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'She’s the Reason I Do It': The Impact of and Responses to Post-2010 Austerity by Lone Parent Families in North Edinburgh (Scotland)

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Abstract

Supported by the Julie-Ann Macqueen Trust, this doctoral thesis examines the experiences of lone parent families in the working class, and socially, religiously, and culturally diverse area of north Edinburgh (formerly Greater Pilton; Scotland) during the decade of state-sanctioned ‘age of austerity’ that followed the 2008 global financial crash (Cooper and Whyte, 2017). Informed by historical and contemporary literature outlining how lone parent families have been conceptualised in deeply gendered, racialised, and frequently ableist ways, my research engaged with lone parents frequently ignored within past investigations. Alongside the normative cisgendered mother-headed lone parent families typified in the academy, press, and practice, this account includes queer lone parents, lone father-headed families, and others who are not the primary caregiver within their families. Utilising Biographical Interpretive Narrative Methods (Ross and Moore, 2016; Wengraf, 2004), research participants were afforded a space within their own community in which they retained control over their own narrative, shaping the dialogue a which touched on the ways in which they sought to retain or enforce their agency, fostered cross-community and interpersonal support networks, or navigated the frequently extreme hardships facing lone parent families in contemporary Scotland.

Adopting a Freirean-approach to data analysis of the thirty-four interview transcripts (Freire, 1972), generative themes emerged on re-defining lone parenthood in the contemporary context as we better understanding the precise experiences of queer lone parents, disabled lone parents, and migrant lone parents through their lived experiences. This, when combined with the extensive literature on each demographic’s experiences of state welfare and policy, allowed uniquely situated understandings to emerge. Innovative theoretical models are produced within the research as mechanisms through which researchers can demonstrate their relationships and connections to participants (a model of proximity), as well as producing a means for charting the priorities and ambitions of individual and social movements - to protect and retain existing services and spaces, or to create new (often radical) methods of peer support amidst the hostile social, economic, and political environments of contemporary Scotland.

The findings demonstrate significant gaps in current educational provision concerning who lone parent families are, offers intimate insights into the marginalisations and oppressions they face centred on precise intersectionalities, and strives to recognise these participants not as those simply victims of policy, but political agents in their own rights. Across this thesis, stories of determination, hope, and care emerge, enabling that very shift in narrative, resulting, I believe, in powerful insights across this immersive exploration of contemporary lone parenthood.
Acknowledgements

Note of Thanks

Foremost, my thanks to the Julie-Ann Macqueen Trust for awarding me the Macqueen Scholarship. The three years of funding enabled me, for the first time, to focus on my academic research without managing multiple sessional, part-time, and overnight posts to make ends meet. The relative financial support was deeply appreciated.

Thanks goes to my partner, Alex, and to our beautiful and energetic boys Sully and Seb. Thank you to Andreea, Nicola, and Marta for your critical engagements with my work. Jackie and Hayley, you’ve both been incredibly influential in getting the work into shape.

And, more than any others, my thanks to each of the participants and their families for sharing your stories, your homes, your fights, and the struggles.

Finally, to you, reader, I hope you find this investigation insightful and can share in its insights.

Luke Ray Di Marco Campbell
Preface

The following doctoral thesis presents my investigation into the lived experiences of lone parent families in north Edinburgh - specifically, the area formerly known as Greater Pilton. The research examines how this community has navigated a decade of state-imposed austerity following the 2008 economic crisis. The work, funded by the Julie-Ann Macqueen Scholarship, involved dialogues with thirty-four adult participants, all of whom live in the area or did so until very recently during the time concerned.

With the qualitative research method of Biographical Interpretive Narrative Method (BINM) explored during my research presentation at the inaugural University of Edinburgh Social Work Department Conference in 2019, a refined line of investigation centred upon a series of themes stemming from the literature on lone parents and their families. These focused on social, political, and economic factors, as it investigated their lives during a decade of austere politics. In-keeping with the BINM approach, a single opening prompt was offered of ‘[t]ell me about your life as a lone parent…’ with the other aspects emerging organically through extensive autobiographically-led dialogues. As explained in the Methodologies chapter subsection 5.3 Interview Method & Key Discussion Points, the participants were afforded as long as they wanted to contextualise their circumstances and histories, with my subsequent questions only seeking greater clarity over points raised by the participant, rather than pushing the conversation in particular directions. If certain topics were not raised naturally, these were understood - within the chosen method - to be of less significance to the respondent than I may have assumed. It’s essential to recognise, however, that some experiences are unlikely to be shared with a researcher who, for many participants, was a stranger.

Save for the two pilot interviews (in November 2019), the discussions occurred between mid-March 2020 - late-May 2020 aligning with the start of the UK Covid-19 lockdown period. The Covid-19 lockdown has since been posited as the biggest social harm of the last decade aside from austerity - and while it was only beginning to be felt in Scotland, the impact on safeguarding was immediate and required a shift in interview practices. A handful of the latter stage interviews occurred as the City of Edinburgh council closed schools and childcare facilities, and physical distancing (so-called ‘social distancing’) measures were coming into place under instruction from the Scottish Government (Scottish Government, 2020). Consequently, this thesis offers insights into lone parent lives in a more ‘business as usual’ period in the UK under state-imposed austerity than in the unique circumstances of the pandemic which saw an unprecedented surge in funding for community groups and short-lived ‘uplifts’ for some social security payments - collectively partially easing additional financial stress (Winchester, 2021; CAS, 2021).

What is offered, therefore, are tales of struggle, intersectional fights for equity and justice, stories of chosen and birth families coming together with local networks, and insights into the difficult choices many make to survive. Hope, however, abounds in the ways that these lone parents have navigated such challenges and, in many cases, not only survived but thrived in the face of adversity - be that alone or collectively. I believe that by sharing in these participant-driven accounts, those of us formulating or already engaged in community-based practices (be they social work, community development, etc.) might come to better recognise the agency of those we work and live alongside - particularly, in this instance, lone parents who have often been considered victims of state policy (Watt, 2016) or demonised as scroungers (Bloor, 2012; see also Channel Four 2016). Thank you for taking the time to
read this work - the culmination of the kindness of neighbours and a collaboration of inspiring lone parents taking empowerment into their own hands.
1. Introduction

Rooted in north Edinburgh (specifically, the area formerly known as ‘Greater Pilton’, a working class community of high religious, racial, and cultural diversity for the Scottish context (NRoS, 2014), this doctoral thesis examines the experiences of lone parent families in the post-2010 ‘age of austerity’ (Seymour, 2014; Lee and Beech, 2011; Streeck and Schäfer, 2013). For clarity, the Office for National Statistics (ONS, 2017) define a family as ‘a married, civil partnered or cohabiting couple with or without children, or a lone parent, with at least one child, who live at the same address,’ whilst ‘dependent’ refers to children aged fifteen-years-old or under, or those under eighteen-years-old but who are still in full-time education. Specifically in Scotland, National Records of Scotland (NRoS, 2014) identify dependents as ‘any person aged 0-15 in a household (whether or not in a family) or a person aged 16-18 who’s in full-time education and living in a family with [their] parent(s) or grandparent(s)’. A distinction is drawn, however, for those ‘aged 16-18 who have a spouse, partner or child living in the household’ as these young adults would no longer be considered dependents in a legal sense. Given the geographical focus, the lone parents considered in this study are categorised by the Scottish definition primarily, though the complicated political systems of the UK and devolved governments mandates navigation between two states1 and an abundance of other actors, agencies, and other organisations. The circumstances of an individual becoming a lone parent - a topic explored extensively during most of the research conversations - are diverse. The series of categorising factors that permitted eligibility to participate in the study will be detailed in-full as part of the participant recruitment subsection in the Methodologies chapter. Conceptualisation and definitions of lone parents (and, by extension, lone parent families) from within the literature, policy, and relevant organisations will also be explored more extensively in section 3.4 How are lone parents defined by the state?

The thesis contributes to the modernisation of how academics, relevant support services, and political actors engage with, support, and understand lone parent families. It does so by building on historic understandings of lone parenthood2 in and outside of the academy including studies that typically focused on ‘single’ or ‘unmarried’ mothers. As outline in the Literature Review, a majority of these investigations have centred - or, indeed, assumed - cisgendered and heterosexual lone parents at the expense of others (see e.g. Kosciw and Diaz, 2008; and Taylor, 2020a). Many past studies have also failed to recognise the political and personal agency that those in positions of social or economic hardship frequently retain and enact (a phenomenon that has, however, been observed by, amongst others,

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1 OPFS (2018), however, clarify which level of government has control over policies impacting the lives of lone parent families, stating that ‘lone parent families are affected by UK Government policies on welfare benefits, employment and child maintenance and […] Scottish Government policies on employability, skills, education, health, childcare, family law and social work.’

2 The differences between terms related to this demographic (‘lone’, ‘single’, ‘solo’, ‘independent’ parenting’, etc.) will be explored extensively during the terminology section of the Literature Review.
Welfens and Bonjour, 3 2021; Holmes et al., 4 2021; Chung and Son, 5 2019). In doing so, a wealth of postmodernist theorists, but primarily those engaging in intersectional practice, self-organised communities, and non-normative or queer approaches are drawn upon to ensure that this contribution does ‘not merely appropriate concepts from contemporary social theory to rework old themes in faintly refined ways’ (Giroux et al., 1996, p.1945). Rather, the thesis sincerely engages with lone parent families - collaboratively exploring their lives, relationships, achievements, struggles, and activism - on their own terms and in their own words. Retaining command over the narration of one’s own lived experiences served as the very justification for adopting a Biographical Interpretive Narrative Method-informed approach to the fieldwork, as depicted by Wengraf (2004), Corbally and O’Neill (2014), and Ross and Moore (2016) - the rationale for undertaking this dialogical-driven approach to the fieldwork will be explored in the Methodologies chapter. Foremost, however, the below outline serves as an introduction to the temporal and geographical contexts, with an emphasis placed on the precise socio-political and economic circumstances in which these life experiences occurred.

The Context of UK Austerity:

Following the 2008 global economic recession, the Labour Party (up until 2010), the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition (2010-2015), and then consecutive Conservative and Unionist Party-led UK Governments (2015-now) have implemented an intense austerity programme involving a myriad of welfare reforms (Chang and Moore, 2017). This has included major overhauls to social security and the drastic reduction or significant reshaping of funding made available to Third Sector organisations and community groups (Cooper and Whyte, 2017; Olah, 2019; Patrick, 2017; Campbell and Arya, 2019). These have seen reductions in the social support provided in communities across UK, shifting much of the need to enact and practice care and aid onto the communities themselves. Such austerity has impacted major social security upon which many low-income families rely (Goodin, 1985; Spicker, 2002; Ghysels and Van Lancker, 2011; Nelson, 2011; Loopstra and Tarasuk, 2013), reduced provision from many support services (UNISON, 2013; Stuckler et al., 2017; FEANTSA, 2011; Cummins, 2018), and caused the complete closure of others (Walker and Corbett, 2013). That communities such as those in north Edinburgh face significant issues around poverty and political disenfranchisement, amongst other factors, indicates that such austere shifts have had a disproportionate impact on local residents, and demonstrates relevance of this research project.

Among the populations most severely affected by this ideological shift were lone parent families - a community that remains primarily formed of lone mothers (WBG, 2017; OPFS, 2017; EloGE, 2016) - people living with a disability or disabilities (Runswick-Cole and Goodley, 2015; Ryan, 2019), and young

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3 Welfens and Bonjour (2021) consider the perceived vulnerability and agency of lone parent refugees.

4 Here, the authors illustrated the emotional intelligence witnessed in the ‘future building of women in relationships that do not conform to norms around having and rearing children’ (Holmes et al., 2021, p. 659) - lone parents being an example of a non-normative, certainly non-nuclear, family. Their career ambitions and political activities have also, frequently, been sidelined in research that reduces them to merely ‘lone parent’.

5 Chung and Son (2019) wrote of Korean single mothers fostering social and political ‘space[s] where they can be true to themselves’ amidst mass stigmatisation. The authors observed that their lone parent status often led these mothers to ‘experience isolation, feelings of guilt, and lower levels of civic participation’, demonstrating the significance of this calculated ‘coming out’ as a single parent in a consciously-created safe space – a phenomena McNeill (2021) suggests occurs across contexts of marginalisation and oppression. Based on the literature and this investigation, this is evidently a dynamic mirrored globally and in a variety of settings.
people (UNISON, 2013; CE&ENOC, 2016). As recognised throughout this thesis, the lone parent participants who engaged in the study come from across north Edinburgh and beyond, bringing with them struggles frequently aggravated when class, cultural, and other identities intersect and overlap (Collins, 1989; Emejulu and Sobande, 2019; Cooper and Whyte, 2017) resulting in situations of extreme hardship for many. Such hyperlocalised impacts have been defined by Koch (2020) as ‘austerity localism’; thus, this PhD thesis is intimately rooted within a similar ontological and epistemological perspective.

The effects of these precise experiences extend into many people’s emotional and mental wellbeing (Cummins, 2018; Stuckler et al., 2017), and increased food precarity (Loopstra, 2015). Responses to the economic crisis have, in several instances, led to the reshaping of notions of citizenship and welfare entitlement, as well as fostering new forms of civic engagement and protest throughout Europe and beyond amongst those most directly affected and their allies (Cabot, 2016). McGrath et al. (2015) went as far as identifying ‘[F]ive Austerity Ailments: [namely h]umiliation and shame’, ‘[f]ear and distrust’, ‘[i]nstability and insecurity’, ‘[i]solation and loneliness’, and ‘[b]eing trapped and powerless’ - an approach that echoes that of the five giants of society (‘[w]ant, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness’) described in the Beveridge Report (Beveridge, 1942). These manifestations, termed ‘actually existing austerity’ (Strong, 2020), that is ‘the uneven ways through which austerity is felt, negotiated, embodied and contested in the varied spatial tapestry of everyday life’, rather than the abstract-ness of the term ‘austerity’. This is a situation that, as noted above, repeats across the participants within this research, similarly grounding it amongst the lived realities of that ‘actually existing austerity’ and Strong’s (ibid.) ‘everyday.’

The Research Project: Twofold in its focus, this research engaged with a total of thirty-four lone parent families living in or recently departed from north Edinburgh as it considers the precise ways that austerity has impacted upon the quality of life, opportunities for, and agency of lone families within this area of severe multiple deprivation (SIMD, 2016). From there, the work critically examines how these lone parent families, in their range of social and political contexts, navigate and survive the austerity practices of the UK, Scottish, and local governments. State actions and approaches have resulted in, at times, severe social harm (Cooper and Whyte, 2017; Stuckler et al., 2017), yet, they have also been met with mitigation, resistance, and challenges at local and national levels (Emejulu and Bassel, 2017; Fominaya and Hayes, 2018; Pemberton et al., 2015; Milbourne and Cushman, 2014; O’Campo et al., 2019). Informed by understandings of active citizenship and forms of mitigation and resistance stemming from social movement campaigns worldwide (primarily, but not exclusively, related to lone parent families; Simpson, 2016), the research is theoretically rooted in Freire’s (1972) ‘process of conscientization’6 and hooks’ (1984, p.74) ‘multi-dimensional gatherings’7 - emphasising the notion of political agency amongst lone parent. These theorists emphasise how people arrive at a greater understanding of their struggles through lived experience and dialogue, which thus enable individual struggles to become collectively-recognised issues against which action can be taken.

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6 Conscientization is a process of consciousness-raising whereby an individual moves ‘toward a higher level of consciousness by becoming aware of how larger social, economic, cultural, and political forces operate to make things the way they are’ (Kridel, n.d.).

7 Described by hooks (1984, p.74) as a mechanism that ‘encourage[s] members of different communities to unify in actively resisting and peer-educating’.
The interviews consider how organic knowledge, gained and developed through lived experience, is utilised to take action either independently or as part of coalition, at times with the support of local community-based practitioners (see e.g. Ledwith, 2011). Other integral elements of this include Collins (1989, p.757) on ‘oppositional consciousness’ - opposition coming in counter to dominant ideologies in varying local and national contexts and systems that create ‘outsiders’ - as the fieldwork seeks to understand the experiences of lone parent families in relation to and separate from the state. At the UK Government-level, this constitutes a neoliberal and austerity-driven ideology being challenged by local communities forming their own oppositional protest groups or through creating alternative forms of provision via mutual aid - rather than merely being subjected to harmful changes to policy, welfare, and funding. Both approaches will be examined extensively during the Literature Review chapter. Questions of ‘in opposition to what,’ ‘critical of whom,’ and ‘for whose benefit’ also constitute key considerations in understanding how lone parent families have mitigated, resisted, and challenged these forms of austerity in North Edinburgh.

The findings presented within this thesis are intended to help reshape modern understandings of lone parenthood, whilst the post-Viva dissemination will include academic publications in journals and blogs within relevant sectors, as well as summaries for organisations and practitioners involved in supporting lone parent families. This will take place with the ambition of informing future practice, whilst, perhaps, being of interest to the state’s recently established Social Security Scotland - an arms-length body managing a range of newly devolved welfare powers granted to the Scottish Government (Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland, 2018;). This body now holds powers relating to Disability Living Allowance; Personal Independence Payment; Attendance Allowance; Severe Disablement Allowance; the Industrial Injuries Scheme; Carer’s Allowance; Sure Start Maternity Grants; Funeral Payments; Cold Weather Payments; Winter Fuel Payments; and Discretionary Housing Payments (Scottish Government, 2017). The PhD, therefore, acknowledges the Scotland Act 1998 and the Commission on Scottish Devolution (2007), the Smith Commission (2014) and the Scotland Act 2016, as it realises which state bodies control social security and explores the ways in which this affects the treatment of lone parent families in this localised context. This comes in addition to a wealth of academic papers which are already published, drafted, or planned. To-date, a paper focused on the research process and the impact of Covid-19 on the interview process (Campbell, 2020b) has been published in The Qualitative Social Work Journal; whilst additional papers centred around political agency, mutual aid, and direct action have been featured in Concept: The Journal of Contemporary Community Education Practice Theory, and the Anarchist Studies Blog.

1.1 Project Overview

Whilst the above introduction has outlined the rationale for the research, this overview provides insights into the specific theoretical underpinnings and the precise contributions I’ve worked towards in producing this research. The above subsection illustrated that much of the existing literature on lone parent families has centred the experiences of cisgendered white lone mothers. To an extent, this is to be expected when, as detailed in the Literature Review section, lone mothers account for 93% of lone parents in Scotland (OPFS, 2017) and with ‘almost 85% of all one-parent families in the EU’ female-headed (EloGE, 2016). The lone parent family population varies significantly across national contexts, however, with the European Commission (2021) advising that of the circa ‘195.4 million
households in the European Union,’ just short of one-third had children living there. Of those, as of 2020, ‘[a]pproximately 14% of households with children (7.8 million households) consisted of single parents, accounting for 4% of total households’ (ibid.), with the breakdown of the data stating that ‘Sweden (34% [of all families]) Denmark (29%), Estonia (28%), Latvia and Lithuania (both 25%) and France (21%)’ had the highest frequency of lone parent families, whilst ‘the lowest shares were registered in Croatia (5%), Romania (7%) and Finland (8%)’, Greece, Slovakia, Malta, Poland, Spain and Slovenia all recorded 9%. Though there are numerous intersecting factors, the data suggests countries recognised as predominantly Catholic are overall less likely to have lone parent families publicly identifying as such (World Population Review, 2021; Pew Research Center, 2013), with religion also being a factor in the number of lone parent families amongst other communities of faith (a topic explored within the Literature Review).

As such, this research endeavoured to engage with demographics who have historically been marginalised or, indeed, excluded from past research. Though these efforts will be fully explored in the Methodologies and Findings chapters, the gap within the existing literature combined with the author’s unique positionality and practice-based relationships (outlined in the Reflexivity and Positionality subsection) facilitated participant engagement through organisations working with lone fathers (e.g. Circle), queer lone parents (e.g. LGBT Health & Wellbeing), parents of colour (e.g. Pilton Community Health Project), and from minority religions in the Scottish-context (e.g. Edinburgh Interfaith Association). Lone father-headed households, ultimately, constituted 21% of all participants (seven interviewees) whilst a further 9% were non-binary (three participants) meaning that 29% of the interviewees were not-women - illustrating a distinct step away from the majority of existing research into, on, or with lone parents. In addition, 38% of discussants identified as queer (thirteen participants) and 26% were people of colour (nine participants); the overall queer and people of colour populations in Scotland estimated to currently stand at circa 1.6%-1.7% lesbian, gay, or bisexual (ONS, 2015; Scottish Government, 2017) and 4% (statista, 2018), respectively. McKelvie (2022; then-Scottish Minister for Older People and Equalities), expressed her ambition for 'Scotland to be a place where everyone’s identity is recognised, respected, and celebrated, and where everybody can access rights and opportunities,’ suggesting that ‘advancing equality for marginalised groups ultimately advances equality for all.’ Similarly, the thesis worked to include those who have historically been marginalised or absent from research. Beyond this investigation, however, this remains the case as very few works have been published that explore non-binary parenthood and, seemingly, none that explore non-binary lone parenthood. The former, at least, is an issue that has been raised by, amongst others, Fischer (2021) and Bower-Brown (2021).

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8 Though the precise figures vary by source and research method, the World Population Review (2021) - drawing directly on the Pew Research Center (2013) - advises that the Catholic populations of nations least likely to have lone parent families were: Croatia (86.3%), Slovakia (62%), Malta (88.7%), Poland (85.8%), Spain (66%), and Slovenia (73.2%). The caveat here being that Romania (4.7% Catholic), Greece (0.2%), and Finland (0.2%) are more likely to be forms of Orthodox Christian - 81.04% for Romania (Secretariatul de Stat pentru Culte, 2013) and circa 90% in Greece (Pew Research Center, 2017) - whilst Finland is primarily Lutheran (67.8%; Tilastokeskus, 2021).

9 Though non-binary people currently lack legal recognition in Scotland, Savanta ComRes (2022) found that '[p]eople aged 16 to 34 [...] backed allowing people to legally identify as non-binary'.

10 Despite numerous pilot studies, prior to 2022, the Scottish census did not include a question on sexual orientation (SPHO, 2021). NROS (2020, p.5) stated this was linked to anxieties ‘about asking the question in a survey like the census, which may be completed by one household member for all other household members, potentially leading to inaccurate replies or pressure on individuals to disclose information they would prefer not to’.
Though for some participants one of their demographic factors distinguished them from the majority of Western research into lone parents (e.g. #8 Mercy as a black Scottish cisgendered heterosexual lone parent), for others these identities intersected (e.g. #5 Dee is a pansexual Hispanic migrant to Scotland; or #15 Sasha who is a non-binary and pansexual lone parent). This thesis, therefore, is not only unique in its focus on contemporary lone parent lives in Greater Pilton, but also offers insights into the parenting experiences of those often marginalised within related research. It is not intended that this work can propose findings which can necessarily be generalised or assumed to encompass the rich diversity of queer lone parent lives, nor are the findings intended to dismiss the incredible care, affection, and activism of many white Scottish lone mothers (indeed, the actions of the lone mothers’ collective All About Me [AAM] serves as a case study during the Findings chapter); rather, it is intended to add to - and, at times, challenge - the existing data and dominant assumptions about lone parent lives.

By way of preview, the fieldwork revealed many unique stories of survival from lone parents, with useful insights from several community-based organisations disclosed during preparation for participant recruitment. Informal discussions with these local groups prior to commencing the fieldwork, found, for example, that few in Edinburgh’s Sikh community (estimated to be circa 1,110 people [NRoS, 2011]) have made themselves known as lone parents. The interviewee practitioner at Sikh Sanjog11 (in Campbell and Arya, 2019), noted that the Sikh community in Edinburgh tends to be socially conservative, leading her to believe it less likely that local Sikh lone parents would have their marital status publicly known or be open to participating in research projects such as this - particularly when being conducted by an outsider researcher such as myself. The same research found that Sikhs in Scotland rarely accept social security,12 and, thus, findings regarding these lone parents is unlikely to be generalisable (ibid.). The impact of welfare reform would, therefore, likely cause less direct social or economic harm to lone-parent families within this religious community than others; rather, funding cuts to community-specific services and reduced provision or the closure of services such families relied on (as described by Koch, 2020) constitute an indirect form of harm. The impact of austerity for Sikh lone parent throughout the UK since 2008 would, therefore, likely have been distinct from the state-sanctioned violence13 experienced by others.

Further intriguing themes emerged around gender performativity and identity - both for the lone parents themselves (e.g. #15 Sasha, #25 Aiden, and #34 Jay - each of whom are non-binary), but also concerning stereotypes of ‘girl toys’ (dolls, make-up, etc.) or ‘boys toys’ (such as plastic guns and knives). These gender-based issues also emerged via concerns over the perpetuation of historical expectations around familial care being the domain of a mother (including from most of the lone father participants, but also #15 Sasha, #21 Edina, #23 Pam, and #33 Sasha). This extended to parental fears, primarily from male-identifying participants (such as #1 Nick, #2 Lawrence, and #9 Frank), about their role in child-rearing and anxieties that the courts would remove children from their care (even in the absence of

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11 ‘Sikh Sanjog supports Sikh women and girls, as well as the broader BME community, in Edinburgh’ (Campbell and Arya, 2019, p.8).
12 The Sikh Missionary Society (2005; PUN: ਸਿੰਖ ਮਸ਼ਹੂਰੀ ਸੁਸਾਈਡਿੰਗ ਤਨਜ਼ਾਨਾ) echo this, stating that despite the widespread practices of donating via daswandi, ‘Sikhi is based on continuous effort to earn own livelihood; begging and dependence on charity are forbidden’.
13 ‘Violence’ itself remains a deeply contested term, yet, Cooper and Whyte (2017) makes clear that austerity constitutes far more than merely financial harm to individuals and organisations via cuts.

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a mother figure\textsuperscript{14}). There was, however, a major issue that could not have been predicted - the Covid-19 Coronavirus pandemic. As such, this Ph.D. is time-situated in the sense that many elements of everyday life have changed drastically and many have not returned to any sense of ‘normal’ (as depicted by the UK Government, 2020 and 2021; Haiven, 2021; Jones, 2021). Several participants were fortunate enough to run or have been working towards establishing their own businesses (e.g. #6 Griff; #8 Mercy; and #32 Nicky) and, as such, have likely experienced very different concerns, impacts, and roads to recovery.

1.2 Research Questions

Though detailed in the Methodologies chapter, the following four questions were used in establishing the precise focus(es) and structuring and presentation of the thesis. These thematic concerns related to situating the research and the researched-community nationally and in time (Question #1), before localising the investigation in north Edinburgh (questions #2-#4). These latter questions focus on the experiences (#2) and agency (#3) of the lone parent families during this age of austerity, and finally the legacies of these individual or community responses (#4). Each concern was pivotal in shaping the Biographical Interpretive Narrative Method (BINM) approach.

- **Question #1:** What does it mean to be a lone parent in austerity-Scotland?
- **Question #2:** How have lone parent families in north Edinburgh experienced and sought to navigate post-2010 austerity?
- **Question #3:** What capacity\textsuperscript{15} have lone parents in north Edinburgh had to mitigate, resist, or challenge austerity?
- **Question #4:** What relationships and networks have been established in north Edinburgh to support lone parent families in this age of austerity?

These four questions have been linked back to throughout the thesis, and - when combined with the themes generated by the thirty-four interviews - provide part of the structure for the Discussion and Conclusion chapters. The questions were formulated, largely, through understandings of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire’s work on critical-consciousness amongst learners, and people’s capacity to make changes in their own lives based on their personal realisations about their lives and needs rather than those imposed on them by the state (Freire, 1972; see Fanon [1954] for the origins of this concept). Further, Italian-Marxist Antonio Gramsci’s proposed dichotomy between an elite and ruling political class over the working classes influenced how I recognised power dynamics in the everyday lives of the participants (see e.g. Gramsci, 1971, 1988, and 2014). Finally, many of the anti-austerity campaigns and praxis detailed by scholars such as Akwugo Emejulu, Leah Bassel, Francesca Sobande, David Whyte, and Vicky Cooper helped illustrate the diverse ways through which communities in Europe and beyond have navigated, suffered, or resisted austerity.

\textsuperscript{14}This was the case for #1 Nick whose child was placed in the care of his ex-partner’s mother (the child’s maternal grandmother) when the mother challenged his right to full custody; or with #2 Lawrence when his then-partner was institutionalised over mental health concerns.

\textsuperscript{15}Taken to mean resilience, pride, social capital (i.e. family and support organisations), financial capital (welfare support, loans, inheritance, money from family abroad), etc..
1.3 Structure of the Thesis

As detailed in the Contents Table, this thesis is broken down into many sections and subsections pertaining to each respective topic. The Preface eases the reader into the project’s premise and core remit, introducing the geographical community of focus, and notes the precise demographics centred. As the submission progresses, the Introduction is split into several sections offering a Project Overview and detailing of the Research Questions – stressing how these are related and interconnected. The subsequent sections Approaching the Project consider my own positionality in relation to the research project and the relationships I hold to the researched-community from Professional, Personal, and Academic perspectives. From there, a Conceptualisation & Theoretical Frameworks chapter details the Theoretical Underpinning, Policy Context, and Temporal settings of this project. Finally, three essential questions of: ‘How are lone parents defined by the state?’; and ‘Austerity and lone parent families’ ensure that the existing situation is fully recognised, thereby allowing my own investigation to be situated within its niche.

The Review of Relevant Literature is extensive and considers an abundance of topics ranging from the Pathways to Lone Parenthood, to an overview of the Demographics in Scotland, the rest of the UK, and further afield from which we can understand population density and the geographical spread, age range, and work status of many lone parents. With the quantitative facts established, core issues affecting lone parents and their families are considered in turn - opening with Poverty and Lone Parent Families, ‘Lone Parent’ as an Identity & Public Perception, and how these families are understood by the state (Lone Parent Families in Policy). The subsections on Gender, Care, and Lone Parent Families and Race and Lone Parent Families each offer a critical engagement with the literature on care practices, cultural attitudes towards lone parents, and divisions of care. In a transitional section, a series of brief Case Studies examine specific incidents based on state decisions and policy, with reflections offered on lone parent-led activist collectives in Edinburgh (Scotland), London (England), and Athens (Greece) demonstrating how the core understandings drawn from the Literature Review relate to the lives, struggles, and actions of lone parents. Finally, Struggles Named by Participants Through an Anarchist Lens is an additional subsection that emerged organically in coming to understand how lone parent families engaged with or described in the literature have sought to navigate a decade of austerity and the ways in which those involved have framed, conceptualised, and acted based upon similar issues facing those with which my own study engages. This was added after the initial draft of the Literature Review had been completed as it became increasingly clear that conceptualisation of the individual as a political agent, how we might understand ‘activism’, and what it means to form independently-run collectives without state involvement were better explored within the anarchist ‘canon’ than in many other fields.

With the current social, economic, and political understandings conveyed within the Literature Review, the Methodologies chapter outlines how I conducted the fieldwork. Opening with an explanation of how I went about Conceptualising the Research Project based upon the foundational understandings that helped propose this research initially, the thesis shifts to justifying why I adopted a Biographical Interpretive Narrative Method approach to conducting the interviews. The Interview Method & Key Discussion Points subsection also explains how I identified the series of thematic discussion points and worded the single narrative question. With the approach detailed, I assess an appropriate interview
setting was fostered (Creating the Interview Environment). Significantly, as the closing stages of the fieldwork occurred as Covid-19 ‘social’ (physical) distancing measures came into place, a number of interviews took place via distanced methods (Zoom, video call, or audio-only phone calls). This experience has been detailed in the first publication developed from this research\textsuperscript{16}. Reflections of the effectiveness of The Interview Process, the Ethical Issues navigated, and the Participant Recruitment process are explored to fully realise the fieldwork. The chapter closes by offering a series of concise Participant Biographies which allow insights into the demographics, lived biographies, and socio-economic circumstances of the interviewees. Through sharing core elements of the participant’s lives, the realities of these lone parent’s experiences under austerity can begin to be realised. Following this, the wide-reaching Analysis of Fieldwork critically engages with a range of themes present in the findings. From a Desire for Control Over [One’s] Immediate Environment to positioning Parenthood as A Politically Transformative Process, these subsections showcase the similarities in ambition, drive, protective efforts, and politicisation stemming from the participants’ lives as lone parents. Further subsections examine what it means to create Blended Families or Becom[e] a Singular Unit, localising the earlier literature on Pathways to Lone Parenthood. The Relationship to Work subsection illustrates the challenges facing many of the lone parent interviewees as they navigate childcare and un-, under-, part-time, of full-time employment. A natural continuation of this occurs in Gendered Struggles & Gender Performativity and Lone Parenting & Living with Disabilities which each examine the specific impact one’s gender holds on how they believe society and the state and state actors (care inspectors, social workers, etc.) treat them. This section offers unique contributions to the literature on lone parent families through reflections on gender identity challenges within these families (the parents’ or the child’s), whilst the intersecting challenges of discriminatory practices towards disabled people are explored. Such accounts provide new insights into the consequences and impact of the age of austerity, before the chapter closes by documenting that ways that these participants have Discuss[ed] Lone Parenthood with Child(ren) and outlining some of their Early Concerns About the Pandemic.

Therein, the subsequent section proposes a new mechanism for charting and analysing individual and community responses to adversity, charting a newly developed theoretically-informed model. By reiterating the Literature Around Direct Actions in relation to the case studies and comparing these to the findings of my own research I Propos[e] the PACA Community Action Model: Preserve, Adapt, Challenge, Alternatives as a means for improving academic understandings of community-based action. The ways several of the lone parent participants underwent their own politicisation(s) and took action leads to the subsection Emergent Direct Approaches As Subversive to Social Democracy, and allows a study of Mutual Aid and Mutuality in-action. This culminates in an advocacy for Reimagining the Contemporary Lone Parent Family based on these in-depth and intimate understandings.

Closing out, the Conclusions chapter draws together the Key Findings, then responds directly to the research questions in-turn (Answering the Research Questions). This ensures that the thesis meets its intended purpose and enables further work to take place going forward. The final subsection offers a series of Personal Reflection on the PhD Experience as a practitioner and local resident, before examining how this project has impacted and reshaped my Local Relationships Post-Fieldwork. As an active member of the local community, this process could have caused several significant alterations to everyday

dynamics with many of the participants, but also how I see and understand the community. Therein, Final Conclusion & Next Steps provides insight into how this project has achieved its aims, before proposing a number of directions the work could take post-Viva.

1.4 Conclusion

This project has spanned the fields of community development, community-focused social work, social activism, gender studies, and queer theory, drawing upon each in order to recognise the breadth of lone parent experiences. Prioritising that the doctoral study sincerely engaged with the cultural, linguistic, sexual, and religious richness of north Edinburgh, amongst other characteristics, and platforming autobiographically-formulated accounts of diversity of gender, care roles, and ambitions demonstrates the uniqueness of the project. Approached with critical pedagogical theoretical framing (Freire, 1972) as a means for understanding how lone parents experience and understand their role(s) within the family and broader society, understandings of social and interpersonal relationships were largely recognised by hooks’ (1984, 1994) conceptualisation of the diversity, conflicts, and care that emerge within communities. Austerity is recognised as a state process, constituting hegemonic approach that perpetuates and threatens to entrench socio-economic divisions, stereotypes, and forms of marginalisation (Gramsci, 1971, 1988), whilst the analysis of individual and collective actions are recognised and examined through similar accounts shared within studies.
2. Approaching the Project

This subsection recognises how the project was situated, outlining my own relationships with north Edinburgh’s communities from a threefold perspective (based upon my own work Master’s research. It outlines my own placement within the insider versus outsider dichotomy, informed by Tuhiiwai Smith (2012 and Berg (1989), charting my own history with the area and the fields upon which this project is built. It then adopted Christakopoulou et al.’s (2001) approach to generating Community Profiles to immerse the reader in the area. Given the nature of this topic, my own experiences of parenting or depending on the aspect, lack of familiarity, influenced how I interpreted and responded to accounts within the literature and the narratives of the participants. That I became both a stepfather and biological parent during the research resulted in additional moments of reflection, and, though the focus of research has been specifically on the experiences and actions of the lone parents, I hope that this thesis had effectively accounted for the care and responsibility involved in supporting, being, and becoming a family unit - coupled, lone, blended, or otherwise.

Aside from gradually sharing some aspects of lived experiences of parenting, I boasted shared geographical and activist settings with many of the participants, some of whom I’d encountered through my professional, placement, or voluntary community development practice in north Edinburgh. Insider positions and familiarity with research participants can, Owton and Allen-Collinson (2013) stress, enable ‘unique insights’ that would otherwise not be available to complete outsider researchers. Indeed, the authors suggest that the inherent ‘complexity and negotiation of roles and different “voices” can add multilayered texture, richness, and emotional depth to the ethnographic interview as lived interactional experience’ (ibid., p.303). Recognising this, the following critically considers the abundance of ways that my experiences overlap or contrast with others in the locality, and is, thus, divided to consider a series of roles I occupy, or have occupied, in relation to the geographical communities considered.

Pre-existing relationships can risk researcher biases manifesting in or warping findings. The chosen research methodology was, in part, chosen due to the manner in which researchers cede their position of power and creator of the interview context works to permit the interviewee as much conversational space as possible during the dialogue. This allows those with the lived experience of the concerned issue an opportunity to articulate their insights, concerns, and experiences as they, themselves, see fit without being dictated to or overly-instructed. Douglas and Carless (2012, p.31) argue, however, that ‘reciprocity, supportiveness, and care are critical within qualitative research [...] in order to build a trusting relationship with a participant, so that [they] can feel safe to be open and forthcoming’, emphasising that ‘this applies particularly to the researcher-friend role’. Given Owton and Allen-Collinson’s (2013) warning that particular issues may trigger distress in the interviewer regarding their own experience of, for example domestic violence and the challenging circumstances under which they became a lone parent (bereavement, separation, etc.), I entered the fieldwork hyperconscious of the sensitive nature of the research topic and believe the BINM to be amongst the most effective means for encouraging the participant to touch exclusively on topics they feel comfortable sharing.
2.1 Reflexivity & Positionality

Divided into three subsections focusing on my (i) Professional, (ii) Personal, and (iii) Academic relationships to north Edinburgh’s communities, this subsection establishes the positions from which I engaged with the researched-community. It addresses the professional identities I hold locally having worked as a community development practitioner in the area since 2012, but also my presence as both a local resident and community activist operating alongside or on issues that had affect(ed) many of the lone parents living locally. Berg (1989), Mitchell (2010), and Råheim et al. (2016) are amongst those in the social sciences who have explored the relationship between an academic researcher and their researched-community. Accounting for Berg’s (1989, p.196) belief in research as ‘a commitment to nonviolent social change’, ‘appreciation of the capacity of humans to reflect, learn, and change’ (a core element of Freire’s [1972] conscientization), and ‘the democratization of knowledge production and use’ within community-based research, this section examines what underpins the research.

On the insider versus outsider researcher dynamic (those of are ‘part’ of north Edinburgh or not), Tuhiwai Smith (2012, p.x) has criticised practices whereby ‘indigenous communities are most often the objects of subjects of study by non-indigenous researchers’ rather than active participants within the investigation. Whilst centred on a less specifically indigenous identity than that of the Māori in New Zealand or First Nations communities in Canada, this research's geographical focus situates the experiences of communities living in north Edinburgh as distinct from other parts of Edinburgh, Scotland, or the rest of the UK, tapping into that north Edinburgh identity described by several participants and local issues recognised by the state17. Given the limited academic attention previously afforded to Greater Pilton - the handful of papers to-date coming from Carlin (2017), McCabe (2010, 2011, 2012), Greene (2007), and Erskine and Breitenbach (1994) with these tending to focus on specific group work or situations around substance abuse - I committed to utilising locally-produced knowledge juxtaposed to that of established research bodies for broader contextualisation qualitatively and quantitatively on the area - ensuring that local voices are not lost within the investigation (insofar as can be represented by locally-produced works in blogs, newspaper articles, and documentaries), with BINM ensuring authenticity to the accounts. Whilst these below elements naturally intersect, the distinctions between each are significant in terms of how I am perceived and what assumptions participants are likely to have of me depending on which roles facilitated our first encounter(s), but also what responsibilities I bear (as a neighbour versus as a researcher).

2.1.1 The Professional: Having moved from Dundee to Edinburgh in September 2012 for the University of Edinburgh’s BA Hons Community Education programme, my professional relationship(s) to the north Edinburgh include three university placements18, paid positions with a number of local youth work organisations,19 and overnight provision of support and services for young people at risk of

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17 Similar sentiments have been raised by Green Councillor Kayleigh O’Neill (2022) who spoke of families in the Forth Ward (part of North Edinburgh) struggling to pay rent, afford food, or heat their homes, and by region MSP Foysool Choudhury (2022) who spoke of ‘a 2018 report [which] found that a boy born that year in Muirhouse of West Pilton had a life expectancy that was thirteen years shorter than that of a boy born in neighbouring [and more affluent] Crandon’.


19 Past employers included the Muirhouse Youth Development Group (2017); Edinburgh Mental Health Service (2016-2017); and SmartLiving (2017).
homelessness. Boasting a pre-existent relationship with several of the would-be lone parent participants through my variety of roles risked the conflation of my former and present roles or assumption over the purpose of our interactions versus expressed meaning as stated within the invitation to participate. Despite this, my professional connections aided the purposive sampling recruitment process and, I believe, afforded me a level of trust amongst the workers and community leaders who, arguably, served as gatekeepers - not necessarily one whom I needed permission from to conduct my research, but certainly, from experience, people who would expect to know what was going on locally.

My first solo venture into Muirhouse occurred in the early evening as I arrived for an interview with the Muirhouse Youth Development Group. My panel, formed of first- and second- year high school students alongside the youth club manager, took to me - the young folk appreciating my openly displayed tattoos and the manager acknowledging my experience in similar positions in Dundee, Glasgow, and other working class communities throughout Edinburgh. It’s worth remembering, however, that community-based roles such as youth workers have an incredibly high turnover of staff due to the well-paid but very limited number of contracted hours (Borden et al., 2011). My hiring may, therefore, have equally related to their need to fill the vacancy as much as to my own efforts to impress the panel members. Though I, admittedly, experienced slight reservations about entering the neighbourhoods stereotyped by violence and intimidation, drug culture, and etc. (as several of the accounts of north Edinburgh in the literature perpetuate), my concerns rapidly dissipated as I realised how familiar the area felt, the ways in which it echoed the neighbourhoods I’d live in, where played football, or in which I’d worked as a community development practitioner.

As I walked towards the community wing for my opening shift, however, several such concerns rushed back. A young man, likely of similar age to myself at the time, approached me - his nose broken, left eye swollen, and blood trickling down his face. Whilst it was unclear whether he had been a victim or perpetrator in whatever conflict had occurred, it was obvious he had held his own adequately enough to end the fight whilst he was still in a condition to walk away. I realised he was walking directly towards me, alone, his motivations unclear. In witnessing the cigarette hanging from my mouth, he asked if I had a lighter. Whilst certain elements of the area’s reputation have been fulfilled during my time working or living in north Edinburgh, my experience has, for the most part, suggested that the majority of acts of violence, theft, and vandalism take place between groups, families, or individuals already familiar with each other (observations suggested by #16 Michael as parallel to his own adolescence). Whilst there are plenty of exceptions, nothing was overly varied from my own experiences as a young adult.

2.1.2 The Personal: Having permanently resided in West Pilton since 2016, the relationships between researcher and the researched-community requires careful consideration to avoid conflation of life roles (as with the professional identity noted above; Etherington, 2007; and Dickson-Swift, 2009). The issues faced by the research participants (eviction, welfare sanction, social isolation, mental health struggles, challenges over legal status of residency in the UK, etc.) each constitute what Lee and Renzetti (1990) refer to as a ‘sensitive topic,’ and, as such, the emotions involved in conducting this investigation cannot be neglected. ‘This is not to say that there does not exist universal human emotional responses involving

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21 Defined by Palinkas et al. (2015) as allowing ‘for the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest’ - in this case, the lives of lone parents in Greater Pilton.
death, grief, or the loss of loved ones; it is just that these responses are tempered, or contextualized, within specific cultural norms and values’ (Hedican, 2006, p.22) each of which bore potential significance to how these lone parent participants became lone parents. The issue being that anonymity is undermined in that there are more direct connections between researcher and participant, whilst the share activism developed trust through embodied effort.

It is in this vein that Hubbard et. al. (2001, p.120) suggest that ‘those of us who carry out qualitative research involving in-depth interviewing are well aware of the ethical issues that are raised when we tap into areas that are emotionally sensitive for the respondent [- t]hat is, we are conscious of the ethical issues that are concerned with the respondent’s experience’. Conscious that these issues affecting my neighbours and having been a community activist in numerous campaigns against austerity and cuts alongside many of them, I ensured to put support mechanisms and mindfulness practices into place to better manage the emotional impact that could occur as a result of these dialogues (contact details for free counselling services, mental health support phonelines, etc.). Dickson-Swift (2008; 2009) notes the emotional toll that conducting social research can have on the researcher, with Bodone (2005) further warning that a researcher’s personal relationship(s) to an area of study risks nostalgia and assumption warping how findings are interpreted.

My youth work, campaign work, and personal exploration of north Edinburgh’s Pilton, Drylaw, Granton, and Muirhouse neighbours was supplemented by extensive university degree programme placements with local organisations. In each instance, I worked (or rather volunteered) as if I were a full-time member of staff. I was present when we were told of a Vietnamese group who’d been present for years, but were only emerging or becoming known as their young children began to speak English and found themselves thrust into positions of liaisons for social, welfare, and census issues they themselves were yet to understand – demonstrating the presence of language barriers in access. I was there as newborns were introduced by their parents (usually their mother) to our English language learning groups; and I introduced my then-partner to our learners and colleagues. My professional and personal lives became integrated and I found myself in a space I began to recognise as ‘my own.’ This led to undertaking roles of significant responsibility within political and social movements. I moved to West Pilton, built myself a garden, and populated my flat with pets. I became friendly with some neighbours (often those with young families), and tensions emerged with others who proved to be deeply problematic on many levels (racist, misogynistic, or intimidating).

My own history of political activism during the 2014 Scottish independence campaign, the North Edinburgh #SaveOurServices campaign (see e.g. Di Marco Campbell, forthcoming; North Edinburgh #SaveOurServices, 2020), and other local periods of action, meant that some social actors meeting the qualifying criteria for participation were already known (e.g. #1 Nick, and #3 Lindsay). As such, steps were taken to ensure known participants were not over-represented in the interview sample via a target-recruitment process via partnering with local organisations that ensured the participants primarily came from outside of my own social, professional, or other relationships. This approach is detailed in the Methodologies chapter which chronicles the recruitment phase and outlines the three levels of connection between the researcher and each participant through my own model.

2.1.3 The Academic: At every stage of my academic career (Undergraduate, Masters, and now PhD), my research has centred on issues of local relevance. An undergraduate investigation into the capacity of
association football to serve as an educational medium to combat racist, homophobic, and Islamophobic attitudes led to an internship with national charity Show Racism the Red Card Scotland (see e.g. Campbell and Hay, 2018a; Campbell and Hay, 2018b). My activism with the housing collectives allowed me to produce an extended study into how to understand the motivations and actions of these local activists’ paralleled or diverged from past women-led housing initiatives elsewhere in the UK under Conservative-led administrations (Campbell, 2018). North Edinburgh also served as the focus for my MSc Education: Philosophy dissertation which examined the relevance and applicability of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire’s (1972) notion of conscientization and US feminist scholar bell hooks’ (1984) concept of ‘multi-dimensional gatherings’ in better understanding the actions undertaken by the lone parent activist collective AAM when they were threatened with eviction during the summer of 2017 (see also NEN, 2017a; NEN, 2017b; and CommonSpace, 2017).

This substantial period spent as a researcher whilst also living in north Edinburgh simultaneously brought with it a wealth of social and professional connections - enabling access to would-be participants - yet further necessitated consideration of Bodone’s (2005) focus on the issues of assumption that stem from this potential overfamiliarity with an area. As such, whilst resources utilised in my previous works on north Edinburgh were re-visited, many updated, new, and broader sources have also been drawn upon to produce a far richer Community Profile than was possible previously. This doctoral work has once again asked members of the local communities to permit me to share in their lives, this time as lone parents - revealing stories of hardship, survival, overcoming odds, giving back to those around them, and tales of personal development. I want to thank each of them for taking me into their worlds and hope my work can do some form of justice to all that they trusted me with.

2.2 Community Profile: The following is based on an approach to understanding communities of place - that is, areas unified initially by geography (Skerratt and Steiner, 2013; Means and Evans, 2011) - which allows a better understanding of how north Edinburgh is perceived within the literature and state-produced datasets, whilst also considering how local people have communicated their experiences of the area. Influenced by Christakopoulou et al.’s (2001) approaches, the profile examines a given area threefold - ‘as a place to live,’ ‘as an economic area,’ and ‘as a political community.’ Utilising qualitative and quantitative data, each of these aspects will be addressed in turn, ensuring that the reader recognises the specific contexts and circumstances in which this investigation occurred.

(i) Greater Pilton as a Place to Live Currently spread across part of the Scottish Parliamentary constituencies of Edinburgh Northern and Leith (86,344 residents) and Edinburgh Western (75,794 residents), the Greater Pilton area encompasses housing estates across Granton, East Pilton, West Pilton, Muirhouse, and Wardieburn. Works centring on urban renewal and housing (Hastings, 2004) have also discussed regeneration and redevelopment taking place in recent decades including the demolition of several locally-iconic high rise blocks of flats (see Image #1).
Despite these attempts at regeneration and urban renewal, the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD, 2016) placed parts of Muirhouse in the ‘Most Deprived 5%’ of the whole of Scotland, with further areas of Muirhouse and West Pilton falling within the ‘Most Deprived 10%.’ Widening the parameters to the ‘Most Deprived 20%’ sees a further twelve data zones highlighted in the bottom quintile (see Image #2). Greene (2007 pp.26-27) notes that whilst ‘in 1993 Greater Pilton became a designated regeneration area [...] Greater Pilton continues to remain one of the few areas of deprivation in Edinburgh.’ McCabe (2011), however, contests this, arguing that ‘in many ways, the physical environment of North Edinburgh (formerly Greater Pilton) has changed dramatically for the better during the last two decades.’ However, as detailed below in the North Edinburgh as a Political Community subsection, campaigns to address the seemingly constant state of disrepair many people are forced to live in are constant phenomena (Living Rent Edinburgh, 2023; CommonSpace, 2017, NEN, 2018a). This seeming ambivalence from the state towards sincere improvements and regular clashes of opinion characterise much of the literature on the area as a place to live.

In terms of social groups living locally, the 2011 Scottish Census (NROs, 2011) suggests that the two Scottish parliamentary constituencies across which North Edinburgh is spread each boasts far more ‘households where not all persons are [from the] same ethnic group category’ than the Scottish national average of 10.6% (North: 17.2%; West: 14.1%). At 2.8%, the Muslim population in Edinburgh Northern and Leith is double the national average of 1.4% with Blackhall Mosque located just outside the concerned area. Another notable statistic is that 19.3% of residents in the north of the city were born outside of the UK (7% across Scotland), with 5.8% of all local people noting their ethnic identity as Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British population and 3.1% Other Ethnic Groups (2.7% average in Edinburgh and 1.3% Scotland-wide). Around 14.4% of north-based census respondents noted national identity combinations that included no UK identity compared to just 4.4% Scottish average. The ethnic and religious identities of those living locally are, therefore, far more diverse than the majority of Scotland. Emejulu and Bassel (2017, p.13) illustrate the importance of this demographic information with the observation that ‘under austerity, minority women are disproportionately disadvantaged due to their already existing precarity compounded by their particular relationships with the social welfare state.’ It
is, therefore, noteworthy that the adult members of AAM - one of the existing lone parent-led groups in the area - were all white Scottish (as evidenced in all publicity materials produced by the activist group and the press see Images #3-#4). This suggests the possible absence of local people from minority populations in community-organised activities and acts of resistance to the austerity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image #3: Member of AAM at a gathering in the North Edinburgh Arts Centre where they shared many of their campaign materials and stories with interested local people (NEN, 2018c).</th>
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<tr>
<th>STOP THE EVICTIONS OF FAMILIES AND CHILDREN</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SCRAP THE BENEFIT CAP</td>
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<tr>
<td>11 families including 42 children face eviction from their privately rented homes in North Edinburgh due to the Benefits Cap – some have already been evicted and are in appalling homeless hostels</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**DEMONSTRATE AT COUNCIL MEETING**

**CITY CHAMBERS, HIGH STREET**

**9.30AM ONWARDS THURSDAY 18th MAY**

**EDINBURGH COUNCIL MUST**

- Pay full Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) to completely cover rent
- House homeless families in decent flats in suitable areas – not in substandard hostels’ B&Bs
- Build more social housing – only 30% of the new Pennywell Muirhouse homes are regular council tenancies
- Ensure temporary accommodation meets acceptable standards
- Immediately repair empty houses and put back in use – temp accommodation flats are lying empty

**SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT MUST**

- Allocate sufficient funds to councils to cover full DHP for the benefit cap

**WESTMINSTER GOVERNMENT MUST**

- Scrap the benefit cap

**PRIVATE SECTOR RENTS MUST BE REGULATED**

**NO MORE EVICTIONS DUE TO THE BENEFITS CAP**

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<tr>
<th>Image #4: AAM campaign leaflet organising one of their first demonstrations (NEN, 2017).</th>
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**(ii) Greater Pilton as an Economic Community**

Originally built as a ‘slum clearance area’ across the 1930s-1950s (Greene, 2007), the percentage of lone parents in neighbourhoods within the former Greater Pilton such as Pilton (East Pilton and West Pilton combined), at 17%, is almost triple the Edinburgh average of 6% (Carlin, 2017). As such, the number of households with a single source of income is significant. The 2011 Scottish Census (NRoS, 2011) stated that, in Pilton, 25% of the population was, at the time, under the age of sixteen (compared to 17% at national level) suggesting a large number of households with multiple dependent children as witnessed in the AAM membership (thirteen women and thirty-five children [NEN, 2017]). Engaging with thirty-four lone parents in this research, thus, enabled a sizeable cross-section of north Edinburgh’s lone parent community to shape the findings detailed and analysed in the latter stages of the submission. It cannot, however, claim to represent the totality of all lone parents’ experiences (social, economic, etc.).

