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Unaccompanied girls in England: (Re)Constructing spaces of belonging and learning

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature:

Acknowledgements

There are countless people who have influenced and supported me throughout my life, and all have contributed to this achievement. While I cannot name every single person here, I recognize that it took a village, many villages, to get me here and I thank you all. Thank you to my parents, who have loved and supported me unconditionally and have always modeled perseverance and fortitude to me; I know that while there will always be change, you will always be there. Thank you to Seth, Holly, Will, and Jack for never once being reluctant to love, house and feed me, and always letting me raid your pantry to fill my luggage. Thank you to my best friends, Meagan and Jodi, who have endured me for nigh on two decades, and continue to stick with me despite the physical distances. Thank you to my love, Dan, who has seen my eyes ‘water’ all too much, and whose endless patience and calm got me through every doctoral meltdown.

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Abstract

At a time of unprecedented highs in global migration and displacement, this study explores the lives of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people (UASC) in England, asking how they construct and experience belonging. Against a backdrop of increased immigration restrictions in the UK, a policy-enhanced ‘hostile environment,’ and the simultaneous duty of care which local authorities have to all children, including UASC, this study considers how the multiple, diverse threads of belonging interact and intersect with the relevant ideas of learning, identity, social connections, and space in the lives of four unaccompanied girls. As the majority of UASC are male, unaccompanied girls have been largely overlooked in research and in practice, and this study helps to fill that gap.

This study takes an epistemological approach of social constructionism and takes into account the right of a child to be “properly researched” as based on the United Nation’s Convention on the Rights of the Child. Within this approach, I use traditional data collection methods – interviews and focus groups – which are innovatively adapted from a more structured question-and-answer presentation to a more casual, open format and include brief English lessons and mind maps. As the unaccompanied girls in this study are English language learners, these adaptations are not only helpful for encouraging engagement in the research, but ethically necessary in ensuring that they understand the research in which they are involved. In this way, the research process is more accessible to the unaccompanied girls and co-constructed alongside them where possible and appropriate. This is in line with a more relational ethics approach which seeks to go beyond “do no harm” by building trust and maintaining ongoing consent with vulnerable groups.

This thesis makes a contribution to research around UASC by developing understandings of spaces of interaction and belonging through relations. Alongside exploration into everyday learning, identity and social connections, it highlights the uniqueness of an unaccompanied girl’s constructions and experiences. Findings also reveal how practices around food and faith can contribute to the construction of spaces of belonging and demonstrate that experiences within a setting such as college are comprised of social as well as academic interactions, which can also contribute to constructions of belonging. Finally, this research illustrates the powerful influence of the temporary in social interactions and its positive impact in building belonging, and it reflects on gender in UASC literature and the usefulness of ‘belonging’ as a lens for research.

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Chapter One: Introduction

“All my life I have searched for a place of belonging, a place that would become home.”
(hooks, 2009, p. 215)

1. Opening remarks

We live in a time when migration is often in the forefront of the media, when it is reiterated daily in world news that powerful nations in the Global North are trying to close their doors to refugees and those seeking asylum. As hooks (2009) spent her life searching for a place to belong, so do many in the world, amongst them those displaced and seeking refuge and asylum. However, affluent governments in the Global North have written and are re-writing policies and regulations which make it increasingly challenging for refugees, asylum-seekers, and other migrants to enter their countries, and to remain for extended periods of time or permanently. Around 70 million people have been displaced globally (UNHCR, 2020a) and issues around migration and refugees are part of a growing academic field reaching across migration studies, education, social work, sociology, psychology, geography, and law.

The recent 2018 UK National Conversation on Immigration report was a comprehensive review of the largest ever consultation of the UK public about their thoughts on immigration (Rutter and Carter, 2018). Overall, the report found online discussion around immigration and migrants to be polarized, while face-to-face focus groups were more measured and calm in discussing whether they felt immigration had been generally positive or negative in their local community. With regard to refugees, the report revealed a general sentiment that refugees should be treated fairly, although specifically anti-Muslim attitudes contributed notably to negative feelings toward refugees. The report concluded by making recommendations for a fairer immigration system, several points of which spoke directly to the protection of refugees within the UK, stating that the government should keep its commitments to schemes and programs which protect refugees and bring them to the UK. It also suggested that other groups such as faith groups and civil societies should continue to push for more public support for refugees. This report is just one of the many recent and frequent conversations being had in the UK around immigration and refugees. With millions of people forcibly displaced in the world and the UK in 2018 hosting more than 126,000

refugees with more than 45,000 pending asylum cases (UNHCR, 2020b), these conversations and research such as this thesis are increasingly relevant and necessary.

The UNHCR defines unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people (UASC)¹ as “those who are separated from both parents and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible to do so” (UNHCR, 1994, p. 121). In 2018 the UK received more than 2,800 asylum applications from unaccompanied children and young people (Refugee Council, 2019a). For these unaccompanied children and young people arriving alone in the UK, life is especially challenging as upon arrival they continue to encounter uncertainty around the security and safety of their futures and must carve out a place for themselves in a new country, which often means integrating in some way and to some extent. The UK Home Office Indicators of Integration framework 2019 measures a sense of belonging, reflecting its role across all domains of integration (Ndofor-Tah et al., 2019). Belonging is an affective aspect of integration and speaks to relations between people, which can in part mark an individual’s integration into a community. While belonging is a hard-to-pin-down concept and regularly undergoes construction itself, it can still communicate a significant part of an individual’s personal story. There is an understanding that belonging is a fundamental human need and right, and something which we all need in some way to some degree (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). Better understanding of how belonging is constructed, then, can lead to improved facilitation of and support for belonging for groups such as unaccompanied young people. Set against increasingly hostile attitudes and policies, my research project explores the experiences of unaccompanied girls in England, considering spaces of interaction and the constructions of belonging within them. This chapter presents the research questions, the rationale for pursuing this research project, the context in which it took place, and literature around unaccompanied children and young people.

¹From here on out, the following terms may be used interchangeably to refer to UASC: ‘Unaccompanied children and young people’ and ‘unaccompanied children’ and ‘unaccompanied young people’ and ‘unaccompanied youth.’ Kaukko (2016) suggests that referring to under-18s as children or minors emphasizes that they are first and foremost under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and “...should be treated primarily as children and secondarily as asylum seekers” (Kaukko, 2016, p. 179). I agree.

2. Research Questions

The overarching research question guiding this study asks: *How do unaccompanied girls in England construct and experience a sense of belonging?* Belonging is a powerful idea, seemingly fundamental to the very experience of being alive and being human, as Wright suggests:

Feeling a sense of belonging (or not), being legally, morally or socially recognized as belonging (or not), truly has the power to change lives, to make communities and collectives, to bring together and to separate in the most intimate, loving, accepting, exclusionary or violent ways. (Wright, 2015, p. 1)

As Wright (2015) suggests, belonging can be different things for different people in different situations, and in the case of this project, the best way to understand how unaccompanied girls construct and experience belonging amidst disrupted and challenging lives is to speak with them and to hear from them. To answer the overall question, the following, more detailed sub-questions seek to consider complementary ideas and concepts which link to and contribute to constructions and experiences of belonging:

1. *What is the nature of the spaces of interaction within which an unaccompanied girl may construct a sense of belonging?*
2. *What are the significant social connections in an unaccompanied girl's life and how do they impact on her construction of a sense of belonging?*
3. *How does learning influence an unaccompanied girl's sense of belonging?*
4. *How do an unaccompanied girl's identities intersect with her sense of belonging?*

The literature around belonging reveals that ideas around social connections, space, identity, and learning stand out as supporting belonging well. In pursuing the above questions, this research project aims to recognize both the complexity of belonging and lived experiences of belonging.

3. Rationale

The rationale for pursuing this research project is threefold: personal, moral, and gap-filling. My personal interest stems from my own family. My Korean grandmother was a young migrant at the age of 17 when she was sent away by her parents from Japanese-occupied

Korea, an occupation which officially ended in 1945. Although she arrived in the nearby American state of Hawaii to some family support, she left her parents behind in Korea and I was raised on the story of her life, at times wondering what it would have been like for her. I knew her in her later years and saw what could be perceived as a successful life: comfortably married with four children, seemingly happily assimilated (I use this word with the understanding of its contentious nature because the sentiments it conveys are in accordance with the way in which my grandmother seemed to want to ‘be American’) into American life. However, I also saw what I might have considered loss, although she never said anything of the sort and was never one to complain or exaggerate or desire attention. For example, my grandmother did not speak Korean regularly and did not teach it to her half Korean children, perhaps because speaking English would have been considered ‘more American.’ Although of her own volition, I have wondered if she felt she needed to leave her language behind or if she felt pressured by the culture of the time or the desire to ‘fit in.’ I cannot speak for her; I can only speculate now as she passed in 2009. That speculation has contributed to my interest in children and young people who are refugees or seeking asylum; children and young people who have been separated from close family, uprooted and displaced and are perhaps just trying to find a comfortable and safe place to be and belong and move forward.

The second reason for pursuing this research is the concept of moral obligation. There are numerous philosophers, from Aristotle to Kant (see Eshleman, 2014), who have written on moral responsibility and today, there is research and writing about where morality and ethical responsibility fit in relation to refugees and asylum-seekers. Amnesty International states quite scathingly of global north leaders that “The catastrophic moral failure of world leaders who dither and squabble amongst themselves while callously leaving millions of people to suffer in disastrous humanitarian conditions will define their legacy for generations to come” (Amnesty International, 2015). Parekh (2016, no page) writes on morality and refugees, suggesting that the principle of the Good Samaritan - “obligations to help non-citizens only when the need is great and we can do so at a low cost to ourselves” – is one ground on which to base this moral obligation. Parekh also proposes that the United Nations (UN) Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951) can be understood to be an attempt to put this sense of moral obligation into international law. This and other relevant legislation are discussed in the following section on Context.

The third reason to pursue this research project is because there are gaps in the literature on unaccompanied children and young people and a substantial gap regarding unaccompanied girls. While there has been some research on more positive and resilient aspects of unaccompanied children and young people, such as inner resources and coping strategies (Chase, 2013; Luster et al., 2010; Goodman, 2004), there has been a call for more. In her review of available literature on unaccompanied children, Wernesjö (2011, p. 505) suggests that “further research on the concept of belonging is essential as a means of exploring the situation of unaccompanied children and young persons in the host country and their own perspectives of their position.” It is often acknowledged that unaccompanied children and young people are a vulnerable group and as a result the majority of research has focused on that vulnerability and the negative and deficit aspects associated with it. These include depression, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), anxiety (Almqvist and Brandell-Forsberg, 1997), other psychological and emotional issues (Bean et al., 2007), loss and separation (Vervliet et al., 2014; Wernesjö, 2011), disruption, discrimination and numerous other issues related to forced displacement (Wernesjö, 2011). However, there is concern that a focus on only the negative angles of an unaccompanied child or young person contributes to an overly simplified categorization of the unaccompanied young person as one who needs protection and support (Wernesjö, 2011). In this image, the unaccompanied young person is forgotten as an individual with her own experiences. Therefore, there is a need for more positive or assets-based perspectives in research with unaccompanied young people, which my research provides.

There is an additional gap in the literature around unaccompanied young people turning 18, transitioning into legal adulthood, losing a level of support and sometimes becoming destitute (Allsopp and Chase, 2017; Humphris and Sigona, 2016). As Allsopp and Chase (2017, p. 2) state, “This focus on child migrants has been accompanied by a notable lack of consideration given to the experiences and outcomes for these young people once they turn 18.” Humphris and Sigona (2016) discuss the issue in which unaccompanied youth in England are supported by a local authority (LA) up to the age of 18 at which time support, both financial and from key figures such as social workers, may be abruptly cut off or significantly reduced. In part due to this decrease in support, “Data on care leavers are extremely patchy and inconsistent across local authorities. As a result, little is known about what happens to young people after they reach 18 years old” (Humphris and Sigona, 2016, p. 2). Therefore, more research is

needed around unaccompanied young people who have turned 18, and my research crosses into such territory.

Finally, there is a gap in the literature around experiences of unaccompanied girls. There is a handful of scholarly works specifically on unaccompanied girls, which are set within the Scandinavian contexts of Sweden and Finland and one in the UK (Ekström et al., 2019; Kohli and Kaukko, 2017; Kaukko, 2016; Larkin, 2018). As the majority of unaccompanied young people arriving in the UK are male, unaccompanied girls have been overlooked. In 2018 in the UK, out of more than 2,800 total asylum claims from unaccompanied young people, around 315 were claims from girls (Refugee Council, 2019a). While small, there is still a percentage of unaccompanied girls arriving and their experiences and needs and desires may very well be different from that of their male counterparts. My research contributes to filling this gap.

4. Context

The three spatial layers of context in Figure 1 below demonstrate the contextual backdrop against which this study was conducted.

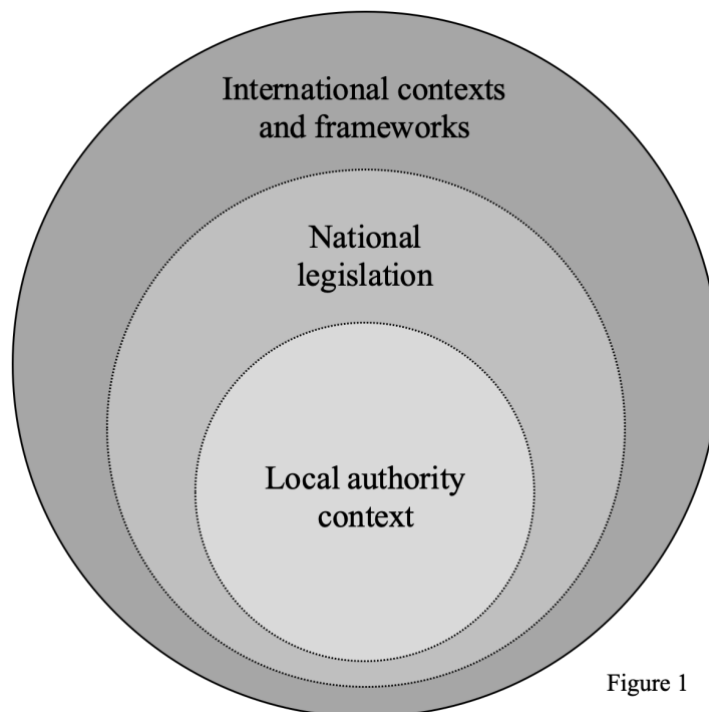


Figure 1

This section begins broadly at the level of international contexts and frameworks, which touches on the state of migration worldwide before narrowing in on migration into Europe. It

discusses the UN conventions, protocols, and declarations which obligate signatory nations both to a standard of humane treatment toward refugees, asylum-seekers, and displaced persons and to the protection of children globally. National legislation then considers immigration policy and presents the general atmosphere, largely the ‘hostile environment’ turned ‘compliant environment,’ toward immigration and refugees in the UK. It also discusses child welfare legislation in England. Following that, the local authority context presents the local authority in which my research took place and discusses the duty of care which all local authorities have toward all children, including unaccompanied children.

4.1. International contexts and frameworks

People migrate for a number of reasons, including work, family reunion and study, while others migrate in order to avoid violations of human rights, persecution, conflict, or natural disasters, amongst others (UN, 2018a). The United Nations (UN, 2019a) reported an overall record high number of migrants at 272 million by mid-2019. Of that 272 million, about 70 million people were forcibly displaced, including 41.3 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), about 3.5 million asylum-seekers, and some 25.9 million refugees (UNHCR, 2020a). Eighty percent of the 70 million people who were displaced in the world were hosted in developing countries with some 57% of refugees coming from just three countries: South Sudan, Afghanistan and Syria (UNHCR, 2020a). In 2018, much of this displacement was fueled by conflicts in Yemen, Iraq, the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, continuing fighting in Syria, and Rohingya refugees fleeing from Myanmar to Bangladesh (UNHCR, 2019a). While the majority of refugees in recent years have continued to be hosted in developing countries, there has also been a surge in migration to Europe, the largest population movement seen since World War 2 (British Red Cross, 2019). A peak number of refugee arrivals into Europe was recorded in 2015 at more than one million people. However, this number has decreased in recent years and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) reports that in 2019 around 128,500 migrants and asylum-seekers arrived in Europe, predominantly through Greece and Bulgaria (Bierbach, 2019). This significant decrease from 2015 to 2019 can in part be attributed to the EU-Turkey Deal made in March 2016 which sought to curb the flow of migrants and refugees entering Europe from Turkey via the Greek islands (Long, 2019).

Treatment of and work with these refugees and asylum-seekers throughout the world has for a long time been predominantly guided by the principles and protocols set forth by the UN 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (UN, 1951) and the following 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, which were born of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948). Ratified by 147 countries, the Convention and Protocol put down in writing a set of standards of response to refugees throughout the majority of the world, a set of laws obligating the signatory nations, of which the UK is one, to a standard humane treatment of refugees, asylum-seekers, and other displaced persons founded on the basic principles of non-penalization, non-refoulement, and non-discrimination. This 1951 Convention defines a refugee as a person who is “unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion” (UN, 1951) while an asylum-seeker is defined as “someone whose request for sanctuary has yet to be processed” (UNHCR, 2019b). More generally, the UN defines a migrant as “any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a State away from his/her habitual place of residence” (UN, 2019b) without regard to legal status, the cause of migration or whether it was involuntary or voluntary, or the length of stay.

The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNHCR, 1989) is a legal protection meant for all children, based on the idea that “childhood is entitled to special care and assistance” (UNHCR, 1989, p. 1). The Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is made up of 54 articles, is the most ratified document on human rights in the world and came into effect in the UK in 1992. It covers every aspect of entitlement in a child’s life and provides guidance on how governments and adults should work together to make provision for all children to enjoy all their rights. Four articles of the UNCRC stand out as ‘general principles’ that guide understanding of all other articles: non-discrimination (Article 2), best interest of the child (Article 3), the right to life survival and development (Article 6), and the right to be heard (Article 12) (UNICEF, 2019). Together, these play a foundational role in interpreting all the other UNCRC articles. The UNCRC provides a basis for legislation in England, which addresses the provision of care for children and young people, including unaccompanied children.

In 2016, the UN adopted the New York Declaration for Migrants and Refugees (UN, 2016) which generally confirms obligations toward the protection of refugee and migrant rights, and agrees to share responsibilities of refugee protection and support more equitably across all countries regardless of where refugees are physically sheltered. A large part of the New York Declaration included agreeing on the core principles of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF). The CRRF's four central aims are to "(1) ease the pressures on host countries and communities; (2) enhance refugee self-reliance; (3) expand third-country solutions; and (4) support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity" (UNHCR, 2020c). The New York Declaration also paved the way for the 2018 adoption of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM). The GCR (UN, 2018b) builds on the CRRF, putting in place measures to assess progress of the compact, and generally aims to enhance the lives of both host communities and refugees. The GCM (UN, 2018c) separately seeks to improve international cooperation regarding international migration by supplying a menu of policy options to countries which allows them the flexibility to implement policy based on their unique migration situations (IOM, 2020).

4.2. National legislation

Recognizing the GCR as a step in the right direction, the UK Refugee Council encouraged the government to embrace the GCR and put it into practice (Refugee Council, 2018). At the time of writing this thesis, England's immigration policies and laws are still predominantly founded on the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol, although the government recently renewed its commitment to refugee resettlement and confirmed its continuation of the national Community Sponsorship scheme (European Resettlement Network, 2019). The most recent iteration of immigration law is the Immigration Act 2016 (Home Office, 2016a), which was updated from the previous 2014 Act in order to better "prevent those unlawfully in the UK from accessing housing, driving licences and banks accounts" and "introduce new measures to make it easier to enforce immigration laws and remove illegal migrants," amongst others (Home Office, 2016b). This new Immigration Act 2016 has affected many, both former and recent migrants while asylum-seekers and refugees have been made even more vulnerable as new regulations have come into effect. For example, the Immigration Act permits the secretary of state to freeze or close the bank accounts of someone believed to be

in the UK unlawfully, such as occurred during the Windrush scandal, and although that action was suspended pending further investigations of allegedly unlawful people, many bank accounts had already been closed (Staton, 2018). Such action can not only severely disrupt a person's life, but also inhibit their financial ability to appeal any erroneous decisions made by the Home Office. In another example, the Immigration Act forces landlords to become border agents as they are required to conduct immigration checks on their tenants under the "right to rent" scheme or face time in prison themselves. The Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (2016) discovered that this allows for discrimination against anyone who is not a British citizen, and disproportionately affects minorities, furthering an overall environment of suspicion and fear.

