

*“I know I have some trauma responses, but it’s not my identity”:*

Amplifying diverse narratives of care experienced and estranged students

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# Background context

- Priority for HE equity and widening participation
- Discussion tends to repeat familiar refrains about underrepresentation:
  - Lower progression (Harrison, 2017; Centre for Social Justice, 2019)
  - Belonging (Ellis and Johnson, 2019; Stevenson et al, 2020)
  - Financial insecurity (Gazeley and Hinton-Smith, 2018; O'Neill et al, 2019)
  - Mental health (Hauri et al, 2019; Rouncefield-Swales and Bland, 2020)
  - Attrition (Centre for Social Justice, 2019; Office for Students, 2020a)
  - Awarding gaps (Harrison, 2017)
  - Precarious graduate transitions (Office for Students, 2020a; 2020b)
- **These inequalities should - and do - demand our continued attention. However, they do not tell the whole story** and can produce a negative effect, particularly when coupled with...

# News media and public imagination

## Blackpool's children in care conviction rate 'absolutely not good enough'

Jeanette Richards said work was being done to address it and the council was "aspirational for our children."

Towns and gowns

## 'All my safety nets went overnight': how Covid-19 is isolating student care-leavers

Without financial help and emotional support, progress in getting more care-leavers into university could be undone

Tess Reidy

Mon 20 Jul 2020 07:00 BST

Students estranged from their families could end up destitute this summer

*Becca Bland*

## Why have so many people in prison spent time in care as children?

October 26, 2016 2.02pm BST

A postcode lottery is stopping children in care from going to university

*Debra Humphris*

## Coronavirus: Students with no relatives 'may have to drop out'

By Max Evans  
BBC News

## Estranged students: 'Homeless' in the holidays

8 May 2019

University or prison? Why getting to the former can feel out-of-reach for care-leavers...

# Methods: Two-phase narrative study

- First phase: 11 biographical-narrative interviews (see table below)
- Second phase: Follow-up analysis interviews (in progress)

<b>Status</b>	6 care experienced	5 estranged	NB: Kinship care in both
<b>Discipline</b>	6 STEM	4 Social Science	1 Arts/Humanities
<b>Stage of study</b>	3 first-year UG	6 second-year UG	2 PGT
<b>Care experience/estrangement bursary</b>	9 receiving bursary	2 not receiving bursary	
<b>Ages</b>	Ranged from 18 to 29		

# Labelling and deficit discourses

*'Most people will see me as just a white male, so then I walk away with that privilege [...] but then they find out I was in care, that I grew up in care, it seemed to be that I've then had all that privilege ripped away and some oppression added onto it'*

Phoenix, Social Science student

*'If I could turn around and say they're dead... But for me it's more like saying, "Oh, my parents are in prison", kind of. [...] My situation, my estrangement, is laced with stigma'*

Marissa, Arts/Humanities student

However, students' narratives highlighted a wealth of powerful resources, strategies and ambitions which undermined deficit interpretations...

## Independence, maturity and financial literacy

*'Things like commuting in, studying at my own time, I was part-time. [...] because I had to go through those extra bits to get here, I had a lot of skills that I needed'*

Gray, Social Science student

*'I went straight into my second year of college doing a BTEC and the council put me into independent living, so I was living on my own in a flat from 18 to 20-ish [...] I was working about 30 hours alongside college'*

Harry, STEM student

## Passion for learning and postgraduate ambitions

*'I've always been quite academically driven, so when there were hardships in my life, I've always thrown myself into my work, even when I was a kid'*

Abigail, STEM student

*'I hopefully will get into management [...] and then do a [...] Master's alongside. So, then if I do that, that would then allow me a pathway into working into the UN, which from working in the UN I can then edit public policies'*

Phoenix, Social Science student

# Socially-oriented professional horizons

*'I want to, you know, do a job which [...] is going to change people's lives'*

Louise, Social Science student

*'Something I'm really interested in [...] was to do some sort of development, humanitarian-type projects'*

Sarah, STEM student

*'Emergency critical care for me, I think'*

Mirai, STEM student

*'My biggest goal is to stand for Parliament. [...] maybe even make it!'*

Michael, Social Science student

## Loved ones and connections

*'I don't think I would have been as eager or as able to do [university] without [...] my wife. [...] it was kind of like almost doing a really personal, emotional thing, being able to move all our stuff in together and having the space'*