In terms of employment, the *Employment and Unemployment (Apr 2017-Mar 2018)* report from Durham University (2018) suggested that 4.2% of the entire Scottish working age population were unemployed
(4.8% of all men and 3.5% of women within their binary categorisation). An area profile produced by the City of Edinburgh Council (2005, p.9), however, found that ‘Muirhouse/Drylaw areas had the highest level of unemployment [in Edinburgh]’ and that ‘Pilton and Granton had the 3rd and 4th highest levels of unemployment.’ However, MacDonald (2011) notes that these statistics may in fact mask true employment levels when ‘underemployment’ is considered. Bell and Blanchflower (2013, p.1) defined ‘underemployment as [those] employed who want more work than is currently available to them,’ with Lichter and Costanzo (1987) similarly characterising it as those working fewer hours than desired and hence living on a low-income despite being considered ‘in-work.’ Mackie (2018) argues that ‘chronic “underemployment” is slowly replacing [...] outright joblessness’ and that in 2018, ‘there [were] twice as many “underemployed” workers as unemployed workers’ -supported by Emejulu and Bassel (2017) and the Women’s Budget Group (2018). The former noted that ‘minority groups were disproportionately more likely to be unemployed or underemployed’ (Emejulu and Bassel, 2017, p.87). This is significant from a quantitative perspective in areas of contextually high diversity, and suggests that, given the ethnic and cultural profiles of those involved with those already present within the literature, such as All About Me, there may be groups facing additional barriers such as language (Bloch, 2007; Tang, 2016), and stigmas targeted towards a specific culture or religion (Netto et al., 2010) who are not yet accounted for within research and activism. Similar barriers also exist for other socially marginalised groups who are more likely to be unable to participate in or who become excluded from these acts of resistance and survival to, for example, austerity, despite facing similar problems to those who are, at least publicly, involved (Frazer, 2005; McCulloch, 2006; Ravensbergen and VanderPlaat, 2010).

(iii) Greater Pilton as a Political Community  
At the time of this investigation, the Scottish National Party’s (SNP) Ben MacPherson MSP represents Edinburgh Northern and Leith; whilst Alex Cole-Hamilton MSP (Scottish Liberal Democrats) gained Edinburgh Western from the SNP in 2016. Despite the re-establishment of the devolved Scottish Parliament in 1999 under the Scotland Act (1998), Westminster (the UK Government) retains many legislative powers over issues facing people in the Greater Pilton area, demonstrating the complexities of navigating and understanding local politics. As detailed in the Key Theorists & Broader Research chapter, the austerity measures implemented at the UK-level have often been devoted to ‘regional’ administrations and, eventually, local councils via, for example, reductions in block grants. Issues such as defence and national security, benefits and social security, and employment also remain Reserved Powers, whilst remits for Health and Education are amongst the Devolved Powers managed at Holyrood (Scottish Parliament, 2018). At the UK-level, constituents in Greater Pilton are represented by the SNP’s Deidre Brock MP (Edinburgh North and Leith) or by the Liberal Democrats’ Christine Jardine MP (Edinburgh West). Historically, the north and north-west areas of Edinburgh have been dominated by Labour (north) or switched between the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties (north-west). At the Local Authority-level, the Forth Ward and Almond Ward are represented by multi-party groups including councillors from the SNP (Eleanor Bird, George Gordon, and Norman Work), the Scottish Conservatives (Jim Campbell and Graham Hutchison), Scottish Labour (Cammy Day), and the Scottish Liberal Democrats (Kevin Lang and Louise Young).

In addition, two major referendums occurred within the four years prior to the doctoral research beginning: the 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum and the 2016 vote on the UK’s membership of the European Union. The City of Edinburgh (2018) voting analysis report suggested that 72,181 people voted within Edinburgh North and Leith - 40% yes (28,813) to Scottish independence; 60% no (43,253). In Edinburgh West, with 65,625 votes cast, the electorate backed a ‘yes vote’ at a slightly lower rate of
34% (22,615), with 65% (42,946) voting no (ibid.). However, many social activist groups in Greater Pilton (e.g. North Edinburgh Fights Back and the Radical Independence Campaign) advocated for Scottish secession from the UK. This was recognised by the then-Edinburgh SNP Group Leader, Councillor Steve Cardownie (2014), who stated that ‘areas within these constituencies where Labour has traditionally been strong voted Yes in substantial numbers – places like Granton, Pilton, Craigmillar and Wester Hailes.’ That data is collated by constituency means data disagggregated by ward is inaccessible. Of the 57,099 votes cast in Edinburgh North and Leith during the ‘Brexit’ vote, 78% (44,618 votes) backed remain whilst just 22% (12,435 votes) preferred leaving the European Union. In Edinburgh West, 71% (38,019) voted to remain compared to 29% (15,353 votes) who believed it would be better to leave (Edinburgh Guide, 2016). In a city of contextually high diversity, with estimated populations of around 39,000 EU nationals (approximately 8% of Edinburgh’s population; Scottish Government, 2016), this is an important statement of seemingly inclusive attitudes, though the precise motivations of individuals backing continued membership of the European Union requires separate investigation. The final results saw Scotland remain within the United Kingdom, whilst the UK eventually left the EU on the 31st January 2020.

My initial experiences of north Edinburgh involved door-knocking as part of the Radical Independence Campaign (circa 2012-2014). In a group of four young men (aged between seventeen and our late-twenties), we were from all over Western Europe - a Scot, a Spaniard, an Englishman, and a Portuguese. We simultaneously embodied the internalist outlook we hoped an independent Scottish state could work towards, yet, reproduced the largely cisgendered male and Eurocentric space that all too often characterises mainstream political debate. This is by no means a downplaying of the interest and campaign groups that emerged during the years leading up to the Scottish Independence Referendum - including Women for Independence, Scots Asians for Independence, African for Independence, etc. - rather it is intended to demonstrate the disparity between gender identities, age, and nationalities that are north Edinburgh’s communities and some activist contexts operating locally.

Electoral politics is far from the only aspect of political life in the area though. Ranging from Gala Days organised by local committees (Muirhouse Residents Association, 1963), the Pilton Festival of Music, Dancing and Drama, lobbying the local council for dedicated drying spaces (Fleeting, 1963), and community histories (North Edinburgh Social History Group, 2011), local organising has been a major element of political activity in north Edinburgh for generations - albeit one that is drastically underrepresented in the literature. These activities sit alongside the more traditional forms of political action such as voting (detailed above) and strike action (for example, by the AUBTW [see Image #5]). In recent years, a local branch of the tenant union Living Rent has emerged, spearheading the coalition Muirhouse Deserves Better campaign. In one such success, the group ‘won’ a £10,000 investment from the Muirhouse Housing Association to address long term damages and infestations (Living Rent Edinburgh, 2023).
2.3 Conclusion

This lived experience of north Edinburgh (social, political, economic, historical, geographical, and cultural) aided me in producing a Community Profile based upon Christakopoulou et. al.’s (2001) threefold template which demonstrated how the literature understood the studied-community. These supportive materials ensured further contextualisation and supported my own reflexivity by engaging with the environment as articulated in the literature. As Palinkas et al. (2015, p.1) emphasised, this was essential in creating a ‘sufficiently complex’ project as ‘a single methodological approach is often inadequate’ (see also Palinkas et al., 2011). From the roles and relationships angle, these were essential in identifying local lone parents who, as Palinkas et al. (2015, p.3) stress may have ‘availability and willingness to participate, and the ability to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner’ on an issue so central to their lives that go far beyond what’s present in the literature, thereby making this project possible. In submitting this thesis, I am eternally grateful for each of the thirty-four contributions.

Understanding the context in which this research took place required recognising the social, economic, political, and historical factors that shaped it. To examine it exclusively from quantitative sources such as the Scottish Census (NRS, 2011) or community profiles produced by the City of Edinburgh Council (2016) masks many important factors only made visible through qualitative accounts (e.g. Greene, 2007; Cardownie, 2014; and NESHG, 2011). So too, were the political understanding to be based solely upon voting patterns, this would be incredibly limiting when rich accounts have been produced by local residents such as those by AAM or Living Rent Edinburgh (2023). That community development practitioners operating in North Edinburgh such as McCabe (2011) have also offered reflective accounts on their practice allows uniquely-situated insights into the area as well as its communities, amenities, and political consciousness that would, arguably, otherwise be absent. With this Community Profile in mind, the thesis now progresses to a outlining the Conceptualisation & Theoretical Frameworks through which the research was framed and, therefore, how it was approached.
3. Conceptualisation & Theoretical Frameworks

Introduction

The following chapter details the core theories utilised in this thesis. It explains how political and social action has been understood at the individual, community, and local level, connecting actions taken in north Edinburgh to broader theorisations of direct action. This includes, but is not limited to, exploring how Alinsky’s (1971) practice in the US offers an overview to conceptualising actions, whilst Gramscian theory (Gramsci, 1988) is outlined, thereby, establishing the hegemonic context in which these lone parent participants operate. So too, the policy context is recognised, reaching a consensus over how the state perceives and treats lone parents. Alongside this, Alston’s (2018) report into austerity in the UK forms a central component of the critical analysis.

As van der Walt (2020, p.62) outlined, ’[p]eople’s different sensory modalities – vision, hearing, touch, taste, smell – and the complexity of the things the different interpretivists take themselves to perceive, make it impossible to claim that any interpreter can arrive at definite knowledge about anything’. Thus, a combination of approaches were utilised in producing the thesis. A wealth of critical theory-centred literature enabled an intense analysis of the political context of austerity and community activism, whilst van der Walt (2020, p.63) recognised that the researcher ‘has to make a judgement about its authenticity and acceptability status’. The chosen research approach of utilising the BINM premised, as it is, upon trust and taking the participants’ narratives as fact is, therefore, a logical progression. The thesis is, thus, better recognised within a constructivist paradigm given that it is ’based on the assumption that reality and the human behavior therein is characterized by continuous fluctuations, adjustments and transformations’ (ibid., p.61). Acknowledging the diversity of experiences and abundance of truths, range of understandings communicated, and relationships - i.e. the ways in which ’[r]eality is constantly being (re)constructed by such actors in interactions with others by assigning an individual meaning to an event or an experience’ (Leutwyler et al., 2012, p.112) - any single approach would struggle to grapple with the wealth of information and perspectives within the literature and accounts gathered during the fieldwork.

3.1 Theoretical Underpinning: Critical Theory(ies)

Emejulu’s (2015) illustrated the ways that hyperlocalised community organising and, at times, cross-community support occurs, stressing that it is intimately shaped by the national contexts – i.e. policy changes at the meso-Holyrood- or macro-Westminster-levels altering what spaces remain in-place, close, or emerge in the micro (the hyperlocalised council areas). Much of the theoretical underpinning of ‘micropolitics' stems from the practical approach to community organisation outlined by Alinsky (1971). Indeed, the thesis recognises individuals for their own capacity and seeks to better understand precisely how they have sought to navigate their lives as lone parents (for whatever duration), as they exist under the state (socially, but also politically in terms of control and agency); rather than proclaiming them a product of it despite the many ways in which it has shaped their lives. In this sense, it draws from Emejulu’s (2015) recognition of the political in the everyday and is founded upon Freire’s (1972) understanding of conscientization whereby we develop and refine our sense of self and politics through our experiences. Rather than examining the dynamics of ‘professionals mediating,
regulating and controlling other people’s development of agency’ (Emejulu, 2015), this thesis learns from the research participants’ own narrations and lived biographies within their micro geographical context of North Edinburgh. Whilst doing so, it recognises how the broader political contexts of Holyrood and Westminster warp, shape, and frequently threaten their capacity to influence or decide what occurs for them and their children.

Concerning that respect for the participants’ insights, the Gramscian notion of the ‘organic intellectual’ centres on lived experience as the fostering of knowledge - in part, the process of undergoing conscientization. Stating that ‘all men are intellectuals, but not all men have the function of intellectuals’ (Gramsci, 1988), he recognised the social and political power maintained by those of privilege and position – generally economic – that affords some the capacity to dominate over others via coercion or, at times, consensus (these being central to his conceptualisation of hegemony). In the context of this thesis, hegemony is primarily recognised as the successive pro-austerity agendas advocated by the British state since the 2008 economic crash (Toynbee and Walker, 2020; Cooper and Whyte, 2017), during which austerity has largely been taken for granted by the state as the only solution to fostering a neoliberal recovery. The brief exception to this occurred during Covid-19 when additional funding was provided for many community-based organisations who were better positioned to address the inequalities directly than the state (Jun and Lance, 2020). This also, however, represented the transfer of much of the responsibility for overseeing the recovery process and survival of communities throughout the UK from the state to local activists and community-based organisations who, in settings like north Edinburgh, frequently boasted far more comprehensive and socially interconnected networks than any state-led organisation.

In the same way that Freire’s (1972) conscientization is the recognition of these social experiences as connected to the political – akin to Emejulu’s recognition of micropolitics - a Gramscian framing allows the contextualisation necessitated for Emejulu’s (2015) understanding to effectively position the everyday within a broader setting. The earlier Community Profile constitutes part of this immersive contextualisation. Drawing directly on the capacity of those with lived experience (Gramsci’s organic intellectuals) to make connections between their own lives and the politics that occurs to, within, and around them in their geographical and social contexts (Freire’s conscientization occurring in the micro), the four themes and the single initial prompt within the BINU research methodology were identified as an appropriate approach for encouraging the articulation of such insights. This, within the thesis, is understood as a central component of the enactment of micropolitics, rooted, as it is, - Craig (2016, p.2) argues - in ‘[d]emocracy, [e]mpowerment, [c]oalition and [t]ransformation discourses.’ These, he recognises, ‘shun the language of capacity building’ and instead ‘focus on “the need for democratisation of public spaces,” recognis[ing] the importance of both process and outcome and act in solidarity rather than within a hierarchy of roles’ (ibid., p.2). Providing spaces, generally of the discussants’ choosing, within community settings to reflect upon these issues allowed participants to articulate empowerment, social change, challenges, barriers, and needs in their own words, without forcing the conversations in a set direction or placing constraints on the participants’ vocabularies via a series of imposing questions.

Under Gramscian theory, every class possesses or has the capacity to produce new knowledges and precise expertise stemming only from their lives, not those of the traditionally valued ‘ruling classes’ - those we might recognise as ‘political aristocracy’ (Saville Roberts, 2021). To an extent, this includes community development workers and social work practitioners who might have professional expertise
locally but are afforded a distinct form of state-sanctioned power unavailable to those merely living in the concerned community of place. Though Gramsci wrote primarily from a Marxist-perspective and, therefore, centred much of his thought on economic and labour-based movements, the same premise is applicable to the social. That people can survive or navigate any number of unique socio-political circumstances – many of which are precise to their own immediate contexts in terms of the intersecting concerns, needs, and cross-community or conflicting ambitions – similarly possesses organically developed insights based on their status and positioning culturally, socially, and economically. The lone parent participants shared particular connections (e.g. time spent living, working, and / or studying in north Edinburgh; collaboration in anti-austerity movements; or attendance at community groups locally), much of which was that related to their status as lone parents.


This subsection details the specifics of how lone parent families are defined broadly - though the terminology will be explored more extensively in the Literature Review - whilst a range of papers, policy briefing, and other state publications will also be considered. Of major significance, for example, are the circumstances which led to the implementation of austerity as state policy (Toynbee and Walker, 2020; Cooper and Whyte, 2017). Termed the ‘age of austerity’ (Seymour, 2014), these social sanctions were first implemented by the Labour Party (until 2010), yet the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition (2010-2015) and then consecutive Conservative and Unionist Party-led UK Governments (2015-now) have implemented an intense austerity programme premised on a myriad of reforms. These have included major overhauls to social security and the drastic reduction of funding made available to Third Sector organisations and, by extension, community groups who had, previously been reliant on state grants to finance their operations (Cooper and Whyte, 2017; Patrick, 2017; Olah, 2019).

The reforms to welfare state provision - money which many low incomes families rely upon, but, particularly of importance to those on low single incomes such as lone parents - saw drastically revisions, and the implementation of several highly controversial policies including the two-child cap, and the introduction of Universal Credit (CPAG and IPPR, 2017). The aforementioned ‘[F]ive Austerity Ailments’ detailed by McGrath et al. (2015) ‘[h]umiliation and shame’, ‘[f]ear and distrust’, ‘[i]nstability and insecurity’, ‘[i]solation and loneliness’, and ‘[b]eing trapped and powerless’ became central to public relationships to the state - particularly from poor and working class families - whilst the cuts and reforms had disproportionately harmful impacts on communities which were already facing far greater degrees of poverty than other areas. As noted above by Emejulu and Bassel (2017), these inequalities were already entrenched in the UK, with minority communities (religious, ethnic, linguistic, etc.) enduring far greater proportional harms. This is not, however, a dismissal of the precariousness facing those who are not part of these demographics, but it recognises the propensity with which intersectional factors impact the likelihood of harms affecting particular communities. Austerity, therefore, is not an abstract concept, but something which has been felt in a very real manner by many living in north Edinburgh - Strong’s (2020) ‘actually existing austerity’.

As stressed by Alston (2018), economic reform - particularly austere politics - is a neoliberal-driven ideological choice, and was only one option for the state to take following the economic crash rather than an absolute necessity. This decision, he advised, ‘could easily have spared the poor, if the political
will had existed to do so’. The WBG (2017) similarly observed the ideological underpinning of this approach, recognising that the reforms had a disproportionate impact on women and put at risk many lone parent families who were within the most impacted demographics (OPFS, 2018; Averett, 2021). As Davis (2017) observed, under austerity circa ‘49% of children in lone parent families now live below the poverty line’. Other groups, such those facing homelessness faced a 24% rise in death rates (Olah, 2019), whilst legal aid for those with precarious residency status was drastically impacted (Beales, 2020b)

3.3 How are lone parents defined by the British and Scottish states?

Though a full exploration of the terminology used to discuss, engage with, and produce policy affecting lone parents will be explored in the Literature Review, this subsection further establishes the policy within which the research occurred. Bernardi et al. (2018) observed that ‘[t]he socio-demographic profile of lone parents has changed in the last decades,’ noting that pre-1970s it had been understood as ‘mostly widowed men and women or young single mothers,’ whilst modern understandings recognise that many lone parents are divorced or were never married to their co-parent (where there was one). They do, however, recognise that women continue to significantly occupy the space of primary or sole caregiver.22 With the England-based Office for National Statistics (ONS, 2021) finding that as of 2020, ‘there were 2.9 million lone parent families in 2020 [-] 14.7% of all families in the UK,’ it is clear that this family type is far more socially accepted now, with the diversity of pathways to lone parenthood fairly commonplace in most of Europe (see Hübgen, 2020). Han et al. (2021), however, suggest that in China the emergence of lone parents remains a new ‘social phenomenon,’ with Li (2020) acknowledging that - as elsewhere - women head the majority of lone parent families in the country. Though a more in-depth exploration of cultural and religious factors which influence the propensity of publicly known lone parent families occurs in the Literature Review, the shifting state perceptions of lone parents are clear. Similarly, their own identities continue to evolve due to social acceptance, but also through lone parents’ growing confidence to openly be themselves. The two are interconnected, but individual lone parents do not necessarily need to wait for social attitudes to change before they may choose to be open about their status in cultures where lone parent families are still frequently looked down upon. As Hall (2019) argued, ‘[p]erhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a “production,” which is never complete, always in [but] process.’

3.4 Austerity and Lone Parent Families

Despite the clear connection between economic precarity and poor health, many studies have focused on the health impacts of life in a lone parent family for children rather than the parent - a situation acknowledged by Chzhen and Bradshaw (2012) regarding the academy in the European context. This is not to negate the importance of this, with Pryor and Rodgers (2001) having examined the health and well-being of children in Anglo-Western nations after parental separation or divorce. Ringbäck Weitof et al. (2003, p.289), for example, claiming that childhood in a lone parent family ‘entail[ed] disadvantages in terms of socioeconomic circumstances and health’ in Sweden during the 1990’s. In recent years, however, large swathes of the literature have documented how austerity has impacted poor and working class people in many negative ways (including physical and mental health, work opportunities, and job

22 Jones (2021) describes this position from a more legal perspective, adopting the term ‘custodial’ parent.
security). As with other aspects of this contextualisation chapter, the crisis many face regarding work will be explored more fully in the corresponding subsection of the Literature Review.

In the aftermath of the global economic recession, the UK Government, like governments throughout Europe and beyond, made an ideological choice to reduce support for communities and support organisations as they sought to address financial imbalances stemming primarily from the financial sector (Cooper and Whyte, 2017; Economou et al., 2016; Alston, 2018; Sutton Trust, 2018). This subsection, therefore, builds on information regarding existing levels of poverty in the UK by examining the impact of austerity on the lone parent families most at risk - amongst them, those on low-incomes, disabled people, those requiring state aid, or others who face further barriers (Alston, 2018; Davis, 2017; OPFS, 2018; Cooper and Whyte, 2017; Averett, 2021; WBG, 2017).

To focus, briefly, on one of the most significant reports into austerity in the UK, Alston (2018) - the United Nations Special Rapporteur for Extreme Poverty and Human Rights - concluded that the Conservative-led UK Government’s austerity measures were ‘a political choice [and that] austerity could easily have spared the poor, if the political will had existed to do so’ (Alston, 2018, p.24). This helps justify the formulation and framing of this project, as many of the lone parent participants fall within multiple categories of those most directly impacted by these ideological choices. In 2017, less than a year before Alston’s investigation, the WBG (2017, p.7) had argued that ‘the Treasury and Chancellor failed to provide an adequate assessment of how the Budget impacts on different groups,’ adding that ‘such analysis must be an essential component of the decision-making process when setting policies that aim to build a country that “works for everyone.”’ They suggested an ‘analysis by gendered household types could be carried out, simply by differentiating the gender of single-adult households’ (ibid., p.9) to demonstrate the disproportionate impact austerity has had on women (and, by extension, many lone parent families in the UK). Alston’s (2018) report is one example of the form of investigation the WBG deemed essential in advancing a progressive and compassionate politics. Upon completing his two-week investigation, Alston (2018, p.2) concluded that austerity had created a form of ‘deep despair that le[ds] the Government to appoint a Minister for Suicide Prevention23 and civil society to report in depth on unheard of levels of loneliness and isolation’ (emphasising the additional health precarities fostered by austerity). Yet, Alston (ibid.) noted the ‘tremendous resilience, strength, and generosity, with neighbors supporting one another, councils seeking creative solutions, and charities stepping in to fill holes in government services’ witnessed across the UK.

Lone parent families featured multiple times throughout the report, with Alston (2018, p.6) observing that the ‘DWP does not make public sanctions data disaggregated by race or ethnicity, much less certain other claimant statuses such as single parents.’ He does, however, identify lone parents, the working poor, asylum seekers and migrants, children living in poverty, and those with disabilities as among those most severely affected by the Conservative Party’s austerity measures - those whom he terms ‘the hardest hit.24 These communities, many of whom face the forms of fuel and income poverty, long-term unemployment, or severe underemployment detailed above have categorically borne the brunt of

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23 Jackie Doyle-Price was appointed to the role of Health Minister by then-British Prime Minister Theresa May, with an expanded portfolio including ‘suicide prevention’ (BBC News, 2018).

24 Taylor (2020c) reported that twenty-nine asylum seekers died whilst being housed in Home Office accommodation between 1st January 2020 - 15th December 2020.
austerity in the UK (ibid., Cooper and Whyte, 2017; Mackie, 2018)\textsuperscript{25}. As Alston (2018, p.18) concludes, ‘the[se] policies have taken the highest toll on those least able to bear it’ financially and, at times, socially - at least in terms of immediately available support to address it (much of which, itself, ceased). This comes despite Sikka (2015) recognising that ‘failure to tackle tax avoidance has serious consequences for distribution of wealth and even survival,’ and that ‘organised tax avoidance undermines confidence in fairness, democracy, justice and the rule of law.’ As such, the UK Government is culpable in their political and ideological decision to orientate post-recession reform towards many of the most marginalised communities (Stephenson, 2011).

Despite claims to the contrary (May, 2018; Hammond, 2019), austerity politics continues to harm communities UK-wide; though, as witnessed with the protests following the implementation of the two child cap to Child Benefit, citizens in north Edinburgh and beyond readily responded to further changes. Alston’s (2018) special report was dismissed outright by Rudd (2018) and others within the Conservative administration for the ‘political language’ and criticism of austerity politics. The findings of this investigation attest similar points put forward by Alston (2018); however, the time spent a dialogically-driven manner with the research participants has allowed more intimate insights than he had the opportunity to afford lone parents-specifically. Rudd’s (2018) comments, in full, dismissed the report ‘on the grounds of taste and decorum, eliminat[ing] the possibility of meaningful debate or critical engagement on the issues affecting people’s lives.’

Published in collaboration between the Child Poverty Action Group and the Institute for Public Policy Research, \textit{The Austerity Generation} (2017) demonstrated that the introduction of Universal Credit (a process of merging six previously separate forms of social security into a single process) would put more than one million more children into poverty; yet, the UK Government continued to implement this reform. Similarly, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF, 2018, p.2) warned that ‘without [major] reforms to fix Universal Credit, more families - especially lone parents - are likely to face higher rates of poverty in and out of work’, given that the ‘families already at greater risk of poverty - including lone parents, families with very young children, larger families and those with a disability - will be especially hard-hit by a decade of cuts’ (OPFS, 2017, p.3). Indeed, upwards of thirty-three percent of the lone parent families currently not in employment live with a disability or long-term illness, with a similar percentage (34%) raising a child with a form of formally diagnosed disability (UG, 2018, p.1). These lone families are, thus, demonstrably among those likely to suffer most under the continued regime of austerity in multiple and intersecting ways.

Many others made similar observations, with Stephenson (2011, p.21) citing both Gingerbread (n.d.) and the Resolution Foundation (n.d.) arguing that the implementation of Universal Credit will ‘make work unaffordable for many low-income women, particularly single mothers.’ The response to the introduction of Universal Credit has been significant, with anti-austerity demonstrations taking place UK-wide (see e.g. Unite the Union, 2018; Corr, 2018; Bell, 2018; Kelly, 2017). Indeed, November 2018

\textsuperscript{25} This topic was raised by \#16 Michael and \#3 Lindsay during our discussions, with both advising of the complications underemployment had imposed on their relationships with their children. \#3 Lindsay worried about the quality of life she could provide for her two kids, whilst \#16 Michael had endured years of anxiety over how his son perceived his inability to afford to travel from north Edinburgh to Grimsby (where the son lived with the ex-partner) on a regular basis. \#21 Edina’s experience contrasted deeply with \#3 Lindsay, however, as she felt that, even with part-time employment, she was able to provide a higher standard of living for her child than she could in her own country of birth.
witnessed four lone mothers in England challenge the UK Government’s over Universal Credit via the High Court on the grounds that it ‘disproportionately affects single parents’ (BBC News, 2018), forcing such families further into poverty and debt. Prentis (2018) acknowledged the Universal Credit programme as ‘pointlessly cruel,’ with ‘single parents, care leavers and people with disabilities and health conditions [...] disproportionately vulnerable to sanctions’ compared to coupled-families and those without disabilities and in relatively good health. This precise experience would be raised by #10 Rona during our discussion. Such privileges, however, can be a temporary status, with genetic factors or other external influences (e.g. Covid-19) able to severely alter those positions in the short- or long-term. Indeed, the WBG (2017, p.11), echoing Stephenson (2011), stated that ‘both lone mothers and couples with children stand to lose 20% of their living standard if they contain both a disabled adult and a disabled child’, constituting ‘perhaps the worst hit of all households.’ These examples from the literature, thus, demonstrate the urgency of this research, with Davis (2017) condemns the austerity measures under the belief that the ‘by 2021 [all] lone parents and their children will lose 20% of their current income due to welfare reforms’, placing almost 62% of children in lone parent families living in poverty by 2022.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter highlighted the range of ways austerity has harmed society according to the literature, whilst the Community Profile showcased some of the local factors, demographics, and challenges that were understood upon entering the fieldwork. As Averett (2021) emphasises, research which is not rooted in intersectional understandings results in ‘broad brushstrokes,’ thereby ‘obscuring differences’ between participants and their experiences of parenting. Such broad comments would similarly blur important differences between groups, identities, and experiences. Thus, the hyperlocalised nature of my doctoral research necessitated an immersive entry point without which the reader would be unfamiliar to the context in which it occurred (geographical, temporal, etc.). Many of the findings offered by Alston (2018) helped demonstrate the extent to which issues have been and continue occurring; however, the focus on north Edinburgh permits greater engagement with the unique impacts of and responses to austerity locally, engaging some of the many lone parent families that live in the area.

In summary, this chapter has identified core theoretical lenses for understanding community-based experiences and motivation(s) to take action. The synthesis of a range of theoretical positions aligns with van der Walt’s (2020) recognition that no single theory or approach can account for the diversity of insights, changes in the political (and policy-based) environment, and conceptualisations of issues as they are experienced both individually and collectively. The BINM approach from Ross and Moore (2016), combined with understandings from Emefulu (2015) and Gramsci (1988) on the fostering of knowledge through lived experience, has been demonstrated as an aptly positioned approach for a dialogical and situated investigation. The agency-centred approach and perspectives that inform this research permit significant power to be retained by the participants – devoid of imposed lines of questions as BINM is, in-action for example – with the conversation participant-led and the environment or form (i.e. online or in-person) components that the interviewees have control over. As such Strong’s (2020) ‘actually existing austerity’ can be discussed without an overreliance on second-hand accounts that limit the responsibility of those living through the studied phenomenon. This becomes particularly urgent amidst Alton’s (2018) emphasis that target austerity was a political choice – one that has
drastically impacted many in north Edinburgh to a far greater extent than in more affluent areas – and his recognition that these state-imposed actions have created multiple complex and intersecting crises around poverty, mental health, social inclusion, and opportunity, amongst other factors.
4. Literature Review

Introduction

This Literature Review chapter provides an extensive overview of existing research on the topic of lone parent families. The chapter covers seven key areas of the literature, offering insights into the intersections of lone parenthood with, for example, the welfare state and on how lone parent families have historically engaged with the state. Therein, it examines literature concentrating on other topics connected to family life, such as gendered assumptions, the impact of disability, and navigating different cultural boundaries. As such, it asks what is known about lone parent families in Scotland drawn from qualitative and other quantitative studies to effectively understand how the academy perceives lone parents. Amongst the intersections examined are understandings of lone parenthood through lenses of race, social class, sex and gender identity, disability, and sexuality, in addition to queries into contemporary family composition. Finally, a number of current policy debates affecting lone parents are examined including the introduction of the two-child tax credit, as well as birth certificate legislation and gender recognition certificates that have marginalised or harmed birth parents who changed their legal gender prior to birthing their child.

Methodologically, a critical narrative review was conducted to gauge an effective understanding of the diversity of literature on lone parent families. Recognised by Sukhera (2022, p.418) as a ‘flexible [yet] rigorous approach to analyzing and interpreting the literature’, narrative reviews typically mirror the broader approach to research undertaken by the investigator(s), centring similar core elements to what the project explores come the fieldwork (see also Rumill and Fitzgerald, 2001). Much of the data sought was produced under post-recession austerity which involved utilising governmental databases to gauge quantitative understandings (e.g. through NRoS or The Scottish Government), utilising the University of Edinburgh’s physical and eLibraries, as well as major journals for relevant fields (e.g. the Journal of Social Policy, The Journal of Qualitative Research Methods, and Community Development Journal), and Google Scholar for key terms (e.g. ‘lone parent’, ‘single parent’, with related intersections such as ‘austerity’). The handful of hyperlocalised qualitative outputs (e.g. local newspapers and blogs produced in north Edinburgh) permitted these reflections to become situated in the researched context in a manner that would not have otherwise been possible. In this way, Strong’s (2020) ‘actually existing austerity’ became sincere.

As emphasised in the findings, a thematic approach was taken to structuring the literature review, clustering contemporary debates within the academy (taken to mean, initially, within the last five to ten years to establish clear parameters for non-exhaustive research) and placing these alongside significant practice examples related to the concerned context (Onwuegbuzie and Frels, 2016; e.g. the case studies offered of All About Me, Focus E15, Fathers4Justice, and The United African Women’s Organisation). In doing so it connections, primarily, to the first research questions of ‘What does it mean to be a lone parent in austerity-Scotland [and beyond]?’ with the searches largely remaining connected to ‘lone parents’ and ‘austerity’ - in-keeping with Sukhera’s (2022, p.419) emphasis that ‘narrative review is not designed to be a comprehensive review of the literature’ but occurs under a set ‘rationale for specific parameters’. In this sense, the approach was purposeful but not overly selective in that these clustered arose organically based on current academic and policy debates on
austerity Britain, demonstrating relevance of ‘a rich, meaningful, and practical’ approach to the investigation. As such, it aligns with Ferrari’s (2015, p.231) belief that, although there remains no set approach to their formatting, narrative reviews tend to showcase ‘a summary of the history of research when clear trends are identified, or presented as a “conceptual frame”, within which the contents are separated according to dependent or independent variables and their relationships’. Whilst he emphasises that under narrative review, the ‘structure should respect, […] the conventions followed in the particular field’ (ibid.), in this instance that necessitates a blending of social work and community development conventions.

4.1 Pathways to Lone Parenthood

This subsection considers the reasons individuals may become lone parents, encompassing divorce, separation, and bereavement. It also notes the circumstances by which someone may live in a lone parent setting, such as imprisonment and the residency status of a partner or co-parent, which can separate coupled-families for extensive periods of time. Further, it acknowledges times when a ‘spouse working abroad [or suffering long-term] illness’ (Ezzeldine, 2011) results in a lone parent setting (Hancock and Mooney, 2013; Martin and Wilcox, 2013). This notion of ‘pathways’ is a similarly premised phrase to Bower-Brown and Zadah’s (2021) ‘routes to parenthood’.

The Centre for Social Justice (2013) found that ‘cohabiting parents are three times more likely to separate by the time a child is aged five than married couples’, however, contrary to popular misconceptions (see Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009), the NRoS (2015, p.22) found that ‘the proportion of households with two or more children was higher for couple households than for lone parent households.’ As such, there are numerous complexities over how we theorise parents given that those with multiple children may have the same partner for one or more of their children, but many do not. Despite countering stereotypes of lone parent families, the challenges of living on a single source of income are demonstrated by neighbourhood, with the NRoS (2015, p.22) advising that ‘in the most deprived decile almost half of dependent children were in lone parent households […] compared to only 10 per cent […] in the least deprived decile.’ This issue of poverty and income inequality arising from reliance on a lone source of income demands reflection on the ‘intact’ family described earlier by Bailey (2017) and seems to justify the different focuses some studies have on the children in lone parent families versus the adult(s) or the family unit.

Concerning divorce, Weir (2013) observed that ‘two-thirds of children have regular contact with both parents after separation,’ creating situations where most children have two separate families, but also revealing a setting where both birth-parents may lay claim to being a single or lone parent despite the child(ren) residing with the other partner. Though seemingly absent within the literature, it manifests within several of the interviews and will be explored during the Discussion chapter. However, family breakdown has been cited by The Children’s Society (2008) as a contributing cause of poor mental health in children. Further evidence has demonstrated correlations between divorce and childhood obesity (Biehl et al., 2014), poorer physical health (Amato, 2000), and poor educational attainment (CfLS, 2007). It is worthwhile, then, to note that between 2015 and 2017 the number of lone parent families in the UK.

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26 This phrase is borrowed from Walker’s (2013) Equality Network publication, LGBT Pathways to Parenthood: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People Share Their Personal Journeys.
decreased from circa three million, to around 2.8 million (ONS, 2017). This significant fall - equivalent to the total number of lone parent families in all of Scotland (NRoS, 2015) - perhaps is due to the status of lone parent often being temporary, with re-marriage, civil partnerships, and cohabitation replacing the ‘lone,’ ‘single,’ or ‘solo’ situation for one or both partners (Panico et al., 2010).

Regarding young lone parenthood and youth pregnancies more broadly, UNICEF (2001) found that fewer than one-in-four teenage mothers were married to a partner when they gave birth to their first child. Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) observed a stark contrast between the UK and nations such as Japan where around 87% of teenage mothers were married prior to giving birth. This preference not to get married whilst a teen mother in the UK was further evidenced by Graham and McDermott (2005), who concluded that heterosexual young mothers often prioritised forming a strong relationship with the child over any connection with the biological father. Furthermore, Ellis et al. (2003) found that, regardless of social class, in both the US and New Zealand teenage girls raised in a female-headed lone parent family with an absent father were significantly more likely to fall pregnant at a young age themselves. Despite suggestions that the majority of unwanted pregnancies in the UK will no longer be forcibly carried to term (Wellings et. al, 2013), this only applies to some countries and political unions as despite UK law mandating access to safe abortion and family planning clinics in Scotland, England, and Wales (see The Abortion Act 1967) abortion remains illegal in Northern Ireland. Furthermore, in the US, Alabama has followed Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Ohio by introducing legislation to make access to safe abortion highly restricted (BBC, 2019) demonstrating that personal agency is at-risk or has been removed for many would-be birth parents.

Related to this, is the significance of religion within family settings (an aspect raised by several participants including #9 Frank and #31 Jenny). Writing in the US context, Amer (2018) observed that whilst lone parenthood has become increasingly common within the Muslim community, divorce is often still 'viewed as taboo in traditional Muslim households.' She counters the common misconception that the Qur'an forbids divorce, recognising that separation is 'a permissible option for a woman or man to exit a marriage if all solutions of reconciliation are exhausted.' Greenwell (2006), however, cited stigmas remain amongst many of the UK’s Sikh communities, stating that ‘the emphasis put on the values of marriage and family in Britain’s Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities is still strong’ (a finding noted earlier in Campbell and Arya, 2019). As noted in the Community Profile, the Greater Pilton area has significantly higher minority religious populations than Scotland, but also than the City of Edinburgh as a whole (NRoS, 2012). Despite many major figures within Islam being raised by lone mothers (e.g. Prophet Ismail, Prophet Isa, and Prophet Muhammad, as well as Imam al-Shafi’, Imam Ahmed, and Imam Bukhari), Ezzeldine (2011) states that, presently, 'the Muslim community often alienates and ostracizes single parents and is often selective regarding which single parent “deserves” compassion, based on the reasons they are single.' This, therefore, was expected to be a challenging community to include in the research as the suggested stigma made assurances that the invitation would reach the eligible populations difficult to attain. This was because some social or familial practices may seek to mask the situation of lone parenthood to avoid alienation from one’s own community. As a non-Sikh, non-Christian, and non-Muslim myself, the connections between myself and those of faith living locally was limited in this regard. Overlaps in lived experience and shared geography were, thus, relied upon in making connections where there were larger differences between myself and participants.
An additional category of lone parents who were significantly underrepresented in the literature were circumstantial lone parents - that is, those who find themselves in situations of lone parenthood (generally on a temporary basis), such as those parenting on their own whilst a partner is in prison, waiting for an opportunity to enter the country in which their partner resides (e.g. asylum seekers), or involved in military deployment. Indeed, it seems that there is no clear term for this specific situation; therefore ‘circumstantial lone parenting’ appears to be the most appropriate description of this community. This is, however, an issue requiring significant concern going forward, given the urgency surrounding the British Home Office's 'hostility' towards, for example, those from the Windrush Generation and their descendants (see e.g. Olusoga, 2019; Gentleman, 2020a; and Topple, 2020) with many people (several of them parents) have been forcibly deported to countries such as Jamaica, Dominican Republic, Nigeria, and Grenada27 - often in ‘wrist and foot restraints’ (Gentleman, 2020a). This comes despite numerous public protests (BARAC UK and BAME Lawyers for Justice, 2020), legal challenges to government decisions28, political interventions (Powell, 2020; Runnymede Trust, 202029; BfID, 2020a; ECHR, 2020), and personal attempts to save relatives whom activists believe are suffering an injustice (Taylor, 2020b). Townsend (2021) advises that this is the consequence of the 2007 UK Borders Act (UK Parliament, 2007) whereby 'individuals who are not British citizens and receive a prison sentence of more than 12 months are automatically targeted for deportation,' emphasising that '[t]his policy has seen hundreds of people, mainly men, put on charter flights to Jamaica, leaving their British children behind in the UK30. Amongst the appeal letters to the Home Office, Taylor (2020a) disclosed:

‘The Guardian has seen a letter and drawing from a 10-year-old boy addressed to a judge he hoped would remove his father from the flight. The boy wrote: “People are making decisions about my dad. When they grew up they probably had a dad. The decisions they make mean I won’t have a dad with me.”’ 31

Such violent interventions into these families’ lives have created a rapidly increasing number of circumstantial lone parents - directly harming people of colour socially by splitting families, and economically by ridding families of an earner, carer, and companion. Several of the organisations working to prevent the deportations provided testimony centring the impact on children and young people.32 Amongst them, Sankey (CEO at Detention Action; 2020) condemned the deportations as a ‘cowboy operation,’ proclaiming that ‘the tragedy of this tale is the many devastated children who have had a loving parent forcibly ripped from their lives without any consultation or being able to make their voice heard.’ This, she described as ‘child cruelty plain and simple’ (ibid,). Similarly, Doyle (2020) stated that

27 The inconsistencies of this were highlighted when London-born twin brothers Darrell and Darren Roberts (children from a lone parent household and in-care since age thirteen) were issued deportation notices to different countries (Gentleman, 2020c). Similarly, Charles Unuane was deported to Nigeria whilst his partner was permitted to remain in the UK with their three children - each of whom hold British citizenship (ibid.) - thus creating another circumstantial lone parenting situation.
28 Taylor (2020a) notes that interventions later revealed that some ‘may have been victims of modern slavery’.
29 Runnymede Trust’s (2020) open letter was co-signed by a further thirty-five campaign groups, coalitions, advocates, and charities.
30 A situation that BfID (2020d) emphasise ‘can lead to family dissolution’.
31 Another testimony from a seventeen-year-old recounting her father’s deportation stated, ‘[i]t feels like he’s died, really. […] He’s all alone with nobody around. He can’t even give us a hug or pick us up from school’.
32 BfID (2020d) further adds that ‘[t]he experience of deportation produces increased emotional and behavioural distress among children and places children at risk of developing a range of disorders, such as sleeping disorders, depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder’.
there are ‘many children who just lost their father before Christmas at a time of pandemic when children’s mental health is already suffering’ (creating a new form of evidence that the absence of a parent can harm adolescence development). Such state action has, therefore, produced many situations of circumstantial lone parenting and may, in some instances, breach Section 55 (‘Duty regarding the welfare of children’) within the UK Parliament’s (2009) *Borders, Citizenship & Immigration Act 2009* which states that: ‘[T]he Director’s functions [include] regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children who are in the United Kingdom’. Indeed, the European Court of Human Rights (2020) concluded that these deportations - which have forced children to witness and endure traumatic familial separation - were ‘not reconcilable with article 8 of the convention’, whilst Beales (of BfID [2020a]) similarly stressed that ‘a child growing up with one of their parents thousands of miles away is never going to be a positive thing for them.’ Beales (2020a) does, however, rehash the suggestion that life without one of their parents means that ‘[i]t will reduce the child’s ability to reach their full potential,’ which remains far from a universal truth. Thus, it would perhaps be more apt to suggest that the trauma of losing a parent via violent state intervention does more harm to the children than simply growing up in a lone parent household.

BfID (2020c) has, however, observed that ‘[i]n some cases [...] parents who are the sole or primary carers for their children have been detained, resulting in their children being placed in care.’ Despite this breach over their duty of care, Townsend (2021) notes that ‘the Home Office has ruled out officially investigating the impact on minors and families when considering deporting a parent,’ indicating that there is likely to be a long-term traumatic impact for many children and partner(s) who have seen another parent forcibly removed from their lives. The recently formed Families for Justice (a coalition advocating on the behalf of the deported individuals; 2021) emphasised this neglect directly, releasing a statement arguing that, in addition to ‘tearing apart British families and communities,’ children were suffering en masse. They advised that:

> ‘Our children have been professionally neglected and inexplicably made to feel unwelcome in the country we call home. Our children’s British birthrights [sic] have been disregarded. We are saddened about the systematic disregard for the mental health of our children and the unassessed separation they are put through.’

Once again, however, the British Home Office (2021) claimed that only ‘[f]oreign dangerous criminals who violate our laws and abuse our hospitality’ were or will be deported. Despite the numerous statements to the contrary, the official line remains that ‘[t]he UK only ever returns those who the Home Office and, where applicable, the courts are satisfied do not need our protection and have no legal basis to remain.’ Beales (2020b) connects this directly to the crisis of austerity advising that legal aid previously made available to parents facing deportation has been cut. He further states on the UK Government policy developments post-2012 that ‘you can only appeal deportation on the basis of your relation to the child if you can prove that it would be “unduly harsh” to separate you from the child.’

There are, therefore, further concerns regarding the entitlement of the circumstantial lone parent to access particular forms of support (e.g. welfare where applicable or access to support from the community sector). In addition, the capacity of the removed partner to provide support will vary greatly depending on the cause of their removal from the coupled family. If incarcerated, there is an immediate loss of opportunity to earn an income, whilst deportations may still allow, in some situations, for
employment opportunities in the new country of residence. It may well be the case, however, that income levels are lower than those in the UK, meaning that any intended financial assistance may be significantly lower in value once differences in cost of living and currency exchange rates are considered, amongst many other factors. Furthermore, a majority of papers reflecting on the experience of the researcher and their work with families appears to focus on the family as a whole, rather than the challenges of interviewing just the parent(s) or guardians (Dockett et al., 2009). An exception to this would be situations in which the parents and children are not living together (Akesson et al., 2012; Brabec and Xu, 2010).

The death of a co-parent is another event that forces a surviving parent to transition into single parenthood, with Donahue (2020, p.11) summarising that, ‘regardless of the nature of the death, whether predictable (e.g. occurring with greater than two weeks of forewarning) or unpredictable, there are certain norms expected of recently widowed parents.’ Indeed, she recognises that when ‘both qualitative and quantitative research suggests that widowed parents typically experience positive and/or negative changes in their parenting that likely co-occur and ebb and flow over time’ and, as expected given the diversity of lone parents, ‘some parents indicated that they had few internal resources left to handle the new set of burdens following their co-parent’s death, while others could manage relatively better.’ Regardless, the loss of a co-parent causes significant challenges for the surviving parent, with gendered differences observed as women tend towards seeking the support of others, whereas men are understood to ‘exhibit more problem-solving approaches to dealing with loss, which involve failure to express grief emotionally or seek social support’ (ibid., see also Martin & Doka, 2000). This was an issue raised by, among others, #4 Lachlan who had put his social life on hold to raise his daughter. Literature examining surviving mothers and fathers have mirrored these gender differences concerning topics such as seeking social support and engaging in problem-solving aspects of grief (Hagan et al., 2012; Kwok et al., 2005). However, it is important to note that a study which examined widowed fathers with dependent-age children found that men often use covert means of support, such as online websites, to address their grief as opposed to seeking out social or emotional support from friends, family members, or mental health professionals’ (Yopp et al., 2015). This is, however, something which is gradually shifting as support groups for men become somewhat more commonplace. In north Edinburgh, this includes the formation of the Men’s Mental Health Club run by the Tamas Jeles Project (Pickering, 2019). These gendered differences between widowed mothers and fathers are significant, suggests Belsky (1984), believing that ‘the marital relationship is the primary support system for parents,’ before emphasising that ‘other social networks (e.g. work, extended family and friends, community ties) can provide primary support in certain circumstances (e.g. single parenthood). The loss of that partnership was an experience detailed by #7 Cathleen in the aftermath of her partner’s parents’ deaths.

4.2 Lone Parent Families: Demographics: General Background:

At present, there are upwards of 2.8 million lone parent families in the UK (ONS, 2017) of which an estimated 174,000 - involving around 295,000 children - live in Scotland (OPFS, 2018). Policy Exchange (2014) note that the UK currently has the fourth highest percentage of lone parent families in the Europe - behind only Estonia, Latvia, and Ireland - whilst Hirsch (2019) suggests that more than 20% of all children in the UK grow up in a lone parent household (a figure that includes siblings). O’Grady (2013) has similarly noted the increased prevalence of this family type, advising that ‘[i]n 1971, just eight per
cent of households [in the UK] were headed by a lone parent, but by 2011 that figure had reached 22 per cent.’ At present, around three-to-four in every ten families in Scotland are lone parent families (UG, 2018), of which an estimated 12,988 such family types live in the Scottish capital, Edinburgh (Taulbut et al., 2016). However, some discrepancy occurs regarding this figure of 174,000 lone parent families as stated by OPFS (2017), with NRoS (2015) suggesting closer to 291,000 lone parent families in Scotland (therein accounting for 11% of all Scottish households [NROs, 2015]). This difference of around 117,000 could be attributed to someone being a lone parent regardless of whether they live with their children. Furthermore, someone’s ‘lone parent’ status is susceptible to change based on new relationships, marriage, civil partnerships, cohabitation, and other forms of second or blended family composition. Despite this, OPFS (2018) estimate that ‘by 2037, households containing just one adult with children are projected to increase by 27 per cent’ (NROs, 2014).

As a demographic, lone parent families in Scotland are significantly more likely to live in relative poverty, with 23% of lone parent families experiencing ‘persistent poverty’ between 2008-2013 (OPFS, 2017) - a figure four times higher than persistent poverty in coupled-families. In line with this, UG (2018, p.1) emphasise the ‘unique challenge’ that many lone parent families face whilst relying on a single source of income (where the parent is in some form of employment), given that this parent often simultaneously acts as primary carer for their child or children. The JRF (2018) does, however, acknowledge that coupled-families in which only one parent is in work may share similar financial circumstances to lone parent families, though care costs are not outlined in their summary. UG (2018) also stressed that the lived experience of lone parent families varies depending on neighbourhood, welfare reform, gender, and the job opportunities available. Around 24% of all children in Scotland live in female-headed lone parent households, with just 2 percent living in male-headed lone parent households (NROs, 2015), meaning that, when understood in relation to the gender pay gaps, the female-headed lone parent households may - and often do - face additional economic marginalisation. Hirsch (2019) advises that most of these female-headed lone parent families ‘have no child maintenance arrangement’ in place from a former partner and, consequently, ‘three in four [children from lone parent families] end up with income lower than the minimum needed for an acceptable standard of living.’ Struggles around poverty, therefore, often become further engrained when lone parents (particularly those who are poor, working class, and female) try to access support with childcare.

Additional barriers which face poor and working communities Scotland-wide but may be proportionately more detrimental to lone parents include dominant language command (Bloch, 2007; Tang, 2016), residency status (Negrón-Gonzales, 2014), education attainment (NROs, 2015), stigmas specific to particular cultures, religions, or towards lone parent status (Netto et. al., 2010; Mohd et. al., 2011; Bailey, 2017), or social marginalisation (Frazer, 2005; McCulloch, 2006; Ravensbergen and VanderPlaat, 2010). The JRF (2018) noted that 30,000 Scottish children in poverty live with a lone parent who was out of work, while a further 15,000 living with a lone parent working part-time were also in poverty. NROs (2015) detailed that lone parent families account for more than 20% of all households in the most deprived areas in Scotland; compared to just 6% of households in the most affluent areas - demonstrating the appropriateness of the chosen geographical focus of this PhD in north Edinburgh.

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33 Relative poverty is defined by the Townsend Centre for International Poverty Research (n.d.) as those unable to afford an ‘ordinary living pattern’.
34 ONS (2017) define persistent poverty as ‘individuals [who] live in a household with an equivalised disposable income that falls below 60% of the national median in the current year’.
Furthermore, the Urban-Rural Indicator (2012) demonstrated that lone parent families account for a more significant percentage of families in large urban areas such as Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen, or Dundee - 12% of all households - than in more remote areas such as some of Scotland’s islands, where lone parent families constitute just 8% of all households. Finally, illustrating the challenge around housing, a majority of lone parent families live in social housing, rather than private rentals or home ownership (NRoS, 2015).

Age: Gingerbread (2015) found that, in the UK, 'less than two per cent of single parents are teenagers,' although UG (2018, p1) suggest that the average age of the primary carer in a lone parent family is around thirty-eight years old. Despite this, stereotypes of lone parenthood being the domain of young mothers persist (OPFS, 2018). Graham and McDermott (2005) recognise, however, that ‘teenage motherhood is a pathway through which women become excluded from the activities and connections of the wider society’, thereby creating another characteristic through which marginalisation might occur. This, they suggest, causes families to become ‘trapped’ in poverty. Indeed, the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU, 1999) and Hobcraft and Kiernan (2001) further reinforced these conclusions, noting that lower educational attainment, youth criminal records, and forms of social exclusion were consistent with teenage parenthood, thus suggesting social and economic marginalisation(s) which gave rise to taking ‘extreme behaviours’ to survive. Given that the UK as a whole has one of the highest teenage birth rates in Europe (FPA, 2016), and with this correlating directly to levels of economic inequality (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009), areas featuring negatively in the SIMD (such as Greater Pilton) may be expected to be home to an above average percentage of young lone mothers (ISD, 2018).

In addition, the SEU (1999) have shown that many teenage mothers (lone parent or otherwise) receive minimal support from the father of their child, whilst girls born to teenage mothers are also statistically more likely to be teenage mothers themselves compared to girls born to older women (again, regardless of whether they grew up in a lone parent family or not). It is therefore essential to stress that teenage motherhood is not witnessed only among communities experiencing poverty. Ermisch and Pevalin (2003) demonstrated that, in the UK 4.8%, of women within the poorest quarter of the UK population were a teenage mother. Of this figure, 2.9% and 2.4% of women in the second poorest and second richest quarters of the population, respectively, also became a mother whilst a teenager. By way of comparison, the lowest rate, 1.2%, of women in the wealthiest quarter of the population gave birth to their first child whilst a teenager.

Finally, and leading into the below subsection, Carter and Coleman (2006) link teenage pregnancy to notions of control and the inaccessibility of traditional markers of adulthood such as home ownership, stable employment, and long-term committed relationships (Eliason et al., 2015; Hall and Walls, 2015). Concerning age and income, the WBG (2017) note that workers aged below twenty-five years old face additional challenges given the age-specific bands of National Minimum Wage (NMW), National Living Wage, and social security, suggesting that ‘women under 25 stand to lose an average £552 against men losing £236, almost entirely owing to benefit freezes and cuts’ (WBG 2017, p.10). When this research

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35 This study only considered those aged 16-19 years, not those below the legal age of consent. The rate of under-age births was reported in The Herald Scotland (2017) as ‘three per 1,000 in 2015 with a total of 244 pregnancies - eight of which were to girls aged under 14.’

36 Behind Bulgaria (35.5 teenage births per 1,000); Romania (29.2); Slovakia (15.9); Hungary (15.4); and Latvia (8.9); FPA (2016) places the UK at 6.8 teenage births per 1,000 - above the EU average (6.0).
commenced, NMW rates were set at just £3.70 for those undertaking apprenticeships; £4.20 for under eighteens; £5.90 for those aged eighteen-twenty; £7.38 between twenty-one and twenty-four; whilst those aged twenty-five and over must be paid £7.83 (UK Government, 2018).

