards themselves, society and the economy, extrinsic motivation showed that the 'responsibilized' students had not avoided duties towards parents, society, and the economy but had ignored themselves. Such an essentialist and deterministic analytical framework were not in line with PAR because it marginalized the 'in-between' students and other layers of understanding (as part of a spectrum of aspirational possibilities). For example, students seemed to condense accidentally: i) aspiration (i.e., to achieve something) and inspiration (i.e., urged to do something), ii) instant and deferred gratification, and iii) teachers' role and aspiration. Such conflations resulted in existential soul searching, causing distress in most cases, difficult to pin down – indeed an *extimite'* or intimate estrangement! The conflation enabled me to problematize motivation in a cause-effect-cycle relationship (later).

The following section presents another layer of Motivation/Responsibilization with Relationships (in-college peer-relationship), with both detrimental and favourable effects.

6.2.3 Motivation/Responsibilization <u>with</u> peer relationships

While Motivation encapsulates each participant's experience in managing intrinsic and extrinsic motivations which considered responsibilization, peer-relationships emerged as influencing college life and, in turn, motivation and MH. As one of the teachers, Evie, informally noted, '…I don't think students here are fussy about teachers…I thought peers were at the heart of their understanding of what life at college was to be!' (fieldnotes). Such a comment resonated with my teaching experience and my initial impressions of the college; I noticed that while some student-participants did not associate peer-relationships with motivation, others really lamented their social awkwardness and often associated it with a motivational deficit and worsening MH. For example, during an enrichment session focused on the pros-and-cons of education, some advocated schools/colleges as places to establish healthy relationships, be it with teachers or peers. Whilst others admitted to struggling with a lack of friendship groups and perceived it as a deficit and a responsibility (fieldnotes).

Supposedly, during interviews, I was struck by students' keenness to talk about their college friendship status and interlink it with other themes such as Motivation, the College-Environment or Exam Pressure. For example, it was not easy for Izzy, Ash, Rina and Vic to manage their shyness both in class and around the college; Izzy's parents even told me they had to keep her company via phone during break and lunch up until Christmas. Similarly, Ash noted that she could engage with essential, in-lesson communication, but once the lesson finished, that was it; she believed it was too late to enter a friendship group in college. Overall, Ash saw the college as 'enabling' her, creating opportunities and giving support; however, she perceived herself as having a problem with peers. Ash admitted, '…nothing really should change here…I SHOULD CHANGE…the college does give opportunities/everything to make friends…but it's about who I am as a person'. Not only was she simultaneously struggling with negative identification and disidentification, but also with subjectivation deprived of agency, echoing Han's point that the individual's psyche is complicit in his/her surveillance (beyond Foucauldian biopolitics).

Others were less worried about friendship, especially boys, or those who felt they were behind with their studies and saw college life as 'getting things done' because time was ticking, and they had to be pragmatic. Similarly, those students-participants who had chosen 'hard' subjects like physics or biology and had science and medicine as university subjects were all self-motivated -

they welcomed a little competition (fieldnotes). A parent, Anri, stressed the importance of using friendship group competitions as hooks for getting boys engaged:

> I think he [son] was … over confident, having a bit of an ego, saying, 'I'm good at it, and I don't need to study!' or…'I don't need to slave and be away from my friends!'…so he would have this kind of attitude, but then, his friends, who often thought they were cool, chilling outside when they were studying a lot at home or the library!! I discovered this after questioning their studying habits when they came around our house…so things changed for my son to hear that, and so…it wasn't uncool to study.

Anri's point suggests her son had internalized peer-pressure, which got managed by her intervention; I would add that even though boys are more competitive than girls, boys take peer-pressure more lightly or are capable of distancing from it more quickly than girls. For example, Saddy was very vocal about her MH concerns and felt responsible for what others thought about her (look, academic results, in-class performance), a view shared by others at interview time but not publicly, as Saddy did with me. Likewise, Juss felt that she had internalized peer-pressure in preparation for GCSE, and the same was happening at A-Level:

> Last year's pressure (at GCSE) also came from my school and peers…for example, people knew I was smart and expected me to do fine…so I felt that I could not speak of my fears, and when I got my results, I saw that some people took it for granted, I start feeling the same here now.

Similarly, Ellinois added another layer to peer (indirect) pressure by saying '…yeah, and some people manage this better than others…like Uni choices, already clear for them…I have no idea about what I want to study'. Her frustration seems accounted for by a tension between Ellinois' personality (kind, loving and caring about peers) and the expectation of competing. On this topic, a teacher, Ricardo, added something relevant by widening analysis:

> Social media is a problem; the idea of peers having a better time than you, seeing these idealized lives on social media, body image issues that affect both boys and girls, parents and teachers, and the expectation students put on themselves…THEY compete more than we did for those desirable outcomes, like jobs.

Teachers like Ricardo, like most parents, were well aware of the influence of peer-relationship to sustain positive MH, and, whereas the college had a robust system in place to help students' integration, take-up for social initiatives was poor. However, Ricardo again claimed that all those who struggled to make friends felt like outsiders and admitted to having MH difficulties.[95]

Therefore, peer relationships implications <u>with</u> motivation and responsibilization in the college-environment are multifaceted and range from unmotivating factors such as 'realizing' personal limitations (lack of social skills) to those motivating factors such as competition and performance comparison as well as engagement with the novelty of a new environment. Therefore, the following section presents the subject choice as inspiration, with less emphasis on the relationship between motivation and responsibilization, but with extra focus on performance to guarantee an adequate transition to university and career.

6.2.4 Motivation/Responsibilization <u>with</u> subject areas

This code looked at student-participants' struggle with subject choices, as confirmed by the MH and well-being officer '…most students who come to see us don't like their chosen subjects, especially late enrollers'. The subject choice at both GCSE and A-Level is often reduced to students being 'funneled' - through internal policies - based on prior measurements which 'guide' students, parents and schools/colleges. All student-participants had gone through option-blocks at GCSE, but in the current college, they could have gone for any three subjects so long as they had the required GCSE grades. However, since September 2020, the college introduced option blocks (or pathways). As a teacher, Nicola, told me:

> One of the attractions of our college was the freedom to choose any A levels....now, we
> have 'pathways'. In pure neoliberalism, the only point of education is preparation for a

---

[95] Students were never explicit about their negative MH, nor were they too critical about the structural pressures affecting their MH - they indirectly hinted at negative MH through their 'subjective configurations'.

career; gone is any idea of the intrinsic value of education. But even by its own career-focused rationale doesn't work... I had a year-11 (interviewed to get into year-12) who wanted to study architecture at university, which requires maths and graphic design, but none of the current pathways allows this.

The choice conundrum, often influenced by parents and career-officers, is followed by a pedagogy focused on teaching-to-the-test (Murphy, 2016), which puts teachers and subject areas in competition, at the expense of genuine student interest, with adverse effects on motivation. This vicious circle creates an impasse because students feel responsible for subject choices, they partially own. Vanni captured the mood of many students under the exam grind: '…looking back… GCSEs put so much pressure on you…they made you feel like the world was gonna end if we did not pass or you were gonna die…it really irritated me'. 'They' surely refer to the teachers and tutors as the first to be accountable for students' under-achievement.

To better evaluate the Motivation/Responsibilization pairing concerning subject areas, we ought to unpack option blocks further because they represent policy enactment on assessment and progression. Option-blocks at GCSE consider prior attainment at primary school (year-6 SATs exams) and cognitive tests such as CATs[96] scores, and, from September 2022, Reception Baseline Tests. The latter are meant to replace year-2 SATs and measure a child's language, communication, literacy and mathematics level at four. Some schools apply further measurements in year-7 and 8, and it is common practice for GCSE to start in year-9, adding an entire exam-focused year to standard two (year-10/11).

The usage of option-blocks, as Nicola noted, responds to neoliberal policy narratives that invite schools/colleges to implement interventions to secure results, disguised as school leaders' strategic guidance to motivate and help students secure success. Unfortunately, while most

---

[96] Cognitive Abilities Tests – not compulsory but widely used to measure children's abilities to think in particular ways, including understanding, memory, reasoning and decision making. Intended to help teachers and schools to get a more rounded view of each child's abilities so they can 'see' each child's academic potential as well as weaknesses.

student-participants accepted or did not thoroughly question option blocks, others 'played the system' and succumbed to it.

For example, most student-participants claimed to be 'ok' with the orientation preceding A-Level subject choices as it logically linked to university subject choice. The following exchange reflected the view of some students and, in retrospect, reminded me that my questioning was biased. I sparingly used the word 'responsible' or 'pressure' when Matty never looked under pressure:

> (DDE) Ok, so do you feel responsible for making certain choices? Which seem to be good choices ...I mean... your three subjects are pretty broad, but my question is: has this freedom to choose three subjects motivated you? It feels like you are motivated, but at the same time, you don't sound motivated, and soon you'll have the pressure to choose your Uni placement and final subject.

> (Matty) I think this college is good at giving us subject orientations, or on the pros and cons of a gap year, Uni or not Uni, losing learning habits etc… we have already discussed this at tutor time sessions plus career talks.

However, for the majority, it was not as clear-cut. Juss was ok with her current A-Level choices but was equally vocal against i) the negative impact of subject 'setting' in secondary school, ii) how it potentially distorted students' perception of academic ability and their global self-esteem, iii) how students would associate with subject knowledge and understanding during the learning journey, eventually leading to 'blocked' choices. For example, setting students based on prior testing is nowadays standard practice across UK schools, with most schools 'sorting' students into up to seven levels in most subjects (from year-7). Juss argued that even though she was in an option block at GCSE, her secondary school ensured classes were mixed ability, enhancing peer-learning activities, '…because you also have those smart in English but not in Maths, others are smart in other subjects…we are all different, and we can learn from each other'. So, Juss highlighted an important school policy as potentially harmful (i.e., settings) but was ok with the option-block (her choices were in the block!). Ash, however, was not so fortunate, and her GCSE results did not set her for her dream subject at A-Levels, Psychology.

It seemed that Ash's early cognitive assessment tests (CATs), her inability to defy their predictions and associated settings, 'blocked' her out and prevented her from studying Psychology

at A-Level. Had she studied it at A-Level, she would have pursued Psychology at university and eventually as an employment/career. However, on the college-enrolment day, she was reminded that her low GCSE grade in Psychology (and English) did not grant her access to Psychology A-level. Ash eventually got '… used to the three A-level subjects offered…I guess it happened for the best…they give grade restriction for a reason…not to struggle later'. Is Ash being harsh on herself? Is she complying with an internalized 'technology of the self' because that is what others expect of her? Is she to be 'blocked' from pursuing her dream at sixteen? Furthermore, she claimed she could not question her low motivation with History (the replacement subject for Psychology); she had to resign from it.

Conversely, the four boys got along with their A-level subjects and engaged with them as they saw fit, being fatalistic about the career associated with a subject choice - interestingly, our conversations about subject choice implicitly suggested a linear journey to a career/job, instead of valuing education *per se*. Hammi and Matty saw college as a place where not to get distracted by peers or teachers but where to get on with subject choices; such choices would eventually '....bear its fruits', they argued, unconditionally seeing their subjects as intrinsically motivating. Alby's rationale was that Psychology was 'my subject' but accepted that '...other peers, one day, could be better psychologists than me and therefore the subject area itself could not yet mean a job/career'; nevertheless, he felt '...motivated to rise to the challenge, and I also find the teacher inspiring'. Teocoli, too, offered a valuable picture of how subjects and teachers interrelated to explain motivation. He was annoyed with his English teacher during his GCSE as she had undermined him and his way of engaging with literature and writing. However, having secured English at A-level, he was now focused on getting the best out of English which, he argued, '...would give me the foundation to become either an actor or a writer, and prove my GCSE teacher wrong!'

These last two examples, Teocoli and Alby, add to the breadth of motivation and how social actors construe it beyond the intrinsic/extrinsic model and any over-imposed 'responsibilization'; instead, motivation seems to work alongside subjectivation. As noted earlier, and I propose again his crucial point here, Victoire made the point about the volatility of his son's subject area as motivation:

> Overall, he seems to be achieving, either, because at the last moment, he gets into a
> relatively orderly panic, and as an intelligent guy, he then performs well, but he hasn't got

that consistency…. So, I don't think he has yet found something he likes.

Thus, these examples portray stereotypical boys, with matter-of-fact approaches through 'defensive' responses but also escapes to manage college, while girls bemoaned the subject choice process and consequences. For example, I noticed that in my post-interview with the boys, I had jotted down similar impressions about my school days:

> I remember feeling both responsible and not responsible regarding subject choice in my days. I insisted on telling students that I embraced the choices I made -and didn't make- which, in my case, eventually included not going to university at 18 but at 27! I pursued other interests like travelling and learning languages, not necessarily linked to a specific job or career (fieldnotes).

Lack of self-knowledge about my wants/needs at their same age often reflected my defensive argument, I wanted to show I was OK with the way things were unfolding for me, but I was not – I was fatalistic about my future; perhaps boys can afford it?

Such a gendered dimension within the motivation/responsibilization-subject area code deserves particular attention to avoid merging subjectivities rooted in diverse socio-cultural models and implicated in adolescents' mental ill-health. Motivation/responsibilization with subject areas get muddled up with a string of governance procedures, difficult to escape: i) early cognitive measurements in the primary; ii) consequent subject 'setting' and associated self-fulfilled prophecies about achievement/attainment; iii) schools/colleges' funnelling pathways or option-blocks, iv) a 'hasty' university location and subject choice to be made half way through A-levels, which bears the intent to lead to employment, disguised in policy guidance as a career.

The pressurized, linear sequence of educational aims, synthetizing in post-18 learning choices at a critical transitional stage, reverberated across the other themes and implicated performance as a stressor point (next chapter). The following section presents another layer of motivation/responsibilization with relationships, that is, teacher-students; it reiterates, for emphasis, elements of the links between motivation and responsibilization from very distinct perspectives and calls for more performance-related nuances.

6.2.5 Motivation/Responsibilization <u>with</u> teacher relationship

This code looked at how relationships with teachers affected Motivation/Responsibilization by presenting: i) each student-participants' experience and struggle to deal with teacher support-and-pressure; ii) added insight into processes of subjectivation that could influence MH positively.

It is essential to distinguish between secondary schools and college-environments policies because student-participants drew their answers from both. Yet, despite similarities, some critical differences apply as variations that shape neoliberal 'learner subjectivities'[97] through exam-focused practices.

Firstly, at A-Levels, students choose three subjects and relate to three teachers only, compared to ten or twelve at GCSEs. This process carries fewer opportunities for dependency, attachments, and surveillance. Secondly, the approach is more mature because of individualizing processes, such as no longer having to wear a uniform, selecting, and creating one's conditions for work experience and, volunteering without college help, attending college for lesson time only. Thirdly, despite similar uncertainties with subject choices, at GCSE, subject choice pressure diminished because not '.... final and vital', as Mollica put it, as A-Levels. Consequently, responsibilization towards achievement/attainment remained implicit across the GCSE and A-Levels but still extrinsically motivated.

However, some student-participants resented their relationship with teachers more than others. Some were able to see this pragmatically and did not expect too much input or motivation from the teachers; others, on the other hand, showed an attachment to the teachers' praise and guidance, which, however, often manifested itself in self-imposed pressure and routine supervision, eliciting reactions such as covert resistance or the need to challenge the teachers openly. For example, unlike focus groups sessions when the consensus was that most teachers in college were capable and caring, at interview time, some student-participants did not hesitate to stress the pressure that

---

[97] Not in contrast and nor dissimilar to Reay's 'learner identities' (2005; 2010; 2011; 2020) but important to distinguish, especially for research that aims to explore working class learner identity construction.

came from teachers even though the exams were, apart from one student-participant (year-13), at the end of year-13. For example, Ellinois, Juss and Vanni remembered the unmotivating pressure felt during their GCSEs as haunting them into A-Levels. Ellinois pointed out that teachers did not hesitate to remind students of the consequences of not getting the grade and the reverberating pressure:

> They always tell you about the next step… if you don't do this, you won't be able to do this…so... for kids through education, being told that ALL there is, in the end, is Uni…then that's what you know about life? Is this all there is here?

Similarly, Vanni describes teachers at GCSE and now as '...over-doing it'; she perceived them as non-genuine, moved by sheer '...convenience... because their job is at stake'. As she cogently observed, '…playing their own game which then benefits the school leaders, the league table, OFSTED and secure funding, that's it, sir'. Likewise, Saddy felt '...relationships are non-existent compared to secondary affecting my motivation'. In secondary, she argued that she relied on '...bonding, every day for years, building a solid rapport' in which teachers' expectations were easier to comprehend. Such expectations reflected both her overall commitment (responsibility?) and performance which, in turn, reflected her own want/need to impress teachers. However, she could not see such dynamics happening in her current college, as she put it '…but right here…it's like…they come in, p/point up, run through it…whatever…it's weird'. Vanni, Ellinois and Saddy try not to take an agentic role to justify their lack of motivation 'because of' teachers. Teachers like Ricardo seemed to corroborate the students' point:

> Yes, I'd always have high expectations regardless of MH issues because my job is about thinking …are you going to be successful in this course? So, with those students suffering from MH issues, even though there's no blame or anything attached but it's also a bit of a case that if you're missing too many lessons, then it's unlikely you're going to be successful in this course, and this is something we have to keep revisiting.

And teachers like Evie too recognized that the pressure was there, especially with coursework expectations and deadlines, but she noted:

> I find it so hard to know the students' perspectives on this…I would say, though, that we are very good at making sure that the focus is firstly on enjoyment, secondly, collaboration…like…we know that in the very last minute you're going to be on your own

in the exam, BUT until THAT we work together…and I don't know if that message is getting through.

As a teacher, I empathized with both; teacher pressure on students is personal (teacher pride in students' achievement/attainment) but also top-down or structural, and there is little room for manoeuvreing unless teachers negotiate roles and expectations fairly; for example, Evie also pointed at students who were disengaged and despondent, affecting relationships.

Subject choice is indeed misinterpreted by many teachers, as I did at the time, but it could get reconfigured by the teacher-student relationship to manage the 'exchange' at stake. Evie was aware of this tension and tried to turn it into an opportunity; she showed she could take students from different angles and suggested another way:

> Let's do it…so, sometimes, you feel like you (the student) are allowed to ENJOY this…so sometimes it's like habit…it's easier to be a bit…despondent…disengaged…that's why it matters…do role play…debate…it matters…btw you can't do this on your own, and it can be fun…being in a group and this is also how you learn…

I would add that this positive mindset approach is also how teachers motivate students to see motivation beyond exam-oriented schooling. Nicola grasped this point, which I reiterate, in his theorizing of Motivation, making relevant links to relationships:

> Motivation isn't something external that sits on its own, I feel like those who're doing well and trying…it's because I've developed a strong relationship, and they're responding to that…whereas this idea of motivation is like something …abstract!

Nicola's point is inspiring because it calls for an authentic and effective pedagogical relationship, process-based, intrinsically motivating and, at its best, 'therapeutic'; the point reifies motivation as a two-way tangible process and offers possibilities for the 'mentoring factor' and therefore a 'pedagogy of resistance and resilience' (Garista & Pagliarino, 2020). On the other hand, Albi, Divvy and Mickey seemed to project a sense of motivation stemming from their teachers' passion for their subjects, and they did not care about having a motivational relationship *per se* with teachers but looked for substance in teaching style, subject content and being challenged.

Furthermore, Divvy showed her drive by challenging teachers' 'sugar coating', as opposed to stricter teachers from her country, as noted earlier. Divvy's point concerns the expectations and

perceptions of teaching and learning roles. On the one hand, she evokes service-user expectations (i.e., students as clients); on the other, she exposes the sensitive and sensible teacher (Ball & Olmedo, 2013; Moore, 2018), who is conscientious about balancing out college pressure to raise grades without impacting on the MH and well-being of the students, where MH is the end and well-being the means.

Teocoli illustrates one final exciting comment about (un)motivation caused by teachers. He, as noted earlier, was particularly annoyed with his GCSE English teacher because he (Teocoli) did not see her building, constructively, on his mistakes; Teocoli used his disagreement as an opportunity to be agentic; he intended to use his love for English as a springboard to become an actor or be a writer.

Teocoli's keenness to explain his point further after the interview encapsulates the complexity of Motivation/Responsibilization <u>with</u> teachers and how it could become a site for subjectivation, despite the inherent top-down relationship. This complexity is due to relationships construed within the boundaries of the college-environment, where teachers have to juggle the pressure from their performance expectations (i.e., get added value to their students' predicted grades) and motivate their students to perform. As a result, a dysfunctional one-size-fits-all standardized approach contravenes multifaceted and individualized schooling experiences. Hence, Teocoli's resistance/response as a 'technology of the self' became an opportunity to reflect on, maximizing the relationship in his favour.

Overall, discussions around motivation/responsibilization <u>with</u> teachers developed ambiguously and were contested in focus groups and interviews. Students' relationship with teachers was a site of struggle that was 'classic' (parent-child), where responsibilization could be passed onto others, or the students took it as a challenge to prove the system wrong. While students took responsibility for their attitude to learning and subject choice by factoring in teachers, they also offered various perspectives on the motivational causes/effects of such a relationship on MH.

6.3 Motivation and MH: a Cause-Effect Relationship?

Motivation/Responsibilization's multiple ramifications could lead back to students' need to aspire by starting on solid grounds, like a subject choice, that would have had a knock-on effect on relationships. I remembered two robust responses I obtained from Janna (psychotherapist) and Davvy (Inclusion Manager). The responses demonstrate how the generative power of PAR helps find the 'right closeness' to the data:

> (DDE) I guess then that we should explore Motivation in more detail and locate it somewhere more significant FOR the students…so, my question is: when students come to see you, and they mention mental ill-health…do you try to convince them that it isn't?

> (Janna) You see … this is an issue for me because I'm…MASSssively oversubscribed …and students are being referred to me by teachers or tutors…and it's slightly elevated because these students would've not completed work…missed lessons…etc…. it's a double effect…THEY (students) say their MH has affected their motivation to whomever they've been talking to…then they get referred to me … basically, my close colleague and I have been thinking that some've been referred who don't NEED counselling…it's not counselling because they're not MH issues…what they ARE…. I haven't GOT a label for it.

School leaders such as Janna and Davvy helped put Motivation into a broader context, further implicating aspiration, as Davvy inferred:

> If you say this [motivation] is coming up top in your discussions, then…what is it telling us?…that they do not want to be here? …they've been forced to come? …they're not passionate about what they're doing…they're just following the system!'.

These statements echoed informal remarks that the MH&WBTeam had already made during initial consultations; they associated students' lack of motivation with a lack of passion for the chosen subjects, resulting in students being uninspired to take risks for learning (fieldnotes). Through Janna and Davvy, though, I see the implications of well-being instantiated by the day-to-day learning (e.g., subject choices) for one's MH having a knock-on effect on responsibilization. Supposedly, the MH&WBTeam seemed to react to the implication of responsibilization in the

neoliberal college (Morrissey, 2015; Torrance, 2017), reacting to the responsibilized student that had avoided their 'duties' to engage in college and therefore had not performed accordingly, potentially a form of subjectivation through resistance or self-affirmation. Therefore, the MH&WBTeam reacted against the generalized belief amongst students that adolescents were experiencing poor MH *because* they were not motivated: mental ill-health, they claimed, lay behind the lack of motivation of those referred to them.

This causal insight implies accountability (i.e., 'responsibilization'). It contextualises the dilemma of the student-participants, whether they were independently motivated or felt so 'responsibilized' that they could only consider an affective pursuit or aspiration (especially the relationship with parents, teachers, and peers) as motivating. It was not surprising to find out that several student-participants claimed, at interview time, 'not to know themselves', or whether it was *them*, their relationships or their subject choice that influenced their motivation. However, they did not hesitate to put Motivation at the top of the themes' ranking. Consequently, by mainly clinging on 'responsibilization' towards their parents (and teachers in some cases), aspiring to please them represented a safety net to make sense of their perceptions (and performances); this revealed to be a short-term sense of duty but also something they would resent as unfair because it denied future possibilities. Juss, amongst others, perceived the conflation of parent-self-motivation-aspiration-responsibilization-MH by claiming to feel the pressure to manage her parents who worked in education, and yet, she also claimed:

> They seem ok, focused on me holistically rather than academically, and they never got angry for bad results; they would (look) for bad behaviour, though…so the pressure is all self-made; I put it on myself because I want to do well.

As I noted in my post-interview fieldnotes, Juss came across as a purposeful student, even though exam pressure had often been a problem (confirmed by her mum). Juss was aware of her secondary school 'students before grades' ethos and her current college's non-high academic status as potentially undermining her C.V.; however, she stressed that it did not bother her. She argued that her educational baggage fit with her and what her parents wanted of/from her. She seemed uncertain about her motivation to go to university, and her aspiration was even less clear because of uncertain University and career choices (fieldnotes). I wonder if Juss got stuck by repressing the specter of mental illness (by adopting aspiration as her default 'technology of the self') while

waiting for the right inspiration and pleasing her parents. This insecurity shows that parental pressure can be indirect, including pressure not to fret too much about achievement/attainment. So, I have concluded that Juss's perceived pressure was inevitable because her parents are teachers. Even though the mother did not seem pushy (I interviewed her), as a teacher father, I know that my children take education more seriously because of my profession.

A teacher, Nicola, confirmed what transpired through students like Juss. Such students felt aspects of educational pressure as interacting with aspiration and responsibilization because the pressures would have influenced their MH. As Nicola put it when I asked if academically weaker students suffered the pressure the most: '…No-no, the opposite of strong students…it's the weaker students who don't feel the same pressure'.

The findings and corresponding analysis suggest that, despite the complexity of extrapolating a fruitful cause-effect relationship, the uncertainty around the causality deserves attention because it opens up a cyclical relationship instead. It is difficult to pinpoint where students like Juss stand; for example, she is either a survivor (i.e., the coping 'acceptable subject' but a potential victim too) or even a normalized, responsibilized and motivated subject (i.e., 'proactive subject'), no matter what type of motivation, intrinsic or extrinsic. While adding depth, such heterogeneity also meddles with analyzing students' MH vis-a-vis performance (next chapter) and related subjectivity, hence my move to look at motivation and MH in a cyclical relationship.

6.4 Motivation and MH: a Cyclical Relationship?

Once more, my 'critical friend' Alionka added expert advice when managing the culture/ethos of a struggling secondary school in London, specifically by looking at questions such as motivation and aspiration. When discussing Motivation, she readily pinpointed a 'cycle' situation more than a cause-effect one. She was keen to stress:

> Motivation's a consequence of MH rather than a cause…I mean, these things go on a cycle, so you cannot always tell…but I'd say…where students are struggling with MH then motivation becomes an issue, mmm…to the two extremes, either lack of any [motivation] or kind of like…I'm going down this road, or am I going fast/past? You know what I

mean?... all as if in a cycle… because if you are un-motivated or don't know where you're going to …it's tough to bring what you're doing in your life together… That's why I put it lower in the ranking because… I cannot think how in itself, motivation can put pressure.

Alionka's assertion suggests that although mental illness is the determinant of lack of motivation, cause-and-effect are confused as in a cycle, making it difficult for all concerned to understand - a confusion reflected in education policy, which seems to have de-politicised and therefore instrumentalised concepts such as MH and well-being for neoliberal economic purposes (Gillies, 2018; Di Emidio, 2021a), therefore over-simplifying their relationship by forcing exam results as the solution.

Nicola, too, hinted at something similar and relevant when I made this point:

(DDE) So far, parental pressure has come up a lot in terms of perceived parental expectations, which crosses over with Relationships but also Motivation, and students seem not sure where they stand with Motivation, perhaps due to the tension between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

(Nicola) Yeah, I put Motivation at the end …in some ways, it is intrinsic to anything else; it's difficult to talk about it on its own; it's almost that …for me….I perceive it as something quite superficial…as …'I am going to motivate you' kind of in a way…but having said that, I also see the importance of me having a positive relationship with all of my students as a motivation….motivation isn't something external that sits on its own.

(DDE) Sure…last week's OFSTED report[98] seems to blame teachers for students' lack of motivation …so I think that the idea of motivation is a cheeky thing to turn to on behalf of students… but THEN, they use lack of motivation as an excuse, as what doesn't enable them to be inspired…so I find it vital to understand how motivation can be re-channelled and then re-conceptualized from within education, starting with policies.

---

[98] The college had just gone through OFSTED.

The above exchange shows how Motivation's *keyness* was a key PAR-generated finding, regardless of its location in the cycle or participants' perception. In other words, the above contributions (Alionka's, Nicola's and mine), months after the MH&WBTeam had problematized the relationship MH-Motivation, helped tie up students' dilemmas about their motivation with a cause-effect-cycle paradigm. Unfortunately, I had ignored the analytical potential of such an illustration when the MH&WBTeam suggested it (perhaps because I wanted to check it against other participants' views). Thus, at the end of the fieldwork, Alionka helped problematize the conceptual struggles to explain the impact of Motivation in the field and, in turn, provide solid ground for future analysis of how Motivation played out across other themes.

Conclusion: Whose Motivation?

Even though Motivation became a central theme, playing the protagonist role while analyzing all the other themes, it also presented analytical challenges. The first pertained to the boundary between the intrinsic and the extrinsic, and the second to my difficulty in using Motivation as a consistent causal concept influencing adolescent MH. As the above section suggested, participants' insights did not clarify which came first, motivation or MH, but at the least, the 'cycle' metaphor offered a reasonable frame for analysis. What did it mean to be intrinsically motivated, especially if a student did not possess extrinsic capital/s (Bourdieu (1986), such as cultural or financial ones? Moreover, what if having capitals were uninspiring? (i.e., was there insufficient evidence, from the literature and now from the field, to argue that even privileged students could suffer from mental ill-health *because* they felt uninspired by schooling/education?).

I shared these emerging questions as my doubts and then contextualized them in terms of MH with my 'critical friend' Alionka. First, she admitted to questionable leadership practices not helping the motivational cause. For example, she agreed with the controversial use of academic interventions in schools as a form of capital, widely seen as solution to worsening MH (Green, 2011; Jones, 2021; Yusuf, 2019). Then, as she had shifted the focus to leadership, I asked:

(DDE) Students often find themselves in assemblies being told to celebrate their potential 'true self', to take 'risks', be 'creative', etc… but then they are squeezed by intervention to raise their grades, even detentions for that…how un-motivating?'

(Alionka) Surely, we as school leaders don't know how to do it…we want to improve things, but school leaders may not manage life-work balance and don't give out the right example, looking stressed, then we equally invite students to do the yoga…you know the 'well-being'…. but then we make sure to remind them about the test coming up…if we haven't got it right ourselves then how do we train students to get the balance right?

Alionka's career trajectory in education added essential critical expertise. Before becoming a Headteacher, she stepped back to widen her outlook and became a consultant across a consortium of schools/colleges across the country. In her response, she seems to afford to acknowledge leaders' opportunism because, at the time of the interview, she was not affiliated with a specific school/college and seized vital aspects of day-to-day schooling: students are constantly bombarded with contradictory messages, but these are also meant to be formative and 'therapeutic' as they transition into adulthood. I argue that such common practice corrupts perceptions of what should be relevant to the progression and transition to adulthood and strongly contradicts theories associated with child development and neuroscience that invoke psychological processes inherent in empowering modes of subjectivation. I leave these issues aside and will address them in Chapter 8. Chapter 7, next, explores 'external factors' and how these relate to performance in and through the demands of the college-environment.

Chapter 7 – Performance and Adolescent MH under Neoliberalism

Introduction

> *'Performance has no room for caring'*
>
> (Ball, 2003, p.224)

The previous chapter examined how the overarching theme Motivation was driven by a sense of personal responsibility entrenched with broader governmental Responsibilisation objectives. In this chapter, we see how the binomial relationship Motivation/Responsibilisation plays out through three more themes I cluster under 'performance'. The overall aim is to unpack the ongoing references to 'performance' made in Chapter 6 as a by-product of the college-environment, which mirrors performance expectations of the dominant neoliberal paradigm.

I start by clarifying what I mean by performance through the lens of 'aspiration'; this is because the association performance-aspiration gradually acquired *keyness* status (Braun and Clarke, 2006) in my analysis and which recalled Appadurai's 'capacity to aspire' (2013) as a defining skill of students in transition. I then present and contextualise the three themes, how I interpreted them through my recoding process, and the clustering under the label 'performance'.[99] Next, I want to show how performance requirements intersect with other aspects of life and schooling performance that eventually influence students' becoming through aspiration, relationships, identity, a sense of self and, by implication, MH. Finally, I consider such *becoming,* in subjectivity's Foucauldian terms, an intertwined mode of subjectification and subjectivation resulting from ambivalent 'technologies of the self' (Hancock, 2018). I conclude by drawing out

---

[99] In line with Codebook TA, I generated new codes and themes (from Reflexive TA) but also used pre-established themes/codes (from Coding Reliability). Codebook TA enables such creative analysis because, as explained in chapter 3, it incorporates Reflexive TA and, therefore, elements of inductivity with deductivity.

the tension and implication of the college-environment as a *dispositif* that 'controls' students' performance while transitioning to adulthood.

7.1 Performance and the Production of the Resilient Subject

'Performativity Education' often refers to school-related performances/acts (e.g., studying, doing homework, seat exams, doing extra-curricular activities). Ball (2003) was one of the first in the UK to offer, in the field of Education Policy, a critique of 'Performativity Education' by employing Lyotard's 'terrors of performativity' (p.216) concerning teachers. Ball referred to a regime of accountability to justify change via 'control', which employed measurability, judgements, comparisons and displays to control students, teachers and schools/colleges. While I take on board Ball's argumentation, to avoid confusion, I will not use the philosophically leaning noun 'performativity', but simply the noun 'performance' and related adjective 'performative'. This decision results from Butler's (1993) philosophical view on 'performativity', which is (too) closely related to subjectivation, a key concept I prefer to address discretely alongside subjectification. Butler takes the 'capacity to perform a type of being' as the possibility of performing one's perceived gender through action, speech and behaviour. Butler's starting point considered Performativity as '….that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains' (1993); however, she turned such 'production' into the same action taken by individuals to shape identity and *becoming* (subjectivation). So, while Butler's performativity is relevant because it ties in with the neoliberal logic of the 'good student' and 'good citizen' (Keddie, 2016), it is too close to subjectivation and subjectification processes which I address discretely.

Interestingly, the participants referred to the word performance and related resilience. Performance was inherent in school life and focused on carrying out instructions, achieving predicted grades, meeting deadlines, writing under time pressure, public speaking, high attendance, pleasing parents, feeling part of a group, looking good/cool enough, dealing with peer pressure (fieldnotes) - indeed, 'Performance has no room for caring' (see opening quote).

In order to nuance students' performance and the responses to the demands of such multifaceted performance, I borrow Appadurai's notion of 'capacity to aspire'. Appadurai (2013, p.289 in Stambach & Hall, 2016, p.2) proposed that the capacity to aspire is an unequally 'navigational capacity' that shows how human potential exists equally everywhere, but not everybody has the resources for activating or realizing it. Therefore, selecting and clustering three themes under 'performance' is my attempt to bridge subjectivity and MH as constituted in the performance-focused college-environment, permeable to external factors. I present the three themes separately (though I integrated Money/Resources within External Factors) but equally stress their relationship through students' lived experiences as 'subjective configurations'. This is because drawing on Nash (2018), the double bind created by achieving grades that emphasize progress (intrinsic motivation) and attaining a prescribed benchmark (extrinsic motivation) open up resilient subject positions not only 'as sites of struggle' (Ball & Olmedo, 2013, p. 85), but also as tools for producing subjectivity.

7.2 External Factors: Theme Contextualisation

This chapter explores those aspects of students' MH that do not take place in the school/college-environment but are strictly related to its effects. They include contingencies as *events* or involving un/motivational relationships, which are not strictly education-related but interfere with 'studying' and, therefore, educational performance. Because of this in-out character, these factors tend to magnify the significance of events and relationships, acquiring a pivotal role in performance because they test students' resilience. We steadily incorporated contributions that pointed at *outside stuff* - as students called it - which causally related to their MH <u>not</u> in, <u>but</u> through, the college environment.[100]

---

[100] Research question n.3 was, consequently, adjusted to include any 'factors' the research presented us with (RQ3: 'What other factors influence adolescents' MH in, and through, the school/college-environment?').

External factors exposed not only the permeability of college boundaries but also how some factors magnified their influence on MH when juxtaposed with aspects of the college-environment which involved i) people and society, ii) sleep patterns, iii) time 'to do' things like the studying or the well-being and MH. Moreover, the choice of enrichment topics and activities had already indicated the tension between external factors and students' increased expectations of autonomy while in transition compared to GCSE. So, for example, students' university choice had to reflect an aspiration which recalls Ecclestone's (2017) 'choice architect' and Mitchell's (2019, p.10) increased 'individuation' which makes choice conflict with the inherent constraints of only three A-Levels and the pressure to pleasing or 'being for others' (Shahjahan, 2020), especially parents.

Therefore, weekly enrichments topics explored through podcasts, discussions, and visitors (see Appx-13), informed the range of codes making up External Factors: 1) lack of time for homework/revision; 2) less freedom for self-growth and exploration, 3) physical stress, 4) poor sleep, 5) living in a 'performance' culture/society. However, following the interviews and initial familiarization (mine) with the transcripts, in line with Codebook TA, I decided to cluster (Fig. 31) some of the codes under the code 'Relating' (i.e., relating to society at large, family and peers), while keeping time and sleep as stand-alone codes.

Figure 31: NVivo's screenshot – External Factors codes

T05. External Factors	24	49
Relating to family and friends	17	26
Sleep deprivation	11	12
Time constrains	7	8

Finally, as the summary of the interviews' theme ranking shows (Table 9 below), External Factors maintained its status amongst the top three across all thirty-four participants, just as it had performed in the focus group, questionnaire, and interviews with student-participants only (Fig.32 below):

Table 9: summary of interviewees' ranking

Paired themes	1st and 2nd
Motivation	**18**
External factors	**16**
Relationships	**15**
Exam Pressure	**15**
College-Environ.	**5**
Money/Resources	**0**

Figure 32: NVivo screenshot – themes' ranking per phase
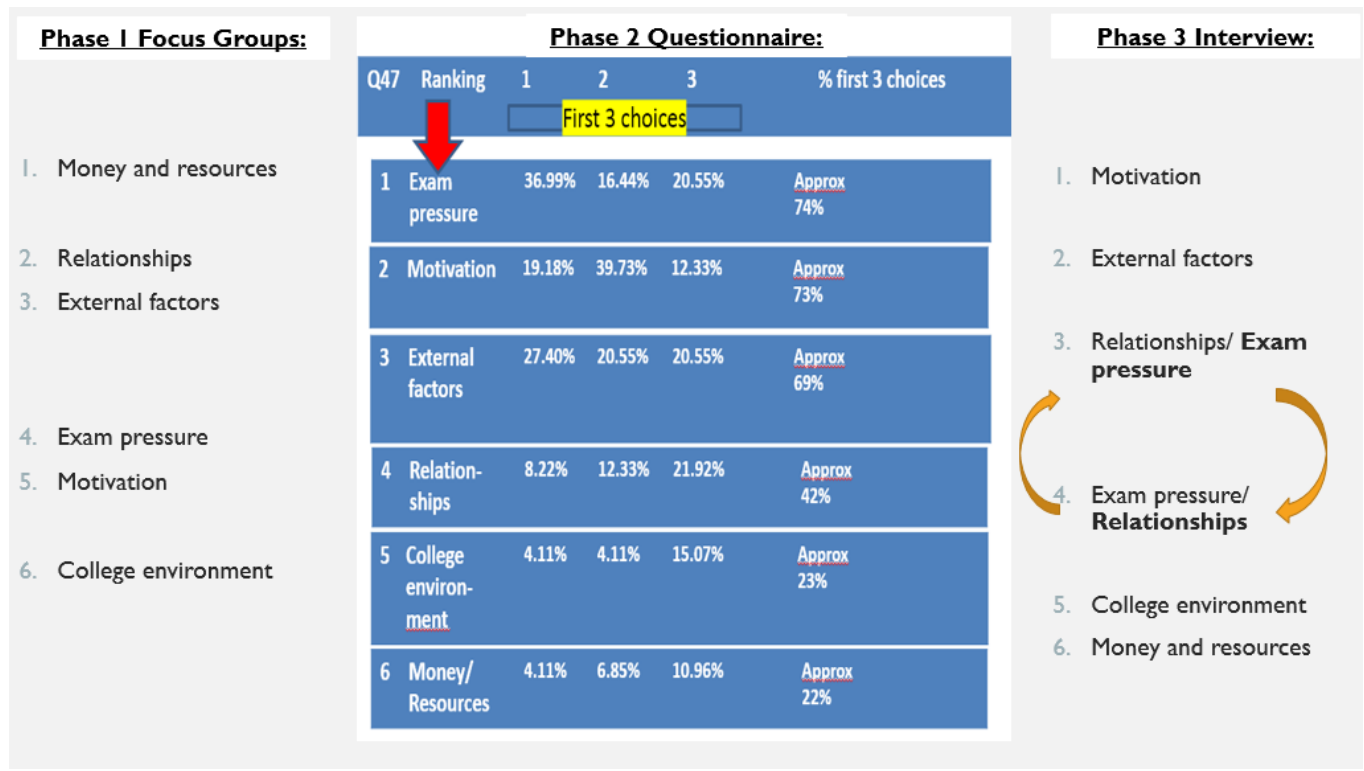
7.2.1 Relating to family and friends

Although participants believed that cheerful family and out-college peer support eased academic life, they also expressed concerns when *outside stuff* did not go well, feeling overwhelmed by people or events. For example, Gabs noted:

> Sometimes you don't want to get up in the morning for what happened at home or with your friends, mmmm…and I felt that stuff affects you a lot, for example, my dog and family members do NOT get on, and I'm the main owner, so get grief from my mum and grandmom.

Similarly, Divvy:

> Mmmm… sometimes a lot is going on…a few times it's happened that the day before a test, I feel the pressure to do well and the pressure to sort family stuff out like immigration papers due to Brexit.

And then Rina, who was overwhelmed by a sense of helplessness to deal with family expectations to perform during work-experience and the uncomfortable feeling of asking parents for oyster top-ups to attend college.

These starting examples demonstrate some of the ambiguity of what is intended by 'schooling' and 'studying' and their effects. This ambiguity results from the quite spatial inside-outside college distinction and may suggest education is only 'in the college'. What about the work students do at home, local libraries or community centres? Rather than being inside-outside the physical space of the college, it is about being inside-outside of studying – whether that is in college or not (hence the earlier point about the college-environment's 'permeability'). In short, it is not just about work *per se* but how all the other factors outside the college-environment impact mental MH-education. Some students mostly talked about school/college and their time there rather than about studying. For example, some student-participants drew on more intimate perceptions of 'external' events, like clashing with ambivalent cultural expectations of their parents or feeling pulled in different directions by peer pressure, by expressing a sense of guilt; also, some felt overwhelmed by their teenage love affairs affecting their education.

Saddy highlighted her religion as clashing with her interest to be into 'self-growth and exploration', which, she admitted, included her religiosity but also her social dimension in a multicultural society:

> Yeah, I think I'm exploring myself… I'm still finding out what's me and not me…and I think external factors affect me more than internal factors of school/college…in school/college, I'm just there… learning…seeing my mates, and then leaving…but external factors stay with me more…say…self-growth and exploration… that's what I have to do on my own and…schools don't help much as much in that.

Saddy recounted that in year-9 she had gone against her culture-religion by worrying about what she looked like instead of showing a typical Muslim (woman) 'humbleness'; at the same time, though, she was ok with it because her family had experienced a massive (cultural) change since the dad moved out, and her sister's atheism. Consequently, Saddy felt unevenly pulled by western/societal high expectations on body image, but then came to regret it all by year-11; and finally, she felt her mum was raising achievement/attainment expectations, '…and I felt… that's too much!…and that's what started my pressure, I have to be or look good for everyone'. However, Saddy highlighted the positives too:

> We now have a more stable home life; we adjusted quite well to my mum being a single mum, my dad moved out last year …finally!… as it was emotionally draining!!, and some older sisters, too, growing up and moving out.

This insight shows that the negotiations between the external college-environment and more personal matters, such as the need to 'find oneself', regardless of religion or family, come into play as a 'technology of the self' that leans on subjectivation/agency; but 'at a cost!', which Saddy remarked as causing her mental ill-health. The notion of 'subjective configuration' is at play here to explain Saddy's MH as more of an experienced position (on a spectrum) rather than an 'expert' diagnosis, indeed circumstantial and biographical. Through the spectrum/continuum, student-participants identified when MH became an issue if one hovered over the 'problematic' part of the spectrum (Psychology student-participants would often refer to the distinction between sadness and depression as an analogy - fieldnotes). Hence, it is worth flagging the ambivalence at the root of the problem. At the same time, student-participants seemed to be talking about school/college and their time there rather than issues related to studying *per se*; it is impossible to separate

education pressures from the mundane, whether inside or outside the college, whether strictly related to studying or not. These stressors happen, are caused, and surely intensify when linked to 'performance' because that is when one's subjectivity gets exposed, more than one's identity, through a kind of *infolding* of exteriority (Rose, 1998, p.37). Ash, another Muslim girl, also presented some parental pressure to perform:

> Yeah, but they don't understand the pressures we're under…they were not born and raised here…they see it all as a better life, and that's all…they don't know about exam pressure…finding a job linked to what you did in education.

So, while Saddy came across as sensitive, intelligent, rebellious, and agentic in all its forms and shapes (e.g., a proactive subject that 'resisted'), Ash seemed gifted by the same sensibility and intelligence but came across as dejected, blaming herself ('*am the problem sir')* for having few friends, or, letting events, in the shape of parental decisions, have the last say. Put differently, both were coming to terms with external factors that influenced their life courses, affected their performance and, in turn, their MH. While Saddy's responses leaned on subjectivation and agency in necessary forms, Ash was at the mercy of some self-strangling subjectification – indeed *an extimite'* or intimate estrangement – whereby she could not identify her needs/wants and therefore do the well-being that would support positive MH.

In contrast, Juss and Ellinois shared similar ambivalent thoughts with regards to parental support; Juss noted: '…you see…some of my friends did the 11-plus in year-6 and my parents made sure they did not put me under the same pressure…they emphasised that a lot…'. And Ellinois:

> I think this list [of themes] represents how I feel about [it] really, with external factors as n.1… the anxiety or stress I feel when at home...well…THAT can affect my wanting to get up…wanting to do HW…but that's the same for other people who're more deprived than me… I'm glad my parents are onto me about stuff; I'm lucky with the basics, like when having MH issues.

Ellinois was the first to attend university amongst her immediate family, and her parents were keen to see her succeed, hence the extra support. At the same time, Juss had parents working in education, keen to protect her from educational pressures without undermining the educational experience.

Both examples expose the ambivalence of family life and parental support as generating MH 'lived experiences'. On the one hand, by involving parental concern with their children's mental stability even if that underrated educational success; on the other, by involving parental acceptance of education as both a means to success and mental stability, especially in the long term, because educational success increased employability or avoided precarity (Hall, 2017).

Overall, parents and teachers tended to agree that outside-college relationships influenced students' behaviour and performance, an association which my 'critical expert' Alionka described as being both deep and shallow parts of students' (emotional) lives:

> Between emotions and HOW we think about our own MH… so… relationships, THEY're the things that provoke students' emotions the most…mmm…so…they can be the really deep things… so deep that that's the thing students got to solve in terms of their MH, as big issues, but, on the other hand, they're the things that are at the surface everyday…you know…someone annoying you…so they're the bits that we see in MH and that's probably why I put External Factors as high in the ranking of themes.

It was unclear whether Alionka's ranking was i) an after-thought, ii) a reflection of leadership pushing away institutional responsibility, iii) something that she would prioritise in her ex-school's internal policies. However, Alionka's overarching point reminds us that 'pressure' on adolescents is ubiquitous and takes so many forms, becoming a stressor in parent-child and sibling relationships, affecting performance through time management and sleep patterns, as the following code demonstrates.

7.2.2 Time and sleep

Schools/colleges regularly address reduced study time and upset sleep patterns as critical factors influencing students' MH. During interviews and informal chats, the MH&WBTeam flagged the same issues; they also suggested that parental pressure to see their children succeed but be happy was a silent stressor. The team also reported a related stressor for adolescents, that is, being young carers (of ill family members), a phenomenon which did not go unnoticed pre-2010 but became high on the 2010 Coalition MH policy.

Overall, the MH&WBTeam concluded that socioeconomic and family circumstances were taking their toll and playing an increasingly more significant role in the students referred to them than the influence of peer pressure or learning difficulties (e.g., the team told me that the last internal review/survey found that 95% of MH students referred did not want clinicians to speak to parents). This point was expanded upon by one of the teachers, Nicola, conflating the time-sleep pairing:

> It's big, with over a third of my students mentioning home life and searching for paid work outside the college as being problematic, with different effects for different students, like making them more mature, while others find it tiring and taking away time from the study.

The other two teachers, Evie and Riccardo, referred to Nicola's points as the most common excuses for students to justify homework delays, lateness for lessons and performance in general.

As for sleep deprivation, only two of the sixteen student-participants claimed to have a solid night's sleep, which became worse during mock and exam times, as shown in the four examples below and which, once shared, most parents and teachers vouched for:

> (Alby) I've got lots of evening shifts…mmm…I work…say….about three days a week.....most of the time, I finish at 10-11pm, and I'll go home, but I have to have some time to relax...so that kind of messes it up, and I just struggle to sleep in general…so… stress and poor sleep I struggled with ....just because if I have lots of my mind.

> (Rina) 'Well, sleep's really bad… I'm often tired even when I get a good sleep, which affects me in college.

> (Ash) 'Sleep wasn't good; it also was Ramadan…plus for one exam, I did not sleep for the entire night!'

> (Vic) 'I did not sleep (before GCSE), I slept very little…'cos I would be wondering about everything…my parents were worried and reiterated that they did not expect anything…they wanted it to be for me, not for them'.