These additions to the prior Immigration Act have been criticized as a furthering of the 'hostile environment' (Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, 2016). A well-known phrase emphasized in 2012 by Theresa May, then the UK's home secretary, it was her stated aim to ensure that Britain was a 'hostile environment' for illegal immigrants (Hill, 2017). It has become increasingly clear that revisions to immigration law have not only affected those in the UK without documentation, but also those with a right to be in the UK such as the Windrush generation and international students. Additionally, since the UK's EU referendum, Brexit, in June of 2016 (occurring about one month after the Immigration Act 2016 came into effect) there has been a record high of enforced removals of EU nationals, and tactics employed such as ID checks demanding proof of eligibility for care at NHS funded medical centers (Hill, 2017). The Windrush scandal is an example of the effect of this 'hostile environment' around immigration and its enormous impact on people who have lived in the UK for decades. Indeed, "the hostile environment created by new legislation and regulation has meant migrants do not face border officials *only* when they enter the country for the first time, but as a constant part of daily life" (Elgot, 2018, no page). This 'hostile environment' has spread a general atmosphere of uncertainty and fear into the lives of many, including refugees and asylum-seekers. Public discourse and attitudes have also reflected this 'hostile environment' as a 2018 YouGov poll demonstrated that 63% of those polled in the UK believed immigration levels had been too high in the last ten years and that the Windrush scandal had simply been handled poorly. However, the 'hostile environment' policies which led to the Windrush scandal were overwhelmingly supported with more than 74% saying that everyone should have to show documents proving their right to live in the UK to do such

things as register with a GP or open a bank account (Wells, 2018). Additionally, a UN special rapporteur sent to the UK “called for the repeal of the policies at the ‘rotten core’ of the hostile environment, which she said affected not just irregular immigrants, but also individuals who had regular status, ‘and many who are British citizens and have been entitled to this citizenship as far back as the colonial era’ ” (Gayle, 2018, no page). In part, she also attributed the environment of increased discrimination, racism, and intolerance in the UK to Brexit, which has helped to legitimize xenophobic discourse on foreign nationals, including refugees, and migration in the media. In 2018, the ‘hostile environment’ was rebranded as the ‘compliant environment’ by then UK home secretary Sajid Javid following the Windrush scandal. However, Members of Parliament commented that this new terminology was essentially meaningless (Bulman, 2018).

The UK, in 2018, had over 45,000 asylum cases pending and was hosting more than 126,000 refugees with the majority of these applicants for asylum coming from Iran, Iraq, Eritrea, Pakistan, and Albania. From June 2018 to June 2019 actual offers of asylum and protection were made to around 18,500 people, 25% of whom were under the age 18 (UNHCR, 2020b). Immigration policies such as those under the Immigration Act 2016 have for the past couple of decades progressively restricted the rights and entitlements of asylum seekers and refugees, placing limitations on access to work and education (Stewart and Mulvey, 2014). The entire asylum system in the UK is taxing on the individuals who endure it, identified as some of the most vulnerable people in society (Stewart, 2005). Asylum seekers and refugees are likely to have higher rates of mental health issues than the general population due to trauma, separation from family, challenges with the asylum system, and deficient housing, amongst others (Mental Health Foundation, 2018). Stresses do not necessarily end when granted refugee status either as refugee status is in fact granted for a period of only five years, after which a refugee must apply for indefinite leave to remain (ILR) and after one year of ILR, a person may then apply for citizenship in the UK (Right to Remain, 2019). This shift from the granting of permanent refugee status to granting temporary status occurred in 2005 as part of an overall new strategy for immigration and asylum and allowed, for example, potential deportation and repatriation if a country of origin were deemed to be safe at the end of the five years (Stewart and Mulvey, 2014). Stewart and Mulvey (2014) found that this 5-year term of refugee status continued to cause uncertainty and fear at psychological and

emotional levels, suggesting that the five-year limit negatively impacted settlement and integration in the long term.

Child welfare legislation also plays a role in the lives of young refugees and unaccompanied children arriving in England. Although, determining who is a child and should fall under the protection of child welfare legislation has been contestable. Until recently, if a child or young person seeking asylum in England appeared to be “significantly over 18,” they would be subject to an age assessment process, and possibly judged erroneously to be an adult. However, in 2019, a Court of Appeal deemed this Home Office policy to be unlawful, and it was amended to state that a person’s “...physical appearance and demeanour must very strongly suggest that they are 25 years of age or over” (Refugee Council, 2019b). The Children Act 1989 provides the framework for the care and protection of children in England (British Government, 1989). It defines parental responsibility and encourages partnership with parents, and cooperation between agencies such as the police and health care service. Children, including unaccompanied children, who are hosted by a local authority under the Children Act 1989, section 20 become ‘looked after,’ which grants them protection under statutory regulations during the time they are looked after and also provides them access to the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 (CLCA 2000). The CLCA 2000 provides further for the needs of care leavers, including preparing them for adult life, supporting a pathway plan, and ensuring continued support from a personal advisor (Sirriyeh and Ní Raghallaigh, 2018). The CLCA 2000 also moved the age of care leavers from 16 to 18 and extended the obligations of a local authority to provide support for care leavers until the age of 21 or even 24 if they remained in education (Mendes and Rogers, 2020). Further support for care leavers can be found through the Staying Put program, which came into legislation in England in 2014 as part of the Children and Families Act 2014. This allows care leavers the option to remain with their foster family upon turning 18 if both parties agree. The program aims to facilitate a gradual transition to adulthood similar to that which is experienced by their peers in the wider community (Mendes and Rogers, 2020).

4.3. Local authority context

My research project took place within a local authority in the south of England, which is both proud of its history of migration and aims to provide for the needs of its current migrant

communities. In 2018, the local authority claimed that some 15-20% of residents were from outside the UK ranging from “economic migrants” to “academic migrants” to refugees and asylum-seekers. As of 2017, around 80 unaccompanied children and young people, including those aged 18 to 25 in leaving care, were being supported by the local authority and came predominantly from Iran, Eritrea, Iraq, and Afghanistan. They were accommodated in a range of housing from foster carers to semi-independent accommodation, although not all were placed within the geographical borders of the local authority. The local authority also supported the unaccompanied children and young people to maintain religious and cultural identities and ties.

Local authorities in England, such as the one in which my research took place, have a duty of care to all children within their borders, including unaccompanied children and young people. This makes them responsible to provide for all children through accommodation and through safeguarding their overall welfare. There are seven aspects of a child’s developmental needs which a local authority must plan for in order to safeguard welfare: “Health; Education and training; Emotional and behavioral development; Identity, with particular regard to religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background; Family and social relationships; Social presentation; and Self-care skills” (Coram Children’s Legal Centre, 2017a, p. 1). These developmental needs are often approached by way of an individualized needs assessment and pathway plan for each young person prepared alongside her social worker, proposing specific ways to meet the needs of the individual young person. Meeting the young person’s needs may involve writing a detailed educational plan or the financial provision to meet maintenance or social needs (Coram Children’s Legal Centre, 2017a). Educational entitlements involve “...timely access to age-appropriate education, training and employment opportunities with suitable support based on the needs of individual young people...” (ADCS, 2016, p. 22). In 2017 UNICEF conducted research in England, Scotland, and Wales to assess the accessibility of education for refugee and asylum-seeking children, in particular, including unaccompanied children (UNICEF, 2017). The report commends the UK on its recognition of the right to education in its legislation and policies, but reveals that in practice, not one region in the UK is meeting its target of getting unaccompanied children and young people into education within 20 days of arrival in the UK, but rather many are waiting more than three months for a place in a school or college.

Although local authorities have an overarching duty of care, in practice that care may look different from one local authority to the next (Kotilaine, 2016). For example, as with any ‘looked after’ child, unaccompanied children should be placed in safe, age-appropriate, and stable accommodation, which in practice may range from foster care to an “independent living” arrangement to residential accommodation, all provided either “in-house” by the local authority or by commissioned independent agencies when a local authority is unable to meet the demand for placements (ADCS, 2016). Independent living can include a flat, lodging or bedsit with or without formal support while residential accommodation may include a children’s home, secure unit, prison, care home, or residential school (ADCS, 2016). Research suggests that for unaccompanied children, “...foster care often provides the best support, particularly for younger children where it can provide safety, security and an opportunity to build new attachments” (Newbigging and Thomas, 2011, p. 376). However, the Association of Directors of Children’s Services (ADCS) reports that there is a nationwide shortage of foster carers in England and also that older unaccompanied youth may not desire to be placed with a foster family as they may prefer to live more independently. As of March 2016, it was reported that just over 55% of unaccompanied children in England were placed in foster care, 32% were in independent living, and just over 12% were in residential care (ADCS, 2016).

Local authority care for unaccompanied children and young people as ‘looked after’ children may also be inconsistent in part because various local authorities may be under more strain than others, especially given the large influx of refugees to Europe from 2015-2016 (Kotilaine, 2016). In the UK from 2014 to 2015 the number of asylum applications from unaccompanied children jumped from 1,945 to 3,253 (Refugee Council, 2019). Due to a large concentration of unaccompanied young people arriving in certain local authorities such as Croydon and Kent, the National Transfer Scheme was introduced in July 2016 (Rosen et al., 2019). This new legislation enabled children to be transferred to other local authorities with capacity, aiming to distribute the responsibility of care more evenly across England (and Wales). In the first few months of its operation from July to December 2016, the scheme saw 148 children transferred out of the region in which my research took place while from January to March 2019, just five children were transferred out of the region (Refugee Council, 2019). Rosen et al. (2019) found that the scheme was received with mixed opinions, as either a sensible strategy given the state of limited resources in strained local authorities or

as having the concerning possibility of placing children in areas with little experience and few linguistic and cultural resources to support them. Pinson and Arnot (2010) report that such policies and schemes may see refugee children end up in a local authority which has limited experience with non-white students and has inadequate resources and knowledge to meet their needs, and in such areas, racial harassment was found to be a problem encountered by young refugees and asylum-seekers. Such schemes could also see a child moved to a new local authority at any time, potentially removing her from a place secured in a school or to a new place not of her choosing (Walker, 2011; Pinson and Arnot, 2010).

5. Unaccompanied children and young people

Unaccompanied children and young people lie at the heart of this study. The UNHCR defines unaccompanied children as “those who are separated from both parents and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible to do so” (UNHCR, 1994, p. 121). However, this definition belies the reality that these children and young people make up a heterogeneous group of individuals with varying stories, histories, personalities, and experiences, a fact which should not be ignored when interacting with them whether at a personal, professional, or policy level (Wernesjö, 2011). It is estimated that in 2018, 2,872 applications for asylum in the UK were made by unaccompanied children, a 20% increase from the previous year (Refugee Council, 2019a). The nations producing the highest numbers of unaccompanied children arriving in the UK were Eritrea with 620 children, Sudan with 462, Vietnam with 312, Iraq with 308, Albania with 286, Iran with 251, Afghanistan with 210 and Ethiopia with 117 children. Seventy-four percent of these were aged 16-17 with the remainder being younger, and as in earlier years, 89% of the children were male.

These unaccompanied young people flee their countries of origin for many reasons, including but not limited to persecution, armed conflict, poverty, forced marriage, and other human rights violations (Frontex, 2010). In Eritrea, for example, indefinite military service persists and it is one of the primary reasons, amongst numerous human rights violations, that unaccompanied children flee as they are conscripted upon turning 18 (Human Rights Watch, 2018a). In the Democratic Republic of Congo many flee political repression and violence from government security forces and police against pro-democracy activists, peaceful protesters, and journalists, amongst others (Human Rights Watch, 2018b). Unaccompanied

young people may travel by land, by boat, or by flight, and are often in danger of being targeted by traffickers and smugglers (Frontex, 2010). All of this contributes to an experience of migration, which Wernesjö (2011, p. 500) terms a “journey of uncertainty,” and after this migratory journey, upon reaching the UK, unaccompanied children and young people continue to face uncertainty as they begin the asylum application process (Chase, 2013). Most unaccompanied children and young people must make an individual application for asylum and while the application process is complicated, there are policies in place meant to ensure that a child or young person making an asylum application has legal representation and guidance (Coram Children’s Legal Centre, 2019).

Public discourse around unaccompanied children and young people in the UK has been fraught with the tension of contradictory images as they have been represented in public discourse as one of two opposing things: either a threat or a vulnerable victim (Boyden and Hart, 2007). Young males seeking asylum are the ones most likely to be perceived as a threat (Boyden and Hart, 2007) and to be portrayed as the “illegal,” undeserving asylum-seeker who threatens the nation (Tyler, 2006, p. 191). However, it is more often that the image of a victim of trauma and abuse is conjured up in discussion around refugee and unaccompanied young people (Boyden and Hart, 2007). In this way, unaccompanied young people may be regarded as asexual and apolitical and in her UK-based research, Crawley (2011) discusses this image and how it may affect unaccompanied young people’s perceived identities and subsequent experiences as they undergo the asylum process. That is, children who seek asylum may be constructed as vulnerable, asexual, passive and apolitical, and therefore deserving of protection. However, children who declare their experiences of a political or sexual nature (whether these experiences were voluntary or not) may very well weaken their assertion to be a child, thereby undermining any entitlement to protection as a child in the eyes of those evaluating their asylum application.

The Dubs Amendment, an addition to the Immigration Act 2016, and ‘The Jungle’ of Calais have also played significant roles in public discourse around unaccompanied children and young people in the UK, both conveying an image of vulnerability. Introduced by MP Lord Alfred Dubs, a Jewish child refugee arriving to the UK on the 1939 Kindertransport from Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia, the Dubs Amendment called for a certain number of refugee children to be relocated to the UK from Europe (Rosen and Crafter, 2018). Lord Dubs

proposed that 3,000 children be moved to the UK under the amendment. However, after transferring just 350 children, the UK government stopped allowing refugee children to arrive via that route (Addley, 2017). While the reason given for this was that the UK government had admitted some 8,000 children in 2016 through other refugee schemes, the decision was met with anger and dismay and called a “shameful betrayal” (Addley, 2017, no page). When the Dubs Amendment was in effect, many of the children and young people who arrived in the UK came from The Jungle (Rosen and Crafter, 2018). The Jungle refers to a refugee camp established in Calais, France near the entrance to the Channel Tunnel to England. It was demolished by the French government in late 2016, leaving hundreds of unaccompanied children and young people homeless (Crowther, 2016). Media attention on The Jungle shed light on the plight of unaccompanied children and young people stuck there, harassed by French police and unable to access England (Townsend, 2017). Despite efforts by independent and non-governmental charities and organizations to assist them, the majority of children were left unsupported and unhoused by the French government (Crowther, 2016). However, during the dismantling of The Jungle, from October 2016 to mid-July 2017 some 769 children were moved from Calais to the UK (Refugee Council, 2019a), the majority of whom were transferred because they had family in the UK (Grierson, 2018).

The literature largely acknowledges that unaccompanied children are a vulnerable group and as a result much research focuses on those vulnerabilities and challenges. Acculturation is a concept relevant to this discussion as unaccompanied children and young people are particularly susceptible to the stresses of acculturation (Kirmayer et al., 2011). Acculturation is a process of change through which a dominant group (e.g. host community) and a non-dominant group (e.g. unaccompanied young people) interact and adapt (Berry, 2006). Bhatia and Ram (2009) suggest that it is a negotiated process, ongoing, and impermanent. The ongoing acculturative stress of integration and adaptation can exacerbate any existing traumas, stresses, or mental health challenges. Issues with mental health and wellbeing are common and widespread amongst unaccompanied children and young people and many suffer some sort of mental health challenges and struggles with wellbeing, which continue after arrival in a country of asylum (Verroken et al., 2018; Vervliet et al., 2014). These issues do not cease because the migratory journey is over, and they will likely remain in some form or fashion in the long term throughout a young person’s life. Vervliet et al.’s (2014) longitudinal study with unaccompanied young people in Belgium suggests that mental health

challenges do not change in any notable way over time, but rather remain high regardless of time spent in a host country. In fact, they suggest that daily stressors, not pre-existing traumatic experiences, increase with time.

Refugee children and unaccompanied children's mental health issues can stem from multiple kinds of trauma and abuse such as family separation, personal loss, disaster, armed conflict, maltreatment or witnessing maltreatment, and disease, amongst others (Vervliet et al., 2014). These mental health issues can manifest as PTSD, depression, anxiety, behavioral and emotional problems, loneliness (Vervliet et al., 2014; Chase, 2013; Bean et al., 2007; Almqvist and Brandell-Forsberg, 1997) and self-injury (Verroken et al., 2018). In their study of unaccompanied young people in Belgian reception centers, Derluyn and Broekaert (2008) report a lack of provision of services to deal with mental health issues, saying that unaccompanied youth are five times more likely than their accompanied counterparts to manifest severe depression, anxiety, and PTSD. The asylum process itself can additionally compound already existing poor mental health and wellbeing as it perpetuates uncertainty about the future (Chase, 2013; Bean et al., 2007). The process includes interviews during which unaccompanied children and young people must remember and recount their journeys and trauma, and months or even years of waiting to find out if they are granted asylum or have been refused (Chase, 2013). Chase calls this period of waiting "limbo," discussing its highly negative effects on the young people living it and stating, "Many said they had a persistent sense of uncertainty about what lay ahead, an inability to envisage a future and feelings of having fundamentally no importance in the world" (Chase, 2013, p. 862). Limbo, then, subjects the young people to further loss of self and mental health issues.

Loneliness is a particularly large issue for unaccompanied children and young people (Korjonen-Kuusipuro et al., 2018). Korjonen-Kuusipuro et al.'s (2018) research with unaccompanied children in Finland involved art workshops alongside Finnish peers as part of an effort to ameliorate some of the loneliness and isolation of unaccompanied youth. While the research certainly did not resolve all feelings of loneliness, researchers saw "glimpses of hope" as unaccompanied youth and Finnish peers spent more time together (Korjonen-Kuusipuro et al., 2018, p. 14). The research also emphasized the necessity of human connection and why social connections are useful to combat loneliness and extend the social networks of the young people so that they are better able to navigate wider society in the

future. While it is clear that unaccompanied children may have mental health issues, there is a need for further research to better anticipate behavioral problems and implement improved longer-term mental health interventions (Bean et al., 2007), and to combat loneliness and other mental health problems by harnessing and facilitating the benefits of social connections (Chase, 2013).

Positive and asset-based approaches to understanding the lives of unaccompanied children often consider the concept of agency (Chase, 2010; Crawley, 2010). Although there appears to be limited literature on the topic, there is research that considers the ways in which unaccompanied children and young people may utilize their agency to reassert some control over their own lives (Crawley, 2010). Wernesjö (2011, p. 503) notes this gap in the literature, saying, "...research on unaccompanied children may tend to be concentrated on their vulnerability rather than on their own resources and agency." That is, there is more often a deficit-based approach taken with regard to unaccompanied children, rather than an asset-based approach. There is literature on agency and literature on unaccompanied children, but there is little to be found at the intersection. While there is minimal agreement on a clear definition of agency, Emirbayer and Mische conceptualize the idea of agency as:

...a temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its habitual aspect), but also oriented toward the future (as a capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment). (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998, p. 963)

In this conceptualization, agency moves beyond the one-dimensional ability of a person to act in the present moment. Rather, it becomes a complex, multi-dimensional understanding in which personal human agency is embedded within the social world and interactions, and takes into account moments from the past and also the potential of the future to inform decisions of the here and now.

In her discussion of the agency of learners in a primary school music classroom who asserted their ideas and knowledge in an effort to be valued and affirmed, Blair (2009, p. 180) suggests that agency implies "...moving from powerlessness to a sense of control and a hope for the future..." Within their context, these learners desired something (to be affirmed) and used what they had (musical knowledge) to achieve their end goal, moving from a sense of

unaffirmed powerlessness to a greater feeling of control over their situation. This understanding resonates well with Chase's (2010) research with unaccompanied children in the UK in which she finds that unaccompanied children use what they have, silence, to employ their own agency and assert control over the asylum process. The children are selective in what information they share or do not share, and make deliberate choices to remain silent about some aspects of their lives. Chase (2010, p. 2052) suggests that the “predominant impetus for this selective disclosure was a desire to retain a degree of agency” and “establish themselves in the social world.” On the other hand, Crawley's (2010) research in the UK reveals that when unaccompanied children and young people express agency and political opinions, they are no longer viewed as children and their claims for asylum can be negatively impacted. Moreover, it is more often assumed that unaccompanied children have no agency at all because many of their recorded experiences are in fact dominated by explanations from adults. From a slightly different angle, Kaukko and Wernesjö (2016) found that some of the unaccompanied girls in their study in a Finnish reception center indicated a decrease in agency, and that they had more responsibility and agency in the past, even during migration, when they had to take care of themselves. Arriving in their country of asylum caused a ‘reversal’ back to childhood and perhaps a sense of being infantilized as they had less agency and experienced almost a feeling of over-care through the application of regulations.

5.1. Cultural negotiation, integration, and belonging

Literature also speaks to unaccompanied children and young people's experiences around cultural negotiation, integration, and belonging as they adapt to life in a new country. Ní Raghallaigh and Sirriyeh (2015) discuss the “negotiation of culture” in their studies with unaccompanied children in foster care in England and Ireland. This refers to the idea around how they negotiate culture in terms of maintaining a connection to their cultural “roots” and identity and also how they adapt to the culture of a new country. Ní Raghallaigh and Sirriyeh (2015, p. 12) understand this negotiation, in part, through identity, saying “They face the challenge of developing an identity based on aspects of culture from both their country of origin and their country of reception.” They found that the unaccompanied children and young people clearly desired to retain and attain parts of both cultures and part of negotiating meant finding a balance. Qin et al. (2015) also discuss the negotiation and navigation of

identity formation in their research with emerging adult refugees in the United States who arrived as unaccompanied youth and were aged 18-26 at the time of the research. They similarly found that "...those who maintained their native culture and combined it with the positive aspects of U.S. culture were the ones who did best in their adaptation" (Qin et al., 2015, p. 233). In these ways, unaccompanied children and young people often demonstrate or convey that they desire to maintain a balance between their connections to and the expectations of their country of origin and the culture of their new country.