4.3 Poverty and Lone Parent Families:

According to OPFS (2018), circa 50% of lone parent families live in some form of poverty; with Davis (2017) observing that ‘recent Department of Work and Pensions statistics show 49% of children in lone parent families now live below the poverty line’ - a significant increase directly correlated to post-2010 austerity. This was echoed by Graham (2014) who advised that children in lone parent families were almost twice as likely to experience poverty than children in coupled-families - 43% compared to 22%. Closely linked to the frequency with which fuel poverty is experienced - between 24.9% and 39% of Scottish households (Energy Action Scotland, 2018; Liddell, 2015) - precarious income and the lack of housing market regulation are all contributed to creating a context whereby many low-income lone parent families are forced into poverty. UG (2018) note that in Scotland, children with lone parents are more than twice as likely to live in relative poverty than children in two-parent families (‘41% compared to 24%’); Poverty Alliance (2013) identifying ‘the rising cost of fuel and food as [...] key concerns.’

On poverty and employment, JRF (2018) and Gingerbread (2018) also note that many families of all types that live in poverty have some form of employment. Consequently, the Trade Unions Congress (2011), Sentamu (2014), Armstrong (2017), and Milburn (2017) each note that work can no longer be considered an effective means of people lifting themselves out of poverty. Consequently, most lone parents (58%) are now in some form of employment, compared to less than 45% in 2000, however, aligning with Graham’s (2014) findings, Hirsch (2019) warns that ‘policies that succeed in getting more lone parents into work do not automatically succeed in reducing poverty or low-income.’ With many lone parents requiring flexible work practices to allow for childcare arrangements, entering low-paid professions (often incurring additional travel costs) in-work poverty amongst lone parents has, in fact, increased (JRF, 2018). Indeed, the JRF (2018) has suggested that as many as four million people throughout the UK now face in-work poverty - an increase of more than 500,000 people since 2016. Graham (2014) further found that 31% of children in lone parent households with a parent in part-time work live in poverty. Even when the lone parent is in full-time work, this figure is almost 18% after housing costs. In addition to barriers such as language, social stigmas, and education, Graham (2014, p.9) argued that health and local job opportunities produce further challenges in identifying employment opportunities, whilst childcare, transport links, car ownership, work hours, work flexibility, number of children, and employer policies regarding childcare responsibilities often result in difficulties ‘reconciling [a] job with care responsibilities.’ Consequently, ONS (2013) found that, in the UK, ‘36% of lone parent households have no adult in work, compared with 5% of couple[d] households with dependent children,’ with Glasgow enduring the ‘highest proportion of working-age households with no adult in work in the UK’ at 30.2%. For context, ONS (2013) suggested that 20.6% of all households in Scotland and 18.1% of households in the whole of the UK experience the same situation.

Note: Fuel poverty occurs when ‘in order to maintain a satisfactory heating regime, [a household] would be required to spend more than 10% of its income on all household fuel use’. When upwards of 20% of household income is required for fuel, this is defined as ‘extreme fuel poverty’.
OPFS (2018) emphasised that lone parents, as both primary carer and sole breadwinner, are the most likely form of family to live on the cusp of poverty. Susceptible to labour market shifts, a significant number of lone parent families in Scotland and beyond fall into what former-UK Prime Minister Theresa May (2016) referred to as ‘the just about managing.’ UG (2018) noted that ‘due to wider changes in the labour market with the increase in the number of people on zero hour contracts and those working part-time but unable to increase their hours or find a full-time job,’ many people are at risk of becoming trapped in poverty due to what Lichter and Costanzo (1987), and Mackie (2018) refer to as ‘underemployment.’ As outlined earlier, this was defined as ‘[those] employed who want more work than is currently available to them’ (Bell and Blanchflower, 2013, p.1). Underemployment causes many individuals and families to cycle between relying on state welfare and earning sufficient income to meet the minimal costs of living. In addition, several other forms of poverty including food poverty38 (Douglas et al., 2018; Douglas et al., 2015; Loopstra, 2015; D’Ambruoso, 2017) and period poverty39 (Astrup, 2017; Zipp et al., 2018; Wolfe, 2019) have also become far more commonplace in the UK over the last decade.

Millar and Ridge (2020) stressed that, in ‘November 2000 Gordon Brown, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, set an […] explicit and important target–70 per cent of lone parents to be in employment by 2010.’ Dhungel et al. (2021) observed that ‘[i]n Japan, ten percent of single-parent households are led by fathers’; however, their approach to work appears heavily swayed against fathers taking on the primary caregiver roles. For example, the paper itself is premised on the belief that ‘[t]aking care of children as a single father is very stressful and could put a strain on their health,’ and, working to ‘prevent and identify psychological distress among fathers for both their own health and to avoid negative impacts on children’ is essential in fostering a more comprehensive Japanese state (ibid.).40 Little attention is given to rebalancing assumptions around gendered care. Li (2020) identified similarly poor mental health amongst lone mothers in China; whilst Abeykoon and Karunanayake (2022) echoed these findings in Sri Lanka, and, likewise, Toledo Dal’Ava dos Santos (2020) found poor mental health was common amongst pregnant lone mothers and mothers of newborns in Brazil.

On this age and gendered component, Averett (2021) stressed that ‘[t]he association of women with ‘private sphere’ care work (including paid and unpaid childcare) and men with paid, public sphere work is problematic because, as England [2005, p.384] points out, ‘what men do is seen as a basis of citizenship rights more than what women do.’ Furthermore, Collins (1989) notes that women of colour - mothers or otherwise – in the US have continued to work in some capacity, thereby resulting in ‘higher rates of participation in the paid labour force than white women, and particularly, the experiences of Black women working as domestic workers.’ This stress has been observed to varying degrees across many contexts. Indeed, involving upwards of 2,000 people, the first of the proposed quarterly Understanding Scotland surveys (DPaCSP, 2021) - an undertaking not dissimilar to the previously conducted Fairer Scotland (Scottish Government, 2019) - found that circa 34% of respondents identified ‘poverty and inequality’ as their greatest concern, though the figure increased to 38% in areas of multiple-deprivation. Whilst this finding is unsurprising, that those raising ‘the economy’ as a concern,

38 ‘Food poverty’, as described by Maslen et al. (2013, p.2), ‘is the inability to afford, or to have access to, food to make up a healthy diet’, adding that ‘[i]t is not just about hunger, but also about being appropriately nourished to attain and maintain health’.

39 ‘Period poverty’ is defined by Lunette (n.d.) as ‘a lack of access to sanitary products due to financial constraints’.

40 Their investigation did find a higher propensity towards psychological concerns amongst lone fathers (8.5%) than in coupled-parents (5%).
dropped by roughly a third between the most to least affluent (26% versus 19%), illustrates the urgency with which navigating daily life takes precedence over neoliberal issues.

4.4 ‘Lone Parent’ as an Identity & Public Perceptions

This subsection considers the terminology used by organisations working with or researching lone parent families, by various governments and arms-length agencies (e.g. Vanier Institute of the Family, 2018; Statistics Canada, 2018; ABS, 2019; and Census Bureau, 2018), and by lone parent families themselves. It seeks to understand how lone parent families are perceived socially - as victims of the actions or inaction of the state; or as active members of society with capacity to challenge or even change their circumstances.

**Terminology:** The Vanier Institute of the Family⁴¹ (VIF) is a charity supporting families in Canada. Working with Mirabelli (2018), the institute observed the diversity of terms used to describe lone parent families across a range of settings, noting the specific connotations they carry. Defining ‘family’ more liberally as ‘any combination of two or more persons who are bound together over time by ties of mutual consent, birth and/or adoption or placement,’ VIF (2018) identify ‘physical maintenance and care of group members’; the ‘addition of new members through procreation or adoption’; ‘socialization of children’ and ‘social control of members’; ‘production, consumption, distribution of goods and services,’ and ‘affective nurturance – love’ as key attributes that can create a family.

Acknowledging the range of terms (including neutral and non-gender specific terminology) demonstrates their understanding of the functions and actions of a family, rather than questioning the particular components and imposing expectations of either heteronormativity or other assumptions over typically gendered aspects of familial care.

Extending into more broadly recognised terminology, Bailey (2017) identified ‘lone parent, single parent, one-parent family, independent parent, non-married parents, alone parent[,] and] autonomous parent’ as common descriptions in Canada - stressing that ‘what can seem like a valid category to one person may be considered a stereotype by another.’ She notes that particular ‘labels can carry stigma with them that has an impact on family well-being and identity - particularly for single mothers’; consequently, divergent uses are witnessed within a single national, organisation, or governmental context based on the understandings, experience, and knowledge (or absence) of the policy makers, politicians, or practitioners involved. Furthermore, the shifts in public tolerance, legal recognition, or categorisation may result in updates or revisions to better reflect contemporary practices and understandings. Acknowledging this, it is important to observe the shift in terminology used towards lone parents in Scotland given this is the geographical focus of the thesis. For example, Macqueen (1972) wrote of ‘unmarried mothers’ and co-established the Scottish Council for Unmarried Mothers (the unfortunately-named ‘SCUM’), whilst One Parent Families Scotland (OPFS) avoid the use of gendered phrasing within the organisation’s name. Terminology and gendered assumptions, therefore, result from a multitude of factors, including changing attitudes towards men in care roles and improved understanding of gender diversity (Arber et al., 2003; Hanlon, 2012; Oláh et al., 2018).

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⁴¹ L’Institut Vanier de la Famille.
Regarding recognition within national contexts, in the US, the Census Bureau (2018) uses several different terms when referring to lone parents, some of which are heavily heteronormative, including ‘female household’, ‘no husband present’, and ‘lone parent’. McMahon (n.d.), similarly, wrote of ‘unwed mothers,’ which may, Bailey (2017) notes, be ‘tied to [...] religious doctrine’ in largely Christian-influenced nations. By contrast Statistics New Zealand (2012) asks about ‘sole parents’, and the Australia Bureau for Statistics (2019) refers to ‘one-parent families.’ Bailey (2017) credits this to a reframing of how lone parenthood is understood in what may be considered more socially inclusive nations. The notion of lone or solo motherhood in particular (ibid) positions parents as “‘on their own’ [and therefore] without support’ - an approach ignorant that ‘many of these parents may have rich networks of support that include family, friends, community organisations and even former partners.’ These networks, this thesis demonstrates, were, and remain, vital for many lone parents, better enabling them to undertake education, employment, and self-care, supplementing or addressing gaps within state provision.

Lone Parent Families and the ‘Big Society’: This subsection investigates the historical relationship between the state and lone parent families in the UK, and notes the rapidly shifting linguistic discourse within policies affecting lone parent families brought forth by the current consecutive Conservative-led UK Governments. Lone parent families in the UK have, at times, been treated as an integral component of British society (e.g. within one-nation conservatism or ‘one-nationism,’ and within the ‘Big Society’); whilst they have also been demonised or treated as synonymous with ‘scroungers’ and ‘benefits street culture’ (Dorey, 1995; Bloor, 2012; Heppell and Seawright, 2012). Understood to be generally associated with the UK Conservative and Unionist Party (Heywood, 2007) - particularly Benjamin Disraeli’s tenure (Blake, 1966) - one-nation conservatism promoted government prioritising established support services, advocating ‘a social and economic program designed to benefit the common man’. The ideology promotes a moral and social obligation between citizens, which Adams (1998) suggests enables governments to place a ‘burden’ of support towards communities - including lone parent families, relatives, and neighbours - instead of the state. In addition, many of the key ideological underpinnings of one-nation conservatism (paternalism, voter appeasement, voluntarism, and social hierarchy) are echoed in the recent Conservative-led Governments (Williams, 2017; Atkins, 2018).

A significant caveat here, however, within both one-nation conservatism and the Big Society comes in the form of ‘deserving’ versus ‘undeserving poor’ discourse. Walker and Corbett (2013) note that, whilst Cameron’s Big Society concept ‘claim[ed] to empower individuals and communities [...] the Government simultaneously remov[ed] state support through massive funding cuts to local government and the welfare state.’ Furthermore, the regime of austerity highlights the disconnect between the one-nation conservatism ideal of philanthropy and reinforcing existing social structures (Blake, 1966). Walker and Corbett (2013) further contend that, within this ideological perspective, ‘the state’s role is limited to shaping basic social institutions like the family and local community.’ This is witnessed in the controversial ‘two-child limit’ introduced for claiming Child Tax Credits. Constituting the ‘Child Element’ of Universal Credit, the reform came into place on 6th April 2017, meaning that families cannot claim state support via Child Tax Credits for any subsequent children - save for in exceptional cases including multiple births, ‘a child you have been claiming for has a child of their own’ (i.e. a parent aged under sixteen-years-old), or, most controversially, where ‘the child was born as a result of non-consensual conception’ (DWP, 2016). This latter aspect, commonly referred to as the ‘rape clause’ (Thewliss, 2017), has been met with significant resistance from communities and parliamentarians in Scotland.
Requiring birthing parents to prove to the satisfaction of the DWP that a third or subsequent child was conceived as the result of rape (Stone, 2017), the reform has been termed ‘abhorrent’ by then-First Minister Nicola Sturgeon (BBC, 2017). As noted by Walker and Butler (2017), the eight-page form also requires ‘rape victims to declare that they do not live with their attacker if they wish to claim an exemption to a new two-child limit for tax credits’ - creating further risk of violence towards the would-be claimant - and demonstrates an ignorance of the genuine danger in which they may be placed if trying to leave their abuser. Thewliss (2017) cited the lack of professional training in recognising sexual violence as evidence of the Conservative-led victimisation of those on low-income, yet this was met with a public statement from the DWP (2017) which stated that the new restrictions were ‘a key part of controlling public spending.’ The JRF (2018) suggested that the restrictions risked forcing an additional 200,000 children into poverty, noting that ‘a nurse with three children, earning £23,000 [...] who became a single parent, would lose £2,780 a year.’ Rustin (2017), The Ferret (2017), and Engender (2017) each note further issues arise given the stigma a child may experience when DWP officials, police, social workers, and healthcare professionals would be aware of the circumstances of the child’s conception. As the two-child limit was introduced, a cut to bereavement-related social security further targeted lone parent families (Walker and Butler, 2017; Thewliss 2018).

4.5 Gender, Care, and Lone Parent Families

This subsection investigates shifting gender roles in the UK including notions of ‘breadwinner,’ women as primary carer, etc.. It places these into context given the demographic data examined earlier, critiquing emergent understandings and trends in care roles within modern families.

**Gender & The Primary Carer:** Of the 174,000 lone parent families currently living in Scotland, OPFS (2018) state that 93% are female-headed households, however, this contrasts NRoS (2015, p.5) who three years earlier reported that, in Scotland, ‘87 per cent were female lone parent families and 13 per cent were male lone parent families.’ In the absence of one parent, the remaining primary caregiver is required to adopt all parental roles (with a caveat for support networks considered later). As such, the gendered dimension to the lived experiences of lone parent families in Scotland is central to understanding them. Written in the context of individuals from negatively stereotyped communities (specifically young black working class men), Hirsch (2019) suggests that many individuals are forced to moderate their behaviours to avoid inadvertently reinforcing particular stereotypes. This notion that individuals must adjust their everyday actions extends to other contexts with, Critchley (2018) attesting that fathers often feel forced to avoid becoming animated during children’s committees for fear of compassion being conflated with aggression.

The WBG (2017) noted that ‘women are disproportionately affected by the care crisis.’ This is, therefore, a further largely gendered concern, given that women are the most likely to provide paid or unpaid care (ibid.). Acknowledging the frequency with which both general care responsibilities and specifically status as primary carer for children within lone parent families are undertaken by women, Stephenson (2011, p.36) stressed that, whilst parents are not forced into work as part of the UK Government’s workfare agenda, this often conflicts with care responsibilities - organisations like Gingerbread have shown that, nationally, benefits advisors do not always show understanding of the particular situation that lone
parents face.’ This results in ‘some lone parents [being] threatened with sanctions for refusing jobs that would be impossible to fit [a]round their children’s needs’ (ibid., p.36).

In the context of lone parenthood, any gender identity beyond that of ‘female’ (and, arguably, anyone existing beyond heteronormativity) who occupies the role of sole parent and performs the role of the primary caregiver becomes ‘the other’ in their gendered experience. Yet, diverging from the expected norm and can result in clashes within social settings or marginalisation of the non-female or femme-reading parent. Understanding caring roles as frequently positioned as that of female-identifying individuals, Butler (1990,) suggests that the ‘man with a feminine attribute [may] still maintain the integrity of the gender,’ adding, however, that the ‘secondary and accidental characteristics of a gender ontology’ mean the expectations placed on the historically binary parental identities of ‘mother’ or ‘father’ cannot be accepted as anything beyond performative. Thus, in the same manner Mihut (Forthcoming) and Mulcahy (2007) understand an individual’s behaviour within the courtroom as performative - theatrical even - parents (dependent on their assigned gendered role) may consciously or unconsciously perform as they believe they are expected to. Such internalised restrictions constitute socially acceptable behaviours for their respective role constitutes, demonstrating hegemony via reproduction of parental roles. When a parent finds themselves lone parenting, however, gender roles become less definable.

Trans* Parenting: Following major consultation in Scotland involving 15,532 people and 165 groups (Grant, 2018; though more since then), the Gender Recognition Act (GRA) may be reformed by the Scottish Parliament with the proposals supported by equalities organisations including ‘Close the Gap, Engender, Equate Scotland, Rape Crisis Scotland, Scottish Women’s Aid, Women 50:50, and Zero Tolerance’ as well as ‘Scottish Trans Alliance, Equality Network, LGBT Youth Scotland, and Stonewall Scotland’ (Equal Recognition, 2019). As a result, ‘non-binary’ could be introduced as an additional gender category within future census data and equality monitoring forms. However, the Holyrood Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee has suggested that the ‘mandatory male-female question over biological sex should remain to protect the integrity of the data [currently] used to help determine the country’s service provision’ (Paterson, 2019). The reforms would enshrine into law that individuals may self-identify regarding their gender (a practice already ‘in place in Scotland since the Equality Act 2010 came into effect’ [Duffy, 2019]), as well as changing the current system requiring two-years spent as their acquired gender for the Standard Track process. Legal and medical consent would also be reduced to one medical or legal professional approving a gender recognition form (Gires, 2014).

When many non-gender-conforming people currently experience poor mental health and a suicide rate amongst the highest of any population (Mueller et al., 2017) - another reason many become a lone parent - legal recognition and the reduction ‘minority stress’ (Meyer, 2003) represents progressive change that will enable transgender individuals to legally identify as male, female, or non-binary regardless of assigned gender (Sommerville, 2019).

42 Wong-Kalu (2014) chronicling that ‘[o]n nearly every continent, and for all of recorded history, thriving cultures have recognized, revered, and integrated more than two genders. Terms such as “transgender” and “gay” are strictly new constructs that assume three things: that there are only two sexes (male/female), as many as two sexualities (gay/straight), and only two genders (man/woman) [with] hundreds of distinct societies around the globe have their own long-established traditions for third, fourth, fifth, or more genders.’
about whose parenting behaviours are considered “mothering” or “fathering” to shift away, Averett (2021) progressing from harmful stereotypes. The author, in fact, argues that this may necessitate a ‘reinvigoration of theorisation about mothering and gender inequality, moving these conversations in important new directions that centre heteronormative, cisnormative and nuclear family models’ to recognise the diversity of lone parent or other forms of families more authentically.

Capraro (2018), however, notes that the GRA review process43 ‘has been marred by widespread transphobia in mainstream media and false information and myths spread via social media targeting [of] trans women in particular’, whilst non-binary people have regularly been marginalised. The proposed reforms were met with hostility from bodies such as the Christian Institute (2018) and Man Friday44 (2018), social commentators (e.g. Macwhirter [2018]), and socially-conservative elected officials Conservative MP David Davies (Agerholm, 2018) and SNP MP Joan McAlpine (2019). Others resisting the proposed reforms include campaign group For Women Scotland (2019) whom activist collective Sisters Uncut (2019) have suggested are ‘gatekeeping […] vital survivor services [which] harms cisgender and transgender women alike’ (see also Richardson, 2019, and McVey, 2019).45 The Dundee Women’s Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre (2018) countered claims that the ‘discourse […] suggests that a system of self-declaration would be a threat to women’s safe spaces,’ stating that the ‘inclusion [of transwomen] does not in any way determine the safety of that space and that to suggest otherwise would be a disservice not only to our trans service users, but to the trans women working within our sector creating those safe spaces every day.’ Despite the challenges, a BBC-commissioned (2022) survey conducted by Savanta ComRes (2022) found that, from a sample of 2,038 adults in Scotland, 70% of those aged 35 or under and 63% of all women contacted supported the reforms. Given the increased likelihood of such support being needed for marginalised persons - including those of minority genders and sexualities - lone parents who are, for example, transgender or non-binary, fortunately, boast the support of many leading feminist and equalities organisations. Davis (2021) stress this, noting that the ‘dyadic, cis-heteronormative understandings of parenthood and sex/gender […] mean that trans and non-binary parents are unable to be adequately registered on their child’s birth certificate’.

Given the high divorce rate for married transgender individuals who transition in later life (Liu and Wilkinson, 2018; Bischof et al., 2016), the Scottish Government’s proposed reform may have significant impact on intact families where one parent is transgender. Indeed, as noted by Watts et al. (2017), prior to the introduction of equal marriage legislation in countries such as Scotland, transgender individuals were required to separate from their partners if undergoing transition - therein forcing situations of lone parenthood. Lowering the legal age of transition to sixteen may increase the likelihood of gender reassignment occurring earlier in life. Given young people aged sixteen-years-old and above are already

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43 These reforms, Sharpe (2018) states, would ‘make it easier for trans people to have their gender identities legally recognised and would have no impact on existing rights of service providers to exclude trans women from women-only spaces. Under the Equality Act, all trans people covered by the protected characteristic of “gender reassignment” are protected against discrimination, subject only to specific sex-based exceptions that permit discrimination in the context of women-only spaces where it is “a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim”’.

44 Man Friday (n.d.) are a collective of UK-based women who position themselves as ‘oppos[ing] the radical trans-right activist (TRA) push for self-ID’.

45 O’Toole (2021a) defined For Women Scotland as an ‘anti-trans pressure group”’. Much of the campaign group’s claims are deeply outdated including claims that transitioning results in sterilisation.
an adult under UK law and can, under current legislation, start a family, situating the legal age of transition in line with the age of consent seems a sound argument.

**Failures in Current UK Birth Legislation:** Late-2018 witnessed what Jackman (2018) described as ‘a landmark case for transgender [parental] rights,’ with the possibility that a baby would have no registered mother for the first time. At present, the Registrar General for England and Wales dictates that a child must have a registered mother named on the birth certificate; however, at the time of birth the lone parent was already legally male having transitioned in circa 2016 (Farmer, 2018; Hartley-Parkinson, 2018). As noted by Glass (2018) naming the father as the ‘mother’ on the birth certificate constituted a breach of human rights legislation - specifically the father’s ‘right to private and family life within Article 8 of the Human Rights Act 1998’. Indeed, Markham QC (2018) attests that current legislation is ‘no longer compatible with the changes in society, the evolvement of freedom of expression and gender equality and the protection of an individual’s rights to identify as a particular gender,’ adding that ‘the forms utilised by the Registrar General to record parent and parent identity discriminate against trans and intersex parents’ (O’Hara, 2018). In California ‘parent’ is already an option on birth certificates (Papenfuss, 2014).

Crellin (2016) and O’Hara (2018) note that, worldwide, transitioned men have often faced challenges and indeed discrimination from medical professionals. In part this aligns with Averett (2021, p.284) observation that ‘ideologies that paint women as ‘naturally’ inhabiting the role of nurturing mother work to obscure the ways in which motherhood is socially constructed, historically and geographically situated and culturally variant.’ The US registered a first transgender male birth in 2008, Thomas Beatie in Arizona (Crellin, 2016), whilst the first known births of this kind in the UK occurred in 2017 - Scott Parker and Hayden Cross (Jackman, 2017). Controversially, twenty-three European nations, including France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Finland, and Slovenia, continue to ‘require [forced] sterilisation in order for a person to be legally recognised as trans’ (TGEU, 2016). The UK does not currently require this.

**Broader Queer Parenting:** Averett (2021) suggested that ‘[f]eminist theorists have long looked to motherhood and mothering behaviour as an important site at which to examine women’s lives, gender inequality and the social construction of gendered institutions,’ to the extent that queer parenting has, historically, been ignored. Many studies have operated to a ‘theorisation of [that] motherhood naturalises biological sex and therefore essentialises mothering as behaviour performed by “female bodies” and fathering behaviour as performed by “male bodies”’. For Averett (2021), this necessitates greater recognition and interest within the academy on ‘queer parenting – particularly research on gay male co-parenting, on the experiences of transgender parents and their children, on non-white LGBTQ parents and on mothering from outside the nuclear family. This, it is suggested ‘will be especially fruitful in moving the de-essentialisation of mothering in new directions that will further contest heteronormative, cisnormative and nuclear assumptions about the family’. My research has worked towards that shared focus, ensuring the involvement of those whom the literature and the academy has frequently marginalised.

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46 As outlined by Riggs et al. (2021, p.7) ‘[h]istorically across the globe, and presently in 16 countries in Europe and Central Asia, men, trans/masculine, and non-binary people have been required to undergo sterilization to change their gender markers and/or to receive gender affirming medical treatment, a requirement that continues to affect their reproductive decisions.’
Hines et al. (2021, p.1) emphasise that ‘[i]ssues concerning reproduction for transgender people are of increasing importance across social, cultural, legal, policy, and medical arenas’, noting that the ‘experiences, needs and rights of men, trans/masculine, and non-binary people who become pregnant’ are of particular significance in the struggle for broader reproductive rights and medical support for pregnant people.\(^{47}\) Though official pregnancy figures for non-cisgender people are difficult to gather, Hines et al (2021, p.1) have observed ‘a rapidly increasing trend toward visible parenthood amongst trans populations worldwide’\(^{48}\). The reality, however, is that - just as cisgendered people - ‘many trans, non-binary, and gender-expansive people wish to become, or do become, pregnant in intended and unintended ways, and also have abortions, miscarriages, and births during their lives’ (ibid., p.3). As stressed by Falck et al. (2021), data on this will only grow as countries - such as Sweden, which served as the focus for their paper - end their ‘former legal sterility requirement[s].’

Failure to fully acknowledge the diversity of parenthood, families, and - for the specific purpose of this PhD - lone parenthood today would mean entrenching inequalities relating to ‘questions of trans parenthood, reproductive rights, and bodily autonomy, addressing topics such as adoption, abortion, and the perspectives of trans women and transfeminine people’ (Hines et al., 2021, p.2).

4.6 Race and Lone Parent Families:

This subsection focuses on the varied experiences of lone parent families from different cultural communities in Scotland. The intersections between race, religion, gender, and class with lone parenthood are integral to this PhD research, if it is to understand the experiences of lone parent families in north Edinburgh.

In the context of post-2010 austerity, many researchers have considered the precise and often disproportionate impact of austerity on minority communities in Scotland, the UK, and further afield (Stephenson, 2011), often focusing on the overlapping and intersecting identities of those subjected to austerity and welfare reform on multiple fronts. Among them, Emeljulu and Bassel (2017) considered the specific experiences of minority women regarding visibility and invisibility within government policy. Despite the already disproportionate impact of recent welfare reform on working class and low-income lone parent families, many minority populations faced additional hardship (Alston, 2018), UG (2018) and WBG (2017) position minority women at an extreme disadvantage under austerity. Indeed, the WBG (2017) notes that Conservative-led UK Government austerity has resulted in ‘black and Asian women facing a triple disadvantage’ based on gender, income, and ethnicity. Eddo-Lodge (2018) has since advocated developing new understandings of what it means to be working class in contemporary Britain, suggesting that ‘instead of a white man in a flat cap, it’s a black woman pushing a pram.’

Netto et al. (2011, p.9) found that the largest minority ethnicity population in Scotland are Pakistani, Chinese, Indian, and mixed or multiple ethnicities, observing that ‘family structures differ, with more large families in the Pakistani and African group.’ The 2011 Scottish census demonstrated that a majority

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\(^{47}\) This category is taken to include ‘[women,] men, trans/masculine, and non-binary people [as well as agender folk] who have conceived after beginning a social and/or medical transition’ (Hines et al., 2021, p.1).

\(^{48}\) Hines et al. (2021) advise that ‘246 men were recorded by Medicare as giving birth in Australia between 1 July 2013 to 30 June 2020’, whilst Moseson et al., (2021) engaged with 1,694 respondents for their paper exploring pregnancy amongst gender-expansive people.
of minority communities live in the four largest cities, though there are increasing minority populations in East Renfrewshire and East Dunbartonshire attributed to a growing ‘middle-class’ amongst minority ethnic groups. Netto et al. (2011, p.9), however, suggests that the number of lone parent households within these communities is lower than that for the overall population in Scotland. In general, they found that ‘Pakistani households are less likely to be one-person and more likely to be multi-family,’ suggesting distinct family types exist within the various ethnic minority communities in Scotland. Furthermore, Hay et al. (2021) advise that Roma, Gypsy, Traveller, and Show People populations are not accurately reflected within Scottish census data and, thus, accurate information on a range of minority populations is currently unavailable. Given the diverse populations in north Edinburgh, such exclusions represent a further area of concern to be addressed by the investigation.

4.7 Struggles Named by Participants Through an Anarchist Lens:

This subsection was produced based on many of the findings within the analysis and draws on literature centred upon activism and agency. In the sense of anarchism permitting the creation of an accepting leftist or socially progressive society, certain debates resurface. To take the example of gender diversity and gender nonconformity amongst lone parents, and their consistent marginalisation, with the sudden emergence of a so-called ‘gender critical’ targeting, amongst others, gender non-conforming parents, there is urgent need for radical change towards practices that encompass the true diversity of modern communities in Scotland and the UK more broadly.

As Stryker (2008) emphasised, ‘most people have great difficulty recognizing the humanity of another person if they cannot recognize that person’s gender.’ Given that multiple interviewees are gender non-conforming, non-binary, or transgender, issues of recognition become vital to the investigation. Directly addressing the connection to colonialism and contemporary British legislation on gender recognition, Lugones (2007; 2003), Morgensen (2011), and Mignolo (2011) note the systemic brutality of the British Empire who sought to ‘erase’ non-binary identities during their occupation, for example, India. Observing that the British legal system ruled ‘eunuchs [locally termed ‘hijras’] as cross-dressers, beggars and unnatural prostitutes,’ Biswas (ibid) chronicled that ‘[o]ne judge said the community was an "opprobrium upon colonial rule" [whilst another] claimed that their existence was a "reproach" to the British government,’ with an 1871 ruling classifying the community of identity (along with others such as the Dalit) as a criminal underclass. The colonial powers of the British Empire sought to eradicate what Morgensen (2011) termed ‘Indigenous possibilities’ by forcing a ‘colonial heteropatriarchy.’ Further condemnation from British officials portrayed this non-binary, yet long acknowledged community, as ‘filth, disease, contagion and deemed them a ‘threat to colonial political authority’ (Hinchy, 2019) – echoing the most concerning language used to marginalise queer identities today.49 With just short of 18% of interviewees (six participants) falling within the ‘transgender umbrella’, such gender - and with it familial - diversity needs to become better centred within literature on family life and to challenge harmful or outdated stereotypes. Indeed, #4 Lachlan highlighted this during his interview:

49 In the US, Gilley (2006) further recognises that many Native American cultures embodied ‘ideas about gender [that] did not employ the gender-binary, bodily-sex-equals-gender view commonly found in European society.’ Instances of diverse gender identities were also acknowledged throughout Eastern Europe (Chuckchi in Siberia), Africa (Mamluk in Egypt, Sekrata in Madagascar, or the Maale Ethiopian Ashtime), Asia (Napalese Metis), and in Central and Latin America (the Guevedoche of the Dominican Republic; the Travesti in Brazil and Argentina).
‘Like, John Major, in power at the time, kept speaking of, you know, “Victorian family values”, saying “that’s what’s wrong with the country; the absence of the two-parent nuclear family - the mum, dad, wee boy, girl, and the family dog’.

But how does this counteraction manifest in daily life? Based on significant precedent, when community-founded organisations become successful, they often face two trajectories - either become co-opted by the state to replace previous provision (Beck and Purcell, 2021) or state-backed services will begin signposting those in need to the grassroots organisations rather than addressing system issues directly. As O’Gorek (2020) and Jun and Lance (2020) both acknowledge, this is generally done ‘without [...] acknowledging or supporting [the local bodies’] work.’ Just as with the community-sourced and locally-coordinated response to the Covid-19 pandemic that took place as the fieldwork ended, significant parallels can be drawn between the US contexts the authors discuss and how lone parent families have sought to navigate and surmount austerity over the last decade. A series of case studies on lone parent-led and lone parent-organised groups follow this subsection.

‘The actions of DC Mutual Aid Network, neighborhood groups, etc., were all undertaken without any demands of local authorities or hope of personal gain. People saw a need, worked together through existing networks, offered help where needed, engaged in discussions of best practices, listened to established experts, and acted in concert with one another in the interests of all.

- Jun and Lance (2020)

Similarly, Kropotkin (2002, pp.136–37) proposed that the purpose is to ‘develop such relations between [individuals] that the interests of each should be the interest of all,’ enabling a collaborative approach to community action and survival amidst austerity. Indeed, Spade (2020) suggests that communities are ‘banding together to meet immediate survival needs, with a shared understanding that the systems in place aren’t coming to meet us fast enough, if at all, and that we can do it together right now,’ precisely the circumstances many lone parents face under austerity. On this, Malatesta (1974, p.29) argues that solidarity ‘is the only environment in which [someone] can express [their] personality and achieve [their] optimum development and enjoy the greatest possible wellbeing’, whilst Goldman (1998, p.118) ‘contends that individual freedom is strengthened by cooperation with other individualities [whilst] only mutual aid and voluntary cooperation can create the basis for a free individual life.’

Though the full extent of these theories of action will be explored in the Discussion chapter, these issues manifested numerous times. Stryker (2008) suggested that lived experience of a marginalised status ‘informs commitment to feminist activism,’ adding that such an ‘overlap’ and ‘kinship’ can be fostered amongst those divergent from the heteronormative white nuclear families as fostered through a more affluent and middle class ideal or norm. Just as #4 Lachlan, #5 Dee, #32 Nicky, and #26 Kim advocated during their interviews - this understanding can foster an allyship amongst marginalised folk. The counter to this, however, could result in individual lone parent families (or other marginalised and intersecting

50 Anarchist thinkers have unfailingly rejected traditional conceptions of “human nature,” maintaining instead that individuals are socially-constructed and that human personality is socially produced. Bakunin (1953, pp.239), for example, argued that “the real individual”—no less than “his family, his class, his nature, [and] his race”—is constituted by “a confluence of geographic, climatic, ethnographic, hygienic, and economic influences” and, as such, situating this precise in north Edinburgh, specifically, enables exploration of those factors.
identities) arriving in a situation whereby they do not feel able (mentally as much as financially or physically) to offer their support to others though very few of the participants spoke to this exhaustion. Those that did occupied intersectional marginalised positions and spoke of a multiplicity of barriers to participation in wider society such as #24 Pria who described the isolation she endured after she and her child were abandoned by her husband. As West (2019) stresses, the need to feel included emotionally and experientially allows community members to develop a sense that ‘my voice is not disparaged’ and a belief that ‘I can feel [a] part of the group here’, creating solidarity and support networks amongst those with shared struggles.

4.8 The Case Studies

This final subsection of the Literature Review considers contemporary examples of lone parent activism with or for their families and demonstrates how the above issues relate to activism. In addition to recognising actions from lone parent activists which specifically in Greater Pilton through All About Me (Campbell, 2018; NEN, 2018b), where possible, parallels are drawn from other contexts. As detailed in the preceding subsections, lone parent families have consistently been treated as a largely homogeneous group, and, as such, the academy has, at times, failed to recognise the abundance of unique lived experiences. A primary purpose of this research, then, is to illustrate the diversity of lone parent actions. These case studies, therefore, aid the reshaping understandings of lone parents from ‘victim’ to socially engaged political agents.

OVERVIEW OF THE EXAMPLES

(i) Lone Parent Activism in Scotland:

(a) All About Me, Edinburgh (AAM; 2017 - Present): As a consequence of Conservative-led UK Government welfare reform, specifically to Housing Benefit, many families in Greater Pilton, north Edinburgh, faced eviction from their private sector tenancies when their income could no longer match the cost of rent (NEN, 2018) as the state chose not to continue to meet the cost private landlords demanded for renting their properties in the absence of adequate social housing. As noted by the Edinburgh Coalition Against Poverty (2017), neighbourhoods within Greater Pilton have been subject to a significant reduction in social housing - by as much as 70% in Muirhouse - illustrating the sustained pressures facing families living in the northern parts of the capital. This shortage of state-provided accommodation is not unique to Edinburgh and is replicated nationwide, resulting in many families (including an overrepresentation of single parent families) being forced into the private sector in what is evidently an untenable practice (Watt, 2016).

Given the popularity of local community groups - many of which cater towards parents (e.g. Dads Rock, the Pilton Community Health Project, and Stepping Stones: North Edinburgh) - awareness spread rapidly that this threat of eviction was not an isolated incident, but a crisis facing many local residents, a significant proportion of whom are lone parents and, more often than not, women (NRoS, 2015; WBG, 2017; Watt, 2016). Organising collectively and aided by support from the Muirhouse Millenium Centre, seasoned local activists in North Edinburgh
Fights Back, local trade unionists, and other residents, the lone parents underwent a Freirean style politicisation and social transformation. Recognising the relevance of the critical theory adopted in the framework, such congregations and the sharing of skill sets, insights, ambition, and resources demonstrate hooks’ (1984) ‘multi-dimensional gatherings’ in-action. Those with less expertise in taking direct action or other forms of protest were still able to lend their insights and utilise their networks to aid the actions of the affected community, and, thus, fostered a collaborative environment that the members believed could achieve their goals.

Though several of the members acknowledged their limited prior political engagement, they were able to benefit from the insights and the knowledge of others with experience in local action. The collective identified a series of targeted demands aimed at local-, national-, and UK-level institutions. The connections they made between the personal and the political can be understood as this Freirean transformation, a demonstration of how conscientization occurs as the political becomes personal (Freire, 1972). A ‘live-in’ was performed at the then-Scottish Conservative Party Leader Ruth Davidson’s office, whereby a reported thirteen families occupied the space, bringing children’s toys, prams, and other items with them (see Images #7-8). With their own homes under threat, the members were able to identify a targeted individual in a position of power - demonstrating Alinsky’s (1971) principle of incorporating both a key focal point for action (the eleventh rule51), but also joy (his sixth rule52) into activism through the live-in. This becomes all the more intriguing when noting the political growth that occurred when a collaboratively-produced manifesto addressing each realm of power (Edinburgh City Council, Holyrood, and Westminster), issuing demands based on the remote and influence these bodies held over the families’ lives, was published. This contrasts directly to Alinsky’s (ibid) second ‘rule’ for activism, to ‘[n]ever go outside the experience of your people [as t]he result is confusion, fear, and retreat,’ but illustrates the capacity for increased agency over one’s own life when threatened by the power others boast over us.

51 Very much embodying hooks’ (1984) ‘multi-dimensional gatherings’, Winstead (2018) emphasises that activists can lend their time and skills to others and to support causes beyond their own primary focus. In the north Edinburgh context this would previously have related to community-based initiative such as the now defunct North Edinburgh Time Bank.

52 ‘Pick the target, freeze it, personalize it, polarize it. Don’t try to attack abstract corporations or bureaucracies. Identify a responsible individual. Ignore attempts to shift or spread the blame’ (Alinsky, 1971).

53 ‘If your people aren’t having a ball doing it, there is something very wrong with the tactic’ (Alinsky, 1971).
(ii) Lone Parent Activism in the Rest of the UK:

(a) **Focus E15 Mothers, London (2013 - Present):** Like AAM in north Edinburgh, when facing eviction from the Focus E15 Hostel (a youth homelessness shelter formed of ‘210 self-contained units’ [Focus E15, 2018]) after the local council closed the site’s mother and baby unit, twenty-nine lone mothers performed their own occupation of the Carpenters Estate in Stratford, close to the site of the Olympic Village\(^\text{54}\). The women, all aged twenty-five or under (Chakrabortty, 2014), had rejected the East Thames Housing Association’s offers of accommodation in areas such as Manchester and Birmingham (the former more than two-hundred miles from London; the latter around one-hundred-and-twenty-five miles) as accepting these relocations would have meant losing their existing networks of support, employment, and familiarity. Through their rejections, the families were deemed to be making themselves ‘intentionally homeless’\(^\text{55}\) and no longer eligible for support from the local council. Few of the members had any form of support networks in either of the proposed areas and thus faced living isolated in a new part of England through what had been recognised as a process of contemporary ‘social cleansing’ (Focus E15, 2018). Rallying together to act against Newham Council, the activists first occupied the council’s homelessness centre, threw a party in a show home in a recently built apartment block, and positioned a double-decker bus outside of the then-Mayor of London, Boris Johnson’s mayor’s office, where they played *Our House* by English ska band Madness on repeat. With ‘one in 25 people in the London Borough of Newham [...] homeless’ (Caritas Anchor House, 2017), the mothers involved in Focus E15 were far from unique in their experience, yet their status as a young group of ethnically diverse lone parents (all lone mothers) makes their experience and political transformation of interest and relevance to this study.

Prior to the UK Government programme of austerity - implemented in this instance through Newham Council’s cuts to Supporting People fund - staff based in the Focus E15 Hostel’s foyer unit provided support via adult learning content including basic literacy, parenting skills, and employability sessions (Butler, 2013). That support is no longer available, with local activists arguing that the site has been reduced to merely substandard accommodation (residents citing damp, leaks, etc. going unaddressed [Prowse, 2014; Chakrabortty, 2014; Focus E15, 2018]), with little to no broader support now on offer. Many of those housed or, in the case of those lone parents, previously housed by the hostel live with poor mental health or suffer from chronic depression (Chakrabortty, 2014), demonstrating the need for support services to be available in-house or locally to service users. Many of the activists have discussed the stress and anxiety they experienced both living in the temporary accommodation in its substandard conditions, and when being asked to move many hundreds of miles for housing (Stone, 2013) - stresses similar to those that faced the members of AAM in North Edinburgh.

\(^{54}\) The Olympic Village was built in advance of the 2012 Summer Olympic Games (‘London 2012’) hosted by the City of London.

\(^{55}\) Butler (2013) notes that ‘homeless people who turn down an offer of suitable accommodation, even if it is hundreds of miles away, risk losing their right to be housed, and can end up homeless again’. As a result of doing so, these people are then deemed as making themselves ‘intentionally homeless’.
The Focus E15 activists mirror many of the ambitions held by AAM including clearly articulating their demands to the local council, striving for accountability, but also exercising their own agency and capacity for action. As of 2018, these demands included:

‘No more evictions from Brimstone house until safe, suitable accommodation is found in Newham, like Carpenters Estate;
To recognise that everyone has the right to refuse accommodation outside of the borough without being labelled as ‘intentionally homeless’ […] [and]
Stop threats from council workers to involve social services (i.e if you made yourself ‘intentionally homeless’ we will rehouse your children but not you).’

- Focus E15 (2018)

As with AAM, the majority of early actions undertaken by the Focus E15 women were entirely independent. Whilst Chakrabortty (2014) notes that a local communist activist collective assisted in scripting the earliest petitions, the mothers undertook increasingly radical action from handing out leaflets to occupying the Carpenters Estate. Broader support, both in-person and online, came later, but examples such as the communist collective’s engagement demonstrate the same collaborative and multi-dimensional approach undertaken in North Edinburgh. hooks (1987), therefore, is already demonstrably relevant to numerous community-led initiatives in general, but also these lone parent-centred forms of activism more specifically. Prowse (2014) notes that, as in previous contexts (e.g. Greater Pilton and the Glantaff Farm Estate [Campbell, 2018]), the Focus E15 members’ actions ‘galvanised an entire community of activists who fought back against local evictions of other young mothers in similar situations,’ showcasing the politicisation process in-action and the lone parents began to individually and collectively make connections between their own experiences and systemic issues such as the political choices of implementing austerity. Following the initial acts by Focus E15, Newham Council purchased the Focus E15 Hostel in 2016, renaming it Brimstone House, and stating that in doing so they were ‘helping some of our most vulnerable residents’ (Apps, 2016).

Focus E15’s campaign efforts were the subject of an extensive investigation by Watt (2016; 2018); however, no other researchers appear to have engaged with the group - at least in an academic context. Watt (2018) acknowledges the shift in approach taken by the activists from addressing their own forced eviction to challenging the broader treatment of marginalised communities experiencing housing issues, advocating ‘social housing not social cleansing.’ The paper considers the significance of wishing to remain in ‘our place’ and the need for support networks in the immediate lived environment. Importantly, rather than portraying the Focus E15 activists as merely victims of the state, rather he celebrates the ‘inspirational young women who do not ‘know their place’ (Watt, 2016).

(b) Fathers4Justice, London (2001 - Present):

Rising to prominence quickly after their founding in circa 2001 - with arguably the peak of public interest coming following a demonstration which involved scaling Buckingham Palace in September 2004 (The Economist, 2004) - Fathers4Justice (F4J) perform high profile stunts, often
in costume, to draw attention to their campaigns against current parental legislation. A particular priority for the group is paternal access to children in cases of divorce where the father is not the primary carer; therein lies their relevance to this thesis’ focus on lone parents.

The organisation has often fostered controversy for the level of disruption stemming from their publicity stunts which, arguably, is the purpose of their activism. To date, these have included storming a courtroom whilst dressed as Santa Clause, scaling the Royal Courts of Justice, climbing Tower Bridge, driving a military tank towards the Royal Courts of Justice, disrupting the Snooker World Championships, interrupting the live National Lottery draw and the daytime TV show Loose Women, a short-lived hunger strike, and damaging exhibitions in public galleries (The Economist, 2004; Mulholland, 2003; Withnall, 2016). Generally, F4J have celebrated these actions; however, in a handful of instances where overtly negative publicity was garnered, the group disassociated themselves from the individual actors. Despite this drive towards disruption, in more extreme cases members have been expelled. Generally, charges against the members - often for ‘public nuisance’ - have been dropped.

In contrast to the two single parent-led groups detailed above, AAM (Greater Pilton) and Focus E15 (London), F4J are a formally registered charity, though notably with a single holder and director - Matt O’Connor. This lack of democratic ownership perhaps highlights the consistency in approach, at least tactically, of ascribing blame on the state and individual actors. As with the previous examples, F4J have sought to exert political influence; though a stark difference is that rather than articulating the changes the membership wish to see (e.g. welfare reform, construction of social housing, etc.), F4J have demanded the resignation of those they deem responsible for the perceived inequality for paternal access. Past examples of this include advocating the resignation of then-Minister for Children, Margaret Hodge and throwing flour bombs at then-UK Prime Minister Tony Blair during a live-Prime Minister’s Questions (White, 2004).

As a result of their prolonged period of activism, F4J exists fairly extensively in academic literature primarily through Jordan (2013; 2018); whereas AAM are only present in my own research produced prior to commencing the PhD. In her initial examination of the group, Jordan (ibid.) advised that the activists sought to ‘highlight[...] the existence of “bad mothers”’ as justification for their approach. Jordan (2013, p.83) further suggests that organisations such as F4J ‘have been characterised by some feminist academics as part of an anti-feminist “backlash,”’ responding to a perceived crisis of masculinity through a problematic politics of fatherhood aimed at (re)asserting control over women and children.’ Jordan (2018) later re-examined the organisation, considering the father as carer and its implications for masculinities. Given their direct contrast to the other lone parent activist groups detailed earlier, this indicates both a distinctly gendered approach to practice, but also a culture of blame rather than a drive towards achieving systemic change. This latter aspect is showcased through the manifestos that each of the former organisations produced (see AAM, 2016; and Focus E15, 2015).

(iii) Single Parent Activism in the European Union:
The United African Women’s Organisation (Οργάνωση Ενωμένων Γυναικών Αφρικής; Greece)

The United African Women’s Organisation (UAWO) are a women’s collective in Greece actively working within existing political structures, but who are distinct in that these parents have largely accepted that in their own otherness - imposed culturally - they may never be accepted as part of the Greek identity (Zaphiriou-Zarifi, 2019). Instead, since their formation in early 2005 by Loretta Macauley (born in Sierra Leone), activists have focused their efforts on gaining societal acceptance for their children, a majority of whom were born in Greece. However, at the time of Zaphiriou-Zarifi’s (2019) research, their children continued to be denied Greek citizenship - a situation increasingly common across Europe as right wing politics (much of it not dissimilar to F4J) continues to gain trajectory (Boatcă, 2017). Most of the women were known to be lone mothers.

As with AAM and Focus E15, UAWO have worked to a series of collectively fostered and explicitly stated aims and objectives. As of 2018, these are:

1. To create awareness of various issues concerning the African women and their children living in Greece;
2. To support and fight for the rights of especially our second generation and at all levels;
3. To create mutual bonds of solidarity between Africans and our host the Greeks;
4. To explore and incorporate the rich African woman heritage into the rich Greek heritage; [and]
5. To work hand in hand with various social, NGOs and other Organizations that stand for justice, non racial and friendly society for all.’

- UAWO (2018a)

Formed exclusively by women who had migrated to Greece from throughout Africa, members initially created the UAWO as a space in which they could, Zaphiriou-Zarifi (2019) observes, exist as Africans without the sense of ‘otherness’ imposed on them when sharing space with the majority white Greek
population. Zaphiriou-Zarifi (2019) notes that the activists often created publicly accessible events, inviting members of the wider population to share in the spectacle of these pan-African events. This was recognised as simultaneously serving to educate and include white Greeks in elements of Greek-African cultures, yet, Zaphiriou-Zarifi (2019) suggests, the spectacle may have further reinforced the women’s otherness given the distinctly non-traditional Greekness of the events. Despite the cultural exposure intended to reduce community tensions, issues remained.

The group has gained international trajectory in recent years, with delegations sent to conferences abroad including a refugee camp in Leece (Italy; UAWO, 2018c) and the European Network for People of African Decent conference in Cologne (Germany), where they participated in a series of workshops with peer activist networks from England, the Netherlands, the US, Spain, and Belgium (UAWO, 2018d). Correspondingly, UAWO’s reputation has intensified, with US Marxist and Civil Rights activist Angela Davis meeting several ground members, as well as those of other domestically-based women’s collectives, in Athens during March 2019 to discuss ‘the abolition of the prison industrial complex, rights of migrant[s] and refugees [to the] the lack of support for self-organized migrant-run organizations, [and] the fight for citizenship for children born in and/or raised in Greece in migrant families’ (UAWO, 2019). Thus, the depth of the activists’ political consciousness(es) has become ever better articulated and - like AAM and Focus E15, but in contrast to F4J - the group continues to draw upon and learn from other activists’ experiences as they challenge existing discourses.

In addition, as with other activist collectives such as Focus E15, the forms of political literacy and engagement demonstrated by the UAWO members have extended beyond their original remit. Whilst there remains a concern that the focus on access to Greek citizenship from those with personal histories connected to the African continent is too specific, and, arguably, unachievable within the current political context of rising xenophobia and hostility towards ‘the other’ (Zaphiriou-Zarifi, 2019). Such concerns dissipate, however, when UAWO have been seen engaging as an organisation in hooks’ multi-dimensional gatherings as supporters, lending their support numerically, in terms of solidarity, and sharing their skill sets to other groups - just as has occurred via Focus E15’s street stalls. Examples of the mothers lending their support include in the aftermath of Zak Kostopoulos’ murder in a homophobic act in September 2019 (UAWO, 2018b) and co-hosting the Black Feminist Skillsharing Workshop (UAWO, 2018d).

4.9 Summary

This exploration of the literature has illustrated an abundance of research into lone parents’ lives, challenges, and treatment within policy. The case studies afforded an opportunity to consider how these understandings manifest in-practice, showcasing a range of differences in motivation and ambition which were largely distinct based on lines of gender and intended outcomes. Though the same or similar issues are no doubt present throughout Scotland, the UK, and elsewhere, the limitations of academic coverage (e.g. Watt [2016; 2017] on Focus E15; Campbell [2018] on AAM; and Jordan [2013; 2018] on F4J) meant that the possibilities for reflections on lone parent activism and struggles for justice in connection to the core theoretical framework outlined earlier (e.g. from Freire, Alinsky, hooks, etc) are somewhat limited to the single researchers and the organisations themselves.
These historic - and contemporary - problematic perceptions of lone parents (particularly, lone mothers) are, as Isola et al. (2020) note, consistent across Europe. Their study of lone mothers in Finland found that the state believed the ‘most valuable function for lone mothers […] along with surviving monetary poverty was raising their children as good citizens’, demonstrating sustained harmful perceptions, yet, as outlined in the terminology subsection, gendered and even religiously-influenced categories remain. Intriguingly, this comes despite the persistence of lone parent characters across major religious texts. Alongside this, there are an abundance of pathways to lone parenthood ranging from the breakdown of relationships to the loss of a partner, and conscious decisions to become a lone parent, yet there are also many situations (incarceration, deportation, and working overseas) that create circumstantial lone parent situations. In addition, the literature has helped dismiss historical notions of employment as a route out of poverty, whilst detailing shifts in how lone parents are accepted or excluded across ideological spheres. Building on this understanding, the following chapter explores how the methodologies deployed were enacted to counter the victim portraits of lone parents, and afford them opportunities to make these Freirean-style connections in their own words.

Amongst the core findings from this extensive literature review section were the specific (in)visibilities of different forms of lone parenthood – echoing the majority (even typified) experiences of lone motherhood (emphasising the gendered and, frequently, racialised issues; Hirsch, 2019; WBG, 2017), often with multiple children, and the ways that this had historically intersected with precise gendered and classed identities; as well as a condensed overview of how lone parents are conceptualised by both the state and academia. Further, it offered acknowledgment of several lesser researched ‘pathways to lone parenthood’ (Walker, 2013; Bailey, 2017) such as circumstantial lone parenthood (e.g. due to long term illness, incarceration, or overseas employment; Ezzeldine, 2011; Taylor, 2020a) and recognition of lone parents who are not the primary carer – often male identifying parents (Weir, 2013). Overviews were also provided of how the state’s current approach to garnering population data have created ambiguities over the number of lone parents (ONS [2017] versus OPFS [2018]), whilst a range of quantitative investigations have demonstrated the inaccuracies of stereotypes surrounding lone parents (e.g. regarding age, with less than 2% understood to be teenagers, for example; Gingerbread, 2015). When synthesised with the qualitative research, these have emphasised the challenges that many young parents experience with regards to accessing secure employment and long-term housing (see e.g. Carter and Coleman, 2006; and WBG, 2017), as well as the ways these factors entrench numerous forms of poverty (OPFS, 2018; JFR, 2018; Armstrong, 2017). As it progressed, overviews were offered of contemporary debates around access to parenthood and the forced sterilisation of transgender parents or would-be parents (TGEU, 2016; Falck et al., 2021).
5. Methodologies

Introduction:

‘The fieldworker is wholly and helplessly dependent on what happens... one must be continually prepared for anything, everything—and perhaps most devastating—for nothing.’