Interestingly, these voices make poor sleep closely linked to lack of, or perception thereof, 'time'. All parents interviewed, too, concluded that there was always less time for studying and more time for friendship groups. Perhaps this point has its relevance considering the age span 16-18, a time when 'life starts to happen', as (father) Leeno put it:

Well, life starts to happen, so there's always 'less time' to do all you want to do, but less time for studying...suddenly school can become secondary because life's about to start happening and if I miss the next couple of years...my friends...partying... it's over!

Likewise, most student-participants lamented a lack of time to complete routine college tasks, pursue hobbies and grow alongside formal education duties. The new (sixth form) routine, travelling to college, and a sense of increased 'responsibilisation' had assumed a higher priority at the expense of well-being-oriented activities. Rina lamented she had no time to paint, her passion; Saddy could not swim as she used to; others reclaimed something that had been taken away from them when starting college - see Gray (2010; 2013) and Whiteford (2000) about the negative impact of reduced play time and 'occupational deprivation' on MH. However, all student-participants admitted to having time management issues and that their procrastination ability was critical to evaluate adolescents' MH. As Vic noted:

Right now, it's time…in secondary school, the structure was there, and I didn't have to travel… So, I didn't have HW due the next day like here…sometimes three essays…and then I have Saturday school…with as much work from there, including the language, history…so it's hard to balance everything and time management is a challenge.

Other students echoed Vic:

(Divvy) 'Oh yes…lack of time…definitely…revision time is difficult…days are long…plus journey…and then little rest…then… the day is ending'.

(Mickey) 'The neg would be….I mean…lack of time but I … I waste lots of time too…so I don't know'.

(Rina) 'Well, time is a problem! I always feel work has to take priority…my own life and hobbies are pushed to the side…which makes me feel sad 'cos you see other people developing their skills, and yours are degrading in the corner'.

What emerges from these voices reveal a potential incongruency; for example, discussions about time management and sleep management are now common in school/colleges and part of the intervention, but student-participants tapped into them ambiguously. Furthermore, their claims about reduced available time and poor sleep patterns contrasted with their perceived happiness with being in college, with new freedoms. In essence, the knowledge of being in 'transition', and

being required to perform was palpable throughout the fieldwork interactions and student-participants' perceived responsibilisation as proportional to the constant reminder of time-ticking and being the best version of themselves to maximize exam performance.

7.2.3 Money/Resources

This theme was predominant in enrichment sessions and focus groups, yet it was not equally popular in the other two phases of data collection (Fig.33). Also, because Money/Resources was often associated with the theme External Factors, the following analysis could be both a section of External Factors and a theme on its own. I incorporated it under External Factors because that is when students would mention it and because students did not voice such a concern during interview times – hence I had little material to use.

Figure 33: NVivo screenshot – themes' ranking per phase

Phase 1 Focus Groups:		Phase 2 Questionnaire:				Phase 3 Interview:
	Q47 Ranking	1	2	3	% first 3 choices	
			First 3 choices			
1. Money and resources	1 Exam pressure	36.99%	16.44%	20.55%	Approx 74%	1. Motivation
2. Relationships	2 Motivation	19.18%	39.73%	12.33%	Approx 73%	2. External factors
3. External factors						
	3 External factors	27.40%	20.55%	20.55%	Approx 69%	3. Relationships/ **Exam pressure**
4. Exam pressure	4 Relation-ships	8.22%	12.33%	21.92%	Approx 42%	
5. Motivation						4. Exam pressure/ **Relationships**
	5 College environ-ment	4.11%	4.11%	15.07%	Approx 23%	
6. College environment						5. College environment
	6 Money/ Resources	4.11%	6.85%	10.96%	Approx 22%	6. Money and resources

During enrichments and focus groups, most student-participants showed their A-Level Sociology syllabus knowledge which covers 'material deprivation' as an explanatory concept of educational underachievement. They linked it to mental ill-health caused by: <u>code 1</u>) educational failure; <u>code 2</u>) not having extra tuition to succeed; <u>code 3</u>) unrestricted access to educational resources or lacking cultural capital – these three worked as principal codes that made up the theme Money/Resources which, variably, was referred to as 'material deprivation'.

Finally, most student-participants hinted at the impact of material deprivation on their MH without personalizing the codes. For example, <u>code 1</u>: none of the interviewees had technically failed or massively underachieved so that they could expand on the impact of educational failure; <u>code 2</u>: only a few had received extra tuition in primary and secondary, and no one was now receiving it (interestingly some resented peers who had received tuition at GCSE because they achieved high results); <u>code 3</u>: student-participants seemed aware of the notion of 'cultural' and 'financial' capital' (Bourdieu, 1986) but could not apply it reflexively to comment on the benefits, often even unconscious, of an educationally resourced environment.[101]

7.2.3.1 Converging voices about the impact of material deprivation

However, later in the fieldwork, Money/Resources did not have the same weight as an explanatory theme, student-participants hardly elaborated on or merged it with External Factors; hence the rationale to merge it despite containing essential well-being elements that would explain students' MH status vis-à-vis material deprivation. I was surprised because several student-participants claimed they had previously qualified for secondary school FSM ('Free School Meal' due to low family income) and were now qualifying for the half-termly bursary (£65). However, like the school/college-environment, student-participants ignored several key areas because, perhaps, it would have revealed their financial status.

---

[101] The last topic is fully explored in the IFS report (see Davenport et al., 2021) which looks at how wealthy parents make wealthy kids through education.

For example, several had to get part-time jobs that reduced study time and resulted in tiredness, generating an intersection (time-tiredness-performance) that negatively influenced their MH, as several students had hinted. A teacher, Ricardo, made a general starting point about material deprivation: '…I'd not expect students would admit that financial conditions or that access to resources weren't of major concern, or simply that students themselves would accept that'. My gatekeeper also confirmed it: '…the number of students taking up work is increasing yearly, and the consequent impact on under-achievement and MH referrals do not have to be underestimated'. The centrality of 'material deprivation' underpins most of the Sociology of Education's findings of the past 50 years, and Kiriakou, Juss's mother, highlighted this; Kiriakou worked in a local secondary school and, by referring to her school, she ranked Money/Resources first and linked it to External Factors:

> First, Money/Resources, a big problem for most of our kids…linked to External Factors, like living in over-crowded flats, sharing technology, having extra responsibilities within their families, and not accessing external enrichments similar to the ones my daughter had.

Conversely, Alby, like most student-participants, claimed to have made a conscious decision to find a part-time job to sustain a newly found sense of independence which he thought was important:

> I mean, the Money/Resources….is at the bottom just because, you know, it's not a problem for me! Because… I mean, I work so…you know, I have a source of income...So, if I needed a book, I don't even bother asking my parents… it also fills me with a sense of pride that I got it.

However, later in the fieldwork, Alby noted that his college days were affected by his two late-night shifts, which he blamed for his lethargy, lack of motivation and underperformance. Others, who did not work, demonstrated that their home-life financial situation was not ideal. Vanni claimed:

> These themes overlap, as I have explained… but, I guess that if you don't have any one there for you…or even enough money…THAT can make you like REALLY stressed… for example, recently, we're about to get evicted, but mum sorted it out …I think she did not pay rent for months!

Others, instead, mentioned that they had reduced access to a quiet study-area. For example:

> (Matty) 'Well, I share my room and desk, so I study here [college]…also at home I get to be asked about house chores a lot, so I prefer here'.

Others claimed that they felt terrible about asking for money because they knew that their financial situation was dire:

> (Rina) 'No, I don't have a room or desk…well… I share my room with mum'.

> (DDE) 'Ever received any tuition support?'

> (Rina)' Yeah, at SAT, but that did not make any difference…I think…you know …I feel…I just feel bad asking for money, even top-up my bus card to come here, or even book money.

These voices show how varying levels of deprivation can destabilize students' education, causing stress and anxiety, yet, none explicitly linked to the impact such deprivation had on their performance and future aspirations. Concomitantly, Spohrer et al. (2017), drawing from Foucault (2000) and Dean, H. (2010), expose pernicious educational policies of the last 15 years that have paired up students' aspirational lack/deficit (predominantly working-class students) with their 'innate' potential to achieve; Spohrer et al. (2017) suggest that the 'responsibilisation card' is subtly laid down as an explanation which overlooks structural unbalance or lack of (Bordieuan) capitals. Furthermore, during the fieldwork, success was synonymous with passing exams and even though enrichments had explored un/practical as much as un/ethical aims of compulsory education vis-à-vis structural inequalities, student-participants never went that far with their analysis. This limitation is due to never thoroughly reviewing our final findings together (see lockdowns), which could have generated *the* knowledge that informed change-action through internal policies to encourage a vision of success alongside the MH (and well-being) of students – i.e., as construed by participants with stake-holding and service-using roles.

However, teachers' and college-leaders' voices, as opposed to those of student-participants, offered a layer of depth regarding the influence of material deprivation, both in practical and abstract terms. For example, all teachers confirmed, together with the gatekeeper's point made above, that the financial status student population impacted learning and MH; a teacher added a pertinent and factual insight:

(Evie) I guess…more about where they come from…I mean…one has an assumption when…ermmm…through UCAS applications…you see the tutorial statement, and you see about their past, like GCSE results…and they may come from areas where the GCSE pass rate is 5 or 10%!!...so, I'm associating it with deprivation…and little things like kids coming late…saying, 'oh! I did not have money on my oyster'.

Despite Evie's clarity, deprivation is a sensitive and relative concept to operationalize in an interview. This means that I could not oblige student-participants, on ethical grounds, to voice the possible influence that their financial status had had on their learning journey and results. Students preferred to be, as it were, in denial and/or were unable to recognize the influence of the theme on their journeys. On the other hand, teachers' voices offered a plausible picture that helped ground my assumptions. Perhaps, only a teacher, Nicola, partially disagreed with the negative influence of students' part-time employment as synonymous with 'deprivation':

Ok, the third one, External Factors, it's big! I'd think of students mentioning home life and paid work outside college because that's a factor [money/resources], with different effects for students, like making them more mature, while others find it tiring and taking away time from [their] study.

Nicola's point suggests that the influence of deprivation on MH is extensive, and yet we cannot read too negatively into it; for example, employment for 16-17 year-olds, while still studying, could offer agentic opportunities like being financially independent. Also, some codes of External Factors (e.g., lack of time for HW/revision; physical stress, poor sleep) showed how Money/Resources correlate with students' performance and attitudes towards education. Relatedly, the following exchange between the career officer (Giovanna) and I, stressed the intersection between material deprivation, under-achievement/attainment and in-college motivation:

(Giovanna) '...but even if the students don't realise this [material deprivation], we can offer opportunities to support it, then the problem is that due to poor motivation students do not take it up!!'

(DDE) 'Oh yeah, I know one student who did not know about the college support for their finances…by missing tutor time?'

(Giovanna) 'Well…look…we provide [university] tutors for ten weeks, from LSE, an amazing opportunity…but students drop out, don't turn up… it's crazy, it's all free!'

The career officer's point is vital as she draws attention to the daily perceived contradictions most teachers and leaders witness in students' behaviour – why not attend intervention lessons offered by schools/colleges? Why not apply for bursaries? Why miss on such opportunities offered by the London School of Economics? - a possible response could be linked to previous points, that students cannot engage with this because they are too busy/tired from working.

Therefore, this sub-theme has shown relevance by cutting across the socio-political and psychological, let alone its underlying relevance across other themes. What emerged throughout the fieldwork was that success was equated with passing exams or gaining qualifications (Torrance, 2017), with little speculation about 'learning'. The notion of material deprivation, therefore, affects the overall outcome of the performative educational experience, including *self-formation* and MH. Such causality might reflect a trend; namely, students from less privileged backgrounds seemed to carry the burden of having only one chance to succeed. I argue that their financial circumstances hindered success and brought out the worst of precarity by making them feel inadequate, as it were, 'fish out of water'[102] or simply 'learning to desire lack' (Atasay, 2014), which affected self-esteem and thus MH.

7.2.4 Tensions and implications: external factors and the permeable, ubiquitous college-environment

In conclusion, as Alionka had indicated, it is impossible to separate the college-environment and external factors such as family/friends relationships as they happen daily, with the college-environment performance requirements resulting in additional pressure for certain students. Alionka also noted:

---

[102] I paraphrase Reay's (2005, p.9) reference to middle-class students who 'move in higher education as fish in water'.

> We had several students with difficult home lives…academically driven and…would find school/college was quite a good place to be…but…. when it came to exams then the combined pressure of them wanting to succeed with then going home and not being able to study because of the complex things going on there…that would be an issue!... whereas for other students it would come out in behaviour with behavioural incidents, for example, because they could not access the work.

Victoire and Rebby, parents of the same boy, illustrate Alionka's point; they expressly merged the theme of Relationships and External factors as crucial for their son's MH, an incidence magnified during the pandemic. They argued that a new dimension of external factors' influences was to be found in adaptability and the new performative challenges their son faced in college and transitioning to adulthood - at the time of the interview, their son was processing his OCD in the 'pandemic normal' and was adapting to online learning.

Therefore, a crucial point about the influence of external factors on adolescent MH is that student-participants had difficulties reconciling college-performance stressors with their external positionalities associated with duty towards family members. Also, all participants tried to understand each other's positions and empathize with each other's roles quite remarkably. Even teachers, who had their own performance pressures, were aware of the influence of external factors on their students' performance. Therefore, External Factors consistent high ranking was a significant finding and, similar to Motivation, was referred to by all participants to explain other themes.

Matty, a student-participant, succinctly explained why External Factors was a key theme for his stable MH:

> Socializing, being with peers, having good family communication, communication in general …to expand my mind and others, views, debating…so…social life and communication can influence us positively…also, having a relationship - I split up when I was 14-15, my first proper relationship, a few months long, very difficult!

Matty was keen to discuss this theme and returned to it when explicating his points throughout the interview. Nevertheless, for now, the intertwining between the demands of the *dispositif*, home life, and out-of-college friendship demonstrates and legitimizes the role of formal education in the practices of governmentality (e.g., educational and therapeutic) as well as the permeability of the

school/college-environment, which risks confusing and extending the causal reasons for adolescents MH and thus, as Gillies suggested, instrumentalizing well-being.

7.3 College-Environment: Theme Contextualization

While this theme had attracted students-participants' attention during enrichment and focus groups, it attracted little concern during interviews. This ambivalence might be because the four codes students associated with the college-environment (1. ethos/culture; 2. perceived college atmosphere; 3. the building-structure; 4. school/college rules) had not been problematised vis-a-vis performance and MH. For example, during the theme formation, student-participants intuitively drew from i) their understanding of the word 'environment' as the built environment, but not an institutional enclosed place with 'controlled freedom'; ii) the critical sociology of education's A-Level, which refers to structural influences (Illich's 'hidden curriculum' or Bourdieu's 'capitals', 'field', 'habitus') and consciousness-raising but which student-participants hardly used; iii) the A-Level Psychology course which covers relatable topics to the college-environment (from Social Influence - types of conformity, obedience, resistance - to Psychopathology - abnormality, deviation from norms, failure to function adequately, deviation from ideal MH) but with little politicised concerns. This means that while student-participants ably articulated education and the college-environment showing 'knowledge of' a state institution, they overlooked performative implications, unlike parents and college-leaders who were more attuned to it.

7.3.1 Defining the college-environment and its influence

The four codes selected by student-participants fit the research literature through Bonell et al.'s (2011; 2013) scholarly definition of the school/college-environment: '...an assemblage of behaviour policies, physical spaces, curricula, school ethos, teaching and learning practices'. Even though Bonell's definition still contains as broad categories as the defined concept itself, it is still essential because the reference to 'assemblage' mirrors the Foucauldian notions of *dispositif* or

apparatus (Agamben, in Murray, 2011)[103] and the associated 'regimes of practice' which partly underpins my analysis. For example, Foucault's *dispositif* is a determinant part of subjectification (i.e., schooling/education as a normative experience) but also of subjectivation (i.e., agentic) that operationalises MH through varying 'technologies of the self' (Hancock, 2018). In other words, I was now grounding subjectivity in the field, bringing together student-participants as co-researchers, stakeholders, and service-users and opening up to revised 'subject positions'. Additionally, the remaining participants insisted on the relevance of the college-environment in the day-to-day of students' lives and their MH, especially in a new educational environment – as implicitly expressed by most teachers, college-leaders and parents. In contrast, other teachers, like Nicola, were more explicit and brought to life Bonell's definition:

> Then… the college-environment, I thought the kind of...their [students'] interactions with teachers, rules and regulations… that's something that may impact, how do they feel when they enter that environment, the classroom, is it a place where they are welcome?... or dread to enter because they have not done the homework? The consequences, so... that sort of thing.

Nicola's point is significant if we look at the college-environment as a *dispositif,* whose mechanisms likely control and produce next-generation citizens, workers and persons at the expense of adolescents' MH. This phenomenon has been accentuated in the past 40 years by the intensification of governmentality-style surveillance to sustain neoliberal responsibilisation and its normalization, affecting every service-user (Green, 2011; Yousuf, 2018; Jones, 2021; Torrance, 2017). For example, schools/colleges e-communication with parents through daily texts/emails (attendance/lateness for sixth formers), weekly bulleting (secondaries), and class dojo[104]

---

[103] Agamben traces Foucault's *dispositif* back to Aristotele's *oikonomia* (the effective management of the household) and the early Church Fathers' attempt to save the concept of the Trinity from the allegation of polytheism.

[104] A popular school software/website used as behaviour management tool; it allows teachers to upload pictures and students' work instantly. The site has been heavily criticized, especially by children psychiatrist Green, R. (2016) because 'it is used to construct a biased picture of what goes on in school,

(primaries) are the norm in London and welcomed by most parents. This e-communication seems significant in that parents are stakeholders and perhaps demonstrates a tension between how students (who are also stakeholders/service users) and parents could experience activities like dojo, possibly differently. It raises questions about parents' complicity in governmental policies. Pertinently, Teocoli stressed the 'need' for e-communication as surveillance; his view illustrates the controversy around a punitive ethos - as a pedagogical tool - which becomes embedded in and through the learning environment:

> (DDE) 'Ok, the school/college-environment…why ranked third? Most students ranked it fifth or sixth'.

> (Teocoli) 'Ok, it sounds dumb, but... the freedom puts you at fault…if that makes sense…there are so many different people, and for some people, it's too much freedom…not making good use of it'.

> (DDE) 'Ok, so would you benefit more from a stricter 6th form? With more rules?'

> (Teocoli) 'Well...in secondary, for example, they would send emails, automatically, to my dad for missing homework!'

While the excerpts above provide a glimpse of the college-environment's *dispositif* in action, the following section will further demonstrate the embeddedness of the college-environment as an assemblage that some students perceived as 'needed' external control to perform. I contend this control determines how empowered and disempowered students perceive themselves as they *become*. For instance, Teocoli accepted the degree of surveillance his secondary school carried out, considered as a 'regulator of freedom'. It was comparable to those student-participants who justified frequent testing to ensure achievement, diminishing the underlying performance-pressure that would highlight the MH-related issues they had initially bemoaned, and strengthening the

---

while hiding how schools already place a premium on blind obedience and mindless compliance'. Whether it is used to construct a biased picture, or it is simply intrinsic to the lack of context of the pictures remains to be investigated.

cycle between motivation and MH. Take Vanni's exposure to the school/college-environment as an example:

> (DDE) 'Ok, so you were happy to leave the place [secondary school]?'
>
> (Vanni) 'Yes, definitely …so many bad memories with that school'
>
> (DDE) 'Sure…and how did you deal with the actual exam period? Any parental pressure?'
>
> (Vanni) 'No…they didn't get the seriousness of it…and the school was pushing loads of revision …intervention…all that'
>
> (DDE) 'And did it affect learning negatively?'
>
> (Vanni) 'Well…now that you ask, yes…it did...they would force stuff in my head that I wouldn't remember…and that would make me even more stressed…I wasn't remembering anything, I just didn't enjoy anything as much anymore!'

When it comes to performance, Vanni illustrates how policies in the college-environment regulate managerial practices that have an impact on students' experiences. Tellingly, my teacher colleagues used to describe the implementation of exam-related policies as "*the tail that wagged the dog*", a metaphor that silenced discussions about the impact of high-stakes examination on pedagogy and day-to-day practices. Rebby's son, however, offers an alternate interpretation of the pupils' fight as 'symptomatic' through overt resistance:

> (Rebby) 'Ok, yeah, don't know why I put the school-environment… don't know why I put it so high up?'
>
> (DDE) 'Has he been a rebel against school rules?'
>
> (Rebby) Oh yeah-yeah, he hates it so much…now it's ok, but in the past, yes, and generally, he hates any aspects of school rules and guidelines about getting organised, being told so, despite going to a liberal secondary... but he still got in trouble for it…he is always ranting against teachers and school rules…he cares about not having rules and expectations about him, and he applies that at home, too…but

compared to his friends, he realises he hasn't got much to complain about it, but

overall having enough freedom is important to him.

There are several ways to interpret Rebby's account of her son's transgression, but one highlights the possibilities that students can forge for themselves. The boy's disobedience served as a subjectivizing "technology of the self" that seemed to help manage his mental health, as if the boy was fully aware of such controlling, limiting, suffocating, the performance-obsessed inherent practice of the college-environment. In a way, the boy's struggle is symptomatic of a widespread malaise fought consciously and unconsciously, the same as for other student-participants.

The idea of 'struggle as a symptom' makes more sense when understood considering Chicchi's concept of 'symptomatology'. In order to assess contemporary capitalism, Chicchi (2021, p.71) combines questions from Foucault and Lacanian theory about performance, work, and subjectivity to evaluate modern capitalism as the cause of psychopathologies today, building on Ehrenberg's (1996, 1999, 2010) and Han's well-known works (2015, 2017). Using Foucauldian perspectives, Chicchi argues:

> In order to express simultaneous passivity and resistance to the organism's normal functioning (social and corporeal), 'symptomatology' delimits not only the logic of suffering but also *the field of struggle*. Moreover, the presence of symptoms signals a 'performance stumble', an imbalance that is also a departure from the norm (2021, pp.71-72 - my translation/interpretation and summary, checked and approved by the same author).

To demonstrate that most participants were unaware of the college-environment's influence and that their education was often about 'coping', the following section further explores the subtle presence of the college-environment's demands for high-stake performance. Next, I use the 'elephant in the room' metaphor for illustration.

7.3.2 The college-environment and the 'elephant in the room'

Overall, unlike enrichments, student-participants' focus groups did not produce the expected high ranking of the College-Environment, already registered in the questionnaire. The same pattern followed during interviews; however, parents, teachers and school leaders ranked the College-Environment's influence as higher.

Teocoli's insights about the value of 'regulated freedoms' to enhance students' performance were widely shared; when I asked Teocoli to expand on his response, based on the codes we had created, he noted: 'It's fine…they [in college] try to emphasize it's on you, whereas in secondary…instead… was more… you HAD to…here you have to take action…'. Instead of addressing the codes one by one, as per my instruction, Teocoli offered an overview, a straightforward answer that referred to 'they' (college-leaders and/or teachers) as those who had decided and enacted college rules. Teocoli then referred to his secondary school and defined that environment's impositions through 'you HAD to' (i.e., 'technology of the self' as normalized subjectification); and, finally, Teocoli returned to the current college by repositioning the college's expectations as inviting agency/subjectivation ('…here you have to take action') adding ambivalence to 'technology of the self'.

Teocoli's response was vital because it illustrated the college 'field' as a performative environment *per excellence* that shaped the daily 'relational' experience of their selves as students and which, as extensively argued by Bourdieu, generates a range of dispositions, *habitus,* through practices (1980; Reay, 2010; Sullivan; 2002). This aspect of habitus constitutes, I argue, not only identities but 'modalities of being' through subjectivation. Allegedly, as Reay notes, Bourdieu emphasized the relational aspects of habitus and field:

> The relation between habitus and field operates in two ways. On one side, it is a relation of conditioning: the field structures the habitus, which is the product of the embodiment of the immanent necessity of the field. On the other side, it is a relation of knowledge or cognitive construction: habitus contributes to constituting the field as a meaningful world, a world endowed with sense or with value, in which it is worth investing one's energy''. (Bourdieu in Wacquant, 1989, p.44 in Reay, 2010, p.8).

Additionally, as Youdell (2006) and Davies, B. (2006) demonstrate, institutions like schools/colleges are rife with examples of Althusser's (1970) 'interpellation' whereby performance measurements work as subjectification. Often, however, these interpellations trigger Butler's 'double subjects' and Hacking's 'looping effect' as forms of subjectivations; therefore, subsequent analysis will show the implications of interpellation with subjectification, subjectivation and their impact on MH.

For now, Teocoli's response conflates ontological certainties and uncertainties, and that is why I found it helpful that student-participants had first constructed the College-Environment (in enrichments) as one central theme and then played it down (during focus groups and interviews). At the same time, parents and teachers hailed its relevance. As a result, I could see the college-environment's performative expectations throughout the data, crisscrossing the other themes and participants' roles. This ubiquitousness meant that I could elaborate on participants' links to MH, their 'subject position' and 'subject formation' as more productive than a concept like identity to understand adolescents' MH.

For example, Albi pointed out the great integration activities offered by the college for students who came from disparate London secondaries; others saw their secondaries as 'family' (Juss, Teocoli, Matty, Izzie), while some could not wait to move on (Saddy, Vanni, Vic and Gab above all). However, it was Ellinois who grasped a less performative aspect of the college which did not reflect this specific college-environment but seemed a consequence of coming from another environment:

> Yeah, everyone seems quite mature here…it's easier not to talk to people if you don't want to…as opposed to secondary…here if there's an issue you just go home…here you choose relationships, while in secondaries, you're forced into a group like tutor times and whatever lesson you ended up in.

Other student-participants, too, were keen to mention the positive side of their codes and welcomed the move from regimented secondaries to a freer sixth form. But, while positive views had analytical significance, I started seeing certain discursive formations through what-was-not-being-said about the college-environment or what-was-being-said-but-vaguely. For example, Gabs

compared GCSE with A-Levels years: '...in year-11 was a lot about pressure and being reminded much time about exams, in England is a lot about exams!'. Similarly, Divvy noted:

> I always thought education was about growing…in a way…but lately, I've noticed that the education system's a mechanism to get you used to tests…you learn…TEST…you learn …TEST…whereas I used to think about making my brain...better!

Vanni, instead, was more specific when I asked her if college life had motivated her despite the pressures to perform no-matter-what and if she had managed to exercise some degree of choice/agency:

> Yeah-kind-of…to get to Uni, yeah… but, I mean…looking back...GCSE put so much pressure; they made you feel like the world was gonna end if you didn't pass or you were gonna die…it really irritated me…I mean… even if I didn't get the grades I wanted, I still got to do the subjects I liked at A-Level.

These statements suggest that the four chosen codes did capture some implications of the environment *per se;* however, our analysis could have been more pertinent had we unpacked the codes further with the 'subject position' available - which they took up or rejected/resisted. For example, some student-participants described the secondary school-environment as 'heavy duty, sir' (e.g., wearing a uniform, standing in line, being told what to do at every step - fieldnotes), in contrast to the newfound freedoms of the college-environment (e.g., moving around the building, leaving college at any time, taking a more active and responsible role in learning). Nonetheless, most student-participants did not identify the performance demands of the college-environment as 'stressors' for MH, while the other (adult) participants did so more clearly. I perceived students' analysis as a mismatch because I saw i) the school/college-environment as internalized, ii) rules and expectations becoming 'second nature', iii) students confusing subjectification with subjectivation; iv) links between student-participants reduced motivation to perform due to the *dispositif.*

As noted in chapter 5, a parent illustrates the duplicity (in the double and deceitfulness sense) of interpretations that many participants held about the school/college-environment. When I asked if compulsory education had served her son well, Rebby replied: '[big sigh] I think I've got to say NO, the education system as it is, the testing system, the target system, that does NOT serve

ANYONE well, that's my broader belief'. Rebby criticized the examination system and the curriculum, echoing a teacher, Ricardo, who came on to the 'examination point'. Talking about the ethos and practices that govern the established routines of the college-environment, he explained, '.... the exam pressure point, sometimes students drop out or are at risk of dropping out because they're not achieving the expected level in their mock exams, and in some cases the expectation of achieving somehow paralyses them'.

These voices emphasize how the effects of curriculum, pedagogy and an exam-focused environment permeate perceptions of the 'environment' and showcase the materiality of education discourses; therefore, my recoding intended to expose the 'elephant in the room'.

7.3.2.1 Exposing 'the elephant'

In line with Codebook TA, which combines Reflexive TA with Coding Reliability, and to better qualify the 'elephant in the room' alongside Foucault's notion of *dispositif,* I clustered student-participants four chosen codes under two new codes (Fig.34):

Figure 34: NVivo screenshot – College-Environment

T04. College-environment	27	87
Attitude towards the college-environment	24	42
Conduct of Conduct - activity to control people's conduct	15	33

For the first one, following NVivo's strategic training advice, I classified statements that hinted at positive, negative and neutral attitudes towards the college-environment to tease taken-for-granted perceptions; notably, they proved the theme as a catalyst for addressing broader issues related to success and performance in education.

For the second code, 'conduct of conduct', I drew inspiration from Bonell's definition of the school/college-environment and its impact. I did so because students' behaviour (i.e., conduct)

operationalised the code, less as a disciplinarian method than a 'controlling' one, indeed a *dispositif,* which I associated with Foucault's notion of 'governmentality' – i.e., which Lemke (2001) associates with ''conduct of conduct', activities to control people's conduct, a term which ranges from 'governing the self' to 'governing others'"(p.2). Thus, using Foucault's critique of state institutions, I considered the school/college-environment as an 'environment in permanent crisis' where the 'conduct of conduct' became visible as a form of governmentality.[105] Because of the college-environment, student-participants expressed anxieties caused by performative and surveillance mechanisms and, paradoxically, valued the inherent guidance of such regimes of practice, especially in terms of exam and success. This paradox is not necessarily a criticism; on the contrary, it reveals students' agency, resilience and internalization of such practices as means of survival (i.e., coping mechanisms) and might illustrate Foucault's ethics (Gros et al., 2005). Foucault's notion of ethics borrowed from the Hellenic tradition, as 'the intentional work of an individual on itself' but which starts with a subjectification to a set of (moral) recommendations for conduct but continues as a self-forming activity (subjectivation), constituting its own (moral) being.

To fully illustrate the point, the following section unpacks my second code (conduct of conduct) using the first code's statements; the latter's selection identified participants' attitudes (pos/neg/neutral) towards the college-environment. In other words, I scrutinised student-participants' view of the college-environment through Bonell's definition, '…an assemblage of behaviour policies, physical spaces, curricula, school ethos, teaching and learning practices' in order to capture those practices that controlled participants' conduct through performance in and through the college-environment.

---

[105] I drew from Deleuze's reference to the crisis of 'environments of enclosure', like schools, asylums and prisons (in Pongratz, 2011, p.161).

7.3.3 Conduct of conduct 1.0 – "nudged" towards desired behaviors

As noted above, the overlaps between Bonell's definition and the student-participants' chosen codes were apparent; however, physical structures and behaviour policies were not perceived as a concern. The physical structure (shapes, spaces and see-through windows) of schools/colleges seemed to be taken for granted, downplaying their surveillance purpose (Kulz, 2017; Morrin, 2017). Likewise, being free to come and go in the college building was liberating compared to secondary 'fortresses' (fieldnotes). Similarly, behaviour policies did not seem to apply at A-Level apart from light-management protocols such as carrying a visible college ID card or having an attendance rate above 95%. However, one thing that stood out was curricula (the subjects comprising a course of study), reverberating with chapter 6's point about 'option blocks' which, as Abraham (2018) noted, limit future possibilities or do not support undecided A-Level students about university choices several student-participants lamented. Meantime, school/college-leaders welcome 'playing the system' under the strain of accountability measures to guarantee students' success through ever-moving 'goal posts'; yet college-leaders overlook how option blocks are short-term, outcome-focused, regimes of 'performance and practices' (Morrissey, 2015) that benefit the school/college as a *dispositif*. The college Inclusion manager, Davvy, presented a layer of complexity which singled out this college (part of a Trust of five FE colleges) which weaved at once: i) curricula, ii) college-environment and iii) MH, when addressing a) subject choice, b) aspiration and c) career's internal policies:

> I have often wondered whether THAT is the problem the sixth form has here…the reason why there are more MH problems HERE than any of the other four sites is because of the rigidity of the curriculum…because over there [other sites], you have BTEC courses, perhaps more practice and hands-on…less pressure around attendance…whereas here it's *incredibly rigid* [emphasis added]…so it's interesting…a student I met last week, a looked after child, with problems around attendance…she said '…I'm so worried about what I'm going to do in the future….law degree? business degree?', so I said... let's forget about it for a minute…I asked her about her subjects, whether she enjoyed them and she said 'I love my A-Levels'…so I said… stop worrying about the future… study what you LIKE …but nothing… completely obsessed about the future.

Davvy's incredulity seems reasonable and works as a critique of MH in relation to the college and the narrowness represented by the three A-Levels subject choice. Pertinently, a parent, Victoire, summarized the issue at stake with the A-Level's three-subject format:

> It seems to me that the English system wants to produce 'experts'…who will miss out in other educational areas, so… the fact that you go [from GCSE to A-Levels] to the reduction of subjects that you study is focused on creating the mentality of an expert, performing in a society in the best possible way in its 'little place', it doesn't create a wider holistic knowledgeable person, like more humanistic/humanitarian…creating people who will have difficulty to relate to society… because they haven't been fully exposed.

Leeno, another parent, echoed Victoire's feeling: '…they don't want individual thinkers…a worry to the establishment, we need all in a box, in a career and all that kind of stuff…'

Both parents, the first raised in an EU country and the other British, resented the institutions that had educated their children alongside family education for twelve years; they were critical but had offered no alternatives.

Thus, the rationale behind 'conduct of conduct' as a code considered how the student-participants' chosen codes collapsed to embed the college ethos, materialized through internal policies (i.e., an example of the materiality of discourse); the ethos would determine teaching and learning practices and, from it, the overall college performative experiences, as Nicola had stressed. Therefore, any references/statements hinting at the college ethos expressed 'conduct of conduct', illustrated by activities that controlled students (i.e., nudges towards desired behaviors) but also performative activities which students carried out to control themselves, emphasizing the ambivalence of how 'technology of the self' may operate. Therefore, through words and sentences like: 'practice of key assignments', 'sit mock exams', 'do tests', 'a testing culture', 'countdown to the mock period', 'get big grades', 'revision', 'intervention' and 'succeed', I reframed student-participants' codes into an overarching one. Such discursivity dominated the references I collected under the theme 'school/college environment' and which echoed the theme 'exam pressure' (next chapter). For now, 'exam pressure' permeates school/college ethos and often utilizes other schools/colleges ethos for support, especially those that promote resilience, character, risk, MH

and well-being; these invite students to perform and achieve no matter what,[106] paradoxically, at the expense of crashing confidence. Equally, some student-participants seemed to accept education as a 'technology of power' to produce next-generation citizens (Gillies, 2017), along the lines of neoliberal responsibilities (McLeod, 2017; Wilkins, 2019, Torrance, 2017). For example, when I asked Divvy about the impact of a school/college ethos that placed exam results high on the agenda, she did not hesitate to say: '...I think some will always be the same and dragged through A-level and Uni, and viceversa, [others] just feel comfortable with the system…'

Others liked the high-frequency testing:

(Vanni) 'There isn't a lot of it BUT STILL we do like…key assignments, exam questions…which is perhaps good'.

(Albi) 'I mean... they [exam mock] are for the best...so you're less stressed when it comes to sitting in the actual exam'.

(Ellinois) 'I don't think there has been exam pressure…it's been gradual…we do key assignments every couple of weeks to prepare us for it'.

(Gabs) 'I don't think it's that bad… I mean... we do exam questions every week, so it gets me used to it'.

Such practices reflected the pressure on schools/colleges to perform, which trickled down and implicated different actors (departmental subject areas, subject leaders, teachers, parents and eventually students) in the name of competition, accountability measures and responsibilisation. Therefore, unlike the above points, which show the normalization and embeddedness of exam practices, the following statement highlights a common practice handled differently by different leaders. Vic did not hesitate to share a controversial secondary school experience about her headteacher's unorthodox routine:

---

[106] After attending nine open evenings to choose my daughter's secondary in 2019, I noticed that <u>all</u> the headteachers' speeches revolved around three pillars: results, resilience and wellbeing.

> Once we reached year-11...our headteacher used to remind us NOT TO BE AN EMPTY CHAIR…so… this became *a normal thing* [my emphasis] in assembly but also lesson time or tutor time…we were reminded that there was no more teaching to add and the pressure was on US…revision revision…otherwise, you were THE empty chair![107]

Vic's response speaks volumes about what students are often presented within and through the various stressors comprising the school/college-environment. For example, as a teacher, I have found myself under the strain of accountability measures, maneuvering students to achieve/attain by touching the responsibilisation and self-esteem cords or normalizing the routine tests to minimize bad results. Similarly, college-leaders indirectly mentioned 'their' college ethos that normalized testing too. So, for example, the psychotherapist Janna referred to: ''Yeah, it's that 'teaching for the text' thing, and I think [students] accept that…I mean…they don't like it, but they think…it's less trouble than the exploration''. Alternatively, the teacher Jo, with inclusion duties, lamented how often she had found herself in management meetings when she perceived that: ''…so... we go about in a circle and... all the time... there is this expectation of …'they've got to make progress…they've got to do better…''. And finally, teacher Ricardo:

> I feel conflicted about this idea of high expectations because, on the one hand, it does lead to better performance, but equally, high expectations can lead students to see themselves as a failure, in terms of their grades… but also in terms of future careers or university.

These three views highlight the importance of the school/college environment and the subtle influences it can perpetuate through the legitimization of performance values; these values require (a regime of) systematic practices to be in place, now entrenched in the (neoliberal) education system. For example, having a school/college culture that did not promote a 'study culture' as an ultimate form of desire would be unimaginable in the current neoliberal climate. The underlying

---

[107] Though anecdotal, during my first fieldwork I attended an assembly where the deputy head warned year-5 students to prepare for the most stressful time of their lives (in year-6) due to the SATs examination. My son, preparing for SATs too, often reports of his teacher 'naming and shaming' those who do not achieve high in Math tests, or that, in preparation for OFSTED, 'the future of the school lies on your shoulders'.

logic of 'conduct of conduct' as 'nudging' is such that the precepts of neoliberal subjectivities (work hard, strive, achieve) correlate with success and realization of one's potential (Chicchi, 2017; 2021; Sebastianelli, 2021). This logic seems a panacea for solving all the problems presented to the government by the adolescent, the family, and the local area, through techniques of governmentality that hold everyone accountable in their dual roles as stakeholders and service users. School/college-leaders, eventually, have to balance out a culture of well-being and mental health '…while reminding students of the next test coming up', as Alionka emphasised; such a 'regime of practice' creates tension and has further implications for adolescents' MH while in transition (next chapter).

7.3.4 Tensions and implications of the College-Environment as a dispositif

When interviewing my gatekeeper, one of the college's Assistant Heads, he did emphasise that one of his roles was to promote a performance-based 'study culture' with students' needs to maintain a healthy mind. But again, as Alionka reminded me:

> Schools/colleges are very structured... routine places… amazing for MH, but in the same way, they can be a problem because it means you have to stick with doing certain things, following certain rules etc., like being ready to learn, revise, do homework and if you don't have the right practical and mental conditions then you're not in a good place.

Unavoidably, I indirectly posed the tricky question that could have tested any leadership perspectives in terms of priorities; it seemed that Alionka was bypassing the influence of school/college-environments and assuming that there were no alternatives to organise it. I said:

> I researched in a primary and then the sixth form with specific aims, [I carried out] a literature review that pointed at the environment being a problem but then… you think… the school/college-environment is also a place where students enjoy, and make friends, and it's, therefore, a microcosm of life, so…then… for me, it's been about understanding to what extent the school-environment triggers mental ill health, but…as you said… it's never easy to separate external and internal factors.

Alionka's response below is, in a way, a 'non-response' to my point but cleverly builds on it:

> Yes, and how do you get that balance? The all ethos of feeling focused and driven and even being successful, which is a positive thing, but without it tipping so far the other way that you become all about THAT? …and when you get THAT extreme stress on people, then THAT's a very tricky line, and I think you'd swing one way or the other all the time, and that's the big challenge!

Alionka identifies a tension which, I think, has severe implications for adolescent MH. For example, in an informal conversation with the college gatekeeper, I questioned his leadership role and expectations, and he seemed not to grasp the influence that management decisions could have had on students' MH. On the other hand, when I asked about the recent introduction of 'option blocks' in the college, he was not hesitant to argue that it was for the student's good - from what I knew about him, I have no doubt he meant it. He was a self-reflexive leader who, like my friend expert Alionka, had genuine interests in making students' life easier but had to live up to a neoliberal educational ethos that forced performative practices and constituted specific 'environments' that, in turn, constituted students' MH. Key players like Alionka correspond to an interpretation of Gramsci's 'organic intellectuals' (Humphrys, 2011) who emerge from within a system to sustain the *staus quo*. As Alionka indicated:

> You are in an institution that is all about academic success; that's what schools ARE, it's SCHOOLING, so we'd be naïve to say…oh, it's broader, it's all about the child…and yes, a lot is about that, and quite rightly so, but the root's different, so how can you get away from exam pressure?[108]

There is no answer to this; there is complexity and 'discomfort' (Baker et al., 2018) enounced on behalf of Alionka, as much as mine; while all participants engaged in meaning-making, which I tightened to subject positions, the ethics of educational policies (macro) and the day-to-day (micro) enactment of policies put participants in difficult 'positions' which increased self-doubt. Therefore, in the college-environment, I suggest students implement Butler's 'double subject' through Hacking's 'looping effect' as intrinsic to a possible theory of subjectivity, which

---

[108] See Morrissey (2015, p.622) about education managers/leaders' biased voices.

implicates both subjectification and subjectivation - for which schools/colleges should be accountable (or should guide education policies to facilitate 'empowerment').

Conclusion: the Implications of Performance while in Transition

I attempted to convey adolescent MH before (and beyond) diagnosis through a notion of performance that went past simple 'studying' but instead concentrated on following directions, achieving grades and meeting deadlines, which depicted the college atmosphere as a *dispositif* (fieldnotes). This approach may challenge official medical models that explain MH only biologically, that is, through the language of treatment or cure as reductionist and deterministic discourses of power. By concentrating on 'hearing' students' voices, I structured my analysis around MH's lived experiences that best presented students' angst, malaise, hope and aspiration, where the underlying emphasis was on performance and resilience, how discourse constitutes and adapts them to meet structural demands that expect an enterprising education, 'caring' about MH.

Ball started an investigation of how school performance is determined (Ball 2001; 2003; 2005; 2008; 2012). By focusing on the issue of resistance to neoliberalism, these were further investigated by Olmedo (Ball and Olmedo, 2013). According to Ball (2015), the paper with Olmedo argues that '…subjectivity is a major site of political struggle in the contexts of nonlinearization and neoliberal governmentality...a modern form of politics for a modern form of government' (p.1). I would also add, citing Madra (2014), that the neoliberal school/college reflects a depoliticized society through an ideological focus on economic imperatives that "...aim to re-organize the social such that all human behaviour is governed through an interface of economic incentives" (p.2). Madra studies neoliberalism as '...enacting an epistemic shift, at the level of social subjectivity, which aims to transform the way individuals relate to each other, to their environments, and potentially enact a change in social being' (2014. p3) moving beyond popular representations that reduce neoliberalism to a set of marketisation policies.

Because the neoliberal schools/colleges are supported by improved performance to address the problems of the 21st C (i.e., see competition among OECD countries), 'performance' helped untangle the relationship between subjectivity and MH. This dynamic means that continuous

testing, cyclical mocks, high-stakes exams, and a certification culture require elevated levels of student resilience brought on by ambivalent 'technologies of the self'. For example, during a supply teaching day, I met a year-8 student who created his badge, '*I love perseverance*', in line with the school's ethos, demonstrating how subjectification can be infused with a subjectivizing sense. Therefore, if the student subject is to own processes of subjectivation, resilience must be warranted sensitively. Here, the fine line between subjectification and subjectivation highlights how education affects students' MH. For instance, the 'educational apparatus' may be compared to the 'psychiatric apparatus' in Foucault's analysis. This means that, to paraphrase Foucault (2006, in Bailey, 2013, p. 819), the analysis of the educational apparatus can be divided into three axes: the axis of power, insofar as the students are established as subjects acting on others; the axis of truth, insofar as the student individuals are constituted as objects of knowledge; and the axis of subjectivation, insofar as the subjects have to make the norms imposed on them their own.

The MH-education balance can consequently be viewed via the prism of performance, putting into question general justifications for compulsory schooling and its goals while transitioning to adulthood. The next chapter explores 'transition' through the remaining two themes, Exam Pressure and Relationships.

Chapter 8 – Transition and Adolescent MH while Progressing to University/Career

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I conceptualized performance through the lens of 'available' subject positions that student-participants either took up (obligingly or willingly) or outright rejected/resisted. This means I could observe subjectification and subjectivation at work via ambivalent 'technologies of the self' (Hancock, 2018) influencing MH, reflected in the subject position. Therefore, this chapter builds on the previous one by concentrating on how the themes of Relationships and Exam Pressure affect performance and MH while transitioning to legal adulthood. I had already teased out the relevance of transition through previous themes; however, these two concluding themes allowed me to "hear" participants' voices regarding transition as a concern. Student-participants, unlike adult participants, sounded simultaneously pressured and excited by uncertainty, and the two concluding themes clarified these ambivalences.

As a result, I start by giving a pertinent overview of 'transition' from convergent transdisciplinary viewpoints; then, I address exam pressure as standing for various pressures during that transition; finally, I analyze how these pressures play out in and through relationships with other stakeholders.

8.1 Transition to Adulthood through Challenges and Expectations

The interviews consisted of two tasks extracted from the whole college questionnaire; task 1 would offer an orientation to assess how student-participants managed, understood and generated meaning from past and present experiences and future aspirations that could influence their MH. Therefore, the 'transition' lens acquires significance because of its association with a measurable progression seen as betterment, echoing Becker's (2009) on the accumulation of 'human capital' as the next frontier of a neoliberal school/society. I do not employ one specific theory of transition *per se*. Nonetheless, I consider conceptualizations of transition from heterogeneous scholars who

see the transition as a 'crisis' moment in the life course and, accordingly, likely to contribute to an increased understanding of students' MH.

For example, primitive societies ritualized transition through cultural landmarks of tribal identity (rites of passage) that reinforced a sense of self through clan affiliation; for example, anthropological theories of transition focused on rituals' 'liminality', a stage of the ritual characterized by ambiguity and uncertainty but productive of one's becoming or 'coming of age'. What a society/tribe intended as a 'person' embedded self-constitution as a survival mechanism; therefore, rituals of transition went along the change of social status in a seemingly structured way, underpinned by clan affiliation above all. van Gennep's (2013/1909) seminal work described rituals as separation (divestiture), transition (liminality), and incorporation (investiture); Turner (1967; 1969), who built on van Gennep, suggested that transition required the remaking of identity to cross a 'social limbo' in which mundane rules were suspended, as at theatre (Turner, 1969), affecting the 'sense of self'. These scholars' insights suggest that what is at stake during any key transition stage enters the realm of sacredness because of its constitutive, almost fixing, status; therefore, we should pay extra attention to how adolescents experience transition in schools/colleges and what may count as divestiture, liminality and investiture.

For example, bringing transition into the mundane, Schlossberg (in Evans et al., 1998) defined transition as any event, or non-event, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles. According to DeVilbiss (2014, p.27), Schlossberg (1981) described her transition model as a vehicle for "… analyzing human adaptation to transition" (p. 2), stating that adaptation is affected by three interacting variables: (1) the individual's perception of the transition, (2) characteristics of the pre-transition and post-transition environments, and (3) characteristics of the individual experiencing the transition. I will come back to these accordingly.

Finally, Erikson (Exploring Your Mind, 2020) indirectly referred to transition through his 'fifth psychosocial stage' of development, taking place through often critical teenage years. This stage is theorized as central to developing a sense of personal identity, which will influence behaviour and development for the future. Erikson argued that adolescents (13-18) needed to develop a 'sense of self' and personal identity. Hence, for example, experiencing success helps one stay true to oneself, while failure leads to 'role confusion' and a weak sense of self. During adolescence, Malone et al. (2016) argue, drawing from Erikson, children are more likely to

reinforce a 'sense of self', independence and control if they are encouraged to explore, as opposed to those who may not get much support and stay unsure about beliefs and desires, hence confused about themselves and the future, at risk of mental ill-health.

These brief reviews of transition-related theories highlight why the following voices emphasized transition as causing uncertainty and anxiety but also provided transformative opportunities stemming from the challenges of exam pressure that also influenced, and was influenced, by relationships. For example, student-participants showed concern about how GCSE exams played out in their relationships with parents, peers and teachers and saw no difference with the incumbent A-Levels. Thus, most evidence below rests in the life-determining character associated with relationships and exam pressure; most voices show participants' negative perceptions of policies focused on educational success and, following Schlossberg, students' *adaptation* as a coping mechanism.

8.2 Exam Pressure: Theme Contextualization

Since 2010, I became increasingly sensitive to the issue of exam pressure because it regularly occupied school council discussions about 'failing', and my school had just created a MH team to manage what resembled a mental ill-health epidemic. I also had two students who suffered panic/anxiety attacks before exams that required hospitalization, and several parents shared their worries about exam pressures. Such pressures extended, variably, to teachers, but I had no personal experience of school-bound exam stress as a student. However, as a researcher, I found the theme of Exam Pressure producing authentic insights by relating the pressures of performance and transition on MH. This productivity resulted from Exam Pressure's predominance in the research, which played out differently at different stages and through different participants. For example, as shown below (Fig.35), Exam Pressure went from the fourth position in focus groups (with mainly year-12s) through the first position in the whole-college questionnaire (with 43% of year-13 respondents) to third/fourth in interviews (carried out in January/February with year-12 students mainly).

Figure 35: NVivo screenshot of themes' ranking per phase

Such variations may reflect: i) partially removed pressure for year-12s following the recent linear approach at A-Levels;[109] ii) decreased motivation at the time of the interview (January/February); iii) ongoing external factors to the college-environment but still education related. Therefore, in line with Codebook TA, I recoded the theme Exam Pressure initially coded by student-participants through: 1. revision and more revision, 2. fear of failure, 3. parental and teacher pressures, 4. affecting the enjoyment of learning.