Gray, Social Science student

*'My grandparents are like my favourite people in the world, they're really cool. They like take me to really cool educational places. Like, I would miss school a lot but it would be to go to a convention about global warming or something like that.'*

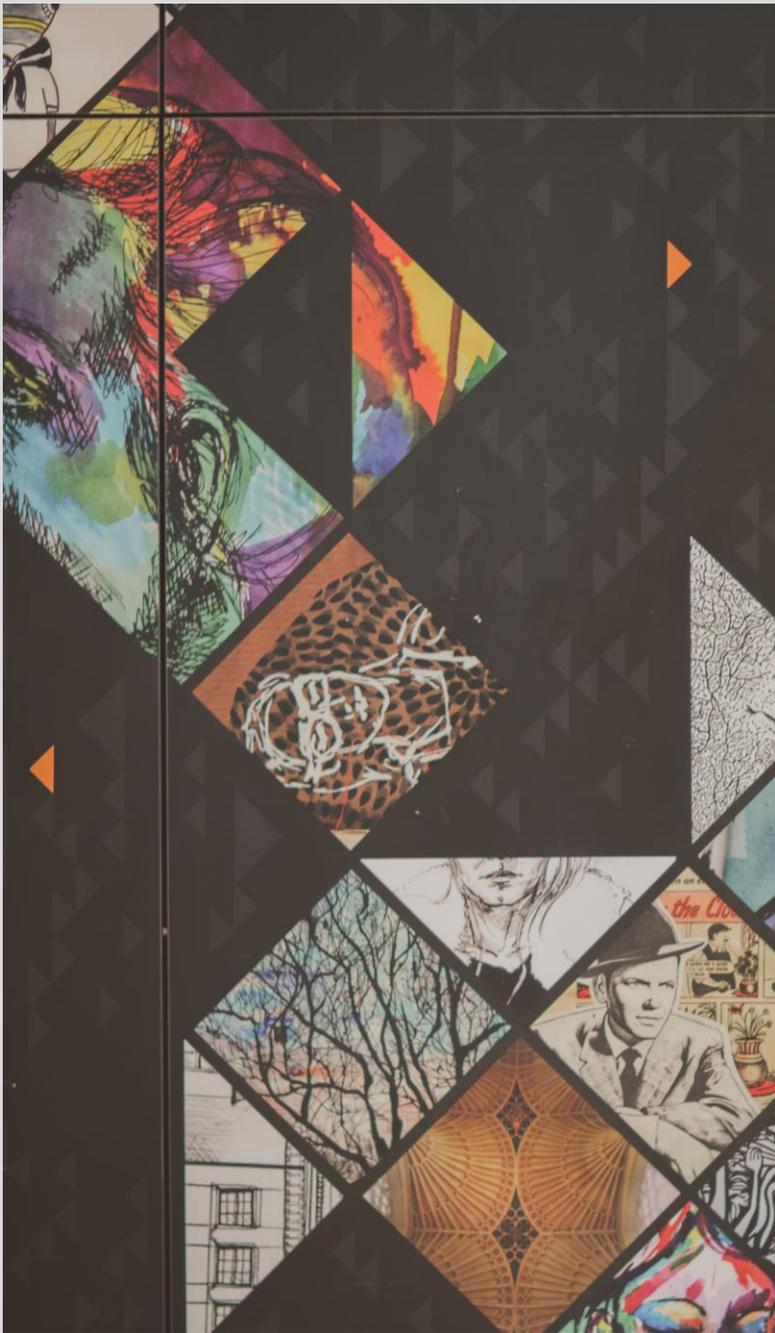
Ellie, STEM student

# Conclusions and implications

- Clearly not intrinsically lesser than the typified Gen Z student. On the contrary, embodying a wealth of powerful resources, strategies and horizons as a result – not in spite – of past experiences.
  - Challenges how the dominant discourse interprets these experiences solely through a lens of trauma.

## Implications

- Does not lessen the reality of material inequalities or the need to tackle them but introduces parallel narratives which recognise students as subjects of value
- Need to amplify students' voices and their plural lived experiences to destabilise negative representations – **speaking with not over and for.**



## Prompts for campfire discussion:

1. How we can simultaneously tackle (and not diminish) real inequalities whilst recognising underrepresented students as subjects of value?
2. How can we best amplify students' lived experiences?

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