- Mead (1975, p.25)

This chapter outlines the research methods including a detailed discussion of Biographical Interpretive Narrative Method (BINM), exploring how the dialogues can answer the research questions:

(i) What does it mean to be a lone parent in austerity-Scotland?;
(ii) How have lone parent families in north Edinburgh sought to navigate post-2010 austerity?;
(iii) What capacity have lone parents in north Edinburgh had to mitigate, resist, or challenge austerity?; and
(iv) What relationships and networks have been established in north Edinburgh to support lone parent families in this age of austerity?

It includes a Lone Parent Families in Greater Pilton subsection that allows for a more nuanced and localised approach to establishing effectiveness of the (i) Interview Method & Proposed Discussion Points; confirms (ii) The Interview Process; and examines the process of (iii) Creating the Interview Environment in greater detail than would otherwise be possible based on the broad understandings offered during the Literature Review. Primarily concerned with understanding the needs of the interviewees, ensuring adequate levels of privacy for discussions of a possibly sensitive nature, and avoiding becoming overly prescriptive with the interview questions, the following reflections draw upon existing literature regarding BINM in-action (Ross and Moore, 2016; Jones et al., 2013; Wengraf, 2004), and acknowledges concerns around qualitative methods when conducted by insider or partial-insider researchers.

5.1 Conceptualising the Research Project

In undertaking a qualitative research project, the manner in which participants will be engaged with and how trust is fostered are central to conducting the project effectively. Though the relationship between researcher and the researched-community is paramount to conducting the project, the participants’ stories are the very foundation upon which any and all findings are built. Thus, it becomes necessary to establish how notions of ‘truth’ may be understood within the experiences of some of those enduring the most severe impacts of contemporary UK Conservative-led austerity in the UK. The project is committed to the BINM proposed by Ross and Moore (2016) in that it takes the individual’s experience of a given socio-political phenomenon (austerity) as authentic and valid in shaping their lived experience and drive towards taking actions as they deem necessary. These descriptions are taken as truth regardless of any concerns over validity or contradictions to any particular policy or welfare practices, for example. The experiences of the respondents are taken as their truth, therefore, regardless of whether elements within their narrative conflict or run contrary to official statements and guidelines issued by
organisations such as the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Job Centres, foodbanks, etc.. Truth, therefore, stems from the individual, and their experiences, insights, hardships, and any other aspects of their responses are taken as the true impact and ‘misery’ of austerity (Alston, 2018), rather than reports from the UK Government. The Literature Review, thus, addressed numerous examples of such reports; however, in this hyperlocalised context, the lone parent participants occupy a distinct space where their truths become gospel for the purposes of this investigation. Stahl and King (2020, p.26) contest that, in its broadest sense, ‘[q]ualitative research is uniquely positioned to provide researchers with process-based, narrated, storied, data that is more closely related to the human experience.’

An essential component across social science research, interviews frequently utilise a pre-prescribed series of questions which respondents address in-turn. Working to break from such a hierarchical model whereby the researcher directs the flow of conversation, I adopted a dialogically-driven approach through which only a single starting point is offered - referred to as a ‘Single Question for Inducing Narrative’ (SQIN) within BINM (Ross and Moore, 2016) - which serves to frame the discussion upon the research topic. Beyond this, the interviewee directs the discussion, taking it down whichever paths they see fit for as long as they would like to or feel comfortable doing so, on the understanding that the researcher may ask them to return to a topic again in the second stage of the discussion. Whilst the conversation has a particular lens, given the premise of the research, the free flow approach permits far greater autonomy than traditional qualitative methods. There are, certainly, risks to this approach, in that the researcher no longer occupies their traditional position of power as director of the conversation and may, therefore, face challenges in identifying commonalities across interviews. With participants, arguably, retaining authority over their own stories that would ordinarily be denied, the approach may be considered challenging. However, the practice aligns well with the Freirean theoretical framework, given that Freire (1972) recognises the political connections and transformations that occur – in this instance, via their everyday actions and experiences as lone parents.

‘Truth’ In & Out of Context:

An increasingly common critique of institutionally-based researchers conducting hyperlocal research concerns whether the intervention that occurs when inserting the researcher into a given context merely reproduces colonialist approaches to understanding an issue - in essence, shining a light on topics that shape the everyday lives of the researched-community that were previously unknown to the academy but a reality for the participants. Generally framed as ‘understudied topics’, the justification for conducting many past and contemporary research projects stems from an often well-placed intention to bring marginalised issues into more mainstream and institutionally-managed conversations (Tuhawai Smith (2012), however, concerns are raised on multiple fronts such as the relationships (or lack of) between the researcher and the researched-community, including what happens when these conversations are removed from the contexts in which they occurred. The community profile was, thus, intended to ground the research, whilst my own relationships to the area and its communities - as detailed from the professional, academic, and personal perspectives - served to demonstrate how I occupy a unique position from which to undertake the project whilst still embedding local knowledge, experiences, and politics into the final output. My insider, or partial-insider, position and understanding of local issues through these forms of life experience afforded me a privileged position that others would
not have access to, whilst the profile offered the reader an immersive overview of the area as demonstrated through existing qualitative and quantitative data sets.

With the core focus of this thesis centred on identifying a ‘truth’ to the experience of lone parent families in north Edinburgh as a consequence of austerity, questions regarding the stripping away of context are addressed thanks to these direct relationships and the community profiles. Prior to undertaking this research, I was already known to many within the local community through a shared lived experience of the area, through comradesy with other members of anti-austerity campaigns, and through my community-based practice. Such shared aspects to our identities offered opportunities to collaboratively explore intimate insider issues beyond merely theoretical components. However, risks also inherently arise when the researcher asks people with whom they share their lived community to reveal intimate aspects of their personal struggles and share information about themselves which were, as yet, largely unknown - perhaps even by these immediate neighbours. Thus, it became essential to recognise the challenges this brought and to justify why the selected primary research method of BINM was prioritised. Indeed, several other approaches have informed or influenced the selected approach, among them Neutralisation Theory and Small Stories, both of which are detailed briefly below.

(i) **Neutralisation Theory:** Primarily stemming from criminological studies, Wortley (1986, p.254) advises that ‘neutralization theory, [as] advanced by Sykes and Matza (1957), contends that offenders are not morally committed to their crimes, and generally share the values and legal proscriptions of the wider community.’ This came in response to historical depictions whereby those outside a minority population were seen as deviants, diverging from expected social or behavioural norms as depicted by society or their immediate social groups (see e.g. Cohen, 1955; and Sykes and Matza, 1957). This concept, Wortley (1986, p.255) explains, permits the ‘offender [...] to periodically “drift” from conventional morality by invoking a variety of excuses prior to acting illegally, which serve to portray [their] behaviour as essentially non-criminal and an exception to the usual rule.’ This was an overview questioned, in part, by Thurman (1984) who suggested that perpetrators generally maintain a knowledge of expected moral standards in their given social context regardless of the misconceptions other groups may have of them. In this context, the misconceptions concern lone parent families and, within this doctoral research, the theory could also be applicable to how others might judge the behaviours necessary for survival in a harsh context such as austerity. There are, thus, instances of morally questionable behaviours (e.g. lying, theft, off-the-books work, etc.), though it is a useful framework through which to temper any suggested reasons participants became lone parents when issues often associated with divorce and child custody (i.e. blame, manipulation, or other overtly negative characteristics) are raised solely in relation to the former partner and the separation process. Regardless, under the BINM approach, the participants’ responses are to be taken as valid and recorded for precisely what it shared (Ross and Moore, 2016), dispelling with historic judgements and prejudices.

(ii) **Small Stories:** Proposed by Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008, p. 377) as ‘antidote to canonical narrative studies,’ small stories propose that brief narratives can provide vital insight into the identity of an interview participant. Together, Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (ibid.) co-formulated a five-step model designed to aid the researcher in ‘navigating between the two extreme ends of fine-grained micro analysis and macro accounts.’ The small story approach - understood as ‘the [stories] we tell in passing, in our everyday encounters with each other’, Bamberg (ibid., p.2) states, ‘theoretically and methodologically enrich traditional narrative inquiry — not in a peaceful, complementary fashion, but by
more radically re-positioning big story approaches as grounded in dialogical/discursive approaches such as small story research.’ In this sense, the subtleties and intimate details provided by research participants within interviews centred on specific moments or events are acknowledged as key to collectively establishing new understandings of a topic - those emergent ‘big stories.’ These can, thus, contribute to the efforts to reshape contemporary understandings of lone parent families conducted and could be considered a key component of the BINM approach.

(iii) Further Considerations: Whilst transcripts provide evidence of specific direct quotes from interview participants, Bamberg (ibid.) has emphasised that the ‘transformation of bodily interactions into written texts is an issue of theoretical and methodological importance’ in that additional details of significance during the physical interview process can provide vital additional insight. As centred above, this includes aspects such as the trust (or lack of) between participant and researcher but also comfort within the interview environment, tone of voice, and factors such as the speed or flow with which a story is told. This, Freeman (2017) suggests, results in a ‘narrowness of the dialogical situation’ with an embodied, emotional, and real-world process reduced only to what was said and ignoring the diversity of other factors. Yet, whilst much of what Bamberg (2004) suggests is correct, his solution that a ‘new pass at a new transcript [be] backed up with the real visual images [so as to] keep a close eye on the strategies employed by all participants (including the moderator)’ is problematic on a number of fronts. Were these to be included, it puts the anonymity of the participants at risk, and, if acted upon during the interview, it may also draw unwanted attention to the interview processes, putting the participant in a state of unease, or discomfort, and risks them feeling outed by becoming a public spectacle in what was intended to be a participant-identified safe space in their local community.

In addition, whilst many incredible stories were shared during the interviews undertaken for this PhD, Bamberg’s (2004, p.3) suggestion that participant responses are ‘only [made] possible against the social matrix of known or imagined possible life narratives’ is essential to understand. This is because the responses offered during the discussions are presented specifically in response to the question of ‘what is it like to be a lone parent family in north Edinburgh during these “hard times”?’ Had the opening question been framed differently, centring perhaps on the opportunities this family type presents in contemporary society or asking about the stigmas lone parent families face, the answers may have taken a very direct turn to a different route, therein radically altering what would be presented. Certainly, ‘the degree of trust one has in the person telling the tale has much to do with the degree of trust attributed to the telling’ (Stahl and King, 2020, p.26); yet, the validation BINM seeks to afford research participants could be claimed as more committed to expressing individual truths in the sense that the respondent directs the entire discussion rather than a pre-prescribed series of questions pushing conversation in unnatural, but expected, directions.

That is not to claim that the analysis process is more straightforward, as Bamberg (2004, p.3) notes that ‘[s]electing episodes for the purpose of commenting and reflecting back on aspects of a lived life [...] requires the ability to cull these stories and bracket them out of the original social settings in which they have been socially shared.’ In part, this can be addressed through the dual community profiles offered in context setting and the retrospective bias placing of participants’ experiences under the same subheadings. Bamberg (2004, p.3) does, however, add that ‘the subject that is created in these socio-cultural practices is a reflective subject [...] that is able to step back, choose from all those that are tellable episodes, and organize them into some form of an overarching theme that gives (more or less)
coherence.’ The five subheadings (political, social, economic, artists, and connections) attempt to do precisely that.

5.2 Interview Method & Key Discussion Points:

Inspired by Ross and Moore’s (2016, p.253) proposed qualitative interview method of BINM - a process whereby the researcher aims to ‘elicit and interpret narratives for qualitative analysis and evaluation; to excavate historically situated subjectivity and to compare “the lived life” and the “told story” by focusing on discrepancies between self-understanding and behaviour - this dialogical method was selected for the research process. I chose to utilise four thematic discussion points rather than an extensive series of set interview questions, as would be required for many other qualitative methods. This, I believed, would accord greater freedom to the participants dialogically, and centre it within a broader Freirean approach. Describing the benefits of the BINM, the authors advised that the method ‘exposes a raw subjectivity in [...] agency and motivation which may not be fully invoked in traditional interview approaches [...] allow[ing] for the articulation of wider social relationships’ (Ross and Moore, 2016, p.450). This creates what Tedder and Biesta (2008) term the ‘vulnerable self.’ Suggesting that ‘a narrative approach is needed in order to reflect the contradictions and nuances of human motivations and experience,’ Ross and More (2016, p.253) stress that ‘[w]ithout this sensitivity, the story and, therefore, the analysis are incomplete’ and devoid of context. Had the doctoral research investigated a wider environment (e.g. across the whole of Edinburgh), much of this subtlety may have been lost. Utilising biographical research methods and specifically BINM should, Chamberlayne and King (2000) suggest, allow the research participants space to reflect upon and explore their lived experience under post-2010 austerity without coercion via re-enforced hierarchical power dynamics.

The BINM process, Ross and Moore (2016, p.253) advise, traditionally involves a three-part-process of opening the interview with a single thematic point, the SQIN, to which the researcher actively listens without interrupting this initial response. This may last just a few moments or require minimal prompts to encourage conversation, but, in other instances, can last for easily fifteen to twenty minutes (as demonstrated during the fieldwork given the range of periods of time different participants spoke for initially). When this flow dies down, the researcher follows up with a series of identified key points from during that initial uninterrupted response, with the researcher then ‘cu[ing] the respondent back to parts of the overall story that are clearly evocative’ (Ross and Moore, 2016, p.253). Described as ‘Particular Incident Narrative[s]’ (PINs), these subsequent points prompt the interviewee to focus on specific, incidents, or feelings which the researcher believes to be significant, though the respondent may or may not wish to further explore these further. When that is the case, the participant is, once again, able to exert their power within the democratised interview process by choosing whether to share more details or reiterate what was already stated. The final stage of the interview involves more specific questions, where the interview may move to a more semi-structured format of thematic prompts. This would enable the researcher to address any final desired points. The semi-structured stage aligns the research method more closely to dialogical forms of oral history (Portelli, 1997); however, the opening SQIN ensures that the interview process is non-prescriptive and limits risk of the researcher directing the interviewee towards responses they may believe the researcher wishes to hear based on pre-planned - and, in many instances, pre-shared - questions.
On this, Portelli (1981, p.100) argues that ‘[t]he significance of oral testimony may lie in its divergence from facts, where imagination, symbolism, [and] desire break in.’ Given that the research interests lie in understanding the ways in which lone parent families have experienced and, at times, resisted post-2010 austerity, providing this open space for monologued oral histories from the interviewees may permits Tedder and Biesta’s (2008) ‘vulnerable self’ to emerge naturally during the course of the conservations. Thus, by offering a condensed single-session version of BINM: an initial platform is offered for expression; the researcher then follows-up by responding directly to elements identified by the interviewee; with the option to close with a more traditional semi-structured interview if of benefit to participants less comfortable with the free form approach. This, therefore, creates a methodologically pluralistic and non-prescriptive process that produces an authentic and non-coerced narrative.

Within this research, such authenticity is achieved through what Holtet (2019) termed ‘inndragelse’ - a Danish research practice whereby research interviews are participant-led - thereby avoiding recreating historically ‘unethical, individualistic practice of research that […] often rewards researchers for telling half-truths or downright lies, that misrepresented [the participants’] world, and that gave authority about [the researched-community] to academic researchers’ (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012, p.xi). As such, the BINM-style approach allows ‘free range to the individual and idiosyncratic voice of the contributors [in this case, the participants] within the bounds of [the] negotiated theoretical scope, rather than risking the kinds of compromise and “ironing out”’ that, Giroux et al. (1996, p.vii) suggest, ‘sometimes attend[s] collaborative authorship [when] predicated on a quest for “univocality,”’ hooks (1984, p.NO) similarly argued that ‘[c]onservative discussions of censorship in contemporary university settings often suggest that the absence of constructive dialogue, enforced silencing, takes place as a by-product of progressive efforts to question canonical knowledge, critique relations of domination, or subvert bourgeois class biases,’ arguing that, as a consequence, ‘[t]here is little or no discussion of the way in which the attitudes and values of those from materially privileged classes are imposed upon everyone via biased pedagogical strategies.’

Post-interview, a three-track analysis usually occurs with (i) Biographical Data Analysis (‘how the person experienced something at that point in their life course – their biographical story’); (ii) Subjective Phase Hypothesis (‘why the respondent thinks things happened as they have’); and (iii) Thematic Field Analysis (‘the feeling and telling of the told story’) each addressed in turn (Ross and Moore, 2016; Corbally and O'Neill, 2014; Jones, 2017). This process, the various authors suggest, would traditionally be conducted by a panel, however, whilst I have engaged in discussions with the supervisory team, the supervisors were not involved during transcript analysis. This variation on the multi-session BINM model pushes the given researcher to ensure each interview is effectively reflected upon and that themes are identified in a manner which authentically reflects the experience of the lone parent participants consistently and that can withstand academic scrutiny without betraying that trust.

Utilising the condensed version of BINM, after ensuring that the interviewee is aware of the format of the interview, consents to be audio-recorded, and signs a participation agreement, the interviews commenced with the SQIN. Leading with “tell me what your life has been like as a lone parent family…”, the interviewees were encouraged to talk to the question for as long as they felt comfortable, with only minor prompts of encouragement to continue to share their stories. No questions were asked at this stage, nor did I push the respondents to go further into any topic that they did not voluntarily divulge. As recommended by Ross and Moore (2016), I prepared follow-up prompts that then guided the
interviewees back towards topics that they mentioned during their monologue. Again, at this stage no set questions were asked to ensure that my own social and political standpoints did not influence or pressure the participants towards particular answers. Once a handful of subjects had been revisited, it was only at the final stage that I could ask the pre-prepared points on the three themes of “what does it mean to you, to be a lone parent family here [in north Edinburgh]?” (designed to prompt discussion of social networks and support mechanisms where this had not come up already); “have these ‘hard times’ impacted you and your family?” (establishing the specific circumstances arising out of the economic and welfare reform); and finally “did you feel positioned to challenge the circumstances you experienced?” (addressing forms of mitigation, active citizenship and acts of protest, as well as barriers to and capacity for resistance).

5.3 Creating the Interview Environment:

Given the central demographic of this PhD project, duties of care and employment commitments are amongst the factors which had to be accounted for when proposing participation during the fieldwork. MacDonald and Greggans (2008, p.3124) advise that ‘[c]reating a safe environment is essential for qualitative research,’ believing that ‘[p]articipants are more likely to open up and communicate if they feel safe, comfortable and relaxed’ - all key components in facilitating sincere dialogue. Fundamentally, participation in research projects such as these must come at the absolute minimal detriment to the lone parents and their families, occurring at times and in locations which best suit the interviewees. A brief in-person, email, phone, or social media discussion with prospective interviewees made it possible to gauge their work commitments, however, accounting for the potential status of sole care provider for one or more children held by many lone parents, the preparation stage also required addressing the possible presence of young children during some of the interviews - particularly those with primary carers. On this, Kisker and Ross’ (1997) found that, in the US, ‘[m]ore than half of the children in families supported by welfare are under age six, and another third are in grade school,’ advising of the challenges many parents face in identifying appropriate care providers. They further state that ‘[m]any [parents] require care for infants and toddlers, care at odd hours, and care in poor neighborhoods - all of which are scarce’ in order to participate in many other facets of life (e.g. employment, socialisation, and - in our case - to participate in research). Furthermore, Sandstrom and Chaudry (2012) emphasise the challenges many parents with limited English language proficiency face in accessing such childcare facilities, adding that many face barriers in identifying appropriate care for children with additional support needs.

The demographic information for north Edinburgh outlined that lone parent families constitute circa 9.9% of all households in Edinburgh North and Leith and roughly 7.7% in Edinburgh West (NRoS, 2012) - north Edinburgh cutting across the two UK parliamentary constituencies. Carlin (2017) suggests that some neighbourhoods in north Edinburgh, including Pilton, feature as many as 17% lone parent families amongst all family types. In an area that also boasts a very young population, with around 25% of all residents estimated to be aged sixteen or under (according to the latest demographic data available at the time of writing), NRoS (2012), a significant proportion of lone parent families are likely to contain several dependent children. Further evidence from the 2011 Scottish Census (NRoS, 2012) and the Area Profiles (CEC, 2016; NRoS, 2015) suggest that an above average number of these lone parent families are likely to be from within minority ethnic or minority religious communities, an issue intimately connected

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56 The 2021 Scottish census was postponed due to the Coronavirus pandemic.
to the frequency of lower overall incomes for many minority communities (Cheshire, 2007; Corlett, 2017; and Scottish Government, 2019). North Edinburgh, however, also boasts an above average percentage of lone parent families to the comparatively lower cost of living in an area of multiple deprivation compared to the rest of the city (Tunstall et al., 2013). Platt (2007) and Clark and Drinkwater (2007) are among those to have described this, in part, as the result of an ‘ethnic penalty,’ whereby ‘ethnic minorities are on average 40 per cent more likely than white UK people to be in income poverty’ (Garner and Bhattacharyya, 2011, p.9). In addition, around 15.4% of households in Edinburgh North and Leith use a language other than English at home, with the 8.1% of households in Edinburgh West doing so - still more than double that 3.9% average throughout Scotland. This correlates to 18.1% of residents in Edinburgh North and Leith and 8.3% in Edinburgh West who were born outside of the UK or the Republic of Ireland, respectively, compared to 6.6% nationally (NRoS, 2012).

Accounting for the possible sole carer status of some lone parents, a number of situations were envisioned whereby I worked to ensure adequate provision was in place for scenarios in which either young children were present or the interviewee would like support in caring for their dependent(s). Laing (1971) as well as Uphold and Strickland (1989) suggest that having family members present influences the capacity for disclosure of sensitive information, and indeed advise that members of the family may internalise the witnessed actions or responses of others. This, however, risks long-term negative influence resulting from the interview process if challenging or sensitive topics are broached. Duncan et al. (2009), and Gardner and Randall (2012) further warn that research participants may be concerned about relatives hearing their responses; however, limited reflection has been given to the precise risks of children overhearing their parent(s) or guardians describing hardships. That Taylor (2008) found ‘[o]nly one in three social housing tenants is in full-time employment’ - again, an increased likelihood of such domestic situations given the geographical context or this research and the targeted community of lone parents - suggests that many of those meeting the eligibility criteria for a research project, such as this thesis, may ordinarily need to have their children present by default based on financial reasons. I, therefore, endeavoured to minimise risk of harm and distraction to the participants. The following points (a-c) outline how several alternative options were considered:

(a) Family Support: It was possible that some participants prefer to leave their child or children with a friend or relative. Bryson et al. (2012, p.2) describe this as 'informal childcare,' suggesting that the term encompasses 'childcare provided by non-parental family and friends (e.g. by grandparents or older siblings), and childcare provided by unregistered childminders, unregistered nannies or babysitters' (see also Baydar and Brooks-Gunn, 1998; Blau and Currie, 2004; Dench and Ogg, 2002; Wheelock and Jones, 2002). Their investigation found that, in 2008, circa ‘30 per cent of children under the age of 15, had been looked after by an “informal” childcare provider,’ observing that, more often than not, this care was provided by older siblings. Much of the need for accessing informal childcare stems from the ‘shortcomings of formal childcare available to parents: including cost and affordability; availability; opening hours; and catering for special needs’ (Bryson et al., 2012, p.7). Understanding this issue is replicated throughout the UK, Garner and Bhattacharyya (2011, p.4) suggest that ‘having well functioning social networks […] counteracts the benefits of moving away to access employment, and encourages a culture in which mobility beyond a certain point is seen as either too expensive and/or generating more problems than would be solved [e.g.] accessing childcare, friends and family, local organisations.’ This was the most affordable option for my own research, though the
research budget provided by the Macqueen Scholarship enabled me to offer to cover the costs of childcare for some of the participants where social support networks were not a viable option; though in many instances additional care was not necessary as the discussions took place whilst the children were at school.

(b) Childminder: Perhaps the costliest option for the research, hiring a childminder (selected by the interviewee) was an alternative option. The Julie-Ann Macqueen Scholarship provided a £750 research costs grant (UoE, 2019), and it was assumed that the majority of this would be allocated to fieldwork costs during the second year of the PhD. An online search indicated that childcare costs in Edinburgh are extremely high, with Bradley (2017) noting that a month of placing a child into nursery can cost as much as ‘43 per cent of the average Edinburgh take home salary.’ The EEN also (2012) indicated that childcare costs in Edinburgh were amongst the highest in Europe, advising that ‘families on low incomes […] simply [d]on’t earn enough to cover their childcare bill as well as living costs.’ Harding et al. (2017, p.9) reported that, whilst ‘Scotland offers 600 hours [free childcare] a year, which is equivalent to 12.5 hours per week over 48 weeks,’ with weekly childcare costs (taken to mean 25 hours per week) averaged out at £111.37 per week for under two-year-olds in a nursery, and £106.16 per week for children aged two years old or over. The same report placed after-school care with a childminder at £62.22 per week or £55.71 for after school clubs (ibid.). A further caveat here, however, given that the six-hundred hours free childcare entitlement only applies ‘for two year olds from families claiming certain benefits, or who are looked after by the local authority’ (ibid.). In circumstances where a relative does not live locally, is unavailable, or the lone parent would not be comfortable leaving their children with a relative, a childminder was identified as an appropriate alternative.

(c) Community Activity: Finally, it was also possible to arrange the interview at a time when the would-be participants’ children were at social activities (e.g. sports or art groups). The North Edinburgh Arts Centre, local community centres (e.g. the Muirhouse Millennium Centre, the Drylaw Neighbourhood Centre, and the Royston Wardieburn Community Centre), and local sports groups such as the Spartans Community Football Academy offer regular activities, many of which last between one- and two-hours (SCFA, 2019; MMC, 2018; DNC, 2018; and RWCC, 2019). Noting that research from, amongst others, Vandermeerschen and Scheerdera (2017) and Collins and Kay (2004) suggest children in areas of multiple deprivation do not participate in the recommended weekly amount of physical activity, understanding the emotional, physical, social, and mental benefits of physical activity (Molnar et al., 2004; and Tanha et al., 2011) - as well as the practicality of using this time alone with the lone parent participant - offering to pay the sessional fee for a class or training session was considered a positive offering. This option would also have been significantly cheaper than accessing formal childcare provision.

The unexpected intimacy I described in my first publication to come out of this doctoral research (Campbell, 2021) addressed the shift that occurred between myself and the participants as we were exposed to each other’s home environments due to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. Participants’ homes have been a setting which had actively been de-emphasised when negotiating where in-person interviews would take place. That intimacy article re-iterated concerns over who would be within earshot when sensitive topics were raised (even more so when homeschooling become commonplace), but practitioner lone parents, such as #3 Lindsay, who remained in-post, were frequently tasked with
offering over-the-phone support to their service users, risking breaches in confidentiality when flatmates, family members, or others might be present. As such, following brief initial exchanges, it was agreed that home environments were suitable for a majority of the latter stage interviews.

5.4 Ethical Issues:

Within the University of Edinburgh, the School of Social and Political Science (SSPS; 2015) state that ‘good ethical practice is a cornerstone of all our research,’ emphasising that it demonstrates ‘a mark of our commitment to professionalism, including our care for our research participants, our colleagues, collaborators, and research partners, as well as the data produced in our research.’ As outlined in the introduction, this PhD occurs within the SSPS and, consequently, the ethical considerations contained within the school website form the central component of this subsection. Once ethical approval was gained, two pilot interviews were conducted to ensure that the interview process ran smoothly and that there was minimal ambiguity within the questions whilst remaining true to the BiNM approach detailed by Ross and Moore (2016).

‘While some participants in sociological research may find the experience a positive and welcome one, for others, the experience may be disturbing. Even if not exposed to harm, those studied may feel wronged by aspects of the research process. This can be particularly so if they perceive apparent intrusions into their private and personal worlds, or where research gives rise to false hopes, uncalled for self-knowledge, or unnecessary anxiety.’

- British Sociological Association (1999)

(a) Ethics Approval Considerations:

Applications to the SSPS Research Ethics Committee at the University of Edinburgh are reviewed based on five key factors:
- ‘The level of risk, or potential for harm, to the researcher.’ (p.2)
- ‘The level or risk, or potential for harm, to the research subjects.’ (pp.2-3)
- ‘The sensitivity of the topic being investigated and the information being sought.’ (p.3)
- ‘Whether the project is engaging with people who may be considered to be particularly vulnerable.’ (p.3); and
- ‘The capacity of the potential research subjects to freely give their informed consent to participate in the research process.’ (p.3)

This subsection demonstrates how the research takes each into account and addresses these specific points.

(i) ‘The level of risk, or potential for harm, to the researcher.’: Advising that ‘most research projects carry little risk’ (p.2), the SSPS guidelines stress the significance of considering the positionality and, indeed, safety of the researcher during the project. A ‘difficult’ situation envisioned whilst conducting fieldwork was that some of the research participants may be known to the researcher. As such, existing relationships had to be considered via a detailed process of reflexivity and positionality.
Any notions of physical danger, it was imagined, would come only through entering into private or isolated spaces with people who were previously unknown to the researcher. All research interviews were intended to take place in public spaces such as the North Edinburgh Arts Centre or the cafe area at either of the two local Morrisons Supermarkets - spaces that the prospective participants had identified as safe locations. Covid-19, however, became a significant risk to the research process with physical proximity recognised as a major factor in spread of the infection.

(ii)  ‘The level or risk, or potential for harm, to the research subjects.’: Though acknowledging the unlikelihood of risk of any physical harm involved in a majority of social science research projects, the SSPS guidelines prompt reflection on the potential ‘social, legal or psychological harm[.]’ that may occur as a consequence of engaging in research. Issues envisioned within this element of the project were twofold. Firstly, as the project considers the impact of austerity on lone parent families in the north Edinburgh areas being asked to recount the impact welfare reform has had or continues to have on one’s own family may cause some distress. To combat this, participants were reminded regularly of their right to withdraw from the project at any time, and I was cautious not to pressure the respondents on topics that appeared to be invoking a particularly distressing emotional reaction, ensuring to receive verbal consent to continue discussing challenging or sensitive topics. In addition, the participant consent form provided to all interviewees contained a list of external support available by topics including Citizens Advice Bureau for financial or housing advice, Samaritans for mental health concerns, and Women Supporting Women for a local gender-based form of aid.

The second issue, however, was that acts of resistance undertaken may hint towards or explicitly describe actions which may be illegal (Olah, 2019). The research required reflection on action (past, present, and potentially forthcoming). Any notion of future action in particular creates ethical issues if there are hints towards illegal activity (e.g. further occupations, vandalism, etc.). This dimension of the research was a risk given that, even where responses are anonymised, participants could be more easily identified than in regional, nationwide, or international data sets; however, participants were made aware that their identities would be protected to the best of my abilities. Thus, to be sincere to the approach, the researcher should not pass judgement on the actions, or indeed the inaction, of the research participants. As noted in the chapter on reflexivity and positionality, my own experience as a worker, community activist, and local resident in the north Edinburgh area had to be recognised to address any potential impact on how the discussions proceeded. Questioning the responses of research participants for further detail or clarity was to be desired, however, at no point were the participants to be made to feel judged for their actions, decisions regarding their family, or how they have experienced post-2010 austerity. Banks (2012, p.177) suggests that professionals involved in social work are

57 Citizens Advice (2019) are a ‘network of independent charities offer[ing] confidential advice online, over the phone, and in person, for free’.
58 Samaritans (2019) are a charity ‘dedicated to reducing feelings of isolation and disconnection that can lead to suicide’.
59 Part of Pilton Community Health Project, Women Supporting Women is ‘a local women’s project with a choice of support services including one to one sessions, groups, monthly drop-ins and Peep sessions’, and ‘offer a safe, confidential, flexible service for women who are experiencing isolation, anxiety, emotional or mental health issues, abuse, violence, relationship and family difficulties’ (PCHP, 2019).
60 Edinburgh Crisis Centre, Penumbra, EdSpace (managed by Health in Mind), LGBT Health & Wellbeing, Scottish Association for Mental Health, and Saheliya.
‘influenced and circumscribed by societal norms, public opinion[, and] the law,’ yet, the ambition in this research was to sincerely recognise and communicate the participants’ authentic selves.

(iii) ‘The sensitivity of the topic being investigated and the information being sought.’: Relating directly to the aforementioned distress austerity as a research topic can cause for some participants, ‘sensitivity’ concerns both the emotional dimension and tact required, as well as the danger of malpractice with particular data collected. Potentially sensitive data collected covers gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, country of origin, the reason the participants found themselves in a lone parent family, and the austerity-related activities the individual has been involved in post-2010. Particular elements (e.g. gender identity, country of origin, sexual orientation, and religion) can be anonymised by the participant themselves and therein only identifiable if the participant indicates their status during the discussion; however, many of the dialogues were explicit. The other factors, such as any specific activities the individual has been involved in post-austerity, however, risked revealing some participants due to their shared experiences in anti-austerity activities or other communal activities in north Edinburgh.

As far as possible, therefore, mirroring the Equality Network (Walker, 2013, p.5.) in their Pathways to LGBT Parenting guide, this thesis sought to provide ‘space and respect to [the] many beautiful stories of courage, of liberation, and of love.’ Thus, despite the challenging nature of the information garnered, I endeavoured to remain as true as possible to the shared stories without betraying the trust placed in me as a researcher. This was particularly true for the groups marginalised within past research into and on the lives of lone parents and has included queer lone parents; as Walkers noted, ‘all too often the stories of LGBTI parents are not fully told’ - a situation mirrored across many other marginalised groups. Hubbard et. al. (2001, p.125) recognised this issue, stressing that ‘whilst we [as the researcher] are interpreting the data, we should acknowledge that the respondent’s account is, ‘shrouded in emotionality’ and will be ambiguous and contradictory’ - echoing Ross and Moore’s (2016) emphasis on the need to accept the participants’ stated lived experiences as their authentic truth.

(iv) ‘Whether the project is engaging with people who may be considered to be particularly vulnerable.’: The extent to which research participants were subject to or actively resisted the UK Government’s austerity programme, in part, dictated how vulnerable some people were during the research process. Other concerns related to sensitivity regarding residency status, learning disabilities, and linguistic barriers. Whilst children were not participants in the interviews, given that lone parents were participating, there existed a likelihood that children would be present. As noted, when considering the research environment, their presence could have influenced the responses some participants felt able to provide whilst their families could hear their answers. Physical disabilities were sought not to be a barrier to participation as the venues selected for conducting the interview were directed by the interviewees and, thus, would be accessible for any given need (e.g. street-level access for wheelchair users). Where the participants had mobility issues or severe anxiety when entering public spaces, amendments were to be allowed so that, if absolutely necessary, I would visit the participant in their own home. Again, this changed based on the sudden urgency around Covid-19.

(v) ‘The capacity of the potential research subjects to freely give their informed consent to participate in the research process.’ (p.3): Regarding the ability of interviewees to agree to participate based on their ‘informed consent’ (p.3), all research participants chose to engage on a voluntary basis.
Efforts to recruit interviewees occurred through contacting public and Third Sector organisations based in north Edinburgh, from posters positioned in public spaces or posted to Facebook and Twitter, and via word-of-mouth referrals between local residents, workers, or the interviewees themselves. All forms of calls for participants contained a project brief, an explanation of what becoming involved entailed for any would-be participants, and contact details for myself. Participants were asked to sign a consent form (a printed copy), whilst a second version was handed to the interviewee to keep for their personal records. The form explained the potential uses of the data gathered during the interview, whilst I also confirmed verbally once the audio recordings began that the interviewee was providing their full consent to participate in the research. Where English was not the native language of research participants, as appropriate, a professionally translated version of the consent form was to be supplied to the research participant and supporting services contacted.

5.5. Analytical Approach

Analysis of the fieldwork occurs through a Freirean approach, predicated on generative themes (understood via Peckham [2003, p.231] as ‘a theme that elicits interest from participants because it is drawn from their lives’ rather than imposed externally based exclusively on the literature reviewed. Commonalities across the thirty-four transcripts were identified via a process of codification inspired by Kirkwood and Kirkwood’s (2011) step-by-step guide developed in grounding Freire’s (1972) ambition to fostering meaningful approaches to taking social justice action for and with communities of practice. In Kirkwood and Kirkwood’s (2011) case this was intended as a means for developing educational curricula for adult learners, yet, the premise remains consistent across a range of research and practice contexts given the ultimate focus remains on developing new knowledge and understanding rooted in participants’ lived experiences.

The process required identification of consistencies across the diverse stories garnered during the interviews, thus, by repeatedly listening back through the audio recordings to gauge emphasise, demeanour, and emotion – aspects that less readily render themselves tangible when exclusively re-reading verbatim transcripts – become increasingly visible through the identification of commonalities across their different intersections. Colour codification was conducted in the first instance, initially identifying elements that aligns with the themes explored during the Literature Review. These quotes related to number diverse – but similar - experiences of marginalisation, generating clustered of quotes concerning the relationship struggles experienced by non-primary carers, or queer lone parents finding their own communities of trust. For example, the latter stage theorisation communicated in the Literature Review of the lone parent participants’ direct action for mutual aid aligned with the commentary from Kropotkin (2002, pp.136–37) that the purpose of this support should be to ‘develop such relations between [individuals] that the interests of each should be the interest of all’ was identified as directly aligning with #5 Dee’s talk of her financial struggles around childcare leading her to co-establish a mutual aid care network. Participant #13 Cally also formed her own network, thus, demonstrating how sections of the transcript relating to these experiences and forms of action could be clustered together based on early readings and listens for subsequent analysis.
The sustained immersion in the interviewee texts enables these codes – that is recognising ‘[i]ssues that have become invisible due to their ubiquity’ (Beck and Purcell, 2010, p.189) – are revisited in a newly co-constructed dialogical space within which the participants had been able to articulated their experiences, (un)met needs, and their deeply situated understandings within the hyperlocalised focus of the research. Such immersion fostered an intimate familiarity with the interviewees’ responses to the singular thematic issue as promoted via the BINM approach regarding the interviewees’ experiences as lone parents, as the aspects that had led to any number of forms of action (social activism, protection of self or the family unit, etc.) verbalised. As such, participants were able to ‘speak to the social, political, and economic conditions’ (Cammarota and Aguilera, 2012, p.493) that have shaped their lives as lone parents during the concerned period of investigation. The SQIN had helped keep the focus set rather than risking immersion in the data from interviews #1 and #2 (the trailed examples) which could have overly influenced latter stage interviews as, from a time-management perspective, data was already analysed as the subsequent interviews were taking place. This set line of entry to the interviews helped avoid bringing new biases to the future interviews, beyond pre-existing relationships and assumptions created by the referral process (e.g. one participant knew me through a given context which shaped a latter dialogue), thus, whilst the process became more refined simply through practice and increased familiarity with the BINM process, predetermined remit aided the consistency of the process.
6. Fieldwork:

Introduction

Having outlined the urgency of conducting the research in an ethical and compassionate manner, this chapter outlines the fieldwork process – specifically the recruitment practices – before offering insight into the participants’ lives. Rudimentary characteristics are noted (e.g. age, gender, and country of birth), whilst the profiles provide core information about each participant. Though key commentaries from the interviews are included as extracts during the analysis sections, information on who participated produces an immersive body of data that illustrates the diversity of relationship types, sexual and gender identities, and recognises cultural factors that shaped how each participant considers lone parent life.

6.1 Participant Recruitment:

I contacted organisations working in north and north-west Edinburgh to gauge understandings of the level of lone parent engagement with services in the researched-community. This involved creating a database of one-hundred-and-seven organisations operating locally (either entirely or with an office in the area), including sixty-eight instances in which I identified a named contact (e.g. a current member of staff, volunteer, or trustee) whom I could direct my enquiries to. The ambition with these general enquiries was that workers within each of these organisations were positioned - regardless of whether they have a small group of ten services users or several hundred people within their clientele - to also utilise any existing mailing lists to contact subscribers when the recruitment process commenced. Even if only a small percentage of people responded, this could have resulted in a significant number of would-be research participants. Local nurseries, primary schools, and high schools could have potentially also provided new contacts and referrals where existing relationships were not already in place. General enquiries requested that anyone within my compiled mailing list forward the email and recruitment flyer to their own contact networks, where appropriate, in the hope of creating a cascade or ‘snowball’ effect whereby eligible people who are perhaps two or three steps removed from my networks might be identified for possible inclusion in the research.

Other possibilities included pinning the flyer on community notice boards in local supermarkets within the identified postcode areas as well as GP services and dental practices. Integral to the participant recruitment process was implementing an effective advertising process and I considered a mix of targeted online advertising, part-page advertising in local print press outlets, and pinning flyers in GP practices, community centres, and sent to local schools. That the 'community participation process can be both time- and cost-effective if consideration is given to a variety of methodological and logistical issues'; whilst a wealth of community-based researchers have noted the problems in recruiting a research participant sample that accurately reflects broader society either locally or nationally (Becker et al., 1992; and Arcury and Quandt, 1999). Given my ambition of addressing past failures to include marginalised communities within research into lone parents, an effective recruitment process was fundamental to its achieving this.

In addition, Gavaghan (1995) and Curry and Jackson (2003) each note the need to, at times, adapt recruitment materials to ensure marginalised or vulnerable communities - which, for this PhD, may have
included non-native English speakers, those with low-level digital literacy, or those living in temporary accommodation (Cohen et al., 1993; Hough et al., 1996) - are encouraged to engage in the research process. These types of obstacles have been described by Ejigou et al. (2011) as 'known barriers.' Levkoff and Sanchez (2003) have, therefore, stressed the need for researchers to 'recognise[...] and understand[...] the culture of each ethnic minority community' - an ethos echoed by the likes of Stahl and Vasquez (2004), who consider effective models for ensuring such marginalised communities are not ignored within the research process.

The recruitment flyer featured bitly.com (shortened) links to versions of the flyer in other languages, it was hoped that non-native English speakers and non-English speakers would feel able to become involved. The 2011 Scottish census (NRoS, 2012) revealed that 9.1% of residents in Edinburgh Northern and Leith and 3.4% in Edinburgh Western 'use[...] a language other than English at home.' Consequently, the flyer shows these shortened links next to the flag of the country from which that language originated (e.g. the Tricolore [the French flag] for French language or the Tricolorul [Romanian flag] for the Romanian language). The translations were provided by professional translation service Elite Linguists with whom I had a pre-existing relationship.

The flyer advised that childcare support would be available including daycare costs and entrance fees for community activities, and advised that the interview would take place in a public space (envisioned as, for example, the local community centre, or even a play park with a public bench if an open space was preferred). The terminology regarding alternative venues for the interview was intentionally vague, with the option of conducting the interview in the participants' home or of performing the interview over the phone not mentioned. This, it was hoped, would encourage the prospective interviewee to consider one of the named options in the first instance (at a community centre, in a public cafe, or at an activity for their children). In addition, the inducement of a £20 Morrison’s supermarket voucher is noted late in the leaflet to ensure that interest is first sparked based on the topic of the research rather than by the prospect of financial compensation. In addition, I considered posting flyers through doors in the relevant postcode areas. Doing so would have increased the democracy of the recruitment process as only a subsection of lone parents will be involved in any given local community groups. It was hoped that this process would, perhaps, allow some of the most marginalised lone parents the opportunity to engage in the research. However, some of the venues and organisations supporting the research were targeted as a priority to increase the chances of reaching the desired demographics previously ignored within the literature. With a total of thirty-four research participants, the other blanket practices were not required.

**Pitching the Research to Would-be Participants**

The manner in which the purpose, and potential impact, of the project was pitched to would-be participants, naturally, shapes how they understand and consider it. Concerning what benefit the PhD research might have for them and their families, I relayed that this could include enhancing understandings of the lived impact that UK-wide austerity politics and welfare reform has had on lone parent families living in north Edinburgh, thus aiding and informing future practice (including with organisations they already knew). I ensured to also stress the broader relevance, stating that the information gathered may serve local organisations supporting all individuals and families in north Edinburgh based on the expressed needs and ambitions of local people where the findings are not specifically centred on the participants’ lone parent identity (as much as that may intersect).
Furthermore, they were advised that, given the introduction of Social Security Scotland, information such as that gathered for this thesis could feed into identifying what additional support mechanisms could be put in place to support this demographic should the organisation be willing to engage with my findings. In addition, the research ambition, I advised, sought to reposition lone parents from current corporate media and social media portrayals of lone parents as well as poor and working class communities as victims of circumstances, scroungers, and subjects of yet more ‘poverty porn,’ instead presenting a case study of active participants, citizens, and members of the local community fighting to navigate the hardships around them. This narrative may prove particularly important in an area such as Greater Pilton which has a rich history of social activism (e.g. Power to the People, the North Edinburgh Social History Group, the Muirhouse Anti-racism Campaign, AAM, and the Muirhouse division of the Edinburgh Living Rent Campaign).

Qualifying ‘Lone Parents’ (Eligibility)

In establishing the qualification criteria for who should be considered eligible for the study, there was also a need to consider, given the often-temporary nature of lone parenthood status, how far back could research participants have been a lone parent - and how long should they have held this status- for the purposes of this research? Anyone who has been a lone parent since the 2008 global economic recession may have been subjected to a number of these welfare reforms prior to any change in their own marital status or other state qualifying criteria. Just as lone parents with non-dependent children as of 2018 may have up to a decade of relevant lived experience of navigating the social security system, other individuals may have many years of experiences of activism or resistance since 2010 yet might now be married and, thus, no longer a lone parent. This left a conundrum of sorts - should these people still be considered for inclusion in the research project? This matters as at any stage during the research process, or between writing up and publishing, any or even all research participants could, hypothetically, have lost their lone parent status if they were to enter a marriage or civil partnership, etc.. Ultimately, a decision on this front was made to qualify those who had been a lone parent for at least three of the last five years (between 2013-2018 when the research started). This could have been to young children or to those who were already entering their late teenage years but who were still classed as dependents under the state criteria outlined during the Introduction.

Analysis: The consented audio recordings from each of the interviews (thirty-four interviews lasting an estimated twenty to sixty minutes in most cases) were transcribed by the researcher before an inductive analysis approach commenced. Influenced by the situatedness of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000), standpoint theory (Harding, 1993), and theories of narrative inquiry (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998), the analysis process involved manual coding as themes are identified within the transcripts. These followed a Freirean-style of codification whereby a loose clustering based upon, for example, a topic, experience, event, or reform constituted a code that permits the researcher to bracket together sections (e.g. active citizenship versus being subjected to state decisions). Furthermore, the volume of interviews permitted me to establish consistency of topics mentioned, thus demonstrating gaps or absences within some accounts.

61 ‘Poverty porn’, Jensen (2013) suggests, is ‘a subgenre of British reality television programmes that emerged in the summer of 2013 [which] individualise poverty, blaming and shaming the poor for their circumstances.’
Research Funding: The use of funding was a straightforward process, with the second-hand Dictaphone purchased at CEX (£45) and the continued use of supermarket vouchers as compensation for the participants’ time meaning that no unexpected costs were incurred as the researcher for the fieldwork process. When the fieldwork was conducted, however, the use of more than one supermarket for purchasing vouchers was an adaptation made to the intended exclusive use of Morrison’s due to the proximity of different supermarkets to where the participant either lived or worked. Both factors had influenced where the interviews took place. This opportunity for choice, thus, increased the level of autonomy granted to the participant and ensured that they were compensated for their time in a manner that best suited their lives (e.g. vouchers for the supermarket they may go to after work rather than imposing the retailer selected by the researcher based on an assumption over where they live), whilst still adhering to the ethical procedures and requirements of the funding provided by the University of Edinburgh. In addition, some interviewees asked to utilise alternative proposals for the compensation. Interviewee #6 Griff initially rejected the compensatory payment, advising that he was comfortable financially as is, and, therefore, happy to participate in the research without the promise of the voucher. Following a brief discussion, it was agreed that the Morrisons voucher would be donated to the charity which his business had previously partnered with during a food drive ahead of Christmas 2019. Others, including #29 June, #17 Meg, #9 Frank, and #18 Carol asked that the money be donated to foodbanks or LGBT charities.

Ultimately, some of the research participants were recruited through existing community networks via the named contacts in which I am or had been involved with (e.g. #1 Nick; #3 Lindsay; and #4 Lachlan) or referral from another participant (e.g. #2 Lawrence) or the targeted organisations working with queer community members or migrant groups. Though these turned out to be the only required approaches given the funding limitation, I also considered the ‘backpacking it home’ method advocated by Mckesson (2019) whereby contact is be made with local schools, nurseries, and other care providers who, if willing to support the investigation, could enable contact to be made with lone parents via their school-age children. The drafted letter would have been sent to such care or education providers for the attention of their respective managers or headmasters. Some of the participants offered to encourage the other lone parent families they knew who might be interested in engaging to get in touch. These individuals were given contact details which were to be used to signpost interested parties to my student email address and project-specific burner phone (purchased second-hand exclusively for this project).

Impact of Covid-19 & Charting Proximity: Although the recruitment phase of the research was already underway before implementation of lockdown guidelines, the closure of many institutions (e.g. schools, nurseries, and youth clubs) and the strict regulation of entry into other spaces (such as medical centres, supermarkets, and local libraries) threatened to limit opportunities to identify would-be participants. Stemming from several years-worth of lived, professional, activist, and academic experiences in north Edinburgh, I produced a three-part diagram to indicate my professional and potentially emotional distance from each participant, thereby helping to address concerns of bias as a result of sustained proximity and pre-existing relationships. As illustrated through Figure #1: Charting Proximity Diagram, the researcher was placed at the centre of the smallest circle, with three stages of separation indicating. Figure #2 demonstrates the results of how each interviewee was situated in regard to myself as a researcher.
(i) **Known:** Those already known to some extent via one of the form aforementioned identities I hold in relation to north Edinburgh;

(ii) **Referrals:** Those who were referred via professional, personal, or academic connections but where the individual was not already directly known; and

(iii) **Unknowns:** Those with whom no direct relationship was held.

Despite fears that access to would-be participants who were unknown prior to the pre-investigation may become increasingly limited due to the reduction of opportunities to recruit folk via in-person attendance at community groups due to Covid-19, the diagram demonstrates that the majority of (particularly latter stage) interviewees were still identified from out with the Known and Referral groups. The need to strictly adhere to healthcare and community safety guidelines during the Covid-19 pandemic meant approaches had to be made through social media channels where lone parents may be present. This largely meant recruitment occurred through advertising in relevant Facebook Groups - always posting only after permission had been gained from community leaders and administrators (often termed ‘gatekeepers’ by those in the academy). Identified groups included digital spaces designed for lone parents in Edinburgh, several Facebook Groups specifically created for residents in the north of the city (e.g. #23 Pam), and two groups for queer parents (e.g. #15 Sasha). Additional approaches, met with mixed levels of success, were made to spaces catering for parents living with disabilities in Scotland and a variety of groups for those in Edinburgh with a migrant background where members advised during our discussions that they were often not involved in more mainstream parenting groups hosted on Facebook for a variety of personal, cultural, or institutional reasons (e.g. #10 Rona; #24 Pria). In several instances, this was a unique challenge in that I had to go through several steps of gaining access to these Facebook Groups given that I was not a member of the centred community. In each instance, I opted to only remain a member for two weeks after making my recruitment post before departing these groups and thanking the identified gatekeepers for permitting my access.
A Change in Dynamics: Several months were spent formulating a comprehensive plan to ensure would-be participants felt comfortable in an interview space, and that the environment (including time, setting, and location) would be understanding of the circumstances lone parents may experience in relation to childcare, work, education, and other commitments. Though early interviews took place in community centres (e.g. #1 Nick and #2 Lawrence), public cafes (e.g. #11 Louise), and in the interviewee’s workplace after hours (e.g. #3 Lindsay and #6 Griff), the interviews involving participants #10 - #34 took place online utilising either video or audio facilities on WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, or phone calls with the discussion recorded (once consent had been gained) on the Dictaphone. The intended approach of conducting the interviews in neutral venues was designed to avoid confusion or blurring the distinctions between neighbour, practitioner, and academic researcher, whilst also supporting local businesses by purchasing coffee for both myself and the participant whilst utilising these local facilities. Fortunately, the original ethical approval application had included opportunities for would-be participants to express a preference for over-the-phone interviews where this was preferred over in-person discussions, and consequently no adaptations were required from an ethical perspective when this became the only safe option.

The shift to utilising video technology drastically altered the interview dynamic as both the researcher and the interviewee now found themselves presented, at least partially, with the other’s home, bringing with it (or perhaps risking) exposure to their family members, home decor, and often amusing interruptions from pets (mostly on my end) which was not desired given this possible blurring. So too, however, it brought additional research challenges, of which the physical distance was perhaps the most significant. When participant #4 Lachlan broke down momentarily at the commencement of his in-person interview due to the nature of his ‘pathway to lone parenthood,’ it was possible for me to bring him a tissue from the interviewee’s kitchen; however, when participant #25 Aiden needed to interrupt the interview to compose themself, it was still easy enough for me to give them a moment alone by pausing the recording. Although it was possible for embodied sympathy to be conveyed through the digital mediums when video technology was the preferred medium, the physical distance seemed to extend into the emotional. This was emphasised by two instances in which participants requested audio-only interviews during which moments of silence and attempts to offer emotional space may just as easily have been misunderstood as merely waiting for the participant to resume talking, or worse - concern that the phone call had been cut off or I was unaware of what to say. Though there is certainly further consideration to be given to the impact of bearing witness to each other’s appearance and the impact this has (e.g. perceived dress code, tattoos, piercings, etc.) in-person or over video, the primary conclusions here must acknowledge the struggle to comfort participants at a distance (either visually or audibly).

6.2 Participant Biographies

As is often the case with such research projects, those that deserve the most thanks for their time and candour are the anonymised participants. Without their honesty and willingness to engage in what is, for many, an emotionally demanding and sensitive topic (Lee and Renzetti, 1990; Dickson-Swift, 2008; Gray, 2008), this research paper, its insights, and indeed the larger investigation, would not be possible. The opportunity to engage with the research participants is something I will forever be grateful for. This is significant as the Addressing Poverty with Lived Experience Collective (2020, citing ONS, 2020a) advised
that “in 2018 there were still 5.3 million adults in the UK [an estimated] 10.0% of the adult UK population” who are non-internet users (see also Ravensbergen and VanderPlaat, 2010). Consequently, save for two participants (#24 Pri and #8 Mercy), those residing in north Edinburgh without digital literacy or access to the appropriate hardware (or without a friend or relative involved in one of these Facebook Groups) could not be reached for the purposes of this study. It is hoped that a future investigation post-PhD may be able to address this unfortunate impasse.