I made the following new codes (Fig.36 below), following Bonell et al. (2011, 2012ab) and Jamal et al. (2013), to identify the college-environment's multiple pressures: i) 'college pressure' could reveal how the ethos and policies of the college-environment influence the daily management of exam pressure; ii) 'good pressure' could capture new data from the focus groups; iii) 'neutral pressure' could reveal the normalized and mitigated views of exam pressure (that I

---

[109] Before 2017, A-Level exams were 'non-linear', that is, broken up and spread over two years. Since 2017, students sit conclusive, linear, exams at the end of the two years.

later merged with 'good pressure'). Finally, iv) 'self-made pressure' illustrated students as the sole perpetrators of such pressure. What emerged at interview time was that parental pressure was either minimal or reflected in self-made pressure, as already argued in the previous chapter.[110]

Figure 36: NVivo screenshot of Exam Pressure's codes

T03. Exam Pressure	30	122
College pressure	20	44
Self made Pressure	13	29
Good Pressure	11	15
Neutral Pressure	9	10

8.2.1 College pressure

All college-leaders, in their leadership roles (i.e., the assistant headteacher as my gatekeeper, my teacher informant, four teachers, three members of the MH&WBTeam and the Career officer), saw exam pressure as the main problem. Exam pressure accounted for most mental ill-health internal referrals with the MH&WBTeam, who claimed to be over-stretched despite being full-time and receiving admin support. However, as Table 9 showed (reproposed below), the theme of Exam Pressure was not as pressing student-participants and parents, impacting on the ranking if we consider all the participant groups.

---

[110] E.g., student-participants had already flagged 'good exam pressure' as an incentive but also its detrimental internalization.

Table 9: summary of interviewees' ranking – 1st and 2nd choice only: totals participants N34 – see Appx-14 for a full breakdown of the ranking by all participants:

Paired themes	1st and 2nd choices
Motivation	**18**
External factors	**16**
Relationships	**15**
Exam Pressure	**15**
College-Environ.	**5**
Money/Resources	**0**

The following section unpacks college-leaders' views of exam pressure as implied pressure from the college-environment *dispositif.*

8.2.1.1 College-leaders' viewpoints

The MH&WBTeam (inclusion manager, psychotherapist, MH and well-being counsellor) and the career officer were very concerned about worsening adolescent MH in college. For example, the inclusion manager, Davvy, had just moved from the Further Education (FE) college section of the Trust and felt overwhelmed by the numerous mental ill-health referrals, compared to the FE's more manageable' learning difficulties' (dyslexia or ADHD)[111] as indicators of MH issues. In addition, Davvy offered fresh perspectives on the college as she had just come from another building and sounded incredulous about what she was witnessing just a few months into the job:

[111] FE colleges deal with 18+ mainly but also some 16+.

(Davvy) Yeah… I've also come from adult education and in my last place I was working with 19+ students going on to access courses, coming back, and re-sitting GCSEs… sometimes I sit with students here, and I say, look… it's NOT the end of the world if you don't do this now…if you fail …if you drop out it's NOT the end!

(DDE) 'So you were dealing with more mature students?'

(Davvy) Yeah…but it's underfunded in this country…level 3 courses now you have to pay…same for access courses…whereas the golden years for free have gone…so yeah, there's a sense that if they don't do it now, then that IS IT… it's game over!

Davvy was echoed by Giovanna, the Career officer, and the other two from the MH&WBTeam; they built on Davvy's point by drawing into the analysis transition-related issues and the anxiety caused by failed mock exams, or not achieving predicted grades - i.e., students' future options and/or progression was at stake. Giovanna gave a lengthy response, of which I offer a snapshot – the emphasis is mine. She used key language which, in my experience, echoed standard student communication with college-leaders:

(DDE) 'In terms of exam pressure, has the theme come up in your work as a career adviser?'

(Giovanna) There is much stress around predicted grades that impact MH…you know …the December mocks...if they were much better…then the students' hope would influence predicted grades…so the predicted grade is definitely aspirational, but sometimes they don't do as well as they hope …it doesn't change the predicted grade…so the exam definitely impacts…they start worrying about what their future options are!

These extracts present the case for concern of two college-leaders who had no responsibility for students' exam success and offered telling views of how tight the system is and how risk-taking or failure are not options while transitioning to adulthood.

8.2.1.2 Teachers' viewpoints

Teachers offered detailed accounts of exam pressure by referring to specific instances that caused stress. Evie had plenty to say about the impact of coursework on MH:[112]

> The coursework in year-13 is incredibly stressful, and students react very badly…. I remember once it was awful…we ended up getting [external] MH support to work with groups to say… IT'S OK! This is difficult, but you can't hide from this.

And later:

> I'm sure [students] do feel a huge amount of teacher pressure in terms of expectations and deadlines… I'd say that we're very good at ensuring that the focus is firstly on enjoyment, secondly on collaboration… I don't know if that message is getting through.

Evie was somewhat optimistic about the pressure put on teachers to have students achieve/attain and suggested that many teachers were still determined to see the enjoyable side of learning and that most teachers had embraced the new linear exam. Furthermore, the national exam policy change reduced the pressure of ongoing, yearly, high-stake examinations (AS=year-12 and A2=year-13), benefitting students and teachers in terms of sustaining other life and college stressors. Ricardo, however, offered another picture through students' attitude to learning vis-a-vis exams; it resonated with my teaching experience with sixth formers: 'Sometimes students drop or risk of dropping out because they're not achieving the level expected in their mock-exams, and in some cases, the expectation of achieving placed [on them] somehow paralyses them'.

Nicola echoed Ricardo by mentioning two recent students' MH 'lived experiences':

> With my year-13s we're doing far more exam prep, and so many students are finding that STRESSFUL! [For example] yesterday…timed piece of work…a student left the

---

[112] In the History coursework students are expected to get a top grade weighing 25% of the final grade. The rationale is to compensate for a bad result from the remaining 75% written exam.

room because she felt sick…. again, today, another student left the room because she felt sick during a timed piece, now… today the student came back and did it, eventually, but yesterday, the student didn't come back for another hour…by then we'd finished… so, she felt fine to come back into the normal lesson…in another class, another student didn't come back …said she'd been feeling anxious about the exam…you know, sitting down just builds up the anxiety within her.

Finally, Jo's view rounds up the teachers' analysis by emphasizing the little room for maneuvering to reduce exam pressure: "…all the time there's this expectation of …'they've got to make progress'…'they've got to do better!'''. The college headship was increasingly embracing the 'work hard' and 'be resilient' mantra that would promote students' better results (see Appx-12) while in transition and as a sign of progression. However, teachers who had been in college for over twenty years were finding it particularly difficult to reconcile the complexity of social and material deprivation of the current student population and the expectation to make students exam-ready, at all costs, while doing 'the well-being' (fieldnotes plus discussion with my informant).

8.2.1.3 Student-participants' viewpoints

As for student-participants, year-12s agreed that exam pressure at GCSE had gone too far; some had coped better than others but had no fond memories. Perhaps, Divvy captured the pressure by comparing it to the current increased pressure, meaning more prep tests and a pedagogy to-the-test. Divvy, who had most of her family abroad and came to England in year-9, stressed her perceived obsession around testing in the UK:[113] 'Yesterday there was a countdown to the mock period…which kind of scared us…10 teaching weeks…50 school days to the mock…so the teaching reminded us of this'. Gab claimed, '…. year-11 was a lot about pressure and being reminded lots time about exams; in England, it's a lot about exams!'. Moreover, Ellinois dreaded

---

[113] Schools offer revision for year-11s and y13s on Saturdays, other schools make them compulsory. My ex-school allocated £500 per department to have C/D grade borderline student attend revision sessions; any C and above grades at the time increased the school standing on league tables.

exams and had decided to consult the MW&WBTeam but, as a year-12, she did not have priority on year-13 because:

> Here the teachers' focus is on year-13s' exam and UCAS, which I understand…in secondary, teachers were more ON us, getting us for intervention and making lists of who'd do better…they'd have meetings with you…but now it's like... you get an email asking you to re-write an essay.

Saddy and Vanny were more specific about teacher pressure:

> (Saddy) 'They put so much more pressure in year-11…I mean…I was a bright student, and they always reminded me of the waste of talent…by pushing me to revise…'.

> (Vanni) 'At GCSE, we were constantly reminded of GETTING the grade, otherwise, we'd not get into college; they were stressing me out…I FELT LIKE no college WOULD HAVE ACCEPTED ME…because of my predicted grades…'

On the same note, we have already heard from Izzie, Juss and Alby, and I re-propose some powerful excerpts:

> (Izzie) 'Once we reached year-11.... our headteacher used to remind us NOT TO BE AN EMPTY CHAIR…'.

> (Juss) 'Last year's pressure also came from my school and peers…people knew I was smart and expected me to do fine…so I felt that I could not speak of my fears...'.

> (Alby) 'We did way too many of them [mocks]!! …. three the week before GCSE started! ....in my secondary school, they [some students] couldn't even walk into the exam hall without shutting down and wanting to leave straightaway...'.

We argued that end-of-unit tests did not offer the proper distance from the topics to 'learn' them; ongoing tests created some estrangement between the processes of teaching and learning, not necessarily measurable, and the realization that one had learned or was supposed to have learned something (fieldnotes). Thus, the excerpts above, triggered by fresh memories of GCSE exams, tell us that teachers and school/college leaders pass on the pressure to perform (Green,

2011; Yusuf, 2019) as normalized 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2013).[114] The latter revolves around exam prep and the implicit lack of recognition of students' worth beyond those exams; such pressures seemed impressed on student voices and should suffice to question an exam-focused education system.

Craftily, educational policies clarify their ambiguity through a vision of success as i) achieving potential, ii) being competitive, iv) perseverance and many more diktats values that corroborate and simultaneously constitute dominant policy discourses. The latter formally call for 'resilience' or 'character' (Di Emidio, 2021a) as attributes to succeed and overcome mental ill-health, often caused by that same pressure. The student-participants' voices and accounts reminded me that most schools/colleges equate learning with success and success with passing exams; otherwise, they would not have survived as state institutions.

The following subsection extends Exam Pressure and its complexity to self-generated pressure as an 'intervention' of governmentality, manipulating aspiration as a 'technology of government' (Spohrer et al., 2017). I mobilize two Foucauldian concepts together, (i) 'conduct of conduct' that exposes the student subject as (ii) a subject of desire (Clarke, J., 2005, p.455; Clarke, M., 2014, p.584), to show government from afar, with subjectification sold as subjectivation (i.e., agentic, liberating, as it were). Such a manoeuvre doubly threatens students through the dangers of self-imposed pressure to avoid a lousy transition (i.e., poor grades, not getting into the desired 'option block' and university), which has the effect of confusing students' aspirations at the expense of a positive MH.

---

[114] 'Every power to exert symbolic violence, i.e., every power which manages to impose meanings and to impose them as legitimate… adds its own specifically symbolic force to those power relations' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2013, p. 4).

8.2.2. Self-made pressure

Following the section above, it is difficult to distinguish between exam-related self-made pressure, college pressure, and external pressure. Even though participants acknowledged the extrinsic pressure of exams, they also inferred that anxiety and worries were self-made, contravening their right to challenge such pressures and telling us more about their subject positions due to precarity. Anxiety and worries were still externally provoked by (i) associating them with enhanced exam performance (to access the next stage of education), (ii) having to please parents and teachers, (iii) managing peer-pressure in and out of college, or fit in. Most voices reflected measurements of self-worth that student-participants imposed on themselves when, in practice, the high-stake exam culture normalized the impact on students' MH by presenting exam success as the way forward.

Furthermore, the 2010 Coalition Government's push for rigorous examination to improve the UK's low PISA[115] ranking reconfigured the curriculum with 'soft' and 'hard' subjects to install knowledge retrieval as the foundation of exam success[116] (see Bailey & Ball, 2016, p.129). Regardless of the soft/hard divide, all subjects now require mental skills often associated with cultural capital, leaning towards the hypercognitive rather than the creative and empathetic 'soft skills' (Heydenberk & Heydenberk, 2022). However, most student-participants did not claim to possess high order or mathematical skills, not all had received quality teaching, not all saw them as essential in the digital era, and not all found them inspiring as measurers of learning.

For example, Vanni suggested: 'They [at GCSE] would force stuff in my head that I wouldn't

---

[115] PISA is a study (every three years) of educational achievement (in reading, mathematics and science) organised by the OECD. Despite improvements in recent years, in 2018, UK pupils '….were, on average, less satisfied with their lives than pupils across the OECD countries. They were also more likely to feel miserable and worried and less likely to agree that their life has a clear meaning'' (Coughlan, 2019; PISA, 2018, p.17).

[116] This is a non-statutory policy supporting new measurement criteria (statutory) like Progress 8 and Assessment 8. Academic subjects have been placed in the following brackets: HARD - Maths. Sciences; SOFT – Drama, Media, Business, PE, RE, Citizenship, Art. However, in practice,, subjects like English Lit and Lang, Geog, History and Foreign Languages are more like MIDDLE, especially because they are compulsory.

remember…and that would make me even more stressed…'. Similarly, Mollica commented: 'I spend the last two years memorizing stuff, sir; that's what my GCSEs were all about'. When I asked Saddy if she felt pressurized by teachers, she responded:

> Noooo I don't think they are… I'm the one…like…they know that it's YOU and there's so much THEY can do. It was so bad [at GCSE] …I was at my lowest…I put so much exam pressure on me…I felt I HAD HAD to get As or A*…I was so low…why did that happen? Mmmm …I wish that to no one!...so much pressure on myself for NO reason, simply because my mum wanted a lot of me!

Saddy also recalled the hype around MH as a way to excuse teachers and blame students themselves: ''Yeah, it's so glamorized right now…it's so bad…at the first moment …'I have anxiety' 'I have this'... 'that'…no you don't …I say!''. Saddy's contribution blamed those peers who turned to MH issues to justify under-achievement/attainment, defending her teachers and diverting pressure to herself (and her mum). She would engage passionately during enrichments, and, at the interview, she showed her annoyance while trying to figure out who and what had created that exam pressure; she swung between personal and external expectations, a dynamic shared amongst those with less parental support. However, students like Ellinois, Juss and Izzie, who had parents involved in education, were perhaps the hardest on themselves only. They seemed to have benefitted from parental support but, in some ways, seemed victims of it - i.e., they were aware of their parental support and no-exam pressure home culture but could not help to live up to their perceived parental expectations. The following extracts show how student-participants perceived the pressure despite the exam being over a year ahead:

> (DDE) 'So what about exam pressure here…has it started?'

> (Juss) Yeah… I think I must have woken up and I was scared about A-level…it happened in GCSE, and in year-9/10 I had the same…same waiting for exam results…I had the same at the start of August when waiting for mid-august results.

This comment somehow matched her mother, who had ranked Exam Pressure as the third theme that could have affected her daughter, stating: 'She's a diligent student…she quite likes the discipline of studying and revision and enjoys that kind of challenge but it sometimes…ermmm… she's paralysed by the fear of failure, or getting things wrong'.

Izzie echoed Juss' account:

> I need to do a lot…not just because of what's expected from me but because IT IS! But I just…tell myself I have to be as best as I can. At GCSE, I didn't sleep …I slept very little…'cos I was wondering about everything…my parents were worried and reiterated that they didn't expect anything…they wanted it to be for me, not for them.

Izzie's dad, Pinto, himself an academic, was well-aware of the 'governmentality' aspect of neoliberal education (e.g., the privatizing culture steering towards measurability and related profit), so he knew why he and his wife had rejected their nearby Mossbaurne:[117]

> Here [in England] it's all about appearance, great school facilities, everything impressive, but some were all about results. They came across as being a bit too regimented …nah…no good; she will internalize the pressure even more, no, no, something a bit more relaxed, less flashy, more messy…. we went to Mossbourne's open evening. I got scared myself…results do not justify the means…through discipline…'good is not good enough for us'…they said, all teaching staff were very young, that means they drain you in a couple of years, they have to do Saturday teaching too…here the system's all about exams, results, while where I teach in my country is a lot about coursework and it's not about a day performance, it's more nuanced, it's about what you have done across the years.

Pinto's point echoes Victoire's account and is essential to widen the insights of parents who had experienced education elsewhere. I reproduce a little excerpt from an earlier contribution: '…the English system wants to produce experts…but will miss out in other educational areas…it doesn't create a wider holistic knowledgeable person, like more humanistic/humanitarian…'

Parents such as Pinto and Victoire were similarly conscious of adding pressure on their children as Leeno and Ianish. In addition, the latters showed awareness of the increased exam

---

[117] A popular academy in East London that, inspired by the Charter Schools USA programme, is funded through taxation and operated by private organizations, proudly employing military-style measures to get students, most from deprived areas, to achieve - see Kulz's (2018) related ethnography and Stahl (2018) who explored a Charter School in New York.

pressure put on children at large, including the part they inadvertently played in their children's self-made pressure.

> (Leeno) The pressure was probably coming from within of wanting to do well...she had always been told how clever she was...her mum also has an interesting way of putting it to her...she says 'you need to know at the end of the day that you've done your best...no one can ask you anymore'...can you do anymore? If you can? If you can't…you can't...but you need to know because of the inner pressure you put on yourself...you need to know you've done your best.

> (Ianish) My wife and I are involved in her education, so how it manifests to me is like…an anxiety…sometimes a positive anxiety to do well, sometimes it's about worrying about things that aren't important to her.

Unlike Ianish and Pinto, parents like Rebby and Anri dealt with their boys' disengagement from college (e.g., exam pressure denial, procrastination) like the boys in the research group had shown. Matty exemplified them:

> At tutor time, we'been told that when applying to Uni at the start of year-13 they look at year-12s' predicted grades [i.e. from next June's mock][…so, I thought the real exam pressure came from the final exam but really… what seems to count is the predicted…so I'll make sure I focus on this!

This loophole has been linked to increased university dropouts, up to a 4/10 ratio at the end of their first year, according to the HESA (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2021), especially in those universities that, according to the OFS (Office for Students, 2019), offer unconditional places based on predicted grades only. Less prestigious universities recruit those likely to drop out by the end of the second year (e.g., those offered unconditional offers) but who seem desperate to get on the degree ladder.

This phenomenon may reveal another aspect of education's influence on MH; seeing no progression and therefore reduced career opportunities (often associated with significant investments of time and money) could diminish aspiration, increase a sense of self as 'lacking', lowering self-esteem and influencing MH. Once again, my 'critical friend' Alionka offered expert insight from a headship perspective on the relevance of accountability measures, revealing that

there is no alternative. We first discussed the possibilities of striking a balance between wide-ranging learning and a narrow, exam-focused curriculum; and then between an educational ethos to be successful and the intrinsic value of learning. Alionka suggested that such balance was important '…so that it did not become ALL about that [i.e., exam success]'. However, despite her willingness to engage in the dialectic exam pressure/MH, Alionka went on to accept, pragmatically, that exam pressure was there to stay:

> I don't think we can escape it in the way our education system's set up, so….we're wary about exams, but I think there's a challenge for our education system to counteract the way you define a young person on their grade…. so… if you take for example the result fiasco in the summer [2020], yes, it caused a major problem for Uni access, but, some of the language used in reactiveness was like 'this has ruined this child's life' or 'because they got this grade rather than this grade', and so, what we see is not a child but his intelligence…so, I do think that even for students who're not classically pressured by exams, you know …you know the students, you can visibly see it, and they're worrying…staying up late …and even those who're not like that because there's a lot of defining involved about who we are, where we are, even when you're in year-7…you're in set 1, set 2 etc., you see…all of that is linked to exam pressure…you're in an institution that's ALL about academic success, that's what schools ARE, it's SCHOOLING! So we'd be naïve to say…oh, it's broader, it's all about the child…and yes… lots is about that and quite rightly so, but the root's different, so how can you get away from exam pressure?

Alionka shows awareness of the exam pressure debate, but her positionality inevitably places her in a difficult place to be entirely critical about how much pressure is viable, or not, or even suggest alternative assessments. What struck me was the sudden shift between limiting the damage of exam pressure while resigning to today's (neoliberal education) policies which have influenced the curriculum and pedagogy in the name of enterprising. Consequently, self-made pressure would logically be part of 'playing the game' as a negotiation between discourses and practices of success and what students could do to manage it through voluntary subject position take-ups or reject the forced ones.

8.2.2.1 Good and Neutral pressure

Having presented a picture of Exam Pressure through more comprehensive college drivers' and student-participants' self-made pressure (as seen by parents, MH&WBTeam and the students themselves), I will present the new codes 'neutral' and 'good' exam pressure together. This pairing is because, on the one hand, the two recalled some adult participants' assumption, that is, students normalised exams by accepting teaching to the test, revision and ongoing tests as ways to manage the pressure; on the other, it was no surprise that several student-participants welcomed frequent tests and the 'care' around exam preparation.

The following extracts, referring to both secondary and college, illustrate the point, even if they contradict some of the previous argumentations. For example, Gabs suggested: 'I don't think it's that bad, no much exam pressure [in college], I mean…I do exam questions every week so it gets me used to it, so right now, not bad…'. Vanni agreed, '…there isn't much of it [exam pressure], BUT STILL we do like…key assignments, exam questions…which is perhaps good'. Matty, instead, nuanced his response:

> Well…[exam pressure] can make things easier in a way…knowing what to do or not, to be directed is a kind of ok pressure…here teachers, make me aware and…not in a wrong way…exam pressure is good to a certain extend to ensure to let you know where you are, it can be a big factor in life that affects one in the future…so can be good.

Divvy and Alby drew similar conclusions by looking back at GCSEs:

> (Divvy) I think I was overly calm…I mean...so many mocks beforehand that anxiety went…so not that stressful...I think some will always be the same and dragged through A-level and Uni, and viceversa; some just feel comfortable with the system.

> (Albi) I mean... they [tests] are for the best... you know, they prepare you for... so you're less stressed when it comes to sitting in the actual exam... we did way too many of them… setting us up to be stressed… really.... but I think they were necessary evils!

Finally, Vic and Rina explained that students pragmatically looked at tests and pressure. Vic claimed that '... tests are linked to the final mock, so it's about ensuring we see the links between units that lead to the mock'; and Rina: '…well...both…some pressure is fine for me otherwise I

wouldn't get anything done!'.

These extracts suggest a peculiar mindset, or 'technology of the self', that could have challenged the rationale upholding the research proposal hinged around the influence of exams. Additionally, even though student-participants thematized 'exam pressure' out of negatively oriented codes that captured extensive data,[118] at interview time, many student-participants welcomed and justified ongoing testing as logical for success. Such logic deserves due attention to make sense of 'subjective configurations' '…which help configure the mental state of the social actors' (Gonzalez Rey's, 2009b, p.218 in Goulart, 2019, p.57) as reliable MH assessment.

For instance, the following critical criteria could apply: i) students as 'subjects of desires' (Calame, 2022) but of others' desire; ii) it follows: desires to 'being for others' (Shahjahan, 2020) as exhausting; iii) the neoliberal 'subjects of performance' as entrepreneurs of themselves (Chicchi, 2021; Han, 2015; 2017) is in a constant state of optimization and unable to recognize personal or individuating attainment/achievement. These criteria could clarify the consequences of success and pressures to achieve/attain internalized along the thread identity-subjectivity; the thread was to spell out the psycho-discursive development (Wetherell, 2008; Wetherell & Edley, 1999) between early and late adolescence, culminating in transition to adulthood and representing, indeed, a life marker. The three points just listed above present the psychological risks (Fisher, 2007; Han, 2017; Reay, 2018) of perceiving such a situation as 'freedom'.

Finally, drawing on Alionka's last point and my teaching experience, some student-participants considered complex exam preparation a distraction from complicated families, confirming that external factors and exam pressure can go together; needless to say, as Alionka noted, the combined home issues would add another layer of complexity for those who could not easily access the curriculum.

So, while neither teachers nor parents expressed a positive view about exam pressure, some student-participants suggested 'good' or more 'neutral' views than others. Perhaps, neutrality

---

[118] Initial codes reminder: 1) revision and more revision, 2) fear of failure, 3) parental and teacher pressures, 4) it affects the enjoyment of learning.

reflected the student-participants' status as year-12s with no exams. Furthermore, most boys reiterated that exam pressure was ok, in both the short and long-term; two boys' views and approaches to GCSEs are worth mentioning (one approach was reported and analyzed by his father):

(DDE) 'Ok, how did he experience GCSE exams?'.

(Victoire) Ehmmm…slowly burning them…. he left it till the end and he wasn't excessively under pressure, unlike me when it comes to exam challenges…I was projecting my fears into him and didn't observe what I would expect as a possible approach; the projection wasn't confirmed by reality…. that was good…for him, so GCSE was good enough.

(DDE)'Ok, as for [GCSE] exam pressure, how did you deal with it?'.

(Teocoli) 'I did not feel too much pressure…I revised…I knew I wouldn't be getting bad results…it was always that 'maybe' but…'.

(DDE) 'So, did you prepare enough?'.

(Teocoli) ''I did; I prepared only for what I wanted to do, which is fine…here they try to emphasize it's 'on you', whereas in secondary, instead was more you HAD to…here you must take action''.

These two examples show a gendered dimension whereby boys, seemingly, take it easier than girls and ensure coolness and self-assurance to safeguard transition. In a way, these two boys were 'doing' the well-being to ensure a positive MH outcome. Such a gendered dimension might resonate with Campbell et al. (2021), who noted that girls reported substantially worse internalizing of MH than boys and that this gender gap increased with age during adolescence. However, Campbell et al. argued, 'Findings point to the hitherto unrealized complex nature of gender disparities in mental health and possible incongruence between expectations and reality in high gender equal countries' (p.1). Taking cue, our research context presented boys that seemed unaffected by exam pressure (apart from Pablo) compared to girls; in fact, my initial research finding was that not many boys would sign up for the research (see Appx 15 for the extra attempt to recruit boys), plus, the four boys' participants tended to underplay exam pressure, and the MH&WBTeam confirmed such gendered trend.

To argue for a gendered view on the influence of exam pressure and its management is beyond the scope of this research but still significant (Barragry, 2017; Wilkins, 2012a). This is because the relative meaning of 'key transition' such as A-Levels does put boys in an advantageous position (e.g., failure does not seem final) while the pressure is on girls to succeed (e.g., little room for risk-taking). MH trends in the literature suggested that girls' MH is at most risk between 13-19 y/o while boys/men are affected from 20 onward.

8.2.3 Tensions and implications

This section builds on the preceding chapter by focusing on the implications of exam performance while in transition to adult life. I shifted the analysis to 'exam pressure' as a schooling fact (or event) which bears witness to discrepant analytical outcomes. For example, student-participants took up ambivalent subject positions, showing pragmatism (as one ex-student told me once: 'what else can I do sir?', perhaps meaning 'what else can I do for my MH but embrace the regime of performance presented to me?'). In contrast, adult participants seemed more cautious and embraced a critical attitude towards schools/colleges as 'factories for learning' (Kulz, 2018). The data offered other interpretations too. For example, even though exam pressure is increasingly linked to anxiety, self-doubt, and poor self-esteem worldwide (WHO, 2014; UNICEF, 2018; Chow, 2016), the causal relationship between exam pressure and anxiety became nuanced through participants 'lived experiences' in terms of motivation. Two determinants might explain possible discrepancies or why motivation is so impactful. First, student-participants referred to their experience of exam pressure as GCSE exam pressure, still fresh in their mind, as un/motivational; second, they referred to college-pressure as they were experiencing it during year-12, as inherently pressurizing because exams underpinned conversations discursively, with teachers, through UCAS applications, amongst friendship groups and in the pedagogy. However, in one part of the interview, student-participants (both sexes) perceived exam pressure as formative and, therefore, acceptable to be ready for their final A-Levels. For the sake of brevity, I purposefully skipped the analysis of adult participants' views on exam pressure, and also because the next and final theme, Relationships, produced explicit intersections with exam pressure and transition attracting *ad hoc* adult-participants interest.

8.3 Relationships: Theme Contextualization

This theme focuses on how relationships with parents, peers, teachers and themselves (i.e., the self) influenced their MH (and well-being) while transitioning to adulthood. The theme 'Relationships' overlaps with the code 'Relating' (see chapter 7's 'External Factors'), but it varies by how such relationships unfold in, and through, the school/college-environment - i.e., as 'internal factors' of their educational contexts. Student-participants coded the theme through 1) peer pressure, 2) competition, 3) appearance, 4) perfectionism, 5) authenticity, 6) constant comparisons/judgment, 7) fear of being excluded.

However, in line with Codebook TA, I clustered them under new labels to emphasize the relationship type (Fig.37) without ignoring the initial codes nor the significance of the coding process - recorded in my fieldnotes. Student-participants' codes played out differently, though convergently, via different participants. For example, I used the label 'with' for each one of the relationship types. I address each code below:

Figure 37: NVivo screenshot of Relationship's codes

T02. Relationships	29	136
with Parents	17	39
with Self	19	39
with Peers	18	27
with Teachers	18	26

8.3.1 Relationship 'with parents'

The revised code 'with parents' presents aspects of (external) relationships that simultaneously exacerbate mental ill-health and support MH related to college life. The main implication of this code is the difficulty distinguishing, like with Motivation, what comes first: i) college-related MH issues that influenced relationships with parents? ii) or college-related parental pressure that triggered MH issues? Therefore, by framing 'relationship' as a sub-theme of Transition, I could highlight the role (McAvoy, 2009) played out by student-participants through their subject positions; parents paid particular attention to how such a role played out at crossroad to adulthood (e.g., being responsible, risk taker, independent and aspirational).

Some parents were more supportive of their children than others, as already discussed with motivation/performance. Supportive parenting could lead to indirect pressure to achieve high while in transition. Some supportive parents were concerned about their children's well-being and MH and would not pressurize but mitigate college pressure accordingly. For example, Juss and Alby, with parents employed in education, and Matty and Ellinois, felt their parents were interested in holistic education and not just academic success.

> (Alby) I think my parents always wanted me to do the best I can. So, obviously, they want me to be successful and to…you know, have a good life!...I think because they know how to, like….push me without pushing too far.... and such that.... I can strain for the best but not damage myself.

Similarly, Matty reported: '…relationship with parents?…I have a normal one, no issue, some bit of pressure about success and have an easier life but nothing problematic!'; Ellinois echoed:

> All my parents want from me is to try my hardest… So I don't have too much parental pressure…and also… they went back to night-school when they were working, so they know how hard it is…so they would want me not to go through the same.

Finally, Juss: '…they never got angry for bad results, they would for bad behaviour…so the pressure is all self-made, I put it on myself because I want to do well…'.

Nevertheless, parental pressure rather than support transpired in different guises from these extracts and my experience in the field. The pressure seemed intrinsic to the relationship and roles'

expectations, activating ambivalent 'technologies of the self', leaning towards 'regimes of the self' (Rose, 1989) – e.g., perhaps, Ellinois is undermining the pressure which comes with parents who expect her to try her hardest. So, pressure ranged from student-participants wanting to please their parents to parents wanting their children to succeed in such a crucial transitional phase to increase career options and/or employability. The pressure was then reciprocal, and the insights above summarized half of student-participants' views. As for parents, the following two voices represented most parents' perception of the last stage of schooling. Leeno expressed such feelings:

> I think when you go into primary school… for a parent… all is there for you...but secondary...more at arm's length...then at college...you are FAR!...and that's not the fault of the institution because I'm sure they're trying to make them [students] more independent...BUT...it's a very noticeable divide...I feel I'm getting further and further away from them.

Leeno was fully committed to his daughter's development and wanted to assist at every stage, and was keen to make his position clear by criticizing the lack of parental support:

> Sadly ...a lack of parental guidance and support...perhaps they are the parents who don't put the most pressure on...the ones that support the least...it's just the ones who come once per week who say ''you'd better do THIS'' ...how can a child process that?

Following an exchange with another parent, Ianish, I partly shared Leeno's point as ambivalent:

> (DDE) 'There seems to be, from my investigation, a sense of responsibility… as something like…making them [students] feel more responsible than they should, which seems to be a contradiction because we [parents] seem so committed to reducing it'.

> (Ianish) I think that is true…I can imagine we can come across as overbearing by being so committed…but what I'm conscious of is that I'm there to offer advise…but ultimately, I try to impress on her that it's her decision! Especially as she's getting older.

> (DDE) 'Clearly… parental guidance help…and some parents are not always present, perhaps too busy …too tired, or some just expect good results, and clearly, some students feel things do not add up'.

The mix of parental voices, including mine, represented most parents' views as genuinely focused on well-being and MH. However, they are one side of a coin which I see, metaphorically, 'in 3D'; participants' rich reflections meaningfully attach the two opposite sides. This apparent conflation is because all participants' responses seem compromises, expressed in a liminal space where analytic momentum does not let contrasting voices undermine participatory meaning-making. Several student-participants expressed dissatisfaction with their parental relationships vis-à-vis schooling but were also aware of their parents' demanding role. The MH and well-being officer offered a staggering statistic confirming the unsupportive elements of parenting:

> Relationship issues? …no peers but parental… YES, an issue, e.g., 95% of referrals don't want me to speak to parents; also, a few of the same teachers seem to come up as harsh but overall good relationship with teachers.

Furthermore, Janna, the college psychotherapist, singled out parental Relationships and parenting styles as affected by worsening material deprivation, a deprivation now stretched to all London boroughs. Janna: 'Yes… PARENTS…yeah, big time…we go from restrictive parents, abusive parents, alcoholic parents, carers for a parent…I get a lot of that…'.

A parent, Leeno, offered a broader view which he drew from his personal experience as a coach. While talking about the theme of Motivation, he moved on to life chances, luck and support. He pointed at the wrong system in place around the country with football academies, putting pressure on kids from the age of six: '…and believe me, most pressure comes from parents -you know 'external factors'…loads of teenagers are broken by the age of 13-14 for choices -trust me- they haven't made'.

Mickey too, the only year-13, juxtaposed secondary school with what was happening in college with regards to parental negative impact; however, Mickey did not consider that parents often associated their children's happiness with achievement:

> I think it was parental pressure rather than exams… really, loads of pressure for the student to do well…rather than the kid to be happy…so, loads of pressure and seemed to affect them…they had to do well BECAUSE of their parents…like here in college.

No one else in the group felt more pressurized by parents than Saddy, Rina and Ash, who saw their motivation vacillate and constantly questioned. They lamented a mix of pressure to achieve,

constant comparison with friends and relatives, and pressure to pursue specific subjects linked to prestige and job security. As we saw in chapter 7, the three of them felt the onus was on them to make the right choices and succeed; it seemed that responsibilisation overtook trust.

Student-participants' feeling of being simultaneously supported and stuck with parental relationships characterized the theme of Relationships vis-à-vis schooling and transition. It showed how adolescent MH in and through the college-environment is very much linked to external factors such as family relationships. The latter's ubiquitous status could trigger mixed reactions when combined with the college's pressures. For some, it could be vital to mitigate the day-to-day pressure of schooling, especially exam pressure. However, as aforementioned through my 'critical friend' Alionka, the combined pressure of schooling, wanting to succeed or being expected to succeed, and home issues seem plausible determinants of worsening MH.

Finally, Alionka's points present the likely scenarios of taking up available subject positions; it also introduces the complexity of management from both leadership and safeguarding perspectives - i.e., to ensure high attainment/achievement while securing the child's psychological well-being (Yusuf, 2019; Green, 2011). These scenarios seemed much easier to ignore from teachers' perspective because teachers were not the first to know about the influence of external factors, though they could detect it; perhaps, other school/college leaders found such factors of guidance to maintain consistency in behavioural expectations, adapt curriculum policies, bring in MH teams, assess and promote the student population resilience. However, Alionka also noted (in Chapter 6) that we should not forget that all external relationships come to influence our emotions daily, which tells us a lot about how we perceive MH and transition (Schlossberg, 1981 in DeVilbiss, 2014) and result in 'subjective configurations' that best explain MH status.

The essential point here is that parental pressure determines education-related relationships; for example, parents and student-participants have to manage the performance-based, result-driven educational agenda alongside relationships; this double bind can either mitigate the pressure or make things worse *for* transition. The schooling demands associated with transition surely warrant anxiety; however, relationships with parents can help (re)articulate students' roles with less ambivalent take-ups (i.e., less obliged); when student-participants showed to be active stakeholders/service-users, they seemed less estranged by the *dispositif.*

The risk of over-parenting emerged, but we could not see alternative approaches. In short, parents tended to worry about societal expectations and academic achievement because it logically translated to better life options. However, being involved emotionally and pragmatically prevented parents (and students) from deciding priorities; this simultaneous involvement shaped ambivalent relationships over a critical developmental time, under the strain of job precarity, expensive universities and intrinsic claims about being unprepared. Additionally, parents had to manage the inexorable detachment associated with their children's transitioning via schooling stages and success demands. Therefore, the code encapsulated each participant's experience dealing with emotions, expectations and roles that invariably led students to take up subject positions concerning parental influence on their well-being and, in turn, their MH.

8.3.2 Relationship with peers

This code presents participants' views on friendship groups and friends-making in the new college-environment and the extent it influenced their MH. Through fieldnotes, focus groups and task 1's interviews, it seems clear that some students benefit from moving to another establishment after spending five years in one school setting. While most friendships with peers of the local community consolidate, some students benefit from the opposite; other times, some have no choice but to move because their secondaries do not offer a sixth form (fieldnotes/focus group discussion).

In our specific college in central London, all students came from different parts of London, which meant that most did not know each other. Compared to my teaching experience (i.e., with sixth formers who came from the lower school), this sixth form college had an adult feel because there were not 'uniformed' students in the building, and sixth formers were free to move in/out. While some student-participants admitted to enjoying such novelty, others struggled, as several students put it. Additionally, as a rule, sixth form students remove uniforms, signifying belonging and identity, and express themselves through enhanced awareness of body image or clothing. Erikson (Exploring Your Mind, 2020; Greene, 2021; Malone, et al., 2016) and Blakemore (2018), respectively, from Social Identity and Neuroscience perspectives, suggested multifaceted implications for adolescent MH while transitioning to adulthood and a new environment gets imbued with added meaning to development, liberating for some and hindering for others.

For example, some student-participants just got on with making friends, while others took a neutral stance. Mickey saw herself as '…getting on well with everyone but not caring about friendship groups since the start in year-12'; Mickey echoed Hamza, who '…don't think college was about making friends but about getting on with learning'. Rina, instead, would feel she was '…. still adapting to a new timetable which did not match other friends, I often feel alone …before school was 9-5, whereas now I have empty gaps, so I'm more alone…I realize my loneliness more now'; Ash was the most negative about her perceived inability to make friends, mirroring what Izzie was experiencing. Izzie's mum also told me that she spent time with her daughter in the first term to keep her company between lessons and lunchtime.

For other reasons, student-participants like Vanni and Alby were reminiscent of toxic relationships from secondary, which would affect their MH, so they were now more cautious about new friends. Likewise, Divvy and Juss felt that their good academic performance/results would attract jealousy and resentment, adding another layer of complexity to peer relationships while securing a 'bettering' transition. Divvy suggested: 'It's weird… before some were getting jealous of me getting good grades…as an EAL [English as Additional Language] student some were not ok with how well I was doing in English, and they were born here'. Juss, too, perceived her peers as jealous of her grades, as we saw earlier.

Unlike Divvy, who came across as super-confident and did not seem to care about others' opinions, Juss was conscious about peer status; she saw herself as sociable and caring about others and what people thought of her. As she explained: '…so, coming to school has always been the nice thing for me, I like getting out of the house and coming to college, you know…I'm very social, so school/college affects me positively'.

As for teachers, all agreed that friendship groups were of the upmost importance, as shown by students' obsessive use of their phones and social media concerns. Evie and Jo acknowledged:

> (Evie) All [themes] are important…but I thought Relationships were their mains…central to their connection WITH the college…'

> (Jo) Teenagers are so desperate to fit in…you know… sometimes you have the odd teenager who is comfortable standing out and being different, but they want to belong to groups or communities.

Ricardo echoed Evie but made specific references to MH: 'Ok, peer-relationships first, some of them this year mentioning not making friends, feeling as outsiders, all acknowledging to have MH difficulties…'. A good reminder of what is at stake for adolescents came from a parent, Victoire:

> Excessive preoccupation of my son with relationships and the fact that many adolescents start discovering love and sex… you know… it's a massive challenge…affecting concentration, again, the motivation, I mean…what's more important? Understanding how you relate to the other sex or learning a book?

It seemed that we (myself, teachers and parents) agreed that even though students tried to appear less concerned with in-college friendships, overall, they were preoccupied with reputation and not having college friends. Also, as Alionka noted in the previous section, relationships provoke emotions the most, are the things that surface in the mundane unexpectedly, and are the bits adolescents struggle to manage and might be perceived as inherent to mental ill-health. So, the college-environment may magnify deep-seated relationship factors that come from having friends (e.g., peer pressure and competition).

Most students-participants felt at ease with how they were getting on with new friends and felt the college provided socializing opportunities. Nevertheless, the range was quite comprehensive and included some who struggled with friendship and those who were, at the time of the fieldwork, not able to judge the friendship transition (and impact) from secondary - i.e., 'finding their feet' was lengthy - additionally, focusing on results/performance while in transition magnified the influence of relationships in and through the college environment. Students juggled many developmental aspects related to their peer status, physiological changes, body image expectations, identity making and the business of 'becoming' so that relationships with peers dominated self-perceptions and influenced MH - matching focus group discussions, the college-life questionnaire and task 1's orientation.

8.3.3 Relationship with teachers

This section focuses on three critical aspects of student-participants' relationships with teachers as developed through 1) the exam-focused curriculum, 2) the *dispositif'*s mechanisms, and 3) how teachers' roles came to influence adolescent MH - three layers of analysis which added degrees of complexity.

Teocoli, as already elaborated in the Motivation theme (chapter 6), claimed to value the more mature relationship with teachers in college, which I interpreted as a more dialogical relationship. Teocoli saw himself always on a learning curve, needing to be shown a course of action that his secondary teacher did not seem to consider. However, in sixth form, he had finally found an English teacher prepared to engage beyond the exam pressure, showing Teocoli's adaptation to transition in line with Schlossberg's (1981) three interacting variables of transition, involving (1) Teocoli's perception of the transition, (2) a new, more mature, environment, and (3) and Teocoli's willingness to engage differently with a teacher who seemed interested in more formative aspects of 'transition'.

Likewise, as we saw through the interview's task 1, Mickey did not seem to care about relationships with teachers *per se* but more about teaching style and personality; Teocoli wanted the relationship to be dialectical and productive. Both noticed the abundant and reciprocal element of relationships, and they put themselves in the picture, voluntarily taking up subject positions that mixed resistance and rejection of any prescriptive tool for success. As a year-13 student, Mickey's experience offered a balanced view of her student-teacher relationships; Teocoli was a shrewd student-researcher, and his insight showed subjectivation because it allowed him 'to remain sane… and aspire to be a writer', as he put it. However, other student-participants were keener to judge their teachers and did not see themselves as initiators of the education-based 'relating' process, which was meant to sustain their 'capacity to aspire' (see also Appadurai's 'capacity to relate', 2013, in Stambach & Hall, 2016). For example, Saddy's contradictory statements tell us about mixed perceptions:

> Ok… teachers in college…no…no real relationship, and that's weird because I relied on my relationship with teachers so much in secondary…I HAD TO build a relationship!…I could go and talk to them, but… right here…it's like…[teachers] come in, show the

p/point, show us whatever…it's weird…I mean…my teachers [in secondary] expected certain grades from me as I was doing well in lessons...also I wanted to impress my teachers and be the best, impress and all that.

On the one hand, Saddy had taken responsibility for the relationship to impress her secondary teachers; on the other, now she found it hard to establish meaningful relationships that worked as an 'available' subject position to take up voluntarily, one that showed some degrees of intentionality and authenticity. Ellinois, too, was critical of her current teachers:

Well… yeah … pressure can also come from teachers who tell you about the next step… if you don't do this, you won't be able to do this bla bla…so if for a kid through education being told that all there is IS Uni…then that's what you know about life?... in secondary was way better.

There is inevitable tension, therefore, between contexts, roles and expectations; as we saw earlier through a teacher, Evie, the difficulty to establish a constructive bond in sixth form, especially when students' attitude is 'not there', must not be undermined if a relationship is to work both ways and constitute a critical theme that influences MH. This new code 'with teachers' presented the multifaceted and complex aspect of relationships as developed by social actors. Typically, student-teacher relationships are constrained by institutional factors such as accountability measures which do not always sustain the MH and success of the adolescent in transition because of ever-increasing expectations. The narratives each adolescent constructs affect their resilience and self-esteem, in which teachers can play the 'mentoring factor' (Garista, 2018; 2019) but often fall short of it due to broader structural problems. At the same time, teachers' accountability is predicated on making students achieve no-matter-what, as Jo (teacher) noted; this leads to what Morrin (2022) terms 'keyoxymorons', '…to analyze key sites of contradictory and simultaneous struggle' (p.177). The 'warm-strict' approach, used by many schools nowadays, might be one;[119] Ricardo noted the tension:

---

[119] Lemov's (2012) 'warm-strict' approach is widely used in state schools; it combines high involvement and warmth with high demands and inflexibility, part of 'authoritative teaching'.

Yes, I'd always have high expectations regardless of MH issues because my job's about thinking…are you going to be successful? So, with those students suffering from MH issues, even though there's no blame attached, it's also a bit of a case that if you miss too many lessons then it's unlikely you will be successful, and this is something we have to keep revisiting.

Alionka, indirectly, addressed Ricardo's point when I criticized leadership's mixed messages about achieving high and doing the well-being for MH: 'oh yeah…we also equally invite them to do the yoga, the well-being… but then at the same time we make sure to remind them about the test coming up…'. Alionka also referred to herself and colleagues as often disregarding their MH by working long hours, and she remarked, '…plus we haven't got it right ourselves then how do we train students to get the balance right?'.

What transpires from the voices above is that teachers (and school/college leaders) end up giving out mixed messages as the norm because they are accountable at different levels: i) to themselves – i.e., to stick with their pedagogical values, which may not lean against measurable teaching and learning but nurture curiosity for the subject; ii) to the school/college as public institutions – i.e., annual performance appraisal must show added value to exam results; iii) to broader policy demands – i.e., to support the MH and well-being.

First, the legal framework under which teachers operate affects perceptions, expectations and enactment of the teacher code of conduct predicated on *in padre parentis* – i.e., acting on behalf of parents, which shapes conflicting teachers' roles and attitudes. Additionally, teachers are officially CAMHs level 1 point of contact (Green, 2011), and recent legislation put the onus on 'Teachers to be trained to spot mental health issues early' (Stewart & Campbell, 2019). However, these demands placed on teachers -not appraised, not measurable- are often taken for granted; having operated *in padre parentis* throughout my career and in consultation with the participant teachers, the intrinsic and broad-ranging caring role of teachers clashed with the stereotypical parent-child relationship and the demands placed by the neoliberal school, expected to produce the next generation entrepreneurs (Olmedo & Wilkins, 2017).

Second, teachers' standards are still a reflection of the labour market (i.e., the teacher/manager in charge and students/worker executing instructions), which is embedded in the 19th-century mass-education model, serving the industrial revolution, inevitably resembling one of surveillance

and control (Bowles & Gintis, 2003).

Third, as a teacher, and as confirmed by a previous study (Di Emidio, 2018), teachers carry the burden of managing an idealized version of 'teaching and learning' while simultaneously being held accountable for students' results and shifting the pedagogical focus on exam success.[120]

Such complexity received mixed perceptions from student-participants. As far as the relationship with teachers was concerned, student-participants seemed to attribute their mixed perceptions to i) the transition from solid bonds with teachers in secondary school to weak bonds or too formal a period in sixth form; ii) the diminished relationships with the only three sixth form teachers compared to the average ten in secondary school; iii) a sense that teachers in sixth form were 'more professional' and eventually more supportive, enabling both success and positive MH compared to their secondary school experiences which, some argued, had been detrimental because teachers were not always fair or neutral.

Some student-participants were more determined to move on and go beyond ideal teacher-student relationships. They constructed new approaches to manage their academic success by personalizing how they 'did' well-being and, in turn, supported positive MH (the 'proactive subject', pragmatically positioned). In short, some were more driven and hands-on in the transition process from secondary to sixth form; they comfortably accepted the change of circumstances by refining their relationship with teachers to engender success and faced up to the challenges of transition, being more agentic. Specifically, while most student-participants showed appreciation, looked up to teachers, felt welcomed and did not suffer the transition to new teachers and styles, valuing teachers' professional and emotional support, others were still grappling with the changes, the novelty, and perceived distance from the teachers, adding up to the uncertainties brought about by the new environment. A minority offered somewhat in-between views, which I found insightful when juxtaposed with teachers' views. For example, Mickey and Teocoli, despite their different expectations of student-teacher relationships, added converging perspectives, which made me

---

[120] For teachers, the uncertainty of meeting personal objectives through the requirements of accountability measures (Ball & Olmedo, 2013) was a cause of major concern, which I personally shared and which Dr Mary Bousted (joint NEU general secretary) has recently denounced through a book (Bousted, 2022).

think of the varying developmental stages and subjectivizing processes characterizing the same age group.

Overall, relationships 'with teachers' is a rich code I shall recall unpacking further students' relationships 'with the self' (next section); the latter draws on teacher-student relationships as a coping mechanism through the 'mentoring factor', which in turn facilitate resilient attitudes (Garista, 2018; 2019) either through building relationships outside the family or through boosting 'academic buoyancy' (Smith, M., 2018, p.126/173/230). Interestingly, parents' views diverged significantly concerning relationships 'with teachers'; some had not much to comment of significance, seemingly taking for granted that their children's relationships were positive and empathizing with teachers' delicate roles; others thought that teachers could be biased and unfair - based on their secondary school experiences. However, they also saw their children transitioning well because of their sixth form teachers.

I created the next final section to refer to students' relationship 'with self' and capture such an apparent relationship that manifested through increased self-awareness in the face of college life challenges while 'in transition'.