Negotiating cultures, occurs, in part, through integration and the development of a sense of belonging. Here, integration may be understood as "...communities where people, whatever their background, live, work, learn and socialise together, based on shared rights, responsibilities and opportunities" (Ndofor-Tah et al., 2019, p. 11). Concerns about the integration of refugees and other migrants have grown in the UK and Europe, although integration can be understood differently in various contexts (Ndofor-Tah et al., 2019; Stewart and Mulvey, 2014). Kovacs (2015, p. 12) suggests that the variety of ways in which integration is conceptualized as "a goal, a means to achieve it or a set of experiences, as well as the existence of dozens of definitions and indicators, exposes the absence of both internal clarity and external consensus." However, Strang and Ager (2010) propose that the term integration must allow for a variety of interpretations which reflect political and cultural sensibilities across different contexts, countries, and spaces. Other research draws out distinctions between certain dimensions of integration such as social, structural, and cultural integration (Wessendorf and Phillimore, 2018). Wessendorf and Phillimore (2018) suggest that social integration, referring to relationships that migrants form upon arrival in a new country, can be instrumental in gaining access to the other structural angles of integration. Although in practice integration occurs at the local level, it can be influenced at a national level by policies such as the Home Office's Indicators of Integration (IoI) framework 2019 for migrants (Ndofor-Tah et al., 2019), which builds on Ager and Strang's (2008) previous framework for integration. The IoI 2019 framework covers what is meant by integration, markers of integration, and how practitioners might use this framework to recognize and measure integration in the UK, although this seemingly positive and forward-looking framework is somewhat juxtaposed with the "hostile environment" and tightening of immigration law. In the framework, integration is understood to be specific to context, multi-dimensional, multi-directional, and dependent on the mutual contribution of all levels of

community from government to newcomers (Ndofor-Tah et al., 2019). Integration is at times conflated with citizenship and Ager and Strang (2008) report that refugees themselves may view equal rights as essential to being seen as equals amongst long-term citizens. However, achieving citizenship does not guarantee a sense of being integrated and does not preclude feeling rejected by British society (Rutter et al., 2007). In fact, Ager and Strang (2008, pp. 177–178) found that refugees and other community members in their study identified “belonging as the ultimate mark of living in an integrated community,” which suggests that belonging is as important as the formal status of citizen. Indeed, in the IoI 2019 framework, “Measures of sense of belonging, along with psychological and emotional wellbeing, are embedded throughout the domains. This reflects their core role across all aspects of integration” (Ndofor-Tah et al., 2019, p. 16). Feeling a sense of belonging, therefore, is a key indicator of living an integrated life, and that is why my research project focuses on the sense of belonging of unaccompanied young people.

Integration and belonging occur, in part, through community and faith groups, which can be especially helpful or meaningful for unaccompanied children and young people who may lack the support a family would normally provide. These and other groups or organizations are social spaces where people can meet and form relationships and friendships, which have the powerful potential to aid refugees in feeling more settled in their country of asylum (Ager and Strang, 2008; Atfield et al., 2007). These social spaces are additionally developed later throughout my analysis and conclusion. Ager and Strang (2008) consider “like-ethnic groups” to be one such type of community group, saying that they often conduct social and cultural activities which maintain shared religion, customs, traditions, and home country language, and that they can relieve feelings of isolation and depression. Indeed, in their research on refugee experiences in England, Atfield et al. (2007) found that ethnically based bonds solidified amongst people who shared a common language. Another type of community group is a Refugee Community Organization (RCO), a term used to refer to any organizational body amongst refugee groups (Griffiths et al., 2006). Griffiths et al. (2006) discuss the general position of RCOs in the UK as a bridge between refugees and the host society but suggest that RCOs almost more importantly contribute to the establishment of informal networks amongst refugees themselves. In their own study, Atfield et al. (2007) suggest that RCOs create spaces where the participants may make and maintain friendships.

Faith groups and gathering to practice a religion can also play a significant role in the lives of unaccompanied youth as a safe space for those who may not have the support of family (Kaukko, 2016). Similarly, from their US-based research, Carlson et al. (2012) suggest that the social institution of a church, or school, and the adults within it may function as a family would as a measure of protection against negative outcomes for unaccompanied children. That is, through positive relationships formed within such social environments, unaccompanied young people may find support and validation, knowing they are less alone (Carlson et al., 2012). A young person's faith may, in fact, be a great source of comfort and a faith group built on a shared belief system provides an opportunity to practice that faith with like-minded people, for example in a church or mosque or temple. Kohli (2011, p. 319) writes of unaccompanied young people in the UK, saying, "...children who keep their faith of origin, and are given opportunities to practice their religion, appear to fare well in hostile contexts." This is, in part, because the practice of faith alongside others builds powerfully on a feeling of belonging, sharing a sense of comfort in new surroundings. In this way, practicing religion can supply unaccompanied youth with companionship and distraction from the difficulties of daily life (Ní Raghallaigh and Gilligan, 2010). Ní Raghallaigh and Gilligan (2010) understand this through the linking of "old and new 'worlds'" as there is a sense of reconciliation between a young person's life before migration and her current life. Religion and faith can help unaccompanied young people cope with present challenges by providing some continuity and even supporting them to feel self-reliant as "their confidence in God's help meant that they did not feel the need to rely on other people for help" (Ní Raghallaigh and Gilligan, 2010, p. 8). Overall, faith groups and community groups such as like-ethnic groups are acknowledged often to "provide resources in three key areas: information and material resources; emotional resources which enhance confidence, and finally capacity building resources" (Strang and Ager, 2010, p. 597). These resources have the potential to impact positively on unaccompanied children and young people who are alone without family as they can facilitate belonging and integration and support settling in a new nation.

Education has the potential to be another facilitating space for integration and belonging for unaccompanied children and young people, although the literature records many barriers to this happening in practice. Of particular concern in the report is the lack of English as a Second or Other Language (ESOL) provision which saw a 50% reduction in funding between

2008 and 2015 (UNICEF, 2017). Indeed, refugee and unaccompanied children and youth in the UK encounter a number of barriers to education and educational success, including but not limited to limited prior education, limited to no English, discrimination, and a lack of knowledge of the UK education system (Morrice and Sandri, 2018; Thommessen and Todd, 2018; Walker, 2011; Pinson and Arnot, 2010). Walker (2011) discusses structural barriers to education as refugee children and youth may arrive at any time of year while the school term is ongoing meaning that there may be no places immediately available. Additionally, in cases where a young person aged 16+ is not admitted to a college due to a low level of English, they may be placed instead on an ESOL course. However, there are a limited number of times in the year that a young person is permitted to begin the course, functionally barring access to even basic ESOL provision (Morrice and Sandri, 2018). Those aged 16 to 18 face particular challenges in that while the UK mandates formal education until the age of 18, local authorities are not obligated to provide places in schools for 16-18s. That is, they are entitled to apply to a college, but must meet the requirements of paying for the course and satisfying the individual college's entry requirements (Coram Children's Legal Centre, 2017b). Walker (2011) additionally notes inconsistencies regarding fees in such cases, stating that refugee youth aged 16 to 18 are meant to receive the same fees as home students, but educational institutions may process applications incorrectly, thereby effectively excluding them from education.

5.2. Transitioning to adulthood

As many unaccompanied young people are aged 16-17 when they arrive and statutory care ends at 18 in England, they are looked after for a short period of time and then must undergo another disruptive transition as they transition to adulthood and become care leavers (Larkin, 2018). Distress around the uncertainty of asylum outcomes regarding whether they will be able to remain in the UK or be returned to their country of origin also plays significantly into the transition to adulthood for unaccompanied young people (Wade, 2017). It is additionally recognized that for those in care, the transition to adulthood comes with increased disadvantages, particularly around employment, education, and health (Bakketeig et al., 2020; Boddy et al., 2020). Literature around this transition, also referred to as emerging adulthood, increasingly acknowledges that this transition is not an individual, linear process, but rather that it depends largely on the socio-cultural location of the transition and on other

interdependent factors of everyday life (Boddy et al., 2020). Expectations of what it means to be an adult play a significant role in a young person's transition to adulthood, and indeed, the care leaver's "...engagement with normative aspirations for interdependent adult lives – establishing a family and having friends – are central to their understandings of doing well" (Bakketeig et al., 2020, p. 9). In Bakketeig et al.'s (2020) comparative study, 'normative' refers to the expectations on adults that care leavers perceive in the various countries in which they live: Denmark, England, and Norway. Roberts et al. (2017) also suggest that the transition to adulthood and more independent living for young people in care is more "compressed" than for their peers who are not in care, which makes the transition all the more challenging.

Unaccompanied young people in England occupy an additionally unique position as they transition into adulthood as care leavers. Unlike their English care-leaving counterparts, "For UAM [unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors], transition represents the phase in which the tensions between child welfare and the immigration systems are at their most acute" (Wade, 2017, p. 8). Wade (2017) suggests that for this population of young people, the transition to adulthood is controlled by the decisions of the asylum process rather than by any steps the young people might need or want to take to achieve their ambitions in life. Becoming an adult is difficult for any young person with concerns about education, relationships, or careers, amongst other growing up experiences, and the transition is exacerbated for unaccompanied children who have significant additional stresses, anxieties, or traumas (Coram Children's Legal Centre, 2017b). Unaccompanied young people report being told that they are now adults and must be independent, but there is little transition training and little protocol in place to assist the young people through what is often another life changing event (Humphris and Sigona, 2016). As they reach 18, their asylum claims additionally become adult claims (Humphris and Sigona, 2016) and they face continued waiting and uncertainty around their claims as they transition into legal adulthood (Sirriyeh and Ní Raghallaigh, 2018). In their research with unaccompanied children in care in England and Ireland, Sirriyeh and Ní Raghallaigh (2018) utilize Honwana's (2012) term "waithood" for this period, saying:

Due to their status and experiences as asylum-seekers and young people in care, in many ways URM [unaccompanied refugee minors] face accelerated transitions to adulthood. However, simultaneously, due to uncertainties surrounding the outcome of

their asylum claims many are also held in a state of ‘waithood’ (Honwana, 2012) in which they cannot attain the rights of adult legal citizens or those with more secure residence status, including rights to education and employment opportunities. (Sirriyeh and Ní Raghallaigh, 2018, p. 95)

The uncertainty of an asylum outcome upon turning 18 or refusal of asylum can result in unaccompanied youth choosing to go ‘missing,’ and living without documentation in the UK to avoid deportation or detention (Meloni and Chase, 2017; Humphris and Sigona, 2016). Destitution is a key problem for this group of ‘missing’ young people because they now lack financial resources and may lack advice on how to navigate the system and culture independently (Humphris and Sigona, 2016). This further contributes to poor physical and mental health (Meloni and Chase, 2017). Additionally, the change from having a social worker to having a personal advisor upon turning 18, can be abrupt and upsetting and in many cases time with personal advisors is much more infrequent and considered insufficient by many unaccompanied youth (Meloni and Chase, 2017). As Meloni states, some unaccompanied young people “...experience the transition into adulthood as a sudden and violent abandonment by institutions, especially if a significant relationship previously existed with their social worker, or their foster family” (Meloni, 2019, p. 4).

In following with an earlier mention of inconsistent care of unaccompanied children and young people across local authorities, Meloni and Chase (2017) found that unaccompanied care leavers may also encounter discrepant practices across England. Meloni and Chase (2017) report that these variable practices often hinge on the financial resources of each local authority as more financially flexible local authorities are able to support unaccompanied youth up to 21 or 25, while unaccompanied children in other local authorities may be more minimally supported due to more limited resources. However, the majority of unaccompanied children who have been in care in England should be eligible for continued support barring age disputes or becoming appeal rights exhausted (Meloni and Chase, 2017). Continued support for care leaving unaccompanied youth is often tied to participation in further education as the Home Office states that they provide funding for care leaving unaccompanied youth who “after turning 21 are in a planned programme of education or training” (Home Office, 2019). Although, upon reaching the age of 25, they are no longer eligible for funding regardless. There is need for more research on unaccompanied young people who leave care at 18 (Sigona et al., 2017).

6. Conclusion

This chapter introduced my research project, the research questions which guided it, and the rationale for conducting it. To answer the question of how an unaccompanied girl in England constructs and experiences a sense of belonging, this chapter set out the context and backdrop against which this research project took place in the south of England. Unprecedented numbers of people have been displaced around the world while applications for asylum made by unaccompanied children and young people in the UK have increased. As a signatory to both the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UK is obligated to protect refugees and asylum seekers, including unaccompanied children. However, a tension has developed in recent years between national immigration legislation with the most recent Immigration Act 2016 and the duty of care which local authorities have for all children under the Children Act 1989. As immigration policy has become increasingly restrictive and migration of refugees and asylum seekers, including unaccompanied young people, into the UK has increased, this tension has manifested in then home secretary May's 2012 declaration to establish a 'hostile environment.' It is within this environment that local authorities are meant to provide care for unaccompanied children as they do for British born children in care. This care includes entitlements to such things as education and accommodation, which may be provided in the form of foster care, a type of independent living environment, or residential accommodation. Literature around unaccompanied children and young people discusses the conflicting ways in which they are represented in the media and public discourse as either a threat or a victim, and how perceptions of their a/sexual or a/political experiences may impact on their asylum claims. Mental health challenges are also common for unaccompanied young people and are often exacerbated by the difficulty and uncertainty of the asylum process and the acculturative stress of adapting in the day to day. These struggles live alongside the agency which unaccompanied young people wield at times as they seek to reassert control over their situations, for example, by employing silence in an asylum interview. Unaccompanied young people must also negotiate culture, and as avenues for integration and belonging, community groups and faith groups are especially significant for unaccompanied young people who lack familial support. The transition from childhood to adulthood can also be an especially trying period for unaccompanied youth as levels of support decrease.

The following chapter presents the conceptual framework for this project, which is centered on belonging.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

“...during the course of our lives we come into contact with many different people, social contexts and places. Consequently, few of us feel a sense of belonging merely to one group, culture or place but rather experience multiple senses of belonging.” (May, 2011, p. 370)

1. Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature around belonging and then presents the conceptual framework exploring how unaccompanied girls in England may construct and experience a sense of belonging. Imenda (2014, p. 194) suggests that a conceptual framework both guides what a researcher “‘notices’ during the course of data collection or as an event takes place,” and serves “as spectacles through which to see the world.” My framework seeks to do just that, establishing the scope of this research project and determining what is already understood about the concepts to be investigated and how they might be applied to understanding the experiences of unaccompanied girls. As belonging is at the center of this framework, May’s (2011) quote above speaks clearly to the multiplicity of belonging, not only in the sense of quantity and that people may experience many belongings, but also with regard to the various types of belongings which may be experienced such as to other people, a culture, or place. With this multiplicity in mind, this chapter begins by presenting the most prominent threads within the literature on belonging and then builds the remainder of the conceptual framework, highlighting the links belonging has with other concepts relevant to this research – social connections, space, identity, and learning. The chapter discusses the essential need of every human being to belong through relationships (Baumeister and Leary, 1995) and the benefits these various social connections can offer unaccompanied young people. The chapter then establishes Massey’s (2005) understanding of space as a product of human interaction in order to suggest that those social relationships and connections create the potential for spaces of belonging. Then, it explores identity and how it connects with belonging and functions as a site in which belonging may be constructed (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Finally, the chapter presents learning, understanding it as an active, social practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) through which identities and belonging may be produced. Together, all these concepts form the conceptual framework or “spectacles” of this research project.

To get into the literature, I used the databases Scopus and Web of Science, the university library's journal subscriptions, and Google Scholar to search for research on belonging, social connections, space, identity, and learning. From these broad searches, I narrowed down the literature related to refugees and unaccompanied children and young people, using bibliographies of applicable articles to find further relevant references. The literature was largely located in the fields of sociology, human geography, education, psychology, and migration. As my conceptual framework came together, it evolved from basic definitions of belonging to deeper understandings of what belonging could be and how it was linked with the ideas around social connections, space, identity, and learning. Throughout data collection and analysis and on into write up, I repeatedly returned to the literature I had begun with, while also continuing to read through newly discovered or newly published works on the concepts and demographic of my research project. In order to keep up to date with new, relevant research, I set up monthly alerts on Scopus and Web of Science.

2. The complexity of belonging

There is a limited but growing body of literature on belonging which speaks specifically to the experiences of unaccompanied young people (Wernesjö, 2015; Kaukko and Wernesjö, 2016; Allsopp and Chase, 2017), but there is much on the concept of belonging in general and on how belonging may be felt or understood by other groups of people. This idea of belonging is not stagnant and fixed, but rather always shifting and changing (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Throughout life, a sense of belonging may at times be present, and at other times not as circumstances alter; or belonging will be understood in different ways, either negatively or positively, or experienced in different contexts. Chin (2019) criticizes current conceptualizations of belonging for individually failing to account for the complex and multidimensional nature of the concept, stating that while belonging is often employed in approaches to citizenship, diversity and multiculturalism, it is rarely considered in detail. He discusses two broad camps of belonging, "vertical" as concerning the state-individual relationship and "horizontal" as pertaining more to the individual-individual connection. He proposes a more comprehensive "multicultural belonging," which "conceives belonging as an ongoing project of reciprocal integration between majority and minority communities" (Chin, 2019, p. 729). Chin suggests that this approach unites the complexities of identity and culture with a normative theory of political community and multicultural citizenship in a way that

other conceptualizations of belonging have not. Working within the field of geography, however, Antonsich (2010) does consider belonging to be a multidimensional construct, which is to be regarded on multiple levels from the personal level of one's own home to the wider community to an entire nation. With reference specifically to immigrants and belonging, Antonsich writes that:

...by focusing on immigrants and their children, a few scholars have investigated forms of belonging which no longer identify purely with territory, but, for instance, with linguistic commonality...or with transnational networks, images, and memories...at times suspended in an imaginary, aesthetic space... (Antonsich, 2010, p. 16)

The idea of belonging, then, is not necessarily bound to a geographical location or group of people, but rather, it is a large, complex and often abstract idea which includes elements of the imaginary and non-tangible. Below are presented the dominant threads running throughout the literature on belonging and how they have been developed through or are relevant to research with unaccompanied children and young people.

2.1. Belonging as a multidimensional construction

Understanding belonging as a multidimensional construction means realizing that belonging exists at multiple levels and in multiple ways from the personal to the national (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Belonging can deal with such aspects as “citizenship, nationhood, gender, ethnicity and emotional dimensions of status or attachment” (Bhimji, 2008, p. 414) and be conceptualized from different perspectives within different fields of study or with different demographics of people. Belonging may speak to shifting desires (Probyn, 1996) or to the constant negotiation between inclusion and exclusion (Mee and Wright, 2009) or even be used in research with unaccompanied young people within a framework of best interests (Allsopp and Chase, 2017) or conceptualizations of home (Wernesjö, 2015). The wide diversity of its application brings to light the strong overall multidimensional aspect of the concept of belonging.

Yuval-Davis (2006) conceptualizes the idea of belonging as being constructed at three overarching levels: (1) in social and economic locations, (2) as identifications (identities) and emotional attachments, and (3) in ethical and political values. These three levels highlight

that belonging is not simply a private, internal process, but that its construction very much takes place in relation to the social world around an individual. The first level concerns connection or belonging to groups of people based on similar age or race or profession, etc.; positions found in the social or economic areas of a person's life. The second level involves a person's internal emotional state and desires as they relate to the construction of identity and a sense of belonging. Finally, the third level refers to the construction of belonging by way of a person's political and ethical values; that is, connecting with others, or being excluded by others, based on a political or ethical stance, regardless of whether this is chosen or imposed (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Probyn's (1996) conception of the nature of belonging as having two complementary understandings – that of depth and that of surface – speaks to Yuval-Davis's (2006) second level of belonging around emotional attachment and desire in belonging. Probyn (1996) describes surface belonging as "...the inbetweenness of belonging, of belonging not in some deep authentic way but belonging in constant movement, modes of belonging as surface shifts" (Probyn, 1996, p. 19). She touches on the understanding of belonging as a deep internal feeling while also drawing out the idea of belonging riding on the surface as it naturally changes and shifts. Surface belonging seeks to capture the moments in which a deep-seated sense of belonging rises to the surface to shift before settling again into the depths.

Allsopp and Chase (2017) convey a different angle of the multidimensionality of belonging in the experiences of unaccompanied young people in their UK-based study. Their research examines the various plans and multiple belongings which unaccompanied youth must consider given the uncertainty of their asylum claims. These multiple belongings are based on whether the young people will be granted asylum and be able to stay in the UK or whether they might be deported. These young people must often "cultivate multiple senses of belonging, affinities and possible selves as a key part of preparing for their future" (Allsopp and Chase, 2017, p. 14). Simultaneously developing multiple potential senses of belonging due to the uncertainty of the future has created a unique space for these young people where a desire for belonging fluctuates in a way that echoes the "inbetweenness of belonging" (Probyn, 1996), where multiple senses of belonging must exist together out of necessity, not only as a product of desire.

2.2. Belonging as process and movement

Belonging can be understood not simply as an end game or product, but as an ongoing process, as “a belonging created through active, hybrid, fragile, and always contested processes that refuse containment” (Mee and Wright, 2009, p. 776). This strand of thought takes the idea of belonging as fluid and dynamic and understands it as a movement and process, as “becoming” rather than “being” (Antonsich, 2010, p. 18). In this way, belonging is not accomplished once and is done, but rather “belonging is something we have to keep achieving” over and over because individuals and the social world around them are always changing (May, 2011, p. 372). This transitory nature of belonging considers the “idea that belonging is not a primordial, essential feature that people have, but something which is socially constructed” (Antonsich, 2010, p. 18).