In recognition of their unique lived experiences, this subsection provides a brief biography of each participant serving to further immerse the reader within the research context. Precise details are included in order to illustrate the distinctiveness of their own experiences, whilst aspects of their pathways into lone parenthood help demonstrate the ways that some of the participants framed their experiences.

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<tr>
<th>Participant Number</th>
<th>Code Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Sexuality</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1 (Pilot)</td>
<td>Nick</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>Scottish</td>
<td>One</td>
</tr>
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</table>

A white Scottish man in his fifties, Nick has lived in north Edinburgh his entire life. Following a lengthy custody battle during which he successfully represented himself in court, Nick has been primary carer for his son since 2012. His son has autism which resulted in a severe struggle to integrate at school, leading to Nick supporting him with finding work (including within Nick's throughout own projects). Nick uses a mobility aids, but finds north Edinburgh to be a highly accessible space - something he credits to the understanding of local community organisations that a large number of people in the area are living with one or more disabilities. Although he briefly attended university, Nick dropped out of his programme following a brief stint in prison. He advised that he is committed to focusing on supporting his son and that he actively distances himself from people or situations that could lead to a further period in custody or a second sentence.

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<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Children</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#2 (Pilot)</td>
<td>Lawrence</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>Scottish</td>
<td>One</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Primary carer to an infant daughter, Lawrence is a white lone father originally from Glasgow (Scotland). He grew up in a lone parent family, moving around various parts of east coast during his primary school years, and briefly attended high school in the Scottish central belt. He was in a long-term relationship with the mother of their child; however, their relationship broke down before the daughter turned two, due to violence from his partner. He’s lived in north Edinburgh for close to eleven years at the time of our interview, and volunteers with a youth group, co-organises a community market, and used to offer sporting sessions around various parts of central Scotland. Lawrence found that his lone father status often meant he was sidelined by other parents, stating that he had faced significant stereotyping by medical and care practitioners in the early years of being a lone parent.

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<tr>
<td>#3</td>
<td>Lindsay</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>Scottish</td>
<td>Two</td>
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A low-paid support worker to those with lived experience of substance addiction and homelessness, Lindsay is
mother to two children - a teenage boy and a girl in upper primary school. Whilst the children each have contact with their respective fathers, Lindsay has been the primary caregiver throughout both children’s lives, with little support from her relatives - including her late-mother whom she found to be highly judgemental of Lindsay’s lone parent status despite two once-committed relationships with each of the children’s fathers. Isolation and the struggle to financially justify re-entering the workforce compared to living on social security after the cost of childcare (including after school clubs and sports sessions) were the core themes that emerged from Lindsay’s interview. Given her bisexuality, Lindsay also revealed that she’d encountered a lot of childism from other women in the queer social and dating scenes.

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<th>Children</th>
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<tr>
<td>#4</td>
<td>Lachlan</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>Scottish</td>
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Having become a lone parent when his daughter was just four-years-old, Lachlan lost his partner to rapidly advancing cancer. A community worker by trade, though now a professional photographer and part-time educator, Lachlan structured his paid practice around raising his daughter. He advised that comrades within his political party often aided his experience and enabled him to continue his professional practice by volunteering to assist with childcare so he could document and archive political demonstrations knowing his child was safe. Lachlan identified the rarity of being a male lone parent as isolating, whilst he also shared his fears about raising a child in a rounded manner owing to a highly gendered parenting experience. Becoming a lone parent through circumstances that demanded he perform as carer for both his parents, partner during the latter stages of her life, and his daughter meant he’d never had a sincere opportunity to grieve until after his daughter had left the family home.

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<th>Children</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#5</td>
<td>Dee</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Pansexual</td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>Latin American</td>
<td>One</td>
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Dee stated that her life is entirely centred around her young daughter. Having just started her PhD when she fell pregnant, Dee struggled to balance childcare with continuing her education, in part because her family worked in another city. Having spent much of her teenage years and early twenties as a dedicated social activist amongst anarchist movements, Dee has sustained her activism where possible - bringing her daughter to demonstrations, feminist art collectives, and trans-inclusive support groups. Having established a queer support group that is now her found family in Scotland, Dee struggled by herself for the first two years of her daughter’s life and continues to endure a complicated relationship with the violent ex-partner who still lives in Latin America.

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<th>Children</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#6</td>
<td>Griff</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>North American / European</td>
<td>Two</td>
</tr>
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A local business owner, Griff runs his own creative space whilst looking after his children on weekends. Having co-founded a different art space with his former partner more than a decade ago, Griff’s ex-wife cares for their two kids most of the week, though the financial success of their co-founded studio ensures that neither parent struggles financially with their care responsibilities. Raised by his father whilst his sister lived with their mother, Griff was used to non-nuclear family types and now endeavours to support local charities involving low-income families including lone parents (e.g. by running a foodbank drives). Griff spent several years crafting his art in mainland Europe before
meeting his partner, but has become heavily involved in the Scottish independence movement - advocating for a People’s Republic of Scotland - though his own politics are a combination of extremes.

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<tr>
<td>#7</td>
<td>Cathleen</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>Scottish</td>
<td>Two</td>
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Cathleen had endured a significant period of chaos and difficulty in her life during the years running up to our interview. This included the deaths of both of her parents coming in quick succession to the deaths of her former partner’s parents. This meant that despite both parents undergoing what Cathleen termed the most challenging period of their lives, she found herself de facto primary carer for their children even prior to the separation. Her former partner, she explained, found family life too challenging amidst the grief, leaving the family permanently shortly thereafter.

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<tr>
<td>#8</td>
<td>Mercy</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>Scottish</td>
<td>Two</td>
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A lone mother to two children, Mercy separated from her partner two-and-a-half years prior to our interview. A lifelong resident of Granton, she has been involved in several key local services. For the most part, Mercy already felt that she was raising her children by herself as her ex-husband struggled with alcohol addiction and was rarely involved with childcare - in part because Mercy could not trust him to be sober around their dependents. After curtailing her work life to ensure she was present for as much as possible of her kids’ lives, Mercy is now working to establish her own healthcare practice. She expressed a deep appreciation of local breakfast clubs and after-school care for making this possible, though she emphasised that she believes her own experience was far more fortunate than many others who similarly endured the breakdown of a marriage. Mercy revealed that she often takes advantage of running her own practice by bringing her children to the centre rather than relying on others for support with childcare. She did, however, recognise that in most instances where a lone parent is an employee rather than the boss, they would likely not be able to bring their children to work as she does.

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<th>Sexuality</th>
<th>Age</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#9</td>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>Scottish</td>
<td>One</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A deeply Christian individual who credits rediscovering his faith with his current sobriety, Frank grew up in in the northeast of Scotland, enduring a deeply abusive childhood at the hands of his mother. Amidst an adolescence plagued by drink and drug abuse, a woman Frank had recently become involved with fell pregnant. Following a turbulent relationship with this partner, she moved to the south of England, taking their daughter with her. Frank’s addictions subsequently became far more harmful to himself and those around him, resulting in a significant distancing occurring between him and his daughter. Reaching a crisis point, Frank moved into a rehabilitation centre in north Edinburgh. Over time, he got a handle on his substance abuse and worked to rekindle his relationship with his daughter. The complicated and intermittent line of communication with his ex-partner has led Frank to make several attempts on his own life, including one after the ex-partner assaulted him whilst visiting with their daughter at New Years. Frank’s decision that evening, he revealed to me, was largely motivated by realising that his daughter had witnessed the incident as he related this to his own childhood trauma. Frank’s identity largely centres around his faith and being a lone parent - existing in that gap within the literature of lone parents who are not the primary carer.
As someone who has lived with multiple lifelong disabilities and degenerative conditions, Rona’s life has been made far more complicated by the fact her family were involved in a UK-based cult. It was not until her honeymoon with an ex-partner whom she was coerced into marrying that she first began to question her upbringing. Though it would be many years until she escaped from the cult, Rona had already birthed two children and fostered a third, whilst also caring for an adult with significant support needs. A further short-lived relationship, again with a male partner, led to a third biological child, meaning that, when this partnership ended, Rona was now a lone mother to four children. A deeply scarring and traumatising experience with the DWP has meant that Rona struggles to trust social security systems despite being largely unable to work. This means that she lives in extreme poverty and strives to manage on an income drastically below what she understands she would be entitled to if she could bring herself to face a welfare state that she blames for much of her suffering.

At present, Louise runs a foodbank in the community in which she grew up. Her own struggles with poverty and alcoholism have given her a great deal of empathy for other people living in precarious circumstances. She credits this with motivating her to gain a degree in Community Education and to become involved with her local community centre. Louise falls within the ‘never married’ demographic, but stresses that she was never interested in a long-term relationship with the biological father of her child. Instead, she focused on building a career she was interested in (one entrenched within her local community), and in raising her daughter ‘right.’ Louise does not have family nearby anymore.

A major concern for Kelly has been how to achieve some form of work-life balance whilst raising her children. Whilst she praised technological developments for making some aspects of her life easier (e.g. online shopping for essentials), she has struggled with managing her finances due to precarious work (including successive short-term contracts). After losing her only secure employment contract (a part-time role), Kelly was forced to sell her car. Though she praised how comprehensive the Edinburgh bus network is, she explained that the time it takes to travel between employment opportunities and those who can support her with childcare leaves her feeling uneasy, likening this to another form of debt.

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<tr>
<th>Participant Number</th>
<th>Code Name</th>
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<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#10</td>
<td>Rona</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>Scottish</td>
<td>Four</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#11</td>
<td>Louise</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>25-34</td>
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<tr>
<td>#12</td>
<td>Kelly</td>
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<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>Scottish</td>
<td>Two</td>
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<tr>
<td>#13</td>
<td>Cally</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>Scottish</td>
<td>/ Two</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Migrating to Scotland from the Republic of Ireland some fifteen years ago for work, Cally opted to prioritise raising her children in north Edinburgh as this was where most of her social network reside. Fostering an informal childcare network, Cally and her friends frequently take turns looking after each other’s children, allowing other group members (four-of-the-five being lone parents) to undertake work opportunities, arrange medical appointments, and practice self-care without stressing over whether they can find affordable and trusted childcare. She credits her own experience of being raised within an extended family as a motivation to create a similar network in her new Scottish home.

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<tr>
<th>Participant Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#14</td>
<td>Kathy</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>Scottish</td>
<td>Three</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With two kids before the age of eighteen, Kathy was highly conscious of the assumptions others made about her. Whilst she briefly downplayed her role, telling strangers who passed comment that she was just the nanny, she feels this was down to public perceptions, rather than anything she sincerely felt. Describing herself as ‘highly competent’ at parenting, she now finds that many people approach her for parenting advise. She remains concerned about her ability to provide secure long-term housing for her children, advising she they have spent close to three-years (aggregated) in temporary accommodation. She is now active in several housing rights campaigns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Number</th>
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<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#15</td>
<td>Sasha</td>
<td>Non-Binary</td>
<td>Pansexual</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>Rest of the UK</td>
<td>One</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A lone parent from the day they discovered their pregnancy (their partner was an anonymous one-night stand), Sasha has spent six years raising their son independently. A non-binary and queer parent, they stumbled across a queer parenting Facebook Group and have established several vital relationships since then within their found family, though many of the members live outside of Edinburgh. As an openly-queer parent, Sasha has found life very challenging in north Edinburgh as they boast a largely androgynous appearance. This, they stated, has caused some issues for their child, Sasha stressing that tensions have come from their gender identity rather than their Englishness which they ‘naively’ believed would be a likely source of tension when first arriving in Scotland.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Participant Number</th>
<th>Code Name</th>
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<th>Age</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#16</td>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>Scottish</td>
<td>One</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Having separated from his partner when their child was just aged three, Michael moved around nearby in English midlands towns seeking work, but would later relocate to Scotland in 2012, returning to Muirhouse - the area in which he grew up. With his ex-partner and their young child remaining in England, Michael travelled south often, initially each weekend, though the cost incurred rapidly became prohibitive, meaning that he feared his child may believe he had disappeared from his life. Accessing financial support through the university after starting a degree, Michael was able to re-enter education, but required paid-work to continue travelling to visit his son. This came via working night shifts most evenings and spending his annual leave travelling south where his son and ex-partner continue to live. Parenting from a distance, Michael advised that he never saw himself as a lone parent until his son moved to Edinburgh aged sixteen to work and study near his father. Michael informed me that his son moving to
north Edinburgh was the first time he was able to rest mentally since the year prior to the separation.

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<tr>
<th>Participant Number</th>
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<th>Age</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#17</td>
<td>Meg</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Homosexual</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>Scottish</td>
<td>Two</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Having birthed two children with the support of men in their social and work circles, respectively, Meg (who carried both children) and her girlfriend endured a complicated relationship for several years, with the ex-partner continuing to live in Meg’s home for two-and-a-half years after they separated. When we conducted our interview, Meg was six months into a new relationship and works part-time as a landlord managing several properties. This is the first time she had returned to what she considered ‘proper work’ after taking time out to care for her children. A volunteer community worker, Meg involves her children in much of her community work, each having attended her youth work groups since she first started volunteering. More recently, Meg has focused her emotional energy on integrating her new partner into her family unit.

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#18</td>
<td>Carol</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Homosexual</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>Latin American / European</td>
<td>Two</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Born in Latin America though also holding EU citizenship, Carol spent eighteen years living in the south of England, marrying the man who fathered both of her children. After enduring an abusive relationship for many years, Carol escaped and met the woman who has since become her long-term partner (in essence a second mother to Carol’s children). Having re-entered education on a part-time basis, Carol began to run parenting groups in England, before relocating to Edinburgh with her children and her current partner some five years before our interview. Carol explicitly advised that she feels she suppressed her sexuality for many years, and that the ex-partner used violence to coerce her into committing herself to him - something she believes has been deeply damaging to her children’s emotional development. She now runs several queer women’s groups, youth work support services, and other public events.

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<th>Age</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#19</td>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>Scottish</td>
<td>Three</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A lone father to two different families, Dan has a son and a daughter from his first family whilst he has a daughter through a second family. Both of Dan’s ex-partners remain in Edinburgh, the latter living in the same block of flats - meaning their daughter is able to live between the two households. Dan was candid in his interview as a result of being involved in numerous criminal activities in his younger years, though he stressed that he has re-entered education in order to improve his circumstances. He believes that the proximity to his second ex-partner has allowed them to co-parent with some ease, though he noted there have been many major clashes over parenting styles which have seen the former partner refuse to permit their child to visit him. When the first family split, Dan’s son came to live with him with the daughter moving in with her mother. Dan believes himself to be ‘an accomplished father’ and expressed his desire to enter independently into politics in the future. Issues of central concern of him include the legalisation of marijuana, increasing legal protections for single fathers, and challenging what he believes to be a ‘fascistic party’ in the SNP.
Nina arrived in Scotland 2002. She has found the absence of a support network to be a significant challenge, though she describes a 'hopefulness' that lone parenthood is becoming more socially acceptable in Scotland. However, if she did not have a shared custody agreement, she explained that she would likely move to Germany with her son where she has family. Though she first moved to the UK to become a care worker (something she believed would afford her the opportunity to travel), she decided to become a stay-at-home mother. Post-split, she re-entered work, but stated that the debt she accrued due to low-wages and then subsequent reliance on her parent for an 'allowance' means she is still working towards a health financial position many years later.

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<tr>
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<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#20</td>
<td>Nina</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>European</td>
<td>One</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Arriving in Scotland eighteen years ago, Edina worked as a social worker for many years before entering a short-lived relationship with a Caribbean military officer who was stationed briefly in the UK. The ex-partner had already entered a new relationship by the time Edina discovered she was pregnant, though she says she is happier as a two-person family unit than she imagines she would be if having to negotiate how to raise her daughter. Currently studying on the same programme as a fellow interviewee, she spoke of enjoying the space to independently parent alongside other lone parents. She also stated that she feels far more settled in Scotland than she did living elsewhere in the UK and believes that she is able to provide a higher standard of living, here, for her and her child.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Participant Number</th>
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<th>Age</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Children</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#21</td>
<td>Edina</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>45-54</td>
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<td>One</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

After ten years in a heteronormative relationship with her former partner whom she now understands to be asexual, Nomi began to question her own sexuality. By the time she broke off the relationship, Nomi had a three-year-old daughter and immediately became the primary carer without any debate between the two parents upon their split. Having explored her sexuality through polyamorous relationships, Nomi has now settled into a primary relationship with another woman though both partners practice an open relationship. Nomi’s child is now seven-years-old and has developed positive relationships with several of Nomi’s partners. Despite the unusual nature of an open relationship, Nomi believes she is demonstrating to other parents that this type of family dynamic can work when all parents understand the urgency with which the child must be prioritised.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Participant Number</th>
<th>Code Name</th>
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<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Children</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#22</td>
<td>Nomi</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Pansexual</td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>Rest of the UK</td>
<td>One</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Though she split from her son’s biological father when their child was barely a year old, Pam spent four years in a live-in relationship with another man whom her child ‘essentially experienced to be his father’. It was not until this second significant partner in her life was ‘sent to prison for selling weed’ that Pam believes she truly felt that she was a lone parent. Struggling socially, she established a social space online for single parents in the east of Scotland and
explained that she believes that she has benefited from the advice and guidance of others with similar lived experiences.

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<tr>
<th>Participant Number</th>
<th>Code Name</th>
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<th>Nationality</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#24</td>
<td>Pria</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>One</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pria was raised with the distinct expectation that she would ‘give’ her parents grandchildren. After moving to Edinburgh where her partner had relocated to for work, Pria discovered that her husband - whom she met through an arranged marriage - was cheating on her and living with his mistress. Turned out onto the street with a toddler, Pria struggled with the English language but was eventually able to access temporary accommodation through the City of Edinburgh Council. After spending several years in a high rise flat, deeply frightened by the frequency with which she observed ‘drug deals’ and ‘violent altercations’, Pria was able to access alternative accommodation. Though she remains socially isolated and experiences significant cultural stigma living as a minority religion single mother, Pria is grateful to organisations like the Multicultural Family Base for their work helping people like her integrate into Scotland.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Participant Number</th>
<th>Code Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
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<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#25</td>
<td>Aiden</td>
<td>Non-binary</td>
<td>Pansexual</td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>Rest of the UK</td>
<td>One</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Originally from the south of England, Aiden is a queer parent with a five-year-old son. Raised in a lone parent family themselves, their mother died whilst their son was two-years-old. Consequently, Aiden has worked to establish their own broader ‘family of support’ - including several other queer parents - which has allowed them to re-enter education due to informal agreements of providing each other with free childcare. They have struggled with alcohol addiction, yet they’d achieved several months of sobriety by the time that our interview took place. Aiden believes that there are many difficulties for their son at school when it comes to relationship education as polyamorous relationships generally retain a social stigma. As such, they suggested there is still much progress to be made in how schools educate children about relationships, but fears that their son is likely to face hostility if he speaks about his parent’s partners.

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<tr>
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<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Children</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#26</td>
<td>Kim</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>Scottish</td>
<td>One</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kim has a young daughter aged two-and-a-half years old. Due to the complicated separation with her former partner, her daughter didn’t see the father for the first two years of her life, though they are currently working to establish an approach to shared custody that would allow him to see their daughter infrequently without the need for court intervention. Kim stated that she had incredibly negative experiences of custody battles during her own childhood, with her father frequently breaching the conditions of the state-imposed agreement. As best she can, she would prefer to co-create something that avoids extending a similar trauma to her child.
A long-term resident in north Edinburgh, Winnie is mother to five children - the eldest of which was a teenager at the time of our discussion. Her partner struggled for years with alcohol addiction and is no longer part of their lives due to violent behaviour whilst under the influence. Winnie has found a major sense of support and community in her church (Protestant), where she advised there are many other lone parents who have endured similar struggles. Her children have enjoyed attending church-run youth clubs, though through witnessing the last decade of cuts, Winnie stated that she sees ever decreasing provision at the local level to support families. Having relied on the goodwill of others to aid her in raising so many children by herself, she fears that they will struggle going forward.

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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>#28</td>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>Scottish</td>
<td>One</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As someone who from a young age had been advised by medical professionals that she would be unable to have children, Lucy never had any doubts about becoming a lone mother when she discovered that she had fallen pregnant. Based in north Edinburgh, though working city-wide, Lucy has struggled on a personal level to marry up striving to provide the best life she can imagine for her daughter with the emotional distance working so much puts between them (her child was in early-to-late daycare most days). Having grown up in a blended family and feeling familiar with the different relationships this creates between the range of family members, Lucy has never had any concerns over how others would treat her due to her lone parent status.

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<tr>
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<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#29</td>
<td>June</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>Scottish</td>
<td>Two</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A seasoned community activist, June became pregnant when she was just sixteen-years-old. Following a strained relationship with the father of her first child, she moved to the west of Scotland for the birth and early years of her daughter’s life. Returning to Granton, June struggled to balance her work and education ambitions with childcare, undertaking late night security work. Some years later, following the birth of her second daughter as her first was leaving the familial home (and, again, experiencing the father walking out on her upon discovering the pregnancy), June undertook community development training and eventually completed a related degree programme. She was fundamental in establishing many organisations that continue to practice locally including a local community centre, a Minor Injuries Unit elsewhere in Scotland, and a residents’ housing association.

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<th>Sexuality</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#30</td>
<td>Marie</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>Scottish</td>
<td>Three</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Though she has a small social circle, Marie stated that she is quite comfortable with her life and that her child-less friends have actively encouraged her to bring her children to social events. One of the friends who regularly hosts movie nights has adapted her spare room to accommodate the young children. Marie advised that she inherited her flat from her grandfather so is no longer anxious about her long-term accommodation needs, nor does she feel a desperate rush to find stable employment. Instead, she picks up creative jobs as and when opportunities arise.
Raised in foster care, Jenny had her daughter, ‘Jay’, when she was just fifteen-years-old. Her biological family were deeply religious, devout in their Catholicism, and insisted that Jenny marry the father of her child on her sixteenth birthday - this being despite the father being some twenty years older than her. When her child was two-years-old, Jenny discovered that Jay was deaf in one ear and only partially hearing in the other. Following three surgeries, her child is now classed as hearing and manages to socialise more effectively. Since a young age, Jay exhibited many behaviours typical of young girls despite being assigned male at birth. After accessing support through local services, Jenny is now supporting Jay to live as her acquired gender. Upon the discovery that they may have a trans child in their family, Jenny's blood relatives became violent towards both her and her daughter, with Jenny’s grandfather breaking into Jenny’s home to shave Jay’s long hair off. As a result of their violently transphobic behaviour, Jenny has cut all ties to her family and strives to live as independently as possible.

Having endured an unstable heteronormative relationship with an unfaithful partner and left to raise her daughter alone. Nicky later came out as a lesbian (circa five years ago at the time of our interview). A significant issue in her life has been a sense of shame she has endured over her sexuality, heightened after having been raised in central Scotland as part of a deeply racist and homophobic family. Presently, Nicky is working to establish her own business after studying via a distance learning course. She has struggled to explain the split with her former partner to her daughter, and has found romantic relationships difficult since the separation. She has attended counselling for many years for support in managing her autism though she is very conscious of her capacity to present as what she termed ‘high functioning’. Nicky has also struggled socially as she feels out of place both as a lone parent and as a lesbian, however, she holds a deeply socialist philosophy and remains committed to practicing ‘radical leftist politics’ whenever she can. She attributes her experiences as enabling her to foster ‘a great sense of empathy’ for the struggles of others, including the marginalisation and persecution facing trans people and people of colour in Scotland today.

Married in 2010, Sasha and her then-husband left the Middle East just before the beginning of the Syrian civil war. She advised that she has endured many cultural anxieties as she moved northern Europe whilst trying to make her ‘already failing marriage’ work. Thanks to her friendships with a lawyer, Sasha was able to access free legal aid during her divorce, allowing her to leave a situation she feared she might be trapped in for life. Her experiences in Scandinavia led her to believe that there are many alternative approaches to how the state supports families that would greatly improve the experience of parents in the UK. Though she was raised to believe that families should find ways to make their relationships work for the benefit of their children, Sasha suggests that there have been many modernisations within Middle Eastern cultures that would make her status as a lone parent more socially acceptable little over a decade later.
Jay stated that their gender identity has long been a contentious issue for their parents, though both have become highly supportive in the aftermath of Jay’s separation. They stated that their parents continued to refer to them as ‘their son’ and, as such, they worry that the same identity struggles their parents generate within them may be replicated in their child as intergenerational trauma. Jay spends as much time out of the family home as possible, but has been unable to hold down long-term employment. Their former partner invited them to move in together when she fell pregnant, however, the relationship broke down within six months and, when the child was less than two-months-old stated she wanted ‘nothing to do’ with Jay or the child. Jay, therefore, moved back in with their parents out of necessity, but expressed an interest in returning to education in the near future.
7. Analysis of Fieldwork: Overview & Emerging Themes

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is dedicated to examining the PhD fieldwork, identifying consistent themes between participant responses, making connections to the core theories outlined within the Literature Review chapter, and signposting towards the new understandings detailed in the subsequent chapter, Theoretical & Practical Findings. It opens by (i) Assessing the BINM Approach In-action to assess how entering the field without a pre-prescribed set of questions fared; a conversational, dialogue-oriented, and participant-led approach influenced by Freire (1972), Fielding (2001), Mezirow (1990), Ross and Moore (2016), and Socratic methods (Gose, 2009; Delic and Bećirović, 2016; Wells, 1999) having been favoured. After assessing how effective the BINM was in fostering an environment for effective discussions, a series of (ii) Emerging Themes are examined; e.g. notions of control; treating the family as a single unit; and gendered social struggles), before attention is redirected to the (iii) Identification of Core Themes - those that occurred in direct link to the four thematic discussion points. Finally, (iv) Early Concerns About the Pandemic are briefly acknowledged, demonstrating the situatedness of this research not only in geographical terms, but also with regards to its timing. The temporal nature pertains to the ‘age of austerity’, but recognises that this work was also conducted immediately prior to and as the impacts of the Covid-19 Coronavirus pandemic began to be felt.

Questions over how authentic the perceptions of what lone parenthood and broader life in north Edinburgh is, what it has constituted, and the suggested hardships reported in the previous academic literature as presented in the Literature Review are critically reflected upon. The presentation of this analysis is, therefore, offered under the same framing approach used for ‘Community Profiling’ as presented earlier. As such, it addresses, in turn, the same three subsections - (i) North Edinburgh as a Political Community; (ii) North Edinburgh as a Place to Live; and (iii) North Edinburgh as an Economic Community; with two further sections developed (iv) Transport Links within North Edinburgh; and (v) Artistic Responses to Life in North Edinburgh based on significant findings during the dialogues. Adopting a systematic method were proposed by Christakopoulou et al. (2001), with my own two additions intended to encompass a further practical element (transport links, both past and present) and creative aspects to life in north Edinburgh (artistic responses). Each aspect either served as a focus during the interviews or was, at least, touched upon enough to justify their addition. Furthermore, the analysis offered under each subheading aspects signposts - where appropriate - to the in-depth analysis offered on the range of emergent themes.

Rather than merely a redrafting of the earlier Community Profile, this edition allows a richer, better situated, and, indeed, more intimate understanding to emerge. Moving away from the objective statistically-evidenced and historical account of the earlier chapter, the synthesised subjective responses of the participants permit new knowledge that builds on the localised studies on north Edinburgh (e.g. Carlin, 2017; Greene, 2007; and Erskine and Breitenbach, 1994).

(A) Revisiting the Community Profile:

(i) North Edinburgh as a Political Community: As outlined during the Community Profile, north Edinburgh is, largely, understood locally to be an economically deprived but deeply politically conscious area. Residents have formed an abundance of collectives and associations including the North Edinburgh
#SaveOurServices to AAM and the Muirhouse Anti-racist Campaign (Campbell, 2019); whilst in major elections, a significant proportion of the electorate voted to secede from the UK, to remain in the EU, and have regularly voted to the left of the British and Scottish political spectrums. Much of this was echoed across the fieldwork with regular mentions of voting for the SNP, Labour, and occasionally naming the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP), as well as name-dropping particular politicians including local representatives such as former-MSP Malcolm Chisholm, MSP Ben MacPherson, Councillor Cammy Day, and MP Diedre Brock. Several looser mentions were offered of then-Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, then-British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, MSP John Swinney, and several former party leaders such as former leader of the Scottish Conservatives Ruth Davidson, as well as Theresa May and David Cameron (both former British Prime Ministers). Similarly, those who have held positions of relevance to lone parent family lives or who currently hold relevant ministerial positions such as Angela Constance (Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities, 2016-2018) and Aileen Campbell (Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government, 2018-2021) featured in several discussions. Numerous participants also outlined their roles in or relationships to aforementioned social movements centring on hyperlocalised issues - #1 Nick being amongst the most prominent members of North Edinburgh #SaveOurServices - whilst others had been present during the Muirhouse Anti-racist Campaign (#4 Lachlan), had created tenant groups (#29 June) or boasted aspirations to enter into electoral politics (#19 Dan).

The overall impression I was left with following the thirty-four discussions was that the participant cohort largely considered electoral politics in one of two ways: (i) by recognising and prioritising local politics and accountability (e.g. challenge Day, MacPherson, and Brock); or (ii) framing politics through a national lens of achieving independent Scottish statehood as a means for implementing social change. The latter frequently engaged in an anti-Tory and anti-cuts rhetoric, often as a suggested means for enabling an end to austerity - a sentiment redeployed during many elections both prior to and following the 2014 Scottish independence referendum. This observation will be further explored in subsection concerning Lone Parenthood as a Politically Transformative Experience, with numerous participants emphasising how their status as sole provider and carer influenced their personal politics, increased their consciousness and awareness of the relationship between the welfare state and parenthood (e.g. #10 Rona), hardened their beliefs in the British union or Scottish secession (particularly amongst male participants such as #6 Griff, #9 Frank, and #19 Dan), or fostered newfound empathy for numerous minority or marginalised groups (including people of colour, transgender people, those living with disabilities, and refugee populations; e.g. #11 Louise, and #32 Nicky).

(ii) North Edinburgh as a Place to Live: The fieldwork discussions reinforced the understanding suggested in the initial Community Profile that, contextually, lower rent prices were a major driving force for many residents moving to or remaining in north Edinburgh - particularly for those who didn’t already boast family histories of living in the area (e.g. #21 Edwina, #9 Frank, #5 Dee, #20 Nina, and #25 Aiden - each of whom cited this as a key factor). For many, raising their families in north Edinburgh was,

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62 It’s worth noting that the Scottish Socialist Party have not stood independently for election since 2011 when they last fielded candidates on the regional list accruing just 0.2% of the vote (8,272 votes) - significantly fewer than Scottish Senior Citizens Unity Party, the United Kingdom Independence Party, or the British National Party (Doleman, 2011). Voters in north Edinburgh were offered the opportunity to vote for RISE - Scotland's Left Alliance in 2016 which the SSP were a part of, though they won less than 0.5% of regional votes (CommonSpace, 2016).

63 Swinney was mentioned with regards to his role in children’s education.

64 ABC Finance (2018) placed Edinburgh amongst the cities with the highest costs of living in the UK.
therefore, as much - if not more – of an economic decision as social factors and affordability. What Uysal and Jurowski (1994; though the field of Human Geography and Sociology more generally) term ‘push and pull factors,’ however, were not the sole reasons that resulted in participants finding themselves living in north Edinburgh. For example, #2 Lawrence arrived through his EdIndex application; whilst #24 Pria was placed in the area (initially on a temporary basis); and for #18 Carol, it was the only affordable area in the capital for her when she left her previous partner.

Consequently, whilst those from outside of north Edinburgh - though particularly from outside of Scotland - spoke of trying to reduce their costs of living though maintaining manageable commutes to their places of work; participants with multi-generational histories such as #4 Lachlan, #2 Lawrence, and #16 Michael regularly highlighted the benefits they experienced through proximity to friends and family who were in a position to assist the participants with childcare indicating accuracy within the literature. #30 Marie and #13 Cally were amongst those who have built their own social and support networks in the time since they moved to the area – relationships which now serve as a reason to stay. The evidence collected by Third Sector organisations (OPFS, 2017, 2018) that emphasise the importance of familial support for lone parent families - at least for those who maintain a relationship with their relatives (#32 Nicky, #10 Rona, and #31 Jenny who stressed the absence of this form of support due to family relationship breakdowns) - was also echoed.

Several concerns were also raised about life in north Edinburgh, though much of it relevant to all residents as opposed to specifically affecting the lives of live parent families. Fears around antisocial behaviour from local young people with recent examples mentioned including a letter sent to all parents of students attending Craigroyston Community High School; the blanket ban (with threats of arrests) on all youths from the designated ‘dispersal zones’ set up for Bonfire Night 2020 which included anyone in parts of Muirhouse and West Pilton (Happs, 2020; Hislop, 2020); and the ongoing issues around motorbike theft (EEN, 2016). Similarly, mentions were made of the several young people who have been arrested in relation to racist attacks (verbal and physical) in recent years - including against Polish, Chinese, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi residents (see NEYPF, 2014; Muslim Engagement & Development, 2017).

Something that was not considered within the Community Profile - receiving only a minor explicit mention during the interviews but that has been observed personally during my time residing in north Edinburgh - is that on the day of Edinburgh’s Pride Marches local buses were full of, primarily, young adults sporting rainbow, bi-, pansexual, or transgender flags, and adorning make-up or face paints. Given that many hate crimes based on gender identity and sexuality have occurred locally in recent years (as noted above) - alongside anecdotal accounts from many residents (including myself and several of the lone parent participants including, #10 Rona, #32 Nicky, #31 Jenny, #15 Sasha, and #22 Nomi) of being subjected to homophobia or other queerphobic behaviours. For such prominence to be given to queer lives and queer politics locally, even if it is from those generally leaving the area to take part in activities located more centrally, is worthy of mention. Though there are certainly arguments and discussions to

65 #21 Edwina cited this as the biggest reason she has never considered relocating despite her financial situation meaning that she sleeps in the living room of her flat so that each of her teenage children may have their own bedroom.
66 The high percentage of male participants who grew up locally noted familial support with childcare contrasted with the several female participants who spoke of ‘going it alone’ (e.g. #21 Edwina, and #10 Rona).
be had regarding the mass commercialisation and, therein, the depoliticisation of Pride (see e.g. McVeigh, 2009; Conway, 2022, Murray, 2022, understanding that such actions constitute (for the most part) informed choices to make oneself known in situations that, at times, risk physical harm, these become deeply political decisions.67

(iii) North Edinburgh as an Economic Community: Amongst the participants, a handful spoke of currently owning or co-running their own businesses (e.g. #6 Griff; #32 Nicky; and #8 Mercy), with others advising they had a great degree of freedom to bring their children to work (#17 Meg). Many more, however, described their struggles with long term unemployment (e.g. #11 Louise; and #1 Nick), precarious contracts (#18 Carol68; #9 Frank, and #4 Lachlan), and the challenges of trying to create a positive work-life balance (#3 Lindsay; #16 Michael, #9 Frank, #13 Kelly, #26 Winnie, #7 Cathleen, and #33 Sasha) - though others such as #5 Dee suggested they’d achieved a decent balance between the two. Even amongst those more fortunate financially, with the intention to open up their own businesses (e.g. #32 Nicky with her optometry), such participants were generally unable to do so due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Though she was far from alone in her experience during the pandemic - with documented instances of similar struggles throughout the UK available from Bellis (2020), Rust (2020), Clinton (2020), and Murray (2020) - her lone parent status and singular reliance on her own income left her in a particularly precarious financial position. As with the above two sections (the political and the social), the series of interviews afforded greater intimacy and insight into the economic lives of lone parent families in north Edinburgh.

Given the rapidly increasing impact of Covid-19 on the lives of the lone parent participants, those involved within their own businesses or enterprises demonstrated significant self-awareness of their fortunate positions of economic privilege. Participant #16 Michael, for example, stated that the informal economy would keep him afloat, stating ‘I can’t image they’re likely to police spaces like car boot sales too heavily. I’m sure me and my lad can keep that going.’ However, as noted throughout the economic section of the earlier Community Profile, unemployment has, historically, been higher in northern areas such as Granton, Muirhouse, and West Pilton than in other parts of the Scottish capital. Concerns about sustained unemployment as well as access to education or training programmes were repeatedly expressed, indicating that the quantitative data largely aligns with the accounts shared via the qualitative research. The participants involved in short-term contract or precarious work (including those involved in creative spaces such as #30 Marie) projected that they might endure increased hardship depending on how challenging distance working proved to be.

(iv) Transport Links within North Edinburgh: A history that I’d been completely oblivious to but that became apparent during the discussions was that of north Edinburgh’s former railway lines. Whilst the bus network (generally operated by Lothian Buses) was praised for its comprehensiveness by #16 Michael, #9 Frank, and #11 Louise, amongst others, it was, however, critiqued for the length of time it takes to travel between points of the city (e.g. #12 Kelly who had been forced to sell her car after

67 Similarly, though it took place after the fieldwork was completed, many people of colour based in north Edinburgh - along with supporters of racial justice, equality, and accountability (including several interviewees) - were witnessed heading towards Holyrood Park (EH8 8HG) for the static and socially distanced Black Lives Matter protest in June 2020 (Salmond, 2020; and STV News, 2020).

68 #18 Carol had already lost her job due to the cessation of the groups she ran for a local queer charity due to the pandemic. In contrast, #9 Frank was already classed as a Key Worker by the time our interview took place.
losing her job). Though the interviewees never experienced these train lines when they were still in operation, several of the routes remain open as walkways. North Edinburgh once boasted several railway stations, with stops at Granton, New Haven, Trinity, and Davidson Mains, yet these gradually ceased as commercial lines during the 1950’s, 1960’s, and 1970’s. Of particular interest was the Leith - Granton line which closed permanently in November 1925 (Quick, 2002), with several interviewees mentioning that they lived in north Edinburgh but needed to find work in other parts of the city - the relationship between travel times, care responsibilities, and work was a key concern for parents though especially lone parents without support networks that could assist with out-of-hours childcare. This issue was further highlighted when #12 Kelly and #3 Lindsay spoke of direct conflicts between the costs of private car ownership, reliance on others to accommodate or adhere to the lone parents’ transport needs, online access and the cost of delivery services, and navigating public transport with (potentially) several young children and any goods purchased.

(v) Artistic Responses to Life in North Edinburgh: Art was an element that didn’t really feature during the discussions and, consequently, is perhaps an aspect of life in north Edinburgh that could be directly explored in future research. Though the cafe space in the local art centre (North Edinburgh Arts Centre) served as the location for several of the initial interviews, creative arts – save for with #30 Marie - were only mentioned in relation to the participants’ children (e.g #2 Lawrance, #17 Meg, and #5 Dee). #2 Lawrence did run his own weekly youth club prior to the pandemic and #17 Meg led several youth groups, yet, in this example, the art centre served as the venue for the sports class rather than necessarily being related to their purpose. The conversations that did veer towards the arts primarily centred around the interests of participants’ children (e.g. #2 Lawrence sharing his daughter’s drawing that he kept in his wallet), with the occasional mention of opportunities offered through local youth clubs. Beyond this, several youth groups and community choirs do operate locally (e.g. Tinderbox, and the Ama-zing Harmonies Community Choir), whilst the arts centre also hosts a recording studio.

(B) Assessing the BINM Approach In-action:

The selected research technique of BINM was chosen due to the freedom it afforded participants to take the fieldwork discussions in whichever direction they felt was most appropriate based on the SQIN (that initial prompt), therein presenting their lived biographies in their own narrative terms and with whatever structure worked for them. Though the earliest interviews occurred as intended, with both actors (interviewer and interviewee) sat in a secluded location within pre-identified community spaces (e.g. the North Edinburgh Arts Centre cafe) or another venue at the participant’s request (e.g. their workplace after hours), the Covid-19 Coronavirus pandemic and subsequent phases of lockdown implemented by the Scottish Government (2020a; 2020b; 2020c) and UK Government (2020a; 2020b) required significant adaptations to the setting in which interviews occurred. As I chronicled in Campbell (2021, pp.574-575):

‘[t]hough early interviews had taken place in community centres (participants #1 Nick and #2 Lawrence), public cafes (participant #11 Louise), and in the interviewee’s workplace after hours (participants #3 Lindsay and #6 Griff), the interviews involving participants #10 - #34 took place online utilising either video or audio facilities on WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, or phone calls with the discussion recorded (once consent had been gained) on a Dictaphone. The intended approach of conducting the interviews in neutral venues was designed to avoid confusion or blurring the distinctions
between neighbour, practitioner, and academic researcher, whilst also supporting local businesses by purchasing coffee for both the participant and the researcher when utilising these local facilities. Fortunately, the original ethical approval application had included opportunities for would-be participants to express a preference for over-the-one interviews where this was preferred over in-person discussions, and consequently no adaptations were required from an ethical perspective.

The shift to utilising video technology drastically altered the interview dynamic as both the researcher and the interviewee now found themselves presented, at least partially, with the other’s home, bringing with it (or perhaps risking) exposure to their family members, home decor, and often amusing interruptions from pets (mostly on the researcher’s end). So too, however, it brought additional research challenges, of which the physical distance was perhaps the most significant. When participant #4 Lachlan broke down momentarily at the commencement of his in-person interview due to the nature of his ‘pathway to lone parenthood,’ it was possible for the researcher to bring him a tissue from the interviewee’s kitchen; however when participant #25 Aiden needed to interrupt the interview to compose themself, it was still easy enough for the researcher to give them a moment alone by pausing the recording. Although it was possible for embodied sympathy to be conveyed through the digital mediums when video technology was the preferred medium, the physical distance seemed to extend into the emotional. This was emphasised by two instances in which participants requested audio-only interviews during which moments of silence and attempts to offer emotional space may just as easily have been misunderstood as merely waiting for the participant to resume talking, or worse concern that the phone call had been cut off. Though there is certainly further consideration to be given to the impact of bearing witness to each other’s appearance and the impact this has (e.g. perceived professional dress, tattoos, piercings, etc.) in-person or over video, the primary conclusions here must acknowledge the struggle to comfort participants at a distance (either visually or audibly).'

What became obvious through these online dialogues was that witnessing each other’s homes and unintentionally encountering members of their family created an unintended intimacy between researcher and participant. These discussions no longer exclusively involved the narration offered by the interviewee, but several respondents likened the space offered by the BNM and its dialogically-informed approach to a counselling session in the way they were permitted to speak openly and uninterrupted (#21 Edina, #26 Kim, and #32 Nicky amongst them). Others stated that they welcomed the opportunity to converse with another adult due to the social isolation they had already endured in the earliest stages of the Covid-19 outbreak and the imposed lockdown. In addition, though a wealth of accommodations were intended to permit the research interviews to take place at the time and day which best suited participants (generally when their children were still at school or at after-school clubs), the pandemic resulted in an unexpected range of responses with the plan of controlling my identities as an academic, activist, and local resident no longer possible due to the home environment setting.

Unexpectedly, in several instances, the lone parent participants encouraged their children to wave to the camera and occasionally - such as with #18 Carol and #21 Edina - they asked their child to tell me about
their experiences of having only one parent or indeed how they navigated having multiple families. One particularly joyous moment occurred when a young boy, at his mother’s prompting, nervously showed his painted red nails to the camera, enabling me to display my own varnished black nails into the camera, bringing a massive smile to the child’s face. With several of the early interviews having taken place whilst children were in school, the aforementioned intimacy created by home-to-home video dialogues resulted in numerous positive moments between the researcher, the interviewee, and (at times) their family, which would never have taken place within the approach of entering neutral spaces.

Though the central actors within this PhD are the lone parent participants and without their interest, candour, and cooperation, the research would not have been viable, the following is produced largely as an autoethnographic account of several of the interview sessions, documenting key moments or changes (voluntarily or forced) that took place as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Written in a first-person narrative so as not to impose or project my own thought processes onto the research participants, the intention here, with its emphasis on the emotional, physical, and other sensory experiences, is to offer an immersive take on the fieldwork experience by taking account of aspects that may otherwise have become lost in the analysis69 (Hedican, 2006; Geertz, 1973; Caretta and Jokinen, 2017). Hedican (2006, p.17) is amongst those to stress the importance of such considerations, stating that ‘despite the importance […] of experience in fieldwork, there nonetheless is a dearth of critical or analytical discussions of it in the literature, aside from the various descriptive accounts of this phenomenon.’ Arguing that this absence ‘suggest[s] that the importance of experience as an epistemological factor in qualitative research should be a matter of greater concern in the qualitative methodology literature’, Hedican (2006) encourages social science researchers to sincerely engage with elements that have historically been better addressed within feminist, queer, and intersectional approaches to qualitative research (see also Young and Lee 1996, and Caretta and Jokinen, 2017).

Others, such as Hubbard et. al. (2001, p.120) term this type of understanding as ‘emotionally-sensed knowledge’ whilst suggesting that this account might be termed ‘confessional tales’ from the field - a technique that Sparks (1992) suggests is ‘distinguishable by their [its] personalized style that emphasize and elucidate the researcher’s point of view.’ Thus, if we accept the emotional components within fieldwork apply not only to the ‘risks’ incurred by raising ‘sensitive topics’ during the interview (Lee, 1993) and acknowledge that both [i]t[he] emotions of the respondent and also those of the researcher are likely to influence and inform our understandings of the topic under investigation, then […] by discussing the role of emotion in research we [can better] explore some of the ways in which emotion impacts on our understandings of the data’ generated by the current fieldwork (Hubbard et. al., 2001, p.121). Furthermore, the same researchers suggest that the emotional compenence to practice involves three distinct but non-separable phases:

‘First, there is the ‘emotional labour’70 (Hochschild 1983) of a researcher. For instance, during fieldwork the researcher may encounter emotionally disturbing situations, [and

69 ‘Researchers are not just situated on the margins of the community life that is studied; they are also an integral component of the knowledge that is gained and processed. As such, the researcher’s inner experience of this endeavor is an important facet of how it is that we come to understand understandings not our own’ Hedican (2006, p.23).
70 ‘[D]efined as the type of work that involves feelings and may be contrasted with physical or task-oriented labour’ (Hubbard et. al., 2001).
find themselves in situations where emotional support for the respondent is called for. Through encounters and experiences in the field, a researcher may also reflect on their own lives and personal situations which in turn, may induce feelings about their sense of self. Second, there is the role of ‘emotionally-sensed knowledge’ [stemming from Hanano, 1990] in the research process. This refers to the epistemology of emotion, where emotion contributes towards understanding and knowledge. The researcher uses their emotion in the field, in discussions with colleagues, during personal reflections and when analysing the data, to gain insight and give meaning to their interpretations of the subject that they are investigating. Third, there is a sociology of emotion [whereby] a researcher may describe the types of emotion that respondents express and they may also interpret the nature of the rules that govern the presentation of feelings, which are subject to these rules, within particular social settings.’

Consequently, the interactions with the participants considered below were selected in order to convey a diversity of settings, sensations, and sounds as I experienced them in my role of researcher during the interviews, whilst also providing greater context to the physical settings in which the fieldwork took place.

Hedican (2006, p18) has proposed that self-reflection and communication enable the researcher to ‘connect the personal to the cultural,’ adding that ‘an important aspect of the introspection process that would serve to illuminate more fully the ethnographer’s personal experience [via] a focus on the emotional aspects of qualitative research.’ To an extent, this has been noted in other sections of the thesis when describing interactions such as #2 Lawerance asking whether he could show me his daughter’s drawings or when #4 Lachlan provided a tour of the awards and trophies his daughter had won through her sporting prowess. These elements would ordinarily not have appeared in the transcript but would be more commonly expected within an ethnographic investigation or fieldwork diaries (Owton and Allen-Collinson, 2013). They do, however, tie into concepts of ‘role performance’ (ibid.) which may stem from either the capacity in which the participant and I were engaging or may be a direct beneficial consequence of creating a space which provided the participant with an opportunity to talk freely about their children; indeed, a more emotionally settled #4 Lachlan looked proudly upon a photograph of his daughter competing and stated gently ‘she’s the reason I do it’. Whether he meant how he found the motivation to strive on after losing his partner, or if he’s re-focused on the political components of building for a better society is unclear. The pride, however, shines through. Hedican (2006), however, is far from alone in this hypothesis, with Ellis (1991, p.45), for example, proposing that ‘sociological introspection provides a way to look at the lived experience of emotions, but it requires that we [also] study our own emotions’ by connecting sensory and non-verbal communications to the transcribed dialogues - therein creating a more holistic representation of the fieldwork interactions and enabling a ‘richer’ analysis.

As noted in Campbell (2021, p.575) ‘[t]he intended approach of conducting the interviews in neutral venues was designed to avoid confusion or blurring the distinctions between neighbour, practitioner, and academic researcher, whilst also supporting local businesses by purchasing coffee for both the participant and the researcher when utilising these local facilities.’ For example, during the interview with #1 Nick, we met in a local cafe space within the arts centre and were, therefore, surrounded by noise, families eating, friends catching up, or colleagues grabbing a quick chat over a coffee. Ordinarily,
this would, perhaps, constitute an environment that may not necessarily have been ideal for such an intimate and personal discussion, but it was, nevertheless, a setting that the participant themself had proposed. Whilst the space was filled with noise, the Dictaphone was close enough to #1 Nick to pick up everything he shared. Yet, when we compare this to the interview with #4 Lachlan, he and I met in his home, surrounded by his own artworks, photographs, and furniture, accompanied only by the cyclical sound of his washing machine. It was a deeply private setting, and though similar topics were addressed, the atmosphere was far more intimate, silent at times, and openly upsetting when the conversation turned to his late partner (something less likely to occur in a public space). Others, such as #5 Dee, and #24 Pria have been selected for the below sampling to convey the differences in dynamic and context of before and after social distancing guidelines came into place, requiring the use of digital communication methods - be that over-the-phone discussions whilst children were at school, in the middle of the children’s dinner, or after they were tucked up in bed.

**Phase #1: The In-person Interviews (Public and Private Settings)**

**#1 Nick:** Though we’d know each other for several years, almost since I first moved to north Edinburgh, #1 Nick and I had rarely spoken one-to-one on topics beyond our shared political interests, beliefs, and activism - particularly at the local level. Though I was aware of his status as a lone parent, the revelations and experiences he was kind enough to share during our discussions conveyed a far less confident, uncertain, and even anxious side than I’d been afforded sight of previously. This became particularly apparent when he spoke of his younger self and the build-up to the successful (from his perspective) court case, in which he represented himself, that saw his son start to live with him instead of the child’s maternal grandmother. Until this point (that is, our fieldwork discussion), his demeanour and actions as a community leader, an articulate spokesperson ready to challenge the City of Edinburgh Council, and an all-round activist, formed almost my entire impression of him - the exception being that we encountered each other infrequently during one of my degree course placements whilst #1 Nick was running a cooking class for local parents. Yet, it transpired that the ways he has matured as an individual, how he has come to understand his personal struggles with depression and substance abuse, as well as engaging in low level criminality following separation from the mother of his child, are the very ‘events’ that facilitated this growth into the person he is today. Based on our dialogue, the older Nick - the one I’ve now come to now know in a new light - is, I believe, entirely deserving of his social standing as a respected community leader, possessing lived experiences mirroring issues many people across north Edinburgh have benefited from or endured, affording him a unique position locally. These insights range from receiving an education at the local college to accessing - then volunteering - with several community-based services, and his various encounters with the local police, whilst his capacity to motivate and rally others to the causes detrimentally affecting his community suggests many others see him in a similar light.

Meeting in a community space that we were each familiar with created a sense of comfort for both of us as hoped for when preparing for fieldwork that centres on such potentially distressing and sensitive

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71 This having been the case since the child’s mother (Nick’s former partner) had been hospitalised and eventually sectioned due to her poor mental health.

72 Something Mcconnell-Henry et al., 2014, p.3) describe as essential in prompting researchers to ‘offer[...] a safe and comfortable setting in which to “open-up”’.
topics. Our pre-existent peer activist relationship\textsuperscript{73} seemed to create an atmosphere of ease as we grabbed a seat at the far side of the cafe. No children were in the play area so, despite the busyness of the cafe, we were able to hear each other quite clearly from around a metre apart. \#1 Nick was appreciative of the offer of a coffee and, as we settled down to begin the interview, he appeared to code-switch a little from the casualness of five minutes earlier when we greeted each other to a more business-like demeanour - as if intent on sharing serious insights and experiences relating to his life as a lone parent during our chat given the uniqueness and contest of this encounter. Knowing the thoroughness with which he prepared his previous statements addressing the City of Edinburgh Council during previous campaigns (several of which we have both been involved in), I would not have been surprised if \#1 Nick had taken a notepad out of his bag, listing key points he had identified following my initial explanation of the PhD project over-the-phone a few days earlier. I believe my observations of the seriousness with which he was engaging in the project are validated by the fact \#1 Nick was the one who, already rising to grab his walking stick, proposed that we relocate to a quieter part of the building to continue the interview after a few more families entered the cafe to have lunch. Though I’d never used it previously, \#1 Nick led me to the elevator as we moved to a more private space on the first floor.

Sitting almost directly across from each other, just off-centre at our circular table - seemingly at the only seating area upstairs - \#1 Nick was more familiar with the upper level than me. I’d only been in this part of the building once before when meeting with a former colleague who’d started a job with a charity involved in an office-share a little further along the brightly lit corridor. Every member of staff who passed our table acknowledged us both. With the exception of the centre manager and a young person to whom I was once their youth worker, \#1 Nick was certainly more familiar with them, telling me their names and providing a rough outline of each person’s role or the community groups that they attended. We were left largely in peace for the duration of our interview and, as if to illustrate both how well connected he is socially and the seriousness with which he took the discussion, he led me round two separate tables in the cafe, introducing me to other lone parents (of which \#2 Lawrence immediately offered to be interviewed there and then). Ever a community leader, and eager to help \#1 Nick suggested that we use the same table upstairs for this second interview.