8.3.4 Relationship <u>with</u> self

Student-participants' relationship 'with the self' captured the (above) influence of exam pressure and those relationships linked to schooling. In addition, the code worked as a catalyst for other relevant relationships; it showed how the pressure exercised by several actors and adverse circumstances affected 'intimate' relationships with oneself - on the one hand, influencing MH negatively, on the other, forging agentic resilient attitudes. Finally, the code also worked in three related ways as: i) a catalyst for all relationships, ii) a subject position lens showing negotiations between voluntary and obliged take-ups influencing MH, and iii) a container of key findings. Consequently, I pay attention to the polyvalent aspects of relationships 'with the self' to strengthen previous chapters' claims linking education, MH and subjectivity.

8.3.4.1 Intimate estrangement – extimite'

There was a sense of change-and-continuity in the PhD research focus if I considered two educational settings of two PAR projects: from well-being and identity (Di Emidio, 2018) to MH and subjectivity (PhD). The former had cast light on the structure vs agency dilemma (Gidden, 2009), which I re-used to interrogate the extent schooling processes in a sixth form influenced students' psychological and emotional well-being. Thus, through the PhD focus on adolescent MH, I was better placed to tease out, first, the connections between subjectivity and 'subject formation', second, which subject positions the *dispositif* made available, and third, the influence that subject positions' take-up had on students' MH. Indeed, choosing 'influence' and not 'effect', nor 'affect' for the PhD research title was precisely ontological, to open to the fluidity of subject positions made available in and through the college-environment.

The dialectic subjectification/subjectivation got problematized through student-participants' subjection to the *dispositif* because relevant subjectivity processes could work as agentic experiences that influenced psychological well-being. For example, self-worthiness could work as a 'regime of the self' (Rose, 1989; Morrisey, 2015) or as 'constrained freedom' that influenced '…relations of control over things, others or oneself' (Foucault, 2001, p.117). At this metaphysical and theoretical junction, MH manifested itself as the result of power production, enabling-and-constraining through resistance-and-submission. Therefore, I referred to participants' lived experiences through Rose's (1998, p.37) *infolding* metaphor; Rose disputes that people have an 'interiority', suggesting that interiority is merely an *infolding* of socially constructed experiences that often alienate people. Hence, lived experiences cause and explain student-participants 'intimate estrangement', raising a fundamental question regarding subjectivity and MH: what in the process of students' subjectivation becomes at the same time so intimate to become foreign?

The data suggested that neoliberal performance requirements clashed with the impact of increased responsibilisation (Keddie, 2016) while transitioning to adulthood with reduced motivation; notably, performance clashed with the dynamics of subjective learning that each student activated (i.e., what to learn, how, why). On the one hand, we witnessed the normative imperative of learning as achieving/attaining and, on the other, how the students organized or imagined their life projects. As a result of this dynamic, the MH symptom becomes the phenomenological space of a 'battlefield' (Chicchi, 2021) that exists when students cannot

organize/imagine their existence at the political-conflictual level. For example, as I witnessed and advocated through my school council leader role, school/college leadership programmes offer the space to generate a 'political-conflictual level' where different year groups come together to discuss and contain the *dispositif's* pressures. This space can turn into a constructive PAR platform where dialogue and democratic action with adult members can take place and mitigate the *dispositif's* pressures for MH benefits.

Thus, to identify 'intimate estrangements' as mirroring the relationship 'with the self', I first focused on how student-participants questioned why their education shaped their subjectivity as learners; I then examined the scholarly literature on subjectivity and education. Both helped me realize that, even though the *dispositif* obliged subject positions, some students seemed to turn them into voluntary take-ups (or, in the best cases, resisted them) by employing pragmatic subject positions. Furthermore, the literature offered theoretical and ethnographic insights gained by Bordieuan and Foucauldian-informed studies in education which helped me identify age-related processes viable for positive MH.

To illustrate the point, I turn to a teacher, Jo: ''…this lot are growing up in a culture of…you know…I can 'choose my identity', 'how I label my sexuality' …you know…lots of the conversations I have are about them having social anxiety!''. While Jo presented this point as a tension, hastily assuming that choice was a liberating force, she did not consider those who could not choose, what was left to choose, nor did she consider identity labels as possible impositions on adolescents. However, I could now stretch, for analysis purpose, the rhetorical 'Who am I?' associated with the notion of identity with 'Who am I becoming?', associated with the notion of subjectivity.

Consequently, the influence of schooling became explicit from lived experiences that hinted at being the ideal student (top set), the average (middle/lower set), or whatever other creative views about oneself. The labels would range widely and present 'identity' as an interpersonal concept, recognizable at large. Also, we have seen that students position themselves within discursive guidelines and interpellations that reflect pre-established roles students take up, thinking of themselves through those roles. Therefore, they adopt subject positions ironically imposed on students, helping to shape their subjectivity and identity, such as those of the mischievous, diligent,

persistent, and average students.[121] However, unlike 10-11 years-olds (Di Emidio, 2018), the 16–18 year-olds (PhD) seemed to do more <u>intra</u>personal work, as shown during interview time. It was then when I conceptualized the thread identity-subjectivity, consisting of a process of *becoming* that student-participants could interrogate through the MH spectrum and *ad hoc* 'subjective configurations'. This approach to MH helped go beyond the medicalization of one's symptoms. For example, I noticed then that the 16–18-year-old student-participants would 'talk MH' more expansively than I expected, either through peers' examples, social media-generated discourses or <u>intra</u>-personal insights. Jo, again, helps illustrate the significance of such reduced stigma:

> It's widespread for students to talk about MH now… there's no shame in it that there was previously, and therefore… someone says, 'oh well, I suffer from social anxiety'…and five-six other students say, "me too!"… yeah…and it starts that they all want to be…I mean, 'you can understand me'…'I can understand you'.

Jo's point is important because she is a leader close to students at (MH) risk, most stuck in a two-year liminal phase during which they take up available subject positions that discursively reveal their MH status, and in which 'therapeutic education' may have played a role. For example, the increased focus on tackling MH issues directs and controls as a governing technique disguised as 'care of the self'. Jo's contribution presents subject positions opened up by the *dispositif*, which we can nevertheless *hear* through students' voices. However, there is a distinction here between two different 'regimes of practices' despite deteriorating MH, which converge. On the one hand, there is 'materiality of discourse' when MH is publicly discussed (e.g., student unions, school councils, PSHE education, or a project like ours); on the other, there is a mix of disciplinary and controlling outcomes through the sensitive topic of MH.

So, to sum up, I saw a thread emerging from possibly over-determined to more constituent students engaged with modes of subjectification and subjectivation through ambivalent

---

[121] Also, through current classifications used at KS3, the statutory 'assessment without levels', known as 'AWOL' which classifies students as 'emerging', 'developing', 'consolidating', 'mastering' or 'securing' (see Di Emidio, 2021a for a full discussion of AWOL's implications).

'technologies of the self' (Hancock, 2018). In order to tap into the thread, I adjusted my analytical lenses by applying them to age and considering the thread identity-subjectivity across the short life course, hoping to succinctly tease out the MH's links to subjectivity.

8.3.4.2 Between identity and subjectivity

Saddy, from a Muslim heritage, illustrates the thread by referring to the clash between i) her background and family relationships, ii) her *becoming* through exploration, iii) compulsory education:

> (Saddy) I haven't come out clashing with the culture...mmmm….I think I show my mum one side and to others another…but I think we've all clashed as a family…. my sister is an atheist! Half my family too… influencing a lot…and now we don't care about culture, yeah… we just started rejecting, these clothes are not culture.

> (DDE) 'Ok, tell me more about external factors influencing your college life'.

> (Saddy) 'I think self-growth and exploration interest me….and religion should be on it too'.

> (DDE) 'Ok…but can you tell me more?

> (Saddy) Yeah…I think I'm exploring myself… I'm still finding out what's me and not me…and I think external factors affect me more than internal factors of college…in college, I'm just there… learning my stuff…seeing my mates and then leaving…but external factors stay with me more…say…self-growth and exploration… that's what I have to do on my own.

We can see glimpses of the theme of Motivation through relationships and external factors that explain Saddy's preoccupation with pleasing people (Shahjahan, 2020). This preoccupation is a subjective configuration that explains a 'contextualized subjectivity' (Cahill, 2007, p. 283). For instance, by and large, Saddy's relationship with her previous school and current college tends to upset her, feeling judged by peers and family members while managing the transition to adulthood. Such preoccupations shape Saddy's current subject position as revelatory of her current MH status through a seemingly negative 'subjective configuration', nonetheless including firm hopes as

coping. Saddy's analysis drew from past experiences and captured herself *becoming* through challenging gendered expectations; hence, her subject position resulted in negotiation between obliged and voluntary take-ups.

Jo offered a view which helped explain Saddy's ambivalent responses. Jo suggested: '…teenagers are so desperate to fit in…you know…sometimes you have the odd teenager who is comfortable to stand out and be different, but as a whole, they want to belong to groups or community…'. Jo's point questions both the workings of the norm and what norms in schools/colleges are open to in terms of normal/abnormal available positions, which the MH spectrum helped student-participants contextualize. Therefore, I see Saddy's extracts as exemplifying the thread identity-subjectivity evolving across the (short) life span (11-18). I constructed the thread to highlight examples of 'subject formation' from the stories of student-participants who were coming to grips with several formal transitions (i.e., primary-secondary-sixth/form-university-work), conceived as progressions that implied betterment. Other identity-related transitions like atheism were add-ons intersecting with 'subjective configurations', which I closely explore in the next section.

8.3.4.3 Between subjectivity and 'subjective configurations'

To start with, Ash and Rina offered downbeat examples of 'lived experiences' as subjective configurations that were problematic given the transition pressures, forcing a 'miserable' subject position. For example, they kept seeing themselves as lacking or not feeling optimal enough for the college-environment's demands and the challenges ahead – especially, the influence of relevant relationships, be it with others or themselves. As reported in the Motivation theme, Ash did not hesitate to say, '…I SHOULD CHANGE…the college does give opportunities [to socialize] …but it's about whom I am as a person' (my emphasis), seemingly rejecting to take up an agentic subject position but making herself complicit to her own objectification/subjectification and demise.

Instead, using Bourdieu (1980), students like Juss 'played the game' in the 'field' because they knew how to play the game of culture; without it, the game would lose its meaning; however, their 'subjective configurations' contextualized a motivational mindset that fueled the capacity to aspire (Appadurai, 2013, in Stambach & Hall, 2016) as an end. Juss did not know what to study,

but she knew she wanted to go to university; and yet, she argued, '…I don't have a clear future path out…so perhaps success is what motivates me now…. I'm not a perfectionist, so… I have to do my best…BE MY BEST…otherwise, I'll be disappointed in myself'.

Juss' subject position seems ambivalent; it fits the 'proactive subject' (Peruzzo, 2020) of the neoliberal school/college and, at first, suggests the absence of mental ill-health. However, the college surveillance of performance seems to exert its power over Juss through the "introjection of duty" (Han, 2017), putting her in danger of *becoming* a victim of overperformance and overproduction. Eventually, though, Juss' 'technology of the self' helped her cope well with her MH despite the strain of high-stake examination, supported by a family who understood her and enabled her subjectivation. Juss seemed a 'pragmatically positioned subject', while other student participants did not show such resolute, also because they did not have similar resources to cope with stressors.

Juss was aware of her potential and the support she received. She looked forward to the future and had attended an unusual London school that prioritized the whole student above the high achiever/attainer. However, structural stressors might have constrained her, like defining/determining transition decisions compressed in less than two years (i.e., three A-level subjects, a university location and a final subject to take forward). So, her subject position was a negotiation between available take-ups; she had to act, '…do the performance bit', as she put it, and it was not a matter of *if* for Juss but *when*.

Here, it is essential to frame Juss within available literature; for example, the Sociology of Education depicts schooling as a time of development marked by misrecognition and symbolic violence, simultaneously (and paradoxically) determining and hindering students' transition into society, selecting and not forming. In the meantime, late-adolescence is a time of introspection (e.g., self-esteem, self-doubt) and managing layers of 'recognition' (personal, private, public – Honneth, 1995, in Fleming, 2014) influencing subjective well-being and successively, MH. Nevertheless, Juss performed well and even claimed to support others academically in a hierarchical way, strengthening her position as a high achiever. Juss modelled the normalized, disciplined student (a product of discourse) but also found her way. Here, the college-environment *dispositif* is both constraining-and-enabling, and, for example, Juss often hints at being a victim of the competitive dynamics of compulsory schooling but coping with it.

While Juss articulated hope, challenge, and risk-taking, others seemed to be in danger of succumbing to the *dispositif* rather than being a failed product. Their 'subjective configurations' presented the uncertainties that come with 'who am I now?', showing a negative mindset rather than a critical balance and forward-looking 'How am I *becoming*?', 'What can I do about myself if anything needs be?', 'How can I let myself be too?' 'Am I being enough?' and so forth; questions that would do justice to a crucial developmental and transitional stage.

Again, Jo shared a relevant incident that occurred days before the interview and spoke volumes of the trauma some students experience week-in-week-out. Jo had just had a career-focused tutor session to discuss UCAS applications, and one student asked if she could chat post-lesson. Jo: "…and… he just started crying!…'I'm lost, miss'….'I don't know what I want to do'…and I said, 'it's ok… you're 16…chill out' and he was 'no! it's not ok…everyone else knows'". This student's anxiety, self-doubt, and panic contrast with Divvy, Mickey and most boys, who reconcile their potentially positive 'subjective configurations' with the available subject positions and their expectations given the demands of the college-environment. They told their stories as agents, recounting how (pro)positive engagement helped them through the transition and exemplifying progress as 'improvement'. They saw structural pressure not as obligatory take-ups but as part of transition and development. They were aware they also had to 'play the game' in their terms, developing *habitus* as 'pragmatically positioned subjects'.[122] This last point contrasts and problematizes 'subjective configurations' because student-participants retrieve them through voluntary take-ups of available subject positions. This process opens a critical question: whose subjectivity succumbs to the system? The subjectified or the subjectivised? Questions I address in the final two sections.

---

[122] This is succinctly expressed in one of the various qualities Bourdieu attributes to *habitus:* '...embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history - is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product...' (1980, p.56).

8.3.4.4 Self as 'bounded agency'

When I asked the MH and well-being counsellor to explain the MH-related college statistics, she referred to the frequent self-doubt of adolescents she encountered in her role. Mainly through unfavourable comparisons with peers who contextualized their mental ill-health through 'subjective configurations'. In retrospect, most responses unmasked the mental ill-health chronicity suffered by adolescents who fall victim to 'techniques of the self' arising from broader social protocols ('techniques of government' leading to 'regimes of the self') that demand constant 'optimality' (Davies, W., 2015). The counsellor condensed the point about the impact of comparison:

> (Counselor) Yeah, this [comparison] sounds familiar and …. has come up in interviews, too… for example, [the] last one [I interviewed] compared herself to the loud ones in the canteen. She feels she is not 'like that'…as if she was something less.

Correspondingly, the following extract from Mickey's interview shows one important aspect relating to her 'subjective configuration':

> (DDE) '…do you have friends here? Go out with them?'
>
> (Mickey) '…eeerhmm… I guess so but not much socializing outside… I'm introverted, so I spend time at home a lot…'
>
> (DDE) Let me tell you that…I found it interesting when during a focus group, you said, '…the degree of independence is the one that comes from yourself…' [fieldnote], and that you saw this as one part of the picture…you said that you liked to learn and explore by yourself…so, I find your points to be the best advice I'd give to students, as the [education] system itself seem to want to frame and make students pretty much …the…same.
>
> (Mickey) '…oh yeah, absolutely!
>
> (DDE) '…and unless you make certain choices and are aware of why you do that…I find the system quite oppressive and limiting…'
>
> (Mickey) '…yeah…and you have to, in a way, sacrifice the time you spend into the system to kind of…make time for your interest… it's kind…one way or the other…'

Re-reading this exchange, I heard my bias, risking to direct Mickey towards negativity; however, I also considered her subject position based on my perception of her *becoming*. She was the only year-13 participant a few months away from graduation, with whom I had engaging conversations about resistance and subordination. Mickey's response was also critical because it illustrates Butler's (1997) notion of the 'double subject' and Hacking's 'looping effect' (2007), which explains how Mickey was aware of her constitution <u>as</u> she attempted to constitute herself in and through the college-environment. As Butler argued, "... the constituted character of the subject is the very precondition of its agency" (Butler, 1995b, p.46). Because 'the subject is constituted continually in relation to discourse', as Foucault would put it regarding the working of power/knowledge (1980a), this '… implies that [the subject] is open to formations that are not fully constrained in advance" (Butler 1995, p.135 in Coffey & Farrugia 2014).

Such conceptualizations help see agency as inseparable from the *self*, as a component of identity and subjectivation. Agency represents the common denominator, operationalizing identity and subjectivity in tandem. To illustrate the point, let us go back to Mickey and apply Karen Evans' (2008) concept of 'bounded agency'. Mickey operates, I would argue successfully, within the 'bounded agency' permitted by compulsory schooling. Karen Evans' (2008, pp.92-93) empirically grounded concept of 'bounded agency' puts into use Mickey's subjectivity as subjectivation alongside identity:

> Bounded Agency…. sees the actors as having past and imagined future possibilities, which guide and shape actions in the present, with subjective perceptions of the structures they negotiate and the social landscapes that affect how they act. 'Bounded Agency' is the socially situated agency, influenced but not determined by environments and emphasizing internalized frames of reference and external actions; examining bounded agency shifts the focus from structured individualization to individuals as actors - without losing the perspective of structuration.

Interview data offered other examples of 'bounded agency' (like Mickey's) as forms of agency resulting from independent thinking and action; such praxis showed how some student-participants came to relate to their selves by accepting, rejecting or compromising with the subject positions.

This process resonates with Goulart's (2019)[123] reference to patients' 'subjective configurations' from original research undertaken in Brazilian community MH services, in which some people expressed defiance and resistance in the face of existential and structural collapse – the same as Mickey and other students did. In contrast, Goulart notes, others succumbed, and their overall health deteriorated irreversibly.

Therefore, instances of 'subjective configurations' enabled the MH status of the student-participants due to direct links to subjectification (submission) or subjectivation (care of the self), offering theoretical reliability grounded in the participants' voices. MH, education and subjectivity development intersected through such voices, primarily through the combined analysis of the themes of Exam Pressure and Relationships.

8.3.4.5 Relationship 'with the self' as a catalyst of exam pressure and relationships

The code 'relationship with the self' was critical and timely because it illustrated how MH occurred and how it was rationalized from outside by the student-participants; also, how subjectivation and subjectification 'did' MH work. To make the latter point relevant, I borrow the four statements from chapter 5's interview task 1, to assess lived experiences as reliable depictions of MH.

The diverse participants' argumentation around task 1 statements articulated students' overall MH status and presented 'subjective configurations' drawn from past and present experiences but projected towards the future, anticipating data that exposed ambivalent schooling requirements while transitioning. Such an ambivalence made it easier to use subjectivity as a heuristic because task 1 helped break the ice and created a rupture between the student as participant and the student as co-researchers with existential anxieties. The latters were presented through biographical 'events' but also shared as future possibilities that generated excited and anxious voices. By putting

---

[123] Drawing on Gonazalez Rey's notion of 'subjective configuration', Goulart constructs points of convergence with critical social psychology and critiques of psychiatry based on antipsychiatry.

subjectivity to work through agency (Di Emidio, 2021), one way for students to cope with school/college stressors was to understand themselves as creatively 'emerging' and not as *final products.*

As a counterpoint, following Allen et al. (2013), 'creative neoliberal subjectivities' conceal structural inequalities and, I suggest, become instrumentalized as an emergency route to get out of precarious lives. My suggestion links to Rose's (1989) 'regime of the self' ('we discipline ourselves for the benefits of others with the illusion we are benefitting ourselves'), in which creative subjects *are* neoliberal subjects. Here, there is a danger that disciplinary subjectification reaches its natural end, which is to form the psychic life of the creative neoliberal student subject who becomes *de-conscious* – the inverse of Freire's (1974) vision of a *conscentizised* educated subject. This analysis echoes Han (2017), who pointed out that ''21st Century society is no longer a disciplinary society, but rather an achievement society. Also, its inhabitants are no longer 'obedience-subjects' but 'achievement-subjects'. They are entrepreneurs of themselves'' (p.8*).* Thus, following Han, this possible evolution, potentially liberating, can put adolescents at greater psychological risk because societies have gone from coercive, through disciplinarian societies (see Foucault, 1977), and now to psychic ones; symbolic and material violence in schools/colleges seems normalized, based on the self-exploitation of the subject. And still Han (2017):

> This is more efficient than allo-exploitation, for the feeling of freedom attends it. The exploiter is simultaneously the exploited. Perpetrator and victim can no longer be distinguished. Such self-referentiality produces a paradoxical freedom that abruptly switches over into violence because of the compulsive structures dwelling within it. The psychic indispositions of achievement society are pathological manifestations of such a paradoxical freedom (p.10).

The 21st-century achievements of liberal democracies, theorized as the logical 'good' of Western liberalism (see Fukuyama's 1992 '*The End of History and the Last Man'*), conceal the exercise of their power over adolescents through the introjection of 'duty'. This historical-political insight adds another layer to the consequences of neoliberal 'responsibilisation' through education. However, we should distinguish individualism from neoliberalism and governmentality when some students make only individual choices to survive - see the 'pragmatically positioned subject'.

This also means that by making subjectivity work through agency, I could identify the extent of 'subjective configurations' that *unmasked* (Rebughini, 2018) the schooling stressors.

For example, I noticed that to assess schooling influence on their MH, student-participants referred to whom they thought they were and how their cultural background made or expected of them. Thus, the code I added, 'with the self', was a timely analytic lens for figuring out how students' relationships with parents, teachers, and peers manifested as Rose's *infolding* of the constructed outside influencing MH. The relationship 'with the self' included student-participants' willingness to take up available subject positions of the *dispositif* or resist, mitigate, personalise, and reject them.

My experience as a teacher and this research data indicate two contrasting outcomes for those unable or unwilling to sustain oppositional behavior as an identity marker and those unable or unwilling to take up viable subject positions: i) some students would eventually succumb to the *dispositif*, significantly when relationships negatively influence motivation, self-esteem, behaviour, character and outlook in future possibilities; ii) others would eventually 'save' themselves by not succumbing to the 'regime of truths' (Foucault, 2019) intrinsic to the *dispositif*. In other words, subjectivity as an 'inward look' enhanced the heuristic credentials I attached to it to learn about adolescents' MH because it exposed the mental cage students had been put in; this process either created the prerequisite to bounce back or to ignore the *dispositif* as a form of resistance (Ball & Olmedo, 2013; Butler et al., 2016; Neilson, 2015; Rose, 2014; Rose & Lentzos, 2017).

To sum up, the relationship 'with self' added layers of understanding to the eclectic ways student-participants, adult participants, and I interpreted past experiences vis-a-vis the current transition and imagined life possibilities despite the college-environment and existential stressors to sustain a positive outlook. This understanding offered impermanent subject positions and, in turn, ambivalent MH status, either not to succumb or to live up to expectations as ways out by 'playing the game' while transitioning and performing to adulthood.

Conclusion

This chapter looked at the themes 'Exam Pressure' and 'Relationships' discretely but emphasized how both converged with students' transition to adulthood. I adopted the umbrella term 'transition' to emphasize how and where the two themes coagulated.

Bringing transition into the mundane through Schlossberg's transition theory (1981 in DeVilbiss, 2014), I could see transition's significant 'events' through relationship types, routines, assumptions, and roles that, in various forms, exposed gender, race/ethnicity and class as possible, and mistakenly, separate issues (Grant & Sleeter, 1986). Taken together, these criteria revealed student-participants' (non) adaptation to transition, the influence of the prior schooling experiences and the prospect of post-transition opportunities and 'choices'. In this conclusion though, to avoid perpetuating gender, class and race/ethnicity biases (Grant & Sleeter, 1986, p.195), I briefly consider the peculiarity of the student-participants' experience of 'transition' under the strain of educational accountability measures and an integrated view of their status groups.

Even though this thesis partly touches on how issues of race, class/ethnicity and gender interweave with compulsory education's influences on adolescent MH, in this chapter we have seen them interlocking to raise 'simultaneous questions'. The latter help realize and resist the full impact of neoliberalism, or, as Aronowitz stressed '…the abolition of conditions for the reproduction of Capitalists modes of production' (1981, in Grant & Sleeter, 1986, p.196). Indeed, the chapter hints at the inextricable influence of race/ethnicity, class, and gender in an institutional setting, demonstrating that each category played a part in students' experience of schooling, however, their intersectionality offers additional insights on students' behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions towards life in general in each context.

For example, the white British middle-class[124] student-participants (one boy and the rest girls) and two white European immigrant-origin student-participants, claimed to have received emotional and academic parental support, imbued with an often-unrealized pressure to perform, and achieve in neoliberal terms (Chicchi, 2021; Ehrenberg, 1996; Han, 2015). BAME students, by contrast, seemed to receive 'only' pressure to perform, along the lines of gender expectations affiliated with collectivist and patriarchal ethnic values (e.g., family honour, immigrant values of 'working hard' – see Grant & Sleeter, 1986). However, such heterogeneous status groups offered rich analytical combinations and their intersection was indeed complex, especially with regards to the multifaceted aspect of 'aspiration' (see Chapter 6/6.2). Importantly, even though these status groups coalesced during focus group analysis, the student-participants did not have a coalescing experience of schooling's influence on their MH. For example, if their MH 'lived experiences' shared similarities, the differential perception criteria affected such experiences, ranging from having over-bearing parental support to varying degrees of parental success expectations, to gender variations in terms of risk taking and success expectations (Bakhshaei & Henderson, 2016; David et al., 2003; Reay et al., 2001).

Perhaps, Alionka's insights about privilege along the lines of class and ethnicity/race is useful when interwoven with gender. She suggested that gifted-and-talented students from underprivileged backgrounds, especially girls, may embrace formal education, including stressful exam-oriented interventions, to break the 'cycle of disadvantage' (Rutter & Mudge, 1976). This suggests that educational success during the transition to legal adulthood helps make meaning through perceived progression and increased likelihood of social mobility. Therefore, as Alionka noted, '…if home issues interfered with school performance…things would kick off badly' – just as my student-participants noted by drawing from their lives or peers' lives.

For example, Juss epitomized how the intersection between class (middle class), gender (female) and ethnicity/race (white/British) helped her cope with the stressors of compulsory

---

[124] The group seemed split evenly, in three: white British middle-class (some potentially lower middle), BAME (mix of first- and second-generation immigrants), white European (with experience of migration to England at around the same age, year-8/9).

education through *coping* mechanisms which included 'subjective configurations' and several resources. By contrast, others were strangled by, as it were, less privileged intersections and therefore too uncertain about their selves and their futures, risking *becoming* the 'impossible' subject as opposed to the well-performing 'proactive subjects', able to know how to direct resources (Peruzzo, 2020). In fact, several student-participants seemed mentally affected by the multifaceted uncertainties of transition and were aware of their pessimism as symptomatic of poor MH, sometimes addressed through different support people/channels, both in and outside the college, sometimes buried.

Overall, most student-participants' perceived preoccupation with 'transition' stayed at the level of being engrossed with something alien, or, as if stuck in a liminal place, instead of making it evolve into curiosity and aspiration as a form of 'investiture', or incorporations into a desirable space. Preoccupations generated anxiety and doubts amongst student-participants, which could explain i) the impact of precarity, dictated by the 2007 financial crisis; ii) ongoing pressures to perform attached to exam results and, more subtly, iii) how precarity and performance expectations shaped transition at all levels while managing several relationships.

While most student-participants saw 'exam pressure' as a normalized 'necessary evil', adult participants acknowledged outright the negative influence of such pressure, which they managed responsibly in their roles as mentors. This approach might reflect governmental strategies to keep the onus on adults to help students manage the transition and, in turn, responsibilize students to guarantee success (Keddie, 2016) as part of the state *rolling back* but still *governing at a distance* (Dean, M., 2010; Wilkins, 2016; 2019).

Relationships between parents and students have shown to be central and added a layer to the 'mentoring factor', which, Garista (2018) suggests should underlie students' resilience as a pedagogical tool rather than something to measure and intervene on.[125] Nevertheless, overall, 'transition' seems stripped of a significant intrinsic value or the values which should come with developing resilient behaviour while mitigating risk-taking and the possibilities hidden in

---

[125] See REACH and WHAMS' projects in Di Emidio's (2021a) study of a primary school.

'uncertainty'. The latter could help develop authenticity, not necessarily through the 'creative neoliberal subject' (Allen et al., 2013) who is 'proactive' in governmental terms (Peruzzo, 2019; 2020), but one who engages with the 'care of the self' (Ball & Olmedo, 2013; Gros et al., 2005) to activate subjectivizing 'techniques of the self' as practices of/for freedom.

The next chapter, a post-fieldwork reflection with student-participants, moves forward the above arguments and addresses the three RQs closely. Despite introducing new data, I geared it towards a 'discussion type' summary that moved forward with existing analysis involving student-participants until lockdown. I wanted to do (PAR) justice to their voices, and the first step to *hearing* them was to offer an e-platform to embed their voices in my final discussion.

Chapter 9 – Epilogue: Conduct and Resistance as Determinants of Subjectivity and MH

Introduction

Now that the significant research 'plot' is over, I add participatory insights to interesting research developments using the 'epilogue' metaphor, which works as a wrap-up and *teaser trailer* for further research. Thus, the following epilogue adds conclusive analysis and discussion of my final engagement with the data (see 'relationship with the self' in the preceding chapter) *and* the student-participants' final unexpected participation. While such a distinction is not clear-cut because I am still the sole writer of this thesis and this epilogue, this chapter adds, builds, and partly challenges chapter 8 by offering the central social actors of this story (adolescents) a last chance to tell us about their present life and near future after the research story has unfolded so that we may *hear* them better.[126]

Here I present thematic 'Area 3', initially conceived as final PAR activities to implement the so-called 'change-action' characteristic of PAR through recommending updates to the college's internal policies. It comprised an outreach task to the college population through a whole-day assembly, where student-participants would share the findings and collect further feedback from small workshops attended by a broad audience of students plus parents, teachers and college-leaders invited to attend. All the participants would participate in different capacities; the headship approved the whole-day assembly agreed for June 2020, an exciting opportunity for student-participants to lead by planning and delivering mini-workshops that expanded participation. The gatekeeper, the four teachers and I would have supported the day. Next, we planned to have one final enrichment to finalize the research findings, which would be shared and discussed in a final focus group with representatives of each participant group.

---

[126] This chapter makes brief references to the first lockdown because we generated the data online post lockdown and students referred to its impact even though the impact of Covid19 was not our focus.

The aim was to use accrued knowledge, critique it, and propose informed 'change-actions' to the college-environment through internal policies regarding ongoing testing, curriculum, pastoral programmes, student leadership, and ongoing monitoring of students' MH (and well-being). Keeping participants' involvement in the analysis, and post-fieldwork, was crucial for sustaining the PAR methodology and keeping 'my side only' of the PhD under check, especially in ethical terms of authorship. Unfortunately, due to lockdowns, the original plan had to adapt to maintain a sustainable 'degree of PAR' till the end.

I chose the only alternative, so to speak, which was an online focus group plus an e-mail query response. So, following the required ethical clearance updates for such design changes and the headship approval, I aimed to share my final analysis of the groups' analytical triangulations. Fig. 38 below shows Area 3 through these last two activities that address my three RQs.

1) Post-fieldwork' ONLINE focus group' – analysis held in October 2020
2) Post-fieldwork E-MAIL – final group analysis via e-mail October 2020

Figure 38: NVivo screenshot of post-fieldwork final analysis

1 - ONLINE Focus Group	2	2
2 - EMAIL	1	99
RQ1. Does an exam-focused curriculum and pedagogy affect adolescents' MH	1	22
Exam Pressure and Motivation	1	2
Stress management	1	14
RQ2. What role could educators, and students themselves, play to manage adolescents' M	1	49
Family	1	3
Peers	1	4
Student	1	26
Teachers	1	2
RQ3. What other factors and events influence adolescents MH in the schoolcollege-enviro	1	28
change of year 12 and GCSE	1	15
approach to stress	1	7
lifestyle	1	5
practice-pedagogy	1	5
subjects	1	2
keep for year 13	1	13
learning environment	1	3
lifestyle	1	2
own assertiveness in practice	1	3
relationships	1	5
subjects	1	4
Subjectivation-Subjectification	1	18
conduct of conduct	1	12
resistance	1	5

9.1 Contextualizing 'Degrees of PAR' Analysis

Apart from interviews, all other research methods included participative activities in which student-participants shared personal views, reflected on personal and others' assumptions, and challenged and supported each other. However, I had to reshuffle the PAR design due to the lockdown and, despite ethics-board clearance to finish the research online, my gatekeeper suggested I did not contact students or teachers during the lockdown. I also had to cancel nine teacher interviews which I could not re-arrange online. Eventually, I had to resign to having already interviewed four teachers before the lockdown, and, as for parents, I interviewed six online during the first lockdown (three more just before).

Accordingly, only in September 2020 was I allowed to re-contact the student-participants (online) and arrange alternative activities that were not as 'PAR' as face-to-face ones but 'still PAR'. The online focus group was another opportunity to reflect, at a distance, on the six themes created almost a year earlier and keep up with 'degrees of PAR' involvement. This involvement entailed that the two final activities I reported below were individualized reflections or reflections with no explicit opportunities to challenge each other as before. However, despite the change, my shared analysis was still held accountable, and student-participants' feedback guided my final PAR-leaning analysis. I could confidently ask:

1. How do these final PAR reflections help me cast further light on the RQs?
2. How can I integrate these reflections in the analysis already carried out of the main themes (Area 1's interviews)?
3. What did these final insights add to the existing ongoing findings?

The online focus group' was contingent on lockdown restrictions; I had initially called it 'PAR *still* in Progress': a final focus group with each participant group to highlight the ongoing element of PAR outside the fieldwork. However, the lockdowns upset my plans, and I had to make do with an online focus group with student-participants only which I organized for October (27/10/20 - it took me two months to organize).

The second activity, an add-on to the online focus group, involved student-participants e-mailing me a short reflection on (i) two things they would 'keep'; (ii) two things they would

'change' of the past three years (i.e., year-12 and GCSEs), that related to the six themes. These queries were my last chance to test the trustworthiness of three RQs systematically and deductively, but also embed the inductive process, especially for RQ2; this is because RQ2's focus on 'roles' presented me with student-participants' perceptions of peers, teachers, school leaders and their own 'roles'. In turn, through RQ2, I could screen student-participants' perceived roles as 'subject positions' expressing varying degrees of subjectification and subjectivation; this means that any limitations of these *ad hoc* analytical decisions turned out to be valuable because they represented my creative efforts to increase 'degrees of PAR' and enhance our case as unique. Moreover, the e-mails led to richly descriptive responses that might have obfuscated a complex picture without limiting the potential for generalizability or reducing the e-mail responses to mere 'stories' (Collins and Stockton, 2018, p.6) because of the reflexive, democratic, participative and critical research approach behind such final evaluations. Thus, having reached the end of my analysis producing such *thick-and-broad* data through a solid conceptual framework, coupled with criticality and rigorous analysis, make our case of more general interest for policymakers.

9.2 Post-Fieldwork ONLINE Focus Group – Investmentality at Play

Given the circumstances brought about by Covid19 and the screen fatigue of online lessons, I appreciated the effort to sign up for yet more online time; we had not spoken for seven months, since March 2020. None of the student-participants engaged verbally or was visible on 'Teams', but they busily commented through the chat while I presented the final findings, relevant feedback from all stakeholders, comparisons, trends and significance. According to my teacher-informant Nicola, such interaction matched covid-online lessons with teachers and even though the interaction was minimal, the session contributed to increasing 'degrees of PAR'. Firstly, because it tested 'my' findings, and secondly, less outspoken student-participants took the chance to express their views and emotions, which was hardly the case in person.

I started by showing old data we had analyzed together (a summary of the college-questionnaire results) and some early interview analyses from diverse participants, carefully suggesting some significance. For example, Alby was the first to say/type a comment about the student population's perception of educational failure '…For me, it's the high percentage of people

saying it's their fault for failure. Most people would say someone else's…. so… interestingly, it was so high!'. The rest of the group agreed. Similarly, Gabby was surprised by only 52% referring to the future as motivational, in contrast with the interviewees' data which suggested the opposite. Teocoli built on Gabby, '…. the remaining 48% might have felt burdened by college-work, affecting the prospect of continuing to future higher studies and employment'.

The analytical sequence Alby-Gabby-Teocoli points to the negative internalization of students' educational experience as a result of an investment in oneself to generate future possibilities. Such internalization might lead to diminished 'investmentality', a concept used by Harling as an example of Foucauldian Governmentality (Harling, 2014). Harling refers to 'investmentality' as a heuristic analytical concept to investigate:

> What appears to be sayable, thinkable and doable in the research material when interest is turned to how individuals and schools are identified (and are identifying themselves) as productive and competitive in the "education economy" (cf. Lundahl, 2012) and how they are governed in relation to education (p.58).

Harling's ethnographic work investigates how Swedish high schools construct subjects about achievement, competition, and perceptions of inclusion. 'Investmentality' helps to think about ''…how unequal hierarchical orders stage educational values and knowledge, but also 'stakes' and 'needs', calculated in economic terms as investments for students and schools'' (p.5). Harling argues that assumptions of inequality underscore the attempts to include pupils and make schooling more equal, based on where pupils "need" expert interventions and explanations to become included in an anticipated future. Therefore, 'investmentality' translates '…motivation and knowledge into investments that govern the pupil with choice, competition and entrepreneurship as self-technologies, explained as an antidote to exclusion' (p.16). Harling suggests that the ongoing marketisation of education has enhanced 'investmentality', represented as '…a salvation narrative, but also as a target for some critical investigations of restructured education' (p.54). I agree with Harling that '…. these hopes and fears have contributed to a consolidation of "marketisation" as a social fact, thus essentializing "the market" almost metaphysically' (p.54).

Harling proposes the analytical usefulness of 'investmentality' to i) research productive power relations and subjectivations in education and ii) to elaborate on how individual strategies and responsibilities connect to work on the *self* (i.e., part of the government of schools). Recalling

Bernstein's concept of *classification* and Bourdieu's concept of *cultural capital*, Harling (2014) suggests that

> [Investmentality] is a good alternative…[building] on a different set of assumptions [for instance, that power is exercised through perceived freedom]. [However] partly thanks to that, [investmentality] may contribute to a finely-grained understanding of the simultaneous governing of a marketized school system and entrepreneurial school subjects (p.60).

Indeed, 'investmentality' is a governing strategy operating on the system and individuals under the logic of hopes and fears in education (cf. Popkewitz, 2008, in Harling, 2014, p.64). Thus, let us apply 'investmentality' to students' online responses. For example, the feeling of being 'at fault' referred to by Alby resides in the actual performer, the student, who is called upon (interpellated) by increasing expectations and/or 'responsibilisations' to have a definite career as job options sorted while in transition to adulthood. At its most pessimistic, I would label it '*assujettisement* tout-court', gambling with students' development unashamedly because career and work get to mean the same: having an income.

Juss, too, expressed (negative) surprise at the 81% who said that the prospect of exam failure negatively impacted their MH '… because these exams shouldn't define how people view their worth like…'. Juss was outspoken throughout the fieldwork and never held back strong views against schooling. However, she reinforced her 'proactive' subject position by taking up the available chances offered by the school/college-environments to grow and *invest* in herself, regardless of her performance and/or exam results. She seemed driven to make the most of what was available and avoided governmental subjectification by taking-up, pragmatically, the most suitable subject position. As her mother reminded me during the interview, Juss had made the most of school/college programs, raising her interest in psychology and young people MH, leading to a small job for the local council; Juss could aspire to alternative, more agentic, routes to having a career. This accomplishment shows that resistance (to subjectification) takes different forms at different levels, and the exam-focused college is one schooling pressure that could be circumvented. Juss wanted to bypass compulsory education's labelling through subjectivation, in turn mitigating exam regimentation. However, Juss was the only one with parents in education

who could offer informed advice responding to her needs and capabilities, including the risk of going to a holistic-oriented secondary school vs an achievement/attainment-oriented one.

I moved on to some initial findings of primary data (interviews with student-participants only) and shared the average ranking of the six themes we had worked on for months. I showed them that 'Motivation' was an overarching theme, as it came first in the interviews while it was only fourth in the focus groups. It also showed that Motivation cut across other themes and proved to be ontologically central, generative of the importance of other themes, and acquired the status of *keyness* - essential to Braun and Clarke TA (2006).

At this point, Alby jumped on the chat claiming to feel '…less motivated these days…cos of the coronavirus and its impact…but also more motivated to make the most out of a bad situation'. Alby was partially echoed by Gabs, Rina and Juss, who claimed to have been negatively affected by the lockdown and could not see a way out for assorted reasons. Finally, Vanny took a cue from these negative responses to Alby's and recalled the survey result (i.e., 52 % claimed the future motivated them) to powerfully suggested that:

> I'd like to know what motivates the other 48%?...or why they're not motivated; like…for me, I don't know what I'd like to do in the future at the moment, I just wanna exist and not do anything, so… do other people think like this too? or are there other reasons? (Oreo[127] and Juss followed with smiley emojis' approval).

Even though the Covid19's impact and the questionnaire's stats observations did not directly connect to Motivation, the cross-fertilisation between responsibilisation (as a result of governance/governmentality) and motivation (as a psychological concept) is evident; for example, Teocoli suggested that '…motivation played a huge role during the pandemic as the level of responsibility is also affected by motivation', which attracted supportive responses (and smiley emojis!). Although the student-participants' responses that drew in Covid19 raise issues beyond the scope of this research, it is significant how several students confirmed that they were in a worse

---

[127] Oreo appears only now as she was very shy and much as she loved attending and discussing in pairs (enrichments), she never spoke publicly, nor did she want to be interviewed.

position than before the lockdown. They felt very indecisive and suggested taking a gap year because they did not know what to do after A-Levels, or whether their university choice was the right one or going to university was the right move. Gabs was the only one to say she was in a better place because, under lockdown, she had had time to reflect and find what she genuinely wanted to do, despite some challenges – Gabs did not elaborate.

Though limited by the online focus group tools, these selected reflections show how students conflated education experiences, the current socio-political climate, the pandemic and their future options (i.e., the pressure of 'investmentality') as inhibiting a positive outlook. While the lockdowns/pandemic cannot enter the analysis, I argue that students' attitudes and perceptions about college and future possibilities got magnified with the pandemic/lockdown, recalling existing hopelessness about aspiration, careers/jobs and the pressure to make an essential decision in the immediate future that reflected a genuine investment in their potential.

For example, we looked at a question that student-participants had answered for the questionnaire and then at interview time ('Has the education system served you well?'). I presented the questionnaire's results to that question (43% were negative) and confirmed that I discussed such a negative % during interviews' task 1. Juss was the first one to respond and reiterated her doubts about schooling, especially about 'what education is for'; she noted '… it isn't right that the school system is failing the purpose it was created for' Juss did not elaborate, but I assume she broadly referred to educating children as per 'educere', leading out potential). She aptly pointed at '…frustration about the mixed messages of meritocracy, achievement and MH'. Even though Juss was critical but also general, her criticism speaks volumes of the risk of widespread negative feelings amongst student-participants. Others, too, did not hesitate to fill the chat with expressions/emojis alluding at feeling overwhelmed by the task ahead and agreeing with Juss. Alby, for example, built on Juss and received several thumb-up consensuses: '...Just the amount of pressure put on us! Most adults say, you are the future generation and have to fix everything we did wrong, which is reinforced from a young age within schools'; thus replied Teocoli, referring to exam pressure: '…. I could somewhat agree with the data as the educational system is sometimes a memory test' - receiving 'agreed' responses. In short, Alby and Teocoli's points resonate with policies' intended aims to compete in the global market (Bailey & Ball, 2016).

In conclusion and taking a cue from Teocoli's remarks and subsequent comment, the responses were symptomatic of a sense of disaffection and realization that learning was too loosely associated with input/output processes, focused, in Juss's words, on '…what you can remember rather than what you know', or Gabby's '…and how fast you can remember under timed condition'. These insights suggest that most did not feel well-served by the compulsory education system and had much to say about their educational experiences, the negative impact of Covid19 and feeling alienated from their imminent futures – surely compromising their MH. While the nature of the question invites all sorts of intro-and-retrospective responses, spurring a reaction as much as critical reflection, the overarching orientation of the responses (not just on this online task but also the ones from task 1's interviews) seemed dictated by disorienting and destructive processes of 'subject formation' including i) those complicit to the *desires* of the system, as it were, 'voluntarily' (subjectification); ii) those who desired pragmatically (subjectivised); iii) those who 'drowned' because the adverse effects of schooling had damaged self-esteem and generated self-doubt. However, the above responses seemed to express indirect resistance as criticism of the *dispositif* student-participants spent thirteen years in, a *dispositif* whose power is exercised to be most productive through the idea of student-participants' perceived freedoms which work as cages. The notion of 'investmentality' seems to drive engagement and disengagement, perceptions of success and failure.

9.3 Post-Fieldwork E-MAIL – Becoming and Coping at Play

This additional post-fieldwork reflection was possible because we ran out of time in the online focus group, and I proposed an e-mail response, where possible, on the same day. It proved influential as the e-mail provided time and space to be detailed and strengthen earlier points made online. All replied within the same day to two questions asking to explain two things 'to keep' and two 'to change' from the last three years (i.e., GCSEs plus year-12) by drawing on the six themes.

To NVivo analyze the responses, I first allocated them under the three RQs (Coding Reliability TA), then added a further classification criterion to capture instances of subjectification and subjectivation as 'subject positions' (Codebook TA). This last research effort was to maximize e-mail responses as the last chance for student-participants to express subject positions without me

explaining the concept to them. I aimed to get glimpses of their *becoming* through the subjectified / subjectivised parameters I would apply to the responses. This application was necessary for my argument because Foucault's late preoccupation with subjectivity and 'the ethics of the self' (Gros et al., 2005) was embedded in my analysis, and I could apply it to understand how students came to be constituted and viceversa. This lens could now support my analysis of adolescent MH precisely due to power relations and productions.

For example, to apply Foucault's ethics (as "the subject's relation to itself") to the reflections in the e-mails, let us assume that students adopt the rules of the college-environment. In this case, ethics does not concern the morally satisfying conduct of students that fulfils the duty of being 'successful' students, but the conduct through which students engage themselves in a way that conforms to the policies adopted in the college-environment.

What I am trying to argue here is the bifurcation of (governmental) intent which students face when encountering (compulsory) education and which reminds me (the teacher and the researcher) of key questions: i) is not subjectification intrinsic to schooling and, in turn, to socialization and acculturation to become the entrepreneur of ourselves?; ii) what are the possibilities for an authentic subjectivation as 'care of the self' within the college-environment that is not just problem solving and/or just *coping*? The new progressive questions that reach out to both MH and well-being should then be: how can authenticity influence students' MH positively within the boundaries of schooling? Moreover, if this cannot be the case, does it mean that the influence is necessarily negative?

With these questions in mind, I sent the e-mail to the student-participants. My e-mail did not reference these abstractions but asked them to reflect on the last three years, as explained above, bearing in mind our improved expertise. By this point, research engagement and the first A-Level year had enhanced student-participants' understanding of their 'conditions', equipping them with grounded but still fluid subject positions, which I could unpick accordingly.

The e-mail responses allowed me to take three PAR-oriented actions, which brought together the three RQs and helped meet research trustworthiness. This is because, following Collins and Stockton (2018, p.8), 'the deductive approach should include a search for negative or discrepant cases in relation to the theory'. Here 'theory' was conveyed by my RQs, built over time, reflecting literature reviews and resulting from a participative methodology. So, I could reassess my analysis

of the six main themes hitherto,[128] consider any developments for my thesis discussion as a response to those e-mails and carry out a summative screening of e-mail responses through a table (Table 10 below - plus see Appx-16 for all the responses I drew from). These could capture the general mood before I unpacked it, something I do in the next section, where I selected specific responses that expressed subjectification and subjectivation vis-a-vis students' MH.

---

[128] Especially in terms of student-participants' views durability, that is, nine months between the interviews and the online focus group.

Table 10: summative screening by questions

RQ1. Does an **exam-focused** curriculum and pedagogy influence adolescents' **MH** – **codes**: exam pressure and motivation; stress management.	While in chapter 8 'Exam Pressure' was not as strictly forbidding as one would have expected, here, student-participants voices/e-mails were unforgiving towards what revolves around exam pressure, calling for a change in exam practices, curriculum and pedagogy.
RQ 2. What **role** should educators, and **students** themselves, play in managing adolescents' MH in the college-environment – **codes:** family; peers; students, teachers.	Included any 'active' role student-participants took (or should have taken) since the start of college one year earlier. Responses ranged from reducing education-related stress to specific changes concerning exam pressure, test preparation, and revision routines; however, some claimed they should have taken a more active role in self-management, especially sleep management. Some felt they had done enough to retain a sense of autonomy and keep motivated by personalising their revision and learning methods. However, some regretted letting the GCSE overwhelm them and carrying it forward into A-Levels. Family and friends played a crucial role by offering support and perspective - though some friendships had been detrimental in some cases.
RQ 3. What **other factors/drivers** and events influence adolescents' MH in the school/college-environment? – **codes**: lifestyle; relationships.	Concerning factors/drivers that were not strictly school/college related and should have changed. However, some statements focused on negative aspects relevant to the first two RQs; for example, changing attitude to learning, avoiding toxic relationships and improving poor lifestyle (sleep). I also included factors/drivers concerning pedagogy, subject choice, and teachers' pressure inherent to the school/college environment and which student-participants suggested had 'to change'. Nevertheless, the same factors/drivers were 'to keep' when they resulted in being motivational.

9.4 Subjectification and Subjectivation Related Analysis

The following analysis uses selected e-mail responses from the grid I initially made for RQ1/2/3 (Appx-16). The selection criteria included:

i. Responses that expressed perceived subjectification through a 'regime of practices' which translated into a 'regime of the self' constituting 'conduct'.

ii. The extent the responses expressed subjectivation in and through educational experience as agentic. Such experiences would also be considered 'subjective configurations' that supported MH, especially as forms of resistance (see Gonzalez Rey's 'subjective senses' in chapter 2).