May (2016) investigates the impact of time as a dimension of change on an individual’s sense of self and belonging. This passing of time is a form of movement and May’s (2016) research furthers the understanding of the relationship between belonging and time, stating, “Belonging is a fundamentally temporal experience, yet there exists to date little research on belonging as a temporal phenomenon” (May, 2016, p. 634). May (2016, p. 646) draws out the temporality of belonging to argue that it helps construct the image of “a changing yet coherent self over time” and speaks to the moral character of a person. That is, following the movement of a person’s sense of belonging across time, for example, through an enduring friendship, can aid in tracking how they have changed and yet remained the same core self, and as May suggests, this can reveal their moral character. This idea of belonging as movement also echoes Probyn’s (1996) notion of “ongoing inbetweenness” (Probyn, 1996) which understands that belonging is not the end, but a continuous journey of fluctuating between one situation or group and another. Probyn (1996, p. 9) writes, “In the face of the fixity of the categorical logic of identity, I seek to instill some of the movement that the wish to belong carries, to consider more closely the movement of and between categories.” She suggests that what a person desires can change and their sense of belonging can shift with that desire.

While the notion of “ongoing inbetweenness” speaks to the existence of movement in belonging, transnational belonging considers aspects of that movement which occur through the transnational migration of humans. The notion of transnationalism takes into account not

simply the movement of humans across physical borders, but the related ideas of citizenship and technology (Quayson and Daswani, 2013). It speaks to the understanding of a “here and there belonging” (Zetter, 2007) which acknowledges a feeling of belonging as being able to stretch between where one has come from, to where one arrives, and to not being strictly bound to a physical place. As it pertains to refugees, Zetter (2007) writes of “here and there belonging” saying:

A global diaspora of refugees no longer exists as atomized clusters of co-ethnics and co-nationals, randomly distributed around the world, who may never see each other again. It is a ‘community’ of people instantly in touch with each other not only across many exilic locations, but with the ‘home’ as well. Where and what is home, not just as physical entity and location, but as a process of belonging, in a very different deterritorialized world? (Zetter, 2007, p. 179)

This “deterritorialized world” is a community of people who share a collective sense of belonging, connected perhaps by a similar heritage, culture, or language even while being spread across different physical places in the world. Antonsich (2010, p. 17) similarly discusses the “‘here’ (the receiving society) and ‘there’ (the place left behind in the process of migration),” understanding that a person’s sense of belonging may not necessarily be to the physical area where they are, but may continue to reside in a place or with a group that has been left behind. Transnationalism generally:

...views the lives of migrants and those who remain behind as simultaneously connected between two or more nation-states, where homeland ties are a defining part of a transnational profile that incorporates recursive models of nostalgia, sometimes lodged in both homelands and the nations of sojourn at once. (Quayson and Daswani, 2013, pp. 5–6)

Zetter’s (2007) “deterritorialized world” relates to this aspect of transnationalism in migration and the sense of belonging and home. Transnationalism may also be particularly relevant in the experiences of unaccompanied young people. These young people trying to settle in a new locality are often seeking a sense of belonging and home and, as Anthias (2006, p. 5) writes, “it is precisely when we feel destabilised when we seek for answers...with finding, even fixing, a social place that we feel at home in.” This “here and there” of belonging in a transnational way may be supported in a variety of ways using a variety of tools. Today, the most dominant tools to sustain consistent ties and connection with family and friends across nations are the internet and technology such as social media,

messaging and communication and videoing apps, and the ability to more easily phone internationally than could be done in the past (Madianou and Miller, 2012; Quayson and Daswani, 2013; Dekker and Engbersen, 2014). This is a particularly important tool used by unaccompanied young people who are crossing borders and leaving home countries to seek asylum in a separate nation (Veronis et al., 2018; Kutscher and Kreß, 2016). Kutscher and Kreß (2016, p. 200) quote an unaccompanied young person seeking asylum in Germany as saying that the “internet is the same like food,” indicating how essential it is for these young people to be able to stay in contact with family and friends in other parts of the world. In their research with Syrian refugee youth in Canada, Veronis et al. (2018) report on the great importance of social media and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in resettlement. They suggest that it allows the refugee youth to both maintain ties and communication with friends and family in other places in the world, and to also learn about their new environment thus building and growing a sense of belonging transculturally both “here and there.” Belonging, then, is a notion of movement, which can reveal new ways to understand the experiences of unaccompanied young people.

2.3. Belonging as emotion, desire, and home

Belonging can also be understood as a personal feeling which “...designates a profoundly affective manner of being” (Probyn, 1996, p. 13). Yuval-Davis (2006) considers Ignatieff's (2001) work on human rights in speaking of belonging as “emotional attachment, about feeling ‘at home’ and...about feeling ‘safe’” (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 197). In this way, belonging may be understood as an emotional state, even one that can alter as time and circumstances change for a person. A person can feel a sense of belonging to a specific place or to a certain group of people at one point in time, but not necessarily permanently, in part because of the shifting of emotions in different situations or times (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Similarly, belonging can be about desire and longing (Antonsich, 2010; Pattie, 1999; Probyn, 1996). There is an understanding that a desire to belong is a longing to be a part of something (Probyn, 1996). Probyn (1996, p. 6) writes “that belonging expresses a desire for more than what is, a yearning to make skin stretch beyond individual needs and wants.” It is a longing for more than what is individual, a yearning for a collective belonging to be part of something greater than oneself. In her research with the Armenian diaspora, Pattie (1999) found that its members had a great longing to belong to the Armenian homeland, and that

regardless of where they were physically located in the world, they held on to a collective idea of the homeland and of being a part of it.

Probyn (1996) cautions against “depth” as the sole perspective on belonging, proposing that the surface aspect must also be remembered and considered as “surface” belonging acknowledges that the very desires and longing for belonging themselves can change. Probyn speaks of a surface:

...upon which all manner of desires to belong are conducted in relations of proximity to each other; a milieu in which different modes of belonging fold and twist the social fabric of life, so that we find ourselves in unexpected ways using desires for belonging as threads that lead us into unforeseen places and connections. (Probyn, 1996, p. 20)

Her complementary conceptions of depth and surface together demonstrate how belonging may capture the complexity of human emotion and desire, and she proposes that the desire to belong propels a person to seek connection with others even when desire shifts, and even knowing “the impossibility of ever really and truly belonging” (Probyn, 1996, p. 8) for so great is the desire to belong.

Another aspect of belonging as an emotion or attachment revolves around a sense of rootedness, or the sense of belonging to a place (Antonsich, 2010; Fortier, 1999). Antonsich (2010) refers to this as “place-belongingness” and points out five factors that can contribute to a person’s feeling of belonging to a place: relational (to do with social ties), autobiographical (to do with personal history), economic (to do with work and labor), cultural (such as language and other cultural practices), and legal (to do with safety and security). These factors can support or hinder a person’s sense of belonging, her emotional desire for or attachment to something, somewhere, or someone. For example, an economic factor may have to do with a job as being able to engage in work can assist in providing a positive material status, which can enhance the emotional sense of belonging (Antonsich, 2010). Fortier (1999) writes about rootedness in her research with Italian immigrants in the UK and the ways in which the immigrants settled themselves, forming spaces and physical places in which to feel a “place-belongingness” and rootedness in a new land. Feeling place-belonging, rooted, and at home can be relevant for unaccompanied young people who arrive in the UK lacking a sense of belonging or attachment (Sirriyeh, 2008). Sirriyeh (2008) suggests these

young people may have the added desire for this sense of rootedness beyond other immigrant groups due to the extra uncertainty of enduring the asylum process and waiting in limbo for a resolution.

Belonging can also be experienced as an emotional feeling of home (Wernesjö, 2015; Antonsich, 2010; hooks, 2009; Yuval-Davis, 2006). However, there is a distinction between the idea of home as a physical, domestic space and the abstract notion of home as “a mobile concept in relation to the multiple social fields of attachment and belonging”(Ní Laoire et al., 2010, p. 157). That is, when feeling at home is understood as a sense of belonging, it is not simply a physical location, but something constructed by an individual and in relation to the social world around an individual (Huot et al., 2014; Ní Laoire et al., 2010; Anthias, 2006). For “to be able to feel at home in a place is not just a personal matter, but also a social one” (Wernesjö, 2015). In their research with “French-speaking immigrants from visible minority groups” in Ontario, Canada, Huot et al. (2014, p. 329) found that their participants tried to construct a sense of place-belongingness within their new community, but their experiences were greatly shaped by local level politics of belonging and experiences of racism and discrimination. Due to these experiences, the embodied capital that they had was “diminished through processes of racialization,” and their efforts to construct a sense of place-belongingness were affected and thwarted by the social environment around them (Huot et al., 2014, p. 339).

hooks (2009) writes on belonging and home from her own experiences of leaving her conservative, religious, predominantly African American home in Kentucky (USA) and relocating to the liberal, secular, more Caucasian dominant state of California (USA) for university. As quoted at the beginning of the previous chapter, hooks writes of her life’s journey, saying, “All my life I have searched for a place of belonging, a place that would become home” (hooks, 2009, p. 226). In this she touches on home as a symbolic, not necessarily physical, space of security, comfort, familiarity, and emotional attachment, somewhere in which she could be herself. That need or desire for comfort and familiarity opens a door to perceive the personal and intimate feeling that can be expressed by a person’s sense of home (Antonsich, 2010). In this way, belonging as home is often linked to work around migration, especially migration of displaced people (Wernesjö, 2015). In an effort to capture the fluidity of migrant children’s conceptions of home, Ní Laoire et al. (2010, p. 158)

draw on Ahmed et al. (2003) to suggest that “home is both re-made and re-membered through migration.” This idea emphasizes the fluid nature and potential of home, and the way the idea or memory of home can change as migration alters a person’s circumstances.

Security is another aspect of belonging in that a person needs to feel safe and secure in their circumstances in order to experience belonging as a sense of being home (Antonsich, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 2006). At the end of her personal life journey, hooks (2009, p. 232) writes "...I wanted to return to the place where I had felt myself to be part of a culture of belonging — to a place where I could feel at home..." For her, a sense of home was felt where she was safe and secure to be herself. This need for security can be experienced by unaccompanied young people who have left their country of origin for reasons of safety. In her research with unaccompanied young people in Sweden, Wernesjö (2015) found that safety and security were desired and sought out by the young people as feeling safe contributed to their senses of belonging and home.

2.4. Belonging as performed

There is a performative aspect to the construction of belonging in that there are certain behaviors or practices which can be intentionally utilized in order to maintain a person’s connection or belonging to a particular group (Antonsich, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 2006; Fortier, 1999). “Specific repetitive practices, relating to specific social and cultural spaces, which link individual and collective behavior, are crucial for the construction and reproduction of identity narratives and constructions of attachment” (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 203). This idea builds on previous work looking at the performativity of identity and belonging (Bell, 1999; Fortier, 1999; Butler, 1990). The idea of a person performing a chosen belonging is relevant in considering the lives of migrants, as in Fortier’s (1999) research with an Italian community in London which investigates the ways that belonging is ‘done,’ largely in the physical place of an Italian Catholic church. Fortier (1999) suggests that the performativity of Catholic rituals, those repetitive norms, particularly in a non-Catholic country, serves to manifest the members’ collective belonging to their Italian community through its re-creation and maintenance of an Italian space and culture away from Italy. Shared practices and behaviors maintain and perpetuate the collective narrative of a group and an individual’s sense of

belonging to that group (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Probyn (1996) considers the performance of belonging, saying:

I wish to emphasize the ways in which belonging is situated as threshold: both public and private, personal and common, this entails a very powerful mode of subjectification. It designates a profoundly affective manner of being, always performed with the experience of being within and inbetween sets of social relations. Moreover, belonging cannot be an isolated and individual affair. (Probyn, 1996, pp. 12–13)

She suggests that belonging is not performed in isolation, does not exist in isolation, but rather within the social world, within the interaction and movement of relationships. Belonging necessitates the existence of another person or a group to belong to and be a part of, moving between what is common and public and what is personal and private.

In her research with undocumented young people in South Africa, many of whom were unaccompanied, Opfermann (2019) describes how her participants applied what she calls “performative agency” through a theater-based research method to emphasize their strength, integration, and belonging in the local community and to contest the oppressions and challenges they faced. In this way, the participants purposely performed and perpetuated a particular image of themselves and their experiences, in part performing belonging in what they interpreted to be the ‘correct’ way in the community. Understanding that belonging can be performed and that a person can ‘do’ belonging (Antonsich, 2010) sets the foundation for belonging to be used as a tool to both include and exclude.

2.5. Belonging as a tool for inclusion and exclusion

Belonging can be used as a tool for both inclusion and exclusion which speaks to the understanding that a sense of belonging is not simply a personal process or feeling, but, again, is influenced and impacted by the social world around an individual (Huot et al., 2014; Antonsich, 2010; Mee and Wright, 2009; Anthias, 2006, 2008; Probyn, 1996). Probyn (1996, p. 24) writes, "Again, my use of belonging wishes precisely to capture the ways in which individuals may wish to belong, knowing full well that belonging is not an individual action, that it is always conducted within limits," referencing the two way street that is belonging. It is never a completely individual endeavor, but rather is constructed alongside or denied by the social world around an individual. The idea of belonging, then, creates a space for both

inclusion and exclusion. Indeed, "...one should keep in mind that 'belongings are conditioned by our bodies and where they are placed on the globe', which means that not every form of belonging is possible..." (Antonsich, 2010, p. 18). For example, a person cannot simply decide to belong to a group or place and then immediately feel a sense of belonging. Belonging is constructed in response to and within the boundaries of the world around an individual (Antonsich, 2010; Probyn, 1996). These limits may be embodied or caught within situations or relationships over which an individual has no power or authority, and therefore an individual may feel excluded from a particular place or group (Antonsich, 2010). Alternately, a feeling of belonging may arise following entrance into a community of people as it is "about experiences of being part of the social fabric..." (Anthias, 2008, p. 8). In this way, belonging and inclusion in a group can result from a sharing of social bonds, discussed more later.

In their work on geographies of belonging, Mee and Wright (2009, p. 776) discuss the negotiations that occur between inclusion and exclusion, stating that it is "in the liminal spaces through which belonging is negotiated that we find the potential for new enactments of being and of longing." Similar to Probyn's (1996) idea of belonging as a threshold, belonging is understood here to live in the transitional space that is the movement between inclusion and exclusion. It is in that inbetween space of negotiation that new ways of belonging or longing to belonging are found and that the movement of belonging is perpetuated as it negotiates between inclusion and exclusion (Mee and Wright, 2009). While a person may be excluded and denied a sense of belonging to a group due to any number of factors, these exclusionary practices can often be based on the political or ethical values of a group, such as that of a nation state (Yuval-Davis, 2006). When belonging functions to include or exclude in this way, it links strongly with the following thread of political belonging.

2.6. Belonging as political

The concept of political belonging plays a large role in the world today and necessitates its own discussion. The use of belonging or of one's desire for belonging in a certain political way is particularly salient in the context of a changing and diverse world where more and more people are migrating to different countries for a variety of reasons (Allsopp and Chase,

2017; Antonsich, 2010; Mee and Wright, 2009; Anthias, 2006; Yuval-Davis, 2006; Fenster, 2005; Crowley, 1999). In policy and political discourse, belonging is often used as a term to indicate a legal, national belonging, or citizenship (Allsopp and Chase, 2017). The use of belonging in political discourse frequently occurs within the bounds of ‘othering’ and discourse around ‘us’ and ‘them.’ This type of language at a national level keeps the sense of belonging often squarely within a frame of “boundary maintenance” (Crowley, 1999) around citizenship (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Mee and Wright (2009, p. 772) suggest that “belonging has formal and informal aspects, implied, for example, by ideas of formal and informal citizenship and civic identity...is associated with exclusion and exclusionary processes...” and that exclusion often appears to be a predominant aim in the wielding of political belonging. In this political arena, belonging has primarily been utilized as a term to exert, maintain, and perpetuate the power of some over others, and as a device to exclude some people from citizenship and the rights and entitlements and status that may come with it (Yuval-Davis, 2006). This is boundary maintenance, the underlying feature of the workings of the politics of belonging, and a highly exclusionary practice.

Building on Yuval-Davis (2006), Antonsich (2010) refers to the politics of belonging, proposing that belonging is “...a discursive resource which constructs, claims, justifies or resists forms of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion” (Antonsich, 2010, p. 4). In this way, belonging is utilized as a discursive tool to include or exclude a person. Antonsich (2010, p. 13) suggests that “Every politics of belonging involves two opposite sides: the side which claims belonging and the side which has the power of ‘granting’ belonging.” Although there are different levels of prescriptive belonging in the political arena from residence permits to humanitarian leave to citizenship (Antonsich, 2010), all function similarly to allow or deny a person the chance to belong to a particular nation state. Political belonging plays a significant role in the experiences of migrants, including unaccompanied young people, as it connects with policy and governmental decisions which effectively determine whether migrants may remain in a country or must leave. Allsopp and Chase (2017) discuss the experiences of unaccompanied young people in Europe and how policy affects their developing belongings and the “best interests” of this group. They suggest that there is a failure of policy to deliver “durable solutions” for the political plight of the young people and that there is a state-centric preference for migrant return in the state’s overall view of migration. In looking at the predominant policy solutions of current European institutions and governments, they propose

further that “any ‘solution’ which fails to take account of young people’s lived experiences of belonging is unlikely to achieve the goals of being ‘durable’” (Allsopp and Chase, 2017, p. 14). Their work highlights the impact that a form of political belonging or its denial can have in unaccompanied young people’s lives and the impact on the long-term durability of a ‘solution.’

Public discourse on the politics of immigration (boundary maintenance) may also have an impact on a migrant or refugee’s experiences of inclusion or exclusion. The UK’s ‘hostile environment’ is one which has been built, in part, on public discourse and rhetoric about the ‘threat’ of refugees, even the ‘threat’ of unaccompanied children. Beyond policies themselves, public discourse through debates or media have potential to influence a person’s sense of belonging. Cisneros (2008) discusses the impact of public rhetoric on immigration in the United States saying that metaphors and language such as the immigrant as “pollutant” or “infection” or “infestation” that are “present in news media discourse on immigration can have serious consequences for societal treatment of immigrants as well as the policies designed to respond to immigration” (Cisneros, 2008, p. 569). Aspects of political belonging such as these, then, play a large role in gatekeeping the boundary between inclusion and exclusion in the UK as well. The UK’s ‘hostile environment’ and negative discourse around immigration and migrants provide evidence of both policy and public movements toward the exclusion, formal and informal, of migrants and those considered ‘non-British,’ including unaccompanied children.

2.7. An image of belonging

As seen throughout the literature above, belonging can take many forms and this discussion of dominant threads does not make the assumption that other modes or feelings of belonging not covered here cannot or do not exist. Rather, the above threads appear to come through most often in the literature and were most relevant to this research project. While the multiple dominant threads highlight the extent of belonging, they also demonstrate its complexity as they show how belonging has been conceptualized in multiple ways and applied to many different contexts, often to nuanced and individual understandings. Although belonging cannot be easily defined or distilled into a single sentence, viewed together, the dominant

threads communicate an encompassing image of the complexity and value of belonging as seen in Figure 2 below.

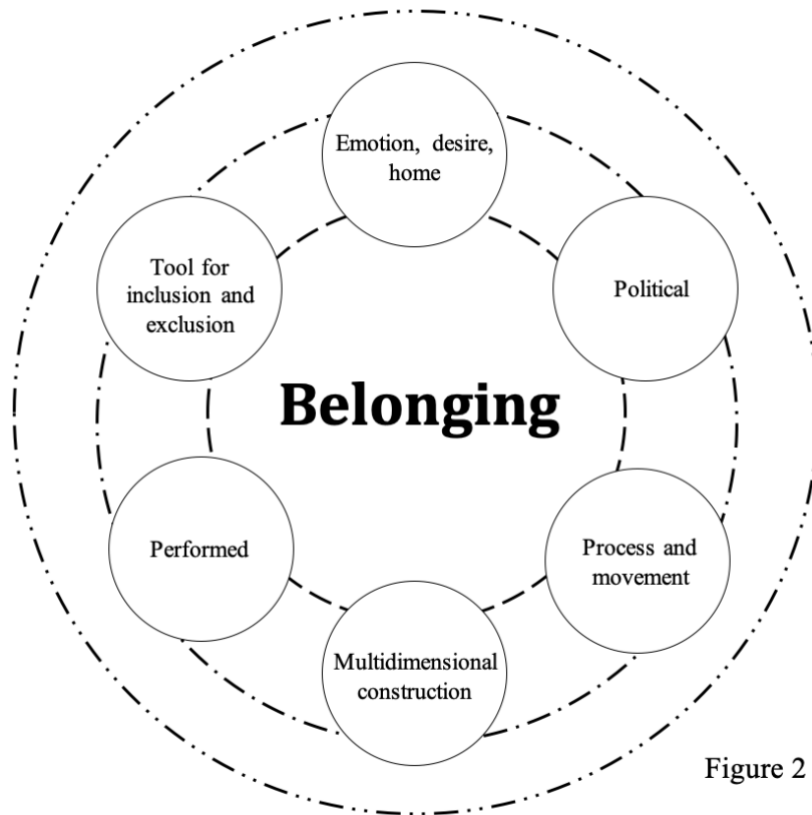


Figure 2

In this figure, we see that there is no inherent hierarchy amongst the threads of belonging, although each thread may be more or less pertinent to an individual at a particular time or in a particular space. The figure shows perforated circles which symbolize layers of understanding of belonging. This is not to indicate that any one layer is more important than those that may come after it, but simply demonstrates that belonging has many layers of understanding. These layers of belonging are permeable and open to acknowledge and receive other understandings and conceptualizations of belonging than are covered in this research project. The dominant threads of belonging in this project are shown in the figure as they were discussed above. In those dominant threads, we understand that belonging is fluid and dynamic and is constructed by an individual or group in a variety of ways and at multiple levels and can even be performed and ‘done’ in a specific way. To experience an affective sense of belonging can be to feel comfort and familiarity as if being ‘home.’ A sense of belonging may be felt when a person feels physically safe or safe to ‘be herself,’ or it may be used as a tool to include or exclude someone, particularly in a political sense through the granting or denying of residence or citizenship. In these ways, we see that belonging can do

and be many things. The following conceptual framework grew from my understanding of the literature around belonging.