\textbf{\#4 Lachlan:} Like \#1 Nick, I’ve known \#4 Lachlan for a while - circa four years at the time of our interview. Perhaps slightly hot-headed when he believes someone is acting disrespectfully towards those whom he cares about - an issue he raises regarding the first time he witnessed men on the street objectifying his young daughter (who was aged thirteen in the story he shares), but also something that has occurred when incidents of a racist, sexist, or homophobic nature have taken place in his presence - he’s been a committed activist, and always seemed a driven individual. Now, seemingly matured and politically-seasoned, he is increasingly calculated in the battles he chooses, both politically and socially. This is something that credits to his age. Now with an adult daughter, I’m fortunate enough to know both of them quite well, though, once again, as with \#1 Nick, the majority of my previous interactions with \#4 Lachlan had occurred in a very set context of political and social activism. I would suggest, however, that of the thirty-four research participants, \#4 Lachlan is the one with whom I came closest during the fieldwork to navigating what Owton and Allen-Collinson (2013) term ‘the dual researcher-friend role.’\textsuperscript{74}

\textsuperscript{73} McConnell-Henry et al. (2014, p.2) identify such familiarity as a deeply under-researched area arguing that the ‘effect this prior knowledge may have on the research and the researcher’ demands consideration.

\textsuperscript{74} Tillmann-Healy (2003) argue that some researchers and interviewees ‘come and stay together primarily through common interests, a sense of alliance, and emotional affiliation; in friends, we seek a gamut of elements such as
From the times he’s voiced his opinions, proposed points of action, or chosen to speak out against others’ conduct within our usual shared spheres of interaction, my experience is that his actions are generally based on principled dissent and his conscience. I also became increasingly aware during our discussion that his beliefs stem from how he understands issues as affecting others in his life (street harassment, sexism, racism, transphobia, the asylum process, etc.). He’s someone whom I would, for the most part, align with quite readily on most issues, however, this was the first time that I had entered into what had been his family home even prior to the daughter’s birth. Entering the building, therefore, constituted a choice to blur the boundaries of our previous exclusively political dynamic - demonstrating the capacity Ellis (2007), Tillmann-Healy (2003), and Owton and Allen-Collinson (2013) highlighted for research to forever alter any pre-existing relationships. This concerns those I’ve termed in Figure #1 as ‘known participants.’ Owton and Allen-Collinson (2013) go as far as to suggest that these ‘overlapping relationships in the research may make loyalties, confidences, and awareness contexts much more difficult for all [involved] to negotiate,’ though they also stress that ‘the research encounter might constitute merely a brief and relatively unimportant episode in an ongoing deep friendship or alternatively may require long-term commitment to the project, involving the revealing of intimate, personal information.’ Every step, therefore, was taken to contextualise the interview and promise confidentiality during initial contact with would-be participants, at the commencement of our sessions, and a reminder was stated afterwards.

#4 Lachlan grew up in Muirhouse and - with the exception of his now adult child - his entire extended family remain in Greater Pilton. Most of our social and cultural references for north Edinburgh overlap, though it becomes clear that there are an increasing number of buildings in other parts of the area that have been repurposed or demolished since #4 Lachlan last visited without a set purpose of specifically seeing his mother or uncle. Though around two decades apart, we both worked across many of the same venues in Muirhouse and East Pilton, though the tumultuous nature of community projects and the precariousness of funding means that several of the organisations or projects #4 Lachlan was once involved and now go by different names or have been replaced by incredibly similar projects when funding needs dictated rebranding or reimagining. I’m conscious that to have acted as if I understood #4 Lachlan’s north Edinburgh of some twenty years ago and longer would have not only been disingenuous but also have failed to heed Smith et al.’s (2009) warning of being ‘wary of assuming[, perhaps, over] commonality of experience’ with my participants75 despite an already apparent abundance of overlaps or assumptions several participants had regarding my own knowledge of events, locations, or people from - sometimes significantly - before I moved to the area.

Though the majority of Pilton and Granton features multi-storey flats, #4 Lachlan’s semi-detached house in the west feels as though it could just as easily be located down a side street in Granton or Davidson Mains. Everything from the garden to the fencing feels familiar, well-tended to but not pretentious. This is the first interview to take place in a participant’s home rather than a community centre, workplace, or trust, honesty, respect, commitment, safety, support, generosity, loyalty, mutuality, constancy, understanding, and acceptance’.

75 Similarly, and perhaps of greater relevance, is Owton and Allen-Collinson’s (2013) concern that, in dealing with sensitive issues such as grief, that our participant ‘wants our sympathy’. The reality of interviews, like with #4 Lachlan, are that these events happened many years prior, and the interviewee has dealt (or not) with them in their own way.
coffee shop and though we know each other well enough, I’m highly conscious that #4 Lachlan’s reaction to the topics raised during the interview could have gone down possible extremes that would, arguably, otherwise not be as great of a risk when chatting in a relatively neutral venue like the arts centre. Given the comfort of his own home, there were opportunities to refer to specific items he had to-hand that related to the stories he shared, or to take space as he needed it without any awkwardness of the participant stepping out of a coffee shop to stand alone. There was, however, also the risk that such a private setting and the significance of it to him could easily cause the themes of our dialogue or questions for clarity to feel like an intrusion into his life - as if breaching what ordinarily served as a safe space, a personal retreat, by bringing a non-family member into it. I also know that despite our ‘intimate familiarity’ (Hanyano, 1990, p.100), the circumstances of his ex-partner’s passing are something I’ve never heard him openly discuss. Fortunately, through a combination of our participant agreement, the trust exhibited in agreeing to take part,76 and a pre-existent mutual respect created an easy atmosphere. We took breaks as necessary, and grabbed a coffee in his kitchen later midway through the interviews to allow distance from particularly emotional topics whilst he showed me the flowers he’s been growing. When the interview was over, #4 Lachlan caught the bus back into town with me and our conversation returned to much the same topics we’d usually discuss. All seemed well.

Phase #2: Covid-19 & Digital Communication

As noted above, over-the-phone and video call interviews were always intended to be offered as options for would-be participants. At the onset, the hope was that a majority of the fieldwork would be conducted face-to-face using neutral venues so as not to overstep particular boundaries between researcher and participants. In part, this was due to the complexity of insider-research positionality given my own residency in north Edinburgh, bringing with it the reasonable assumption of regular future encounters whilst we went about our own daily business when highly personal information may have been shared during the interview. The onset of the Covid-19 Coronavirus pandemic brought about a rapid halt to face-to-face discussions, and it was decided when the first recommendations came from the Scottish Government (2020) in mid-March 2020 that, for the protection of all parties, utilising alternative means of communication would constitute best practice physically and ethically. ‘[I]nterviews involving participants #10 - #34 [therefore] took place online utilising either video or audio facilities on WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, or phone calls with the discussion recorded (once consent had been gained) on a dictaphone’ (Campbell, 2021, p.575). However, as noted in Campbell (2021, p.571) ‘[t]he subsequent closure of many community-based institutes through which recruitment had been intended to take place represented a significant challenge to completing the investigation.’ The following examples, thus, offer an indication of the differences between the in-person interviews, as described above, and the distance methods or those that took place during the Covid-19 period.

#5 Dee: In the first over-the-phone discussion to take place, the initial wave of physical distancing guidelines and the early indication of the impending social lockdown was not held fully realised. I felt

76 FitzGerald (1995) argues that this is ‘paramount to the participant opening up and sharing their experiences’, stressing that an ‘understanding of their situation’ - that is lived, social, economic, and political context of an area - can help facilitate this. McConnell-Henry et. al. (2014, p.3) similarly propose that ‘when the researcher and participant have a pre-existing relationship the stages of rapport building are rapidly accelerated’. Explicitly opposed to situated relationships, however, Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) attest that ‘the researcher should aim to develop an empathetic rapport with the participant while concurrently preserving social and intellectual distance’. 

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fortunate that I loosely knew the participant, #5 Dee, having met her perhaps twice previously, including once with her young daughter. As such there was a small degree of familiarity. Though it was not much, I felt it afforded me an easier first non-face-to-face interview than launching into what was a planned option for participants, but the circumstances of a suddenly impending global pandemic meant many people were already feeling uncertain. I want to thank #5 Dee for her understanding as we worked through minor language barriers without the opportunity to witness each other’s body language - something Hochschild (1983, p.32) raised when stressing that ‘we infer other people’s viewpoints from how they display feeling[s].’ Though the transcript demonstrated a less dense conversation than several other interviews, the slower pace of this dialogue was a vital practice in navigating difference. The conversation took place once #5 Dee’s daughter was asleep, enabling a free flow of conversation without concerns that the child may hear information that were not privy to.

**#24 Pria:** This is the only participant to advise that, regardless of the social context and physical distancing required by the Scottish Government (2020), she was only interested in taking part via audio-only phone call. This, she stated, was down to the cultural stigma around lone parenthood she described within Indian culture and the social anxiety she felt as a result of the abandonment she and her son had been subjected to by her former partner, the child’s father, who - as stated in the Participant Biographies section - started cheating on her some months before she and their son joined him in Edinburgh. As a result of her preference for an audio-only discussion, #24 Pria’s interview was, beyond a few issues regarding my accent, amongst the most straightforward and easy-going digitally-conducted sessions during the fieldwork stage conducted during the pandemic. She was eager to avoid any risk of being recognised in the street after our interview, which she stated was down to her difficult and emotionally sensitive history. As she expressed during the conversation, it is unlikely that she would have agreed to take part had she not been in as secure, safe, and settled a position by the time of our interview.

A topic addressed in the first publication to stem from this Ph.D., Campbell (2021, p.575) advises that:

‘The shift to utilising video technology drastically altered the interview dynamic as both the researcher and the interviewee now found themselves presented, at least partially, with the other’s home, bringing with it (or perhaps risking) exposure to their family members, home decor, and often amusing interruptions from pets (mostly on the researcher’s end). So too, however, it brought additional research challenges, of which the physical distance was perhaps the most significant. When participant #4 Lachlan broke down momentarily at the commencement of his in-person interview due to the nature of his ‘pathway to lone parenthood’, it was possible for the researcher to bring him a tissue from the interviewee’s kitchen; however when participant #25 Aiden needed to interrupt the interview to compose themself, it was still easy enough for the researcher to give them a moment alone by pausing the recording. Although it was possible for embodied sympathy to be conveyed through the digital mediums when video technology was the preferred medium, the physical distance seemed to extend into the emotional. This was emphasised by two instances in which participants requested audio-only interviews during which moments of silence and attempts to offer emotional space may just as easily have been misunderstood as merely waiting for the participant to resume talking, or worse concern that the phone call had been cut off.
Though there is certainly further consideration to be given to the impact of bearing witness to each other’s appearance and the impact this has (e.g. perceived professional dress, tattoos, piercings, etc.) in-person or over video, the primary conclusions here must acknowledge the struggle to comfort participants at a distance (either visually or audibly).

(C) Establishing Themes:

The BINM approach enabled me to develop a sense of whether the themes shown in the transcripts reflected the understandings of lone parenthood within the related literature, as well as in the diverse range of intersecting identities and lived experiences more broadly. During this analysis phase, (i) Desire for Control Over Immediate Environment; (ii) Parenthood as A Politically Transformative Process; (iii) Family Becoming a Singular Unit; (iv) Relationship to Work; (v) Broader Social Support; (vi) Gendered Struggles; and (vii) Discussing Lone Parenthood with Child(ren), were overtly consistent themes and constitute a similarity in lived experiences, to some extent, amongst the thirty-four participants. In order to fully understand the significance and nuances of these seven emergent themes, it’s vital to ensure that the reader engages with them in-context. As such, the following paragraphs provide immersive contextualisation through the responses of the participants, highlighting particular concerns or comments.

Like with Riggs et al. (2021, p.10) ‘key themes were developed through a process of repeated readings of the initial data, and developing codes into coherent thematic groupings.’ When combined with regular re-listens of the audio-recorded interviews - a format that allowed for a more intimate experience of the emotions and intonation of the discussions than could occur through exclusively re-visiting the transcriptions - the humanity of the participants remained intact in a manner that would otherwise have become lost. McNeill (2021) is amongst those to have stressed that social science research frequently - in essence - steals people’s stories as it ‘simplifies, flattens and distorts them [in] ways that […] alienates, marginalises and excludes people.’ The limitations of the doctoral submissions mean that, precisely as with Riggs et al. (2021), ‘the quotations included in the results are indicative but not exhaustive of each theme,’ but rather ‘representative.’

In his investigation of the lives of lone fathers in California (US), Jones (2021) adopted a similarly analytic approach which, generating eight themes: ‘(a) societal stressors, (b) the aftermath of separation from child’s mother, (c) the reason for separation from child’s mother, (d) hands-on work in raising a child and accomplishing chores, (e) economic stressors, (f) help in caring for a child, (g) motivated by own child to do better, and (h) developed ‘resilience’.

7.1 Desire for Control Over Immediate Environment:

A desire for control was observed amongst those who had experienced all manner of ‘paths to lone parenthood’ and, generally, involved working to establish a sense of security and stability for the lone parent and their child(ren) after divorce, death, separation, or after a decision to ‘go it alone.’ This was particularly prominent in situations of risk and trauma concerning the primary caregiver, their child(ren), or both parties (including coerciveness, violence, or abandonment). For several participants (including #3
Lindsay, and #12 Kelly), a lack of financial control and the perceived removal of agency to challenge their circumstances was a major source of anxiety and stress. This extended to those with experiences of life in refugee centres and emergency accommodation, ostracization from relatives (either via abandonment or active exclusion from family events, for example, relating to sexuality and entering new romantic or sexual relationships).

Such stress also manifested when participants spoke of trying to address harms from situations involving abuse of power. In some instances, this stemmed from sexual abuse and financial exploitation during previous intimate relations (though not exclusively involving the co-parent or former partner?), drastically impacting many participants’ self-perceived capacity to build trusting relationships during which another adult may come to assume partial responsibility for the child’s welfare. In other cases, however, this desire for forms of control (arguably inclusive of financial or housing security) resulted in radical individual transformation with examples ranging from a participant’s capacity or desire to return to or enter work, training, education with a view to improving the life circumstances of their family (e.g. #20 Nina, #16 Michael, #28 Lucy, #29 June, and #12 Kelly), to the opposite choice, whereby other participants chose to remove themselves from work commitments, as far as possible, to allow more time with their children (e.g. #3 Lindsay, #4 Lachlan, #33 Sasha, and #17 Meg). At times this required removing themselves from their children temporarily or longer term (e.g. #33 Sasha), though in other instances (such as #1 Nick, and #16 Michael) such transformation meant becoming the primary carer.

Others detailed their ambitions to implement larger scale change, such as #19 Dan who intended to enter politics to challenge social attitudes towards fathers (relating to the following subsection). #33 Sasha’s decision to encourage her son to move in with his father and step-mother to enable her to re-enter education for her personal and professional development was an approach she, herself, believed to be highly unusual, but necessary.

‘It wasn’t so much a discussion, rather I told him [her son], you’re going to live with your dad and step-mummy now. Mummy need some space to work on herself for a while’

- #33 Sasha

#17 Meg also raised this idea of control and fostering a sense of agency in her kids, stating that her older daughter (aged sixteen) wanted more say in which of her parents she stayed with each night (her biological mother, biological father, or the mother’s ex-partner who had also raised her). Whilst not articulated in the same explicit manner, the younger daughter (aged ten at the time of our interview) was struggling - prior to #17 Meg’s current partner coming into her life - with what was for her the first parental split she’d known. #20 Nina communicated similar ambitions, but contextualised them in relation to her financial precarity:

‘Money was always tight. I mean, I came across to the UK to be a care worker, but, at the time, I was a bit… I don’t know… young and dumb. I mean, I don’t regret my kid at all. I’d always wanted babies. But, I probably would’ve stayed together with him [the ex-partner] for longer to look after the kid, but it was a bit of a relief when we broke up. I’d been a stay-at-home mum since we moved to Edinburgh and when he revealed that he’d met someone else I got my life

As had been the case for #23 Pam who stated she had ‘never really felt like a lone parent’ until separating from the partner she had been with for the first four years of her child’s life.
back on track - tough as it was - I got myself into work. If it happened today and I was in the same situation, when I know how tight money is, I would definitely have moved back to Germany. It would have made the housing situation much easier.’

Her financial struggles not only fostered an intense level of what she termed ‘comradery’ with other lone parents, yet, even with her knowledge that trading childcare was helping out other lone parents, she communicated what I can only describe as feelings of guilt when others were caring for her children. She said that though she ‘hugely appreciated others taking [her] kids for the weekend’ when she had exams after returning to education, she could never shake the feeling that her children eating others’ food might be harming the caregivers’ own tight budget.

7.2 Parenthood as a Politically Transformative Process:

The majority of participants had, themselves, been raised in north Edinburgh, with others migrating to the area in later life - some before the birth of their children. There was a distinct understanding of north Edinburgh (more specifically what was Greater Pilton) as an area of, in many respects, severe multiple deprivation - in-keeping with the indicators within the SIMD (2016) – with various mentions of various local issues during the discussions. These included perceptions of antisocial behaviour by local youths; and a lack of prioritisation by the state. Several interviewees, however, noted progressive initiatives within the local community (e.g. #11 Louise; #8 Mercy; and #17 Meg), whilst others praised self-sufficiency via a group identity and a do-it-yourself approach (e.g. #29 June; #2 Lawrence; and #1 Nick) where state provision was deemed to be failing. Several participants – including #1 Nick, #31 Jenny; and #29 June) suggested that democratically elected representatives (at local council, Holyrood, and Westminster levels) rarely held authentic understandings of life in areas such as West Pilton, Muirhouse, and Drylaw. As such, some of the participants had taken it upon themselves either to present evidence during consultations at the City Chambers, or had chosen to stand for positions as trustees on local community-based services. Often this was the direct result of a desire to protect existing services and, by extension, members of the local communities from the ‘violence of austerity’ (Cooper and Whyte, 2017). Occasionally this was supported by long-standing local services - as witnessed with AAM and the North Edinburgh #SaveOurServices campaign (Di Marco Campbell, Forthcoming), whilst elements of this anti-austerity activist mentality were also seen historically in work from North Edinburgh Fights Back and the Muirhouse Anti-Racism Campaign (SEE, 1993).

A significant number of the interviewees spoke explicitly about their personal politics, openly describing themselves as ‘socialist’ (e.g. #26 Winnie, #4 Lachlan, #17 Meg, #9 Frank, and #32 Nicky), ‘social democrat’ (#6 Griff), ‘anarchist (#5 Dee) or otherwise socially-inclined. For many, this manifested foremost in significant efforts to self-educate on both the circumstances and political ideologies that had led to their various situations (as occurred with the lone parent collectives AAM and Focus E15) and about other people’s social, emotional, and political struggles (taking place through a combination of learning from peer actions, engagement in electoral democracy, and witnessing or participating in social movements or protests; e.g. #6 Griff, #7 Cathleen, #1 Nick , #4 Lachlan, #9 Frank, and #8 Mercy). Indeed, political struggles around race, the politics of ethnicity, migration, gender, disability, and sexuality were frequently raised organically during conversations - with participants either treating the topic in isolation or considering them explicitly as intersectional.
Political party allegiances and affiliations to a range of social movements emerged through a combination of discussions around familial values (generally those of their own parents) and life experiences; however, very few participants perceived their becoming a lone parent as a transformative moment in their politics in isolation. Instead, many participants detailed the impact of this status (e.g. having dependents whilst relying on a single source of income) as creating the circumstances through which their education occurred organically. These experiences of being a lone parent - particularly for those living in sustained poverty - repeatedly demonstrated an intimate understanding of social security, support systems, and the welfare state – each learnt by necessity or, as with #10 Rona – avoided entirely. In addition, the time that some of the participants had spent with local community organisations, usually first encountering them as service users (e.g. #1 Nick), offered exposure to the inner workings of the Scottish Third Sector and its relationship to state funding. The presence or absence of support services (including bookbug groups, parent and toddler groups, information hubs, etc.) and the shifting availability of these mechanisms where they had previously existed created a tangible understanding of the impact of a politics of austerity at the societal level - even amongst those depicting themselves as ‘less politically conscious’ than they perceived an average member of the electorate to be (e.g. #16 Kelly and #21 Edwina). Others such as #31 Jenny who was dealing with both familial transphobia and assault on her, as well as being a young lone parent, felt it was their duty to become politically active in order to challenge the forms of hate crime their families endured. In #31 Jenny’s case, her family had enacted extremely transphobic behaviours upon her and her child. Their own experiences, many interviewees advised, had fostered newfound empathy or sympathies towards individuals and communities in precarious or insecure circumstances. Public struggles mentioned in several cases involved the marginalisation of trans folk and systemic violence towards black and other people of colour.

Whilst perhaps not generally explicit in reshaping an individual’s openly stated values, the politics of becoming a lone parent were embodied or illustrated by certain actions or moments in the participants’ lives. Participant #1 Nick, for example, described his experience of the courts whilst he sought custody of his son, citing this as the reason he learnt how to articulate himself, therein fostering a new confidence that he has carried into his political activism in later life - including through campaigns such as North Edinburgh #SaveOurServices (NEN, 2019). #9 Frank, on the other hand, felt that his experience of the justice system had been deeply discriminatory, motivating him to advocate for co-operation, where possible, between the parents post-split, to act in the best interests of the child(ren):

‘Ah used to really believe in that, you know, Fathers4Justice approach, but the more I looked into it, the more I’m like “naw, you cannae do it that way. You’ve got to work with both parties, work with the mother cause you’re both - ideally - after supporting the wee one.” The legal intervention and the solicitor should only be the last stage, so if you’re big enough, and strong enough, and daft enough to have a child then you’ve got to be ready to engage in that and dedicate yourself to it. Otherwise, you’re really no mature enough to be a dad’.

- #9 Frank

hooks (1984), however, has countered suggestions that the process of ‘becoming’ (taken to mean experiencing Freire’s [1972] realisations through conscientization and shared struggle) is, by default, politically transformative for individuals, their peer groups, or their communities. Rather, she suggests
that the reduction of - in this thesis’ context – a ‘family’ to a heterosexual two-parent household, has, at times, resulted in the reinforcement of performative norms of gendered identity and patriarchal structures (regardless of the gender of the lone parent). She cites the additional domestic and employed labour (premised on the ‘norm’ being a two-parent household), along with the emotional and physical demands as central to many lone mothers deciding it is easier to passively accept gendered stereotypes (e.g. boys playing with police and military styled toys - guns, knives, etc.) than to challenge societal expectations. This issue of particular toys being marketed towards young boys is demonstrated in my below photograph, taken of the window display at a newsagents in Muirhouse (on 12th April 2020) in which mock assault rifles, handguns, and handcuffs are promoted as ‘boy toys’. The support of such stereotypical gendered behaviours, hooks (1994) suggests, extends to the clamping down on atypical behaviours in a child such as the disciplining of overly effeminate boys or particularly rowdy girls to conform more directly with historic norms, and was an issue raised by multiple lone parent participants (including #2 Lawrence; #4 Lachlan).

![Image #11: My own photograph of children’s toys displayed at a Muirhouse newsagents.](image)

Whilst some individuals such as #1 Nick underwent radically transformative experiences with regards to personal confidence, literacy, and their desire to engage in broader community-based action, other discussants struggled with diverging from expected behaviours (e.g. #4 Lachlan, #9 Frank, #13 Kelly, and #21 Edina). Amongst them, #4 Lachlan, for example, spoke of his fear that raising a girl by himself with his perceived lack of female role models in his daughter’s life (despite the sustained involvement of the child’s paternal grandmother) would lead to overtly masculine behaviours and could impact her later sense of self, her sexuality, but also how other children interacted with her during her adolescence.
7.3 Blended Families or Becoming a Singular Unit / Broader Social Support:

Many of the interviewees readily advised that they now enter new relationships (be that romantic, sexual, or social) with an attitude that both they and their child(ren) must all feel comfortable in the presence of any new partner - or partners in the case of polyamorous participants such as #22 Nomi and #25 Aiden. In several instances, participants recounted occasions when they had either consulted or sought counsel from their child(ren) about how the new relationship was going, stressing that they would readily end any new relationship should the child(ren) feel anxious or express concerns about the emerging dynamics. At times, particular moments of breaches of trust - ranging from minor lies to manipulative behaviours and sexual exploitation between the adult partners - had severely impacted the parents’ willingness to readily bring new adults into their child(ren)’s lives.

This conscious decision meant solidifying the one-parent family as a singular unit rather than continuing towards any form of traditional parenting partnership due to social pressures. In light of this, though by no means a universal experience, several participants advised that they were settled in their identity as a lone parent, with no desire or inclination to actively seek out a new partner (#5 Dee, #21 Edina, and #19 Dan). On occasion, those with older children stated that they had, in essence, put their own romantic or love lives on hold to focus on raising their children (e.g. #4 Lachlan). However, postponing a personal life had frequently meant also delayed the interviewee from allowing themselves to experience the grief of their loss (#4 Lachlan; #7 Cathleen).

In almost all instances where the participant was currently the primary caregiver, their role was generally assumed and had rarely been an issue open to debate where a split had occurred between the birth parents. As such, all life plans were made either as or with a collective unit of the lone parent and their child(ren) in mind - often with any ex-partner uninvolved in core decision-making processes, though this was a source of conflict for non-primary caregivers such as #9 Frank and #19 Dan. Indeed, during multiple interviews, participants highlighted the bonds their central unit had formed, referring to their child(ren) as ‘their best friend(s).’ This was generally stated during the latter stage interviews with participants advising that they believed their kids were the best people to be experiencing the Covid-19 lockdown with.

hooks (ibid.) states that within heteronormative two-parent families, what she terms ‘mother love’ has been largely unconditional. Naturally, there are many exceptions to this based on accounts offered of family life generally, though also through biographical narratives of life within single parent households (e.g. Hunter, 2019). The breakdown or absence of such nuclear family types results, hooks (2004) suggests, in struggles amongst the father figure (where present) as they are often unable to create a life for themselves and the children in their care that aligns with the historically male-dominated patriarchal family archetype, noting the frequently arising frustrations with work and family life they endure. She adds, however, that such understandings are, largely, the result of white middle class forms of feminist thought, arguing that women of colour had long documented the lives of working class and ethnic minority men who faced similar struggles and dissatisfaction facing those men who do not occupy peak positions within white and middle or upper class led ideals, yet continue to ascribe – or are socially subjected to – these expectations.
One story #21 Edwina cited as a particularly emotive moment that caused a shift in her perspective over care roles went as follows:

‘Not long after he [her son] finally started going to the nursery, I came in to pick him up and he was bawling. I asked to the teacher “what happened? Why is he crying?”, and she told me that “it is because I wouldn’t allow him to paint.” I asked her why, and she said “because they were making Father’s Day cards and he doesn’t have a daddy.” For me that was devastating! She just made me so angry that she deny to him [sic.] this opportunity to paint. In the 21st century why, she doesn’t allow him to paint? She asked to me, “who would he make the painting for?” so I told her that he can give it to me because, in his life, I am everything for him; I do everything for him. In every way that matters, I am the daddy’.

Unfortunately, this was not the only occasion that #21 Edwina’s son has been subjected to exclusionary practices. Indeed, one teacher asked which country he was adopted from – owing to his mixed-race heritage and #21 Edwina’s whiteness. On another occasion, a volunteer from an early learning group denied him entry to the group because, in her words, ‘she made it clear to me that she believed a mixed-race child being taken to a group by a white mother demonstrated in he wasn’t “vulnerable enough” to need access to their group for struggling parents.’ Our discussion of the matter revealed that #21 Edwina’s understanding was that the volunteer believed that the child’s parents must still be together. Despite the father’s absence from their lives, she tries to keep her son in touch with this cultural heritage by exposing him to traditions from Scotland, Malta, and St. Lucia through various migrant-run community organisations.

There was a range of blended family models involved in this study, bringing with it an abundance of different assumptions over what constituted ‘normal’. #17 Meg, for example, had had one daughter by a male ex-partner, while the younger daughter was a in co-parenting agreement with a friend. Both still have a relation with a later long-term female partner whom the children stay with two nights a week:

‘[S]o, like, I am [the] primary carer though the kids are away usually two nights a week. I do think my situation is probably a little more complicated that most families - even those that are separated but still have both parents involved. Not in a bad way, just that with me being gay, I think it’s a tad complicated, especially with the kids having different dads and my ex-partner and me. My youngest daughter has a relationship with her dad so does stay there, and that’s been the case for two years, but, as I say, my ex-partner [female] did continue to live with me for quite some time after we broke up. During that period, I was fortunate enough to have a spare room, so we had our own spaces. Had been rough with different living arrangements for each of the kids with so many parents involved and now I’ve got a ‘new’ partner; but, in all honesty, I think that being a lone parent, for me, has truly been the easiest time of my life. No more complaining, less conflict, and no underhand behaviour.’
By comparison, #18 Carol’s ex-wife (a transwoman from the south of England\textsuperscript{78}), is involved in their two children’s lives, though Carol and her wife are the primary carers. What these accounts demonstrate then, is that the range of participants boasted many unique family models, defying social norms, not only of a nuclear family, but also as to how a lone parent family operates in-practice.

7.4 Relationship to Work:

Several of the interviewees discussed the dilemma they faced between living on a lower income (either through part-time employment or via reliance on social security) versus taking on full-time employment which would mean losing time with their young children. For most who raised this issue, having to spend a significant proportion of their income on the additional childcare expenses was akin to an overall loss (e.g. #3 Lindsay; #5 Dee, #29 June, and #8 Mercy). This was particularly prevalent for those with no immediate family nearby whom the parent could rely on - a situation faced for a variety of reasons including physical distance due to migration and, therein, social isolation (#13 Cally, #5 Dee, and #24 Pria), family breakdown (#31 Jenny, #8 Mercy, #10 Rona, and #32 Nicky), and loss or bereavement (#7 Cathleen, and #4 Lachlan). Others, however, felt their financial capacity was greater than the primary carer for their children, stating that, even with the additional cost of care, they believed they would provide a better standard of living if their child resided with them instead.

‘Free education has given me a lot more opportunities in life, but when you think about my daughter who lives down south, I think a lot about her mother’s financial hardship. I honestly don’t think that she [daughter] would be living in that same hardship if she’d stayed up here with me.’

- #9 Frank

#9 Frank and his ex-partner were both teenagers when his then-partner fell pregnant. He spoke of their different life trajectories and the opportunities they had living in their respective nations. Their on-off relationship meant that they never lived together, however #9 Frank believed that he had benefited from opportunities available in Scotland-only (e.g. financial support in accessing higher and further education), crediting this with his newfound financial security. Whilst #6 Griff advised he is generally very comfortable financially, he linked his own income to the banking crisis in 2008. Reflecting on the crash, he stated ‘that’s when I noticed it! Literally overnight half my business just dried up. People just didn’t have disposable income anymore!’ - but even with that, he still believes he ‘do[es] better than most [other lone parents] for his children’. Another of the earliest participants, #3 Lindsay, advised that even whilst working a circa forty-hour-working-week, she believed that she was only around £300 better off each month:

‘I literally had weeks where I was feeding the kids and no’ myself. So, through my benefits… £700 was what I was getting and that became a one-off payment without anything else coming in for up to five weeks. And now, like, with full time employment I’m barely £300 better off a

\textsuperscript{78} #18 Carol also disclosed that her former partner struggled with her mental health and was perhaps slipping towards alcoholism as a result of a long-term battle with the health services in England for assistance with a medical transition.
Indeed, the balance of employment and family life was the primary feature of #3 Lindsay’s conversation, with a clear conflict between comfort (‘full-time employment made the rent affordable even with the cost of extra travel’) and developing her relationships with each of her children (‘I honestly just felt I was never seeing them anymore’). #13 Kelly echoed this experience, advising that she had to work two jobs to afford costs that ran into several hundred pounds per month for her two kids to attend after school clubs. Her own health, however, meant that she was unable to maintain this highly demanding work pattern and when finances dictated an end to attending after school club, #13 Kelly said her daughter ‘started to resent [her mother] cause she lost her main escape and a huge part of her social life.’ Recounting the difficult of navigating this, she advised that ‘it meant I was working the whole summer and no seeing them. It meant it’s a toss-up between whether I’m better off being poor and seeing the kids or working full-time to bring in money but never seeing them.’

This was something she struggled with, advising that her son would become frustrated with his family’s poverty – examples offered included being unable to get a bus into town with his friends or attend the cinema. ‘It’s horrendous,’ she advised, ‘having to have this kind of conversation with them [her kids] when they’re so young.’ Similarly, #3 Lindsay recounted stories of struggling to afford more than one school uniform for each of her children - even with ‘Back to School’ discounts or deals.

‘I honestly feel that the financial strain and the emotional turmoil that I’ve been through has affected their education. It feels that the struggle – and being open about the difficulties we’re facing - has severely changed our relationship.’

Further examples of frustrations between her financial situation and opportunities that savings would’ve permitted included her daughter being accepted to private schools based on her talents, yet the offers were made based on a majority self-funding model, rendering this unaffordable. #3 Lindsay’s anger was, therefore, she stated, rooted in systemic exclusion of poorer and working class families without an abundance of funding readily available to invest in their children’s education. Though not an issue that exclusively blocks working class lone parent families from accessing private education, #3 Lindsay’s sense of injustice was shared with other participants including #13 Cally, #12 Kelly, and #30 Marie, each of whom spoke both of a fear of failing to provide enough opportunities for their children but also of their rage at the dismissal of talent, dedication, intellect, and ambition in favour of those with material and financial wealth. A number of other parents similarly advised that they had chosen to survive or ‘make do’ with a lower level of income whilst their children were too young to attend nursery or school (#3 Lindsay, and #26 Kim). This was a significant divergence from #6 Griff, for example, who advised that when he and his partner split (both parents had been co-owners of an art studio) the single amicable aspect had been an agreement that their children would be taken care of financially (an informal agreement he terms ‘the settlement’).

This theme does, however, directly correlate to the following subtopic regarding support with childcare, opportunities for the parent to safeguard their own wellbeing, and, latterly, to historical perceptions of male breadwinner identities. Those more comfortable financially - some with their own businesses (e.g #17 Meg, and #6 Griff) - had often undertaken acts of solidarity within their means. At times this occurred through financial donations or utilising the popularity of their businesses as collection points
for foodbank collections (#6 Griff); whilst for others donated their time to youth clubs, taking on shared care responsibilities in mutually reciprocal partnerships with other parents (#17 Meg).

‘I always try to think globally and act locally. I mean, I’ve been pretty fortunate, man, and I was always taught - something a lot of folk don’t get taught - is that it’s okay to give a little back. Even when I ran my previous shop, we wrote a cheque for over a grand to a charity that works with kids who’ve been abused and endured all kinds of shit. With this shop, I’ve been able to partner up with the foodbanks and arrange Christmas drop-offs. I give customers a wee discount when they drop off some food. It’s a win:win’.  

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Like #6 Griff, #17 Meg was very conscious that her own financial status - managing multiple properties - places her in a far more comfortable economic situation than many others lone parents. This would include participants such as #20 Nina who went from a ‘stay-at-home mum’ to training to be a high school English teacher. This, in part, was a necessity rather than a choice as her former partner ‘was a freelance gardener who never earned shit loads of money and was severely harmed by the economic crisis.’ Likewise, #21 Edina’s situation became further financially precarious after her ex-husband decided to pursue a relationship with his former mistress in Manchester. This, she suggested, meant he preferred ‘to spend what income he had on visiting her rather than supporting his child.’ Later in the discussion, she said that in the last two years she’d ‘only seen £200 out of him.’ Whilst some separated families had been able to continue to split childcare during the early stages of the pandemic and imposed work-from-home remit, extensive travel requirements meant #20 Nina found this challenging to combine with her full-time university degree. Though the father historically unwilling engage with childcare, this was, however, a dynamic #20 Nina felt was changing because of her ex-husband’s new partner ‘smoothing over some of the rough edges’.

A distinct diversity in experiences regarding support with childcare emerged along lines of migration backgrounds, with unique familial histories of sexuality and gender identity also significantly affecting this (e.g. issues of ostracization or family breakdown). Participants with relatives in the immediate vicinity were, for the most part, able to take advantage of support with childcare, though splits within families had in several instances left the lone parent increasingly isolated through rifts based on non-heteronormative relationships; as well as the breakdown of co-parenting situations or the abandonment the now-primary caregiver and / or their child(ren). Individuals with long term personal residences or multi-generational legacies within north Edinburgh were, for the most part, able to rely on trusting and supportive relationships locally - dynamics which permitted the lone parents to consider undertaking education, training, volunteering, or employment opportunities which they might otherwise have been unable to take on. With the exceptions of #9 Frank, #26 Winnie, and #8 Mercy, very few participants spoke of communities of faith - a finding, largely, in line with the declining percentage of followers of most mainstream religions within Scotland and the UK more generally (NRoS, 2016).

Several accounts of lone parent struggles during the lockdown period have emerged on corporate media platforms - many detailing the loss of social, state, and corporate support. Booth (2020), for example, detailed the range of anxieties that emerged as lockdown intensified: ‘Who would look after my daughter if I got ill? How was I going to shop for groceries with a child in tow? How would I work as well as look after a child? Friends who suspected they’d had the virus spoke of exhaustion so deep they
needed four-hour naps – and these were people with supportive partners. How would I cope alone?’ Like #15 Sasha and #21 Edina, Booth (2020) advised that she had chosen to be a lone parent from the outset, articulating how central familial support and her capacity to hire a private childminder were to her plans. Whilst Booth (2020) wrote from a position of affluence - exhibited by the examples of activities she missed including regular ‘cultural outings [and] weekends away’ - her support mechanism of ‘solo mother WhatsApp and Facebook groups’ mirrors the spaces #15 Sasha, #23 Pam, and #12 Kelly engage with on a regular basis. Booth’s (2020) concerns over the ‘mental health issues, financial concerns, anger and impatience with their children, and resentment at coupled-up parent friends’ exhibited within her support groups are issues frequently named in the local lone parent groups cited during the interviews. Other lone mothers cited within Booth’s account included lone mothers advising that they had lost time for self-care (McIntyre, 2020), internalised concern and social isolation (ibid.; Mirza, 2020), physical exhaustion from frontline work (ibid.), and the attempt to process grief through loss of loved ones (Perry, 2020).

‘That’s something I really wish I had made more effort to do [meeting more queer parents]. All the parents I really know are through the school and, as far as I know, they’re all heterosexual [...]. I do think it would’ve benefited me, but probably helped my kids as well to see and just be around more queer families like ourselves. I do get the feeling that I’ve raised two queer children though, so in terms of their accepting and openness, I’ve definitely done something right.’

- #17 Meg

This was something #18 Carol referred to as being ‘queer minded’ during our discussion about her older daughter’s relationship ‘with a trans boy’. The importance of knowing (either personally or at least being made aware of the existing of) queer families, lone parent or otherwise, has been further evidenced by those like #17 Meg, who spoke of how open her children have been with her about their own friendships. crushes, and (for her sixteen-year-old) romantic relationships with those or their own or other genders. #18 Carol’s children had endured sustained homophobic and transphobic bullying whilst living in England for ‘being the only children with openly queer parents.’ Even upon moving to Scotland, #18 Carol struggled, initially, to find other queer parents in Edinburgh, advising that she did later access LGBT Health & Wellbeing’s Rainbow Families service. This topic also arose from many of the heterosexual lone parent participants, with #20 Nina advising that ‘gay relationships were never something that [she] or [her] six siblings were made aware of, even though [her] aunt has always lived with another woman.’

7.5 Gendered Struggles & Gender Performativity/ Lone Parenting & Living with Disabilities:

Primarily an issue raised by the male-identifying adults, some parents struggled to feel they could provide adequate social and emotional support to children of genders divergent from their own. In #4 Lachlan’s case, his partner had died during their daughter’s infancy; a situation that resulted in internal dilemmas over ‘how best to raise a daughter’. Whilst some of the parents had endured literal or perceived marginalisation themselves (e.g. feelings of being victimised for being a lone father; isolation as a result of limited English language skills, etc.), others felt stigmatised either by their own or societal perceptions of masculinity and male breadwinner identities. For most of the male participants, this was
due to their (in)ability to either secure a steady well-paid post. In instances where a participant found themselves as the primary or sole caregiver within a male-headed lone parent family, the impact of the care responsibilities was generally believed to hold direct impact on the earning potential – an issue long documented for women and other gender identities, whether they are a parent or not (see e.g. WBG, 2017; and Alton, 2018) - however the gendered dimension emerged among men when their supposed would-be successful breadwinner status was unachievable. This often resulted in the participant advising that they had lost sense of themselves given how they had been raised (conditioned, even) to understand their role within a deeply patriarchal and racialised society.

Female-identifying participants often expressed their frustrations over the assumptions of others who were aware of their single mother status. Where it was possible, this resulted in numerous participants hiding this aspect of their identity in their work relationships - at times this was always the case (e.g. #13 Kelly, #21 Edina, and #3 Lindsay) - though others decided that this was necessary after negative experiences such as being passed over for a role due to assumptions that they might have another child, were unable to hold down a stable relationship, or would need time off based on their care responsibilities (e.g. #33 Sasha, and #3 Lindsay; with #16 Michael using all of his annual leave to visit his child). In contrast, moving to Edinburgh - a decision that came mere months after his ex-partner and daughter moved to the south of England - allowed Frank to enter into recovery under a Twelve Step Programme as although he was a single parent, he was not the primary carer. Echoing his comments about ‘opportunities’, Frank also suggested that the increasing levels of bureaucracy and eligibility criteria we have experienced (something he has insight into via his community-oriented practice) would have prevented him from undertaking the move were he to attempt the same move today. Instead, he believes he would have been required to enter a programme in the city he already lived – Dundee. Bluntly, he informed me that ‘if that were happening for me back then, I’d probably be dead now’. Others also spoke of the material or emotional benefits of engaging with support provision, including #18 Carol’s experiences with her then-young children in a women’s homeless hostel where ‘the Salvation Army brought in Christmas presents for all [of] the kids’, and #24 Pria who praised the dedicated aid she was eventually able to access at Multi Cultural Family Base after the struggles she endured following her husband’s infidelity.

In #9 Frank’s case, the relationship continues to evolve (as does how he understands what it means to be a lone parent, particularly to an older child), with conversations around whether his daughter will come live with him in Edinburgh someday. He disclosed, however, that the ex-partner publicly assaulted him during New Year in the capital celebrations two years prior to our interview. An intervention from neighbours was integral in calming him from a panic attack over whether police becoming involved in this situation would mean he might be barred from being his daughter again. Having attempted to provide space, #9 Frank returned to discover his ex-partner and their daughter had left during the early hours of the morning. Suicidal ideation followed once again (‘mate, I was sat there with the belt around ma fucking neck’), however with professional help he advised that he’s okay now. Anxiety, however, continues to impact his life. Overall, he credits this to having witnessed violent assault towards his mother from his step-father and, on multiple occasions, having been victim to the same assaults when he attempted to intervene (‘we were both gettin’ beaten black and blue by the cunt…’). That the social

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79 Intriguingly, however, participants such as #28 Lucy stated that they felt no anxiety or fear around being a lone parent and how this would be perceived by others. She put this down to her own adolescent experience of growing up in a blended family.
hooks (1984) notes such gendered expressions of violence and embodied masculinity, stating that she would often experience significant fear over the possible anger which her father may express. Situating her fear of men specifically within the actions of one particular man seems to directly mirror not only #9 Frank’s anxiety, but also are the cause(s) of fear amongst several participants of other genders. She (ibid.) connects this to historic norms within heteronormative two-parent families where ‘wait until your father gets home’ would be deployed as a common means of inciting fear in a child over their perceived misbehaviour. Tischler (2008) similarly notes that in contexts of abusive or intimidatory heteronormative relationships, when rehoused ‘despite exposure to major stressors, most women’ - the demographic in which most lone parents are within⁸⁰ - ‘had begun the process of resettlement by improving their physical surroundings [whilst] achiev[ing] personal growth as they had managed to escape violence, overcome homelessness and create new opportunities for themselves and their children’. Rather than a broader anxiety over toxic masculinity in a broader sense, hooks grounds her own fear and that of many others within a reinforced and gendered patriarchal style of parenthood. Indeed, this extends further to a suggestion that the child may be able to discount their father’s behaviours as deeply conditional - connecting back to her notion of fatherly love being earned within the heterosexual two-parent family, whereas mother love is assumed. She adds that the existence of liberatory forms of feminism cannot achieve meaningful change without addressing the behaviour of men through both engaging and involving men within such social movements as well as challenging women who reinforce such patriarchal family lives (hooks, 2004).

Here, the argument becomes that the lack of non-heteronormative and non-patriarchal experiences in adolescence result in the repetition of many toxic behaviours when people become parents themselves - lone or otherwise. Without ‘blueprints’ for alternative approaches to parenthood, particularly towards fatherhood, the absence of precedence for lone fathers, such as #4 Lachlan, the participation of a contextually significant number of non-female identifying and non-gender conforming parents within this study demonstrates the need for greater understandings and discussions around divergence forms of parenthood becomes clear. This is particularly true in the context of lone parents; especially amongst those without familial or other support structures around them (those restricted to the aforementioned ‘singular unit’). Critically considering the alternatives created by the participants within this doctoral research is one aspect in which the study can offer a unique and contemporary contribution to academic literature and supportive practice for parents in general, and lone parent families in particular.

Class and lone fatherhood were also raised by #4 Lachlan who was advised that he was the only single father present at the school gates, frequently finding that when he attempted to get to know the other single parents (seemingly exclusively women) would face assumptions that he was trying to ‘chat the women up’. Consequently, despite clear efforts on his part, #4 Lachlan spoke of feeling ‘out of place’ amongst other lone parents at the time, despite large overlap in many other characteristics (class,

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⁸⁰ Bramley and Fitzpatrick (2017) have emphasised a ‘well-established vulnerability to homelessness of lone parent households (mainly female)’, echoing both the experiences of the lone parent activists of both Focus E15 and AAM, as well as reiterating the existing literature regarding the financial precarity many lone parents experience.
geographical area, family status, etc.). For him, therefore, this experience was shaped by how others saw him, rather than an extension of his own personality or ambition.

Benzeval (1998) highlights that many lone parents experienced poorer health than those in two-parent families (and, often, single adults with no children). Their work actually advocates for a ‘systematic assessment of the contribution that lone parents’ relatively poor socioeconomic circumstances make to their relative health disadvantage’ (Benzeval, 1998, p.1337). Though many lone parents in poor health experienced this prior to become a lone parent - indeed, amongst the participant cohort, #10 Rona noted that her health needs were a factor cited by her former partner for their separation shortly after the birth of their child, the link between those in poor health and living on low-income is undeniable (Alston, 2018). Crosier et al. (2007) also observed that economic factors were, by far, the greatest contributor, in causing ‘moderate to severe mental disability’, noting that this was ‘significantly more pronounced among single mothers (28.7%) compared with partnered mothers (15.7%)’. Indeed, the authors suggested that ‘[c]hildren with single parents showed increased risks of psychiatric disease, suicide or suicide attempt, injury, and addiction’ (ibid.), with Hope et al. (1999) offering a similar account of lone parent life in Britain. Echoing many of Ryan’s (2019) findings suggesting the harshest experiences of post-economic recession UK austerity occurred for those living with disabilities, several of the research participants spoke of their frustrations over the treatment and corporate media portrayals of ‘disabled people’ in recent years. With Ryan (ibid.) stating that the ‘group [...] being sacrificed’ (those living with disabilities) under austerity had once been positioned as the most deeply protected community. #32 Nicky and #10 Rona, for example, offered accounts that mirrored the accounts offered in Crippled: Austerity and the Demonization of Disabled People (ibid).

7.6 Discussing Lone Parenthood with Child(ren)

Many of the discussions turned to the topic of how the child(ren) in these families have experienced the shift into being part of a one parent family – recognising, however, that several had only ever known one parent in their lives (amongst them, #15 Sasha, #17 Meg, #14 Kathy, #21 Edina, and #5 Dee). This revealed a wealth of situations ranging from a child being very young at the time of their other birth parent’s death (#4 Lachlan) and the kid(s) never having experienced life with both birth parents (noted above), to the child being a teenager by the time a split occurred (#6 Griff) and having extensive experience of living in a co-parenting two-household arrangement (#18 Carol). As a result, the child(ren) had radically different levels of comprehension of the dynamics between their birth parents, though emotional intelligence and fear of repeating their own traumas were also flagged by several participants as a struggle (#18 Carol, #26 Kim, #21 Edwina, and #9 Frank).

Among those children who were old enough to engage in conversations with their parents at the time of a split, divorce, or death it was understood that they rarely had a choice over where they would live as their primary residence. It’s important to acknowledge that in a handful of cases it was not a split between the birth parents, but rather the end of a relationship that started whilst the child was a baby or an infant which led to serious discussions or personal reflection about the changing care situation (e.g. #23 Pam). Like #9 Frank, #17 Meg’s experiences post-break-up with her ex-partner, at times, quite severely impacted her relationship to her youngest daughter who had formed close connection with this partner. However, the ex-partner, ‘Leanne’, Meg explained, would regularly convey misinformation to the daughter who would come home asking about money owed to the ex-partner. This challenging
relationship also bore similarities to #18 Carol’s experiences with the father of her children and though she openly said expressed regret at not having sought out other queer parents - something she felt would’ve greatly benefited her children’s experiences or alternative family types - #17 Meg did outline the impact that having a closeknit group of fellow lone parents around her has had for her.

‘I do have these folk close by, my neighbour in particular who has three kids - two of whom are around the same ages as mine. The fact that she knows what it’s like when you’re doing this by yourself means that if I’m ever facing an emergency, or on the handful of occasions I’ve encountered an issue at the work that’s meant I’ll be late for the school run, I can just let the kids know that Janey or Amira says they can nip over there after school’.

- #17 Meg

The support of other queer parents and LGBT Health & Wellbeing had been invaluable to #18 Carol and her partner ‘Lissette’ when they had first moved to Edinburgh. However, even within #18 Carol’s contacts in the queer groups she has engaged with since moving to Edinburgh, she knows that many queer parents - including two of them examples she raised (whilst adhering to confidentiality) during our discussion – they had own have faced verbal harassment. For one, this occurred at the school gate when collecting her kids (a lesbian friend) and another who had been subjected to interpersonal violence due to their gender transition (a friend who had been assigned female at birth, but lived as male now). It’s the unfortunate reality, therefore, that despite #17 Meg’s optimism of queer parents being accepted, generally, this is not a unanimously experience.

In deep contrast, others such as #21 Edwina spoke of how ‘everything fell on her shoulders’ with regards to care, both before and after the split. Having briefly been based in the Scottish Borders, the move to Edinburgh when her son was around nine months old addressed some of her feelings of social isolation from the rural setting, however, her stay-at-home mother role continued to make her life quite difficult and had a significant impact on her mental health. Returning to work, therefore, offered her something of a social life. Later in that conversation, #21 Edwina disclosed that social isolation had been a major source of anxiety for her, stating that ‘my own parents kicked me out the day I turned nineteen’ - an experience she believes led to the ‘what the hell’ approach she had to life in her early twenties.

Several queer participants with children in their teens or older advised that their kids had openly identified as queer or bisexual - demonstrating less inclination towards rigid straight versus gay binaries than may be expected. This, these parents suggested, was largely down to the open - though age appropriate - dialogues which had taken place within their families or social networks. With many queer lone parents understood to experience an erasure of their sexuality (or endure heteronormative assumptions) from support services, schools, etc., these interviewees tended to place an emphasis on dialogue and trust. On their ‘LGBT+ single parents’ tab, Gingerbread (2020) advocate the importance of queer parents discussing identity with children, though an emphasis is placed on support around addressing and combating homophobic bullying. The Single Parent Action Network (2020) have also noted that ‘more people are ‘coming out’ later in life’, suggesting that this ‘may well be because homosexuality has become more accepted, so people feel more able to be open about feelings they may have denied or repressed for many years’. #18 Carol and #32 Nicky, for example, stated that they have come out as queer after having a family within a heterosexual relationship. The urgency of #31 Jenny’s
familial exit from her family for the benefit of her child is made all the more important when we acknowledge that huge numbers of young children with gender dysphasia age out of the services intended to support them (O’Toole, 2021b) and do not receive the necessary support to transition to adult-orientated services.

7.7 Early Concerns About the Pandemic

Given the fieldwork was conducted, primarily in early 2020, the Covid-19 Coronavirus pandemic was still at its earlier stages in Scotland and the UK more generally - indeed, much of Europe was yet to face the social, economic, and health challenges that later witnessed the closure of thousands of businesses. ‘Its disruptions have caused chaos, isolation and despair, but are also revealing huge reservoirs of creativity and resilience in our society’ (Tett and Hamilton, 2021). Despite the interviews occurring at such an early stage of the pending health crisis, several participants - though particularly in the latter days of the fieldwork - began to articulate fears around their child(ren)’s continued education, employment opportunities, potential food shortages, and anxieties over how an influx of claimants may affect capacity for social security to continue as normal. The expression of such anxieties may have been increasing given that interviews transitioned from in-person to over-the-phone or via video - the significance of this choice being that though interviews became easier to conduct – for the earliest digital sessions, social distancing guidelines were not yet in place.

By the time of our interview, #9 Frank’s planned trip to visit his daughter had been cancelled due to the earliest concerns over the pandemic - partially relating to his own health issues placing him in a ‘highly vulnerable’ category. Having lived in a homeless hostel for some time during his own recovery from addiction, #9 Frank was deeply concerned about rough sleepers in Edinburgh facing criminalisation for being on the street during the pandemic. Others outlined their panic over how they could manage to work-from-home during the pandemic, whilst their child(ren) were no longer attending daycare.

‘It’s been three days that the nursery has been closed and it’s driving us both insane! We don’t know when it will happen. They will really go back again, but it’s going to be crazy. His nursery is closed and my placement has been cancelled.’

- #21 Edwina

Some of the issues articulated within this subsection were earlier published in Campbell (2021, p.573):

‘The need to strictly adhere to healthcare and community safety guidelines during the Covid-19 pandemic meant approaches had to be made through social media channels where lone parents may be present. This largely meant recruitment occurred through advertising in relevant Facebook Groups - always posting only after permission had been gained from community leaders and administrators (often termed ‘gatekeepers’ by those in the academy). Identified groups included spaces designed for lone parents in Edinburgh, several Facebook Groups specifically created for residents in the north of the city, and two groups for queer parents. Additional approaches, met with mixed levels of success, were made to spaces catering for parents living with disabilities in Scotland and a variety of groups for those in Edinburgh with a
migrant background where members may not have been involved in ‘mainstreamed’ parenting
groups hosted on Facebook for a variety of personal, cultural, or institutional reasons.’