I created two codes (i.e., things 'to keep' and 'to change') to carry out Coding Reliability TA; I selected statements that indicated how, through retrospection, student-participants could formulate intentions as forms of 'resistance' (i.e., subjectivation) and statements that indicated the subjugating (i.e., subjectification) nature of governmentality as 'conduct of conduct'. This means that from the 'I would change' and 'I would keep' e-mails, I drew out instances of 'conduct' and 'resistance', even if they were presented in hypothetical and retrospective terms. While 'conduct of conduct' referred to any implicit and explicit forms of government the student-participants had been subjected to with degrees of compliance, 'resistance' represented not only a conscious struggle but also the ability and willingness not to be affected by such 'governmentality'.

9.4.1 Conduct of conduct 2.0

I refer to this section as 2.0 to emphasize that I am building on the first reference of 'conduct of conduct' made in Chapter 7 (7.3), when I offer a general definition and explain how the government conducts (as in 'leads') students to certain behaviors. Through such control mechanisms, subjects are directed to certain desired behaviors, which take students' agency into a liminal space where its meaning is suspended and subverted; agency is, therefore, still helpful for making sense of subjectivation processes. Here, I build on the 1.0 version and refine 'conduct' by drawing from Foucault's Subject of Power article (1982). I do so upon realizing the non-literal

translation of 'conduct of conduct' from the French original but its interpretation. In the English version, it says:

> Perhaps the *equivocal* nature of the term conduct is one of the best aids for coming to terms with the specificity of power relations. For to "conduct" is at the same time to "lead" others [according to mechanisms of coercion which are, to varying degrees, strict] and a way of behaving within a more or less open field of possibilities.[129] The exercise of power consists in *guiding* the possibility of conduct and putting in order the possible outcome. Basically, power is less a confrontation between two adversaries or the linking of one to the other than a question of government.

However, the French version of the same article clearly addresses it (see 'conduct of conduct' underlined):

> L'exercice du pouvoir consiste à «conduire des conduites» et à aménager la probabilité. Le pouvoir, au fond, est moins de l'ordre de l'affrontement entre deux adversaires, ou de l'engagement de l'un à l'égard de l'autre, que de l'ordre du «gouvernement». Foucault M (1994) Dits et écrits IV (Paris: Gallimard) p.237.

Interestingly, the non-literal translation of «conduire des conduites» in English (e.g., 'to lead one's behaviour') through the straight 'conduct' facilitates the incorporation of the translator's note in the main English text, hence offering an interpretation which I find clarifying because it expands signification without altering its root meaning. However, even if such a translation conveys some clarity, I insist on using 'conduct of conduct' to reinforce the 'equivocal nature' of the term required to understand how the economic grid of neoliberalism has been applied to social life since the late 1970s. It has narrowed the conceptual gap between power and freedom '....as power is less a confrontation between two adversaries or the linking of one to the other than a question of government (Foucault, 1982, pp. 789-790). Thus, 'conduct of conduct' refers to the

---

[129] Foucault is playing on the double meaning in French of the verb *conduire,* "to lead" or "to drive," and *se conduire*, "to behave" or "to conduct oneself"; whence *la conduite*, "conduct" or "behavior" [Translator's original note, but emphases added]. (Foucault, 1982, pp. 789-790).

less coercive modern notion of power that transcends disciplinarian methods but is still 'controlling', resulting from 'relationships'. This power can only be exercised, to paraphrase Foucault, with the subject's complicities or the subject's *non-recalcitrance* because '…without the possibility of recalcitrance, power would be equivalent to a physical determination' (1982, p. 790). While the earlier Foucault's work does not necessarily entail a fracture with this later work, here Foucault seems interested in the 'role' played by the subject or the possible role it can play to engage with existence.[130]

So, Table 11's statements (i.e., e-mail responses - below) show that students had had enough of exams and the testing regime *dispositif* as practices that would influence their sleep as much as their self-esteem because of self-surveillance. This was the first time I could *hear* such an explicit critique of the *dispositif* from them:

---

[130] Foucault eventually develops his theories into the 'art of living' as an aesthetic (1980c; 1983).

Table 11: statements of <u>conduct of conduct</u>[131]

(Izzy) **<u>The focus</u>** seems to be more on the **<u>exam results</u>** than on making **<u>students motivated to work hard and do well for themselves</u>**. So, I would change how much **<u>exam pressure was put on us</u>** and instead put that energy towards **<u>motivation and inspiration</u>**.
(Juss) I would have <u>**slept more and tried to stress less**</u> as I think these factors **<u>impacted my mental health due to the pressure I was under</u>**.
(Vic) I'd probably **<u>change the amount of pressure I put on myself</u>** for anything - I think that **<u>this pressure comes from my wanting to do my best in everything I do and expectations from family and friends.</u>** Although no one has ever told me that if I was not to get a certain grade or do something and achieve a set result on that thing, **<u>I would tell myself that I would be letting them down.</u>**
(Rina) However, I also **<u>wish I could change the state of my mental health</u>** at the time of GCSEs. This is because I felt extremely anxious about failing, **<u>which caused a lot of stress and panic</u>**. So, **<u>I wish I could have calmed down and just tried my best rather than losing motivation and stressing out.</u>**
(Alby) I would **<u>change my attitude towards my GCSEs because</u>** <u>I was too relaxed.</u>

Through student-participants' regrets, these powerful statements identified missed opportunities and illustrated the impact of pressure, working as 'subjective configurations' that succinctly explain why theirs and their peers' MH had not been optimal over the last few years.

---

[131] Underlining and bolding in Table 11 are used for emphasis.

9.4.2 Resistance [132]

The selected e-mail responses (Table 12 below) show the actions that student-participants had taken (i.e., things 'to keep') or that they would have taken (i.e., 'to change') as forms of resistance and/or subjectivation. The notion of 'resistance' has been elaborated on (Butler et al., 2016; Moore, 2018; Rose 2014; 2017) and applied in education (Cammarota & Fine, 2010; Davies, B., 2006; Morrin, 2017; Youdell, 2006) in different ways. However, the critical point that is gleaned from Table 12 concerns the effect of resistance, whether empowering or just an end-in-itself and therefore void of developmental significance.

---

[132] Italics and underline are used in the table for emphasis.

Table 12: statements of *Resistance*

(Juss) I also would have *ended certain friendships earlier due to the toxic nature* and how it sometimes kept me away from self-care and studies.
(Juss) I would keep the fact that *I made my revision plans instead of listening to what other people pressured me to do*. I was proud of what I achieved and *that I did it on my own.*
(Teocoli) I would change my method of learning and revision. *Instead of memorising a plethora of content, I would focus on ensuring I understand all the ideas being taught.*
(Izzy) I would keep my external factors because I feel like even though school was stressful at times**,** *I managed to keep my life out of school the same*. I didn't have much time for personal growth but I still *managed to keep a good lifestyle and social life.*
(Mollica) I would *keep the friends I have and the stuff I experienced.*
(Vanni) One thing I would change is that we *would not do exams at all,* since I think this is only *to test our memory* and not our practical skills. Another thing I would *change is the national curriculum since there are many things wrong with it*; for instance, it is very Eurocentric. I would've liked to know different perspectives on history or English.
(Vic) Another thing I would change if I could would be to be more open to change in my life and work on things I fear.
(Vic) In addition, I would also not change the opportunities *I have taken up over the last four years.* For example, I did a 10-week internship with a global creative company where I was allowed to work on huge projects and meet so many people in the creative field...
(Hammi) If I were to keep two things, it would be the school I went to and how *I grew and changed to become a new person.* This is because the schools that I went to allowed me to come out of my shell and grow as a person and become a new and more mature person when I started my first year of A Levels.

Unlike the 'conduct of conduct', these powerful statements indicate how some students personalize the schooling experience, some as 'problem solving', others as just *coping*, and others as '*a posteriori'* reflexive exercise. Hammi's last response offers an exciting insight that reminds me of other student-participants who used schooling as a place where to do well-being through agency.

Importantly, these last two sections bring forward vocal views on the college-environment as

a *dispositif*, something that had not been prevalent earlier, especially amongst student-participants and parents. This analytical discrepancy with teachers or the MH&WBTeam possibly shows how the normative aspects of an institutional 'environment of enclosure' make it difficult for participants to express their criticism while *in* college. As Deleuze commented, '…these are the societies of control, which are in the process of replacing the disciplinary societies (1992, pp.3-4 in Pongratz, 2011, p.163). Co-participation, stakeholding and service-using were finally coming together to make subjectivation a reality for learning and *conscientization* (Freire, 1974).

9.4.3 In-between **conduct of conduct** and Resistance

I finally created an 'in-between' column (see Table 13's **bold/underline** and *italics/underline* – or see double-headed arrow column in Appx-17) to include those responses that showed both. These could be instances that showed how student-participants felt 'caught in two minds' regarding the politics of achievement/attainment. Importantly, this section is quite explicit about what students went through (including being harsh on themselves as the inevitable outcome of 'conduct of conduct' to keep up with 'the conduct') and what they would have done differently (a form of *conscientization* that worked as retrospective resistance).

Table 13: statements of **conduct of conduct** a*nd Resistance*

(Vic) Sometimes when things get a little stressful or too much, especially with online school, **it feels like I'm trapped and that there is nothing else in my life other than classes and school and homework,** and because of this sometimes *I neglect myself* and the people around me. *But I have worked on this and I think I've become better at balancing my life in and out of college.*
(Teocoli) *I would also lessen the amount of stress I put on myself.* **Exams can't always determine the intelligence of an individual.**
(Gabs) *Another thing is keeping motivated during very stressful times*; **even though it was hard it would still have been better** *and I should have looked at who and what motivates me the most.*
(Teocoli) I would also **lessen the amount of stress I put on myself.** *Exams can't always determine the intelligence of an individual.*
(Hammi) If I was to change two things... *it would be some of the situations I got myself in to* and some of the people I called friends. This is because **a lot of what I did was a waste of time and could've easily been spent doing so many other things that would've been more worthwhile.**

These statements foreground powerful language ('I'm trapped' and 'I have worked on this') that show ambivalent feelings and perceptions, an *infolding* of feelings to work with. Sentences like 'I'd lessen stress…', 'exams can't always determine...' reveal a sense of maturation, a 'taking distance' which was not always enounced during the fieldwork, quite the opposite, as if students did not want to publicly ridicule themselves by being too extreme. Meantime, school leaders and teachers seem constrained to contradict themselves by having to push the 'therapeutic' (Ecclestone, 2017) and 'whole child' (Jones, 2021) policies agenda while subtly working on optimization and quantifiable results. Therefore, these responses show how some try to be authentic and 'do' agency through intrinsic motivation, negotiating or compromising with the pressure to affect the desired outcome pragmatically.

Despite the singularity of conduct and resistance and related scholarly debates behind a distinction between processes of subjectification and subjectivation, distinguishing the latters along the line of agency helps see the extent students feel victims or get 'empowered' by

compulsory education. The distinction depended on more tangible *becoming* which I could hear through their e-mailed voices, as if they owned it rather than reflecting counter-discourses *per se,* while in transition to uncertain adulthood and while the dispositif daily scrutinised performance levels due to the incumbent exams.

Conclusion: Between the 'Drowned and the Saved'

This last close look at the three RQs uses my attempt to offer a final PAR opportunity to my student-participants before I embarked on my final analysis. Although I addressed the questions throughout the different analytical stages, explicitly, the Covid19's impact on the fieldwork made it more pressing I used the questions to keep the 'my side' analysis under check, enhance the 'explanatory power of negation' (Flyvbjerg, 2011, in Collins and Stockton, 2018, p.9), and improve 'the [research] craft in general' (Flyvbjerg, 2011). Student-participants' views came under more scrutiny (mine) when triangulated with parents' and teachers' (see previous chapters). As already mentioned, the ideal situation would have seen all 34 participants taking part in a final enrichment session, followed by a focus group with two representatives of each group to query my final analysis.

Through the ONLINE focus group, I could share my final research findings as a triangulated result from across all the stages; I could contrast them with the whole-college questionnaire results, and I could get student-participants views on my analysis (2ndorder construct) to arrive at our analysis (3rdorder construct).[133] In an ideal PAR face-to-face situation, I would have structured the session differently and maximized the participants' analytical role, not only as a leading role but one that distinguished between the committed student-participant, the stakeholder who wanted to know more about its stakes, and the service-user who offered feedback/criticism. Such distinctions

---

[133] However, the MH&WBTeam plus parents and career officer could not contribute as per normal iterative practice despite several attempts to organize online focus groups with all of them.

would have gone hand in hand with 'degrees of PAR' – but it was impossible. Instead, student-participants online reflections took place through the chat box and, from the start, I had to remind them that the impact of the pandemic/lockdown should have been contextualized in their contributions because I was presenting pre-pandemic material.

Three issues were brought forward and conflated as inhibiting a positive approach to future possibilities despite the positive outlook emerging in task 1's interviews: i) educational and schooling experiences; ii) the post-Brexit socio-political climate (including some sporadic reference to the pandemic); iii) future options. Most did not feel 'well-served' by the compulsory education system and admitted that online learning had been technically and emotionally challenging; however, some claimed to have benefitted from recorded lessons and the decreased social pressure 'to perform' in class and/or in the college-environment.

Finally, the e-mail responses added an extra layer of knowledge and understanding of adolescent MH by getting students' retrospection and seeing it spread over the RQs. These e-mails offered a moment for 'subjective configurations' as reliable indicators of students' MH and revealed their 'sense-making'. Students identified two things to keep and two to change in their past three years that had influenced their MH. Eventually, I filed the responses under the three RQs and narrowed them down through my associations with subjectification and subjectivation processes.

My analysis pointed at the negative impact of the testing regime and what it entailed in terms of education; I also saw the importance of relationships (in and out of college) to manage college pressures successfully and the inevitability of pragmatically embracing (i.e., *coping*) a performative culture to survive. However, while some students took responsibility for their poor effort, minimal resilience, or vulnerability, others were proud of their proactive roles. They managed to fend off specific pressure endemic to the school/college-environment, retained a sense of autonomy and looked forward to the future.

Although I had not seen the students for so long, the 'e-mail voices' echoed a sense of ambivalent maturation that showed how some were at risk of drowning in a selective (i.e., non-formative) education system. In contrast, others seemed strengthened and ready to face future challenges, perhaps with a newly acquired 'capacity to aspire' - driven or not by neoliberal

principles - due to taking up 'pragmatically positioned subjectivities' which helped manage the pressure to *invest* in themselves.

Chapter 10 – Conclusion

.

'Something has emerged from you, which surprises, which astonishes and denies everything which has made our society what it is today. That is what I would call the extension of the field of possibilities. Do not give up'.

J.P. Sartre (1968, addressing the French students)

Introduction

This chapter's starting quote applied to a different context and time, but I chose it to illustrate PAR's epistemological potential, a position which this research embraced following a critical question I have held since my BA Anthropology undergraduate: why research? Later, it became: why research adolescent MH? Having such questions underpinning my interpretivist epistemology and constructivist ontology helped us to start assessing the 'realities' that schooling presented adolescents and, where possible, making links to modern psychopathologies such as adolescent depression, anxiety, eating disorders, self-harm, and OCD (Chicchi, 2017; Chow, 2016; Rose, 2013; 2018).

The quote, therefore, is also intended to stress and praise my participants' endeavours as crucial to several contributions this thesis makes to the education research fields. Consequently, I suggest that the main contribution is developed around stakeholders' and service-users' involvement as co-researchers through varying degrees of engagement ('degrees of PAR'). This contribution consisted of multiple triangulations to generate knowledge and understanding from critical analysis of 'lived experiences'. Other (sub)contributions ensued: i) to knowledge (different disciplines); ii) to school/college practitioners (education policymakers, teachers, MH teams); iii) to key stakeholders and service-users (parents, students). Similarly, methodological limitations: i) the impact of Covid-19 lockdowns limiting the 'action research' aspect of PAR; ii) the status of the research, a PhD, contravening some of the tenets of participatory research regarding final write-ups; iii) researching with minors in public institutions, which restricted PAR practice.

I problematized available subject positions in the college-environment, implicating questions of agency, choice, intentionality, and resistance. Through a PAR approach, which simultaneously centralized and decentralized students-participants, I tried to identify the fluidity and heterogeneity of subject positions that best explained student-participants' MH status without *fixing* the positions. PAR values triangulation of different actors and stages, which is iterative, generative, and therefore complex, because layers of reflection and validation were continuously added to the process, enhancing rigour and credibility (Abma et al., 2019).

Accordingly, this research contends that PAR, deployed together with ethnography (Tamboukou & Ball, 2003), offered the practical and theoretical platforms for adolescents, often omitted in research concerning themselves (Alderson, 2013), parents, teachers, and school/college-leaders, to reflect on policy influence by critiquing the practices entrenched in and through the school/college-environment. The latter offered a conceptual reference to identify those education policies addressing adolescent MH in an environment characterized by 'crisis' (Pongratz, 2011), with the awareness of the caveats that come with the pre-adulthood's social-emotional and developmental stage.

So, this closing chapter (re)presents the research problem and initial aims alongside the impact of my positionalities and situatedness on the research; then, I suggest potential implications and related contributions. Next, I draw out the study's limitations, leading to further research. The *chain*[134] implication, recommendation, limitation and further research draws from crucial research findings, which I partially discussed in each chapter and which I move forward below in a layered fashion because some aspects of what makes the *chain* are timelier than others – e.g., PAR's theoretical and practical limitations. Finally, I conclude by addressing or 'answering' the main research question, followed by a final remark.

---

[134] The *chain* metaphor is inspired by Pat Thomson (2022) educational blog.

10.1 Revisiting the Research Problem, Aims and my Positioned/Situated Approach

Multifaceted aspects contribute towards a young person's MH, a fact which is confirmed through the literature review, this study, and which I witnessed during my teaching career and recently as a father. Some of these aspects include the inevitable pressure of high-stake examinations in a questionably meritocratic and mobile system, whether there is a MH *crisis* amongst adolescents, and the suggestion of schools/colleges as *happy* places offering nourishing experiences that positively influence MH.

Most findings showed that the close relationship between adolescent MH and education could be associated with brain development and the search for individual and group identity, unveiling tensions between stigmatization and students' desire for diagnosis while undergoing performance-based challenges. Secondly, internalization of the pressure from parents, peers, and competitive culture in schools is reinforced by educators' tendencies to use MH labels to categorize pupils' feelings/behaviour when unsure of the causes. Thirdly, the confusion with what defines good MH in adolescence, especially from the perspective of students and in the context of education, is instrumentalized by linking MH to learning/pedagogy and exam results. Lastly, the negative impact of ranking on students' self-esteem because of ongoing tests and high-stake exam pressure states the case for revisiting the relationship between MH and education.

Schools/colleges in the UK have increasingly taken on pastoral duties with add-ons such as 'therapeutic' education, instrumentalized in a society that, according to the environmental epidemiologist from Imperial College Prof. Vineis (see Tola, 2022), exerts pressure in terms of individual success more than many other countries. Resource distribution, based on merit and responsibilization, has, paradoxically, made such deficits more pronounced, justifying more *crises* and interventions. Meanwhile, schools/colleges offer opportunities to air their voices as equal citizens, opening the *possibilities* offered by a democratic system where stakeholders and service-users can impact reforms. This premise means that despite this research's claims, implications and recommendations, stakeholders and service-users should work with the systems in place, which does not necessarily mean embracing policies and their implementations.

I employed a PAR methodology because a previous study (Di Emidio, 2018) had shown that research co-intention and knowledge co-generation mobilized participants as stakeholders *and*

service-users of the education system, plausibly attracting policymakers. Hence, building on a previous study, as a multi-positioned PhD researcher, I wanted to evaluate how educational policies regarding the curriculum, assessment, and learning environments influenced adolescent MH in late adolescence. That is when a sense of *self* 'shapes up' through an institutional environment entrenched in individualizing precepts that, instrumentally, do not renounce communal life but stress how the individual must function for oneself and the group, regardless of personal (adverse) circumstances.

Therefore, one of the original design strategies of this project considered shifts in educational policy and their influence on adolescent MH despite, as Ball and Reay's work has suggested across the last 30 years, not much has changed in education policymaking since the 1870 Education Act. In addition, my close examination of the school/college-environment as an *apparatus* or *dispositif* revealed, for example, how policy interventions of the past 15 years aimed at the prevention of mental ill-health through short-term benefits, such as attractive exam scores to access top universities and raise schools/colleges league tables profiles, instead of long-term developmental benefits. Relevant literature and increased data availability on adolescent mental ill-health beg the following question: are educational policies fit for purpose? What are the financial costs of compulsory education in the practice of governance as modes of accountability and governing in a very narrow instrumental sense? These questions oriented me and urged me not to lose sight of research as an exercise in criticality, to *unmask* the work of power and then *innovate* (Rebughini, 2018).

The policy *dispositif's* (Bailey, 2013) implications with subjectification and subjectivation helped critique a seemingly self-defeating governmental practice that finds expression through education policies addressing adolescent MH (and well-being) within a 'subjectivity of neoliberal governmentality context' (Hofmeyr, 2011), in dissonance with the high national costs of mental ill-health. Policies seem to engineer *kinds* of subjectivities through the rhetoric of 'therapeutic education' to support adolescent MH (and well-being) in the name of fairness and justice alongside competition, performance, empowerment, responsibilization, meritocracy and, therefore, no equality or the importance of inequality as the incentive to achieve/attain. Here lies the complexity of the *dispositif* in which policies about MH (and well-being) are the currency that informs social investment, 'social mobility as panacea for austere times' (Reay, 2013b) and accountability

measures (Jones, 2021), tightening up the education-MH-subjectivity relationship at the heart of this thesis.

Overall, this was a worthwhile and ambitious project, and not before time. I set off to investigate a problem as part of institutional processes and learned that mitigation was a real focus of this thesis, or at the least, commensurate to the findings. Mitigation would do justice to the complexities at stake and the participatory nature of the research, as it were, coming out of our research rather than exploring the questions 'I' wanted to start with. Therefore, the main strength of this study is 'our' ongoing reflexive approach resulting from PAR's iteration and a personal ethical commitment to testing my analysis. Because such a participative/iterative process would eventually saturate, being the only author of the thesis made me face the shaky grounds of 'ethical hesitancy' (Staunæs & Kofoed, 2015) because I was stretched between certainty and uncertainty, knowing and not knowing. Staunæs and Kofoed (2015) advocate ethical hesitancy, building on Pillow's 'Reflexivities of discomfort' (2003) as '…an embodied thoughtfulness that includes discomfort and uncertainty' (2015, p.36). They outline an ethical hesitancy in fieldwork underpinned by the uncertainty that strategically and ethically obliges 'not to be certain', bringing about a productive pause at a particular event or challenge (p.37). This hesitancy required the automatic inclusion of my multi-positionality, multi-layered analysis and triangulations of participants who responded to my situated researcher status; the multiple methods employed across two research and two age groups tested the effectiveness of a PAR project, enriching and complicating data generation.

Such reflexive problematizing of my positionalities and situatedness resonated with a critical theme of this thesis ('subject positions' as take-ups or rejection/resistance), showing the '…uncomfortable, unclear and uncertain aspects of researcher subjectification in fieldwork' (Staunæs & Kofoed, 2015, p.24). Assuming 'uncertainty' as part of my subject position and approach helped me follow Staunæs and Kofoed's suggestion to include an ethical obligation 'not be certain' in research, primarily through fieldwork, when affective relationships are at stake. Of course, I was conscious of my assumptions, built over 20 years of teaching, and did not want to influence my participants, but my presence as a researcher about the influence of education on adolescent MH already spoke volumes and could have skewed the Critical Theory premises of the thesis. Consequently, the positionalities I projected could confuse my situatedness, and 'that' was fine so long as I recognized any overlaps and moved them forward through analyses and discussion.

The abrupt end of the fieldwork shook participation, mainly regarding 'action research', representing a limitation of this research because we planned to work for ten months to present a policy-focused change-action to the college-headship. Unfortunately, this objective collapsed overnight with the Covid-19 lockdown. Nevertheless, the data generated over seven months suggests several potential implications and contributions to the research field, policymaking, stakeholders, and service-users, including future research recommendations.

10.2 Revisiting Key Findings: Moving Forward!

As argued elsewhere (Di Emidio, 2022), The Health Foundation's inquiry (Abdinasir, 2019) into young people's future health identified that UK children are amongst the most tested students in the world with a negative impact on students' MH and well-being, let alone the prohibitive costs of mental ill-health for the government. In addition to ongoing preparation for routine tests, children in the UK are formally assessed three times by the age of eleven versus one time in most European countries, and some countries have abandoned formal exams in primary education altogether.

A culture of learning measurement justifies a culture of intervention at all levels, sold as a form of governmental 'care', best illustrated by the 'a hand up, not a handout' Conservative mantra. Intervention could, in the long term, reduce the 'burden' of mental ill-health on the economy but, in turn, raise ethical questions of what, why and who is intervening and who does the intervention. The expected top performance inherent in the progression to the 'good life' implicates worsening adolescent MH paradoxically. For example, Humphrey (2018) argued that the unjustified public-health costs to promote and better manage adolescent MH was not cost-effective, counter-intuitive to a market-oriented education system, thriving on self-efficacy (recently reiterated by McDaid & A-La Park, 2022). This research, and the literature's evidence, indicate that adolescents' motivation is at its lowest and MH services are over-stretched, requiring educational institutions to employ psychologists and counsellors or wasting valuable time and energy from teachers - teachers are now expected to spot self-harm as part of CAMHS' tier 1 intervention (Stewart & Campbell, 2019; Yusuf, 2019). As a result, schools/colleges become recipients of an *ongoing crisis*.

As one of the starting quotes of this thesis suggests ('...subjectivity is strictly related to the medicalization of our existence', Foucault, n.d.), health concerns, particularly MH, have become widespread in industrial societies, prompting a mix of reactive and initiative-taking policies that have become central to a culture of intervention and prevention that are difficult to disentangle. These practices happen at a governmental level, exploiting affective and emotional language whereby 'care' of people's needs drives dubious neoliberal policies. The latter uses policymakers' MH and well-being sentiments as an opportunity to operationalize market and profit-driven ideals. These are unquestionably for 'the good' competitive life for all, revitalizing and normalizing 'survival of the fittest' theories. However, by implementing such logic through the schooling *dispositif* and in the name of performance, the risk is to lose sight of the structural reasons behind adolescent mental ill-health, calling for undue intervention. Repeatedly, I have witnessed the medicalization of students' behaviour and performance because they did not fit the functioning and productive requisites of the *dispositif,* serving a questionable governmental agenda.

If students' curiosity, desires, and motivations become an after-thought for neoliberal policymakers, mainly worried about measuring learning and progression for economic ends, then, policies that insist on 'achieving the potential' as a solution to mental ill-health risk to increase the pressure. Instead, students' view of their future selves should be spurred by the challenges derived from curiosity as much as the inevitability of uncertainty and failure, but not the life-or-death scenarios presented by school/college, as several student-participants noticed, and which some parents alluded to. Preoccupations with jobs and careers seem linked to obliged subject positions that policies attach to too many disparaging variables: learning, developing, MH, well-being, empowerment, achievement/attainment, betterment, progression, performance, transition, and resilience. While adults might pragmatically grasp the rationale behind such (eclectic) policing, students seem not to follow their logic in the mundane, inevitably warranting anxiety and, borrowing from Zizek (2017), 'cynicism as a symptom of ideology'.

I have argued that neoliberal education, understood as a form of governmentality – 'a way of reconfiguring selves and the social order in accord with the demands of market economies' (Cromby & Willis, 2014, p.241) - underpinned by a creed against total state control, still legislates 'at a distance' through statutory and non-statutory policies. Meantime, neoliberal policies have partially devolved adolescent mental ill-health to over-stretched families and underfunded schools/colleges operating in the entrenched accountability system. Such devolution inevitably

'corrupts' institutional practice in schools (e.g., teaching to the test, leaders fiddling with exam data to 'save' their jobs, teachers told to serve their *client* students and therefore teaching-to-the-test), at the expense of a 'possibility', namely, an emancipatory, transformative, and actualizing education, whereby individual and collective interests are harmonized. However, the state still *regulates* education by expecting adolescents' success, resilience and responsibilization in what seems conditional reciprocity, with MH consequences.

10.3 Implications and Contributions (and further research)

'….*subjectivity is strictly related to the medicalization of our existence''* (Foucault, n.d.)

This thesis builds on and adds to the Critical Ethnography in Education tradition by employing students as co-researchers alongside other social actors who drew from lived experiences to inform the analysis. I also referred to them as service-users alongside or interchangeably with stakeholders, experts or participants. In addition, this thesis' critical exploration of worsening adolescent MH added valuable findings for education-related sociology and psychology theories and policymaking. In turn, these would then inform further research and policy implementation practice. The notion of service-users can be stretched not only to parents and students but also to 'users' of my final research - e.g., those working in education policy, government officials, and governors, whom Wright refers to as 'user communities' (2008, p.7), who are stakeholders but <u>not</u> strictly participants.

10.3.1 For policymakers and further research

We can start drawing a map which link agency and subjectivity (Di Emidio, 2018; Di Emidio, 2021b) as processes that generate 'cognitive possibilities' for positive MH. Therefore, devolving varying degrees of agency/autonomy to adolescents can help promote well-being and positive MH within the school/college-environment. The *possibilities* to be autonomous and independent, as it were, 'agentic selves' within the boundaries of the school-environment were a concern amongst

the primary school student-participants, and often associated with promoting 'happiness'. However, moving forward to the PhD, this thesis demonstrates that subjectivity and agency could not be separated from i) the influence of increased responsibilization for self-improvement through neoliberal precepts, ii) heightened educational performance, and iii) the associated character and resilience, which policies call for in the transition to adulthood. Subjectivity and agency can inform more progressive and holistic policymaking through ´new´ MH and well-being definitions, a less ambiguous use of resilience and character, and improved consideration of agency as a precondition of subject formation.

I noted that processes of subjectivity are essential to students' MH and then argued that educational policy-as-discourse constitutes subject positions that respond to the logic of the market and, perhaps, very little to the logic of child development. Such logic foregrounds curiosity, discovery learning, trial and error, work in progress, and a less antagonistic relationship between success and failure (Smith et al., 2015). Therefore, evidence of mental ill-health as statistically high in adolescence reinforces Foucault's quote: '…subjectivity is strictly related to the medicalization of our existence'. This insight could inform policymakers since quality, equity and ideology, as the 'sublime objects' of education policy remain '…elusive, serving as sublime objects that function as sites for the investment of desire while simultaneously covering over and compensating for the ultimate impossibility of a harmonious society' (Clarke, M., 2014, p. 584). Clarke suggests that idealized preventative and interventionist policymaking is far from being beneficial for students, primarily when policies treat concepts as means to promote neoliberal values of what constitutes the 'good life'. For example, Tony Blair's in/famous 1997 Labour conference speech '*Education, Education, Education'* (Blair, 1997) reinforced the 1980s educational agenda welcoming the logic of privatization, competition, in/equality, fairness and performance in education policies to achieve social justice. Not dissimilarly, Conservative education minister Michael Gove, in 2012, claimed: '…we have, for generations, failed to stretch every child to the limit of their ability…we have, for all of our lifetimes, failed the poorest most of all' (Gove, 2012, in Lapping, 2020, p. 144). Hence, by drawing on Jones' (2021) recent work on the 'whole child' policy agenda, I added value to my work and Gillies' by spelling out the complexity and confusion of successive governments' intentions to extoll the virtues of neoliberal education.

Henceforth, policymakers should acknowledge how responsibility allocation to students and families, high-stake performance demands and status change to legal adulthood (transition) converge at a time of development characterized by uncertainty and change at a physiological and emotional level that shape adolescent MH vis-à-vis their subjectivity. Moreover, to counter-balance accusations of policy-as-discourse (i.e., policies that favour some groups only), policies should replace instances of 'giving voice' to students with 'hearing' their voices as stakeholders and service-users. For example, MH and well-being terms employed alongside attainment/achievement should be harmonized with internal policies and practices; otherwise, students perceive policy incentives 'to give voice' as instrumentalized.

In sum, the perspectives presented throughout this thesis showed how policy-as-discourse reflects neoliberal values that put, paradoxically, adolescent MH at additional risk through the mechanisms and processes that claim to ensure a healthy and happy development. If relevant policy changes informed by students' voices are not implemented, future research should look at the insufficient sustainability of students' coping approaches as potential short-termism destined to catch up with life satisfaction, decision-making, meaning making and, indeed, students' MH.

10.3.1.1 For policy terminology and further research

Drawing attention to adolescence as a developmental opportunity and not a menace to the adolescent or society, we can look at it for what it is, in 'transition' to adulthood in a heavily 'performative' economy, which calls for parental and students' 'responsibilization'. The required resilient attitude promoted through policies *already* shows that adolescent mental ill-health can be managed differently. However, the critical issue of adolescent MH is only partially and instrumentally covered in policy documents and calls for better definitions and/or understanding of MH that guide policy. Furthermore, de-politicized concerns with MH and well-being have entered the education system, marginalizing broader societal issues such as stagnant social mobility, knife crime and unemployment; additionally, the individual's personal and collective responsibilities have been merged, confusingly, through the private vs public dualism, by evoking fairer reforms in the name of meritocracy (Reay, 2020), to enable social mobility. Consequently, pedagogically relevant concepts such as 'resilience', 'character' and 'behaviour for learning' seem

instrumentalized to enhance the role of MH and well-being policies that favour exam results, undermining their potential to contribute to progressive and holistic education.

In the past 15 years, different policies around MH and well-being have been bundled with concepts like 'character' and 'resilience', which successive Coalition and Conservative governments have sustained. These policies show the increasingly corrupt and intrusive nature of quotidian neoliberalization policies to engineer adolescents' subjectivities as forms of legitimization of governmental surveillance, which instrumentalizes universal messages that require a 'well-rounded education' for the 'whole child' on econocentric grounds. Moreover, this governmentality influences the subject at different levels through the same medium meant to be intrinsic to its development: a learning predisposition.

As a result, definitions and conceptualization of MH, well-being, and the idea of MH as stigmatized (see 'Time to Change' anti-stigma MH campaign between 2009-2021) impacted the research design and now offer potential implications for further PAR research in education. For example, the tendency of policies to normalize MH and well-being definitions had research implications: from student-participants who challenged the limitations of 'caging' definitions to stimulating participative critique for more inclusive views of adolescent MH that questioned the '…commodification of our education system, in the pursuit of driving up standards and raising attainments' (Yusuf, 2019, p.3).

The contentious definitions of MH and well-being, widely used in statutory and non-statutory policies reaching schools/colleges, and their combined usage, alongside props such as resilience and character/behaviour, ambiguously shape educational policymaking and implementation. This ambiguity reflects policy directives that do not tackle adolescent MH at its roots but risk diverting from it. I claim that policy literature does not address the issue of adolescent mental ill-health as a clinical condition impacting the body, performance, and subject formation, nor as a result of socio-political influence.[135] On the contrary, it becomes apparent that the 'yoking' of several vital

---

[135] Carra and Vineis (2022) apply Bourdieu's notion of capital and stretch it to 'biological capital' to identify how social inequalities affect the individual biological development. Likewise, future research could use the same approach to identify schooling influence on the body. A related example came up in a previous

concepts such as MH, well-being, resilience, and character results in depoliticization and therefore constitutes a significant area for policy change, policy upgrade, and future research. For example, Gillies' 'yoking' metaphor problematized mental ill-health in socio-economic terms, adding to Gonzalo Reyes' 'subjective configurations' and questioning the schooling *dispositif's* interventions through the medicalizing gaze. Instead, having a more apparent distinction between the various terms, starting with distinguishing 'mental' disorder from 'mental' health, is a recommendation for policymaking which would strengthen the well-being-MH correlation and add clarity for policy implementation.

In essence, the risk of falling short of 'adequate care' in schools and universities (Davies, B., 2006, p.437) call for *ad hoc* MH and well-being definitions that are also carefully implemented with their associates, resilience and character. Such policy upgrading would then guide policy implementations via college-leaders and attain goals aligned with progressive ideas of what MH and well-being entail in and through the schooling *dispositif,* without necessarily clashing with the *dispositif.* We need definitions that help question the way state education meets mass education aims (acquiring knowledge and skills and forming responsible and active citizens - Crick report, 1998), while re-engineering citizens of the future (Gillies, 2016) based on future citizens' input. Nowadays, still, such engineering is carried out on utilitarian grounds as expressed by 'the state theory of learning' (Lauder et al., 2006, in Brown, 2018, pp.42-44) and through a questionable 'therapeutic education' agenda. Only then, when students' input is integrated, could 'therapeutic education' be absorbed and interrogated by service-users and stakeholders, critically, opening new perspectives on the neoliberal educational agenda which expects students' care and attainment to go hand in hand.

---

study (Di Emidio, 2018) when a student argued 'Sir, I could not sleep nor eat properly prior to my SATs, MH and physical health are good friends!' (fieldnotes).

10.3.2 Dissemination/Impact

In a culture where health has become a high-value asset, it should not be surprising that life problems have become medical pathologies. One of the ironies of our culture is that no matter how much health is improved, the reporting of health problems continues to rise.

(Conrad, 2007, p.149)

10.3.2.1 For stakeholders and service-users

After 20 years of teaching and following this thesis, I suggest that the moral imperative of compulsory education *is* to provide students with opportunities to exercise critical thinking and creative risk-taking. These would not undermine the *dispositif*'s precondition to measure academic learning and to produce neoliberal subjectivities alongside the next generations of workers. On the contrary, progressive views about acquiring an education, nurtured by an ethos of trial and error as part of the performance, would compensate for the *dispositif's* questionable handling of MH and well-being vis-à-vis public costs and policymaking around the care of the next generation adult/worker. A less selective and more formative education would be foundational for managing future life challenges, as it were, learning to mistake better, aware that '*life problems'* (starting quote) arising from schooling are not medical pathologies. Improved communication between parents, teachers, leaders, and students should rest on the consideration that the pressure of exam time constraints, relentless class-based testing, and peer competition account for a diminished learning experience. Even though this type of educational experience finds support amongst students who already hold pragmatic views of schooling (i.e., preparing for employment/work), a common ground between all stakeholders and service-users must be established in terms of realistic expectations, possibilities, resources, wants and needs of each student involved.

These recommendations have implications for the research field and practitioners like teachers. For example, the main implication for sociological and psychological education studies that intend to employ a participatory approach is to identify *with* participants how aspects of the school/college-environment which can hardly change (e.g., high-stake examinations) could be mitigated through students improved (pedagogic) relationships with teachers and parents.

Also, shared awareness of the 'empirical messiness' of schooling (Cieslik, 2019) could concentrate on concepts such as MH and well-being to re-conceptualize them to contain undesirable pressures. This means that the *possibilities* offered by the school/college-environments for subjective hopes should compensate for objective limitations, such as narrow judgmental examinations. Finally, improved 'practice' entails improved research of students' processes in school/college and how best to plan for agentic opportunities, which should make empowerment synonymous with emancipation. For example:

1. Taking on board that examined students are more likely to be 'occupationally deprived' of an ontologically defining trait such as play or *serious play* (Bibby, 2011, pp.111-112), it is the practitioners' duty to implement such approaches to reduce any negative impact of perceived academic failure.

2. Considering educational policies as neoliberal 'discourses' that influence adolescent MH vis-à-vis subjectivity constitutes an area of PAR research to pursue further (I regret, for example, not having shared the identity-subjectivity distinction with participants nor the links between subjectivity and MH). Remitting these categories to co-researchers with 'lived experiences' opens new conceptual avenues and possibilities to harmonize 'keyoxymorons' like a warm-strict educational approach or a pragmatic-free will.

3. Leadership programmes aimed at students can offer the space to generate a 'political-conflictual level' where to discuss and contain the *dispositif's* pressures, not as an act of resistance but as a PAR dialogue to embed in internal policies.

10.3.2.2 For current policymaking: my recent contribution

To inform parliamentary debate, I recently contributed to a briefing for members of parliament discussing the new Mental Health Act Whitepaper 2021 (RMHA, 2021). My briefing paper was titled: 'Human Rights Implications in the Reforming Mental Health Act 2021'.

As the Government brings forward legislation to reform the Mental Health Act 1983 with an emphasis on race and ethnic inequalities (see UK Parliament post 'POSTNOTE, 2022'), I argued that such an Act would not be complete without integrating a commitment to reducing the 'impact' of schooling on adolescent MH. I presented some of the data and analysis of this research through

ICOP (Influencing Corridors of Power - see SOAS University of London), arguing that, from a psychological and socio-economic perspective, compulsory education often limits the "choice and autonomy" of those who are already disadvantaged. This contravenes the UNCRC (1989), especially Article 12, which states that children should be listened to and taken seriously, with their evolving capacities considered. This possibly class-based unbalance is due to educational policies and practices that are heavily weighted toward measurement, which corrupts teaching practice, implicates Bourdieu's capitals, and precludes a holistic approach that would plausibly promote positive MH amongst adolescents.

Therefore, as the Government seeks to reform the Act, I suggested that they must place genuine emphasis on 'people with lived experience' (as is suggested on p.69 of the RMHA Government's proposals) by:

1. Reforming the national education policy to support human diversity and contribute to our collective flourishing.
2. Ensuring that any attempt to monitor education does not stifle human potential with processes of standardisation and measurement.
3. Involving students in any processes of education policy formation, implementation and accountability.

My recommendations sought to respond to the aims of the review which was set up to find out how the old legislation was used, how the practice could improve, and the views of service-users, relevant professionals and affected organizations.

10.3.2.3 For transdisciplinary approaches

Transdisciplinarity mirrored my effort to integrate the natural, social and health sciences in a humanities context and transcend traditional conceptual boundaries or break the silos of knowledge which paralyze crucial discipline-specific efforts. I chose transdisciplinarity as the best compromise between multi and interdisciplinarity (Choi & Pak, 2006), a worthy effort to cross disciplinary boundaries to mobilize knowledge at different levels and for a heterogeneous audience. As an effort in knowledge mobilization, I made several disciplines converge to explain a phenomenon like 'worsening adolescent MH' that, I believed, did not rest on single isolated

explanations. The risk of discipline-bound analysis, I claim, would have objectified the phenomenon further and made available justifications for more evidence-based interventions, amenable to top-down, unilateral policy intervention. Instead, I adopted a 'constructivist' approach to highlight the participatory methodology underpinning this thesis, hence more like a convergence of contributions, where the research_ed_ and participat_ed_ student/adolescent contributed to knowledge generation about the influence of education on MH, with the support of other critical participants implicated with/in the topic, though at different levels. The strengths and weaknesses of my use or approach to transdisciplinarity can only be judged by the readers, privy to my efforts to synthetize and harmonize the participants' analyses by myself only, wearing several hats and lenses simultaneously and dealing with academic concepts that are perceived differently in the academic world.

10.4 Limitations and Further Research

The limitations of this study, noted in the introduction and methods chapters, help explain their impact on the results and the consequences of the limitations; i) conceptual limitations (e.g., PAR is better understood as "degree of PAR" in an educational setting); ii) methodological limitations (e.g., focus groups provide great opportunities to 'speak' MH but, unlike interviews, lower personalization); iii) practical limitations (e.g., a global pandemic amid research, ethical and safeguarding issues limiting recruitment of boys, plus university ethics committee and the college headship turning down student-participants as interviewers of other students).

So, here I outline some of the limitations with corresponding future research directions and applications of this PAR research - for example, to create propositions for policy change that can be justified based on our results and, ambitiously, set radical and far-reaching changes in practice that connect our research results to children's rights.

10.4.1 About PAR and future PAR research practice

One critique of qualitative research is the assumption that research participants are rational, 'unitary' subjects who will share the researcher's meaning frame and can use language to meaningfully communicate their experiences (Holloway & Jefferson, 2008). As a result, serious consideration was given to the potential for the participatory population of a primary school and a college to be guarded against outside enquiry exposing personal vulnerabilities or leading to misunderstanding. For example, psychoanalytic theories in research consider if people unconsciously choose specific behaviour or language that *defends themselves* against anxiety (Bibby, 2011), which provides an incisive perspective on the consideration of people's relationships in the classroom and the PAR research itself. In addition, psychoanalysis theorises individuals' inner life and the implications of unconscious anxieties on experience and the meaning a person attributes to it (Bibby, 2011; Holloway & Jefferson, 2000). In response to this, a psychoanalytically informed epistemology could underpin future educational PAR studies to enhance the aims of (the) research concerning participants' 'meaning-making' of schools/colleges as 'environments of enclosure', characterized by crises but also providing 'care' for some.

Overall, the rationale behind my methodological choices was to increase the trustworthiness of the claims; however, the nature of a PhD, lacking a longitudinal approach, did not enable me to track changes in the children's experiences (Derbyshire, 2005, p.10). Cieslik (2019) strongly recommends a longitudinal approach to capture the 'ebbs and flows' character of life to evaluate the influence of schooling on MH and wellbeing. In this way, planning for *agency* and reducing the risks of MH would not happen as second thoughts to policy recommendation and implementation. Below, therefore, I appraise the PAR adventure using theoretical material and the actual PAR experience.

*10.4.1.1 PAR, a constructive appraisal: the good and the bad
(or the imponderable)*

PAR's status as an epistemology gained prominence in my research design *because* democratically generated knowledge could help address crucial questions: What is MH knowledge? Whose knowledge? How valid and convenient was it to have many voices speak for a state-funded research project which risked perpetuating discourses of power? Would those voices speak the truth of power or to power? Who would 'hear' these voices? What research methods best suit heterogeneous groups? Above all, what control did we have over the project? Was it just illusory empowerment?

In response to the above questions, PAR guaranteed the exploration and creation of new knowledge (the participatory side), and the potential of an intervention to improve the reality of those affected (the action-research side - McTaggart, 1997, CH. 2&7). Also, PAR further operationalized my interpretivist epistemology and constructivist ontology by (re)centralizing social actors through knowledge generation instead of being participat<u>ed</u>. Finally, participation involved making *meaning* out of 'lived experiences' and was central to this research for three different reasons: i) it cumulatively showed participants' expertise, ii) it helped some student-participants manage subject positions as authentic accomplishments and not simply overdetermined ones; iii) and it indicated how student-participants configured their MH given the suitable instruments of/for analysis. The following sub-sections expand these claims, comprising further appraisals that present potential implications and limitations of PAR for more PAR research in school/college settings.

10.4.1.2 PAR – the good

Certain PAR-ideal conditions of this research become feasible at the outset, but not to judge how well a method/ology measures phenomena, but to explain them via different methods of data gathering and active participation of stakeholders/service-users. For example, the heterogeneity of our participants helped shift absolute knowledge about the influence of the college-environment on MH to a contextual one, where me, teachers, parents, and college-leaders' views on topics that

mattered to student-participants could be challenged or supported by listening to student-participants. Furthermore, the number of hands-on participants, the use of internal consultants and an external 'critical friend' (Alionka) all converged systematically through ongoing triangulations. This made PAR's 'messiness' relevant because I became aware of a 'three levels epistemic' (I, We, Them) and what could count as expertise that led to knowledge/truth, resulting from three 'order constructs' (Schütz, 1962).

Nonetheless, it was never easy making decisions to move forward with such multiple criticalities that combined participants' analysis/feedback with, first, my insider status as an ex-teacher and, second, with my lead-researcher status in a PAR context. These PAR elements became pronounced at the final analysis point, where questions of authorship arose. However, I stand by Dlouhá & Pospíšilová who note that '…participation involves *decision making* [emphasis added] within processes of social transformation where prevailing fundamental theories and paradigms are questioned' (2016, p.4324). Making decisions and questioning underpinned our weekly engagements and why we all got involved in understanding compulsory education's influence on MH better. Thus, a 'degrees of PAR' context eased varying levels of participation/engagement; even though student-participants maintained the focus on the six themes, other participants added, built or challenged the six themes accordingly.

Thus, through a democratic platform, we interrogated educational policy implementation to different extents. Matthew Clarke's (2020) psychoanalytically informed analysis of education policies is pertinent because such policies are driven by heroic visions of the future, fantasmatic narratives, and an illusory harmonious society far detached from what it can 'really' be (pp.125-144, in Lapping, 2020). Consequently, 'degrees of PAR' analysis/feedback mitigated such visions and narratives. In fact, across the last 40 years, policy goalposts and accountability measures have changed-and-continued to exert *pressure* on school/college actors through curriculum content, pedagogy, and assessment which policymakers ostensibly gear towards an econocentric future as a panacea for holistic education. Moreover, here is where PAR acquired progressive significance; '…the benefits of participation consist of collective and reflexive *learning* which raises the capacities of individuals and communities for social change' (Dlouhá & Pospíšilová, 2016, p.4325). This research appropriately enabled active participation in different formats; student-participants chose some research methods due to 'research dialogue' (Sinha & Back, 2014, p.478)

and Reflexive TA, and all participants had significant degrees of analytical freedom. My role was to do justice to multiple speakers in such a way that we moved forward, but also that I accomplished a PhD within research ethics parameters.

If a PAR standpoint assumes that participants are knowledgeable about their lived experiences, then this research needed an epistemological paradigm before a methodological one, which integrated participants as co-generators of knowledge in a dialogical way. Sinha and Back (2014) refer to 'research dialogue…whereby researchers can make observations about participants' worlds, and participants can shed light on how issues in their worlds connect with public [here educational] issues' (2014, p.478). A 'three levels epistemic' approach helped verify and use the 'messy' nature of PAR with several groups of participants. For example, even though this research offered student-participants 'some' choice of methods due to ethics/safeguarding protocols, all participants had significant freedom to make analytical choices over codes and themes' relevance or which interview task to spend more time on; hence, 'degrees of PAR' had to be accounted for accordingly in my analysis.