3. Conceptual framework

Belonging connects and interacts with the other key concepts of social connections, space, identity, and learning, which all together comprise the conceptual framework for this research project. In exploring the constructions and experiences of unaccompanied girls, none of these concepts can stand alone or they risk oversimplifying the unaccompanied girls' stories. Rather, the concepts work together to form a framework, as seen in Figure 3 below, which permits a holistic and open approach to explore the unaccompanied girls' constructions and experiences of belonging.

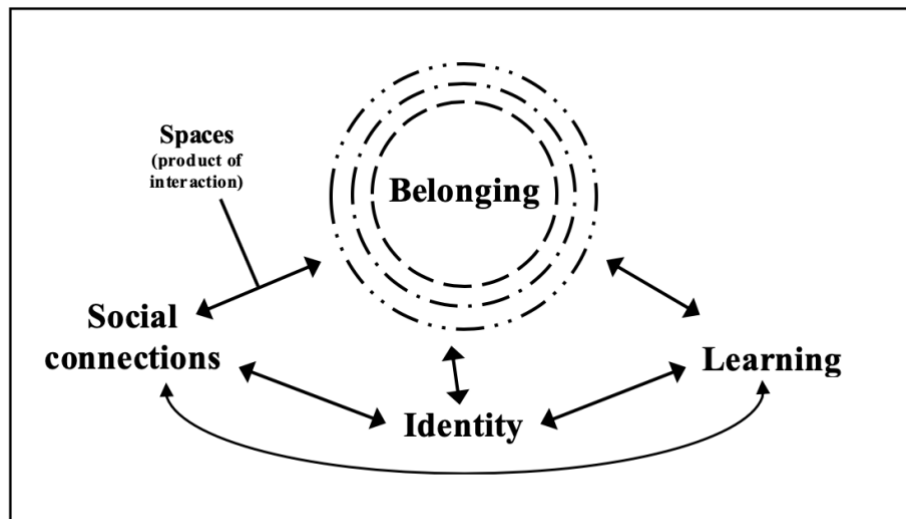


Figure 3

In this figure, 'Belonging' denotes the threads of belonging as envisioned in Figure 2 above. The arrows between the concepts convey that they are linked but does not prescribe the nature of those links, which supports the open and holistic approach of this framework. The link between belonging and social connections speaks to the 'who' in an unaccompanied girl's life while spaces denote the interactions between her and her social connections. Identity is linked to belonging in that it is a site where belonging can be constructed (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Learning speaks to the active, agentic, social processes that an unaccompanied girl goes through in learning to live in a new place. It further acknowledges the learning that occurs through social interaction and the role that learning plays in identity construction

(Lave and Wenger, 1991). The following sections discuss the concepts of social connections, space, identity, and learning more fully.

3.1. Belonging through social connections

From within the field of psychology, Baumeister and Leary (1995) suggest that the need to form social attachments and build stable relationships and belong is fundamental to every human being. Similarly, Neely et al. (2014) build on Maslow's (1968) hierarchy of needs in their review of the literature on young people, food practices and social relations to emphasize the fundamental human need for positive social connections and a feeling of belonging through that connectedness. These understandings establish that social relationships are important and essential in human life, which is echoed in the idea of social capital. Originally an economic metaphor employed by Bourdieu (1971), “social capital” has since been utilized and conceptualized by other scholars in a variety of fields to many ends. Putnam (2000) advances understanding around different types of social capital by suggesting that it refers to “the connections amongst individuals’ social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (Putnam, 2000, p. 19). Although he proposes that social capital serves important functions, he argues that bonding social capital networks such as ethnic groups are inward looking and reinforce homogeneity and exclusive identities while bridging social capital networks such as youth service organizations look outward to include people from across society. In contrast, Zetter et al. (2006) argue that bonding capital developed through shared ethnicity is important to new migrants, who appear to build it up early on in their time in a new country. This can occur through an activity as simple as playing football together, but Zetter et al. suggest the bond goes deeper, acting as a defense against a potentially hostile environment as it provides security in the act of gathering together. Ager and Strang (2008) borrow the terms “social bonds” and “social bridges” from the concept of social capital, largely as it was conceptualized by Putnam (1993), stating that the terms are especially helpful when looking at integration at the local level. They suggest that social bonds refer to connections built on similarity while social bridges refer to relationships between diverse and different groups or communities (Ager and Strang, 2008). Like Zetter et al. (2006), Strang and Ager (2010) suggest that building social bonds is a priority in the refugee experience, although considering who is ‘the same’ can be complex. Moreover, Akkaymak (2016) urges caution when considering migrant networks

simply as ‘bonding’ or ‘bridging’ as this cannot always capture the complexity of relationships or the formation of networks.

For unaccompanied young people, those who interact with and establish social connections, whether bonds or bridges, with them in a variety of settings and contexts are highly influential (Smyth et al., 2015; Valtonen, 2014; Eide and Hjern, 2013). These may be family, friends, carers, social workers, advocates, solicitors, educators, and/or other professionals, and not all of these relationships may be face-to-face, but can be transnational relationships maintained via virtual or technological means such as social media or phone calls. These relationships are important as unaccompanied young people arrive in a new country and begin to settle. Eide and Hjern (2013, p. 668) suggest that “...substitute caregivers who can form lasting and close relationships with the children are essential if they are to reach their full potential.” A positive and nurturing relationship on the ground in the young person’s new location can make all the difference to that young person. Smyth et al. (2015, p. 12) also report in their study with unaccompanied youth settling in Ireland that the young people “felt that the presence of a supportive adult who ensured their primary care needs were being met was essential to general wellbeing and had a particularly stress buffering effect on mental health.” These various social connections can function as a support system to meet both the basic needs of the young people and to encourage the fullest potential in the young person. In their work with unaccompanied girls in Finland, Kohli and Kaukko (2017) found such connections contributed to sustaining the girls while waiting for their asylum decisions, saying:

...the relationships that asylum-seeking girls develop with themselves and others in dealing with times of stillness and movement while waiting for decisions to reach them, as they reach out towards connections that will sustain them—connections that belong to the past, to the networks in the present and to future anticipations. (Kohli and Kaukko, 2017, p. 2)

In this way, social connections formed with others can ‘sustain’ young people during the challenging time of awaiting an asylum result and learning to live in a new country. Those who form a positive connection with an unaccompanied young person can have a strong impact on their construction of belonging. It is acknowledged in the literature and by those who work with and care for unaccompanied young people that they often experience trauma and stress and even physical injuries as a result of their migratory journeys to a safe location.

Eide and Hjern (2013, p. 668) suggest that they “are *more* vulnerable to post-traumatic stress, because they are deprived of the close relationships that could help them cope better with difficult events.” Valtonen (2014) notes the positive effects of reducing stress and relieving feelings of isolation in the lives of unaccompanied young people in Finland when peers functioned as advocates, ambassadors, mentors, and friends. In this way, it is understood that a social connection can be made not only with an older, caring adult, but also with a peer.

Pastoor (2017) suggests that facilitators can provide opportunities for successful integration and promote belonging for young refugees by working with them as “...more competent others – who scaffold or guide their participation...and charitably interpret their language and behavior” and who “support young refugees’ transition from being a ‘legitimate peripheral participant’...to becoming a full participant in the communities of the host society” (Pastoor, 2017, pp. 159–160). These facilitators are in a position to help young refugees to recover a sense of belonging by supporting introductions and participation in the wider community (Pastoor, 2017). Many different types of facilitators can play influential roles from social workers to those who run and support an accommodation to acquaintances turned friends made through involvement in NGO or sports activities to coworkers at part time jobs. Ager and Strang (2008) report that even a group home for unaccompanied young people can function as a facilitating presence by supporting the abilities and skills of individuals and helping to eliminate structural and systemic hurdles to participation in the community. Similarly, in their UK-based research, Wessendorf and Phillimore (2018) identified fleeting encounters, crucial acquaintances, and friendships as three types of social relations migrants had with other people that supported their social integration and sense of belonging. Furthermore, whether the interactions were more fleeting or more enduring, in addition to supporting belonging, they played a role in facilitating access to further resources and structural forms of integration.

3.2. Spaces of belonging

In this research project, space is a concept which is useful for understanding and conceptualizing constructions and experiences of belonging. Massey (2004, 2005), in particular, writes extensively on space, moving from a more concrete and physical geographical understanding, and into the realm where there exist moments and intersections,

and where human trajectories reside and progress. Massey's (2005) proposals form the foundation of her approach to space and also serve as an avenue through which the idea of space can be further explored. She first proposes that space is the "product of interrelations" between humanity, "from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny" (Massey, 2005, p. 9). Second, she suggests that space is multiple, a realm of plural possibilities where "trajectories coexist" (Massey, 2005, p. 9). Third, she suggests that space is constantly being constructed, saying, "It is always in the process of being made. It is never finished; never closed" (Massey, 2005, p. 9). Thus, as space is never completed and is always 'in progress,' it is the "simultaneity of stories-so-far" (Massey, 2005, p. 9). In short, space is relationally constructed and as such, there must be many and multiple spaces which have existed, do exist, and will exist. This perspective sees the uniqueness and 'ongoingness' of interactions between people as a way to conceptualize the spaces people create with other humans. In this way, space-making becomes a participatory and creative activity.

Similar to Massey (2005), there are a few researchers who have also utilized the term space to refer to symbolic spaces, the non-physical and intangible intersections between humanity that can contribute to a sense of belonging and feeling of home (Antonsich, 2010; hooks, 2009; Ehrkamp and Leitner, 2006). As discussed earlier, Antonsich (2010) and hooks (2009) work with the abstract idea of home as a space, not a physical house or location, but a symbolic space that feels comfortable and secure where there is an emotional attachment. Another of the dominant threads of belonging discussed above was of process and movement, and the fluidity and shifting of belonging, which resonates with Massey's (2005) proposition of space as constantly being constructed. Punch et al. (2010, p. 228) also consider space, saying "Our social positions and experiences are shaped in and through specific spaces; and, in turn, spaces are constituted via our ways of interacting with each other and the objects around us." In this, there is a Massey-like view of space being born of interaction and Punch et al. (2010) propose the creation of spaces through daily activities in which people position themselves in a certain way and are, in turn, positioned by others.

The concept of space, then, is fluid and changing, and highly temporal. It does not refer to a physical place but rather to the compilation of events and happenings and interactions and possibilities, come together as what was, what is and what could be. Massey (2005) promotes an "urge towards 'outwardlookingness', towards a positivity and aliveness to the world

beyond one's own turf, whether that be one's self, one's city, or the particular parts of the planet in which one lives and works" (Massey, 2005, p. 15). In this, she seeks to resituate space within the bounds of that which is alive and changes and grows, and away from a fixed point of stasis of that which is immobile and dead. This changingness of space resonates with the fluid and changing circumstances often experienced by unaccompanied young people and children who have migrated and seek to settle in a new place. Furthermore, viewing space as interaction between humans can foster a more comprehensive understanding of what can occur between an unaccompanied young person and a social connection, making space a useful concept to capture the unaccompanied young person's constructions and experiences.

3.3. Identity and belonging

Yuval-Davis (2006) suggests that identities, or identifications, are sites in which a sense of belonging can be constructed, saying, "Identities are narratives, stories people tell themselves and others about who they are (and who they are not)" (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 202). She understands that not all these narratives regard belonging, but can speak to other factors such as physical attributes, skills, aspirations; and that some identity narratives are collective, while others are individual. Anthias (2008) argues that identity is itself a process, a site of construction, which is "symbiotically" connected with belonging, although each has a different emphasis. She suggests that:

Identity involves individual and collective narratives of self and other, presentation and labelling, myths of origin and myths of destiny with associated strategies and identifications. Belonging on the other hand is more about experiences of being part of the social fabric and the ways in which social bonds and ties are manifested in practices, experiences and emotions of inclusion. (Anthias, 2008, p. 8)

Identity, then, is understood to be neither fixed nor stagnant, but rather a fluid, "situationally salient" (Anthias, 2006), constructive process; a messy fracturing of oneself that daily defies even the slightest notion of being 'one thing.' Indeed, an individual does not simply have one identity which 'is her,' rather there exist multiple identities in a person which may interact with each other and also with the social world (Smith, 2014; Anthias, 2006; Yuval-Davis, 2006; Gee, 2000; Hall, 1996). In addition to the multiple and constructive nature of identity, there are aspects of identity in which a person may choose to perform a particular identity, or where an identity may be thrust upon that person. There is also a consideration for the

identities of today and desires for identities in the future, which contribute to the concept of fluidity in identity.

Guerrero and Tinkler (2010) distinguish between what they call “actual identities” and “designated identities.” This distinction is based on the premise that identity is a narrative told by an individual (Sfard and Prusak, 2005). Actual identities are present tense stories which tell the current situations of a person. Designated identities are future tense stories that use particular phrasing to signify desires or necessities or obligations that will or can become part of a person’s actual identity. These complementary aspects of identity can provide some insight into the experiences of unaccompanied young people as they frame well the constant construction of a young person’s own identities through present stories and future stories. There is also an element in the literature which acknowledges that identity can be imposed upon or ascribed to an individual by someone else (Goodyer and Okitikpi, 2007; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Goodyer and Okitikpi (2007) understand these ascribed identities to be socially constructed and in their research with young people of mixed race, ascribed or imposed identities are often not in line with the way a young person or child self identifies. Similarly, Sutherland (2005, p. 370) considers “ascription of identity...as boundaries in that individuals are forced to confront them repeatedly vis-à-vis their own self-definitions, shaping their views of themselves in the process.” Like the young people of mixed race in Goodyer and Okitikpi’s (2007) study and the young black girls of Sutherland’s (2005) research, unaccompanied young people can be ascribed numerous identities and labels which they do not choose but which affect how others view them (perhaps negatively) and sometimes how they view themselves. Similar to belonging, identity can have a performative quality (Smith, 2014; Gee, 2000), which Gee (2000, p. 99) refers to as “being recognized as a certain ‘kind of person’ in a given context.” That is, one may consciously or unconsciously bring forward and present one identity or another on the outside depending on one’s current circumstances. It may be appropriate or more helpful to ‘perform’ a certain identity in the presence of a social worker, and then be better to ‘perform’ a different identity with friends later. These performances may not necessarily be a cognizant choice if a person is simply adapting to each situation. As mentioned earlier, Fortier’s (1999) research with an Italian community in London identifies how individuals performed certain practices and behaviors, a specific Italian identity, in order to maintain and perpetuate the collective narrative and belonging to their specific migrant group in their specific space.

In particular, unaccompanied children and young people can experience severe disruption in the formation of their identities due to displacement during very formative years, which in part highlights the constructive process of identity. This disruption is caused by the many difficulties of displacement ranging from trauma to the loss of familiar culture to the challenges of learning a new language, amongst others. (Miller et al., 2005). Carlson et al. (2012) suggest that identity formation is already a hallmark stage for adolescents but is especially hard for unaccompanied young people who likely feel out of sync with their home culture and also with the culture of their country of asylum and whose identity confusion may cause further isolation. Because of this, they must engage in additional work to reconcile and make sense of both past and present lives (Miller et al., 2005).

3.4. Learning as a social process

Learning is “a natural accompaniment to everyday life” (Morrice, 2011, p. 34) through which an individual can unconsciously acquire new or update existing skills and information (Morrice, 2011). Learning may also be understood as an active, agentic process which can enable the constructions of an individual’s belongings, social connections, spaces, or identities. Lai (2015, p. 267) suggests that “learning is an active and interactive process of perceiving and acting on affordances in different contexts.” This proposes that there is agency in learning and that a learner’s agency supports her to take advantage of available opportunities. Mercer (2011) similarly suggests a socio-constructivist perspective of learners which views them as agents who actively construct the terms of their own learning in the communities with which they engage. These perspectives contribute to an overarching perspective that views learning as an ongoing, social process.

Lave and Wenger's (1991) seminal work around a ‘social theory of learning’ promotes learning as a product of social interaction and seeks to go beyond the idea of learning as an individual psychological process. They suggest that learning is a situated activity which occurs within communities of practice in which a newcomer progresses from legitimate peripheral participation, learning through sociocultural activity and practice, to eventually become a full, knowledgeable participant in the relevant community. In this, learning occurs not necessarily through direct instruction or a transfer of information, but rather through

social interaction, which necessitates change and transformation. Lave and Wenger argue that identity is changed through learning processes, saying, “Learning thus implies becoming a different person with respect to the possibilities enabled by these systems of relations. To ignore this aspect of learning is to overlook the fact that learning involves the construction of identities” (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 53). In this way, focusing on the social and interactive element of learning does not mean that the personal is left behind, but rather it emphasizes that the individual is a social participant and that the social world contributes to the construction of identity (Wenger, 2010). Indeed, “...identity reflects a complex relationship between the social and the personal. Learning is a social becoming” (Wenger, 2010, p. 3). Learning through the process of legitimate peripheral participation suggests transformation and change on the journey to full participation, and in this, the movement and process of learning and identity echo the movement and process of belonging discussed earlier. Brown et al.’s (1989) related concept of situated cognition and the culture of learning also suggests that “...knowledge is situated, being in part a product of the activity, context, and culture in which it is developed and used” (Brown et al., 1989, p. 32). That is, learning is produced through observation and immersion of what they call “ambient culture.” Lave (2019) reflects more recently on her work around learning and the pursuit of “...changing conceptions of learning in/as practice...” (Lave, 2019, p. 134). She suggests, “...learning as ‘changing participants’ changing participation in (humdrum, complicated, conflictual) everyday practice” (Lave, 2019, p. 1). In this, a strong relational aspect maintains that learning is always in relation to the other participants of the social world, and practices can be understood as the always ongoing social practices of everyday life in which participants take part, perpetuate, and change. Lave, in fact, has often used the phrase “everyday life” as a substitute for “situated activity” or “social practice” (Lave, 2019, p. 114).

Kemmis et al. (2017, p. 45) use the metaphor that learning is “‘being stirred’ into practices.” They suggest that learning is an innately social process by which one is ‘stirred into’ particular practices, or ways of life. This inherent process of being ‘stirred into’ everyday life may also promote the construction of belonging. The idea of learning through participation in everyday practices resonates with Lloyd and Wilkinson's (2016) exploration of learning in daily spaces with young refugees, which says:

...everyday spaces act as rich sites of informal learning, and young refugee people draw upon these sites and knowledges to enhance their ability to gain entry to the established community and to link into a wide range of prospects that enable them to position or situate themselves in relation to opportunities such as finding a job, learning new skills or simply fitting into the community. (Lloyd and Wilkinson, 2016, p. 300)

In their research, Lloyd and Wilkinson discovered that young refugees may acquire substantial funds of information through common, everyday activities such as a conversation while playing basketball or visiting a shop. That learning through everyday activities played a role in many of the successes of the young refugees, for example, in helping them to understand the process of getting into higher education. Considering such spaces of learning with phrases such as “diverse learning contexts” and “alternative learning contexts,” Pastoor’s (2017) research with unaccompanied young refugees’ learning in Norway conveys the inclusive and diverse nature of young refugees’ learning experiences. Pastoor (2017, p. 161) writes “Participation in an expanded range of learning contexts is crucial in enabling resettling young refugees to acquire the knowledge and skills required to succeed in education as well as to develop a sense of belonging.” This recognition that a variety of learning contexts can make up a young refugee’s learning experiences resonates with the understanding that learning does not require direct instruction. Pastoor adds that for young refugees, in particular, these various learning contexts can contribute to the development of a sense of belonging.

Learning has also been considered to have a ‘deconstructive’ element in that it can cause an upset in a person’s current worldview, allowing for the re-centering of perspective as one takes on board something previously unknown or misunderstood (Morrice, 2011). In a longitudinal study with refugees seeking higher education, Morrice (2012, p. 267) discovered that “there is a complexity and depth to the learning that refugees experience, which is not always a straightforward process of building on previous learning, neither is it necessarily positive or beneficial. Rather, it is contradictory and largely deconstructive.” That in becoming a refugee, there are new, acquired behaviors, skills, and information taken on board, but there can also be a shedding of certain aspects of an individual’s identity and belongings which may not support the refugee to live in a new place. Deconstruction, here, is perhaps an expression of transformation. At this point, if we consider learning as ‘being stirred’ into everyday practices, then such transformation is inevitable as a participant’s

participation inevitably forms and transforms the practices in which they engage (Kemmis et al., 2017). Kaukko and Wilkinson (2018, p. 5) similarly suggest that for refugee children, practices based on their prior “...constructed *sayings, doings* and *relatings*...may or may not be sustainable and adaptable in the changing conditions which they find themselves.” This, again, suggests the potential for transformation of practices through learning.