The rapid alterations that occurred within the UK job market as a result of Covid-19 included significant
rises in unemployment (termed ‘weakening employment rates’ by ONS, 2020a; see also IFES, 2020),
temporary or permanent closures of businesses (Parikh, 2020; Scottish Government, 2020; Littlejohns,
2020; Parkes et al, 2020), reduction in opportunities for those on low or zero-hours contracts causing
‘economic inactivity’ (ONS, 2020a), an inability to progress proposed business ventures (Gillespie, 2020;
UK Government, 2020); and financial insecurity (Standard Life Foundation, 2020; Poverty Alliance,
2020a). Each was raised as concerns by the lone parents interviewed during the latter stages of the
fieldwork (late-March 2020). Several participants cited multiple issues, though in the time since the
fieldwork ended, many families have been public through local social media platforms (e.g. posting to
north Edinburgh-specific Facebook Groups), through campaign groups - often via major news outlets
(Pregnant Then Screwed, 2020), or cited by academic or Third Sector studies (Poverty Alliance, 2020a;
Poverty Alliance, 2020b) - where they have voiced their anxieties or worries over the manner in which
childcare and schools were predicted to return for the 2020/21 academic session. The experience,
management, and agency of lone parents during this period could serve as the topic for a follow-up
study post-PhD. Despite that, the following offers reflection on the precise issues raised by participants
during the fieldwork as related to employment, care, physical and mental health, and housing.

Whilst #6 Griff’s business was forced to temporarily close due to the intimacy of the nature of his work;
#8 Mercy was unable to formally open the businesses she had been working to establish. Others (such as
#17 Meg who volunteered as a youth worker in outdoor spaces; and #18 Carol whose support groups
shifted online) were able to continue their practice, albeit with significant restrictions. Numerous
participants (#20 Nina and #1 Nick) each spoke of the difficulties they faced whilst being transferred onto
Universal Credit - detailing their frustrations and the hardships they endured during the five-week
waiting period for their first welfare payment – a process situated by Brewer (2020) as ‘an ideological
rather than bureaucratic necessity’. With Poverty Alliance (2020c), Women’s Aid (2020), Trussell Trust
(2020), Gingerbread (2020), The WBG (2020), and Action for ME (2020) among those to have advocated
for the removal of this transitional limbo, but to no avail, Pearce’s (2020) suggestion that the wealth of
middle class individuals now facing unemployment - and the shift in demand from largely only working
class folk making pressuring for a redesign of this social security process - is unlikely to be negative
development for working class communities. This five-week period, Poverty Alliance (2020c, p.1) have
suggested, has been ‘a key driver of poverty, destitution, and food insecurity across the UK in recent

81 Note, however, the problematic nature of these ONS (2020a) figures. As Mackie (2018) observed,
‘underemployment’ is a cause of severe economic hardship for many and creates numerous complications for
those accessing social security. As ONS (2020a) state, ‘[t]he International Labour Organization (I.L.O.) definition
of employment includes those who worked in a job for at least one hour and those temporarily absent from a job.
Workers furloughed under the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme or who are self-employed but temporarily not in
work have a reasonable expectation of returning to their jobs after a temporary period of absence. Therefore they
are classified as employed under the ILO definition.’ Thus, despite the realistic of more closely aligning with the
ONS’s category of the economically inactive during the lockdown period, many workers who remained on full or
partial income from whatever forms of employment they may have held prior to the furlough claims cut of date
(DATE), a significant proportion of these workers remain susceptible to mental health risks more readily associated
with the long term un- or underemployed.
years’, with StepChange (2020) revealing many individuals have been forced to rely on loan sharks and the informal economy to survive, go without two meals per day, or survive without weather appropriate clothing. Indeed, around ‘856,000 people signed up for universal credit and jobseeker’s allowance benefits in April, driving up the overall UK claimant count by 69% in a single month’ (ONS, 2020c); whilst Partridge’s (2020) comments that ‘the government had expanded eligibility for universal credit in response to Covid-19’ suggests Pearce (2020) may be accurate in her comments and indeed the likes of Toynbee (2020) and Lavelle (2020) have echoed the sentiment.

- **On Lone Parenthood Post-Covid-19:**

Though, as noted during the Introduction and the Literature Reviews, the anarchistic elements emerged organically during the discussion and analysis, and were, thus, an unexpected focus within the thesis. The ethos of anarchism (mutual aid, peer support, and direct action) would have been intimately connected to the agency and politics components of the questions, as well as about the creation of support and solidarity networks. Those in positions of greater affluence within their communities (however slight) or of strategically significant networking roles, this become a particular area of concern, along with recognition of their status and ability to survive the economic and social hardships have been common amongst many (Spade, 2020). This is, however, a crisis which could easily impact the families and result in the loss of loved ones for any participants. Similarly, the impact of lone parenthood on care, employment (both past or existing but also opportunities), and housing security were already issues raised in the literature, yet it’s expected that these issues would likely have been exasperated had this investigation occurred later during Covid-19.

The forced furlough periods - experienced as a positive or negative time in the participants’ lives – rapidly altered the day-to-day structure of normal family life. The reality of this meant that those who were previously able to separate their work lives from their family lives faced the rapid blurring of these spheres as work was often relocated from the public and into the private domain; or removed entirely for others. These already precarious situations (detailed in several of the participant biographies) have been further intensified - and often significantly extended- as state-run administrative offices shut temporarily or staff were relocated and worked from home – taking place alongside a sixfold increase in Universal Credit applications:

>[‘t]here were more than 6 times the usual number of claims made in the 4 weeks from 13 March 2020, with a record 1.5 million claims made. Comparatively, in 2019 there was an average of 55,000 claims made each week’.

- DWP (2020)

Whilst remembering that Universal Credit occurred on a phased introduction, the percentage of lone parent family claimants rose from circa 23% of all recipients in February 2018, to around 35% by February 2020 (ibid.). The rising number of applicants caused extensive delays – going beyond the promised five-week period – harming many applicants. The furlough scheme, for many, reduced that dilemma as some lone parents opted to take furlough when it became possible as the 80% wage guarantee from the state was - frequently - in fact, higher when childcare costs were removed due to homeschooling, addressing concerns raised by, amongst others, #3 Lindsay. According to Sánchez-Mira et al. (2021), ‘as is often the case, [during Covid] close family ties provided support with childcare,
however, elderly family members were not mobilized to help with their grandchildren’; a decision taken ‘purposefully in several families during the period to protect them from contracting the virus.’ Though the authors found one creative exception, [whereby a] grandmother watched over the children “virtually” through Skype’, no such instances were raised during the fieldwork with lone parents across north Edinburgh.

In addition, the nature of work undertaken by most of the in-employment lone parents occurred in primarily public-facing organisations - charities, the service industry, etc. As such, this type of work could not easily be reimagined as a working-from-home style job in the manner that office jobs that could be, largely, conducted at a distance via laptops and re-routed calls to work mobiles. Others, such as those studying (#25 Aiden, #21 Edina, and #19 Dan) were able to base themselves from home whilst still maintaining a sense of productivity (with full recognition of the complications of working or studying from home whilst also unable to access support with childcare) - something which #28 Lucy, for example, advised she was struggling with. The loss of a sense of purpose (even employment serving as only one element of an individual’s identity; albeit a major one under capitalist society) has been demonstrated to negatively impact mental health (Pearce, 2020; Siva, 2020; Campbell, 2020). The Royal College of Psychiatrists (2020) has already predicted a ‘tsunami of mental health problems’ will occur as a result of this lockdown period, so whilst participants such as #2 Lawrence and #34 Jay praised their relationships to their children (#29 June suggesting that her kids were ‘just the best people to be locked up with’), the absence of broader social interaction and human contact is expected to have a broader lasting impact.

This latter element of human contact (along with the issue of no support with childcare) extends to health, social care, mental health, and other manners of adult support for the parents themselves. Several participants discussed their physical disabilities or spoke of struggles with poor mental health, yet the pandemic has resulted in a drastic reduction in the number of workers able to provide in-person care, whilst others endured changes to the manner in which support was be provided due to the need for protective personal equipment. Naylor (2020, p.60) offered commentary on this, noting the detrimental toll a lack of assistance can take on the body when care is either not provided at appropriate times (e.g. when a supported individual is enduring what she terms ‘brain fog or the need to sleep’), or when equipment is not suited to the service users (such as offering the example of the demands of manual wheelchairs eventually harming the upper bodies of those who would benefit from electric scooters). Such situations, she notes, are further exasperated when appropriate accommodation is not provided to those in social housing or when the carers themselves do not feel valued, protected, or appropriately paid in their role (Naylor, 2020; see also Poverty Alliance, 2020b). The Covid-19 pandemic is understood to have disproportionately affected communities living in economically deprived areas throughout the UK and beyond, yet, existing economic and capitalist structures caused significantly higher infection and death rates amongst working class as a whole (ICNARC, 2020). In part, this is due to the proximity of working class workers to frontline occupations (NOMIS, 2020).

7.8 Conclusion

The thirty-four dialogues with the lone parent participants permitted a unique but timely snapshot of struggles, acts of support and solidarity, and identified the direct impact of austerity in one of Scotland’s most economically depreciated communities (SIMD, 2016). Having endured a decade of austerity
aftermath of the 2008 economic recession the effects of reduced funding and service closure has impacted the day-to-day lives of these lone parent participants are plain to see, yet, this period far from represents the entirety of their lives (as lone parents, coupled-parents, or otherwise). What it does offer, however, is an intimate exploration of the increased hardships of this period, and builds uniquely situated stories of survival – whether thriving or ‘just managing’. As noted above, some discussants took it upon themselves to provide replacement services (e.g. #1 Nick with his cooking classes; #29 June with her information and signposting social centre; and #18 Carol with her queer groups), whilst others such as #26 Winnie and #20 Nina spoke openly of their hardships in the face of an absence or limited forms of community support. The likes of #26 Winnie and #9 Frank strengthened their relationship with the remaining institutes or groups (e.g. their church or with other family members), yet these spaces also endured their own reductions.

The consequences of these cuts, however, were not exclusively felt by service users (lone parent or otherwise). Indeed, #16 Michael, #12 Kelly, #11 Louise, and #34 Jay, for example, faced fewer work opportunities due to the nature of their contracts of employment - an issue many have experienced due to the rapidly increased prevalence of sessional, part-time, and zero-hour contracts (Angry Workers Collective, 2020; UNISON, 2016). For #9 Frank this left him unsure whether we would be able to visit his daughter as frequently as he hoped, though few opportunities to spend time with their children was also a concern previously for interviewees who already lived at a distance. Whilst participants such as #9 Frank and #16 Michael both had children living with the ex-partner in the south of England – some of the children were, at the time of our interview or recently before coming of an age when they were able to choose where they wanted to live. Given this project was highly situated temporally, it is clear that many of these situations were likely to exasperate in the context of Covid-19. An early indication of this was already becoming apparent during the latter stage interviews, but was not yet being experienced to its full extent.
8. Theorising Acts of Resistance & Survival:

Introduction:

With a series of core thematic points having been identified through the analysis of the thirty-four discussions with lone parent participants, the following chapter explores the practical actions, emotional needs, precise hardships, and anxieties experienced in connection to a range of social and political theories outlined in the Literature Review. Specifically, the approach to navigating and surviving this past decade of austerity informs a theoretical model for exploring community-based action, drawing on the lone parent case studies and the individual accounts of those in north Edinburgh. Examples considered include the significance of peer education networks as a form of adult learning - social activist education - within contemporary movements in Edinburgh (Scotland) and London (England). Taking the lone parent groups as its focus, the chapter continues the critical reflection of the socio-economic context which gave rise to the contemporary economic and housing crisis in the United Kingdom (UK) and beyond, drawing upon the aforementioned theories of conscientization through experiential learning (Freire 1972) and ‘multi-dimensional gatherings’ of diverse social communities (hooks, 1984) during this ‘age of austerity’ (Giroux 2013; Lee and Beech 2011).

Focusing on two of the case study groups – AAM (the all-women activist collective in north Edinburgh who faced eviction from their homes due to welfare reform to housing support); and Focus E15 (the lone mothers evicted from their homeless hostel due to the closure of the mother and baby unit in September 2013) - the chapter examines the precise actions undertaken by members as I situate acts of resistance via a proposed model. The charted design encompasses activist approaches ranging from navigation and mitigation, to challenging and refusal. In chronicling these two lone parent community groups, the chapter accounts for the origins, membership, and actions undertaken by examining the legacies of both AAM and Focus E15. This includes reflection on the use of in-person and online protest, occupation, and art to galvanise support from their respective local communities (Watt 2016; Watt and Winton 2016; Campbell 2019) and is produced by utilising a combination of the limited existing academic literature on lone parent activism, supplemented by local newspaper reports, and firsthand accounts from the group members.

Premise

As outlined earlier, contemporary politics in the UK has largely been shaped by what both Giroux (2013) and Lee and Beech (2011), amongst others, term ‘the age of austerity’. Primarily implemented by the Conservative and Unionist Party (2010 - present), though commenced by the Labour Party administration that ended in 2010 following the 2008 global economic recession, austerity has devastated communities throughout the UK (Cooper and Whyte 2017; Davies 2017; Davies et al. 2020), resulting in the reduction of provision or the entire closure of many community centres, youth clubs, and support services (Sutton Trust 2017; UNISON, 2018; FEANTSA, 2011, Campbell and Arya, 2019). This has seen the stripping away or entire removal of such spaces has often harmed already marginalised communities that relied on support for childcare, access to employment, language learning, etc., and has, thus, had a particular detrimental effect on lone parent families, those from ethnic and religious minority groups, migrant communities, and those living with disabilities (Ryan 2019; Emejulu and Bassel
2017; WBG 2017; OPFS, 2016) – many of these intersecting across the participant cohort. Simultaneously, welfare reform to social security has resulted in increased evictions and consequently record levels of reported homelessness - this coming alongside the already drastic and long-term UK-wide shortage of social housing observed by Fitzpatrick and Watt (2018), among others. Furthermore, Tischler (2008) recounts that 'previous research has identified that most families who become homeless are women with dependent children' – issues which have only become further entrenched by austerity. With the majority of lone parent families in Scotland, the UK, and further afield headed by mothers, the relevance of these lone parent groups serving as the charted examples on the theoretical model are clear. Indeed, #14 Kathy, #24 Pria, and #10 Rona each described their struggles with obtaining secure housing as a key hardship within their lone parent experiences, with others becoming concerned about these issues in light of reduced employment opportunities (e.g. #13 Cally, #34 Jay, #12 Kelly, and #33 Sasha).

Despite facing a wealth of social and economic barriers to participation in many aspects of daily life, ranging from linguistic differences (Bloch 2007; Tang 2016) to extreme financial constraints amidst a deeply precarious job market (Alston 2018), many individuals and communities have undertaken what may be considered radical forms of resistance or direct action encompassing acts of self-preservation, mitigation of social harm, and navigation of welfare reform, through to outright refusal to engage or accept the demands placed upon them by the state (Emejulu and Bassel 2018; Emejulu and Sobande 2019; Packnett 2019; and Carty-Williams 2018). In this context of mass austerity and, for the purposes of the chapter, specifically the housing crisis that gave rise to new forms of social activism from some single parents, AAM (north Edinburgh) and Focus E15 (London) are two such lone parent collectives which have emerged to undertake significant acts of resistance in the Scottish and English capital cities of Edinburgh and London. Addressing Hölsgens’ (2017, p.146) investigation into ‘how […] resistance, disagreement, conflict, and struggle [are] best understood, once we have located conceptual space for its possibility’, the earlier case studies of these lone parent groups helped contextualise the momentum that motivated members of both groups to challenge decisions which caused significant disruption to the lives of their young families premised upon the dream of creating a better and more settled life – disruption having been central to many of the research participant’s narratives. Theorising forms of action and striving to realise possible solutions is, therefore, of central concern when examining the acts undertaken by both activist collectives. Further, the chapter works to incorporate ‘idea[s] of what it means to be an activist or an actor in public space’, as it builds on Emejulu’s (2017) effort to challenge the notion that activists are assumed to ‘a citizen, […] most likely white male, and that they are audible and legible to both the state and also to other citizens’. Whilst the above accounts recognise that such social actors are present and have served a purpose, at times, in north Edinburgh, the thesis centred the experiences of those historically marginalised within the academic - queer and disabled communities, fathers who serve as primary carers, etc..

By way of reminder, AAM were a collective of circa thirteen lone mothers and their children (though figures reported locally have varied) who, after being placed within private sector accommodation due to a shortage of social housing in Edinburgh, faced eviction due to reforms to housing benefit and the subsequent refusal by private landlords to accept a reduced payment (as before, see NEN, 2017; Campbell 2019). Threatened with relocation tens or even hundreds of miles from their friends and family, the children’s schools, and of becoming isolated from their wider networks within the north Edinburgh community, the members undertook radical action including protest and occupation of
political offices and council chambers in an effort to force the council to reconsider their decision. Similarly in London, Focus E15 are formed of a gendered demographic, all with childcare responsibilities, who also faced being rehoused hundreds of miles away due to Newham Council’s decision to close the mother and baby unit at the largest homeless hostel in the UK (Focus E15 2018a).

That these collectives were formed specifically by lone parents is vital to conveying their activism and, thus, their relevance to the thesis their rationales, actions, motivations, and activities have been outlined in the earlier case studies. The lone parent families in north Edinburgh that came together to form AAM, for example, were already living in an area of severe multiple deprivation (SIMD, 2016) and, therefore, that many local residents experienced a multitude of issues beyond housing (e.g. precarious employment, a lack of childcare support, etc.) is in-keeping with the challenges facing lone parents on low-incomes residing in communities such as Pilton, Granton, and Muirhouse at the time of the study (several years after the core activities of the group. Accounting for these issues, this chapter works to identify the motivations and priorities of group members when formulating their tactics and strategies as they have sought to survive life in the margins (hooks 1984; Hunter 2019), drawing out insights of broader relevance to future analysis of other social activist movements working to navigate severe social hardship via the theoretical model. This, along with the figure charting researcher and research participant proximity (see Figure #1), as well as the reframing of lone parents as political actors rather than victims of the state constitute the three core contributions of the academy produced within this thesis.

8.1 Proposing the PACA Community Action Model: Preserve, Adapt, Challenge, Alternative (and the Risks):

In working to theorise social action and approaches progress towards new ways of understanding responses to austerity, as well as either individual or collective struggles to survive (Hunter, 2019), it is essential to understand the diversity of acts, experiences, and forms of documentation that constitute acts of ‘resistance’ – a term drawn from Cooper and Whyte (2017). Ranging from acts of self-preservation and self-care (as described by Lorde [1988]) against the daily harms of austerity via mitigation (e.g. peer care as detailed by #5 Dee and #13 Cally) or navigation of existing systems through to outright refusal to accept the circumstances one finds oneself in (as depicted in the accounts from AAM and Focus E15), forms of activism and notions of resistance are diverse and should not be underestimated or undervalued based on visibility of the individuals, collectives, protests, or exhibitions, nor by whether they take place online or in the streets. Rather, as has been demonstrated through the Literature Reviewing and Findings chapters, each situation must be taken in context, recognising the capacity of the individuals involved. As noted in the thematic subsections, politically transformative actions can encompass actions as diverse as representing oneself in court cases concerning their child (#1 Nick) and distancing ourselves from harmful individuals (#31 Jenny), to establishing information hubs and community centres for our local communities (#8 Mercy) and embedding spaces which are

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82 Jones (2019) challenges notions of digital activism as being of lesser value than in-person frontline action, stating that, ‘being online is [...] important and accessible’, and contrasts historical hierarchies, stating that ‘people sharing their own stories is one of the greatest things that we’re witnessing right now’. Indeed, she argues that ‘for people to act like [online action] isn’t a form of activism is ridiculous, particularly for marginalised people, for you to say “this is my story and this is why I matter” and [if] you join in with hundreds of thousands of other people doing the same is a form of collective activism that we’ve never [...] seen before’.
accepting, or at least understanding, that some parents may need to bring their children to work if they are to sustain their practice amidst extortionate childcare costs (#8 Mercy).

These components, as demonstrated above, illustrate a connection between the literature on lone parents and a variety of lone parent-run activist groups (detailed in the series of case studies). Much of this aligned with the aforementioned concept of ‘acts of resistance’, showcasing the similarities between the collective and the everyday practices that could be understood through this activist lens. Jones (ibid) attests that when envisioning activism ‘a lot of people will think [of] folks on the frontlines carrying placards and being attacked by police[,] but activism also exists in educating people about their history and helping contextualise what’s going on right now’. Thus, when the activists of AAM held a public film and collection exhibition, entitled Scrap the Cap, Stop the Evictions, in June 2017 at the North Edinburgh Arts Centre (NEN, 2017a; the same venue where three of the interviews took place), this form of public education shared intimate details including stories and images of a struggle which lone parent members of the local community face. These allow those non-associated or previously unaware of the group’s existence to foster not merely sympathy, but also empathy and their desire to collectivise with their neighbours in their struggles to foster a more supportive community – the reality of which can be explored through the model and detailing of each subsection. Similarly, the women of Focus E15 in London holding their weekly public stalls not only shared individual experience, but drew attention to the precise mechanisms that allowed the mother and baby unit to be shut down, therein making the actions of Newham Council known to the broader public and, thus, provides the contextualisation that Jones advises is so pivotal to engaging in activism as a whole. Ricks (2017, p.148), therefore, posits that ‘identifying communities where we can find shared terms of justification, that is, shared standards for creating and evaluating justifications for actions or practices’ is essential for enabling would-be ‘activists’ to make their contributions towards shared understanding and progress. The latter demonstrated the need to understand acts of preservation (one of the four points explored), whilst the history of AAM showcases efforts to challenge systems of injustice (another proposed point in the model).

The chapter now presents the suggested model for understanding community-based action. Proposed as a four-part spectrum encompassing Preserve, Adapt, Challenge, and Alternatives, ‘PACA’ examines how researchers and social actors (in this instance, lone parents) understand ‘action’. This model was created based on the findings contained within the Literature Review, but aligns them with the clustered findings to demonstrate the rationale for each axis. Under austerity, the most extreme situations may account for the deaths (including those by suicide related to welfare sanctions; BBC, 2018; Naylor, 2020) and broader social murder that came as a consequence of the post-2008 austerity (Barr et al. 2012). Any such model must, therefore, acknowledge survival as a form of resistance and understand the diversity of actions this can occur as (hence the broad exploration of intersections and direct actions explored earlier). At the other end of this spectrum, attacks or forms of violent action may constitute the most extreme elements of ‘resistance’, however, this comes in opposition to non-violent direct action (forms of which include protest, occupations, sit-ins, live-ins, etc. - acts undertaken by both AAM and Focus E15 and documented within the localised outputs such as blogs or newspaper articles).

This returns us to Butler’s (2020, pp.2-3) understanding of ‘violence’ and the diverse manners in which it is understood whereby ‘[d]emonstrations, encampments, assemblies, boycotts, and strikes are all subject to being called “violent” even when they do not seek resource to physical fighting, or to the forms of systemic or structural violence’. Here, they (Butler) stress that, just as anarchistic approaches exist in relation to the statist mechanism they seek to break from, ‘violence’ is subject to the state’s
definitions and language, with ‘institutions [able to] rename nonviolent practices as violent’, therein ‘conducting a political war, as it were, at the level of public semantics’ (ibid, p.3). In the case of AAM, Focus E15, or other social movements (lone parent or otherwise), there is a risk that state actors and corporate media can dismiss the activists as a ‘mob’, deem them ‘a chaotic or destructive threat to the social order’ (ibid, p.4). This could have been the case when AAM’s members performed their ‘live in’ inside then-Scottish Conservative Party Leader Ruth Davidson’s constituency office where ‘violence’ can exclusively be understood as disruption rather than physical harm or damage to property. Consequently, the actions of several lone parents might be understood as ‘violent’ despite the core impact of their activism being to provide safe spaces or inter-familial care (e.g. #5 Dee in co-establishing trans inclusive spaces alongside other families in safe but unoccupied buildings; whilst Focus E15 took advantage of the former Olympic Village’s housing and utilities). Once again, this demonstrates the urgency of integrating locally-produced accounts – from those involved when possible – that may verify or counter public comments and policy statements that offer highly divergent or even harmful depictions. The following, therefore, places these lone parent experiences as part of the progression towards a model that charts their responses to austerity.

(i) Understanding Narrative Amidst ‘Austerity’: As Butler (2020) articulated above, controlling narrative is an essential component in successfully running any form of action (individual, collective, or state). This concerns the stories we tell ourselves and buildings on Freirean understandings of critical consciousness, and the way we come to name the problem (Freire’s [1972] theorisation of how we come to ‘name our world’). Indeed, our ability to influence narrative is pivotal to encouraging acceptance of what may in fact be a deeply harmful process via normalisation – leading to blogs, forming allies amongst local outlets of repute, and communicating our actions via social media, etc. (both central to AAM and Focus E15’s practices). This enabled them to contribute to reshaping narratives around lone parenthood and helped humanise those harmed by austerity from a position of lived experience of ‘actual existing austerity’ or other harms. To situate such action theoretically, Collins’ (1989) notion of ‘oppositional consciousness’ posits the social actor (the lone parent members of the activist collectives, or individual research participant) in contrast to the norm or statist narrative. In this instance, the conservative ideological standpoint of the centrist and ring-of centre political parties that dominant British politics), countering narratives of ‘deserving’ versus ‘workshy’ low-income families. The lone parent participants involved in this study have demonstrated the breadth of lone parent experiences in north Edinburgh, with accounts covering migrations (e.g. #20 Nina, #24 Pria), defying stereotypes, living beyond binary expectations (e.g. #15 Sasha, #25 Aiden, and #34 Jay), and fostering peer-run initiatives that challenge assumptions over the necessary life course of a ‘typical’ lone parent family (e.g. reciprocal childcare practices [e.g. #34 Jay and #13 Cally]). This in the real-world contexts of the everyday, but also counters many of the narratives offered to-date in the literature.

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83 The broader impact - or threat - of this means that those with the ‘power to attribution violence to the opposition itself becomes an instrument by which to enhance state power, to discredit the aims of the opposition, or even to justify their radical disenfranchisement, imprisonment, and murder’ (Butler, 2020, p.5).

84 Thomson (2018), too, argues that core to a social movement’s success is ‘its ability to co-opt broadcast power, to create a moment that demands broadcasters to pay attention so that you show all those marginal participants [...] this is a movement that is gaining momentum... and you can come join it’. This, he believes, enables movements to command attention, better articulate their intentions to a broader audience, and promote their goals.
(ii) Theorising Resistance: Formulating ‘Political Acts’: Encompassing far more than merely protests (such as those of AAM or North Edinburgh #SaveOurServices) or democratic participation (i.e. electoral politics and referenda), political action can, Emejulu and Bassel (2017) suggest, constitute mere acts or survival, peer support networks, or alternative economies. Consequently, this section works to establish a paradigm through which ‘resistance’ or ‘a politics of survival’ can be formulated. Though Jun and Lance (2020) suggested that ‘grassroots networks of solidarity, being fully voluntary, have no choice but to be internally horizontalist,’ anecdotal evidence from my own experiences of anti-austerity movements in North Edinburgh, along with those of the interviewees (including #1 Nick, #4 Lachlan, etc.), suggest that experienced activists can continue to dominate new coalitions. Franks (2009, p.99) describes these people as actors who purport to be able to ‘win battles for others (and often speak […] on behalf of the group)’, meaning that the issues articulated by the lone parents would not authentically be enacted without their role in-practice and organising.

Rather than offering themselves as a guide or mentor, however, it continues to be the case in north Edinburgh - and undoubtedly in many other areas - that this overconfidence can intimidate would-be actors from amongst the affected communities (be that community centres facing cuts to funding, lone parents facing eviction from their homes, etc.) from becoming involved in collective forms of action (even when these are occurring individually). Thus, despite the authors’ suggestion that in crisis contexts ‘[n]o one can be coerced to follow decisions of a group that they can simply leave at any time,’ the reality remains that “power over” readily becomes the default in such urgent situations even when ‘[o]ne can see an at least implicit commitment to this [anarchistic] structure of organization’ (Jun and Lance, 2020). Participants such as #8 Mercy stated that she co-created the community space to serve as an information point where community members could volunteer to share their insights and understandings for the benefit of others – a dialogical practice that counteracts the domination of these spaces by ‘experienced’ actors. That the social centre relies on state funding to sustain itself (primarily to cover overhead costs), this means that the work cannot be overtly political in an anti-state sense, but, rather, must serve the interests of local people as the state understands them. This contrasts deeply with #5 Dee who intentionally bypasses state infrastructure to create peer-led spaces without hierarchy or state intervention. Indeed, Campaign Zero co-founder Packnett (2019) stresses that ‘charity is very different than solidarity’, arguing that ‘charity is interested in solving one problem, one time; [whereas] solidarity and systems work is interested in eliminating the problem altogether so that the problem doesn’t exist for future generations to come’, and, therein, lies the difference between the politics of the state and the everyday activism of these lone parents.

However, Nozick (1974) prompts the question of whether the state can be considered the arbiter of ‘reliability and fairness.’ Certainly, many residents in north Edinburgh - both those interviewed for this thesis, though also amongst the broader geographical community - would contest the fairness of the recent budgeting processes premised as enacting greater democracy. #1 Nick, #4 Lachlan, and #32 Nicky each used similar phrasing over their perceived unfairness of such participatory budgeting processes, likening these to a ‘choose your own cuts’ fanfare that feigns democracy and community engagement85.

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85 Significantly, Mckesson (2018) has emphasised that ‘just because people don’t use the language that you use to describe the world they live in, doesn’t make their perspective or their points any less valid’, further stressing that ‘people are always learning the languages but often have the experiences up front’. Recognising that similar premises may be offered under diverse terminology was a core aspect of the analysis phase and teasing out the consistencies across a diversity of experiences.
Jun and Lance (2020) have even suggested the centralisation of powers is deeply problematic - connecting back to Day (1945; 1963) - proclaiming that ‘if there is no compelling reason to require uniformity, then it would be an assault on freedom to require all communities to act in the same manner.’ Thus, when circa half of the participants raised the devolution of power from Westminster to Holyrood as an important aspect of creating a ‘fairer society’, and others attested that the City of Edinburgh Council continuously fails to understand the intimate struggles facing those living in north Edinburgh, there is evidently a political literacy amongst the participants, with arguments over their current conditions. Vitally, within the dialogues – and demonstrating the relevance of the case studies – this commonly raised political issue showcases how the issues created by austerity, or broader capitalism fostered increased political understandings amongst the lone parent participants.

Given that Cook (2020) contests that ‘[n]o political candidate, local public official, charitable foundation, higher education institution, corporate mitigation fund, public health rep [etc..] will do whatever is necessary to ensure that […] people receive what is needed to live in dignity while facing […] catastrophe’, the direct acts these lone parents took and continue to take demonstrates the significance of their experiences are creating political literacy. Though his quote referred to Covid-19, the premise is equally applicable to those challenging austerity, and highly applicable to those living in north Edinburgh. Recognising the aforementioned diversity of actions from Emujulu and Bassel (2017), forms of direct action recognised amongst the participants included voter apathy and consciously not voting (#5 Dee and #10 Rona) due to a belief that representative democracy is limited or that the elected officials cannot understand the issue faced. For others, such as #31 Jenny, they were frustrated via their understanding that representative politics take time extensive to pass reform - often leaving those enduring hardship in the same or worsened circumstances for years until change passes at any legislator level. AAM’s non-violent direct action through their occupation of Ruth Davidson’s office, for example, was seen as more likely to trigger immediate action (and create safe conditions for their family) than lobbying for a different administration to enter local office.

As such, key dimension of this notion of protecting and preserving concerns who counts in these communities of faith, place, interest, or circumstance. Whether an ideological outlook includes only those of a similar language, background, culture, gender, or religious perspective, or whether it is cross-community is significant for which voices are heard and who is included in particular forms of action. As raised earlier, for example, AAM was presented as all white and all women. As demonstrated throughout the literature, such a homogenous group cannot be considered as representative of the communities living in north Edinburgh (NRoS, 2016), nor of the diversity of those most severely affected by the housing crisis (WBG, 2017). A caveat, however, concerns the politics of visibility and who is in a position to make themselves known – even if only via blogs, but particularly when it comes to physical forms of action. If particular individuals and communities are in extremely marginal or precarious positions, becoming a state agitator in the public eye is riskier for some than others. This issue is observed during the aforementioned North Edinburgh #SaveOurServices example where some activists rallying against the cuts proposed by the Integrated Joint Boards carried placards bearing messages from women accessing the Women Supporting Women project for support around domestic and intimate partner violence as these women could not make themselves known (Di Marco Campbell,
This demonstrates Collins’ (2018, p.xii) argument ‘traditional metrics of political participation simply do not work in explaining the political perspectives and actions of minority women’. There is also the risk that the researcher becomes too precise – be that for time, labour costs, or other reasons – that forces them to be selective from a large pool of would-be studied groups. In the case of north Edinburgh, AAM and the handful of lone parent community programmes are amongst the few publicly visible local resources studied for this thesis, yet, without a narrow focus (e.g. ‘lone parents’) is could be incredibly difficult to offer an authentic conceptual portrait via the model.

On this, some have positioned the sharing of narratives as indispensable ‘if you are to truly know resistance, and the stories it gives rise to’ (Carty-Williams, 2018, p.ii). Indeed, Mckesson (2018, p.xiii) proclaims that social actors ‘have to make what we fight for, the world we want’, adding that ‘in order to do this well, we have to be able to narrate how we got here, to describe the live we’ve lived in order to unearth the things that we may have been too close to understand before’. The visibility of experience and the sharing of knowledge via peer and popular education activities such as the public exhibition held by AAM or the skills shared organised by Focus E15, along with their social media presence, demonstrate the opportunities to inspire and to provide the language through which those suffered an injustice may come to put a name their experiences and ‘to unpack, to frame the world around [them]’ (Mckesson, 2018, p.xi). A significant caveat here, however, in that the emergence of a dominant or single version of an accepted history risks the loss of nuance and diversity in experience or approach – something this thesis sought to avoid by engaging with the abundance of lone parents from historically marginalised communities.

The above showcases two possible methods of presenting the PACA model – either open or circular girds.

- Charting the Model:

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This is further significant, with Britt (2018), stressing that ‘perspective matters, and when we are missing perspective(s) at the ballot box, in the electoral process, and in more places where citizens need to be heard then we are losing out on the kind of solutions that need to be had’.
The proposed model for charting these acts is comprised of four components across two axes. The following outlines each of these, detailing the précises ways in which the lone parent participants and the case study groups may be charted.

**Preserve:** Conceptually, preservation may prioritise individuals and their immediate surrounding community (friends, those they care for, or relatives) over the policy reform affecting lone parent families, for example, though it could also encompass a larger collective covering a particular demographic - such as a local community of place, faith, or interest (Henri and Pudelko 2003). A key dimension of this means analysing how actors protect and preserve the self and exploring who counts as one’s ‘communities’; whether an ideological outlook includes only those of a similar language, background, culture, gender, or religious perspective, or whether it is cross-community is significant for which voices are heard. Who is included in particular forms of activism also matters significantly for survival within this context of austerity as it risks perpetuating within social hierarchies or exclusions. For example, the membership of AAM presented as all white women based on publicity within local press outlets NEN and NECN. Again, however, it matters how the researcher selects which groups to study – particularly in an area of high complexity with actors operating towards divergent goals – though presenting a series of these models would help disaggregate presentations which would risk blurring diverse ambitions.

A homogenous group however, regardless of its intentions in terms of support and survival cannot be considered as representative of the communities living in north Edinburgh, nor of the diversity of those most severely affected by the housing crisis – e.g. based on the findings of the WBG (2017). This indicates that there is a need for work such as those of Bassel and Emejulu (2017) and Emejulu and Sobande (2019) which explore minority women’s activism to become core to understanding how specific individuals and communities resist austerity, but also for contributions such as this thesis which localise those theories, reimagining them in new contexts and with new collectives or communities. Emejulu (2017) further articulates the need to consider not only how intersections of identity interact within austerity - particularly the disproportionate impact on women of colour (WBG, 2017) - but also how dimensions such as ‘race, class, and gender serve as resources’ in acting against the state. This, Emejulu (2017) argues, is pivotal in realising social actors as not merely ‘objects’ or ‘victims’ but as political agents, capable of working towards the change they wish to see or fighting to retain what resources they already had. At times, preservation may mean engaging in activities that help survival but are not known or recognised by the state, such as cash-in-hand work that would go undeclared to maintain one’s study amidst increasingly precarious economic circumstances (such as that undertaken in the informal economy by #1 Nick).

**Adapt:** Alternatively, community members may adapt to the circumstances in which they find themselves - e.g. meeting the demands of Job Centre workers (its enforces serving as state actors). This dimension expands on self-preservation within the stated situation (i.e. the imposition of austerity) whereby the actor works to navigate and exist within the proposed system. In essence, in a context such as policy reform, it should be understood as the state’s desired outcomes. Rather than finding means of survival which may include reliance on informal support networks, adaptation would mean adjusting one’s activities and broader life to comply with reforms and the demands placed on those wishing to access support. This element would be inclusive of both changes to social security, but also cuts to funding for Third Sector organisations and, thereby, the loss of provision. Packnett (2019)
recognises this in stressing that ‘charity is very different than solidarity’, arguing that the former ‘is interest[ed] in solving one problem, one time; [whereas] solidarity and systems work is interested in eliminating the problem altogether so that [it] doesn’t exist for future generations to come’ - promoting agitation rather than complicity. This component, then, understands that circumstances may not permit actors to ‘resist’ the changes imposed upon them (be that in terms of capacity, fear of repercussions, or the absence of appropriate support networks). Far from a recent problem, Zinn (1970) identified this when stating that ‘our problem is that people are obedient all over the world in the face of poverty, starvation, stupidity, war, and cruelty’.

To effectively explore this element, the researcher(s) need to understand the policy or practice contexts which are undergoing reform, necessitating a degree of familiarity with the affected environments to effectively chart the practices taking place in response. Without support materials such as the Community Profile generated for this thesis, there becomes a risk of that unfamiliarity with the researched communities (geographical, social, political, etc.) which may see the model reduced in its effectiveness. The following two sections, ‘Challenge’ and ‘Alternatives’, are therefore essential in recognising efforts to shift away from life within recent austerity-centred regimes whereby the only foreseeable option is to adapt to demands placed on the individual and their family in order to survive.

**Challenge:** In contrast, oppositional consciousness, as proposed by Collins (1989), situates itself as a challenge to the dominant conservative ideologically in the studied context and, consequently, the largely Conservative-led era that has aligned to much of the UK’s current ‘age of austerity’. Such opposition may manifest in a range of acts – many of which are straightforward democratic rights-based practices afforded to those of citizenship status - such as voting for a rival party (in north Edinburgh this includes the SNP, Scottish Labour, the Scottish Socialist Party, or the Scottish Liberal Democrats), though, as has been recognised in the literature and acts of groups such as the lone parents of AAM it may more impactful when it occurs though taking direct action (e.g. the occupations undertaken by both collectives). Oppositional consciousness being that which contrasts the dominant (conservative) ideological standpoint and, in the studied context, the narrative of ‘deserving’ versus ‘workshy’ poor being challenged is also a form of countercultural resistance – again, demonstrating how many of the lone parent participants had acted counter-hegemonically simply by refusing to accept imposed changes.

When major television broadcasters commission programmes such as *Benefits Street* which had further demonised public perspectives of lone parents as it sought to ‘[r]eveal the reality of life on benefits, as the residents of one of Britain’s most benefit-dependent streets’ (Bloor, 2012; Channel Four 2016). Mckesson (2018), however, has been forthright in emphasising that ‘the goal of protest is to progress, not simply to protest’ – echoing Freire’s (1972) drive towards taking action rather than merely studying a given phenomenon. Positioning protest as ‘a precursor to the solution’, he suggests that challenging dominant ideologies through acts of resistance such as occupation, protest can ‘create[…] space that would otherwise not exist […] for[cing] conversations and topics that have long been ignored into the public sphere’ (ibid). The lone parent participants that co-led the demands of North Edinburgh #SaveOurServices as they challenged the cuts to community funding, or those that occupied Ruth Davidson’s office to call demand reversal to the evictions serve as examples of this type of response, however, the Literature Review demonstrated extensive study of other relevant examples across local, national, and international contexts.
**Alternatives:** Arguably the most difficult form of action, identifying alternatives can be understood as a refusal or rejection of existing systems and socially accepted ways of being (ideological or cultural). It goes beyond merely protesting (challenging) or seeking to protecting existing provision (preserving). Indeed, it can be better understood as the refusal to adapt, instead promoting or creating alternative mechanisms, networks, and, ultimately, divergent or non-statist institutions that enable the aforementioned action to occur. Packnett (2019) observed that ‘doing transformative work requires stamina’, illustrating the heavy toll – be that emotional, physical, or mental - that creating alternatives requires. She notes that issues such as marginalisation, housing, and discrimination are neither ‘short struggles [nor] new struggles’. Consequently, by way of a housing example, refusal to accept offers of accommodation in Manchester, Hastings, and Birmingham, due to the realities of losing social and support networks in their local community, demonstrates the strength of will shown by the members of Focus E15. It may involve the proposal of new ways of existing and proposals for alternative means of survival - including occupation (e.g. AAM in Ruth Davidson’s office and Focus E15 in the Olympic Village; or #5 Dee with her anarchist-run family spaces) – or, in premise, it could see community actors enter into dialogue (akin to the ‘Challenge’ component), yet it advocate concrete alternatives rather than engaging in reformism.

Creating alternatives, however, need not start and end with one’s original struggle(s). Commenting on Focus E15, Watt (2018) acknowledges the shift in approach taken by the activists from addressing their own forced eviction to challenging the broader treatment of marginalised communities experiencing housing issues; ‘social housing not social cleansing’. His paper considers the significance of wishing to remain in ‘our place’ and the need to build support networks in the immediate lived environment – alternatives to the mechanisms put in-place (if any) by the state. Rather than portraying the Focus E15 activists as merely victims of statis reform, he celebrates these ‘inspirational young women who do not ‘know their place’” (Watt 2016). As outlined earlier, forms of direct action may occur due to a voter apathy, a belief that representative democracy is limited or that the elected officials cannot understand the issue faced by a given community, and a conclusion that representative politics takes too much time to pass reform when those most marginalised cannot wait. Relying on ‘due process’ often means leaving those enduring hardship in the same or worsening circumstances until change passes at any legislator level with individuals and community groups stepping in to provide immediate aid during the interim period – something that has been central to enabling many of the lone parent participants to manage their circumstances. In addition, individuals and groups may choose to act within existing paradigms or take action by offering alternatives such as forming new activist collectives ranging from mutual aid groups to peer care networks, or creating new political parties and pressure groups.

- **The Risks**

Whilst these components are central to the charting approach, it is important to recognise the risks that occur under each form There are those who acknowledge the emotional, physical, and mental toil direct interventions and other forms of action can take on individuals and their dependents. Bush (2019), for example, prompts activists to continue fighting, stating that ‘when you stop, when you step back, that’s how they win’, yet, in addressing fears of fatigue, stress, hopelessness, and burnout, she warns that ‘if one [person] stops, two stop, ten stop, fifty stop, and it just keeps going... when we stop and sit down, they win’. Whilst her focus was specifically on running for political office and the necessary groundswell to successfully enact change, the premise applies to challenging any form of institutional power.
Intriguingly, Gates (2018) depicts ‘millennial activism [as achieved] through study, discipline, and conviction’ – a premise which urges us to recognise the politicisation process in these lone parent activists. ‘Study’ occurs when the actors learn the state’s structures and practices (e.g. producing the manifestos seen in both AAM and Focus E15), whilst ‘discipline’ occurs as people sustain their activism. This may mean learning to enact self-care during the occupation or live-in, or understanding when to take breaks to prevent burnout. Finally, ‘conviction’ centres upon the drive and determination born out of the struggle. These are visions of not only the forms resistance takes but, more concretely, ‘how to struggle’ (Kendi, 2018, p.1) - including understanding the impact activism can have. This promotes an understanding and acceptance that activism beyond the frontlines is integral within any struggle, with education a key component, be it through dialogue, studying history, learning from activism, or other means.

Similarly, others have positioned the sharing of narratives as indispensable, suggesting that ‘if you are to truly know resistance, and the stories it gives rise to’ (Carty-Williams 2018, ii), then this provides motivation. Indeed, Mckesson (2018, xiii) proclaims that actors ‘have to make what we fight for, the world we want’ (akin to Freire’s premise of naming the world; Freire, 1972), adding that ‘in order to do this well, we have to be able to narrate how we got here, to describe the live we’ve lived in order to unearth the things that we may have been too close to understand before’. The visibility of experience and the sharing of knowledge via peer and popular education activities such as the public exhibition held by AAM or the skills share sessions organised by Focus E15, along with establishing a social media presence, demonstrate the opportunities taken to inspire and to provide the language through which those suffering an injustice may come to put a name their experiences and ‘to unpack [and] frame the world around [them]’ (Mckesson 2018, xi). A significant caveat here, however, is that the emergence of a dominant or single version of an accepted history risks the loss of nuance and diversity in experience or approach. Therein a fictionalised or artificial story can take hold, merging or blurring the multiple histories members of any movement have lived through into an accepted ‘truth’, despite a far more complex reality. Such resolutions may therefore, in part, result in the perpetuation and social exclusion of those not already involved in a movement. This, in part, demonstrates the urgency of situated investigations that work with community groups and individuals to more fully understand the complex circumstances they endure and to recognise the complexities of struggle – be that collectively or in isolation.

Mckesson (2018, xiii) seeks to address this, observing that many ‘praise a hypothetical community, only to exclude anyone who disagrees with them from their definition of community’, advocating that ‘words and stories must live up to the ideals of the moment in which they are offered’ (Mckesson 2018, xiii). This must be inclusive and reflective of the diversity with which an issue has been experienced, otherwise the same struggles may be experienced by others who are, in essence, left behind. To cite two examples within the research cohort, #24 Pria found herself isolated from other families, struggling to make connections, and continued to endure cultural stigmas; whilst #10 Rona found them her disabilities left her largely isolated from other families in north Edinburgh due to her complex health needs. There were, however, other examples, such as #2 Lawrence and #4 Lachlan who each found themselves struggling to make connections across gendered boundaries living, as they do, in circumstances where the majority of lone parents (and, indeed, those present at the school gates) are women. It is, therefore, essential to realise that the political literacy fostered by activists from both AAM and Focus E15 coming to articulate their respective demands was the result of self and peer education through experience
within the financial and housing crises (Freire’s conscientization), whilst the two groups were, to varying extents, supported by existing activist communities in both areas.

How Best to Present the PACA Model?

With a broad range of options, three potential presentation styles have been identified (i) Circular; (ii) Placed; or (iii) Intersecting. Each offers different ways of charting how the acts of each group or individual may be understood, as well as the opportunity to aggregate data for comparison between national contexts, gendered work, etc. The below addresses the three options, outlining the rationale behind working towards the chosen model, emphasising why this works more effectively than the alternatives. All three options operate within a grid system utilising four quadrants across the two axis, however, the conclusions are presented in distinctly different ways, thus requiring reflections as to why one option is preferred to the others.

(i) Circular: Adopting a circular base with the opportunity to turn a quarter-sized dial through each of the sections, this option suggests that community groups may fit perfectly between subsections (e.g. Preserve / Challenge; fighting to retain existing services or provision). However, an organisation, group, or individual’s actions may fall partially between three (e.g. both the Preserve / Challenge section [fighting to retain existing provision] and the Preserve / Adapt sections [reimagining existing services in new ways that respond to challenging conditions], and, thus, the desire to preserve may be key, but at no stage would a desire for alternatives (i.e. new practices or spaces) manifest. This suggested version is, therefore, limited given it can account only for a maximum of three categories, and forces a single element to be identified as central to the work, even when this may not sincerely be what the person or persons are driven towards.

(ii) Placed: By comparison, this versions requires the examined group or people to be placed at a single point within the quadrants. This version of PACA would, largely, restrict assessments to a single intersection between two categories rather than permitting it to be spread across three as with the circular edition. Whilst using placement method would allow easy comparison between groups, it fails to account for the diversity within motivations, desired outcomes, intend, and actions that the circular model allowed. The above example of a community’s members trying to repurpose a space (e.g. the ways that #8 Mercy’s social centre is forced to adapt to changes in funding priorities under different
governments; or how the Focus E15 members temporarily occupied the Olympic Village whilst demanding a suitable alternative to the mother and baby unit at the hostel be identified).

(iii) Intersecting: Arguably, the most apt format, this version requires any given group or actor to be assessed on a five-point scale in each of the four categories. Rather than arguing that a single group were primarily engaged acts of preservation (or even attempting to preserve through challenging), this edition asks, ‘to what extent did the group prioritise challenging those in positions of power?’, as well as ‘to what extent did they aim to preserve existing services or funding?’, etc. This is a complexity that the other models failed to recognise. As such, the intersecting approach recognises that each axis is not binary, but rather many actors will consider all four elements to some extent. As with the ‘Placed’ edition, this version allows for easy comparison between groups in diverse contexts, given that the visualised conclusions can be overlapped (e.g. through utilising different colours to overlay).

As useful as these diagrams may be in understanding the priorities and actions of activist collectives - though equally applicable to individuals, political parties, manifesto pledges, etc. - the diagrams must be positioned alongside the deep contextualization offered. Whilst this could include information on the geographical areas in which they operate – either through Christakopoulou et al.’s (2001) three-part approach to analysing areas from political, social, and economic perspectives, or the expanded version presented within this thesis – addition profiles could be created for detailing the groups. This may be presented thematically based on the available data, as has occurred within this thesis, or a fourfold could supplement the charted visual presentation. Echoing my own Master’s work, as appropriate, profiles focus on the origins and motivations, membership or associations, activities, and impact / legacies of these groups, permitting immersive case studies. As with the area profiles, activist or group profiles permit more intimate insights into the subtleties and experiences of a particular group, demographic, or campaign. Such details enable better understanding of who accesses what spaces or services (where these have served as the motivations for undertaking action), helps identify communities which may have been historically marginalised or excluded from protest or resistance activities (e.g. AAM not necessarily being representative of the local populations affected by austerity), and showcase the support networks formed or informal connections created by way of sustaining solidarity and providing direct or mutual aid.

Based on the above detailed outline of the PACA Community Action Model, this chapter proposes that Focus E15 can be understood to have worked to identify alternatives to a greater extent than AAM (as suggested in the intersectionally charted version). Whilst preserving their family units and sense of community was vital to both activist collectives, AAM sought to be relocated locally through the existing
homing system (accepting the state apparatus, if not their outcomes), whereas Focus E15’s members could not be housed within a similar area as circumstances stood during their formation given the closure of the hostel by Newham Council. Thus, greater alternatives were required with the activists undertaking an occupation of the former Olympic Village site and refusing to accept offers of housing in Hastings, Manchester, or Birmingham - demonstrating a politics of refusal (and thus an unwillingness to adapt to existing guidance). Furthermore, each group adopted creative campaign tactics as they challenged decisions taken by their respective local governments - ranging from the live-in occupations to photo exhibitions. Recognising the proposed supplementary information, specifically the ‘impact and legacy’ component: at present, many of the members of AAM have since joined the local support group Low Income Families Together (LIFT) and remain active in north Edinburgh’s anti-austerity movement (NEN, 2018b); whilst Focus E15 members continue to run a weekly stall in Stratford and to lend their support to other social movements in the UK and beyond (Focus E15 2018b).

To some extent, the model may be considered as aligning to the ‘fight or flight’ premise of survival. That, under the chosen edition, neither the x axis nor the y axis place the individual or collective’s reactions on a set dichotomy between two dynamics enables a more authentic reflection of the complicated nature of decision making within frameworks beyond our control. Explicitly advocating and working towards creating alternatives to existing provision or the accepted form of, for example, the welfare state, ties in intimately to the Gramscian notion that whilst ‘the old is dying [...] the new cannot be born’ (Gramsci, 1998) in that when people accept the existing situation (to whatever extent), it can incredibly difficult to enact alternative ways of being. Thus, Preserve is positioned in opposition to Alternatives as struggles to maintain the status quo (particularly in the case of anti-austerity movements) cannot easily align with demands for new ways of operating, yet elements of the two can be witness in-action when considered across a sustained period. That reinstating funding served as the focus for the North Edinburgh #SaveOurServices movement (co-headed by participant #1 Nick- required the campaign to operate within the current paradigm illustrates this precise challenge. What was distinct within the approach, however, was that the activists and organisations banded together, instigating a pan-organisational solution across north Edinburgh (Di Marco Campbell, Forthcoming), with #8 Mercy co-creating an information sharing space that allowed local people to better navigate a harsh and austere system.

It is in recognising the hardships created by recent austerity programmes that the PACA Community Action Model works to understand the distinct ways communities have resisted and adapted their activism based on their social circumstances and experiences. In particular, this subsection outlining the proposed model recognised that preservation and compassion are not passive approaches ignorant to social harm, but, rather, a drive to survive is resistance in itself - applicable at both individual and collective levels. Indeed, for Emefulu and Bassel (2018, 115) ‘caring for others is to refuse neoliberal, racist, sexist, xenophobic, homophobic, ableist frameworks that govern their everyday lives’. The authors attest that ‘to care for others is an act of refusal’, adding that ‘care rejects hierarchical domination and attempts to create new political subjectivities’ - all of which constitute actions that go against the increasingly right-wing political cultures of contemporary Europe and create or further entrench forms of marginalisation across identities and their intersections (Halgrimsdottir et al., 2020). Thus, when individuals or communities challenge social situations by working to mitigate the difficulties many find themselves placed within, this in of itself is a rejection of the normalisation of poverty and combats the narrative of the deserving and the undeserving poor.
In these examples, those with the capacity in terms of time, resources, or ability to step in and either take over or form alternative support mechanisms (e.g. establishing food or clothing banks, social centres, care networks, and housing co-operatives, etc. – many of which have been named within this work), enabling others to benefit from their insights, skills sets, and understandings. This demonstrates a refusal to accept that those with the least resources or who find themselves marginalised due to their personal circumstances or employment situation – and, thus, endure harsh treatment by the state or who face wider social stigmas - deserve to suffer results, at times, in very public manner. Therein, efforts to mitigate aspects such as food poverty or struggles to access childcare at an individual or familial level, even when conducted on a peer-to-peer basis, are examples of the tactics and nuanced understandings of need between those in similar social situations (e.g. lone parenthood, low-incomes, language barriers, etc.). Many of the lone parent activist efforts chronicled within this thesis, therefore, demonstrates how they work to resist imposed expectations, regardless of whether they are the primary carer or not, across genders, and how, regardless of their respective political ideologies or perceptions of those in-power at different levels of government, many believe that they can contribute to the change they wish to see.

8.3 Emergent Direct Approaches as Subversive to Social Democracy:

‘When central authority fails in socially crucial tasks, mutual aid, solidarity, and grassroots organization frequently arise as people take up slack [via] informal networks and civil society organizations. We can learn something important about the possibility of horizontal organization by studying such experiments, including how it arises through spontaneous action. If political thought is best illustrated through its implementation in practice, the functioning of grassroots individuals and organizations in a time of crisis is one way to understand the political mechanisms core to anarchist thought’.