Furthermore, I always invited student-participants to expand their judgment by taking risks, actively listening to one another, or playing 'devil's advocate' to facilitate participatory depth. The substantial empirical chapters illustrated the critical PAR process of data collection/generation. To an extent, though, the impossibility for participants to comment on this final thesis contravenes the 'research dialogue' metaphor of a standard PAR research which aims at a unanimous report/action, though 'degrees of PAR' helped compensate. It means that future PAR research should value PAR's triangulations and 'messiness' in an educational context despite some intrinsic limitations. So long as reflexivity and iterations are systematized, paying attention to organic elements of research such as 'unexpected participants' (Di Emidio, 2022), being open to participants' suggestions and the contingencies of researching in an over-structured, and yet, very unpredictable environment, should constitute foundational PAR education research.

10.4.1.3 PAR – the bad (or the imponderable?)

While academic literature and my engagement with a PAR methodology presumed to suffice to acknowledge PAR's advantages in an education setting, PAR's limitations emerged directly from the field and through relevant PAR literature. However, I call them contradictions more than limitations because they enhance reflexive analysis, especially in a PAR education context. Contradictions call for extra-reflexivity and give limitations (potentially 'bad') renewed purpose or a new status (the imponderable), more productive.

Gallagher and Gallagher offer a reflection on the potential limitations/contradictions of PAR, questioning participation as a framework of research involving children, in which participation has become both an aim and a tool in an ethical quest towards empowering them. However, while acknowledging the critical features of PAR, they argue that participatory approaches involve children in processes that aim to 'regulate' them (2008, p.499/502). This kind of involvement was visible from my positionalities. Moreover, it resulted in an (unintentional) intervention which pleased the college-leaders for disparate reasons – either for ticking a box concerning MH and well-being intervention (see OFSTED) or because several leaders genuinely believed in the research. Nevertheless, I can broadly associate such practical limitations/contradictions with the constraint of operating in a heavily scrutinized state institution which limits student-leadership and access (e.g., respectively, we had to rephrase some questionnaire questions, and lesson observations were objected to). More specifically, the abrupt ending of fieldwork due to Covid19 lockdowns disabled crucial final PAR stages that would have tested PAR credentials.

Furthermore, following Cornwall and Jewkes' (1995) critique of participatory research, PAR should cast light on agency, representation, and power, showing that the critical limitation/contradiction of PAR, in contrast to other methodologies, lies not in the methods or methodology but the *attitudes* of researchers (and participants) and the location of *power* in the various stages of the research process (pp.1666-7). This scenario was visible when I regularly reported the fieldwork developments to the school/college-leaders in both the primary school (Di Emidio, 2018) and the college (PhD). They would not hesitate to remind me that students' views

were important, but teachers and the headship team knew 'more' (fieldnotes).[136] This is to say that leading into an educational setting with a PAR methodology comes with precise arrangements, roles, expectations, and inputs as a joint venture, with participants and leaders who welcome the research on agreed conditions. For example, I could refer to the fieldwork planning stage to 'push' my PAR agenda despite the lockdown limitations (e.g., I was eventually allowed for one final time to meet students and teachers online despite strict college instructions not to contact students and teachers to reduce screentime).

Therefore, Cornwall and Jewkes' point about researcher participants' attitude vis-à-vis power helped mitigate hierarchical decisions; also, being in a position of power myself, I learned not to feel at fault for setting the agenda and writing the final analysis. As the authors suggest, '…in many cases people are 'participated' in a process which lies outside their ultimate control, researchers continue to set the agenda and take responsibility for analysis and representation of outcomes' (1995, p.1667). I shared this view with the student-participants when they claimed to feel disempowered and reminded them that, *still*, they were the leading architects of the research, making PAR in school/college happen within 'degrees of PAR' premises.

Thus, this conclusive appraisal of PAR's limitations/contradictions in *this* research illustrates how we actualized PAR as 'degrees of PAR' despite the power relationships which determined and regulated participants' status, positionalities and expected 'roles'.[137] Throughout the fieldwork, I paid extra attention to student-participants as they were the most involved and (their) MH drove the research. Furthermore, I used the early enrichment sessions to establish *rapport,* agree on research routines, select relevant themes, and gradually create a community of 'experts' committed to generating trustworthy knowledge.

---

[136] I came across a similar situation as a school council leader, when reporting to the headship team, they did not hesitate to remind me of students-councilors' status as stakeholders and therefore any requests were subject to executive interdiction quite regularly.

[137] Chapter 2's part 1 '*The politics of PAR'* made related links based on how PAR's commitments to democratic knowledge and our PAR *attitude* sustained our compliance with ethical research.

So! Does Schooling Influence MH?

I had three working RQs, which I addressed in the previous chapter; the first question addressed the influence of the exam-focused school/college; the second was about the 'roles' educators and students played in managing MH in and through the *dispositif*; the third opened to any education and studying related factors/drivers identified by the participants as influencing MH. In this final appraisal of the questions, for the sake of brevity, I consider the umbrella question, 'To what extent does schooling influence MH?

Following our participatory approach and mostly congruent findings from different layers of (thematic) analysis, I used three umbrella concepts (responsibilization, performance and transition) to condense the six themes. 'We' claimed that the sense of responsibilization that shapes failure in schooling-related performance evokes sentiments such as guilt, low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, disappointment, and un-motivation for a significant number of student-participants. The latter were consulted and involved directly but were also represented through the voices of parents, teachers and other college-leaders who assist students daily.

Despite policies acknowledging data about worsening adolescent MH, no links are made to the impact of governance that, questionably, hints at the 'survival of the normal' through instrumentalizations of concepts like MH, well-being and their associated character and resilience. Instead, these concepts become the pillar of a 'therapeutic education' that merges universal rights to acquire an education with schooling practices to acquire a *kind* of citizenry that help contain economic 'threats', nationally and internationally. The use of emotional language, or rhetoric around the care of the child and its education, are clear instances of political goal-scoring on behalf of successive governments who, on neoliberal ideological grounds, reframe what it means to be/come human nowadays through social engineering that blatantly minimizes government's responsibility while still governing 'at a distance'.

Schooling influences adolescent MH and there are children's rights implications which, as I suggested above, should inform the current parliamentary debate to reform the Mental Health Act 1983. Some adolescents manage to cope but coping is hardly the answer to long-term MH (Chow, 2016). While college life and learning opportunities seemed to be valued by participants, on reflection, a sense of disappointment remained, which I detected on inspection of participants'

'subjective configurations' presented in the online focus group and email responses. A crucial ambivalence for MH emerged: signs of resignation and resistance as forms of subjectivation. This means that, on the one hand, that student-participants' lack of trust in themselves and the institution hinders 'empowerment' in its basic version (the 'care of the self'), possibly affecting MH negatively; on the other, it stimulates coping mechanisms and resilient behaviour - perhaps a 'result' for governmental policies?

Final Remarks

The close relationship between adolescent MH and education takes multiple forms. Educational policies instrumentalize such a relationship for reasons that influence students' development in line with a vision of society underscored by competition, survival and a dubious notion of meritocracy. Outcome-focused policies mobilized rhetoric of governmentality through apportionment of responsibility and expected improvements of resilience, character, and performance while in transition. These have considerable influence on adolescent MH because the demands placed on students unequivocally represent life stressors. Policy documents did not fully address the roots of the problem despite superficial attempts to solve a crisis, avoiding saying that a focus on tests, assessments and exams to secure a place at (expensive) universities is taking its toll through the schooling *dispositif* – this is what the fieldwork unpicked through six main themes chosen by student-participants, reviewed by adult co-researchers. However, I am aware that upgrading policies by admitting to such an unethical demeanour would undermine the neoliberal educational apparatus hinged on questionable accountability measures, quantifying learning, and justifying ongoing testing that has taken centre stage at the expense of positive MH and, by extension, subject formation.

Opening to critical thinking and creativity as indicators of knowledge acquisition, building capacity for teacher assessment of oral presentation and opportunities for cross-curricular links would put students at the centre of the learning process and not regard them as mere casualties. Our student-participants 'understood' the relevance of having a measurement of their educational performance and, accordingly, that education was about responsibility (to study) and performance (in tests/exams) while in transition (to independence). However, they resented the exam regime

wholeheartedly, not as a sign of laziness or fear, but through the suspicion about the utility of high-frequency testing, which meant memorizing facts linked to a specification (see Freire's criticism of 'Banking' education). I witnessed this perceived ambivalence in the past 20 years in schools/colleges; policies merge *educare* with *educere (*Bass & Good, 2004) through labels like 'empowerment' and/or 'fulfil the potential', which become over-signified. Students seem to experience these labels or 'nudges' as contradictions of the schooling *dispositif,* which unavoidably, activate the take-up process (forced or intentional) of available subject positions or reject/resist them.

Therefore, because this research evaluated the influence of compulsory education on adolescent MH and how the two triangulated with the unwieldy notion of subjectivity, I call for future compulsory education to concentrate on the *interaction*, not the dualism, between the individual and society (Henriques et al., 1998, p.14), or the student and the school/college. Referring to the individual subject and the self-aware subject implies that the condition of being a subject is a result of societal changing discourses and practices (Henriques et al., 1998, p. xvii/3/20/23) influencing adolescence through compulsory education.

Finally, compulsory education's relationship with child-development theories has informed the pedagogical development of teacher training since its inception, often in a reductive manner. Hence, Walkerdine's illustration of child development speaks volumes and must underpin what future schooling entails:

> Perhaps the supreme irony is that the concern for individual freedom and the hope of naturalized rationality that could *save* mankind should have provided the condition to produce the *normalized child*. It is the empirical apparatus of *stages of development* which of all of Piaget's work has been mostly utilized in education. It is precisely this, and its insertion into a framework of biologized capacities, which ensures that the child is *produced* as an object of the scientific and pedagogical *gaze* by the very mechanisms intended to *produce* its *liberation*' (1998, p.191, my emphases).

Indeed, the notion of the *normal* child was thus established with the advent of mass education, aiding governmental welfare practices and control. Walkerdine's point reverberates with Bordieuan/Foucauldian critique of compulsory education and illustrates further the influence of schooling in the 'achievement-society' (Han, 2015). Perhaps, following Walkerdine (1998), the

purpose of (compulsory) education should be to *produce* the child on its own terms, without losing sight of its needs, wants and rights to emancipate itself. This is because, paraphrasing Sartre (1968), *something emerged through our participatory research, which <u>questioned</u> the processes that have made our school/college-environment what it is today. That is what I would call the extension of the field of possibilities. Do not give up*!'

This thesis, and Walkerdine's admonishment configure the *possibilities* for an education that, despite the risks of unfavourable influences on adolescent MH, still opens *the field of possibilities* for new policies, resistance and emancipation for long-term well-being and positive MH.

Appendices

Appx. 1 – Identity map and related activities (from Di Emidio, 2018)

IT'S YOUR TURN!
(STUDENT LED)

1. **Identity map:** who am I? what/who makes me?
2. **n Happiness Education map**: What/Who/When/Why/hoW of people and processes
3. **Problem Solving Tree:** thinking tree

ISSUES TREE

TRUNK – ISSUE
ROOTS – CAUSES
BRANCHES – EFFECTS
FRUIT – SOLUTIONS

ISSUE

EFFECTS

CAUSES

EXAMPLE OF PAR ACTIVITIES
(CO-RESEARCHING):

UN/HAPPINESS IN SCHOOL

Starting 'analytic interest'

'INTERVIEW WHEEL' – (CO-PRODUCED)

EDUCATION
RELATIONSHIPS
PEERS TEACHERS TAs
LEARNING
UN/HAPPINESS IN SCHOOL
TESTS EXAMS
FAVOURITE SUBJECT
SCHOOL BUILDING

DATA FR M:

1. Identity map
2. n Happiness Education map
3. Problem Solving Tree

Appx. 2 – Key educational policies between 2011 and 2018 – see weblinks in references

Most documents were selected from a variety of sources: by exploring the Gov.UK website, by contacting safeguarding teams from a LEA, and by contacting two schools' deputy heads. Such cross-searching enabled comparison between recent, wide-ranging, guidance and their implementation. The data was then grouped per a-d):

a) Four starting, wide range, documents (one setting out the coalition agenda on MH, 2011, aiming at tackling it in all spheres of society; one offering further operationalization through the NHS, 2016; two offering ongoing reflections and guidelines:

- **2011. No health without mental health. A cross-government mental health outcomes strategy for people of all ages.**

- **2016. Five year forward view for MH for the NHS in England.**

- **2017. A Framework for mental health research.**

- **March 2019. NICEimpact – Mental Health.**

b) Five documents which were wide range too but with a specific focus on young people's MH; this helped narrow down my interest and/or age group:

- **2012. A framework of outcomes for young people'**

- **March 2016. The Survey of the Mental Health of Children and YP in England' – responses to the consultation on survey content**

- **2017. Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision: a Green Paper.**

- **November 2017. Mental Health of Children and Young People in England. Summary of key findings**

- **July 2018. Government Response to the Consultation on Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision: a Green Paper and Next Steps.**

c) Two which were wide ranging too but with a specific focus on young people's MH <u>and</u> schools/colleges:

- **March 2015. Promoting children and young people's emotional health and wellbeing. A whole school and college approach.**

- **February 2019. One of the largest mental health trials launches in schools.**

d) Four documents that were specific statutory guidance for schools:

- **March 2016. Mental Health and Behaviour in schools.**

- **August 2017. Supporting mental health in schools and colleges. Summary Report**

- **November 2018. Mental Health and Behaviour in schools.**

- **October 2018. Mental Health and Wellbeing provision in schools – Review of published policies and information.**

Appx. 3 – Interview tasks

- all participants completed these tasks at the start of the interview

Task 1: *as you did in the college-life questionnaire, please fill in the statements below:*

There is no agreed Mental Health definition; some use a spectrum, which means humans go from total emotional pain (when they cannot function and help themselves and others) to blissful wellbeing (when they can fully function for themselves and others). **Based on such descriptions, please** fill in the gaps using one of the options given and **explain your choices**:

S1. a. My general mental health .... a problem.

      is not at all   is not much of   is sometimes   is mostly   is very much

S2 b. My general mental health .... limit my SOCIAL college life.

      does not   does sometimes   does very much

S3 c. My general mental health .... limit my ACADEMIC college life.

      does not   does sometimes   does very much

S4. d. I feel ....confident about my future mental health.

      not at all   not much   sometimes   mostly   very much

Task 2: Themes' ranking: *Again, as you did in the questionnaire, rank the themes (see cards) in order of importance – 1= mostly affect my MH in college and 6= least (you can talk through all of them, or we shall focus on the one/s that interest you the most).*

_____ **External factors**

_____ **Money/Resources**

_____ **Exam pressure**

_____ **Relationships**

_____ **College environment**

_____ **Motivation**

Appx. 4 – Attendance register

– names removed but ID code kept under the orange headings

Tuesday

Tuesday	17-Sep	24-Sep	01-Oct	08-Oct	15-Oct	29-Oct	06-Nov	12-Nov	19-Nov	10-Dec	07-Jan	14-Jan	21-Jan	INT	INT	visito	visito	25-Feb	####
S0216813	n/a	n/a	IN	excused	IN	IN	IN	IN	IN	ABS	IN	IN	IN					EXCUSED	IN	IN
S0220520	n/a	n/a	IN	IN	IN	IN	ABS	IN	excused	IN	ABS	IN	ABS					EXCUSED	IN	IN
S0188247	n/a	IN	IN	ABS	IN	IN	IN	IN	excused	IN	IN	IN						ABS	IN
S0224147	n/a	IN	IN	IN	excused	IN	IN	IN	IN	ABS	ABS	excused	IN					EXCUSED	IN	IN
S0220950	n/a	IN	ABS	IN	excused	ABS	ABS	IN	IN	ABS	IN	IN						ABS	ABS

Wednesday

Wednesday	##	##	##	##	##	##	##	##	##	##	##	##	##	##	###	####	INT	INT	VIS 1	VIS 1	###	#####	04-
S0216862	IN	IN	exc	IN	IN	exc	IN	IN	IN	IN	exc	IN	IN									IN	IN	IN
S0216280	IN	IN	IN	IN	IN	ABS	IN	ABS	ABS	exc	IN	ABS										IN	ABS	IN
S0216452	IN	IN	IN	IN	IN	exc	IN	IN	ABS	ABS	exc	IN	IN									IN	EXCUS	IN
S0219270	IN	IN	IN	IN	IN	IN	ABS	IN	IN	exc	IN	IN	ABS	ABS								IN	IN	IN
S0216732	IN	ABS	IN	IN	IN	ABS	IN	IN	exc	IN	ABS	ABS	IN									EXCU	EXCUS	ABS
S0227476	n/a	IN	IN	IN	ABS	IN	IN	IN	IN	ABS	ABS	IN	ABS									IN	IN	ABS
S0218144	n/a	n/a	n/a	IN	IN	ABS	IN	IN	ABS	ABS	ABS	IN	IN						EXCUSED			IN	ABS	IN
S0233083	n/a	n/a	n/a	IN	IN	IN	IN	ABS	IN	IN	IN	IN	IN	IN								IN	IN	IN
S0233079	n/a	n/a	n/a	IN	ABS	IN	ABS	IN	IN	IN	IN	IN	IN									IN	IN	IN
S0239903	n/a	n/a	n/a	IN	ABS	IN	IN	IN	IN	ABS	ABS	IN	IN									IN	IN	ABS
S0218767	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	IN	IN	IN	IN	exc	IN	IN	ABS	IN									IN	IN	IN
S0241986	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	IN	IN	IN									IN	IN	ABS
S0217830	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	IN

TEMPORARY participants

	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O
S0190124			1 SESSION										
S0216190			3 SESSIONS										
S0239385			2 SESSIONS										
S0217376	ATTENDED MOST SESSIONS TILL DEC. THEN LEFT THE												
S0232283	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	IN		
S0224009	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	IN	ABS		
S0221972	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	IN	IN	ABS	ABS		
AC16357	IN	IN	IN	excused	IN	ABS	ABS	ABS	IN	ABS	ABS	ABS	LEFT COLLEGE
S0218390	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	IN	IN	IN	ABS	IN	IN		LEFT GROUP as got a job	
S0228599	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	IN	ABS	IN	IN	ABS	ABS	excused	ABS	LEFT GROUP
S0219784	IN	IN	IN	IN	IN	IN	IN	excused	excused	IN	IN	ABS	ABS	STOPPED ATTENDING FROM MID JAN.
S0221203	THESE LAST 3 WERE KEEN TO ATTEND BUT COULD NOT EVENTUALLY SORT THEIR OTHER ARRANGEMENTS, AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEWS THOUGH												
S0216089													
AC20691													

Appx. 5 – Summary of common answers for each question

(using TOP two ratings of 'mostly' and 'very much so')

External factors (NB: 2x Qs are missing as analysed separately - Fig 3)	%
1. Do you think lack of time for HW/revision affects your mental health negatively?	42
2. Do you think lack of time for yourself affects your mental health negatively?	58
3. Do you think that having less freedom for self-growth and exploration affects your mental health negatively?	54
4. Do you think physical stress affects your mental health negatively?	64
5. Do you think poor sleep affects your mental health negatively?	66
6. Does living in a 'performance' society, that expects people to be 'successful', impacts positively on your mental health (MH)?	38
Money/resources	**%**
1. Do you sustain your educational life by working part-time?	27
2. Do you have access to educational resources such a quiet place where to study?	78
3. Do you have access to educational resources such as a computer/laptop?	96
4. Do you have access to educational resources such as a private tutor?	7
5. Do you feel that access to such resources has made a positive difference in your educational experience?	55
6. Do your personal financial circumstances and access to resources affect your current educational and mental health positively?	31
Exam pressure	**%**
1. Do you think that ongoing exam preparation impact on your mental health positively?	18
2. Do you think that the prospect of exam 'failure' has ever had a negative impact on your mental health?	81
3. Did you think that parental pressure to succeed at GCSE impacted on your mental health negatively?	33
4. Do you think that parental pressure to succeed at A-Level is impacting on your mental health negatively?	45
5. Throughout your education, have you felt teacher pressure in relation to exams impacted on your mental health positively?	18
6. Do you think that learning in a school/college environment is just about passing exams?	63
7. Do you think learning should be linked to exam success?	19

8. Do you think exam pressure to perform (grades) affects your learning experience and MH positively?	**31**
9. Do you feel that routine tests or mock exams stress you out unnecessarily?	**55**
10. Do you feel that compulsory exams stress you out unnecessarily?	**61**
	54
11. Did your secondary school put you under the necessary pressure to better perform at GCSE?	
12. Has compulsory education put you under unnecessary pressure to better perform at your final A-Level exams?	**64**
Relationships	**%**
1. Do you have positive peer relationship at college?	**73**
2. Did you have positive peer relationships at secondary school?	**65**
3. Do you care about your peers' opinion/judgment at college?	**37**
	41
4. Did you care about your peers' opinion/judgment at secondary school?	
School/College-Environment	**%**
1. Do you feel that the educational environments (i.e. the buildings, the classrooms) have had a positive impact on your mental health?	30
2. Do you feel that rules and expectations in a college or school environment are a major source of unnecessary stress for you?	37
3. Do you think the overall atmosphere in college is positive?	66
Motivation	**%**
1. Have you normally felt motivated in your schooling journey?	**31**
2. Do you feel motivated in your education at the present?	**24**
3. Throughout your education, have teachers normally motivated you?	**28**
4. Do your A-Level subjects motivate you?	**37**
5. Does the future motivate you? E.g. going to Uni, getting straight into employment.	**52**
6. Are you able to motivate yourself?	**25**
7. Do you feel 'responsible' for your current attainment/achievement in college?	**91**

Appx. 6 – Reflexive Thematization photos

– photo 1: in the middle of the table examples of reflections/brainstorms carried out at the start of the year; externally, student-participants extract possible codes to then make themes. This process was repeated several times over different tasks and helped create the questionnaire. Photos 2 and 3 are just magnified examples of 1.

Photo1:
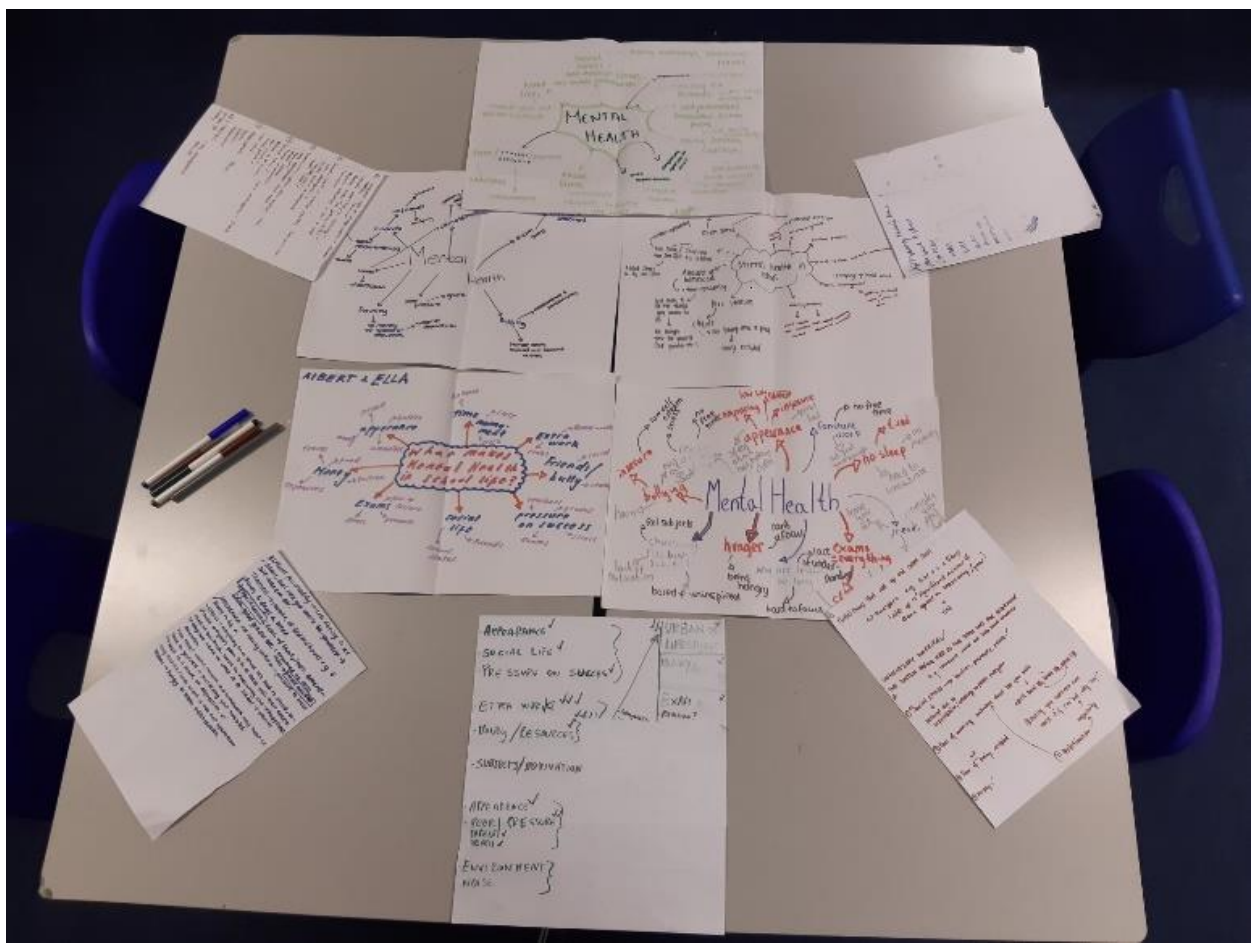
Appx. 7 – Interview questions' criteria

I created a set of semi-structured interview questions following a scheme suggested by King and Horrocks (2010):

1. Experience/behavior

2. Opinion/values

3. Feelings

4. Knowledge

5. Sensory

The interview initially comprised two tasks; in the first task, student-participants completed four statements, which focused their attention on their perceived (current) MH status (how it affected their social and academic lives) and how it might affect their future MH.

The second task was the theme ranking, taken from Q47 of the questionnaire; this task helped recall the six main themes and assess their importance four months after their creation. The ranking would have given us an indicative base for starting the interview – i.e. I would ask students to run through their ranking in whichever order, and I would add/build with specific questions accordingly – see following **Appx. 8** (in the first 3-4 interviews I often referred to King and Horrocks' 1-5 scheme until I almost memorized the process). Finally, the interview would end with Q46 of the questionnaire, asking about 'how well' compulsory schooling had served them.

Appx. 8 – Student Interview BACK UP questions for semi-structured interviews

External Factors

Experience/behavior: Which external factors affect/ed, your MH neg and pos in school/college?

Opinion/values: why are you selecting them?

Feelings: how do/did you feel……… (interviewer chooses one for each factor presented)

Knowledge: do you know if this factor(s) affects others too? Why so?

Sensory: depending on the 'factor', interviewer tests the sensory aspect of experience (hear, smell)

Money and Resources.

Experience/behavior: have money and resources made a difference to your MH? **And:** which resources are required to meet school/colleges' demands? Are you willing to search them out? Do you know how to find them? (NB: remember the careers officer's point, plus other in-college routes which students do not take up, by missing tutor time??)

Opinion/values: why yes/no? what is the best way to deal with material deprivation?

Feelings: how do/did you feel……… (interviewer chooses accordingly based on responses so far)

Knowledge: do you know if others in college are affected? Do you notice it in college? Did you know anyone in secondary whose MH was affected by such deprivation? Which resources are expected to meet college's demands, and if not, are you willing to search them out?

Sensory: depending on the response, interviewer tests sensory aspects (hear, smell etc)

Exam pressure

Experience/behavior: exam pressure is the theme where participants asked the most questions, for good and bad. Has EP made a difference to your MH and educational experience? Do you think you'd have had a different experience of learning without such pressures?

Opinion/values: why yes/no? what is the best way to deal with such pressures?

Feelings: how do/did you feel, or how do you respond to…. (Interviewer chooses accordingly)

Knowledge: what do you know about the impact of EP on MH? do you know if others in college are affected by EP? Did you know anyone in secondary whose MH was affected negatively/positively by EP?

Sensory: depending on the response, interviewer tests sensory aspects (hear, smell etc).

<mark>Relationships</mark>

Experience/behavior: this theme crosses over with some of the themes from above. Can you tell me about your teacher/peer/parent relationships? and how -or if- they influence your MH in college? You can also compare each one with your time at secondary school.

Opinion/values: why are relationships so (or not so) important for your MH?

Feelings: how do/did you feel, or how do you respond to......... (interviewer chooses accordingly)

Knowledge: do you know if others in college are affected by 'relationships'? How?

Sensory: depending on the response, interviewer tests sensory aspects (hear, smell etc).

<mark>School and College Environment</mark>

Experience/behavior: (this theme has two dimensions, one purely factual, the other a bit more abstract, as it is based on perception of experiences; it also crosses over with some of the themes from above). Can you tell me about your school building and how does it compare to the colleges? Did/do they influence your MH?

Opinion/values: are the school ethos and rules that govern education important to consider for your overall MH?

Feelings: how do/did you feel, or how do you respond to......... (interviewer chooses accordingly)

Knowledge: do you know if others in college are affected by the 'school-environment' as I broke it down to you? You could recall secondary school experiences too.

Sensory: depending on the response, interviewer tests sensory aspects (hear, smell etc).

<mark>Motivation</mark>

Experience/behavior: this theme seem very popular, can you summarize your motivation/s? For example:which subjects motivate you the most? Teachers? Aspiration? Responsibility? Future in general?

Opinion/values: should motivation can from within (self-motivation, intrinsic) or be stimulated from outside (extrinsic)? **And (*2)**: do you think that college life is key to your future?

Feelings: how do/did you feel, or how do you respond to……… (interviewer chooses accordingly following answers from above, though this should apply to all: How has your motivation changed over the years? Or has it remained stable?)

Knowledge: do you know if other students manage motivation differently from you? If so, what does it say about you?

Sensory: depending on the response, interviewer tests sensory aspects (hear, smell etc).

==**Final for all:**==

This is the million dollar question I ask to everyone, you can't get it wrong, nor right, but you can hint at something which when I collect all the answers might reveal something interesting/useful:

Do you feel the education system has served you well in the past 12 years?

How similar or how different would (student name) be now had (student name) not been formally educated?

==Add-up==: **Final for all**

(linked to motivation – added recently when students did not seem to fully engage with the question above):

1. Do you look forward to the future? Both immediate and long term?
2. Do you feel that the demands of life (as you know them or perceive them now) are worth to invest on?
3. Are you curious about life?
4. Do you feel life is 'meaningful' after this initial, formal, educational stage?

Appx. 9 – Problem-Solving-Tree plus summary help

– the tree metaphor fed into other activities: trunk=problem/ roots=causes/ branches=consequences/ fruit=solutions)
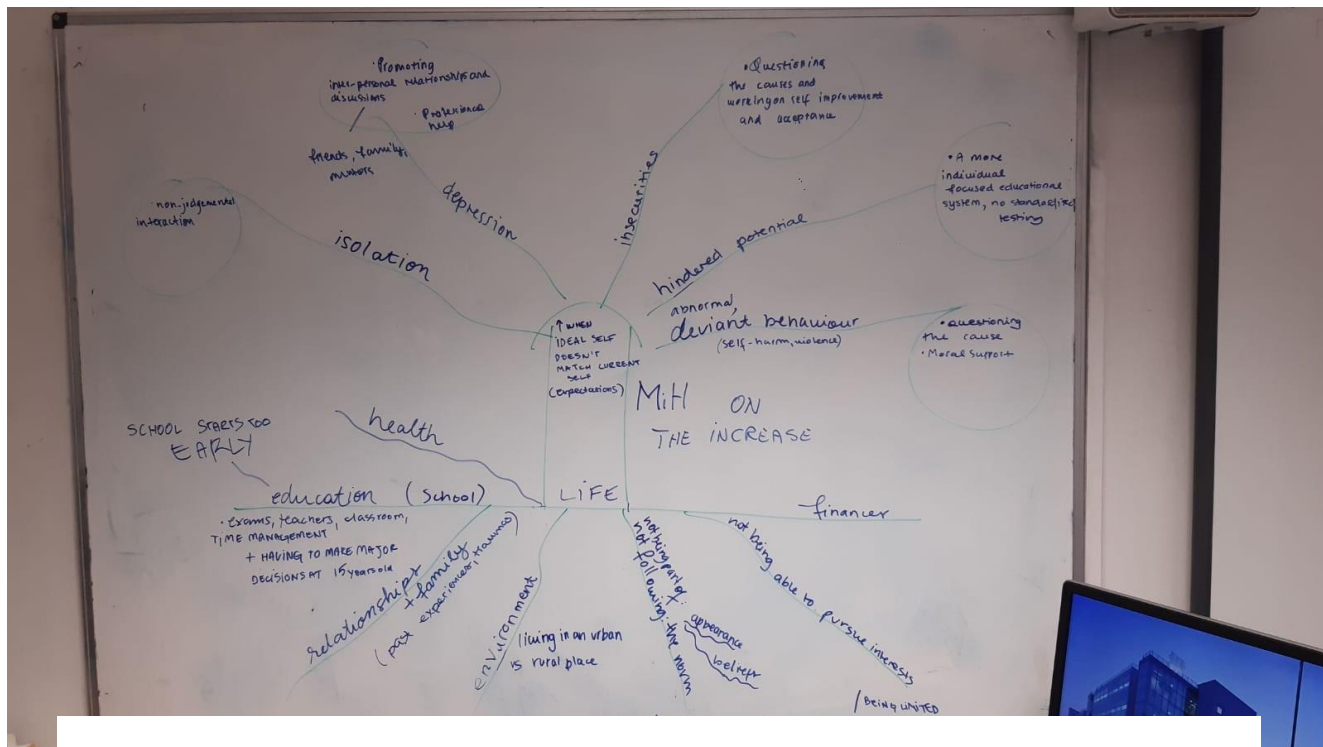
Here is a summary of your brainstorms over the last 2 weeks:

Positives of Education	Grey area	Negative
1. Socialization/ 'meet like minded people' 2. Qualification 3. Useful/ Fun 4. Practice certain skills/useful 5. Opportunities/ Life experience 6. Self development 7. Some inspirational teachers 8. Nice school environment 9. 'Gives foundations to develop your passions and skills'	a) Competitive b) Stressful c) Some stuff not needed d) Time consuming e) Knowledge of the world/Learning f) Social rules/fit in g) Teaching of values/morals h) Money/ Careers i) Perception of curriculum, type of schools /varying expectations between primary and secondary j) Necessary for 'getting a job' k) GCSE focused on memory l) 'Curriculum focus to open paths in your life' m) 'Be with same age group people, which is unlikely later in life'	A. Tiring/Boring/useless/too difficult/ consuming exam pressure B. Discrimination/Inequalities/biased C. Always a right way and a wrong way / 'one' right way D. Too Eurocentric E. Conformity (uniform, core subjects) F. Exam pressure G. Peer pressure H. Parental pressure I. Mental illness (sleep deprivation, depressing, self esteem) J. Too linear/uninspiring K. 'All about being judged' – teachers, peers, society L. 'Detached from reality' M. School-environment too stressful N. Too short-term gain focus

Appx. 10 – Q46 of the questionnaire – reused in the interview

Q46 - Do you feel the education system has served you well in the past 12 years?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	not at all	13.51%	10
2	not much	29.73%	22
3	sometimes	37.84%	28
4	mostly	14.86%	11
5	very much so	4.05%	3
	Total	100%	74

Appx. 11 – Breakdown of Area 3 and RQ1/2/3

Area 3. Post Fieldwork PAR analysis	3	119
1 - ONLINE Focus Group	2	2
2 - EMAIL	1	99
RQ1. Does an exam-focused curriculum and pedagogy affect adolescents' MH	1	22
Exam Pressure and Motivation	1	2
Stress management	1	14
RQ2. What role could educators, and students themselves, play to manage adolescents' M	1	49
Family	1	3
Peers	1	4
Student	1	26
Teachers	1	2
RQ3. What other factors and events influence adolescents MH in the schoolcollege-enviro	1	28
change of year 12 and GCSE	1	15
approach to stress	1	7
lifestyle	1	5
practice-pedagogy	1	5
subjects	1	2
keep for year 13	1	13
learning environment	1	3
lifestyle	1	2
own assertiveness in practice	1	3
relationships	1	5
subjects	1	4
Subjectivation-Subjectification	1	18
conduct of conduct	1	12
resistance	1	5

Appx. 12 – New signs going up after a poor OFSTED

Appx. 13 – Topics breakdown and Data Collection Chart

– this is a record of college enrichment sessions which provided the weekly point of contact with student-participants. In yellow the bits cancelled due to Covid 19 lockdowns

Data 1 – from Sept	W1 (16Sept)	W2/W3	W4	W5	W6	W7	W8	W9	W10	W11	W12-13 (Christmas)
Focus group/ Enrich-ment	Intro/ consent forms/ debrief/ expectations – both ways.	MH: unpick & understand concept; prior knowledge& future knowledge -recorded	Doc "Schooling the world" (plus discussion and analysis)	Theme generator 1: MH's and education – generate preliminary themes in small groups -recorded	Theme generator 2: MH and college – pre-themes' unpicking as whole group -recorded	Survey/ planning 1 – Qs making	Survey planning 2 – finalize Qs -recorded	'Storm and stress' podcast 1 followed by discussion -recorded	'Storm and stress' podcast 2 followed by discussion -recorded	'Storm and stress' podcast 3 followed by discussion -recorded	'Storm and stress' podcast 4 followed by discussion And final wrap up with 'Problem Solving Tree'

Data 1 continued	W14	W15	W16	W17	W18	W19 (mid-March)	W20	W21	W22	W23	W24-25
Focus group/ Enrich-ment	Recap/ Reflexion/ Planning ahead WITH students	Carry out W13's Problem solving tree as a mid-term reflection on K&U (see photo)	Visitor 1: From Mind/ Charity – focus on students' views on adolescents' MH intervention for locals	SurveyS: (teachers/ students) analysis – get ideas to explore further with teachers and parents and leaders	Doc part 1 on MH issues in an adolescent psych ward	Doc part 2 on MH issues in an adolescent psych ward	Visitor 2 (Sana M – Career paths without a degree and impacts on MH and WB)	Visitor 3 (Jo L – adolesc MH education/ See links to PAR's mid-term reflection)	Debate several issues to wrap up key themes: e.g. adolesc MH a real crisis? The 'snowflake' generation?	Film: 'Detachment'- students choose a debate focus, framing it within key themes	Start sharing research findings / plan executive summary / plan Q/A panel

Data 2 – from Jan	W14	W15	W16	W17	W18	W19	W20	W21	W22	W23	W24
Students Interviews	1-2-1 interview	1-2-1 interview	1-2-1 interview	1-2-1 interview	1-2-1 interview	1-2-1 interview	1-2-1 interview	1-2-1 interview	1-2-1 interview	1-2-1 interview	1-2-1 interview

Data 3 – From Feb	W18	W19 - mid-March	W20	W21	W22- Approx. Easter	W23	W24	W25	W26	W27	W28 Mid July
Parent FG + Interviews	Ongoing Interviews from February till July, based on availability	(same as b4)	Same as b4 PLUS start MY Thematic Analysis of data collected	Thematic Analysis	Thematic Analysis	AMR plus Transfer	AMR plus Transfer PLUS teacher's survey out	AMR plus Transfer	Teachers' Survey analysis	Share findings (with students and expert panel) 1x FG	Share findings (with teachers and parents) 1x FG
Teacher FG + Interviews	(Same as above)										
Part. Obs:	Agreed between March-June										

Appx. 14 – Summary of participants' paired frequency of theme ranking (interviews)

Students (N16)

Paired themes	1st and 2nd	3rd and 4th	5th and 6th
Motivation	**11**	3	2
Ext Factors	**8**	4	4
Relationships	6	**9**	1
Exam Pressure	5	**9**	2
College-environment	2	4	**10**
Money/resources	**0**	3	**13**

Parents (N9)

Paired themes	1st and 2nd	3rd and 4th	5th and 6th
Ext Factors	**5**	3	0
Relationships	**4**	3	0
Motivation	3	**3**	2
Exam Pressure	3	**2**	3
College-environment	2	2	**1**
Money/resources	0	1	**1**

Teachers (N4)

Paired themes	1st and 2nd	3rd and 4th	5th and 6th
Relationships	**3**	1	2
Ext Factors	**1**	2	**0**
Exam Pressure	2	**1**	0
Motivation	1	**3**	**0**
College-environment	1	0	**4**
Money/resources	1	0	**3**

School Leaders (N5)

Paired themes	1st and 2nd	3rd and 4th	5th and 6th
Exam Pressure	**5**	1	0
Motivation	**3**	0	0
Relationships	2	**3**	0

Ext Factors	**1**	**1**	**0**
College-environment	**0**	1	**3**
Money/resources	**0**	2	**1**

Totals (N34)

Paired themes	**1st and 2nd**	**3rd and 4th**	**5th and 6th**
Motivation	**18**	8	5
External factors	**16**	13	4
Relationships	14	**17**	1
Exam Pressure	14	**14**	5
Money/Resources	**0**	6	**18**
College-Environ.	5	7	**16**

Breakdown:

Students (N16)		**Parents (N9)**		**Teachers (N4)**		**School Leaders (N5)**	
Paired themes	**1st/2nd**	**Paired themes**	**1st/2nd**	**Paired themes**	**1st/2nd**	**Paired themes**	**1st/2nd**
Motivation Ext Factors	**11** **8**	Ext Factors Relationships	**5** **4**	Relationships Exam Pressure	**3** **2**	Exam Pressure Motivation	**5** **3**
Relationships Exam Pressure	**6** **5**	Motivation Exam Pressure	**3** **3**	Motivation Ext Factors	**1** **1**	Relationships Ext Factors	**2** **2**
College-environment Money/ resources	**2** **0**	College-environment Money/ resources	**2** **0**	College-environment Money/ resources	**1** **1**	College-environment Money/ resources	**0** **0**

Appx. 15 – Extra advert for boys' recruitment

Appx. 16 – Students' responses to the email

- in yellow reused statements from the first two columns because related and for emphasis

RQ1. Does an **exam-focused** curriculum and pedagogy influence adolescents' **MH** – **codes**: exam pressure and motivation; stress management.	RQ 2. What **role** should educators, and **students** themselves, play to manage adolescents' MH in the college-environment – codes: family; peers; students, teachers	RQ 3a. What **other factors** and events influence adolescents MH in the school/college-environment? – codes (focused on the **'change** task'): approach to stress; lifestyle; relationships	RQ 3b. What **other factors** and events influence adolescents MH in the school/college-environment? – codes (focused on the '**keep** task'): approach to stress; lifestyle; practice-pedagogy; subjects; environments; relationships; conduct-of-conduct; resistance; subjection
I would also lessen the amount of **stress I put on myself.** Exams can't always determine the intelligence of an individual.	I would have **slept more and tried to stress less** as I think these factors really impacted **my mental health** due to the amount of pressure I was under.	==I would have **slept more and tried to stress less** as I think these factors really impacted **my mental health** due to the amount of pressure I was under.==	==I would **keep the fact that I made my own revision plans instead of listening to what other people pressured me to do**==. I was proud of what I achieved and that I did it on my own.
I would change **exam pressure and motivation**. Both things correlate as I found that the more pressure that was put	I **would keep the fact that I made my own revision plans instead of listening to what other people pressured me to do**. I was proud of what I	I also would have **ended certain friendships** earlier due to the toxic nature and how it was keeping me away	==I would also **keep the way I structured my revision**== as I stuck to a timetable and found a way to concentrate without

on us about exams then the less motivation I would have to revise	achieved and that I did it on my own.	from self-care and studies sometimes.	overwhelming myself or cramming
I would keep my external factors because I feel like even though school was **stressful at times**, I managed to keep my life out of school the same. I didn't have much time for personal growth but I still managed to keep a good lifestyle and social life.	I would also **keep the way I structured my revision** as I stuck to a timetable and found a way to concentrate without overwhelming myself or cramming.	I would **change my method of learning** and revision. Instead of just memorising a plethora of content, I would focus on making sure I understand the all ideas being taught.	I would **keep the learning environment in class for Gcses since it increased my motivation further promoting hard work**
I would change **how I deal with revision and the exam stress** as I feel like I did not put enough effort into many of the subjects like GCSEs and some mocks for A levels	I would **change my method of learning** and revision. **Instead of just memorising** a plethora of content, I would focus on making sure I understand the all ideas being taught.	I would also lessen the amount of **stress I put on myself. Exams** can't always determine the intelligence of an individual.	If I was to **keep two things it would the school that I went and the way I grew and changed to become a new person.** This is because the schools that I went to really allowed me to come out of my shell and allow me to grow as a person as well as *becoming* a new and more matured person when I

			started my first year of A Levels.
Another thing is **keeping motivated** during the very stressful times even though it was hard would have been better and I should have looked at **who and what motivates** me the most.	I would **change some of the situations I got myself in to and some of the people I called friends.** This is because a lot of what I did was a **waste of time** and could've easily been spent doing so many other things that would've been more worthwhile.	I would **change some of the situations I got myself in to and some of the people I called friends.** This is because a lot of what I did was a waste of time and could've easily been spent doing so many other things that would've been more worthwhile.	I **wouldn't change the subjects I chose as they were all enjoyable and pushed me out of my comfort zone.**
I would spend less time **worrying** about other people, and I would spend a lot more time revising.	I would also **lessen the amount of stress I put on myself.** Exams can't always determine the intelligence of an individual.	I would choose **exam pressure and motivation**. Both things correlate as I found that the more pressure that was put on us about exams then the less motivation I would have to revise. **I wish teachers at school would've encouraged us to be motivated rather than put pressure on us to just get good results.** The focus seems to be more on the exam results than making students motivated to work hard and do well for	Two things that I would keep would be my relationships and external factors over the past four years. I feel that throughout GCSEs and A-levels I've had strong relationships around me so I've always felt very supported. **Without those relationships, school would've been much harder** and I'm grateful I was able to share the stressful experiences of school with my friends. I would keep my external factors because I feel like

		themselves. **So I would change how much exam pressure was put on us and instead put that energy towards motivation and inspiration**	even though school was stressful at times, I managed to **keep my life out of school the same**. I didn't have much time for personal growth but I still managed to keep a good lifestyle and social life
I would change my **attitude towards my gcses** because I was too relaxed about it. I would also change one of my choices, **I chose a subject at a level that I do not enjoy** for one which I do enjoy	I wish **teachers at school would've encouraged us to be motivated rather than put pressure on us to just get good results**. The focus seems to be more on the exam results than making students motivated to work hard and do well for themselves. So I would change how much exam pressure was put on us and instead put that energy towards motivation and inspiration	I would change **how I deal with revision and the exam stress** as I feel like I did not put enough effort into many of the subjects like GCSEs and some mocks for A levels	Another thing is keeping motivated during the very stressful times even though it was hard would have been better and I should have looked at who and what motivates me the most.
One thing I would change is that we would **not do exams at all**, since I merely think that this is only to test our	I feel that throughout GCSEs and A-levels **I've had strong relationships** around me so I've always felt very supported. Without those relationships, school would've been much	Another thing is keeping motivated during the very stressful times even though it was hard would have been better and I should have	Another thing I would keep is the freedom and the individuality in this college as it allows me to grow.

memory and not our practical skills.	harder and I'm grateful I was able to share the stressful experiences of school with my friends.	looked at who and what motivates me the most.	
I would probably change the amount of **pressure I put on myself** for anything - I think that this pressure is coming from me wanting to do my best in everything I do, in addition to **expectations from family and friends**. Although, no one has ever told me that if I was to not get a certain grade or do something and achieve a set result on that thing - I would tell myself that I would be letting them down or disappointing them.	I would change the way I deal with revision and the exam stress as I feel like I did not put enough effort into many of the subjects like GCSEs and some mocks for A levels	I would spend **less time worrying about other people,** and I would spend a lot more time revising.	**I would spend less time worrying about other people, and I would spend a lot more time revising**.
I would keep my a-level choices. Sometimes when things get **a little stressful or too much** especially with online	Another thing is **keeping motivated during the very stressful times** even though it was hard would have been	I would **change my attitude towards my gcses** because I was too relaxed about it. I would also change one of my choices, I chose a subject	**keep many of the relationships that I have with family, friends, and teachers as I believe it has shaped me a lot**. Another thing I would

school, **it feels like I'm trapped and that there is nothing else in my life** other than classes and school and homework, and because of this sometimes **I neglect myself** and the people around me. But I have worked on this and I think I've become better at balancing my life in and out of college.	better and I should have looked at who and what motivates me the most.	at a level that I do not enjoy for one which I do enjoy	keep is the freedom and the individuality in this college as it allows me to grow.
(2016-2020/age 13-17), I would probably change my approach to GCSEs, firstly. This is because I sometimes feel as though **I could have performed better than I did**.	**I would keep be many of the relationships that I have with family, friends, and teachers as I believe it has shaped me a lot. Another thing I would keep is the freedom and the individuality in this college as it allows me to grow.**	One thing I would change is that we would **not do exams at all**, since I merely think that this is only to test our memory and not our practical skills. Another thing I would change is the national curriculum since there are many things wrong with it, for instance, it is very Eurocentric. I would've liked to know different perspectives in history or English for example.	**I would keep the friends i have and the stuff I experienced.**

However, I also wish that I could **change the state of my mental healt**h at the time of GCSEs. I was extremely **anxious of failing** which caused a lot of **stress and panic**. So, I wish I could have calmed down and just tried my best rather than losing motivation and stressing out.	I would **spend less time worrying** about other people, and I would **spend a lot more time revising.**	<mark>Change **the amount of pressure I put on myself for anything** - I think that this pressure is coming from me wanting to do my best in everything I do, in addition to expectations from family and friends. Although, no one has ever told me that if I was to not get a certain grade or do something and achieve a set result on that thing - i wound tell myself that i would be letting them down or disappointing them</mark>	<mark>Something that I would **keep the same are my a-level choices**. Sometimes when things get a little stressful or too much especially with online school, it feels like I'm trapped and that there is nothing else in my life other that classes and school and homework, and because of this **sometimes I neglect myself and the people around me**. But I have worked on this and I think I've become better at balancing my life in and out of college. I would keep my a-level chooses the same because they have allowed me to find what I am really passionate about which makes me feel happy and it also allows me to help others.</mark>
I wish **teachers at school would've encouraged us to be motivated rather than put pressure on us to just get good**	I would **keep the friends i have** and the stuff I experienced.	Another thing that I would change if I could would be to be <mark>more open to change in my life and work on things that I am fearful of</mark>. For instance,	In addition to this, I would also **not change the opportunities that I have taken up over the last four years.** For example, I did a 10 week

results. The focus seems to be more on the exam results than making students motivated to work hard and do well for themselves. So I would change how much exam pressure was put on us and instead put that energy towards motivation and inspiration		when anything changes in my life - having to start college, move house, lose relationships with people etc. I tend to completely shut down, because due to past experiences which I feel like have triggered this, I have lost many people in my life and for some reason I believe that it has all been caused by the change that has occurred, not allowing myself to realise that it is a part of life and growing up and that sometimes people should not really be a part of our lives and that we all grow and evolve individually.	internship with a global creative company where I was allowed to work on huge projects and was able to meet so many people in the creative field and learn so much about how much goes into producing anything, whether that it's designing prosthetics, billboards, brands etc
	I would **change my attitude towards my gcses because I was too relaxed about it**. I would also change one of my choices, I chose a subject at a level that I do not enjoy for one which I do enjoy	==(2016-2020/age 13-17), I would probably **change my approach to GCSEs**, firstly. This is because I sometimes feel as though I could have performed better than I did==	The first thing that I **would keep would be the choices of my GCSEs and A Levels**.
	I would probably **change the amount of pressure I put on myself**	==However, I also wish that I could **change the state of my mental**==	Another thing that I would ==keep would be the friends that I have==

	for anything - I think that this pressure is coming from me wanting to do my best in everything I do, in addition to expectations from family and friends. Although, no one has ever told me that if I was to not get a certain grade or do something and achieve a set result on that thing - i wound tell myself that i would be letting them down or disappointing them	==health at the time of GCSEs==. ==This is due to the fact that I feel as though **I was extremely anxiou**s of failing which caused a lot of stress and panic. So, I wish I could have calmed down and just tried my best rather than losing motivation and stressing out.==	==currently== got at this particular point in my life. I have lost friends throughout the last 4 years, but with every lost I have had a gain and I now have friends in my life that I know I will have forever, and I hope that will not change.
	I would keep my a-level choices. Sometimes when things get a little stressful or too much especially with online school, it feels like I'm trapped and that there is nothing else in my life other that classes and school and homework, and because of this sometimes I neglect myself and the people around me. But I have worked on this and I think I've become better at balancing my life in and out of college.		