For refugee and unaccompanied young people, learning also often includes the acquisition of a new language, which is a necessary tool for living and learning in general, and therefore is repeated throughout the literature on refugee and unaccompanied young people learning to live in a new place. Indeed, Norton Peirce (1995, p. 17) suggests “...that if learners invest in a second language, they do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources...” Ager and Strang (2008) similarly suggest that learning the host community’s language can have a positive influence on experiences of integration and belonging, in part because it increases access to the culture and community. In their research around refugee wellbeing and language, Tip et al. (2019) suggest that language proficiency in the host country’s majority language promotes intergroup contact between refugees and the local community, which can lead to improved refugee wellbeing in the long-term. Additionally, language is considered to be a key factor of a person’s identity (Korjonen-Kuusipuro et al., 2018) and when (a lack of) language functions as a barrier, it can negatively affect feelings of being understood (Thommessen and Todd, 2018), inhibit access to education (Dryden-Peterson, 2015), and even perpetuate feelings of being unsafe and uncertain (Connolly, 2015). In this way, the issue of language is not simply the lack of the language itself, but also the lack of access to everything which requires use of language and communication, including the community and culture (Thommessen and Todd, 2018).

4. Conclusion

This chapter laid out the overall conceptual framework, the “spectacles,” through which my research project investigated the constructions and experiences of unaccompanied girls. I presented the concept of belonging and six dominant threads in the literature which demonstrate the complexity and variation in the understandings and conceptualizations of belonging. These threads cover belonging as a multidimensional construct; as process and movement; as emotion, desire, and home; as performed; as a tool for inclusion and exclusion;

and as a political idea. While the framework centers on belonging, belonging does not stand alone but rather works together with the complementary concepts of social connections, space, identity, and learning as seen in Figure 3. Literature demonstrates how social connections, such as social bonds and social bridges, can benefit migrants and refugees by facilitating access into the wider community and promoting integration and belonging. Considering space as the product of interaction further allows for the exploration of how human interaction can create a site for the construction of belonging. Identity echoes belonging as a constructive process and as being multiple in nature, demonstrating that it may be constructed through either factual narratives or future, wishful stories. Learning is understood to be both a product of social interaction and an active process which contributes to an unaccompanied young person's construction of belonging. In all, these concepts – belonging, social connections, space, identity, and learning – formed the conceptual framework which endeavored to convey more depth, complexity, and authenticity than any one concept could capture alone of an unaccompanied girl's constructions and experiences of belonging.

The following chapter discusses the methodological approach of this research project.

Chapter Three: Methodology

“...this sort of research experience may be unsettling but it can also be fascinating...[the doctoral student] describes her sense of ‘loss and discomfort’ and ‘apparent disaster’ when her research didn’t go as imagined. Suddenly, her supervisor smiles at her and says: ‘But isn’t it interesting?’” (McArthur, 2012, p. 424)

1. Introduction

The above quote expresses well how I felt many times during my research, uncomfortable and as though I had done something wrong. Then, echoing the supervisor in the anecdote above, my supervisors would point out interesting parts in the data as it came in and as it was analyzed. McArthur discusses the value of clarity in theory, method, and purposes alongside the virtue of mess, and what it can reveal unexpectedly, suggesting that “we need to accept the messy, contingent nature of the social world we research” (McArthur, 2012, p. 419). That is not to suggest that clarity is undesirable or research plans should be put aside, but rather to permit the notion that unexpectedness in research and “mess” can *also* be valuable in their revelations. Indeed, in my own research I came across unexpected changes and a vast amount of messiness in unrealized plans and disorganized, tangential conversations. However, what was revealed in the unexpectedness were the innovative potential of conventional research methods and findings I had not known to consider.

This chapter begins with the epistemological approach of social constructionism and a discussion of the UNCRC standards which underpin this study. It then presents the research plan, the recruitment of four unaccompanied young people participants and four key worker participants, and the data collection methods used. Finally, the chapter discusses the fieldwork experience and data analysis. With an aim to answer the overarching research question – *How do unaccompanied girls in England construct and experience a sense of belonging?* – the original research plan sought to allow participants to select from a menu of creative data collection methods around photos, music, and taking a walk around their neighborhood/city with an aim to build choice into the research. However, this did not occur as participants were older than I expected and were uninterested in engaging with any of these methods. In the end, I utilized more conventional data collection methods – interviews and focus groups – and adapted them for and with participants. Throughout the research

project, I worked to ethically maintain two separate roles as a researcher and volunteer, both within the same organization. Throughout this chapter, I write reflexively about what worked and did not work as Sultana suggests that a “reflexive research process can open up the research to more complex and nuanced understandings of issues, where boundaries between process and content can get blurred” (Sultana, 2007, p. 376).

This research project takes an epistemological approach of social constructionism. Epistemology is concerned with how knowledge is known or demonstrated (Mason, 2002) and a social constructionist perspective suggests that “knowledge itself is socially constructed and facts are social products” (Cunliffe, 2008, p. 125). This approach understands that social reality is constructed and comprised of interactions and practices, and recognizes that there can be many truths. Berger and Luckmann's (1966) book *The Social Construction of Reality* is largely recognized as the origin of social constructionism and in it they propose that the social world is both a subjective and objective reality, and is understood through externalization, objectivation, and internalization. Externalization is the argument that the social world is produced by humans in continuous activities and routines. Objectivation refers to the understanding that the social world is “experienced as being objective in that it affects our lives on an ongoing basis” and we must go and learn from it (Cunliffe, 2008, p. 125). Finally, internalization occurs when “we are socialized in the world as we interpret meanings of events and/or others’ subjectivities, and in doing so we take on the world, the identity of others and therefore our own place and identity” (Cunliffe, 2008, p. 125). Essentially, social constructionism suggests that realities and identities of the social world are crafted and maintained through encounters and conversations with others.

Since Berger and Luckmann, various interpretations and orientations of social constructionism have developed, from the micro to the macro (Cunliffe, 2008). The macro level of social construction may deal with culture, institutions, and ideology, for example within wider historical contexts (Ashcraft and Mumby, 2004) or through the creation of meaning by way of discourse and language (Potter, 1996). At a more micro level, social construction of reality can be said to occur on a daily basis between individuals and their dialogues as “an interweaving of past, present, and future conversations” (Cunliffe, 2008, p. 126 referencing Katz et al., 2000 and Cunliffe et al., 2004). This micro view takes into account not only what is occurring in the present, but the impact of the past and the potential

of the future as an accumulation of social reality in that moment, and it is this orientation of social constructionism to which I am drawn, in particular, to a “relationally responsive social constructionism” which “emphasizes the intersubjective and dialogical nature of experience: we are always in relation and responsive to others, and meaning emerges within the dialectical interrelationship of speakers/listeners, body/language, speech/silence, etc.” (Cunliffe, 2008, p. 131). This orientation suggests that a person’s social world is almost always constructed through relationships with others and that meaning is produced through ensuing and ongoing interactions. Because meaning and the construction of the social world is dependent on other people, this orientation highlights a responsibility to create “ethical dialogue, respecting the rights of those around us to speak” (Cunliffe, 2008, p. 136). This relationally responsive social constructionism suits this study and supports well a focused ethnographic exploration of experiences and constructions of belonging with unaccompanied girls.

Ethnography is an approach often employed by social constructionists given its emphasis on interaction and relations in the study of culture (Cunliffe, 2008). My research took the approach of a focused ethnography; an approach which often “...deals with a distinct problem in a specific context and is conducted within a sub-cultural group rather than with a cultural group that differs completely from that of the researcher” (Wall, 2015, p. 3). Unlike traditional ethnography, focused ethnography is guided by a specific research question, made up of short-term visits, involves a researcher with some knowledge of the group being studied, and may utilize video or audio recordings (Wall, 2015). As ethnographic approaches continue to be used across more disciplines, amongst new cultural groups, and with pre-decided research questions, Wall (2015) suggests that ethnographers will, in fact, be entering their fields of research with increasing existing connections. Van Es et al. (2019) took a focused ethnographic approach in their research with unaccompanied young people in the Netherlands in which they employed interviews and focus groups as data collection methods, which, in turn, allowed them to support the participants to control the direction of the discussions. Throughout my own study, I maintained the position of not only researcher, but also volunteer and spent much of my personal time with two unaccompanied girls, which informed how I interacted with them and broached conversation during our research sessions. In balancing the roles of researcher and volunteer, I drew strict lines around what constituted data and what did not in order to ensure that participants were always comfortable and to

maintain a strong ethical stance throughout the research. In a study conducted with young asylum seekers in Finland, one researcher spent time ethnographically ‘hanging out’ with the young people, but consciously chose not to use her own knowledge of that time as data in her research (Petäjaniemi et al., 2020). Rather, she intentionally conducted interviews with the participants so that they could choose which parts of their stories they wanted to include as data. In a similar way, I made a conscious choice to clearly separate my volunteering time and the casual chats with participants before and after research sessions from the specific research conversations with participants. I did this by only using as data what the participants said in the research sessions (not what they said when I volunteered with them) and by not recording the casual chats just before and after the research sessions. Additionally, I ensured that participants always knew when the audio recorder was being turned on and off, and that they were happy for the recorder to be switched on. In this way, the participants always knew exactly when data was being collected in a research session via audio recording and could choose what they wanted to include as data and what they did not.

I return to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNHCR, 1989) to discuss one more element which underpins this methodological approach, and confirm the standards which contributed greatly to the design of this project. As unaccompanied young people are understood to be a vulnerable population (Vervliet et al., 2015), it was important to work within these standards and build in opportunities for the young people participants to appropriately and meaningfully participate in and contribute to the research process. Several of the UNCRC’s 54 articles have been drawn out and conceptualized by researchers for the purposes of framing research with children, what the responsibilities are of the adult researcher, and how and to what extent to include children in the research design and process. The “right to be properly researched” (Beazley et al., 2009) is laid out clearly in a special issue of *Children’s Geographies* as it seeks to show the growth of “rights-based research” with children over the last twenty to thirty years. Articles 3.3, 12.1, 13.1, and 36 of the UNCRC are utilized by Beazley et al. (2009) to outline a child’s right be researched in an appropriate manner. Of them, 3.3 concerns having high and maintained standards of both research and researchers themselves; 12.1 refers to a child’s opinions being taken into account; 13.1 points to the necessity of research methods which are accessible to a child, and even chosen by the child; and 36 makes clear that children are never to be harmed during research. Lundy (2007) has also written extensively on researching *with* children, utilizing

Article 12 as her main platform for the inclusion of children into the research design and process. In her own work, she emphasizes bringing children into research as co-researchers and producers of knowledge, not simply as subjects for study, in line with Beazley et al.'s (2009) discussion. I took into account these UNCRC-based standards of research with children as I designed the research plan, and took care to address Article 13.1, which seeks to make research methods accessible.

2. Research plan

The research plan was influenced by my experiences, understandings, and readings before I met the participants, so while I inevitably held considerable power and influence over the planning and structuring of the research project, I intentionally tried to mitigate this by designing the project to allow the participants to choose how to engage with me. As much as was possible and practical, I wanted them to be able to choose in following with Article 13.1 of the UNCRC. The initial research plan involved a creative menu of activities from which participants could choose: a photo elicitation activity (Foster-Fishman et al., 2010), a colorful and creative social mapping activity (Buzan and Buzan, 1993), a music elicitation activity (Wilson and Milne, 2013), and taking a walk around their neighborhood/city (Trell and Van Hoven, 2010). Chase et al. (2019, p. 10) suggest that such innovative and arts-based methods may "...constitute a shift away from extractive methods of data collection...towards approaches which encourage co-construction and meaning-making of their experiences." However, the participant young people were not interested in engaging with these methods, and having the benefit of hindsight, I suggest two reasons why. The first reason is that the creative methods may have come across to the young people as additional work i.e. taking photos, selecting a song to share, or choosing a route to walk with me (taking the lead and having to decide where to go). The second reason is that the participant young people may have found these methods to be unfamiliar. In their research with young people, Woodgate et al. (2017) also found that these same reasons could be barriers to their use of the innovative method Photovoice. Although I felt as though I had somewhat failed at that time, the research project, in fact, adapted to better accommodate what participants desired, and therefore, continued to promote a young person's "right to be properly researched." We adapted to more straightforward and seemingly conventional methods of interviews and focus groups, which are discussed in detail further below.

2.1. Haven

This research project was conducted through a local level non-governmental organization in the south of England, which has been given the pseudonym 'Haven.' When I began searching for a group or charity or organization through which to recruit for my research, I sent out an email about my research project to as many organizations and charities who work with unaccompanied young people as I could find online in the south of England. I received few replies and two real expressions of interest which turned into conversations, one in person and one on the phone. I was invited to conduct research with both, but ultimately chose one organization, Haven, due to the more convenient location and I parted amicably with the other organization. When I was first spoke with Haven, I made it clear that I would also like to take up a volunteer position with them. One reason was to demonstrate to Haven that I was willing to commit long term to being part of their organization in some capacity because I valued the time and lives of the young people. I did not want to simply arrive, gather data, and leave as I felt that this would be especially wrong to do with unaccompanied young people who are widely acknowledged to be a vulnerable group. Another reason was to begin building rapport and trust with young people who could potentially be participants, to show them that I cared about them personally and could be trusted with their time and thoughts. As a volunteer, I also gained insight into the workings of Haven in a way which I may not have as solely a researcher. The specific volunteer position which I took up several months prior to beginning fieldwork was as a mentor and befriender of two young people, both girls, who I met with once a week and did things such as help them with college work or find something at a shop or talk over a coffee. Walker (2011, p. 212) states that "Research has shown that mentoring can be of particular benefit to young refugees, through enabling them to receive individual attention, reduce their isolation, increase their confidence and access services more easily." In these ways, my volunteer work before, during, and after the research also had the aim to ethically give back, which is discussed more later. My willingness and desire to volunteer in my personal time was part of the reason Haven granted me access to their unaccompanied young people as it helped them to feel more at ease and welcoming of my research project. I was informed that in the past, Haven had received multiple requests from researchers, but denied them.

Haven works on behalf of the local authority's social services to deliver accommodation and further services to unaccompanied young people. Often, young people referred to Haven come from a foster placement which has broken down, although Haven has also been referred pregnant unaccompanied girls and older young people on their arrival in the UK as Haven was considered more suitable than a foster placement in those cases. The young people retain support from social services and then additionally receive support from Haven. Haven has been doing its work for around 15 years and takes an assets-based approach to their work of person-centered empowerment of young people with the overall aim to support and empower young people as they transition into adulthood and independence, particularly through the making of positive life choices. Haven works predominantly with unaccompanied young people aged 16-21 in two primary ways: by providing supported, semi-independent accommodation and by providing holistic support to newly arrived unaccompanied young people from point of arrival through to independent living or even return to their home country. As part of their holistic support package, the organization initiates and runs programs for their young people, which seek to provide spaces and opportunities for integration into the local community. These programs have often been developed from direct conversations with the young people in which the organization asks direct questions such as "What do you need?" and "How can we help you?" They work closely with social services and other relevant professional groups such as General Practitioners, educators, and solicitors in order to ensure that pathway plans and any additional needs of the young people are being met. Haven provides optional, supplemental activities and training to their young people such as pre-tenancy training and homework support. The organization additionally supplies training for professionals and foster carers who work with unaccompanied young people, while continuing to collaborate with other organizations and charities that interact with unaccompanied young people. This is all in an effort to support and empower unaccompanied young people settling in England, even indirectly.

Haven is comprised of both office staff and hands-on key workers. Each key worker has a caseload of 6-7 young people with whom they meet weekly for 2-10 hours each. The number of weekly contact hours each young person receives is determined by the local authority's social services and depends on their level of need, although this can be negotiated if the Haven key worker feels the young person needs more support. Key workers keep in

communication with other professionals, for example educators and solicitors, and support young people to attend appointments and submit paperwork regarding their asylum claims. They facilitate the review of each young person's pathway plan every six months, which involves both the young person and all other relevant professionals. Key workers may support the young people with any number of things, such as going to the shops with them or assisting them to register at a college. Outside of direct contact hours, the organization is on call for emergencies or problems and is available to its young people 24/7 via an off-duty phone number.

2.2. Researcher positionality

Positionality involves aspects of power, privilege, and bias; it is a compilation of the positions, or roles, that a person holds, and when we listen to other people and their positions we “become aware of the conceptual shackles imposed by [our] own identity and experiences” (Takacs, 2003, p. 29). In this way, we come to understand that “since positionality is the multiple, unique experiences that situate each of us, no one [person's] perspective is privileged” (Takacs, 2003, p. 33). We realize then that our unique experiences and perspectives and bias can impact on the research being conducted, including the research design, process, and analysis. It is particularly important in a qualitative study such as this to acknowledge and discuss one's positionality within the study in order to explain and justify the decisions made, and to support the validity of the findings. Understanding one's position within the research also contributes to the maintenance of ethical commitments in research (Sultana, 2007) and should be clearly stated (Plummer, 2001). This provides the reader with a fuller understanding of what the research has produced, how it was produced, and why.

Here, then, I acknowledge my own privileged position in order that the reader may understand how I entered into this research study. In the context of my research, I recognize that I am privileged by my predominantly white appearance; by my fluency in the dominant language of English; by the fact that I am a passport-holding citizen of a nation considered a ‘world power’ which allows me great mobility throughout the world and provides me a broad spectrum of safety and security; and by the fact that I am academically and financially able to pursue a high level of education. It would be foolish at best and unethical at worst to ignore the fact that my position in this world sets me in a place of advantage over my participants.

These acknowledgements are an effort to balance that scale and visibly limit any authority. Plummer (2001) writes of research bias saying that “To purge research of all these ‘sources of bias’ is to purge research of human life. It presumes a ‘real’ truth may be obtained once all these biases have been removed” (Plummer, 2001, p. 156). Although a researcher cannot remove all bias, she should be aware of it, describe it, and explicitly write how bias may contribute to results, conclusions, or findings. This, then, implies that there is not only one truth to be discovered, but rather shows how one particular truth or understanding can be constructed in a particular setting alongside acknowledged biases.

Part of my positionality in this research project included an inbetween position where I was neither exactly inside nor outside, where I both shared similarities with participants and encountered differences between us. A researcher on the inside, an ‘insider,’ may share similar linguistic, national, cultural, ethnic, religious, or other heritage or traits with participants. This position of insider may appear to sit opposite ‘outsider,’ that is, a researcher who does not share any of the above similarities or connections with research participants (Ganga and Scott, 2006). However, this is a false dichotomy and a researcher, in fact, does not have to be either an insider or outsider. Rather there exists a continuum on which a researcher can slide between being more inside (having similarities) or more outside (having differences) in relation to participants (Drake and Heath, 2011). Drake and Heath (2011) suggest that recognition of the insider-outsider continuum may help a researcher to better protect both their project and themselves by being aware of their interactions and influences. They primarily discuss the continuum of being practitioner-academic, but there are multiple ways to live within a “hyphen,” as Drake and Heath (2011) refer to it, on the continuum of insider-outsider.

Similarly, Labaree (2002) suggests that it is possible to function as both insider and outsider depending on a researcher’s initial position and on becoming a trusted insider to those in the study while Milligan (2016) proposes that a researcher may be an “inbetween,” neither completely outside nor inside. Milligan suggests that the “term of ‘inbetween’ recognises that the researcher can make active attempts to place themselves in between” (Milligan, 2016, p. 248). In her research with older school students in Kenya, Milligan reviews how she actively attempted to re-position herself from being an outsider to being an inbetween and the implications that had “for being able to develop relationships built on trust and

comradery” (Milligan, 2016, p. 248). Similarly, I found myself actively positioning myself in certain ways with my participants both consciously and unconsciously in order to slide closer to inbetweener (from outsider) and build rapport. For example, I drew on my being a foreign national and visa holder in the UK, similar to the unaccompanied young people participants, to relate to a sense of being culturally outside of the general populace of the UK. This aided me in positioning myself as more of an inbetweener than an outsider when I was with the young people. My role as a volunteer also helped to position me as somewhat of an inbetweener and less of an outsider as I was familiar with the people and workings of Haven and could keep up with certain mentions of Haven by participants.

However, I recognize that my position more often than not set me as an outsider with the young people. A noticeable aspect which located me as an outsider was a difference in our financial states with the implication that our lifestyles were noticeably different. One of the ways that I incentivized and thanked participants for participating was by paying for the meal or tea and coffee that we consumed when we met for a research session. A couple of times the young people expressed discomfort with this as though feeling that it was a lot of money and wondering how I was able to always pay for everything. In an effort to put them at ease, I repeatedly explained that it was to thank them for agreeing to participate in the research, aiming to indirectly emphasize that I was not covering the cost of the food or drink because I felt they were unable to, which could contribute to a sense of indebtedness, but because I wanted to. Apart from this, I intentionally minimized any references to finances, although a couple times I received the impression that they felt they needed to reciprocate. After a few sessions together, they seemed less concerned about it. I discuss the idea of reciprocity in research later in the section Ethical considerations.