- Jun and Lance (2020)

During the fieldwork, two forms of action emerged concerning the political impact of lone parenthood in the context of post-2010 austerity. Responses indicated a dichotomy between actions intended to apply pressure to elected representatives by holding them accountable for decisions that impacted day-to-day life in north Edinburgh (e.g. through voting, public meetings, protests, attending political surgeries [#1 Nick, #4 Lachlan, and #6 Griff], or ambitions to stand for election [#19 Dan]), whilst the countenance witnessed subversive, peer level sub-state forms of organising (including exchanges of childcare [#13 Cally] and provision of emergency food packages [#11 Louise]).

Though not a theoretical perspective with which I entered the research, historical connections to critical pedagogy are acknowledged (Haworth, 2012), the level of independently-conducted self-organisation and mutual aid approaches conveyed by lone parents during the interviews pushed the PhD research towards theories around direct action, mutual aid, and grassroots intervention – much of it best represented within anarchist theory. Anarchism as an ideology has often been misrepresented with distorted understandings reported en masse (both in corporate press and the academy), with Graeber (2004, p.2) amongst those emphasising that ‘most academics seem to have only the vaguest ideas what
anarchism is even about; or dismiss it with the crudest stereotypes. Jun and Lance (2020) made similar observations, stating that ‘among the classical nineteenth-century political philosophies, anarchism is the least studied within the academy and most widely mischaracterized’.

To clarify, rather than ‘anarchy’ (understood as chaotic, idealistic, criminal, or, by default, violent [Marshall, 1993; Ward, 1966; Carter, 1978; Kitsantonios, 2017; Imrie, 1994; Bonanno, 1977]), anarchist approaches are, generally, rooted in mutualism and local organising. This is particularly prudent given the absence of state-run services in the current economic context of state-imposed austerity and impending recession (Adams and Levy, 2018; Jun and Lance, 2020; Laursen, 2019). In the space created by the ongoing erosion or elimination of state-backed provision, has emphasised earlier, many of the interview participants spoke of engaging in struggles against the state (primarily anti-austerity), as well as establishing their own locally-organised alternative support.

Despite those historical misrepresentations, inherent organised militancy is also not central within a wealth of anarchist movements, though civil disobedience and other forms of nonviolent protest are regular features (Day, 1963; US Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1983). As such, peaceful but determined campaigns can challenge the state for reform or action (e.g. over welfare or regarding housing) whilst protecting themselves and those in their care – demonstrating elements of preservation and challenging, whilst, perhaps, also creating alternatives in the meantime. Butler (2020, p.1) addresses this, acknowledging that whilst ‘[t]he case for nonviolence encounters sceptical responses from across the political spectrum, there are those on the left who claim that violence alone has the power to effect radical social and economic transformation. They accept, however, that ‘the question of whether or not to act in a violent way is a privilege and luxury’ (ibid., p.7) that those with young dependents - such as the majority of participants within the fieldwork - can’t always afford. For the women involved in AAM or Focus E15, for example, their politicisation occurred when they were forced into dire circumstances.

Instead, from this theoretical perspective, people from hyperlocalised communities of interest, experience, or geography, prioritising organisation around presented needs such as shared care responsibilities, addressing social and economic isolation, sourcing work or volunteering opportunities, accessing education or other learning opportunities (such as skill sharing and peer education), and the like (Williams, 2018; Williams, 2019) - each of which was raised by the research participants during our dialogues. Such values have been described by Ward (1966) as ‘social principles’, that which prioritises the wellbeing of individuals and communities over profitability for business or existing hierarchical representative democracy. Indeed, Landauer (1910) argued that the state ‘is a condition, a certain relationship between human beings’ that can be dismantled or subverted by individuals ‘contracting

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87 Traced back to 1539 as a term for the ‘absence of government’ (‘anarchisme’; Merriam-Webster, 2020), ‘anarchism’ enters the English language in 1642 (Merriam-Webster, 2019), becoming a formal ideology under French anarchiste Proudhon (1840). Prior to this, anarchist movements had emerged in the Middle East in Basra (modern day Iraq), though also within Islam leading to religious anarchism (Marshall, 1993; Graham, 2005). The ideology spread globally during the 1900’s, with the Japanese and Argentine capitals becoming hubs for anarchist activists and thinkers within their respective continents (Dirlik, 1991; de Laforcade, 2015; Ramnath, 2019; Moya, 2015).

88 Malatesta (2015, p.49) has suggested that some anarchists do support violent acts ‘in order to put an end to the far greater […] violence that keeps the majority of mankind in servitude’. Further, he contests that ‘violence is justifiable when it is necessary to defend oneself and others from violence’. As understood under the ‘violence of austerity’, violence may constitute harms caused via welfare reform, but interventions may also be proclaimed by the state as a form of violent intervention in the sense that it disrupts hegemonic practices.
other relationships, by behaving differently’, such as in the peer and locally-led initiatives described by participants (e.g. forming new youth clubs [#17 Meg]; or creating informal support and care networks [#13 Cally; #5 Dee]).

Whilst not explicitly named as such (with the exception amongst the research participants being #5 Dee who stated herself to be an anarchist), Jun and Lance (2020) emphasise that broader hyperlocal organising can ‘illustrate core elements of anarchist thought’ even without the need to claim that ‘the bulk of [such] grassroots work was done with anarchist ideas explicitly in mind’. They detail how Armand (1926) proposed that, ‘[i]n practice, any individual who, because of [their] temperament or because of conscious and serious reflection, repudiates all external authority or coercion, whether of a governmental, ethical, intellectual, or economic order, can be considered an anarchist’. They proclaim that anyone who consciously rejects the domination of people by other[s through] the social ambiance, and its economic corollaries, can be said to be an anarchist as well’ (‘economic corollaries’ manifesting through state-imposed austerity). Though some would reject the notion, subversion is open to far-left and far-right ideological co-option (Goodway, 2006) and could be applied as much to radical inclusion and sub-statist interventions as to anti-migration or forms of criminality – elements which were raised by #19 Dan who positioned the Scottish Government as a ‘fascist’(ic) state.

Though Esenwein (1989) advocated ‘anarchism without adjectives’ (‘an unhyphenated doctrine without any qualifying labels such as communist, collectivist, mutualist, or individualist [-] an attitude that tolerate[s] the coexistence of different anarchist schools,’ many precise denominations of anarchist approaches and thought have emerged (Honderich, 1995). Regardless of the precise nature (hyphenated or unhyphenated), Ward (1996) suggested that ‘[anarchists] claim that, at the basis of our social problems is the principle of government’. This thesis proposes that an anarchist ethos – even if not by name - was witnessed in many participants’ self-described actions, offering local solutions to the problems raised. Such a premise carries significant credibility given the imposition of austerity, anger, and demonstrations over cuts to community funds, and perceived failures across successive governments to create adequate social housing at council, Holyrood, and Westminster levels (e.g. divergent perspectives having been raised by #19 Dan, #1 Nick, #6 Griff, amongst others).

Within hyphenated anarchism, this research connects most explicitly to Anarcha-feminism89 (Brown, 1993; Dunbar-Ortiz, 2012; Ashbaugh, 1976; Cohn, 2009; Jones, 2017; O’Carroll, 1998; Dolgoff, 1971) and Social-anarchism as, under each, power becomes (at least in theory) largely horizontal, with service users or community members involved in decision making via processes of direct democracy in a decentralised manner (de Heredia, 2007; McLaughlin, 2007; Proudhon, 1840; Ervin, 2017; Levine, 1979). The foundational premise within both denominations being that those with lived experience of an issue (e.g. food insecurity or financial poverty, care responsibilities, etc.) are best placed to identify effective solutions and advocate appropriate allocation of community or state-controlled resources connects to topics raised by many interviewees. The direct democracy of anarchist approaches (self-organisation within and by communities) is distinct from the largely tokenistic consultation processes regularly

89 Also referred to as ‘anarchist feminism’, ‘anarcho-feminism’, and ‘anarchx-feminism’, generally varying based on broader political beliefs. ‘Anarcha’ works to feminise the traditionally masculine ‘anarch’, with ‘anarchx’ stems from the intentional eradication of gendered vocabulary - also witnessed through the use of ‘Latinx’ as opposed to ‘Latina’ or ‘Latino’.
deployed by governments, local councils, and other authorities during decision making processes – approaches which were critiques by participants such as #13 Cally and #5 Dee.

Anarchistic and DIY approaches in the context of this fieldwork - combined within insider perspectives and experiences - and the wealth of hyperlocalised news coverage (NEN, NESHG, NECN, etc.) illustrate a history of locally-led resistance movements combatting racism (Muirhouse Anti-Racism Campaign), unsafe housing conditions (Muirhouse Living Rent), and anti-austerity (North Edinburgh #SaveOurServices). With many vital community and family-oriented services throughout the UK eroded or eliminated entirely during the last decade of austerity, these movements and peer-instigated support mechanisms demonstrate initiative and efforts to ensure the collective (taken to mean the local community, though also related to questions of who is included) might navigate, or, at least, mitigate, social ostracization and economic hardship. Whilst there have been specific countermovements across north Edinburgh rallying against the funding cuts to local services, the responses of greatest interest within this PhD are those which have emerged informally in the non-statist spaces at the grassroots level between families (primarily lone parents) and their neighbours rather than those exclusively conceived of and led by workers of the organisations threatened (e.g. via trade unionism). As in the case of the North Edinburgh #SaveOurServices campaign - an initiative #1 Nick was central to establishing - anarchistic style organising can be witnessed in the manner in which community members, service users, and other supporters came together to co-create an anti-austerity movement as they believed the services threatened to be invaluable to the broader wellbeing of local people (including support with child care and training opportunities that many lone parent families benefit from where they sought employment). Levine (1979) has drawn similar parallels between local sub-statist movements and anarchism, observing of the 1970’s US, that ‘all across the country independent groups of women began functioning without the structure, leaders and other factotums of the male Left, creating independently and simultaneously, organisations similar to those of anarchists of many decades and locales’. Considering anarchism in such contexts is not, therefore, unprecedented.

Drawing more intimately on connections to Anarcha-feminism, Brown (1993, p.2) argued that ‘as anarchism is a political philosophy that opposes all relationships of power, it is inherently feminist’. De Heredia (2007) goes further, declaring that ‘Anarcha-feminism is, ultimately, a tautology’. Given the lone parent focus of this research, the independence of many non-partnered mothers interviewed, the relocation of care duties from heteronormative mother to several of the lone fathers, and a concerted effort to address historical underrepresentation of queer, non-binary, and gender nonconforming solo parents, feminist actions can be witnessed by the unique nature of participants’ family lives. Taking one element of traditionally feminised relations, empathy (a core element of social activism and solidarity) is created through common struggle and recognition of shared adversity and mutualism (Brown, 1993; Dolgoff, 1971). Though not universally recognised in feminist terms (Broude and Garrard, 1992), this common ground and mutual ethos whereby an individual is able to recognise and legitimise the hardships of those around them, often between folk sharing a geographical context, appears pivotal for mutual survival in the face of adversity. This is not, by any means, a suggestion of unconditional support for others in our immediate vicinity, rather it prompts reflection on the intimate relationships and motivations within cross-community groups (manifesting hooks’ [1984] ‘multidimensional gatherings).

Indeed, the participants who were engaged in social movements (e.g. #4 Lachlan, #5 Dee, #29 June, #1 Nick, and #8 Mercy) recognised that others boasting histories of political activism frequently sought to dominate or dictate to those they deemed newcomers to social action – therein, reinforcing hierarchy.
Self-organisation, however, must not be confused with the acceptance of the traditionally conservative ambitions of relocating support from, for example, state-provided healthcare to ‘care in the community’ - another example of deinstitutionalisation historically witnessed via the absence of the state rather than via proactive choice from the families involved (see e.g. Miller, 2020; Kitsantonis, 2017; and Weller, 1989). Day (1945) argued that the Catholic Church held direct responsibility to those in need, yet broke from the upper echelons of the church (traditionally hierarchical and largely male-dominated), advocating solutions rooted in local knowledge rather than guidance issued without incorporating organic understandings based on lived experience. Day was explicit in her critique of the state, pushing for social responsibility where she perceived statist failure, therein working to address the problems she believed were created by the state’s decisions to abdicate responsibility or become overly reformist.

In her own activism, Day (1974) demonstrated the combining of ideologies within cross-community ‘multi-dimensional gatherings’), stating that ‘[w]e ourselves have never hesitated to use the word [‘anarchism’, but] Peter Maurin came to me with Kropotkin in one pocket and St. Francis in the other!’ Despite her own ethos being rooted in Catholicism as part of the Catholic Worker Movement, Day sought to illustrate where anarchistic approaches overlap with other ideologies, pushing for redistribution of resources -described by Malatesta (2015, p.79) as when ‘oppos[ing] unjust forms of organization built around coercion, domination, and exploitation’. Whilst she understood the need for cooperation between divergent ideological (but progressive) forces, she was eager for the results to favour new religiously shaped approaches and, draws parallels to #9 Frank and #26 Winnie in the intimate connection between desires for social justice and the importance of faith. Similarly, localist Kauffman (2000) backed hyperlocalised responses to social issues. Though he identified multiple conflicts between Day’s and his own positions, he contested that ‘if small is not always beautiful, at least it is always human’ - illustrating his belief that local residents are those best placed to identify the most appropriate solutions to local problems, despite pro-statist beliefs that solutions can, largely, be implemented in a top-down fashion.

On this notion of redistribution and justice, Nozick’s (1974) entitlement theory - comprising three core principles - amongst the most effective lens through which we can consider what this may look like if enacted. Based on (i) justice in acquisition; (ii) justice in transfer; and (iii) rectification of injustice, Nozick’s beliefs come into direct conflict with the state. Though he wrote from a largely individualist perspective, when applied to the collective, notions of asset transfer (the state relinquishing control of a particular service requiring the public to step-in in order to save the amenity) or the state applying financial cuts to community-based support (i.e. processes of austerity, reallocation of funding, etc.) Nozick’s theory retains its relevance. Taking two examples of participants who initially accessed local services yet now find themselves occupying leadership roles, #1 Nick first accessed the Pilton Community Health Project as a service-user before leading his own cooking programme for parents; similarly, #8 Mercy was involved in setting up a local social centre. Following his frontline role as one of the North Edinburgh #SaveOurServices activists, #1 Nick now sits on the same organisation’s board of directors, whilst #9 Frank has taken on increasingly senior roles in his community-based practice, in part, stated as possible due to his increased confidence and developed understandings of family. It, therefore, bears remembering that ‘[social] movements arise not utterly spontaneously out of nothing, but by way of existing networks, systems of contacts, and established organizations’ (Jun and Lance, 2020).
To take one example, explicitly named-anarchist groups have emerged to plug these gaps as state provision is reduced. In Athens (Greece), Void Network (GRE: ΚΕΝΟ ΔΙΚΤΥΟ) members - similarly subjected to extreme forms of economic austerity engaged in what Kitsantonios (2017) described as ‘social activism that is effectively filling a void in governance’ via practice which commuted to ‘unfiltered self-help and citizen action’. Anarchist activists in the Greek capital sought to provide emergency food packages, deliver medication to those in need, and established hundreds of member-run community centres (echoing aspects of #8 Mercy’s practice, though more explicitly political), as well as members facing housing precarity or homelessness undertaking squats in public buildings (again, mirroring the practice of AAM and Focus E15). Within this context of Greek national austerity, the aforementioned concern of sub-governmental spaces for radical solutions being open to left and right politics, the extremes of the latter were witnessed as Golden Dawn (The Popular Association – Golden Dawn; GRE: Λαϊκός Σύνδεσμος – Χρυσή Αυγή) when organisers were witnessed as frontline service providers, aiding those in positions of severe food poverty within Athens in an attempt to garner political support. With several interviewees describing their particular ‘north Edinburgh identity’ (amongst them, #1 Nick, #8 Mercy, and #16 Michael), further correlation to the Greek contexts can be witnessed in comments from anarchist artist Spathara who suggest that ‘authorities want to downgrade the [Exarchia] area because it’s the only place in Athens that has an organized, anti-establishment identity’ (Kitsantonis, 2017).

Though a significant percentage of research participants conveyed their socially-inclined values (indeed thirteen explicitly identifying as ‘socialist’), distinctions between ambition and historical precedent become increasingly evident as anarchism is understood as a way of living rather than purely as a way of thought (Brown, 1993; Bowen and Purkis, 2004; McLean, 2003; Ward, 1966) – not entirely unlikely socialism in a broad sense. Anarchism has frequently worked in-practice, thus Jun and Lance’s (2020) observation of the same premise in the context of localised responses to the Covid-19 shows that much of the anarchistic ethos to peer support and mutual of aid ‘arises out of related ideological commitments, but most simply functions out of no more than a desire to support one another’. The women-led efforts from the Mujeres Libres - a division of the Federación Anarquista Ibérica - (see e.g. Ackelsberg, 2005; Kaplan, 1971; Graham and Labanyi, 2009) - provides an example of how non-patriarchal community-based Anarcha-feminism organising can occur - therein tying back to the ‘abiding [the] gendered self’ (Butler 1988, p.519; see also Sandhya and Jayaraman, 2019). Though the Madrid-based Mujeres Libres membership extended into tens of thousands, parallels can be drawn to the hyperlocalised working class context of north Edinburgh where organising occurred outside of statist interventions.

Distinctions must be drawn, however, in terms of similarities and the extent to which the alternative and subaltern approaches depicted by the fieldwork participants embody anarchist pedagogies. Certain anarchist factions have advocated political abstentionism (Thomas, 1985), yet electoralism and representative democracy (described by Ward [1966] as buying into the ‘political principle’ rather than a ‘social principle’) rarely featured as the core concern of the interviewees - with the exception of advocacy for Scottish independence (including questioning the authenticity of the vote count) or the occasional mention of previously voting SNP or Labour - rather their actions often subverted assumed democratic practices (perhaps, partially, down to the perceived limited accountability of representatives once they are elected [Di Marco Campbell, Forthcoming]). #4 Lachlan also spoke about his own frustrations with politicians and party members - citing examples of two-parent families where both
adults are members of any given party yet, in heterosexual couples, the woman is expected to take on all care responsibilities so that the man can pursue a career in politics. He spoke of children who ‘grew up around a party but not in the party’, where preexisting conditions would merely be replicated rather than challenges by embodying ‘a different kind of politics’.

‘When I lived in [Europe] in the 80’s, I would’ve considered myself “Labour”. You know, fuck Reagan, fuck Thatcher, fuck Reagonomics! The punk scene did a lot to shape my politics. Today though, I’m much more chilled out. I’m a democratic socialist, and the SNP, they’re good guys with a hard deal from the crooks in England. […] Here, in Scotland, it’s all about us being run by those... the criminals down south. Like, I don’t believe for a second that the 45% was accurate. There’s plenty of videos up on YouTube of votes being put into the wrong piles!’

- #6 Griff

A further core area of relevance to Anarcha-feminism is the rejection, by some, of the sole acceptance of the nuclear family. Though marriage was, and in many respects remains, an expectation of would-be parents (particularly, as the literature demonstrated, in largely religious countries), placing lone parent families outside the ‘norm’. Goldman (1914) was amongst the earliest anarchists to voice her opposition to institutionalised marriage, which she described as ‘primarily an economic arrangement’ which, in heterosexual partnerships (the only form of marriage legal in Scotland until 2014), the woman ‘pays for it with her name, her privacy, her self-respect, [and] her very life’. Working to chronicle these precise beliefs, Kowal (2019) notes the history of ‘supporting the broader efforts of the anarchist movement’, whilst adding that ‘anarcha-feminism offered a model of womanhood that articulated women’s sexual agency as an economic and personal imperative, which in turn provided a radical alternative to the suffrage movement and a critical framework for modern feminism’. Thus, it bears noting that whilst several participants had endured the breakdown of marriages or long-term relationships (heterosexual, same-sex, or multi-partnered), others had opted to go it alone in their parenting from an early stage – a clear divergence from social expectations.

Despite this belief from Goldman (1998) and De Cleyre (1907), among others, in women’s liberation in relation to marriage as an institution, not all denominations of anarchism or those who held anarchistic-style beliefs so readily accepted shattering the suggested narrowness of the define two-parent heteronormative family. Day (1963), however, proclaimed, of sexual liberation, that ‘[t]he wisdom of the flesh is treacherous’ arguing instead for ‘a woman who must think in terms of the family, the need of the child to have both [a] mother and father, who believes strongly that the home is the unit of society’. Her rejection of the conceptualised sexually liberated woman went as far as condemnation, stating that ‘[w]hen sex is treated lightly, as a means of pleasure ... it takes on the quality of the demonic, and to descend into this blackness is to have a foretaste of hell...’ (ibid.), therein, the freedom several interviewees expressed concerning their enjoyment in how they could explore new relationships with new partners of any gender or with multiple partners (e.g. #22 Nomi and #25 Aiden) may have - or indeed may still - be met with outright vilification from the church or other such institutions. There is, however, a caveat here in that a handful of discussants spoke of aid, advice, and guidance they received after outing themselves as lone parents to their community of faith or disclosing their status to religious officials (e.g. #26 Winnie). Furthermore, #9 Frank spoke of the importance of faith during his journeys to recovery from (or gaining control over) addiction.
The core anarchistic tendency towards mutualism is a further aspect which bore repeated correlations to the actions depicted during the fieldwork dialogues. As such, having established a more nuanced understanding of anarchism in practice than, according to Graeber (2004) and Jun and Lance (2020), is generally held in the academy, the following subsection reflects on the practice of mutual aid recounted by interview participants.

8.4 Mutual Aid and Mutuality:

‘There is an immense amount of warfare and extermination going on amidst various species; [yet] there is, at the same time, as much, or perhaps even more, of mutual support, mutual aid, and mutual defense… Sociability is as much a law of nature as mutual struggle’.

- Kropotkin (1902, p.12)

Russian anarchist Kropotkin (1902) was fundamental in his belief that ‘mutual aid and mutual support [is] a feature of greatest importance for the maintenance of life’. Grounding his arguments in the works of naturalist researcher Kessler (1880), connecting it to natural development via countenance of exclusively Darwinist competition for survival. He recognised that modern states and the advancement of private property disadvantages poor and working class communities, minimising opportunities for mutualism and cross-community solidarity (see also Todes, 1989; Dolgoff, 1971; Boucher, 1985; McKay, 2010; and Gould, 1997). Whilst, at times, the examples Kropotkin (1902) provided at the turn of the 19th century related to acts of aid and solidarity in moments of physical danger (e.g. rushing pails of water to a neighbour’s burning house), works that examine situations spaces such as food banks and school uniform exchanges demonstrate support and altruistic redistribution of resources from those with - not necessarily an abundance of capitals (as much social, experiential, and political as financial [Flora and Flora, 2008; Flora et al., 2004]) but generally with ‘enough’ - to those without. Within the participant cohort, #19 Meg, for example, volunteered her time with a local youth club once her children became old enough to look after themselves. Such redistribution is essential, according to Rawls’ (1971, p.289) theory of justice, if ‘social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are to be of greatest benefit to the least-advantaged members of society’ and manifests frequently in the actions of discusants.

Kropotkin’s (1902) theories expanded - and intertwined more intimately with those of Kessler (1880) - to suggest that ‘mutual struggle’ - that is the challenge to survive - and competition for resources (taken to mean social support, employment opportunities, etc) is often offset by mutual aid, though participants frequently struggle to self-organise to the same extent of the former services – be that due to limited experience, capacity, or the absence of funding. Despite that, at times, self-directed provision and community-run solutions can provide more appropriate and adaptable solutions than the state. The struggles therein come down to capacity, competing social and work commitments whilst operating on potential zero-budget or relying exclusively on community-sources donations (see e.g. LIFT [NEN, 2018b] or the pan-Edinburgh Edinburgh Helping Hands [Campbell, 2021]).

‘To embrace mutual aid as the sole legitimate organizing principle of society is to reject the institutionalization of any means of coercion, or of violence and the threat of violence. It is to embrace the idea that we can cooperatively reason with one another,
and thereby instantiate our common inclination to build a society that benefits all without instituting any sort of hierarchy that functions to enforce such arrangements.’
- Jun and Lance (2020)

Anarchism is understood by both McLaughlin (2007) and Ward (1966) to have four key tenets. The former suggested these as ‘[t]he will for a non-coercive society; [...] rejection of the state apparatus; [a] belief that human nature allows humans to exist in or progress toward such a non-coercive society; [and] suggestion[s] on how to act to pursue the ideal of anarchy’ (McLaughlin, 2007, pp.25-26). In only a minor contrast, Ward (1966) was more concise in identifying ‘four principles behind an anarchist theory of organisation: [...] (1) voluntary, (2) functional, (3) [often] temporary, and (4) small’. Taking these aspects of: voluntary participation (‘non-coercive’); a mistrust or, certainly, a lack of faith in the state to safeguard and protect local services; a belief that the state is limited or incapable of protecting vulnerable groups (e.g. implementing sanctions and cuts to social security); and a repeatedly expressed belief in the positive nature of other residents, there are many tenets of anarchist thought that can be witnessed in the behaviours through struggle, self-management, and community organising from the interview participants, even if anarchism is not a familiar part of the political ideology that most would readily align themselves to.

8.5 Reimagining the Contemporary Lone Parent Family:

The Literature Review chapter outlined many ways in which lone parent families have been understood or neglected by state policies, how recent understandings within the academy have described or failed to account for the intersecting, complex, and multifaceted identities of lone parent families, as well as the limited sense of agency the academy and state afforded them (‘the unwed’; ‘never married’, ‘single’). In this closing subsection of analysing those historical portrayals of lone parenthood will be contrasted against the findings of the thesis.

In the Scottish context circa 93% of lone parent families are understood to be mother-headed (OPFC, 2018), with lone parent families constituting around 5% of all Scottish households (Scottish Government, 2017) most of them understood, or certainly assumed to be, heterosexual white women. Whilst it is true that many this 93% will be white and heterosexual, the UK Government (2018) advises that almost one in five Black households in Britain (18.9%) ‘were made up of a single parent with dependent children’. Queer parenthood emerged as limited focus within academic literature - with almost no works directly considering lone queer parenthood. Though the likes of Gabb (2001), Sandell (1994), Weeks et al. (2001), Dierck and Lucas Platero (2018) have produced texts considering the experiences of gay or lesbian coupled-families (some of the research specifically addressing trans-related narratives), accounts shared by several of my research participants were amongst the first direct accounts I’ve encounter to offer insight into the intersections of lone parenthood, queer identity and the stigmas faced, familial ostracisation, and childism within the queer community. There are, however, a handful of works that consider the experiences of children raised within queer families (e.g. Green, 1978; Green, 1998) of which some parenting couples’ relationships didn’t survive the coming out process or ended when one parent transitioned, thereby creating situations of lone parenting.
Emejulu (2018) recognised that throughout history feminism ‘was always to say that biology was not destiny because that was precisely the argument that people used to keep women in private spaces: that women with their “smaller brains” were “prone to fainting” and are not fit to be in public spaces, such as politics and the workplace.’ Butler (1990) has further suggested that ‘sex is taken as an immediate given, a sensible given, physical features belonging to a natural order’, yet understands that ‘what we believed to be a physical and direct perception is only a sophisticated and mythic construction - an imaginary formation which reinterprets physical features - in themselves as neutral as other’. Similar clustering often occurs during social commentary and policy formation concerning groups such as lone parents. Indeed, intersections and imposed expectations are common across social class, settled status, employment, housing situation, sexuality, familial or inherited wealth, physical and mental health, (dis)ability, gender identity, and social or supportive relationships significantly impact the experience, capacity, and wellbeing of the lone parent, and those in their care.

Whereas Vidic (in Butler, 1990) argues that there is, in essence, only one gender - that of female with the male understood and socially treated as what she terms ‘the general’, in the context of lone parenthood, any gender identity beyond that of accepted definitions of ‘female’ (and anyone existing beyond heteronormativity) who occupies the role of lone parent and performs the role of the primary caregiver becomes ‘the other’ in terms of their gendered experience. Dorsey (2013) has, however, stressed that although cisgendered fathers within heterosexual relationships are increasingly defying traditional breadwinner role and undertaking stay-at-home roles, the accepted gendered roles have been less commonly accepted within queer parenting dynamics (lone, coupled, or otherwise). Understanding caring roles as frequently positioned as those of female-identifying individuals, Butler (1990, p.32) suggests that the ‘accidental characteristics of a gender ontology mean the expectations placed on the historically binary parental identities of “mother” or “father” cannot be accepted as anything beyond performatve’. Thus, based on privileges of power, status, and opportunities (or the lack of) to participate in proceedings, parents (dependent on their assigned and traditionally gendered roles) may consciously or unconsciously perform as they believe they are expected to.

Such internalised or self-imposed restrictions on what the parent understands to constitute socially acceptable behaviours for their respective gendered role constitutes a form of Gramscian hegemony via its reproduction of parental roles within heteronormative coupled-families, even where observed in lone parent settings to a certain extent. Assumptions over care roles was present in numerous interviews, with participants such as #2 Lawrence, #20 Rona, #4 Lachlan, and #7 Cathleen stating that no conversations took place over who would become primary carer post-split, rather, they were expected to take on the role. However, performance and adherence to expected or, rather, accepted forms of gender and bodily dysphoria have also long been understood as based on a particular level of performativity. Butler (1990), however, is among those to recognise that terms such as ‘dad’ have long been utilised by non-male identifying individuals (including those assigned as female sex at birth) and gender-nonconforming folk - with Butler staying that butch lesbians have often adopted the traditionally male term of ‘father’. The term ‘lesbian dads’ (Goldberg et al., 2014), frequently adopted by the nonbiological parent in coupled lesbian parents, is ‘used to describe lesbian parents who feel like the culturally accepted identity and role of father is more in line with her own parental identity and role than the culturally accepted identity and role of mother’ and is primarily used by those who ‘identify with a more masculine or gender-neutral/ambiguous/queer role than a feminine role’.
Among the gendered and gender performative issues raised during the interviews were topics regarding the absence of non-gendered parental terminology (beyond ‘mum’ and ‘dad’ [e.g. #25 Aiden and #15 Sasha];childism within the queer community (#3 Lindsay); the impact of raising a child of another gender than their own (#4 Lachlan); and the forms of work which - as a lone parent or being of a particular gender - they may be expected to enter into (#20 Nina, #7 Cathleen, and #12 Kelly). The circumstances of becoming a lone parent significantly impacted the extent to which this latter element was an issue, though it become particularly prevalent in heteronormative situations whereby one parent was either entirely or largely absent from the child’s life (e.g. through bereavement, institutionalisation, or relocation). Though centring his work on active anti-racist practice, Kendi (2018) stressed that genuinely equalities focused work - that which ‘knowingly’ strives to address ingrained prejudices - ‘requires persistent self-awareness, constant self-criticism, and regular self-examination’. As demonstrated through the Freirean process of conscientization, many of the interviewees had recognised the political struggles they endured based on externally-imposed views, whilst some had opted to engage in social action to improve their own circumstances.

8.6 Summary

Concerning how the participants understood their own identities, generally, biographical narratives were offered in chronological order, starting with the circumstances of (where applicable) the biological parents meeting or with the moment of separation. Though these explanations frequently centred on the participants’ children, it became clear that many of them came from non-nuclear families themselves. #6 Griff grew up in a lone parent family, living his father in the Midwest whilst his sister was raised by their mother. Though he himself suggested it was largely a ridiculous notion today, #4 Lachlan spoke directly to this shame of single parenthood - particularly young parents who birthed children whilst out of wedlock - detailing family dramas during which it was revealed that a woman he had believed to be his aunt was in fact his half-sister, some thirty years his senior. Even in his own family unit, #4 Lachlan was expected to assume the duties of ‘the man of the house’ after his father passed as despite being just seventeen years old, his brothers already had their own families. Evidently, gender has played a significant role in shaping how the lone parents perceived themselves, but much of it stemmed from their own adolescence (including being subjected to violence from caregivers [e.g. #16 Frank] or their families exhibiting intolerance to queer family members [#31 Jenny]).

More broadly, however, as I stated in my previously publication, the dialogues created an intimacy that revealed significant aspects of how the participants perceived themselves, and what connotations this carrier for them – particularly in social and economic terms:

‘What has become obvious through these […] dialogues is that witnessing each other’s homes and unintentionally encountering members of their family, created an unintended intimacy between the researcher and the participants. These discussions no longer exclusively involved the narration offered by the interviewee, but several respondents likened the space offered by the BINM and dialogically informed approach
to a counselling session\textsuperscript{90} (participants #21 Edina, #26 Kim, and #32 Nicky) whilst others stated that they welcomed the opportunity to converse with another adult due to the social isolation they endured as a result of the earliest stages of the Covid-19 outbreak and the imposed lockdown. In addition, though a wealth of accommodations were intended to permit the research interviews to take place at any time of day which best suited participants (generally when their children were still at school or at after-school clubs), the pandemic resulted in an unexpected range of responses with the plan of controlling the researcher’s identities as an academic, activist, and local resident no longer under their control due to the home environment setting. Unexpectedly, in several instances, the lone parent participants encouraged their children to wave to the camera and occasionally - such as with participants #18 Carol and #21 Edina - who actually encouraged their child to tell the researcher about their experiences of having only one parent or indeed multiple families.’

- Campbell (2021, p.576).

As Hedican (2006, p.18) stressed, the desire to situate the research through addressing emotional components, understanding one’s own relationships (academic, social, and practice-based) is an ongoing process of aggregation, growth, and richer understandings. He suggested that ‘reflexive understandings accumulate and are transformed over time the more they are thought about in the context of the continued social interaction with the people in the field of study’ - in this context the lone parent participants. As he attested, ‘[t]here is also the complex process of organizing the [researcher]’s thoughts, putting them down on paper (or laptop), rethinking them in the context of future events and situations, and then eventually drawing conclusions in the form of the final [...] account’. The analytical process, then, is recognised as integral to creating an effective investigation, whilst reflecting on one’s own circumstances and the feelings these interactions evoke demands addressing.

8.7 Blending Social Work and Community Development Practices

In closing out this thesis, let us re-empathise the core components, strengths, and contributions of this investigation. As a practitioner and academic operating primarily within the Community Development contexts, this thesis synthesised core elements of the direct and dialogical practices of my own field with a range of social work theories and concerns - focusing, as it did, on lone parent families’ precise experiences of austerity, rather than a broader exploration of community-wide challenges. Amongst the most significant components of this work’s legacy are the possibilities of intimate discussion that adopts free-flowing dialogues and promotes a participant-led investigation (foregrounded by the advocacy of Ross and Moore’s [2016] BINM) rather than allowing we, as researchers arriving with institutional backing, to dictate the dialogue in order to extract precise responses. So too, as I have incorporated during the community profile and reflexivity subsections, the thesis encourages immersive approaches to understanding the communities in which we work and research and sincerely recognising the impact

\textsuperscript{90} A topic deserving of deep interrogation, the undertaking of emotional labour by the research around sensitive topics has been considered by Hochschild (1983) and Owton and Allen-Collinson (2013) in relation to the role and purpose with which the research engaging in interviewing. The latter, for example, stress that ‘[l]istening to stories that are emotionally laden and troubling […] can have a powerful effect on any researcher and this can be exacerbated where a friendship relationship is also involved, and the researcher feels a greater duty of care to [their] participant’.
that we have in arriving into these spaces (including the diversity of relationships – and reputations or roles - we hold with those who living there.

Despite the contemporary academia treating doctoral research as a highly individualised process, many aspects are only possible through collaboration and dialogue with those living and working in the area of study (geographical, subject-specific, or otherwise). Recognition of this is offered through the carefully constructed biographies of the participants who enabled the research through their candour and sincerity, whilst the reflexive components outlined my multifaceted relationship with north Edinburgh, its communities, and institutions, illustrated that such deeply-situated research is only possible by those invested and established in some capacity within their community of study. Given that complexity, the threefold Christakopoulou et al. (2011) method of producing community profiles made it possible to relay many fundamental elements of life in Greater Pilton from a range of social, economic, and political perspectives (these were then supplemented by transport and creative responses which emerged as issues of significance locally based on the research and interviews). This was an approach I have previously utilised in my Community Development practice, research, and teaching and, in this instance, sought to bring a broad contextualisation of the systems and ideologies that shape the participants’ experiences (somewhat typical of Community Development), whilst recognising the urgency of centring the participants’ individually (a more direct Social Work premise). This permitted core elements of individual and collective agency to take centre stage in the analysis of the findings, recognising the determination and politics of the everyday, acknowledging the range of acts taken by discussants to safeguard their own family units whilst, frequently, collectivising formally or informally with others experiencing similar struggles (be that with care, employment opportunities, policy impacts, etc.).

That drive towards action - promoted by major theorists canonised within Community Development detailed in this work (e.g. Freire, 1972; and Ledwith, 2011) - influenced the creation of the PACA model as a tool for practitioners across sectors, but it may also serve as a reflective tool for groups themselves. Shaped largely by political theorist and social activist contributions in works from Emejulu and Sobande (2019), Whyte and Cooper (2017), and Emejulu and Bassel (2017) as they explored immersive contextualisation and notions of agency, this model works to understand the priorities, concerns, and ambitions of community members or activist groups (such as the lone parent collectives detailed in the four case studies in the Literature Review). The model incorporates thematic analysis (generative themes based on input; Kirkwood and Kirkwood, 2011) that align with the themes fostered during the Literature Review, to help communicate information expressed by research participants or studied activist groups. Charting four-points regarding desires to preserve existing community resources versus creating alternatives amidst challenging circumstances; as well as attempts to challenge external processes (e.g. austerity) or to adapt to these new situations enabling a form of visual analysis (supported by commentaries under each subheading) that could serve as a starting point for reflection, analysis, and future planning.

Though the model offers scope for analysis of community organisations based on their actions, communiques, and outside observations of their practice, it is equally useful when analysing participant responses. That is not to suggest, however, that there are not limitations to it use and applicability. Though the entire thirty-four participant reflections could be analysed with a view to producing a single broad and all-encompassing summary (a visual supplement to the written commentaries contained in the analysis), this might blur the subtleties and distinctions between different intersections or
collectivised experienced. It can, however, be applicable should a given demographic be or particular concern or interest (e.g. all non-UK participants or the gender-diverse parents) and can, once again, cluster the responses based on a particular need or experience; with these easily overlayed to demonstrate where groups diverge (as a social trend or within their collectives) Whilst this would facilitate highly engaging and easily communicated overviews, the structured subsections remain integral to communicating the minute details of a given community or intersection via qualitative inputs when mixed with quantitative data.
9. Conclusions

This final chapter draws the thesis together, outlining how the core research questions have been addressed, whilst recognising what the research has achieved. It revisits the relationship between myself, as researcher, and the community member participants post-fieldwork, recognising the lasting impact of this work. More significantly, it reiterates the three contributions to academic theory and future investigations (the researcher to participant proximity model, the charting socio-political actions, and the reimagining of how we understanding lone parents). The importance of the BINM approach and the underpinning dialogically-driven theory from Freire (1972) in making this a successfully conducted investigation are acknowledged.

9.1 The Findings:

The immersive approach taken to this doctoral research was made possible, largely, because of the established relationships the researcher held to the research communities (geographical, activist, professional youth worker, resident, etc.). These connections permitted trust to quickly be fostered despite, under many criteria, only being a partial insider, the shared experiential capital communicated during the recruitment phase meant that the BINM approach enabled an openness as the two actors (interviewee and researcher) were able to relate on a significant number of intersections. Though concerns about the extent to which some components of our identities diverged (e.g. most significantly on gender), the suggested ‘North Edinburgh identity’ described by several participants (including #1 Nick, #16 Michael, and #8 Mercy) meant that shared working class identities were frequently a core ‘in’ - this being despite the researcher boasting only seven years of practice, research, and lived experience in the area at the onset compared to the many decades or even multi-generational legacies several participants boasted. As such, were this research to be expanded to consider additional contexts (domestic or international), the loss of those pre-existing relationships, professional connections, established local identity, and insights through shared lived experience would present a significant new barrier. This would risk a radical change in the information returned during the fieldwork through, necessitating researchers who boast similarly capacity in any future studied areas to combat the would-be absence of shared knowledge and experience.

Returning to the importance of anarchist theory around direct action and mutual aid – which become central in developing effective understandings - this ideological approach and embodied manner of living was afforded significant space within this work when recognised as the most appropriate way to analyse the findings. As with Ward (1966), many anarchist schools of thought would argue for the immediate formation of structures to ensure financial security in the face of poverty, with socialist-inclined research participants such as #4 Lachlan, #32 Nicky, and #6 Griff eager for welfare reforms intended to stave precarity like the Universal Basic Income to address the precarity many participants described. Furthermore, a guaranteed and unconditional income - one that forces would-be employers to ensure attractive working conditions and guarantees of worker safety are in-place (circumstances many research participants regularly face - would enable folk to avoid becoming trapped by financial debt (Graeber, 2004), therein limiting the extensive problems that stem from this such as poor mental health and broader anxiety.
As outlined across several of the thirty-four interviews and considered extensively in the analysis, that the North Edinburgh #SaveOurServices campaign has served as an core example of current proactive efforts to combat austerity, it is appropriate to consider the lessons from this type of action to-date. From an insider perspective, it is necessary to highlight the concern of particular voices dominating over others whilst in the shared space (an issue recognised in previous campaigns and that has served as a deterrent to some participants becoming involved in community action). Whilst there were benefits to the multi-dimensional gatherings enabling cross-community dialogue and levying the social, political, or experiential capital of others, this frequently failed to promote the voices of those most directly affected by an issue and others tended to dominate dialogue - particularly the voices of seasoned white, generally heterosexual, and cisgendered male activists\(^1\) with decades of experiential capital in north Edinburgh. Though such familiarity was welcomed for the intimate organic knowledge it brings, hyper-confidence and overbearing personalities often drown out voices of others, particularly newly motivated actors eager to influence their local community and safeguard essential services threatened by a regime of cuts (several of the thesis interviewees being amongst them). This can significantly alter the campaign ambitions and success (for better or worse depending on how that capital is utilised), however, successful lone parent examples were found in the creation of the manifestos from both AAM and Focus E15.

What this thesis research does find, however, is that political ideology (albeit not always explicitly) informs many of the participants’ thoughts - the majority situating themselves on the ideological left (ranging from centre-left to social democracy and, though not all). Whether through a determination to operate in direct contrast to the state - therein connecting to anarchist approaches to community organising (e.g. #5 Dee) - or participants aligning with themselves with a particular political party (the SSP, SNP, or Scottish Labour; e.g. #6 Griff, #4 Lachlan, etc.), community groups continue, for the most part, to operate within a pre-existent paradigm, making their demands on the state to address their concerns via the same processes that created them. Indeed, Beckett (2019) suggests that within the traditional political sphere, ‘[e]ven when rightwing parties are not in power, conservative ideas and policies set the shape of society and the economy.’ Therein, despite local activists’ ambitions (the lone parents interviewed but also the broader north Edinburgh anti-austerity movement), the removal of statist support via the decade-long process of economic austerity renders a majority of subversive initiatives unsustainable in the long term due to the required opt-in nature, labour-intensive, and absence of assistance or accessibility of care systems (connection to Ward’s [1966] belief that effective practice was often short-term), however, this echoes the rationale for #8 Mercy’s co-created social centre which, she advised, cannot explicitly challenge the state if it wishes to continue operating under different regimes of power.

9.2 Relationships Post-Fieldwork:

Even after the fieldwork was complete, several interviewees kept in touch, letting me know about online parenting groups they’ve found helpful, positive stories about interactions with their wider families or new relationships, but also the struggles they’d endured since our dialogues and, in the case of the

\(^1\) This, generally being understood as the demographic afforded the most social privilege and, therein, permitted to occupy a disproportionate platform in comparison to others who may be perceived or convey themselves as less dominant or carry lower confidence due to the historic undervaluing and downplaying of minority contributions.
non-cisgendered or gender non-conforming participants, the sustained campaigns of harassment and disinformation they encountered on the street, corporate press, or directly. Whilst these additional inputs occurred after the interviews and, thus, could not contribute to the analysis chapters, it feels significant to recognise these in the closing states to demonstrate the sustained struggles several of the lone parent participants present in this thesis continue to endure - particularly amongst those historically marginalised within the academy. Examples received through private communications included praise for LGBT Health & Wellbeing’s online outreach work to queer families (lone or otherwise) during the pandemic and, in particular, periods of lockdown and self-enforced isolation\(^92\); but also anxiety after witnessing the results of the SNP party conference in late November 2020, and a series of what a majority of those reaching out identified as transphobic disinformation being published online. On the SNP elections, Mukerji (2020) suggested ‘the dominant story of the night is the success [of] anti-GRA candidates across the elections, and the defeat of pro-GRA incumbents.’ With many of the participants disclosing their past support for the SNP (including the majority of those who identified as queer, with their support often becoming conditional rather than the default), a perceived radical shift from explicitly trans-inclusive stances was upsetting for many participants (including those who stated that their often marginalisation as lone parents had fostered greater empathy for other minority groups [e.g. #11 Louise, #32 Nicky, and #31 Jenny]).

Though the Covid-19 pandemic was only starting to impact daily life in Scotland and beyond during the latter stage interviews, the swelling health demands of the general population caused a significant backlog in health care provision. As such, the Scottish Government (2022) ‘developed the NHS Recovery Plan, which sets out key ambitions and actions to address the backlog of care across NHS Scotland by March 2026.’ The realities of this were, evidently, set to bear significant consequences for several of the participants in this study, particularly those reliant on personal care for themselves and assistance with childcare. Longer term, the research demonstrates the need for training programmes like those advocated by the Non-Binary Working Group (2022, p.8) promoting ‘[f]und[ing] mandatory training for mental health providers on trans and non-binary healthcare needs’, as well as a push towards more comprehensive educational programmes about relationships and family types.

9.3 Theoretical Contributions

The three core contributions that this thesis has produced concerned the Re-conceptualising Lone Parents; Visualising Researcher Proximity; and Charting Activist Motivations. Foremost, it has sought to reimagine how we - as academics, as activists, and as community-based practitioners - understand ‘lone parents’. The insights provided by the thirty-four research participants have demonstrated critically conscious actors who, for the most part, take the actions necessary – to the best of their ability - for the benefit of their families whether still lone, recently-coupled, blended, or non-primary caregivers. The harms of a decade of austerity have produced immense hardships for many of them - to the extent that some no longer engage with the welfare state for fear of the damage further reforms might do to them emotionally, to the wellbeing of their families, or, to their physical safety (e.g. #10 Rona). The families whose stories are presented in this research exist under the state, yet, their choices demonstrate a willingness to defy societally or state-imposed norms around care.

\(^92\) In an article I produced for Bella Caledonia, I was able to discuss this work with LGBT Health & Wellbeing CEO Maruska Greenwood (Campbell, 2020).
In addition to the adapted version of Christakopoulou et al’s (2001) approach to producing Community Profiles with connectivity (transport links) and creative responses now added as further categories, and the enhanced version of the three-fold exploration of researcher relationships to a researched geographical community (as developed for my Masters dissertation), this thesis has proposed two further tools. The first (and more rudimentary) device enables the researcher to chart their social proximity to the research participants from immediate connections - essentially those which were pre-existing and in-place before the investigation commenced - to these who came in via direct referrals either from participants putting the researcher in touch with others in their own networks, and culminating in a final stage which encompasses those who were completely unknown. The third group arrived at the project via the cascading effect of a working advertising programme. The model, itself, was presented in the Impact of Covid-19 & Charting Proximity subsection as terms these groups as the (i) Known, the (ii) Referrals, and the (iii) Unknowns.

The final and more complex contribution is the PACA Model, an ideologically-shaped tool that seeks to chart the ways that community actors have sought to alter their circumstances. Though its exploration builds on the series of case studies presented in the Literature Review - specifically on the local organisation AAM in north Edinburgh, the Focus E15 mothers in London (England), the UK-wide F4J, and UAWO in Athens (Greece) - the two-axis established mean that researchers and community groups, themselves, can use it in reflecting on their motivations. Each axis does not present absolute poles, but do illustrate the choices that need to be made over whether actors fight to preserve what has existed (combatting the impacts of austerity), or will they build their own alternatives that break with state reliance (the peer-supported spaces, direct and mutual aid). The other axis explores whether the actors challenge the processes that enabled these harms to be performed (voting different political parties into power; implemented new ways of doing politics such as direct democracy and consensus building rather than simply majority-rule), or whether they adapt to the circumstances imposed upon them by those in positions of power.

9.4 Conclusion

In this closing section of the PhD, I’d like to return to the reflexivity employed during the positionality chapter of the thesis. This chapter provided a space to convey some of the more intimate insights and changes that have been gained throughout undertaking the doctoral research. The manner in which I experience north Edinburgh has, without a doubt, shifted - reshaped and influenced by the stories that participants entrusted me with. Though I’ve been a community worker for many years, efforts were usually undertaken to ensure that professional versus personal boundaries remained distinct. Though there were many occasions when the professional and lived elements overlapped due to a shared proximity (e.g. through my social activism with the range of north Edinburgh-based movements given the reforms affect me too as a local resident), the ‘give and take’ aspects were generally strictly maintained.

The range of discussions and wealth of organisations, businesses, and other points of interest operating throughout north Edinburgh have increased my own awareness of the diversity and depth of amenities locally (though, as several participants stressed, many of these had suffered from austerity, financial precarity, or issues around sustaining volunteers to maintain provision). Though I was, of course, aware
of the religious institutions situated locally - such as Blackhall Mosque (مسجد، EH4 2AJ), Drylaw Parish Church of Scotland (EH4 2RP), and the Kingdom Hall of Jehovah’s Witnesses (EH4 4AP; located on the same street in which I lived during this research), these were locations I’d never previously entered on a personal basis and, to date, with the exception of Blackhall Mosque, my professional practice has not taken me there. The accounts provided of interactions within one such institutions, for example, as shared by #26 Winnie, were useful new knowledge. That the Kingdom Hall has appeared closed on a near constant basis since I moved to north Edinburgh made it unsurprising, therefore, that I received no response when reaching out to them during my recruitment phase of the fieldwork.

Though the data considered throughout the thesis is taken specifically from the fieldwork interviews, several of the participants (including a number of those who were not previously known when the research commenced) kept in touch, sending me links to news articles of interest, tagging me on Twitter threads covering issues they felt were relevant to my research, or taking the time to catch up informally with me when we encountered each other in everyday life. Despite this latter aspect having been a concern discussed at length during the ethical issues subsection - with a particular anxiety over how interactions may be experienced following the sharing of any personal experiences - a majority seemed eager to build on our new relationships with a clear understanding that new information was shared on a peer basis rather than continuing the researcher-interviewee relationship.

What the case studies demonstrated constituted Freirean-style dialogue and examples of conscientization whereby ‘horizontal communication between equals engaged in a process of critical inquiry’ (Ledwith 2011 p.106) permits new connections to be made, fostering more in-depth understandings that most of us – lone parent or otherwise – could never achieve in isolation. Despite this, Wright (2011, p.59) suggests that ‘[f]or more than a decade, social security in the UK has been fundamentally reformed in order to reinforce a vision of social citizenship in which the primary legitimate societal contribution is conceived of in narrow individual economic terms as active engagement in paid employment’. The social and support networks illustrated through peer referrals from several of the lone parent participants (e.g. #1 Nick encouraging #2 Lawrence to share his experiences, or #11 Louise and #21 Edina suggesting they each participate) demonstrate yet another example of how the lone parent participants were able to assist each other to share their stories - even when they were not necessarily engaged in shared activist groups.

As Freire (1972, p.72) emphasised, ‘[k]nowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other’. Though there are clear opportunities to consider group work and collaborative interviews in future projects into the political and social experiences of lone parents – albeit once intense preparation has been undertaken to ensure the purpose and constraints of a shared space for the safeguarding of participants – the actions and encouragement demonstrated between several of the interviewees helps to demonstrate where these types of connection are already observable simply through peer referrals when understood as acts of encouragement to contribute towards the reassessment of how lone parents are recognised or considered within the literature.

What we are left with, then, is a concrete revelation that many of the research participants continuously struggle to find sincere and lasting resolutions to the issues that face them in their daily lives through their elected representatives - whether that concerns childcare; protecting the services and groups they enjoy or benefit from; or options for sustained and suitable employment – yet several recognised the
urgency of finding more immediate solutions to their challenging circumstances, highlighting that waiting for the state to implement solutions rarely occurred as the necessary pace. Given, as noted in the introduction and community profile chapters, that the areas within north Edinburgh of concern for this PhD voted in significant numbers for Scotland to leave the UK in 2014, to remain in the EU in 2016, or have consistently returned SNP, Labour, or Liberal Democrat candidates in Westminster elections only to face a Conservative-led administration, such disillusion for representative democracy is unsurprising. Indeed, several participants such as #10 Rona and #5 Dee outlined their completely disengagement with the state.

The frustrations voiced by participants regarding the failures of their elected officials at Council, Holyrood, and Westminster levels to prevent cuts to local services under the Integrated Joint Board approach to Health and Social Care indicates similar exasperation, even when there’s less of a distance between the would-be electorate and their representatives (north Edinburgh to the city centre, compared to the distance to Westminster, London). As such, that core tenets of anarchist actions such as direct interventions, mutual aid, acts of social financial solidarity where possible, and advocacy of alternative approaches to politics in our everyday lives emerged consistently during our conversations, can be understood as a logical conclusion. Indeed, on this, Olah (2019, p.7) observed a lack of accountability at the state level, stressing that:

‘over decades, we’ve heard “good taste”, “pragmatism”, “sensibleness”, “civility”, “respectability” and “decency” used ad nauseum to justify policies whose real-world effects amounted to widespread suffering and harm […] whip also being used as a line of impenetrable defence against any outside criticism.’

It’s clear that the frustrations of these lone parents in north Edinburgh are not unique across the UK, yet their reactions to such struggles have been deeply grounded in their local geographical communities and the relationships between individuals, collectives, and support networks. With Beck and Purcell (2010, p.15) attesting that taking control of narratives ‘reshapes the balance of social power away from ruling elites into the hands of people who are marginalised in the current social order’, it is hoped that this thesis has helped diversify the literature on lone parents, and, I believe, achieved its ambition of recognising lone parents as social and political actors in their own right – those capable of fighting for a better future, be that at the individual and familial level or more widely. The theoretical contributions and models will be of use going forward in future research on lone parents or broader community activism – both at the academy and community levels - whilst other projects can utilise the findings detailed, here, to support and critically observe how lone parents navigate future government by working to hold them accountable, or through creating their own solutions locally. Once again, I thank the research participants for their openness.
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