	I **would keep the creative field** and learn so much about how much goes into producing anything, whether that it's designing prosthetics, billboards, brands etc.		
	(2016-2020/age 13-17), I would probably change **my approach to GCSEs,** firstly. This is because I sometimes feel as though I could have performed better than I did		
	However, I also wish that I could **change the state of my mental health at the time of GCSEs.** This is due to the fact that I feel as though I was extremely anxious of failing which caused a lot of **stress and panic.** So, I wish I could have calmed down and just tried my best rather than losing motivation and stressing out.		

Appx. 17 – Double-headed arrow column – an 'in-between' column

- (see below bold/underline and italics/underline)

Conduct of Conduct	⟷	*Resistance*
(Izzy) **The focus** seems to be more on the **exam results than making students motivated to work hard and do well for themselves**. So, I would change how much **exam pressure was put on us** and instead put that energy towards **motivation and inspiration**.	(Vic) Sometimes when things get a little stressful or too much, especially with online school, **it feels like I'm trapped and that there is nothing else in my life other than classes and school and homework,** and because of this sometimes *I neglect myself* and the people around me. *But I have worked on this and I think I've become better at balancing my life in and out of college.*	(Juss) I also would have *ended certain friendships earlier due to the toxic nature* and how it was keeping me *away from self-care* and studies sometimes.
(Juss) I would have **slept more and tried to stress less** as I think these factors **really impacted my mental health** due to the amount of **pressure I was under.**	(Teocoli) *I would also lessen the amount of stress I put on myself.* **Exams can't always determine the intelligence of an individual.**	(Juss) I would keep the fact that I made my own revision plans *instead of listening to what other people pressured me to do*. I was proud of what I achieved and *that I did it on my own*.
(Vic) I'd probably **change the amount of pressure I put on myself** for anything - **I think that this pressure is coming from me wanting** to do my best in everything I do, in addition to	(Gabs) *Another thing is keeping motivated during the very stressful times*, **even though it was hard it would still have been better** *and I should have*	(Teocoli) I would change my method of learning and revision. *Instead of just memorising a plethora of content, I would focus on*

expectations from family and friends. **Although, no one has ever told me that,** if I was to not get a certain grade or do something and achieve a set result on that thing, **I would tell myself that I would be letting them down or disappointing them.**	*looked at who and what motivates me the most.*	*making sure I understand the all ideas being taught.*
(Rina) However, I also **wish that I could change the state of my mental health** at the time of GCSEs. This is due to the fact that I feel as though **I was extremely anxious of failing which caused a lot of stress and panic**. So, **I wish I could have calmed down and just tried my best rather than losing motivation and stressing out.**	(Teocoli) I would also **lessen the amount of stress I put on myself.** *Exams can't always determine the intelligence of an individual.*	(Izzy) I would keep my external factors because I feel like even though school was stressful at times, *I managed to keep my life out of school the same*. I didn't have much time for personal growth but I still *managed to keep a good lifestyle and social life.*
(Alby) I would **change my attitude towards my gcses because I was too relaxed about it**.	(Hammi) If I was to change two things... *it would be some of the situations I got myself in to* and some of the people I called friends. This is because **a lot of what I did was a waste of time and could've easily been spent doing so many other things that would've been more worthwhile.**	(Mollica) I would *keep the friends I have and the stuff I experienced.*

		(Vanni) One thing I would change is that we _would not do exams at all,_ since I merely think that this is only _to test our memory_ and not our practical skills. Another thing I would _change is the national curriculum since there are many things wrong with it_, for instance, it is very Eurocentric. I would've liked to know different perspectives in history or English for example.
		(Vic) Another thing that I would change if I could _would be to be more open to change in my life and work on things that I am fearful of._
		(Vic) In addition to this, I would also _not change the opportunities that I have taken up over the last four years._ For example, I did a 10-week internship with a global creative company where I was allowed to work on huge projects and was able to meet so many people in the creative field...
		(Hammi) If I was to keep two things it would _the school that I went and the way I grew and changed to become a new person._ This is because the

		schools that I went to really allowed me to come out of my shell and allow me to grow as a person as well as *becoming* a new and more matured person when I started my first year of A Levels.

Appx. 18 – Diary entry reflection

- **First term diary reflection:** Name…………………………Date:………..

Summary of last week's brainstorm on 'education'

Positives of Education	Grey area	Negative
1. Socialization/ 'meet like minded people' 2. Qualification 3. Useful/ Fun 4. Practice certain skills/useful 5. Opportunities/ Life experience 6. Self development 7. Some inspirational teachers 8. Nice school environment 9. 'Gives foundations to develop your passions and skills'	a) Competitive b) Stressful c) Some stuff not needed d) Time consuming e) Knowledge of the world/Learning f) Social rules/fit in g) Teaching of values/morals h) Money/ Careers i) Perception of curriculum, type of schools /varying expectations between primary and secondary j) Necessary for 'getting a job' k) GCSE focused on memory l) 'Curriculum focus to open paths in your life' m) 'Be with same age group people, which is unlikely later in life'	A. Tiring/Boring/useless/too difficult/ consuming exam pressure B. Discrimination/Inequalities/biased C. Always a right way and a wrong way / 'one' right way D. Too Eurocentric E. Conformity (uniform, core subjects) F. Exam pressure G. Peer pressure H. Parental pressure I. Mental illness (sleep deprivation, depressing, self esteem) J. Too linear/uninspiring K. 'All about being judged' – teachers, peers, society L. 'Detached from reality' M. School-environment too stressful N. Too short-term gain focus

Use the first brainstorm done in September and our six themes (below). Comment on all of them or choose the one/s that you feel mostly comfortable with.

1. **External factors**– lack of time for HW/revision, less freedom for self-growth and exploration, physical stress, poor sleep, living in a 'performance' culture/society

2. **Money/resources –** material deprivation linked to un-success, no extra tuitions to succeed, access to resources.

3. **Exam pressure –** revision and more revision, fear of failure, parental and teacher pressures, affects enjoyment of learning.

4. **Relationships**– peer pressure, competition, appearance, perfectionism, authenticity is questioned, constant comparisons/judgment, fear of being excluded

5. **College-environment** – ethos/culture, atmosphere, structure, types of rules and expectations.

6. **Motivation** – subject inspiration; everyone must fit same schooling system; having to please everyone else not yourself.

WWW ('what went well') in college life? (Use anything from the list above to record some initial thoughts, impressions, experiences).

EBE ('even better if')? - Please Turn over to fully explain your reasons.

Appx. 19 – Main recruitment leaflet

==**Psycho-Social Research project at [college name]**==

Choose <u>one</u> session, either Tuesday <u>or</u> Wednesdays, between 3.05 and 4.30pm

XXXX Challenge: ==AC====Cr== ==CE== ==CA==

Are you interested in finding out what influences **students' mental health** both positively and negatively?

Are you interested in being a ***co-researcher*** **and** *a participant* in a psycho-social research project investigating students' mental health & well-being?

Be ready to:

be part of focus-group discussions,

prepare interview topics and questions,

interview your peers, parents and teachers,

design and carry out a whole-college consultation-questionnaire (…**and more).**

==**Benefits**==

Increase your (Sociology and Psychology) subject knowledge.

Support your UCAS applications and general CV writing.

An opportunity to practice and gain *transferable skills*.

ALL welcome!

Appx. 20 – Five Ethical approvals/ Amendments from UEL's Ethics Board Committee

1. Sent on 13 Jun 2019 by Catherine Hitchens

Dear Danilo,

Application ID: ETH1819-0051

Project title: Education policies in the UK: exploring the relationship between the focus on attainment/achievement and adolescent mental health (MH) in a sixth form London

college.

Lead researcher: Mr Danilo Di Emidio

Principal Investigators: Professor Ian Tucker, Dr Heather Price

Your application to Research, Research Degrees and Ethics Sub-Committee meeting was considered on the 13th of June 2019. The decision is:

Approved

The Committee's response is based on the protocol described in the application form and supporting documentation. Your project has received ethical approval for 2 years from the approval date. If you have any questions regarding this application please contact your supervisor or the secretary for the Research, Research Degrees and Ethics Sub-Committee meeting. Approval has been given for the submitted application only and the research must be conducted accordingly.

Should you wish to make any changes in connection with this research project you must complete 'An application for approval of an amendment to an existing application'. The approval of the proposed research applies to the following research site.

Research site: (REMOVED)

Local Collaborator: Mr Danilo Di Emidio

Approval is given on the understanding that the UEL Code of Practice for Research and the Code of Practice for Research Ethics is adhered to.
Any adverse events or reactions that occur in connection with this research project should be reported using the University's form for Reporting an Adverse/Serious Adverse Event/Reaction. The University will periodically audit a random sample of approved applications for ethical approval, to ensure that the research projects are conducted in compliance with the consent given by the Research Ethics Committee and to the highest standards of rigour and integrity.

Catherine Hitchens - Research Integrity and Ethics Manager

2. Sent on 25 Sep 2019 by Fernanda Pereira Da Silva

Dear Danilo

Application ID: ETH1920-0023

Original application ID: ETH1819-0051

Project title: Doctoral Research Project

Lead researcher: Mr Danilo Di Emidio

Your application to Psychology School Research Ethics Committee was considered on the 25th of September 2019.

The decision is: **Approved**

The Committee's response is based on the protocol described in the application form and supporting documentation. Your project has received ethical approval for 2 years from the approval date. If you have any questions regarding this application please contact your supervisor or the secretary for the Psychology School Research Ethics Committee. Approval has been given for the submitted application only and the research must be conducted accordingly.

Should you wish to make any changes in connection with this research project you must complete 'An application for approval of an amendment to an existing application'.
The approval of the proposed research applies to the following research site.

Research site: (REMOVED)

Principal Investigator / Local Collaborator: Mr Danilo Di Emidio

Approval is given on the understanding that the UEL Code of Practice for Research and the Code of Practice for Research Ethics is adhered to.
Any adverse events or reactions that occur in connection with this research project should be reported using the University's form for Reporting an Adverse/Serious Adverse Event/Reaction. The University will periodically audit a random sample of approved applications for ethical approval, to ensure that the research projects are conducted in compliance with the consent given by the Research Ethics Committee and to the highest standards of rigour and integrity.

Yours sincerely

Fernanda Silva

Administrative Officer for Research Governance

3. Sent on 19 Oct 2019 by Catherine Hitchens

Dear Danilo,

Application ID: ETH1920-0029

Original application ID: ETH1920-0023

Project title: Education policies in the UK: exploring the relationship between the focus on attainment/achievement in the school-environment and adolescents' mental health

Lead researcher: Mr Danilo Di Emidio

Your application to Psychology Research Ethics Committee was considered on the 19th of October 2019. The decision is:

Approved

The Committee's response is based on the protocol described in the application form and supporting documentation.

Your project has received ethical approval for 2 years from the approval date.

If you have any questions regarding this application please contact your supervisor or the secretary for the Psychology Research Ethics Committee. Approval has been given for the submitted application only and the research must be conducted accordingly. **Should you wish to make any changes in connection with this research project you must complete** 'An application for approval of an amendment to an existing application'.

The approval of the proposed research applies to the following research site.

Research site: (REMOVED)

Principal Investigator / Local Collaborator: Mr Danilo Di Emidio

Approval is given on the understanding that the UEL Code of Practice for Research and the Code of Practice for Research Ethics is adhered to. SEP SEP
Any adverse events or reactions that occur in connection with this research project should be reported using the University's form for Reporting an Adverse/Serious Adverse Event/Reaction. The University will periodically audit a random sample of approved applications for ethical approval, to ensure that the research projects are conducted in compliance with the consent given by the Research Ethics Committee and to the highest standards of rigour and integrity.

Yours sincerely,

Catherine Hitchens - Research Integrity and Ethics Manager

Research, Research Degrees and Ethics Sub-Committee

4. Sent on 20 Jan 2020 by Fernanda Pereira Da Silva

Dear Danilo

Application ID: ETH1920-0122

Original application ID: ETH1920-0029

Project title: Doctoral Research Project

Lead researcher: Mr Danilo Di Emidio

Your application to Psychology Research Ethics Committee was considered on the 20th of January 2020.

The decision is: **Approved**

The Committee's response is based on the protocol described in the application form and supporting documentation.

Your project has received ethical approval for 2 years from the approval date.

If you have any questions regarding this application please contact your supervisor or the secretary for the Psychology Research Ethics Committee. Approval has been given for the submitted application only and the research must be conducted accordingly. **Should you wish to make any changes in connection with this research project you must complete** 'An application for approval of an amendment to an existing application'.

The approval of the proposed research applies to the following research site.

Research site: (REMOVED)

Principal Investigator / Local Collaborator: Mr Danilo Di Emidio

Approval is given on the understanding that the UEL Code of Practice for Research and the Code of Practice for Research Ethics is adhered to.
Any adverse events or reactions that occur in connection with this research project should be reported using the University's form for Reporting an Adverse/Serious Adverse Event/Reaction. The University will periodically audit a random sample of approved applications for ethical approval, to ensure that the research projects are conducted in compliance with the consent given by the Research Ethics Committee and to the highest standards of rigour and integrity.

Yours sincerely

Fernanda Silva

Administrative Officer for Research Governance

5. Sent on 08 Jul 2020 by Fernanda Pereira Da Silva

Dear Danilo

Application ID: ETH1920-0287

Original application ID: ETH1920-0122

Project title: Education policies in the UK: exploring the relationship between the focus on attainment/achievement in the school-environment and adolescents' mental health.

Lead researcher: Mr Danilo Di Emidio

Your application to University Research Ethics Sub-Committee was considered on the 8th of July 2020. The decision is: **Approved**

- *In view of the COVID-19 pandemic, the University Research Ethics Sub-Committee (URES) has taken the decision that all postgraduate research student and staff research projects that include face-to-face participant interactions, should cease to use this method of data collection, for example, in person participant interviews or focus groups. Researchers must consider if they can adapt their research project to conduct participant interactions remotely. The University supports Microsoft Teams for remote work. New research projects and continuing research projects must not recruit participants using face-to-face interactions and all data collection should occur remotely. These regulations should be followed on your research until national restrictions regarding Covid-19 are lifted. For further information please visit the Public Health website page https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england*

The Committee's response is based on the protocol described in the application form and supporting documentation. Your project has received ethical approval for 2 years from the approval date. If you have any questions regarding this application please contact your supervisor or the secretary for the University Research Ethics Sub-Committee. Approval has been given for the submitted application only and the research must be conducted accordingly.

Should you wish to make any changes in connection with this research project you must complete 'An application for approval of an amendment to an existing application'. Approval is given on the understanding that the UEL Code of Practice for Research and the Code of Practice for Research Ethics is adhered to. Any adverse events or reactions that occur in connection with this research project should be reported using the University's form for Reporting an Adverse/Serious Adverse Event/Reaction. The University will periodically audit a random sample of approved applications for ethical approval, to ensure that the research projects are conducted in compliance with the consent given by the Research Ethics Committee and to the highest standards of rigour and integrity.

Yours sincerely

Fernanda Silva

Appx. 21 – Three Photos of initial mindmaps/brainstorms

Photo 1: focused on the RQ, initial findings, initial literature, methodology and early focus on identity and subjectivity
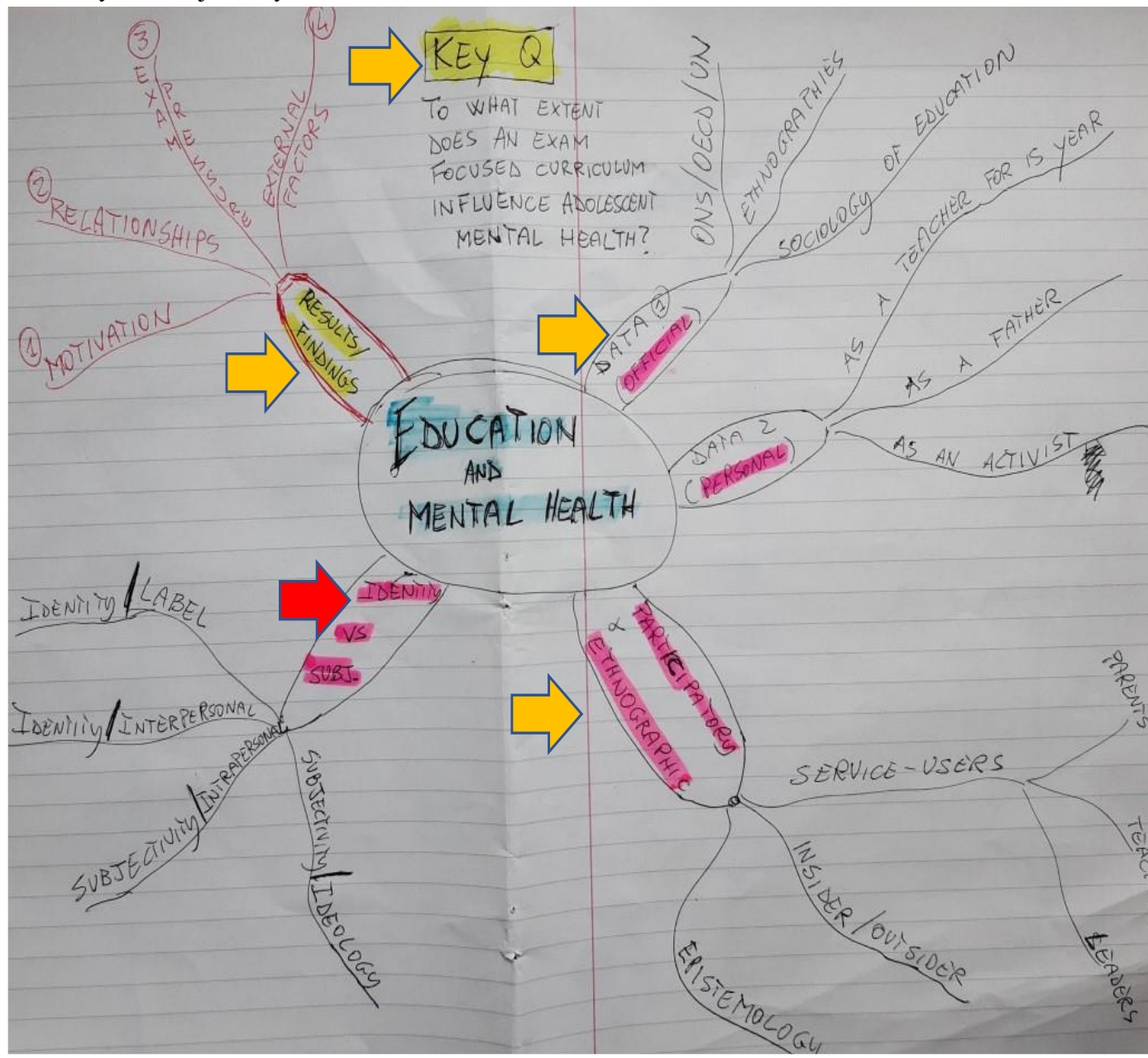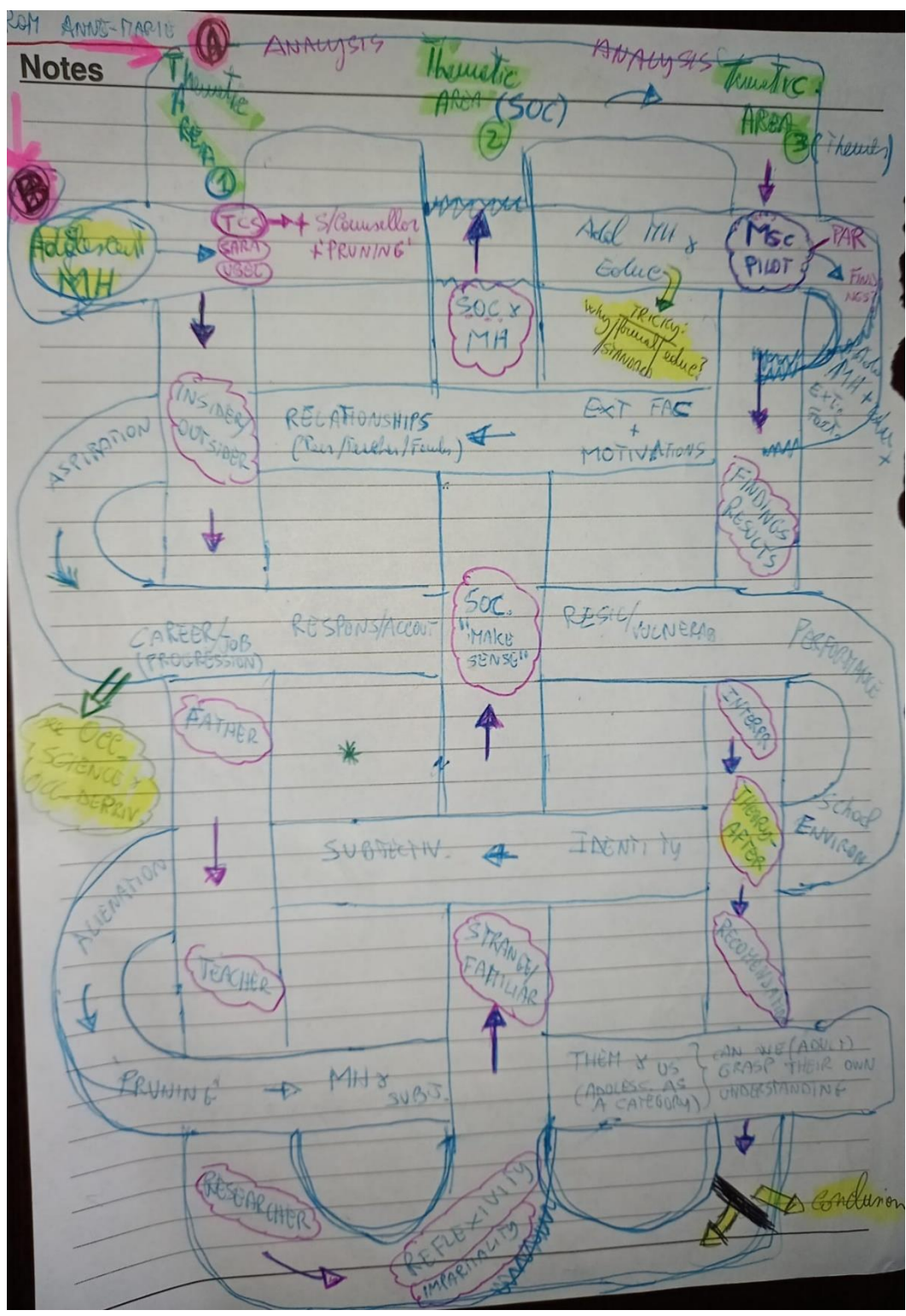
Photo 2: a triple thread tapestry, thematic areas and concepts intertwine

Photo 3: A research map inspired by Prof. Gerry Czerniawski's adaptation of Layder. D., (1993)
"New Strategies in Social Research" (Blackwell) Cambridge – see model in the next page

Derek Layder's model

Research Element	Research Focus
CONTEXT	***Macro Social organisation*** Values, traditions, forms of social and economic organization and power relations e.g. legally sanctioned forms of ownership, control and distribution; state intervention, as implicated in the sector below
SETTING	***Intermediate Social Organisation*** Work: Industrial, military and state bureaucracies; labour markets; hospitals; social work agencies, domestic labour; penal and mental institutions Non-work: Social organization of leisure activities, sports and social clubs; religious and spiritual organisations
SITUATED ACTIVITY	***Social Activity*** Face-to-face activity involving symbolic communication by participants in the above contexts and settings. Focus on emergent meanings, understandings and definitions of the situation as these affect and are affected by contexts and settings (above) and subjective dispositions of individuals (below).
SELF	***Self-identity and individual social experience*** These are influenced by the above sectors and as they interact with the unique psychobiography of the individual. Focus on the life career.

(HISTORY — vertical label spanning all rows)

References

Abbott, J. (2010). *Overschooled but undereducated: How the crisis in education is jeopardizing our adolescents*. Continuum.

Abdinasir, K. (2019). Report. Centre for Mental Health. How education shapes young people's mental health [CentreforMH_CYPMHC_MakingTheGrade_PDF_1.pdf (centreformentalhealth.org.uk)](https://centreformentalhealth.org.uk)

Abma, T., Banks, S., Cook, T., Dias, S., Madsen, W., Springett, J., & Wright, M. T. (2019). *Participatory research for health and social well-being*. Springer International Publishing.

Abrahams, J. (2018). Option blocks that block options: exploring inequalities in GCSE and A Level options in England. *British journal of sociology of education, 39*(8), 1143-1159. https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2018.1483821

Albert, C., & Davia, M. A. (2011). Education is a key determinant of health in Europe: A comparative analysis of 11 countries. *Health Promotion International, 26*(2), 163–170. https://DOI.org/10.1093/heapro/daq059.

Alderson, P. (2013). *Childhoods Real and Imagined: Volume 1: An introduction to critical realism and childhood studies.* Routledge.

Alexander, P. (2017). 'Coming of Age through the Recession: High School Imaginings of Post-Recession Futures in New York Cities'. In G. Stahl, D. Nelson & D. Wallace, (Eds.), *Masculinity and Aspiration in an Era of Neoliberal Education: International Perspectives*. Routledge.

Alhojailan, M.I. (2012). Thematic analysis: A critical review of its process and evaluation. West East *Journal of Social Sciences, 1*(1), 39-47.

Allen, K., Quinn, J., Hollingworth, S., & Rose, A. (2013). Becoming employable students and 'ideal' creative workers: exclusion and inequality in higher education work placements, *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 34*(3), 431-452. DOI: 10.1080/01425692.2012.714249

Althusser, L. (1970). "Lenin and philosophy" and other essays ideology and ideological state apparatuses (notes towards an investigation). First published in La Pensée. Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses by Louis Althusser 1969-70 (marxists.org).

Anderson, G. (1989). Critical Ethnography in Education: Origins, Current Status, and New Directions. *Review of Educational Research, 59*(3), 249-270.

Anderson-Levitt, K. M. (2012). *Anthropologies of education: A global guide to ethnographic studies of learning and schooling.* K. M. Anderson-Levitt (Ed.). Berghahn Books.

Antonovsky, A. (1987). *Unraveling the mystery of health. How people manage stress and stay well.* Jossey-Bass.

Antonovsky, A. (1996). The salutogenic model as a theory to guide health promotion. *Health promotion international, 11*(1), 11-18.

Ariès, P., & Baldick, R. (1962). *Centuries of childhood.* Penguin.

Atasay, E. (2014). Neoliberal schooling and subjectivity: Learning to desire lack. *Subjectivity, 7*(3), 288-307. https://DOI.org/10.1057/sub.2014.12

Audureau, J. P. (2003). Assujettissement et subjectivation: réflexions sur l'usage de Foucault en education [Subjectification and Subjectivation: reflections on Foucault's usage in

education]. *Revue française de pédagogie*, 17-29. Assujettissement et subjectivation : réflexions sur l'usage de Foucault en éducation on JSTOR

Bacchi, C. (2010). Policy as discourse: What does it mean? Where does it get us? *Discourse: studies in the cultural politics of education, 21*(1), 45-57. https://DOI.org/10.1080/01596300050005493

Bailey, P.L.J (2013) The policy dispositif: historical formation and method, *Journal of Education Policy, 28*(6), 807-827. https://DOI.org/10.1080/02680939.2013.782512

Bailey, P.L.J. (2015a). *"Teach First" as a dispositif: towards a critical ontology of policy and power* [PhD thesis, UCL Institute of Education, London].

Bailey, P.L.J. (2015b). Consultants of conduct: new actors, new knowledges and new 'resilient' subjectivities in the governing of the teacher. *Journal of Educational Administration and History, 47*(3), 232-250, DOI: 10.1080/00220620.2015.1038696

Bailey, P. L., & Ball, S. J. (2016). The coalition government, the general election and the policy ratchet in education: a reflection on the 'ghosts' of policy past, present and yet to come. In *The coalition government and social policy: Restructuring the welfare state*, 125-149. Policy Press. https://DOI.org/10.1332/policypress/9781447324560.001.0001

Baker, A. M., Quayle, A., & Ali, L. (2018). Reflexivities of Discomfort: Unsettling Subjectivities in and through Research. In *Places of Privilege* (195-213). Brill. DOI:10.1163/9789004381407_012

Baker, A. (2006). What else do students need? A psychodynamic reflection on students' need for support from staff at university. *Active learning in higher education, 7*(2), 171-183. https://doi.org/10.1177/1469787406064751

Bakhshaei, M., & Henderson, R. I. (2016). Gender at the intersection with race and class in the schooling and wellbeing of immigrant-origin students. *BMC women's health, 16*, 1-15. DOI 10.1186/s12905-016-0328-0

Balibar, E., & Végső, R. K. (2003). *The subject.* Faculty publication – University of Nebraska, Department of English.

Ball, S.J. (1990). *Foucault and Education. Discipline and Knowledge*. Routledge.

Ball, S.J. (1993). What is policy? Texts, trajectories and toolboxes. *Discourse, Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 13*(2), 10–17. https://DOI.org/10.1080/0159630930130203

Ball, S.J. (2003). The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity. *Journal of education policy, 18*(2), 215-228. https://DOI.org/10.1080/0268093022000043065

Ball, S.J. (2011). Back to the 19th century with Michael Gove's education bill. The Guardian (online). https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/jan/31/michael-gove-education- bill

Ball, S.J. (2012). *Global education inc: New policy networks and the neo-liberal imaginary*. Routledge.

Ball, S.J. (2013). *Foucault, Power and Education*. Routledge

Ball, S.J. (2015). What is policy? 21 years later: Reflections on the possibilities of policy research. *Discourse: Studies in the cultural politics of education, 36*(3), 306-313. https://DOI.org/10.1080/01596306.2015.1015279

Ball, S.J. (2016). *Foucault as Educator*. Retrieved from https://ebookcentral.proquest.com

Ball, S.J. (2017). *The Education Debate*. Policy Press.

Ball, S.J. (2019). A horizon of freedom: Using Foucault to think differently about education and learning. *Power and education, 11*(2), 132-144. https://DOI.org/10.1177/1757743819838289

Ball, S.J. (2018). The tragedy of state education in England: Reluctance, compromise and muddle–a system in disarray. *Journal of the British Academy, 6*, 207-238. https://DOI.org/10.5871/jba/006.207

Ball, S.J., & Olmedo, A. (2013). Care of the self, resistance and subjectivity under neoliberal governmentalities. *Critical Studies in Education, 54*(1), 85-96. https://DOI.org/10.1080/17508487.2013.740678

Bandura, A. (1999). Social cognitive theory: An agentic perspective. *Asian journal of social psychology, 2*(1), 21-41. DOI:10.1111/1467-839X.00024.

Barker, C., & Jane, E. A. (2016). *Cultural studies: Theory and practice*. SAGE

Barnes, S-A, Brown, A. & Warhurst, C. (2016). Future of Skills & Lifelong Learning Evidence Review Foresight, Government Office for Science: ''Education as the Underpinning System: Understanding the propensity for learning across the lifetime''. Education as the underpinning system: understanding the propensity for learning across the lifetime (publishing.service.gov.uk)

Barragry, A.B. (2017). How do adolescent girls experience having a mental health issue whilst at secondary school? A narrative study using creative arts [Doctoral dissertation, the University of Sheffield].

Bass, R. V., & Good, J. W. (2004). Educare and educere: Is a balance possible in the educational system? In *The educational forum* (Vol. 68, No. 2, 161-168). Taylor & Francis Group. - https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ724880.pdf

Bazzul, J. (2016). *Ethics and science education: How subjectivity matters*. Springer International Publishing

Bazzul, J. (2017). The 'subject of ethics' and educational research OR Ethics or politics? Yes please! *Educational Philosophy and Theory, 49*(10), 995-1005. DOI: 10.1080/00131857.2016.1270184

Beauchamp, G., Clarke, L., Hulme, M., & Murray, J. (2015). Teacher education in the United Kingdom post devolution: Convergences and divergences. *Oxford Review of Education, 41*(2), 154-170. https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2015.1017403

Becker, G. S. (2009). *Human capital: A theoretical and empirical analysis, with special reference to education.* University of Chicago press.

Bell, J. (2014). *Doing Your Research Project: A guide for first-time researchers*. McGraw-Hill-Education.

Bergold, J., & Thomas, S. (2012). Participatory research methods: A methodological approach in v emotion. *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung, 37*(4), 191-222. https://www.jstor.org/stable/41756482

Bernstein, B., & Solomon, J. (1999). 'Pedagogy, identity and the construction of a theory of symbolic control': Basil Bernstein questioned by Joseph Solomon. *British journal of sociology of education, 20*(2), 265-279. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1393112

Berger, P. L. (2004). Invitation to Sociology. In J.J. Macionis, N.V. Benokraitis & B. Ravelli (Eds.), *Seeing Ourselves. Classic, Contemporary and CrossCultural Readings in Sociology* (Canadian Edition) (pp. 6-9). Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Bibby, T. (2011). *Education-an 'impossible profession'? Psychoanalytic explorations of learning and classrooms*. Routledge.

Bird, E.L., Halliwell E., Diedrichs P.C., & Harcourt D. (2013). Happy Being Me in the UK: a controlled evaluation of a school-based body image intervention with pre-adolescent children. *Body Image. 10*(3), 326-34. DOI: 10.1016/j.bodyim.2013.02.008

Blair, T. (1997). Tony Blair talks about Education, Education, Education, 1997. [Video]. YouTube.

[(1200) Tony Blair talks about Education, Education, Education, 1997. Film 90949 - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com)

Blackman, L., Cromby, J., Hook, D., Papadopoulos, D., & Walkerdine, V. (2008). Creating subjectivities. *Subjectivity, 22*(1), 1-27. https://DOI.org/10.1057/sub.2008.8

Blakemore, S. J. (2008). The social brain in adolescence. *Nature Reviews Neuroscience, 9*(4), 267-277. https://DOI.org/10.1038/nrn2353

Blakemore, S.J. (2018). *Inventing ourselves: The secret life of the teenage brain*. Hachette UK.

Blakemore, S. J., & Choudhury, S. (2006). Development of the adolescent brain: implications for executive function and social cognition. *Journal of child psychology and psychiatry, 47*(3-4), 296-312. https://DOI.org/10.1016/j.euroneuro.2017.12.017

Bohman, J. (2005). 'Critical Theory'. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2016 Edition). Edward N. Zalta (Ed).

Bonell, C., Harden, A., Wells, H., Jamal, F., Fletcher, A., Petticrew, M., Thomas, J., Whitehead, M., Campbell, R., Murphy, S., Moore, L. (2011). Systematic review of the effects of schools and school-environment interventions on health: protocol for evidence mapping and syntheses. *BMC Public Health 1*(1), 453.

Bonell, C., Fletcher, A., Sorhaindo, A., Wells, H., & McKee, M. (2012a). How market-oriented education policies might influence young people's health: development of a logic model from qualitative case studies in English secondary schools. *J Epidemiol Community Health, 66*(7), e24-e24.

Bonell, C., Parry, W., Wells, H., Jamal, F., Fletcher, A., Harden, A., & Whitehead, M. (2012b). The effects of the school environment on student health: a systematic review of multi-level studies. *Health & place, 21,* 180-191.

Bonell, C., Fletcher, A., Jamal, F., Wells, H., Harden, A., Murphy, S. & Thomas, J. (2013). Theories of how the school environment impacts on student health: Systematic review and synthesis. *Health & Place, 24*, 242-249.

Bousted, M. (2022). *Support, Not Surveillance. How to solve the teacher retention crisis*. John Catt Educational Limited. ISBN: 978 1 915261 16 8

Bowles, S., & Gintis, H. (2003). Schooling in capitalist America twenty-five years later. In *Sociological Forum* (Vol. 18, No. 2, 343-348). Wiley, Springer.

Bourdieu, P. (1980). *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1986). 'The Forms of Capital'. In Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Capital. Richardson, J. G. Greenwood Press, 241-58.

Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J-C. (1979). *The Inheritors*. University of Chicago Press

Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J-C. (2013). *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*. Sage.

Bourdieu, P., & Eagleton, T. (1992). *Doxa and Common Life*. New Left Review, January/February 1992.

BPS (2018). British Psychological Society - Code of conduct, ethical principles & [and] guidelines.

Code of Ethics and Conduct | BPS

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology, 3*(2), 77-101.

Braun V., & Clarke, V. (2020). One size fits all? What counts as quality practice in (reflexive) thematic analysis? *Qualitative Research in Psychology,* 1-25.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). *Thematic analysis: a practical guide.* Sage publications.

Braun, V., Clarke, V., Hayfield, N. & Terry, G. (2019). Thematic Analysis. In: P. Liamputtong (Ed), *Handbook of Research Methods in Health Social Sciences*. Springer. https://DOI.org/10.1007/978-981-10-5251-4_103

Britzman, D.P. (1995). 'The question of belief': writing poststructural ethnography. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 8*(3), 229-238. DOI: 10.1080/0951839950080302

Brown, C. (2018). Education Policy and the Binds of Poverty: Lack of Aspiration or a Failure of the Imagination?. In I. Gilbert (Ed.), *The Working Class.* Independent Thinking Press.

Bryman, A. (2008). *Social Research Methods*. University Press

BSA (2017). British Sociological Association. bsa_statement_of_ethical_practice.pdf

Burke, P. (2013). *The right to higher education: Beyond widening participation*. Routledge.

Burman, E. (2018). *Fanon, education, action: Child as method*. Routledge.

Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies that Matter: on the Discursive Limits of ''Sex''.* Routledge. ISBN 9780415903660

Butler, J. (1995a). For a Careful Reading. In S. Benhabib, J. Butler, D. Cornell & N. Fraser (Eds.), *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange* (pp. 127-143). Routledge.

Butler, J. (1995b). Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism. In S. Benhabib, J. Butler, D. Cornell & N. Fraser (Eds.), *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange*. Routledge.

Butler, J. (1997). *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*. Stanford University Press.

Butler, J. (2002). *Gender trouble*. Routledge.

Butler, J., Gambetti, Z., & Sabsay, L. (Eds.). (2016). *Vulnerability in resistance*. Duke University Press.

Cahill, C. (2007). The personal is political: Developing new subjectivities through participatory action research. *Gender, place and culture, 14*(3), 267-292. https://DOI.org/10.1080/09663690701324904

Calame, C. (2022). Subject of Desire and Subject of Discourse in Foucault: Sexuality and the Erotic Relations of Greek Women and Men. In *Foucault, Sexuality, Antiquity* (pp. 74-88). Routledge.

Callison, W. (2017). Subjectivity. In I. Szeman, S. Blacker & J. Sully (Eds.), *A Companion to Critical and Cultural Theory* (pp. 173-189). John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

Cameron, David (2011). PM's speech on the Big Society - PM's speech on Big Society - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Campbell, O. L., Bann, D., & Patalay, P. (2021). The gender gap in adolescent mental health: a cross-national investigation of 566,829 adolescents across 73 countries. *SSM-population health, 13*, 100742.

Cammarota, J., & Fine, M. (2010). Youth participatory action research: A pedagogy for transformational resistance. In *Revolutionizing education* (pp. 9-20). Routledge.

Canaan, J.E., Hill, D., & Maisuria, A. (2013). Resistance in England. In D Hall (Ed.), *Immiseration Capitalism and Education: Austerity, Resistance and Revolt.* Institute for Education Policy Studies, pp. 176-205.

Carra, L., & Vineis, P. (2022). *Il Capitale Biologico. Le conseguenze sulla salute delle disuguaglianze sociali* [Biological Capital. Health consequences of social inequalities]. Codice edizioni. ISBN 979-12-5450-011-8

Cieslik, M. (2019). Sociology, biographical research, and the development of critical happiness studies. In *Critical Happiness Studies* (pp. 144-161). Routledge.

Chase, M., Tucker, I., Goodings, L., & Jobber, N. (2016). Young people's mental health in the UK: A 'preventative turn'emerging from crisis. *European Health Psychologist, 18*(3), 134-138.

Child Development Institute (2020). Erikson's Stages of Social-Emotional Development. https://childdevelopmentinfo.com/child-development/erickson/#gs.5r1cl6

Children's Defense Fund (1996). The state of America's children yearbook. Children's Defense Fund

Chitty, C. (2014). *Education policy in Britain.* Bloomsbury Publishing.

Chicchi, F. (2021). *Sintomatologia della società della prestazione. Lavoro e soggettività nel capitalismo contemporaneo* [Symptomatoloy of the performance society.Work and subjectivity in contemporary capitalism], 71-81, in B. De Rosa (Ed.), *Forme del malessere nell'orizzonte contemporaneo. Un dialogo interdisciplinare* [Forms of malaise in the contemporary horizon. An interdisciplinary dialogue]. Alpes Italia srl.

Chicchi, F., & Simone, A. (2017). *La società della prestazione* [The performance society]. Ediesse.

Choi, B.C., & Pak, A.W. (2006). Multidisciplinarity, interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity in health research, services, education and policy: 1. Definitions, objectives, and evidence of effectiveness. *Clinical & Investigative Medicine, 29*, 351-364.

Chow, P. S. Y. (2016). Adolescent Development and Mental Health: Challenges and Opportunities. *Journal of Youth Studies (10297847), 19*(2), 19-54.

Chowdhury, M.R. (2019). What is the mental health continuum? In Positivepsycholoy.com

https://positivepsychology.com/mental-health-continuum-model/

Clarke, M. (2014). The sublime objects of education policy: quality, equity and ideology. *Discourse: Studies in the cultural politics of education, 35*(4), 584-598.

Clarke, M. (2020). Talkin' 'about a revolution: the social, political, and fantasmatic logics of education policy, in Lapping, C. (2020). *Freud, Lacan, Zizek and Education: Exploring Unconscious Investments in Policy and Practice*. Routledge.

Clarke, J. (2005). New Labour's citizens: activated, empowered, responsibilized, abandoned? *Critical social policy, 25*(4), 447-463.

Cloud, D. L. (1994). The materiality of discourse as oxymoron: A challenge to critical rhetoric. *Western Journal of Communication (includes Communication Reports), 58*(3), 141-163.

Coffey, J., & Farrugia, D. (2014). Unpacking the black box: The problem of agency in the sociology of youth. *Journal of Youth Studies, 17*(4), 461-474.

Collins, C. S., & Stockton, C. M. (2018). The central role of theory in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 17*(1). DOI: 10.1177/1609406918797475

Conrad, P. (2007). *The medicalization of Society: on the Transformation of Human Conditions into Treatable Disorders*. Johns Hopkins University Press

Cornwall, A., & Jewkes, R. (1995). What is participatory research? *Social Science and Medicine, 41*(12), 1667-76.

Cosmo (2022). Study wave 1. Publications | COSMO (cosmostudy.uk)

Coughlan, S. (2019, December 3). Pisa tests: UK rises in international school rankings. Pisa tests: UK rises in international school rankings - BBC News

Crick Report (1998). Education for citizenship and the teaching of democracy in schools. Final report of the Advisory Group on Citizenship. https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/4385/1/crickreport1998.pdf

Cromby, J., & Willis, M. E. (2014). Nudging into subjectification: Governmentality and psychometrics. *Critical Social Policy, 34*(2), 241-259.

Cromby, J., Harper, D., & Reavey, P. (2017). *Psychology, mental health and distress*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Curtis, P. (2009). Much do better: Michael Gove delivers damning report on schools. The Guardian. 7 October 2009 [Online]. http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2009/oct/07/michael-gove-conservativeconference-schools

Franks, D., Dale, P., Hindmarsh, R., Fellows, C., Buckridge, M., & Cybinski, P. (2007). Interdisciplinary foundations: reflecting on interdisciplinarity and three decades of teaching and research at Griffith University, Australia. *Studies in Higher Education, 32*(2), 167-185. DOI: 10.1080/03075070701267228

Darbyshire, P., MacDougall, C., & Schiller, W. (2005). Multiple methods in qualitative research with children: more insight or just more? *Qualitative research, 5*(4), 417-436.

Davenport, A., Levell, P., & Sturrock, D. (2021). *Why do wealthy parents have wealthy children?* (No. R196). IFS Report. [Why do wealthy parents have wealthy children? | Institute for Fiscal Studies (ifs.org.uk)](#)

David, M. E., Ball, S. J., Davies, J., & Reay, D. (2003). Gender issues in parental involvement in student choices of higher education. *Gender and Education, 15*(1), 21-36. DOI: 10.1080/0954025032000042121

Davies, B. (2006). Subjectification: The relevance of Butler's analysis for education. *British journal of sociology of education, 27*(4), 425-438.

Davies, B., & Saltmarsh, S. (2007): Gender economies: literacy and the gendered production of neo-liberal subjectivities. *Gender and Education, 19*(1), 1-2.

Davies, W. (2015). *The Happiness Industry: How the government and big business sold us well-being*. Verso Books.

Dean, H. (2009). *Understanding Human Need*. Policy-Press

Dean, H. (2010). *An Introduction to Social Policy*. Policy-Press

Dean, M. (2010). *Governmentality: Power and rule in modern society*. Sage publications.

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The "what" and "why" of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry, 11*, 227-268.

DEMOS (2015). Character Nation. A demos report with the jubilee centre for character and virtues.

http://www.demos.co.uk/files/476_1505_characternation_web.pdf?1433340847

De Aragujo Freire, A. M. (1995). 'Literacy in Brazil: The Contribution of Paulo Freire'. In M. De Figueiredo-Cowen & D. Gastaldo (Eds). *Paulo Freire at the Institute*. Formara LTD

DeVilbiss, S. E., (2014). *The Transition experience: understanding the transition from high school to college for conditionally admitted students using the lens of Schlossberg's transition 'theory'* [Doctoral thesis, University of Nebraska - Lincoln]. http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cehsedaddiss/187

Dewey, J. (1938/2015). *Experience and Education*. Free-Press.

Donaldson, M. (1978). *Children's minds*. Fontana/Collins.

DfE (September 2015). Commission on Assessment Without Levels. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/commission-on-assessment-without-levels-final-report

DfE (March 2016). Mental Health and Behavior in Schools – Departmental advice for school staff. https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/25794/1/Mental_Health_and_Behaviour advice_for_Schools_160316.pdf

DfE (August 2017). Supporting mental health in schools and colleges. Summary Report (NatCen Social Research & National Children Beaureau Research and Policy Team). https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/634725/Supporting_Mental-Health_synthesis_report.pdf

DfE (November 2018). Mental Health and Behaviour in schools.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/755135/Mental_health_and_behaviour_in_schools__.pdf

DfE (October 2018). Mental Health and Wellbeing provision in schools – Review of published policies and information.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/747709/Mental_health_and_wellbeing_provision_in_schools.pdf

DfE (February 2019). One of the largest mental health trials launches in schools.

https://www.gov.uk/government/news/one-of-the-largest-mental-health-trials-launches-in-schools

DfE (February 2019). One of the largest mental health trials launches in schools.

https://www.gov.uk/government/news/one-of-the-largest-mental-health-trials-launches-in-schools

DfE (May 2019). £10 million scheme to help teachers tackle bad behaviour in the classroom.

https://www.fenews.co.uk/press-releases/29098-10-million-scheme-to-help-teachers-tackle-bad-behaviour-in-the-classroom

DfE (December 2022). Pupil premium: overview. Pupil premium: overview - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

DfES (2003). Every Child Matters, Green Paper. The Stationary Office.

DfES (2007). Social and emotional aspects of learning. DfES Publications.

Didau, D., & Rose, N. (2016). *What Every Teacher Needs to Know about Psychology*. John Catt Educational Limited.

Di Emidio, D. (2018). *A school based ethnographic investigation in a London primary school concerning school leaders', parents', teachers' and students' experience of learning and the school-environment, upcoming statutory examinations, and potential impacts on students' wellbeing* [Unpublished Master's thesis, Birkbeck University – London].