I primarily occupied a researcher-volunteer hyphen which I balanced and lived in a couple practical ways. To begin, I was intentional in creating a clear boundary between being a volunteer and being a researcher with the young people participants. It was important, appropriate, and ethical that I make a clear distinction between the two roles. For the two participants with whom I separately volunteered, I explicitly explained that I would only record what we talked about during the research sessions, and not ‘take’ data or information from them when I was volunteering. It was essential to maintain the voluntary space as a distinctly separate safe space. However, the time I spent with the two young people as a

volunteer certainly informed how I interacted with them during the research sessions. By the time fieldwork began, we had built a friendly rapport, and I was more able to ‘read’ situations and how the young people might respond to a particular line of thought regarding a research topic. At times, I did bring up something they had told me while volunteering that I thought was relevant to the research, and made it clear that this was an interesting thing, but they could choose whether we spoke about it in that research session or not. I regularly reminded the young people that they did not have to participate in the research, and that it would be perfectly okay if they chose not to. In navigating multiple positionings along the insider-outsider continuum, I found myself overall to be an inbetweener with the young people and sought to live well the hyphen of researcher-volunteer.

I found it easier to be more of an insider with the key worker participants in this study. While we differed in our positions of employment, we shared several similarities such as having experienced a higher education setting and being close in age, and this positioned me as more of an insider than an outsider. All the key workers had achieved a master’s degree (or two) and had an understanding of the general research process I was working within and through. Two of the key workers were also non-British nationals living in the UK as I am, and the other two had spent time living outside the UK or working with non-British nationals within the UK, meaning that we all shared some form of international experience. These similarities, then, positioned me as more of an insider with them (Ganga and Scott, 2006).

3. Recruitment and data collection

In total, this project ended up with eight participants comprised of four unaccompanied girls and four key workers, all recruited through Haven. Haven worked with around 20 young people at the time of the research and my intention was to recruit 8-10, either male or female. I ended up with a convenience sample (Marshall, 1996) of four participant young people who all happened to be female. This sample size was appropriate for my qualitative study as the data was produced in depth through multiple research sessions with participants and I was embedded in a focused ethnographic way. The research questions were also suitably addressed (Marshall, 1996). When I recruited key workers, I ended up with another voluntary, convenience sample of four.

Overall, recruiting the unaccompanied girls was challenging. While necessary for the protection of the unaccompanied girls, myself, and Haven, safeguarding policies functioned as a barrier in this project and at times made it challenging to find an opportunity to speak with Haven's unaccompanied young people about participating in the project. I did not have access to the personal contact information of the young people and therefore had to rely on my primary contact at Haven to relay messages and make calls between myself and the young people. My Haven contact was very gracious and willing to help me as she understood the value of the research project. However, the need for an intermediary made the process of recruiting quite lengthy. The first occasion on which I tried to recruit the young people was at a bowling activity for the young people organized and paid for by Haven. I had only 10 minutes to introduce myself to those who did not already know me (at this time, I just knew the two girls I had been volunteering with) and explain my project. At that time, I gave out information sheets (Appendix 1) and the creative menu of activities (Appendix 2) to about eight of Haven's young people. The second way I tried to recruit young people was by inviting them to come to meet me at a café and hear about the project. I composed a text message which Haven then sent to all their young people. It read as follows:

“You are invited to a free coffee/tea and cake/sandwich at [a specific café] on [a specific date at a specific time]. You can meet Anna (she will have a sign with her name) and she will tell you about some activities where you can practice your English for free while having a free lunch or coffee. :) Anna is looking to speak to young people about her research at Sussex University, and she would love to hear your thoughts and opinions. :) Please come and have a free coffee or tea.”

Unfortunately, nobody came. In hindsight, I suspect it was perhaps not enticing to them as teenagers and because they did not know me. The third and final way I tried to recruit young people was by directly asking, which my Haven contact and I discussed and agreed on as a good, viable, and appropriate way to do this. I informed the two unaccompanied girls I was volunteering with about the project when I volunteered with them one week and I went over the information sheet and the creative menu of activities with them. I was quite uncomfortable as I felt that there was some conflict of interest on my part as I used some of the volunteer time to inform the girls about my research, but my Haven contact had agreed and expressed trust in me to present the research without pressure. I explained to the girls that the research was completely separate from my volunteer time with them, emphasized that they absolutely did not have to participate, and stated clearly that if they chose not to, I would

continue to volunteer with them and nothing would change. I said these things repeatedly as I was concerned about them feeling some obligation to do the research since I had been volunteering with them. After we talked, both girls agreed to participate and also told me about two of their friends who they thought might be interested. My Haven contact phoned the two other young people, also girls, who agreed to meet with me and hear about the project. When we met at a mutually agreed time and place, I presented the project, went over the information sheet and creative menu of activities with them and made it clear that this was voluntary; they both agreed to participate. In the end, while the participants were presented with the menu of activities, they were not interested in any of them, and we shifted to a more straightforward, conversational approach through focus groups and interviews, discussed below.

Recruiting the four key workers was less challenging. There is literature around unaccompanied children and young people which records the perspectives of professionals such as social workers (Söderqvist et al., 2015), educators (McBrien et al., 2017; Miller et al., 2005), and foster carers (Rogers et al., 2018; Sirriyeh and Ní Raghallaigh, 2018), but there is little from the perspective of a professional at a local level organization such as the key workers at Haven. As they work directly with unaccompanied young people and support their participation in the local community, the key workers can provide another perspective on how unaccompanied young people construct belonging in England. As I had been volunteering with Haven, several of the staff and key workers were already familiar with me and knew that I had been granted access to the organization to conduct my research. My Haven contact forwarded to her colleagues in an email the information sheet about the project and an invitation to contact me along with my contact information (Appendix 4). My Haven contact additionally sent the information sheet and invitation to speak to a former Haven key worker who had recently transitioned into a position as a personal advisor to care leavers, many of whom were young refugees. This was in an effort to widen the pool of possible participants. Many people were invited to participate but just four responded. With each of them, I set a meeting for a date and time and place, as much to their convenience as was possible. The interviews with key workers were also helpful to inform how I approached my research sessions with the young people as I gained increasing understanding of the role and scope of Haven, and they provided further topics relevant to the research concepts which I could pursue with the young people. While the interviews with key workers provided

valuable insight into their experiences with unaccompanied young people, I wanted to keep the primary focus of this thesis on the unaccompanied girls. Therefore, the perspectives and understandings of the key workers are predominantly presented in their own separate section in chapter five.

3.1. Adapting the research plan

In the end, adapting the research plan meant forgoing the creative menu of activities for data collection and shifting to more straightforward and seemingly traditional methods of interviews and focus groups, which included small teaching moments and mind maps, discussed in detail below. These adaptations to my data collection methods came out of conversations with my Haven contact, my supervisors, and the participant young people themselves. Coming to the realization that it was necessary to leave behind my creative menu of activities was challenging for me personally as I thought that meant my original research plan was flawed or I had not put enough work or thought into it. Indeed, McArthur (2012, p. 424) suggests that “Too often, conventional approaches to research, seeking a simple clarity, regard the unexpected or unplanned as problems or evidence of something having gone wrong in the research process.” With time, hindsight revealed, however, that these adaptations were necessary and were, in fact, in keeping with “the right to be properly researched” that the UNCRC mandates for research with children and young people. Adapting the research plan also meant remaining within the scope of my responsive approach to research. I do not believe that I designed a poor research plan initially given that I was approved to conduct the project by my supervisors and by the university. Rather, I think it simply did not work for my particular participant young people at that particular time, as discussed earlier. So, while they agreed to meet and speak with me for the research, they went quiet when I asked what they would like to do from the menu of creative activities, as though they did not want to outright say ‘no.’ However, once the young people participants were recruited and we began meeting, the nature of our research space began organically to emerge and grow. Together, we co-constructed a research space which was comfortable for all present and negotiated a general structure to the research sessions, predominantly around either what I describe as a conversational focus group format or a conversational interview format with mind maps to facilitate discussion. The flexibility and adaptability of these formats lent themselves to the spirit of researching *with* young people and including them in

the research design and process where possible and appropriate (Lundy, 2007). Participants were also able to choose a place and time which was convenient and comfortable for them, and which would be likely to put them more at ease (Elwood and Martin, 2000).

As part of co-constructing a comfortable research environment, I presented myself as open and vulnerable to participants' inquiries about myself or about the research content or format. I believe that this aided in building rapport with them and their trust in me as they realized that I wanted to 'give' to the conversation, too, and not only 'take.' This does not mean that every participant chose to inquire about myself or my personal experiences, but I repeatedly made it clear that they were welcome to ask me anything. When data collection started, I quickly discovered that the researcher-volunteer hyphen (Drake and Heath, 2011) was not the only one which I would occupy throughout the research. As I met for research sessions with the young people another role emerged – teacher – and the researcher-teacher hyphen was born. My previous experience as an ESOL teacher played a larger part than I had expected. As part of my background, it had certainly influenced how I considered and approached the research project, but the direct role that teaching ended up playing during data collection was more than I initially anticipated. However, it was necessary and appropriate for my interactions with the young people. As we met and conversed, I periodically needed to explain vocabulary and ideas due to their lower to intermediate levels of English. During research sessions, I found myself shifting between researcher and teacher when I would take several minutes to explain and 'teach' something because it was necessary for the continuation of the discussion. In fact, the young people seemed to enjoy and appreciate this learning aspect. I believe this made our time together more valuable to them and served as an incentive to participate. These pauses on a teacher-student type interaction were perhaps more familiar as the young people seemed comfortable and quite engaged in those moments. They were all enrolled in college courses and had some experience in teacher-student interactions, and how to function within them. On the other hand, they seemed less familiar with the informal research setting we were constructing together, and I could see at times their uncertainty as to what they were meant to do or contribute, or how. In this way the teacher in me gained access to the participants in a way that I think the researcher alone could not. For these young people, 'the teacher' was positive and helpful. Having stated the advantages of using a teaching aspect during the research, I also acknowledge the disadvantage. There were occasions when it was easy for me to slip into a teaching role and

forget the research purpose of speaking with participants. The researcher-teacher was a hyphen that I had to work to balance, and I did this primarily by having to hand a list of guiding questions printed in front of me to refer to easily and to visually remind me to stay on track with research related conversation if necessary.

The young people participants and I continually co-constructed our research space throughout all the research sessions. Overall, 18 research sessions occurred from February-May 2018 between both young people participants and key worker participants, resulting in 18 total audio recordings. Figure 4 below shows the data set for the 11 sessions with young people (the four names are pseudonyms).

Research sessions with participant young people											
	1 15/02/18	2 15/02/18	3 16/02/18	4 01/03/18	5 15/03/18	6 22/03/18	7 06/04/18	8 12/04/18	9 19/04/18	10 21/04/18	11 26/04/18
Time	34m	50m	29m	52m	55m	41m	78m	40m	56m	89m	41m
Nia	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X		
Lina	X	X		X	X			X			
Raisa				X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Talia				X						X	

Figure 4

Figure 4 demonstrates that there were at times different numbers of young people as all would be invited to participate in a session, but not all would turn up (see Appendix 5 for themes and prompts of sessions with young people). At the beginning of the research project, the young people requested that the research be conducted in a group rather than individually, perhaps to take the pressure off of them and ensure the support of the other young people. On the occasions when one young person turned up, I made clear that she did not have to stay and speak with me and we could meet all together with the others at a different time, but she decided to stay. Perhaps by the time that happened, the young people were more comfortable to be one-to-one and knew more what to expect from the research session. Time with the young people ranged from 29-89 minutes, as shown in Figure 4. These times with young people were almost always cushioned on either side by personal conversation which was not recorded and which supported this project's sense of an ethnographic approach. Time with

the four key workers ranged from one hour 15 minutes to one hour 45 minutes. The following sections present in more detail the literature around interviews and focus groups and how they were utilized within this research project.

3.2. Interviews

Interviews can be understood as communication between two people where one person asks questions and the other person responds, and they are one of the most common methods in qualitative research today (Roulston, 2010; Trell and Van Hoven, 2010). However, Roulston (2010) speaks to some of the challenges of interviewing, implying that it is not necessarily a simple and straightforward time of question and answer, but rather a skill to learn which can be done to varying degrees of quality and success. Ezzy (2010, p. 163) understands that interviewing is not necessarily easy and proposes a framing of interviews as either communion or conquest with the understanding that they are “emotional and embodied performances.” ‘Good’ interviews then are produced through researcher reflexivity and engagement with the performed, embodied, and emotional aspects of the experience.

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) suggest two ways an interviewer may function or may be viewed: as a traveler or as a miner. The approach of the miner aims to simply uncover information, to mine data from a participant. That is an image and attitude which I distinctly worked to avoid. Alternatively, the traveler “...walks along with the local inhabitants, asking questions and encouraging them to tell their own stories of their lived world...” (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p. 48). This is the approach I aimed for in order to demonstrate to the young people that they were valued and not simply being used for information. My doctoral research may have been the catalyst and the cause of meeting the participant young people, but it was not the sole reason I volunteered for months ahead of time or stayed on with Haven after completing my fieldwork. I stayed because the young people deserve stability and I wanted to continue with them as a demonstration of long-term commitment.

Elwood and Martin (2000) argue that the location of an interview or meeting with research participants is itself embodied and speaks to scale of meaning and spatial relations which aid in construction of participants’ positionality and power. At a minimum, “interview locations provide an important opportunity for researchers to make observations that generate richer

and more detailed information than can be gleaned from the interview content alone” (Elwood and Martin, 2000, p. 653). This is a chance for a form of participant observation, which may inform how the researcher understands what is said in the interview. Elwood and Martin (2000) suggest that research participants may even feel empowered by having this choice of location. I found this to be especially true in this research project. As mentioned above, participants selected the time and location of a meeting and the participant young people most often selected early evening times and elected to meet on a main street in the city and then walk together to a nearby café or fast food establishment. On one occasion I was at a café with a participant young person, a café that served food from her country of origin, which she had selected. There, she understood how to do things better than I did and she became an authority on the matter. She seemed confident asserting herself and her knowledge of how to eat and pour traditional coffee correctly, confident in a way that was not evident in other locations. I enjoyed witnessing her in the position of greater knowledge and authority as she was enthusiastic and engaged in telling me about the images in the art on the wall and how to say things such as ‘plate’ and ‘cup’ in her first language.

As seen in Figure 4 earlier, four out the 11 research sessions with the young people ended up being in the form of casual, conversational interviews led by a couple guiding questions around the topic of that session such as belonging or learning (Appendix 5). On these occasions, I asked both specific questions and more open-ended questions with the understanding that “directive questioning and non-directive questioning are likely to provide different kinds of data, and thus may be useful at different stages of inquiry” (Atkinson and Hammersley, 2007, p. 120). I was careful to never use the word ‘interview’ with the young people, but rather ‘conversation’ or ‘chat.’ I felt that this was very important due to previous experiences the young people may have had, and the potential baggage which could accompany the word interview, particularly as it relates to the asylum process. Sinha and Back (2014) discuss being sensitive in research with migrant participants around interviews and interview type settings because it can feel reminiscent of an asylum interview. Therefore, I was intentional in my aim to establish a research atmosphere which was not comparable to an asylum-related, question-and-answer interview, to the extent that I did not want to use the word interview with the young people. I strove for a more equitable, conversational feel in our sessions.

All of my interactions with key worker participants were more conventional semi-structured one-to-one interviews (Roulston, 2010; Trell and Van Hoven, 2010). When we met, I had a series of guiding questions (Appendix 6). However, I made it clear that if they had thoughts beyond what I asked, to please share, and I encouraged and welcomed tangents. All the key workers appeared comfortable with this structure of questioning and answering. At the end, I asked them if there was any topic or subject I had not broached which they thought was relevant, or if there was anything they would like to share which I had not asked. I intentionally worked to establish a space for myself and the key workers which positioned us as knowledgeable and inquiring equals having an interesting conversation. They were the experts on this topic and it was appropriate for them to be positioned as such.

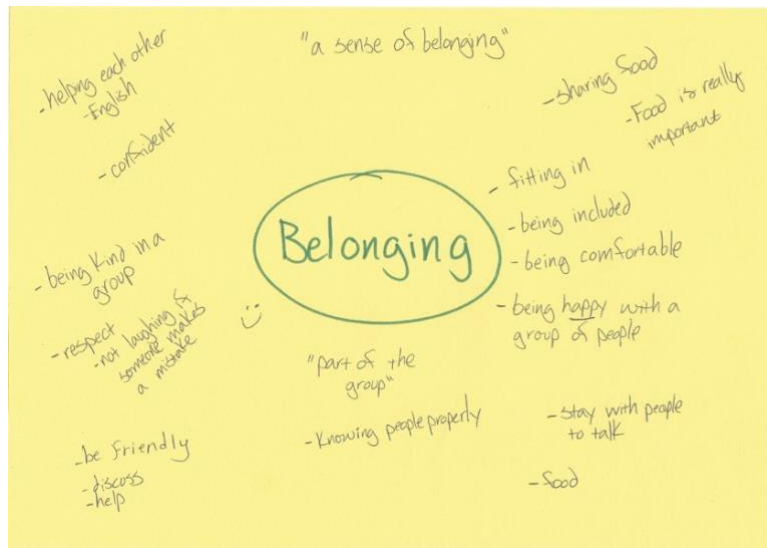
3.3. Focus groups

A focus group "...is a discussion involving a small number of participants, led by a moderator, which seeks to gain an insight into the participants' experiences, attitudes and/or perceptions" (Hennessy and Heary, 2009, p. 236) and it is useful in a number of ways. One is that a focus group can bring to light that which is generally covert, such as group norms, which may very well be a part of the everyday but are often unspoken assumptions within the group (Bloor et al., 2001). This occurs through the interaction between participants, not necessarily through the interaction between participants and researcher, and is advantageous as it produces data which could not be got by means of a one-to-one interview with the researcher (Bagnoli and Clark, 2010). Kitinger (1994) suggests that when participants interact with each other, it makes a way for them to not simply talk, but question one another, generating data which would not be uncovered otherwise. Bloor et al. (2001) list three additional roles that a focus group may play in research: in pre-pilot design work, as an extension and interpretation of findings, and as a way to communicate with participants.

Hennessy and Heary (2009) suggest that focus groups can be useful as a complementary method alongside other methods as was done in this study. Focus groups in this research project took on a particular structure as they were adapted according to negotiations between the young people participants and I, in particular through the inclusion of teaching moments as mentioned previously. Focus groups became what I describe as a 'conversational focus group' centered around a brainstorming session or a mind map. As part of a teaching

moment, I would often write the main idea of the research session as a word or a phrase in a circle in the middle of a piece of paper so that young people could read it, not just hear it.

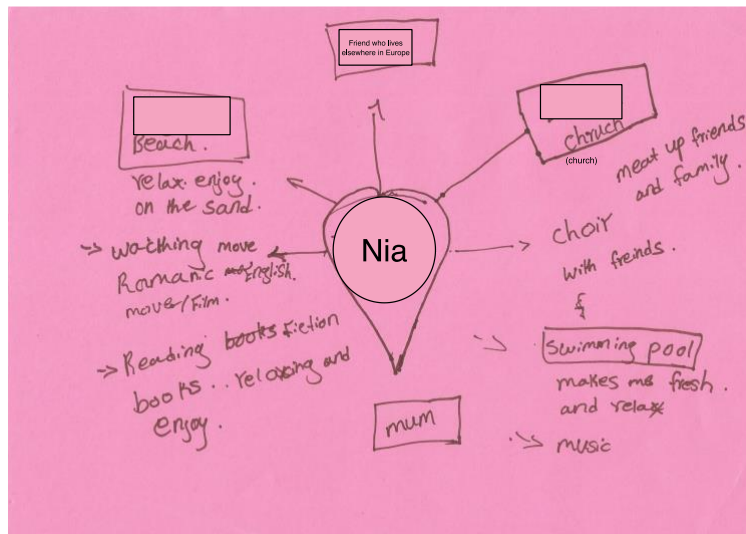
Below is an example (see Appendix 7 for more examples):



We would then brainstorm what they may understand about it already and the conversation developed from there. This 'lesson' type of format was helpful for the young people as language learners because it allowed us time to pause on vocabulary when the young people did not understand something. Additionally, using the term 'brainstorming' (which one participant described as sharing ideas) helped to set the tone of more equitable back and forth where both participants and I had equal opportunity to contribute and to inquire. Although the young people were invited to write on the brainstorming paper as well, they almost always preferred that I do the actual writing as they were perhaps unsure how to spell certain words and may not have wanted to expose themselves through that process of writing. However, they seemed to actively desire to interact within this format and on one occasion when I did not begin our research session with a brainstorming paper, one young person stopped me and specifically requested it. They appeared to enjoy the group atmosphere and perhaps felt less pressure as a group, which is another benefit of focus groups (Hennessy and Heary, 2009; Basch, 1987).