Di Emidio, D. (2019). A Participatory Exploration of the Relationship between the Focus on Academic Achievement in UK Education Policy and Adolescents' Wellbeing and Mental Health. In *Proceedings of the 1st International Conference of the Journal Scuola Democratica "Education and post-democracy"*, VOL. 2, Teaching, Learning, Evaluation and Technology (pp. 50-55). Proceedings - Second International Conference of «Scuola Democratica» Journal (scuolademocratica-conference.net)

Di Emidio, D. (2021a). Policy 'Meandering': The Influence of Mental Health and Well-being in Educational Policies. *Crossing Conceptual Boundaries, 11*(1), 18- 33. https://DOI.org/10.15123/uel.8912z

Di Emidio, D. (2021b). Thinking through Adolescent Subjectivity and Agency and their Role in Supporting Mental Health: A Contribution to the New UK's Mental Health Act. In *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference of the Journal Scuola Democratica "Reinventing Education",* VOL. 2, Learning with New Technologies, Equality and Inclusion (pp. 1133-1144). Proceedings - Second International Conference of «Scuola Democratica» Journal (scuolademocratica-conference.net)

Di Emidio, D. (2022). Conducting Participatory Action Research in a Primary School: The Key Role Played by (Unexpected) Social Actors in the Successful Completion of a School-Based Research. In book *Global Handbook of Health Promotion Research*, Vol. 1. DOI: 10.1007/978-

3-030-97212-7 - Chapter Title: Knowledge Transfer: A Snapshot on Translation Processes from Research to Practices.

DoH (December 2017). A Framework for mental health research. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/665576/A_framework_for_mental_health_research.pdf (accessed November 2018).

DoH & DFE (December 2017). Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision: a Green Paper. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/664855/Transforming_children_and_young_people_s_mental_health_provision.pdf (accessed December 2018).

DoH & DfE (July 2018). Government Response to the Consultation on Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision: a Green Paper and Next Steps. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/728892/government-response-to-consultation-on-transforming-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health.pdf (accessed November 2018).

Ecclestone, K. (2017). "Behaviour Change Policy Agendas for 'Vulnerable' Subjectivities: The Dangers of Therapeutic Governance and its New Entrepreneurs". *Journal of Education Policy, 31*(1), 48–62. DOI: 10.1080/02680939.2016.1219768.

Ecclestone, K., & Hayes, D. (2009). *The dangerous rise of therapeutic education*. Routledge.

Eden, D. (2003). Self-fulfilling prophecies in organizations. *Organizational behavior: A management challenge* (pp. 87-120).

Elliot, J. (1991). *Action Research for Educational Change*. Open-University-Press

Elwell, F. (1996). "Verstehen: The Sociology of Max Weber."

http://faculty.rsu.edu/users/f/felwell/www/Theorists/Weber/Whome2.htm

Ehrenberg A. (1996). *Le culte de la performance* [The cult of performance]. Hachette

Ehrenberg A. (1999). *La fatica di essere se stessi. Depressione e società* [The fatigue to be oneself. Depression and society]. Einaudi

Ehrenberg A. (2010). *La società del disagio. Il mentale e il sociale* [The hardship society. The mental and the social]. Einaudi. Torino.

EIP (1995). The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (IEP) - ISSN 2161-0002. Foucault, Michel | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (utm.edu).#

Evans et.al, (1998). Excerpt from pp. 111-114 of Student Development in College: Theory, Research, and Practice by Evans, Forney, and Guido-DiBrito (1998). Jossey-Bass. https://www.unthsc.edu/students/wp-content/uploads/sites/26/Schlossberg.pdf

Evans, G. (2006). *Educational failure and working-class white children in Britain*. Palgrave-MacMillan.

Evans, K. (2008). Concepts of bounded agency in education, work, and the personal lives of young adults. *International journal of psychology, 42*(2), 85-93.

Exley, S., & Ball, S. J. (2014). Neo-liberalism and English education. In *Neo-liberal Educational Reforms* (pp. 31-49). Routledge.

Exploring Your Mind (2020). Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development. https://exploringyourmind.com/erikson-stages-psychosocial-development/

Fattore, T., Mason, J., & Watson, E. (2012). Locating the child centrally as subject in research: Towards a child interpretation of well-being. *Child Indicators Research, 5*(3), 423-435.

Feld, L.D., & Shusterman, A. (2015). Into the pressure cooker: Student stress in college preparatory high schools. *Journal of adolescence, 41*, 31-42.

Fine, M. (2015). Glocal provocations: Critical reflections on community-based research and intervention designed at the intersections of global dynamics and local cultures. *Community Psychology in Global Perspective, 1*(1), 5-15. DOI Code: 10.1285/i24212113v1i1p5

Fine, M., Weis, L., Weseen, S., & Wong, L. (2003). For whom? Qualitative research, representations, and social responsibilities. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The landscape of qualitative research* (pp. 177-207, 2nd ed.). Sage.

Fine, M., & Ruglis, J. (2008). Circuits of dispossession: The racialized and classed realignment of the public sphere for youth in the US. *Transforming Anthropology, 17*(1), 20-33. DOI: 10.1111/j.1548-7466.2009.01037.x.

Finlay, L. (1998). Reflexivity: an essential component for all research? *British Journal of Occupational Therapy, 61*(10), 453-456.

Finlay, L. (2002). Negotiating the swamp: the opportunity and challenge of reflexivity in research practice. *Qualitative Research, 2*(2), 209-230.

Fisher, M. (2009). *Capitalist realism: Is there no alternative?* John Hunt Publishing.

Fleming T. (2014). Axel Honneth and the Struggle for Recognition: Implications for Transformative Learning. In A. Nicolaides & D. Holt (Eds.), *Spaces of Transformation and Transformation of*

Space, Proceedings of the XI International Transformative Learning Conference (pp. 318-324). Teachers College, Columbia University.

Flew, T. (2014). Six theories of neoliberalism. *Thesis eleven, 122*(1), 49-71.

Flyvbjerg, B. (2006). Five misunderstandings about case-study research. *Qualitative inquiry, 12*(2), 21, 219-245.

Ford, T. (2018). A Significant Number of Our Children Are Really Not Alright: Commentary on Professor Neil Humphrey's Open Dialogue. *Psychology of Education Review, 42*(1), 25-30.

Foucault, M. (1972). The Archeology of Knowledge. Routledge, 1995 ed, trans R. Sheridan; see also M Foucault, 'Politics and The Study of Discourse', in G. Burchell, C. Gordon & P. Miller (Eds.), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (pp. 53-72).University of Chicago Press.

Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Allen Lane.

Foucault, M. (1982). *The Subject and Power*. University of Chicago Press.
https://foucault.info/documents/foucault.power/

Foucault, M. (1980a). *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977*. Vintage.

Foucault, M. (1980b). "The Confession of the Flesh" (1977) interview. In M. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge Selected Interviews and Other Writings* (pp. 194-228). Harvester Wheatsheaf

Foucault, M. (1980c). Truth and Subjectivity (Howison Lectures) 20-21 Oct 1980, UC-Berkeley [Video]. YouTube. Foucault: Truth and Subjectivity - YouTube

Foucault, M. (1983). The Culture of the Self [Video]. YouTube. Michel Foucault - The Culture of the Self, First Lecture, Part 1 of 7 - YouTube

Foucault, M. (1988). "Technologies of the Self." Lectures at University of Vermont Oct. 1982. In Technologies of the Self, 16-49. Univ. of Massachusets Press – in Technologies of the Self – Michel Foucault, Info.

Foucault, M. (1991). *The Foucault effect: Studies in governmentality*. Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Foucault, M. (1994). *Power. Essential works 1954-1984*, (D. Defert & F. Ewald, Eds.). Penguin Random House.

Foucault, M. (2001). *Fearless speech*. Ed. Pearon, J Semiotext(e). CA

Foucault, M. (2003). *Madness and civilization*. Routledge.

Foucault, M., 2008. The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France, 1978-79. Palgrave Macmillan. on Neo-Liberal Governmentality (thing.net)

Foucault, M. (2019). *Ethics: subjectivity and truth: essential works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984*. Penguin UK.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Penguin Group

Freire, P. (1974). *Education for Critical Consciousness*. Sheed and Ward LTD

Frisch, M. B., Cornell, J., Villanueva, M., & Retzlaff, P. J. (1992). Clinical validation of the Quality-of-Life Inventory. A measure of life satisfaction for use in treatment planning and outcome assessment. *Psychological Assessment, 4*(1), 92–101. https://DOI.org/10.1037/1040-3590.4.1.92

Frosh, S., Phoenix, A., & Pattman, R. (2003). Taking a stand: Using psychoanalysis to explore the positioning of subjects in discourse. *British journal of social psychology, 42*(1), 39-53.

Frosh, S., Phoenix, A., & Pattman, R. (2017). *Young masculinities: Understanding boys in contemporary society.* Bloomsbury Publishing.

Furedi, F. (2010). *Wasted: why education isn't educating*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Gallacher, J., & Raffe, D. (2012). Higher education policy in post-devolution UK: more convergence than divergence? *Journal of education policy, 27*(4), 467-490. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2011.626080

Gallagher, L.A., & Gallagher, M. (2008). Methodological immaturity in childhood research? Thinking through participatory methods'. *Childhood, 15*(4), 499-516.

Garista P. (2018). *Come canne di bambù. Farsi mentori della resilienza nel lavoro educativo* [Like bamboo sticks. Making oneself mentor of resilience in educational work]. FrancoAngeli.

Garista, P. (2019). Pamphlet presented for the 6-9 June 2019 in Conference website: http://www.scuolademocratica-conference.net

Garista, P., & Pagliarino, E. (2020). *Educazione, resilienza, democrazia. Narrazioni per una scuola ecologica e resiliente* [Education, resilience, democracy. Narrations for an ecologic and resilient school]. (4) (PDF) Educazione, resilienza, democrazia. Narrazioni per una scuola ecologica e resiliente (researchgate.net)

Geertz, C. (1973). Thick Description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture. In *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (Chapter 1). Basic Books.

Geertz, C. (1968). *Islam Observed*. Yale University Press. In Rosaldo, R. (1993). *Culture and Truth: Remaking of Social Analysis*. Routledge.

Gelling L (2013). Participation in action research. *Nurse Researcher, 21*(2), 6-7.

Gerring, J. (2004). "What is a Case Study and What is it Good For?" *American Political Science Review 98*(2), 341-354.

Giddens, A. (2009). *Giddens Sociology.* Polity Press

Gidley, B. (2019) [Failing better at convivially researching spaces of diversity](). In M.L. Berg & M. Nowicka (Eds.), *Studying Diversity, Migration and Urban Multiculture: Convivial Tools for Research and Practice.* UCL Press. ISBN 9781787354784.

Gilbert, I. (Ed.). (2018). *The Working Class*. Independent Thinking Press.

Gillies, D. (2011). "Agile Bodies: A New Imperative in Neoliberal Governance." *Journal of Education Policy 26*(2), 207–223, DOI: 10.1080/02680939.2010.508177

Gillies, V. (2017). 'What about the children?' Re-engineering citizens of the future. In: J. Pykett, R. Jones & M. Whitehead (Eds.)*, Psychological Governance and Public Policy*. Routledge.

Gillies, V. (2018) (presentation given at ''What Future in Mind? Critical Perspectives on Youth well-being and Mental Health'' - London 18/05/2018 – a print out of the presentation was sent directly to me by the author).

Gilroy, P. (2013). *There ain't no black in the Union Jack*. Routledge.

González Rey, F. (2009). Epistemology and Ontology: a necessary debate for Psychology today. Diversitas: *Perspectivas en Psicología, 5*(2), 205-224.

Goulart, D. (2019). *Subjectivity and critical mental health: lessons from Brazil*. Routledge.

Gorczynski, P. (2018). 'More academics and students have mental health problems than ever before'. The Conversation, 22nd February 2018. [http://theconversation.com/more-academics-]()

and-students-have-mental-health-problems-than-ever-before-90339?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=twitterbutton

Gordon, S. (1991). *The History and Philosophy of Social Science: An Introduction*. Routledge. (Chapter 15, The development of sociological theory).

Gov.UK Policy paper (May 2010). The Coalition: our programme for government. The Coalition: our programme for government. The Coalition: our programme for government - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Grant, C. A., & Sleeter, C. E. (1986). Race, class, and gender in education research: An argument for integrative analysis. *Review of Educational Research, 56*(2), 195-211. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1170375

Gray, B. (2022, September 22). Lived experience research: A guide to the barriers and facilitators from a service user's perspective. In Menta Health Today. Lived experience research: A guide to the barriers and facilitators from a service user's perspective (linkedin.com)

Gray, P. (2010). The decline of play and rise in children's mental disorders. *Psychology Today, 1*, 26.

Gray, P. (2013). *Free to Learn: Why Unleashing the Instinct to Play Will Make Our Children Happier. More Self-Reliant, and Better Students for Life*. Basic books.

Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Lawrence and Wishart

Green, H. M. (2011). *Exploring teachers' construct o mental health and their reported responses to young people experiencing mental health problems: a grounded theory approach* [PhD thesis, University of East London - London].

Green, R. (2016). Research – Critical Evaluation of Class Dojo – Rowan Barnes (lincoln.ac.uk) -
    Research – Critical Evaluation of Class Dojo – Rowan Barnes (lincoln.ac.uk)

Greene, R.R. (2021). Erikson's Healthy Personality: Resilience and Development. Academia Letters,
    Article 1728. https://DOI.org/10.20935/AL1728

Greenwood, D.J. (2008). The Deinstitutionalization of Activist Research. In C. R. Hale (Ed.), *Engaging
    contradictions: Theory, politics, and methods of activist scholarship.* University of California
    Press.

Gros, F., Foucault, M., Burchell, G., Ewald, F., Fontana, A., & Davidson, A. I. (2005). *The
    Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981–1982*. Trans. Burchell, G.
    Palgrave Macmillan.

Hacking, I. (2007). Kinds of people: Moving targets. In *Proceedings-British Academy* (Vol. 151, p.
    285). Oxford University Press Inc.

Hall, K. D. (2017). Reflections on Student Futures and Political Possibilities: An Afterword.
    In *Anthropological Perspectives on Student Futures* (pp. 159-173). Palgrave Macmillan.

Han, B. C. (2015). *The Burnout Society.* Stanford University Press.

Han, B. C. (2017). *Psychopolitics: Neoliberalism and new technologies of power*. Verso Books.

Hancock, B. H. (2018). Michel Foucault and the problematics of power: theorizing DTCA and
    medicalized subjectivity. In *The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy: A Forum for Bioethics and
    Philosophy of Medicine* (Vol. 43, No. 4, pp. 439-468). Oxford University Press.

Haraway, D. (1988). Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial
    perspective. *Feminist studies*, *14*(3), 575-599.

Hartel, J. (2010). Managing documents at home for serious leisure: a case study of the hobby of gourmet cooking. *Journal of documentation, 66*(6), 847-874.

Hemment, J. (2007). Public anthropology and the paradoxes of participation: Participatory action research and critical ethnography in provincial Russia. *Human Organization, 66*(3), 301-314. https://doi.org/10.17730/humo.66.3.p153144353wx7008

Henriques, J., Hollway, W., Urwin, C., Venn, C., & Walkerdine, V. (1998). *Changing the subject: Psychology social regulation, and subjectivity.* Routledge.

Herbert, B., (2020). Introducing our youth-led research project, Breaking the Silence. Reimagining Education. States of Mind

Heron, J., & Reason, P. (2008). Extending epistemology within a co-operative inquiry. In: P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds), *The SAGE Handbook of Action Research. Participative Inquiry and Practice* (pp. 365-380, 2nd ed.). Sage. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4135/9781848607934

HESA, (2021, December 22). Non-continuation: UK Performance Indicators. Non-continuation: UK Performance Indicators | HESA

Hill, M. (2006). Children's voices on ways of having a voice: Children's and young people's perspectives on methods used in research and consultation. *Childhood, 13*(1), 69-89.

HM Government (2011). No health without mental health. A cross-government mental health outcomes strategy for people of all ages. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/213761/dh_124058.pdf

Hodgson, A., & Spours, K. (2013). *New Labour's New Educational Agenda: Issues and Policies for Education and Training at 14+.* London: Routledge.

Hoffman, K.E. (2009). Culture as text: hazards and possibilities of Geertz's literary/literacy metaphor. *The Journal of North African Studies, 14*(3-4), 417 430. DOI: 10.1080/13629380902924075

Hollway, W., & Jefferson, T. (2000). *Doing Qualitative Research Differently: free association, narrative and the interview method*. Sage Publications.

Hollway, W., & Jefferson, T. (2008). The free association narrative interview method. In: Given. L. (Ed.) *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*. Sevenoaks.

Honey, A., Boydell, K. M., Coniglio, F., Do, T. T., Dunn, L., Gill, K., ... & Tooth, B. (2020). Lived experience research as a resource for recovery: a mixed methods study. *BMC psychiatry, 20*(1), 1-13. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-020-02861-0

Hornsey, M. J. (2008). Social identity theory and self-categorization theory: A historical review. *Social and personality psychology compass, 2*(1), 204-222.

Humphrys, E., (2011). Rethinking Gramsci's Organic intellectuals. Alternative Futures and Popular Protest 16th international conference Manchester Metropolitan University 18th – 20th April 2011.

Humphrey, N. (2018). Are the Kids Alright? Examining the Intersection between Education and Mental Health. *Psychology of Education Review, 42*(1), 4-16.

Hayes, D., & Ecclestone, K. (2008). *The dangerous rise of therapeutic education*. Routledge

Hodgson, A., & Spours, K. (2013). Building a lifelong learning system for the future. In *Policies, Politics and the Future of Lifelong Learning* (191-205). Routledge.

Heydenberk, R., & Heydenberk, W. (2022). The Hard Truth about Soft Skills. Academia Letters, Article 4653. https://doi.org/10.20935/AL4653

IDEA (2017), Democracy and Resilience. Conceptual approaches and Considerations. [WWW] https://www.idea.int/gsod/files/IDEA-GSOD-2017-BACKGROUND-PAPER-RESILIENCE.pdf.

Infinito, J. (2003). Ethical self-formation: A look at the later Foucault. *Educational Theory, 53*(2), 155.

Irisdotter-Aldenmyr, S., & Olson, M. (2016). The inward turn in therapeutic education–an individual enterprise promoted in the name of the common good. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society, 24*(3), 387-400.

Jamal, F., Fletcher, A., Harden, A., Wells, H., Thomas, J., & Bonell, C. (2013). The school environment and student health: a systematic review and meta-ethnography of qualitative research. *BMC public health, 13*(1), 798.

James, A. & James, A. (2012). *Key Concepts in Childhood Studies*. SAGE.

James, D. (2015). How Bourdieu bites back: recognising misrecognition in education and educational research. *Cambridge Journal of Education, 45*(1), 97-112, DOI:10.1080/0305764X.2014.987644

Jahoda, M. (1958). *Current concepts of positive mental health.* BasicBooks. https://DOI.org/10.1037/11258-000

Jenkins, R. (2014). *Pierre Bourdieu*. Routledge.

Jerome, L., & Kisby, B. (2019). *The rise of character education in Britain: Heroes, dragons and the myths of character*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Jones, B. M. (2021). *Educating the Neoliberal Whole Child: A Genealogical Approach*. Routledge.

Jones, R. (1990). Educational practices and Scientific Knowledge. In S. Ball (1990), *Foucault and Education. Discipline and Knowledge*. Routledge.

Kanfer, R. (1990). Motivation theory and industrial and organizational psychology. *Handbook of industrial and organizational psychology, 1*(2), 75-130.

Keddie, A. (2016). Children of the market: performativity, neoliberal responsibilisation and the construction of student identities. *Oxford Review of Education, 42*(1), 108-122. http://dx.DOI.org/10.1080/03054985.2016.1142865

Kellet, M. (2006). Children as active researchers: a new research paradigm for the 21st century? NCRM Methods Review Papers NCRM/003. *ESRC National Centre for Research Methods.*

Kemmis, S. (2010). What is to be done? The place of action research. *Educational action research, 18*(4), 417-427. DOI: 10.1080/09650792.2010.524745

Kim, B. (2001). Social Constructivism. In M. Orey (Ed.), *Emerging perspectives on learning, teaching, and technology*. http://projects.coe.uga.edu/epltt

King, N., & Horrocks. C. (2010). *Interviews in qualitative research*. Sage publication.

Knowles, G., Gayer-Anderson, C., Beards, S., Blakey, R., Davis, S., Lowis, K., ... & Schools Working Group. (2021). Mental distress among young people in inner cities: the Resilience, Ethnicity and AdolesCent Mental Health (REACH) study. *J Epidemiol Community Health, 75*(6), 515-522.

Kramsch, C. (2014). Identity and subjectivity: different timescales, different methodologies. In *Researching identity and interculturality* (217-236). Routledge.

Kulz, C. (2014) 'Structure liberates?': mixing for mobility and the cultural transformation of 'urban children' in a London academy. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 37*(4), 685-701, DOI: 10.1080/01419870.2013.808760

Kulz, C. (2017). *Factories for Learning. Making Race, Class and Inequalities in the Neoliberal Academies*. Manchester-University-Press

Kuhn, L. (2021). Happy or not? – How wellbeing in young people in the UK is changing. [Happy or not? – How wellbeing in young people in the UK is changing - NFER](#)

Kvale, S. (1994). *Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Sage Publications, Inc.

Langer A. (1996). *Il viaggiatore leggero. Scritti 1961-1995* [The secret traveller. 1961-1995 writings]. Sellerio.

Lapping, C. (2011). *Psychoanalysis in social research: Shifting theories and reframing concepts*. Routledge.

Lapping, C. (2020). *Freud, Lacan, Zizek and Education: Exploring Unconscious Investments in Policy and Practice.* Routledge.

Lara, A., Liu, W., Ashley, C. P., Nishida, A., Liebert, R. J., & Billies, M. (2017). Affect and subjectivity. *Subjectivity, 10*(1), 30-43.

Leask, I. (2012). Beyond subjection: Notes on the later Foucault and education. *Educational Philosophy and Theory, 44*, 57-73.

Learning Theories (2020). Social Development Theory (Vygotsky). https://www.learning-theories.com/vygotskys-social-learning-theory.html

Lemov, D. (2012). *Teach like a champion field guide: A practical resource to make the 49 techniques your own*. John Wiley & Sons.

Leonard, N.R., Gwadz, M.V., Ritchie, A., Linick, J.L., Cleland, C.M., Elliott, L., & Grethel, M. (2015). A multi-method exploratory study of stress, coping, and substance use among high school youth in private schools. *Frontiers in psychology, 6*, 1028.

Levecque, K., & Mortier, A. (2018). "Wellbeing" and "Mental Health" in academia: nomen est omen? https://eua-cde.org/the-doctoral-debate/66:%E2%80%9Cwellbeing%E2%80%9D-and-%E2%80%9Cmental-health%E2%80%9D-in-academia-nomen-est-omen.html

Levecque, K., Anseel, F., De Beuckelaer, A., Van der Heyden, J., & Gisle, L. (2017). Work organization and mental health problems in PhD students. *Research Policy, 46*(4), 868-879.

Lorenzini, D. (2018). Governmentality, subjectivity, and the neoliberal form of life. *Journal for Cultural Research, 22*(2), 154-166.

Lundahl, L. (2012). Educational theory in an era of knowledge capitalism. *Studies in Philosophy and Education, 31*(3), 215-226.

McAvoy, J. M. (2009). *Negotiating constructions of success and failure: women in mid-life and formations of subject, subjectivity and identity* [PhD thesis The Open University].

McDaid, D., & A-La Park (2022). Mental Health Foundation - The economic case for investing in the prevention of mental health conditions in the UK (Summary). The economic case for investing in the prevention of mental health conditions in the UK | Mental Health Foundation – see also

Mental Health Foundation (2020). Economic and social costs: statistics.

https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/statistics/mental-health-statistics-economic-and-social-costs

McFarland, J., & Cole, M. (1988). An Englishman's Home is his Castle? A Response to Paul Willis's 'Unemployment: the final inequality'. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 9*(2), 199-203.

McLeod, J. (2000). 'Subjectivity and Schooling in a Longitudinal Study of Secondary Students'. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 21*(4), 501-521.

McLeod, J. (2017). Reframing responsibility in an era of responsibilisation: Education, feminist ethics. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 38*(1), 43-56. https://DOI.org/10.1080/01596306.2015.1104851

McNeil, B., Reeder, N. & Rich, J. (2012). A framework of outcomes for young people. The Young Foundation. https://youngfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Framework-of-outcomes-for-young-people-July-2012.pdf

McTaggart, R. (1997). *Participatory action research: International contexts and consequences*. Suny Press.

Lundy, L. (2007). 'Voice'is not enough: conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. *British educational research journal, 33*(6), 927-942.

Maisuria, A., (2018). *Class Consciousness and Education in Sweeden. A Marxist analysis for revolutionary strategy in a social democracy.* Routledge, 2017. Class_Consciousness_1PP_from_page_93-libre.PDF (d1wqtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net).

Maisuria, A., & Beach, D. (2017). *Ethnography and Education: Ethnography and Explanatory Critique. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*. Oxford University Press.

Malone, J. C., Liu, S. R., Vaillant, G. E., Rentz, D. M., & Waldinger, R. J. (2016). Midlife Eriksonian psychosocial development: Setting the stage for late-life cognitive and emotional health. *Developmental Psychology, 52*(3), 496–508. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0039875

Malson, H. (2004). Fictional(ising) identity? Ontological assumptions and methodological productions of ('anorexic') subjectivities. In M. Andrews, S.D. Sclater, C. Squire & A. Treacher (Eds), *Uses of Narrative*. Transaction.

Marlow, S. (Host). (2020). Storm and Stress: New Ways to look at Adolescent MH [Audio podcast]. BBC Radio 4. BBC Radio 4 - Storm and Stress: New Ways of Looking at Adolescent Mental Health

Marshall, J. D. (1989). Foucault and education. *Australian journal of education, 33*(2), 99-113 - ISSN 0004-9441

Masschelein, J. (2010). E-ducating the gaze: the idea of a poor pedagogy. *Ethics and education, 5*(1), 43-53. DOI: 10.1080/17449641003590621

Macdonald, J. (1982). Marxism and education: a brief survey. *The Journal of Educational Thought (JET)/Revue de la Pensée Educative*, *16*(3), 174-180.

Mental Health Taskforce (2016). Five year forward view for MH for the NHS in England. https://www.england.nhs.uk/mentalhealth/taskforce/

Merleau-Ponty, M. (1992) [1962]. *The Phenomenology of Perception*. Routledge

Merten, S., Martin Hilber, A., Biaggi, C., Secula, F., Bosch-Capblanch, X., Namgyal, P., & Hombach, J. (2015). Gender determinants of vaccination status in children: evidence from a meta-ethnographic systematic review. *PloS one*, *10*(8), e0135222.

https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-06/MHF-Investing-in-Prevention-Report-Summary.pdf

Miles, M., Huberman, A., & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: a methods sourcebook*. Sage-Publications-Ltd.

Millar, F. (2022, June 29). Inspecting the inspectors: students assess Ofsted regime's toll on well-being. https://www.theguardian.com/education/2022/jun/29/inspecting-the-inspectors-students-assess-ofsted-regimes-toll-on-wellbeing?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

Mills, C. (2015). The psychiatrization of poverty: Rethinking the mental health–poverty nexus. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass, 9*(5), 213-222.

Mitchell, K. (2019). Changing the subject: Education and the constitution of youth in the neoliberal era. Establishing Geographies of Children and Young People. *Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd*, 317-335. https://DOI.org/10.1007/978-981-4585-88-0_6-1

Moore, A. (2007). *Teaching and learning: Pedagogy, Curriculum and Culture*. Routledge.

Moore, A. (2018). *The Affected Teacher: Psychosocial Perspectives on Professional Experience and Policy Resistance*. Routledge.

Morrin, K. (2017). *Business as usual? The 'space' between reproduction and resistance in an entrepreneurial academy* [PhD thesis, The University of Manchester].

Morrin, K. (2022). The 'contradictory space' of the entrepreneurial academy: Critical ethnography, entrepreneurship education and inequalities. In *Inside the English education lab* (pp. 176-199). Manchester University Press.

Morrissey, J. (2015). Regimes of performance: Practices of the normalised self in the neoliberal university. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 36*(4), 614-634.

Murphy, R. (2016). 'How Testing Took Center stage'. In NUT booklet (2016). The Measurement of Learning.

https://www.academia.edu/30220336/Testing_times_and_the_thirst_for_data_for_what

Murray, A. (2011). *Agamben Dictionary*. Edinburgh University Press. ISBN 9780748646982

Nash, P. (2018). Response To: Professor Neil Humphrey's Paper'Are the Kids Alright? Examining the Intersection between Education and Mental Health'. *Psychology of Education Review, 42*(1), 35-38.

NatCen Social research - March 2016. The Survey of the Mental Health of Children and YP in England' – responses to the consultation on survey content.

http://www.natcen.ac.uk/media/1431140/mhcyp-2016_consultation-report.pdf

Nature. (2019). The mental health of PhD researchers demands urgent attention. *Nature*, *575*(7782), 257-258.

https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-03489-1?utm_source=The+PhD+Proofreaders+Knowledge+Base&utm_campaign=7b700edf97-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_06_15_12_12_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_0db29f8ed3-7b700edf97-96668657

Neilson, D. (2015). Class, precarity, and anxiety under neoliberal global capitalism: From denial to resistance. *Theory & Psychology, 25*(2), 184-201. https://DOI.org/10.1177/0959354315580607

NHS Digital (2017). Mental Health of Children and Young People in England. Summary of key

findings. https://files.digital.nhs.uk/9B/6F123E/MHCYP%202017%20Summary.pdf

NICEimpact (2019). 'NICEimpact mental health'. https://www.nice.org.uk/media/default/about/what-

we-do/into-practice/measuring-uptake/niceimpact-mental-health.pdf (NICE has since removed

the content from the website but the pdf can be requested at nice@nice.org.uk)

NICE (2009). Promoting young people's Social and Emotional Wellbeing in Secondary Education.

(Clinical Guidance 20). *NICE - National Institute for Clinical Excellence*. 1 (iriss.org.uk)

NICE (2022, September 7). Self-harm: assessment, management and preventing recurrence. *NICE -

National Institute for Clinical Excellence.* Overview | Self-harm: assessment, management and

preventing recurrence | Guidance | NICE

Oberprantacher, A., & Siclodi, A. (Eds.). (2017). *Subjectivation in political theory and contemporary

practices.* Palgrave Macmillan UK

OFS (2019, October 30). Students with unconditional offers more likely to drop out. Students with

unconditional offers more likely to drop out - Office for Students

Olmedo, A., & Wilkins, A. (2017). Governing through parents: A genealogical enquiry of education

policy and the construction of neoliberal subjectivities in England. *Discourse: studies in the

cultural politics of education, 38*(4), 573-589.

http://dx.DOI.org/10.1080/01596306.2015.1130026

Oldfield, J., Humphrey, N., & Hebron, J. (2016). The role of parental and peer attachment relationships

and school connectedness in predicting adolescent mental health outcomes. *Child and Adolescent

Mental Health, 21*(1), 21-29.

ONS (2022). Measures of National Well-being Dashboard. What is wellbeing? - What Works Wellbeing

Ong-Van-Cung, K. S. (2011). Critique et subjectivation. Foucault et Butler sur le sujet. *Actuel Marx* [Critique and Subjectivation: Foucault and Butler on the Subject]. *49*(1), 148-161. DOI 10.3917/amx.049.0148

Oswell, D. (2013). *The agency of children: From family to global human rights*. Cambridge-University-Press.

Oxford dictionary (2018). https://www.dictionary.com/browse/well-being

Patel, V., Flisher, A.J., Hetrick, S., & McGorry, P. (2007). Mental health of young people: a global public-health challenge. *The Lancet, 369*(9569), 1302-1313.

PEH & Children & Young People's Mental Health Coalition (2015). Promoting children and young people's emotional health and well-being. A whole school and college approach. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/414908/Final_EHWB_draft_20_03_15.pdf

Peruzzo, F. (2019). *The Government of Disability in Times of Austerity: Disability dispositif in Italian higher Education* [PhD thesis, UCL Institute of Education, London].

Peruzzo, F. (2020). The Model of Becoming Aware: disabled subjectivities, policy enactment and new exclusions in higher education. *Journal of Education Policy, 37*(3), 482-504. DOI: 10.1080/02680939.2020.1856415

Peters, R. S. (2015). *The concept of motivation*. Routledge.

PISA (2018). National Report for England. PISA 2018: national report for England - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Plowden, B. (1967). The Plowden Report: Children and their primary schools. A Report of the Central

Advisory Council for Education (England), 1. Plowden Report (1967) Volume 1

(educationengland.org.uk)

Pongratz, L. (2011). Controlled Freedom-the Formation of the Control Society. *Journal of*

Pedagogy, 2(2), 161-172.

Portelli, J. (2008). Researching education in Malta. In P. Sikes & A. Potts (Eds), *Researching education*

from the inside: Investigation from within (pp. 296-315). Routledge.

POSTNOTE (2022). UK Parliament post. POST-PN-0671.pdf (parliament.uk)

Preskill, H., & Catsambas, T. T. (2006). *Reframing evaluation through appreciative inquiry*. Sage -

https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/11873_Chapter_1.pdf

Price, H. S. (2001). 'Emotional Labour in the Classroom: a Psychoanalytic Perspective'. *Journal of*

Social Work Practice, 15(2), 161-18.

Price, H. S. (2002). 'The Emotional Context of Classroom Learning: A Psychoanalytic Perspective'.

European Journal of Psychotherapy, Counselling and Health, 5(3), 305-320.

RBA (May 2022). Reception baseline assessment and reporting arrangements. 2022 Reception baseline

assessment: assessment and reporting arrangements (ARA) - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

RC-PSYCH (2019). Behavioural problems and conduct disorder for parents and carers.

https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/parents-and-young-people/information-for-parents-

and-carers/behavioural-problems-and-conduct-disorder-for-parents-carers-and-anyone-who-

works-with-young-people

Read, J., & Masson, J. (2022). Biological Psychiatry and the Mass Murder of "Schizophrenics": From Denial to Inspirational Alternative. *Ethical Human Psychology and Psychiatry, 24*(2), DOI: 10.1891/EHPP-2021-0006

Reay, D. (2004). 'It's all becoming a habitus': beyond the habitual use of habitus in educational research. *British journal of sociology of education, 25*(4), 431-444.

Reay, D. (2005). Who goes where in higher education: an issue of class, ethnicity and increasing concern Institute for Policy Studies in Education London Metropolitan University. In Seminar paper presented at University of Birmingham.

Reay, D. (2010). *Identity making in schools and classrooms*. The SAGE handbook of identities, 277-294.

Reay, D. (2013a). 'We never get a fair chance': Working-Class Experiences of Education in the Twenty-First Century. In *Class inequality in austerity Britain* (pp. 33-50). Palgrave Macmillan

Reay, D. (2013b). Social mobility, a panacea for austere times: Tales of emperors, frogs, and tadpoles. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *34*(5-6), 660-677. DOI:10.1080/01425692.2013.816035.

Reay, D. (2018). *Miseducation: Inequality, education and the working classes.* Policy Press.

Reay, D. (2020). The perils and penalties of meritocracy: Sanctioning inequalities and legitimating prejudice. *The Political Quarterly, 91*(2), 405-412.

Reay, D. (2022). 'The more things change the more they stay the same': The continuing relevance of Bourdieu and Passeron's Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture. *RES. Revista Española de Sociología, 31*(3), 2. ISSN-e 1578-2824

Reay, D., Davies, J., David, M., & Ball, S. J. (2001). Choices of degree or degrees of choice? Class, 'race' and the higher education choice process. *Sociology, 35*(4), 855-874. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0038038501008550

Reay, D., G. Crozier, & Clayton, J. (2009). "'Strangers in Paradise'? Working-Class Students in Elite Universities." *Sociology 43*(6): 1103–1121. doi:10.1177/0038038509345700.

Reay, D., Crozier, G., & James, D. (2011). *White middle-class identities and urban schooling*. Springer.

Rebughini, P. (2014). Subject, subjectivity, subjectivation. Sociopedia. isa, 11(1), 1-11. Layout 1 (ehess.fr)

Rebughini, P. (2018). Critical agency and the future of critique. *Current Sociology, 66*(1), 3-19. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392117702427

Recalcati, M. (2014). *L'Ora di Lezione. Per un'erotica dell'insegnamento* [Lesson time. For an erotic of teaching]. Einaudi

Rimmer, M. (2017). Music, middle childhood, and agency: The value of an interactional–relational approach. *Childhood, 24*(4), 559-573.

RMHA (2021). Reforming Mental Health Act White Paper 2021. Reforming the Mental Health Act - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Rosaldo, R. (1993). *Culture and Truth: Remaking of Social Analysis*. Routledge

Rose, N. (1989). *Governing the Soul: the shaping of the private self.* Free Association.

Rose, N. (1998). *Inventing Our Selves: Psychology, power, and personhood*. Cambridge University Press.

Rose, N. (2013, May 13). Mental Illness: Five Hard questions [Video]. YouTube

   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KxI6DmbEKQg&feature=emb_logo

Rose, N. (2014, September 11). From Risk to Resilience: Responsible citizens for uncertain times

   [Video]. YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=unc2_r_HprA

Rose, N. (2018). *Our psychiatric future*. John Wiley & Sons

Rose, N., & Lentzos, F. (2017). Making us resilient: Responsible citizens for uncertain times. In S.

   Trnka & C. Trundle (Eds.), *Competing responsibilities: The ethics and politics of contemporary*

   life. Duke University Press.

Rovatti, P. A. (2013*). Restituire la soggettività: lezioni sul pensiero di Franco Basaglia* [Returning the

   subjectivity: lessons on Franco Basaglia's thinking]. Edizioni Alpha Beta Verlag.

Rutter, M., & Madge, N. (1976). *Cycles of Disadvantage*. Heinemann.

Schools White Paper (March 2022). Schools white paper delivers real action to level up education.

   Schools White Paper delivers real action to level up education - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Sebastianelli, P. (2021). *Economia del desiderio e governamentalità neoliberale. Lavoro, desiderio e*

   piacere nei processi di soggettivazione contemporaneita [The economy of desire and neoliberal

   governmentality. Work, desire and pleasure in contemporary subjectivation processes]. In De

   Rosa, B. (2021). *Forme del malessere nell'orizzonte contemporaneo. Un dialogo*

   interdisciplinare [Forms of malaise in the contemporary horizon. An interdisciplinary dialogue].

   Alpes Italia srl.

Sharp, R., & Green, A. (1975). *Educational and social control. A study in progressive primary*

   education. Routledge/Kegan Paul.

Shaw, A., Zahuranec, A.J., Young, A., Verhulst, S.G., Requejo, J., & Carvajal, L. (2020). Adolescent Mental Health: Using A Participatory Mapping Methodology to Jointly Identify Key Topics, Questions, and Priorities for Future Work and Data Collaboration. [Adolescent Mental Health: Using A Participatory Mapping Methodology to Jointly Identify Key Topics, Questions, and Priorities for Future Work and Data Collaboration (thegovlab.org)](thegovlab.org)

Shaw, S.E. (2010). Reaching the parts that other theories and methods can't reach: How and why a policy-as-discourse approach can inform health- related policy. *Health 14*(2) 196-212.

Shaw, S. E., & Russell, J. (2012). Policy-as-discourse-an additional theory that makes for a more comprehensive glossary. [Policy-as-discourse - an additional theory that makes for a more comprehensive glossary | Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health (bmj.com)](bmj.com)

Shahjahan, R. A. (2020). On 'being for others': Time and shame in the neoliberal academy. *Journal of Education Policy, 35*(6), 785-811.

Scheurich, J. (1997/2014). *Research method in the postmodern*. Routledge.

Simon, B. (1977). Marxism Today. Marx and the Crisis in Education, 195-205. http://banmarchive.org.uk/collections/mt/pdf/07_77_195.pdf

Sinha, S., & Back, L. (2014). Making methods sociable: dialogue, ethics and authorship in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research, 14*(4), 473-48.

Sinha, C. (2016). Rethinking interdisciplinarity in social sciences: Is it a new revolution or paradox?. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Education, 4*(2), 44-66.

Smith, L. M. (1978). 8: An evolving logic of participant observation, educational ethnography, and other case studies. *Review of research in education, 6*(1), 316-377.

Smith, M., (2018). *The Emotional Learner. Understanding emotions, learners and achievement.* Routledge.

Smith, M., (2020). *Becoming Buoyant. Helping Teachers and Students Cope in the Day-to-Day.* Routledge.

Smith, P.K., Cowie, H., & Blades, M. (2015). *Understanding children's development.* John Wiley & Sons.

Smith, R. (2016). *Education, citizenship, and Cuban identity.* Palgrave Macmillan. - ISBN: 9781137583055

Spivak, G. C. (2003). Can the subaltern speak? *Die Philosophin, 14*(27), 42-58. http://users.uoa.gr/~cdokou/TheoryCriticismTexts/Spivak-Subaltern.pdf

Spohrer, K., Stahl, G., & Bowers-Brown, T. (2018). Constituting neoliberal subjects? 'Aspiration' as technology of government in UK policy discourse. *Journal of Education Policy, 33*(3), 327-342. http://dx.DOI.org/10.1080/02680939.2017.1336573

Stahl, G. (2018). *Ethnography of a Neoliberal School: Building cultures of success.* Routledge.

Stambach, A., & Hall, K. D. (Eds.). (2016). *Anthropological perspectives on student futures: Youth and the politics of possibility*. Springer.

Stake, R., 1978. 'The Case Study Method in Social Inquiry'. *Educational Researcher 7*(2), 5-8.

Staunæs, D., & Kofoed, J. (2015). Hesitancy as ethics. *Reconceptualizing Educational Research Methodology, 6*(1), 24-39.

Stewart, H., & Campbell, D. (2019, June 16). Teachers to be trained to spot mental health issues early.

Teachers to be trained to spot mental health issues early | Mental health | The Guardian

Strozier, R. M. (2002). *Foucault, subjectivity, and identity: Historical constructions of subject and self.* Wayne State University Press.

Sotardi, V. A. (2017). Exploring school stress in middle childhood: interpretations, experiences, and coping. *Pastoral Care in Education, 35*(1), 13-27.

Sullivan, A. 2002. Bourdieu and education: how useful is Bourdieu's theory for researchers? *Netherlands Journal of Social Sciences, 38*(2), 144-166.

Tamboukou, M., & Ball, S. J. (2003). Genealogy and ethnography: Fruitful encounters or dangerous liaisons. Dangerous encounters*: Genealogy and ethnography, 17*, 1-36.

Taylor, C. (2021). *The politics of recognition. In Campus wars* (249-263). Routledge.

Thatcher, M. (1981, May 1). Mrs Thatcher: The First Two Years, Interview with the Sunday Times. https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/104475

Thomson, P. (2022, February 14). Concluding well, part 1 – 'the big air problem'. conclusion | Search Results | patter (patthomson.net)

Thompson, K. (2015). Explaining Gender Inequality in Education – In School Factors. Explaining Gender Inequality in Education – In School Factors – ReviseSociology

Thorley, C. (2016). *Education, Education, Mental Health: Supporting secondary schools to play a central role in early intervention mental health services.* IPPR.

Tola, E. (Host). (2022). 'Salute Interna Lorda' [Internal health gross weight]. In RADIO3 Scienza podcast https://www.raiplaysound.it/audio/2022/10/Radio3-Scienza-del-12102022-72878ebb-e253-4a91-94a9-029a070867a2.html

Toye, F., Seers, K., Allcock, N., Briggs, M., Carr, E., & Barker, K. (2014). Meta-ethnography 25 years on: challenges and insights for synthesizing a large number of qualitative studies. *BMC medical research methodology, 14*(1), 1-14.

Torrance, H. (2017). Blaming the victim: Assessment, examinations, and the responsibilisation of students and teachers in neo-liberal governance. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural politics of Education, 38*(1), 83-96.

Turner, V. (1969). Liminality and communitas. The ritual process: *Structure and anti-structure, 94*(113), 125-30. [TurnerVictor- Liminality and Communitas.pdf (trinity.edu)](#)

Turner, V. (1967). *The Forest of Symbols. Aspects of Ndembu Rituals.* Cornell Univ. Press

UKRI (2021). Framework for research ethics. [Our core principles – UKRI](#)

UNCRC (1989). United Nation Convention on the Right of the Child. [Convention on the Rights of the Child | OHCHR](#).

van Gennep, A. (2013/1909). *The Rites of Passage*. Routledge.

UNICEF (2018). Adolescent Mental Health. https://data.unicef.org/topic/adolescents/mental-health/#_ednref1

van Manen, M. (2016). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy.* Routledge.

Vinje, H. F., Langeland, E., & Bull, T. (2017). Aaron Antonovsky's development of salutogenesis, 1979 to 1994. In *The handbook of salutogenesis* (25-40). Springer, Cham.

Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind in Society*. Harvard University Press.

Wakefield, A., & Fleming, J. (Eds.). (2008). *The Sage dictionary of policing*. SAGE Publications Ltd. DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446269053

Walker, M., & Boni, A. (2020). Epistemic Justice, Participatory Research and Valuable Capabilities. In *Participatory Research, Capabilities and Epistemic Justice* (1-25). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.

Walkerdine, V. (1998/1984). Developmental Psychology and the child-centred psychology. In Henriques, J., Hollway, W., Urwin, C., Venn, C., & Walkerdine, V. (1998). *Changing the subject: Psychology social regulation, and subjectivity.* Routledge.

Waller, R. (2011). The sociology of education. In B. Dufour & W. Curtis (Eds), *Studying Education: An Introduction to the Key Disciplines in Education Studies*. Open University Press

Wandel, T. (2001). The power of discourse: Michel Foucault and critical theory. *Journal for Cultural Research, 5*(3), 368-382.

Wellington, J. (2015). *Educational Research. Contemporary Issues and Practical Approaches*. Bloomsbury.

Wells, K. (2015). *Childhood in a Global Perspective*. Polity Press.

Wetherell, M. (2008). Subjectivity or psycho-discursive practices? Investigating complex intersectional identities. *Subjectivity, 22*(1), 73-81. DOI: 10.1057/sub.2008.7

Wetherell, M., & Edley, N. (1999). Negotiating hegemonic masculinity: Imaginary positions and psycho-discursive practices. *Feminism & psychology, 9*(3), 335-356. DOI: 10.1177/0959353599009003012

WHO (2019). World Health Organization. https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-mental-health

Whiteford, G. (2000). Occupational deprivation: Global challenge in the new millennium. *British journal of occupational therapy, 63*(5), 200-204.

Whitehead, J., & McNiff, J. (2006). *Action research: Living theory*. Sage. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4135/9781849208536 (accessed online: https://methods.sagepub.com/book/action-research-living-theory)

Whyte, W.F. (1989). Advancing scientific knowledge through participatory action research. In *Sociological forum, 4*(3), 367-385). Kluwer Academic Publishers-Plenum Publishers.

Wiklund, M., Malmgren-Olsson, E. B., Öhman, A., Bergström, E., & Fjellman-Wiklund, A. (2012). Subjective health complaints in older adolescents are related to perceived stress, anxiety and gender–a cross-sectional school study in Northern Sweden. *BMC public health, 12*(1), 993.

Wilkins, A. (2012a). The spectre of neoliberalism: Pedagogy, gender and the construction of learner identities. *Critical Studies in Education, 53*(2), 197-210.

Wilkins, A. (2012b). Push and pull in the classroom: Gender, competition and the neoliberal subject. *Gender and Education, 24*(7), 765-768.

Wilkins, A. (2016). *Modernizing education Governance: Corporate planning and expert handling in state education*. Routledge

Wilkins, A. & Olmedo, A. (Eds). (2018a). Education governance and social theory: Interdisciplinary approaches to research (1-20). Bloomsbury Publishing.

Wilkins, A. and Olmedo, A. (2018b). Conceptualizing education governance: Framings, perspectives and theories. In A. Wilkins and A. Olmedo (Eds). *Education governance and social theory: Interdisciplinary approaches to research* (pp. 1-20). Bloomsbury Publishing

Wilkins, A. (2019). Technologies in rational self-management: Interventions in the 'responsibilisation'of school governors. In *World Yearbook of Education 2020* (pp. 99-112). Routledge.

Willis, P. (1977). *Learning to labour. How working-class kids get working class jobs*. Saxon-House.

Wilson, S. (1977). The use of ethnographic techniques in educational research. *Review of educational research, 47*(2), 245- 265.

Winch, C., & Gingell, J. (2008). *Philosophy of Education: The Key Concepts* (2nd edition). Routledge.

Wit, D. J. D., Karioja, K., Rye, B. J., & Shain, M. (2011). Perceptions of declining classmate and teacher support following the transition to high school: Potential correlates of increasing student mental health difficulties. *Psychology in the Schools, 48*(6), 556-572.

Wood, P. (2016). *Educational research. Taking the Plunge*. Indipendent-Thinking-Press.

World Health Organization. (2004). Department of mental health and substance abuse. Promoting mental health: concepts, emerging evidence, practice: summary report. Geneva: WHO, Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth). University of Melbourne.

Wright, K. (2008). Conceptualizing Influence and Impact in Development Research. Briefing Paper for ESRC- DFID.

Wolcott, H.F. (2005). *The art of fieldwork*. Oxford: Altamira Press

Youdell, D. (2006). Subjectivation and performative politics—Butler thinking Althusser and Foucault: intelligibility, agency and the raced–nationed–religioned subjects of education. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 27*(4), 511-528.

Yusuf, Y. (2019). *'Burnt at the [high] stakes'? A qualitative study of teacher and pupil wellbeing in neoliberal education systems* [Unpublished Master's thesis, UCL Institute of Education]. [(PDF) 'Burnt at the [high] stakes'? A qualitative study of teacher and pupil wellbeing in neoliberal education systems. UCL Institute of Education. | Yasmin Yusuf - Academia.edu](#)

Zizek, S. (2017). Slavoj Zizek - Cynicism Is A Symptom Of Ideology [Video]. YouTube. [(1200) Slavoj Zizek - Cynicism Is A Symptom Of Ideology - YouTube](#)