The young people and I also used mind maps to facilitate and complement the conversational focus group discussions. A mind map is a method in which participants are able to draw and map out a particular topic or theme and its related pieces. It is designed for flexibility and

creativity as it begins with a main image or word on a paper, and then allows participants to branch out from that with multiple layers of relevant words, images, and concepts (Eppler, 2006; Budd, 2004; Brightman, 2003). Pioneered by Buzan and Buzan (1993), mind mapping encourages its user to “use emphasis” by way of images and colors; “use association” by linking ideas and information; “be clear” by being visually organized; and to “develop your own mapping style” (as cited in Brightman, 2003). The young people and I created mind maps such as social maps (of their favorite people, places, and things) and learning lines (of things they learned/did or wanted to learn/do in the past, present, and future). For example, below is Nia’s social map (see Appendix 8 for more examples):



4. Fieldwork

Part of being in the field involved managing my own experience of emotions. During fieldwork, I experienced discomfort and anxiousness at a level which was new to me, but may not be unusual for researchers in general (Levy, 2016; Bondi, 2005). This was often a discomfort with the idea of ‘taking’ information from someone from which I would personally benefit. Speaking to Duncombe and Jessop's (2002) argument against “faking friendship” and “doing rapport,” Holland writes, “They felt discomfort in recognising that even feminist interviewing with all the trappings of empathy and friendship could be seen as a job, where the instrumental purpose was to get good data for the research and hopefully to enhance future careers” (Holland, 2007, p. 202). These researchers appropriately questioned the discomfort they experienced in fieldwork, and I, too, feel it necessary to convey how I was affected and how my overall research project was affected. Research fieldwork seems at

times to be romanticized or is spoken of as one of the ways that a new doctoral researcher ‘comes into her own’ or ‘becomes a researcher’ but it is neither simple nor straightforward (Dunne et al., 2005). Fieldwork was messy and had to be constantly flexible. My intentions and ethics were in the right place, but I felt consistently uncomfortable, as though I were intruding into the lives of my participants. There is value in the research that has been conducted, but the process of collecting data was personally challenging.

Due to the discomfort I experienced, I was at times tense during conversations with the young people, which could have resulted in different reactions from them versus when I feel more at ease. That is to say, perhaps the young people reacted unconsciously to me acting differently. While I aimed to be casual and friendly as usual, I was perhaps more cautious and intentional in how I phrased things in conversation. Observing the tone or level of engagement of the young people influenced how I proceeded in each session. For example, at any given research session, a participant may be more talkative or less talkative. These different levels of engagement each time we met could have been the result of multiple goings on in their lives – college, asylum claims, stress around being separated from family, struggle or success with English language that day, amongst others. – and not necessarily a direct result of the research. Potential factors such as these affected participant engagement, or sometimes lack thereof, in our time together, and that was something we either worked through, or on one occasion, simply concluded the research session for that day.

With two of the young people, Raisa and Talia, I was almost always more at ease because they seemed always happy to talk and share. Another participant, Nia, however, sometimes gave me pause or caused me to question myself or my approach. I was always cautious and aware of potentially sensitive topics and considering how participants might react to certain streams of inquiry influenced how and what I introduced as a guiding question into our conversations. On one occasion when I saw that Nia may have become slightly distressed (it was no more than an obvious kind of fidgeting and becoming quieter), I halted and changed direction. At that time, I also reminded Nia that she could leave if she wanted to and that was perfectly okay. She did choose to leave the session at that time, and the next time I saw her, she did not seem distressed. I do not believe that she was distressed by the research because another participant, Raisa, was also there and was not concerned by anything. Perhaps, rather, something unknown to me had affected Nia that day.

4.1. Ethical considerations

There are three primary tenets of ethics in contemporary research: consent, confidentiality, and protection (Swartz, 2011) which all live within the ancient Hippocratic understanding of “do no harm” (Hugman et al., 2011). However, these tenets do not necessarily look the same in every research situation. Refugees and asylum-seekers are often understood to be a vulnerable group and that means that sometimes “do no harm” is not sufficient (Hugman et al., 2011). One particular vein of ethics which works to exceed “do no harm” is relational ethics (Kaukko et al., 2017; Ellis, 2007; Etherington, 2007). Relational ethics “requires researchers to act from our hearts and minds, acknowledge our interpersonal bonds to others, and take responsibility for actions and their consequences” (Ellis, 2007, p. 3). Kaukko et al. (2017, p. 16) seek to apply relational ethics or “working from the ‘minds and hearts’ rather than fixed ethical guidelines” to vulnerable populations such as refugees or unaccompanied children and young people. This is not a disregard for ethical guidelines, but rather a call for flexible and empathetic ethics which openly acknowledge the complexity of a vulnerable person’s context. Kaukko et al. (2017) also engage with a young person’s UNCRC based “right to be properly researched” with regard to ethics and vulnerable children and young people and the need to ‘go beyond.’ Part of that beyond can include establishing realistic expectations with the vulnerable participants about how they will or will not benefit from the research, building a solid foundation of trust, and maintaining ongoing consent.

Vervliet et al. (2015) consider relational ethics in their work with unaccompanied young people and acknowledge that there has been an increase in the research of ethics with refugee populations in general. However, they suggest that there is little to be found on the ethics of working with unaccompanied young people. They present six specific ethical themes which they discovered in their own research with unaccompanied young people. The themes are introduction and first meeting, establishing a mutual relationship, responding to personal requests and appeals from participants, the boundary of the researcher’s responsibility, appropriate channeling of the researcher’s emotions, and stepping back from the participants. Kohli and Kaukko (2017) agree that this more relational ethics is necessary with unaccompanied and refugee children, stating:

...research with refugee children requires more than a good grasp of relevant theories, suitable techniques or following procedural ethical guidelines. Importantly, it requires relational ethics, namely the inherently situational, moment-to-moment decisions in regard to the most suitable actions, to ensure the dignity and the safety of the participants. (Kohli and Kaukko, 2017, p. 8)

This kind of ‘beyond’ relational ethics mandates care, empathy, and trust, particularly as a result of reciprocal relationships in research with vulnerable children and young people (Kaukko et al., 2017). This approach of relational ethics is what I strove to maintain throughout my research project, predominantly by making “moment-to-moment decisions” (Kohli and Kaukko, 2017) in the field most often related to maintaining ongoing consent and making sure the young people were still happy to speak with me.

Part of a relational ethics approach speaks about giving back to research participants as an “intentional ethics of reciprocation” (Swartz, 2011, p. 47). It is ethical and appropriate to ensure that participants are not simply asked to contribute to a research project, but that they receive something in return, that there is reciprocity. This could be something monetary such as a gift card or cash, or an educational training, or any number of compensations. Hugman et al. (2011) discuss this with reciprocal research which has an aim to share benefits equally between a researcher and participant, although the benefits may not necessarily look the same. In order to follow Haven’s protocol, I could not give gifts or money to the young people I recruited. However, I was permitted to and happy to compensate them by paying for a meal or tea or coffee each time we met for a research session. Another way I was able to compensate the young people was with English language practice. My Haven contact and I spoke about this a number of times and, as a key worker, she suggested that this was desirable and welcomed by the young people. This was not only ethical as compensation but also necessary in order to speak about the research content at times, as discussed earlier as teaching moments.

It is also important that a researcher part with participants ethically and positively at the end of a research project (Hugman et al., 2011; de Vaus, 2002). Vervliet et al. (2015, p. 13) write that as researchers “...we cannot ‘rush in’, as building trust takes time, but we also cannot simply ‘rush out’, as breaking boundaries of trust may be very harmful for young people who are already confronted with substantial losses.” A researcher’s leaving has the potential to

feel like yet another abrupt change in the life of a research participant, especially unaccompanied young people who have experienced so much change and disruption in their lives. Therefore, it is ethical, important, and necessary to be very sensitive when parting with the young people. I was able to complete my data collection with the young people and they departed from the research project positively. However, at the time of finalizing my thesis, both the young people with whom I spent time as a volunteer mentor have moved out of the city. One of them left abruptly and there was no time to say goodbye, although I was able to send a farewell card to her through my Haven contact. There was time to say goodbye to the other young person who moved. As for the other two young people, I do not have contact information for them and I am unsure where they are now. A couple of times soon after we concluded the research, I passed them by chance on the street and we exchanged friendly hellos but that was now quite some time ago.

Before I began this research project, I needed ethical approval to conduct it. I submitted a high-risk ethics application, which received formal approval from the Ethics Committee at the University of Sussex, and I received verbal and written permission from Haven to conduct the research project through their organization. Approval from both these bodies to pursue this research project set the foundation for the maintenance of consent and confidentiality, two of the principle ethical tenets of qualitative research (Swartz, 2011). During recruitment, each participant was given an information sheet, either specifically for the young people or for the key workers. First, I talked through the information sheet with them and verbally confirmed that they understood and were happy to participate. For the key workers, this was fairly quick and easy. However, going over the information sheet with the young people had its challenges due to their lower levels of English. I went slowly through each section of the information sheet, asked checking questions along the way, and told them to ask me about anything they did not understand. Following verbal agreement to participate, I also obtained written consent from every participant, and went over each point on the consent form prior to signing (Appendix 3). Most importantly for the young people, I maintained ongoing verbal consent every time we met by asking if they were still happy to speak with me, reminding them that they did not have to, and that if they chose not to, it would not affect anything else in their lives. Ongoing verbal consent included reminding participants that I would audio record our conversations and the reason for doing that. I then asked them each time if it was okay for me to turn the audio recorder on. If they consented

(they did each time), then I turned on the recorder and discreetly placed it on the table between or near us and then left it there for the duration of our time together. A couple of times, one of the young people wanted to hear the recording played back and I was happy to oblige. Beyond hearing their own voice on the recorder for a few minutes, the young people never asked to see anything such as transcripts or summaries from the research sessions afterward or expressed any further interest in the project on the occasions that I ran into them on the street; and then I lost contact with them. The key workers were invited to contact me after their interviews if they would like to know what came from the research, but none did.

Regarding confidentiality, I explained to participants in the information sheets and verbally that I would maintain confidentiality by not using their names, and thereby not associating anything they said with their name when I wrote up the research. I informed them that the exceptions to this were if they disclosed a threat of harm to self or others, or criminal action. I used pseudonyms in writing up this project which are non-identifying to protect the participants and to maintain that confidentiality. For the young people, I did not want to utilize English pseudonyms and neither did I want to use names which were regionally specific to their country of origin. I ended up searching for cross-cultural names, and then chose the following names that started with different letters for the reader's ease: Nia, Lina, Raisa, and Talia. For the key workers, I selected the following common English names for pseudonyms: Sam, Laura, Paul, and Sara.

Throughout the research sessions, I also regularly fed back to my Haven contact the general tones of the fieldwork (e.g. 'It went well today' or 'It was a challenge to keep everyone focused today') while maintaining confidentiality and not revealing the specifics of what the participants and I discussed. This was done to maintain consistent contact and a working relationship with Haven and to maintain accountability as per the spirit of safeguarding policies. I had already undertaken training with Haven regarding their safeguarding and boundary policies and procedures when I began volunteering several months earlier.

5. Data analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research is not a process which transpires solely at the conclusion of a research project's data collection period, but rather it begins informally during fieldwork

as a researcher's initial thoughts about raw data begin to emerge (Dunne et al., 2005). It can be a messy process, involving much reflection, and constant movement between and amongst the data and literature. Within a constructivist epistemological approach such as mine, "trustworthiness, credibility, dependability, transferability, confirmability, authenticity and impetus to action provide constructivist versions of validity, reliability and objectivity but still indicate a commitment to good science" (Dunne et al., 2005, p. 85). That is, qualitative data analysis should aspire to be trustworthy and credible in its process and product. It should be thorough, organized, and methodical without being overly systematic to avoid removing the findings of the analysis from the context in which they were produced.

I used thematic analysis in this research project. It is one of the most common analytical methods used in qualitative research as it is "the most useful in capturing the complexities of meaning within a textual data set" (Guest et al., 2012, p. 11). That is, thematic analysis has enough flexibility in its application to take into account the complexity of data such as the nuance of stories set within a complex context. In this way, it provides an avenue to discover patterns in data collected through a variety of methods: "Through its theoretical freedom, thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 78). Thematic analysis intends to loosely arrange and organize data into separate sets of information, or themes. However, it must be remembered that the "'keyness' of a theme is not necessarily dependent on quantifiable measures – but rather on whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 82). While thematic analysis is a useful method for coding data into like and manageable bunches, it is still ultimately dependent on the researcher to determine if the uncovered data answers the research questions. Data analysis does not occur in isolation but within the context of a project and of a researcher's biases and experiences (Dunne et al., 2005). This understands that a thematic analysis approach includes an element of interpretation on the part of the researcher (Guest et al., 2012). There is risk of bias in my voice being the sole authority and checkpoint for interpretation of data and it is essential to be aware and wary of this (Plummer, 2001). One way to combat these challenges and increase the validity of interpretations and findings is to be transparent about the analysis process (Miles and Huberman, 1994), which this section seeks to be.

I primarily worked to mitigate my bias and conduct thorough analysis by following the suggestions of Nowell et al.'s (2017) phases of analysis, which aim to establish trustworthiness throughout the process of thematic analysis. These phases build upon Braun and Clarke's (2006) phases of good thematic analysis, expanding to emphasize the need for trustworthiness. They involve becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report (Nowell et al., 2017). In seeking to establish trustworthiness in my analysis, I worked with a data set comprised of 18 transcripts produced from 18 research sessions, although most of my time was spent with the 11 from the unaccompanied young people. As the mind maps were predominantly used to facilitate discussion, what was written on them was for the most part reflected in the transcripts. Therefore, I used them more referentially alongside the transcripts, rather than as wholly separate pieces of data.

As Dunne et al. (2005) suggest, my analysis began informally during data collection. Immediately after having and audio recording a session with participants, I typed up fieldnotes to record my immediate thoughts, and sometimes also spent time journaling about emerging thoughts on the data, how fieldwork was progressing, and how it might be improved. In this way, I was already following several of Nowell et al.'s (2017) suggestions for establishing trustworthiness; I documented reflective thoughts and potential themes, and stored the raw audio recordings in an organized and safe manner.

Transcribing was the next step of analysis. I completed all the transcripts myself, although it took some time to find the process that worked for me. Transcribing was very difficult for a couple reasons. One, all the recordings had been done in public places so there were extraneous sounds to contend with, and two, the participants had accents different from my own, which means I sometimes had to listen to something several times to understand what they were saying. Very rarely, I simply could not make out a word, and I noted that in the transcripts with an asterisk. Additionally, as the young people participants were English language learners, they did not always speak with correct vocabulary and grammar. However, I chose not to 'clean up' the transcripts, but rather left the grammar and syntax as they were spoken by participants. Ellingson (2017) suggests that 'cleaning up' a transcript may cause a loss of clues and that such "verbal disfluencies often relate to gender, race, class, and other marginalized experiences...Retaining 'inelegant features' of participants' talk

shows their distinctive perspectives and also may signal embodied emotion...” (Ellingson, 2017, pp. 138–139). Therefore, for analysis I retained the participants’ original speech in the transcripts in order to more truthfully convey their experiences and voices. In the data excerpts shared in subsequent chapters, I retain the participants’ original speech and do not change what they have said, but I also add the occasional word, always indicated by brackets, to assist the reader to read the excerpt. When I began transcribing, I tried voice recognition software, but that did not work because of the extra noise and varying accents of participants. In the end, I returned to basics, playing the recording and typing it out manually, pausing and rewinding when I needed to. Transcribing manually also allowed me to develop my own transcription conventions to include ‘the personality’ of the conversations through written acknowledgment of pauses, interjections, overlaps, and the ways words were extended sometimes e.g. yeahhhhhhh. This nonverbal information also included what Bird (2005) calls “editorial comments,” which I recorded as well. The following is an example taken from one of the transcripts with the editorial comment in parentheses:

Raisa: *we don't have the English* (all laughing)

The majority of these comments had to do with the participants laughing or gesturing, all things I wanted to record in the written transcript to ensure that the right tone was understood on the paper I would use to do the bulk of the analysis. Additionally, throughout transcription, I would pause whenever I saw something interesting, or connected the transcript to a piece of literature in my head, or saw potential themes emerging. I recorded these thoughts for posterity, easy referencing in the future, and as an audit trail.

Once I completed all the transcripts, I read through them in one go together to familiarize myself with the data (Nowell et al., 2017). I intended, then, to use the software NVivo 12 to assist in coding the transcripts and I did that for about one month. I looked for information that was interesting, significant, surprising, different, or theme related (Watts, 2014; Creswell, 2007; Braun and Clarke, 2006) or information in which I found wonder (MacLure, 2013). It took a long time to code just one transcript and I struggled the whole way through because it all seemed like important text. I ended up with many codes in great detail, essentially having written out the whole transcript again because I was struggling to code without divorcing the context from each piece of text. Around this time, I gave a presentation

on my ongoing analysis struggles to a group of faculty and peers in my school, what Nowell et al. call a “peer debriefing” which can “...help researchers examine how their thoughts and ideas evolve...” (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 7). My faculty and peers were gracious and generous in their feedback on my thoughts and I came to the realization that NVivo was simply not going to work for me. It was limiting and boxed me in by forcing me to pull apart and decontextualize the data so that I lost any sense of the participants. This fragmentation of the data and loss of my participants’ voices was not what I was aiming for and did not befit my approaches of ethnography or social constructionism, which focuses on interaction and the relevance of the social world and context. At this point, I created a simple Word document as an outline with the themes I saw emerging as headings, and I added subheadings as I began reading through the set of transcripts afresh. In this way, I analyzed from large to small, recording emerging themes as initial “temporary constructs” (Thomas, 2009, p. 198) and then reading through the transcripts and slotting illustrative information/text into the headings of emerging themes. In this format, I could also see the context around the information better while still “keep[ing] detailed notes about development and hierarchies of concepts and themes” (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 4). However, this still did not exactly work and I was producing a longer and longer outline, again, almost re-writing entire transcripts in an effort to regard every word the participants spoke.

Around this time, my supervisor had also suggested writing a short vignette of each of the four young people participants to introduce them in my thesis. Doing this, I ended up with four ‘vignettes’ which were very long and could no longer qualify as vignettes. In an effort to be thorough, I had written a piece for each participant which was comprised of everything she had said in her transcripts, both from one-to-one discussions and focus group conversations. It was almost more of a mini-narrative. Nowell et al. state that “whatever technique is used, it is important to apply it to all of the data” (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 6). To that end and to write these mini-narratives, I methodically went through every transcript and recorded in a fresh document everything that Nia, for example, said, writing paragraphs which included nonverbal and contextual information around her words. I did this for each of the four young people participants. Here, I began theorizing within each mini-narrative, moving back and forth between the literature covered in the previous chapters and my analysis and findings, and meeting regularly with my supervisors to receive feedback and guidance. I had a desire to maintain a dense mini-narrative of each participant, to convey

fully who each participant was, her likes and dislikes, in part, I believe because I had come to know them so well, and feel such respect for them. Although I ended up excluding material that, while interesting to me personally, did not pertain to the research aim or questions, I felt I was better able perhaps to “speak nearby” to participants, rather than “speak for” them (Chen, 1992). As theorizing continued, I returned to the transcripts to draw out illustrative quotes and excerpts and confirm that the developing themes were holding up and made sense next to the data (Nowell et al., 2017). I followed an overall similar process in analyzing the data from key workers, although it was easier for a couple reasons. The transcripts were easier to transcribe because the key workers all spoke either fluent or a high level of English and the analysis was more straightforward as the key worker interviews all followed a similar semi-structured pattern and discussed the same questions. This made it easier to track emerging themes across the key worker data.

6. Conclusion

This chapter discussed my overall methodological approach throughout this research project, which was underpinned by an epistemology of social constructionism, by the UNCRC based standards of a young person’s “right to be properly researched,” and by a sense of ethnography. The chapter largely considered the shift from more creative data collection methods to more traditional data collection methods, which proved to be flexible, adaptable, and effective in this case, and reflected the “right to be properly researched.” The innovation in the research was not in the methods themselves as I had originally intended, but rather was demonstrated in the minor, responsive adaptations which were desired or needed by participants and were necessary to engage with them well e.g. the inclusion of teaching moments and use of mind maps to facilitate discussion. The co-construction of the research space subsequently continued to reflect the right of the young people to be properly researched and to promote a more equitable exchange between the participants and I in which I could “travel” alongside them rather than “mine” from them. The relational ethics approach taken in this project further supported a mindset of care, empathy, and trust, and highlighted the need to ensure that the young people were not only protected from harm, but also experienced reciprocity in some way. The hyphens I lived as researcher-volunteer and researcher-teacher sought to contribute to this reciprocity. Furthermore, the effort to establish trustworthiness through data analysis served as an extension of the desire and need to treat

participants ethically with respect and dignity. In these ways, the *right to properly researched* was reflected throughout this research project.

The following two chapters present the findings produced by the above described methodology.

Chapter Four: Unique stories

“When you here arrive, afraid and can’t speak language very good. [You] don’t understand something, yeah, some confusing...now, different...now, better for me. [I am] brave.” (Raisa session 9)

1. Introduction

From this chapter forward, I often refer to the four unaccompanied girls involved in this research – Nia, Lina, Raisa, and Talia – as ‘the girls’ due to the familiarity I developed with them and because I found ‘the participants’ to be a bit clinical when speaking about their stories. We spent a lot of time together and while the girls were giving of their time, they were not always willing to share details of their lives or pasts. Rather, and intentionally, the girls and I focused on their present lives and their futures. However, “An understanding of these pre-migration identities and experiences helps us to understand migrants as whole beings with aspirations, expectations and dreams” (Morrice, 2014, p. 153). While Morrice (2014) conducted her research with adult refugees who had lived in their home countries longer than the girls had, it was still important to take into account pre-migration experiences where they were available in order to enrich understanding of the girls’ experiences, constructions, and desires. Therefore, I did come to know some aspects of their pasts, most often shared unsolicited, and respected their right to not be questioned about the parts of their past they did not offer to share, so I acknowledge that there are gaps in their stories within the pages of this thesis. In what they did choose to share, I saw that the girls came to trust me to a degree, trust me enough to share their time, lives, thoughts, and dreams, and that is a trust which I took most seriously. By the time of the research in the spring of 2018, Nia, Lina, Raisa, and Talia had been in England 1.5-2.5 years and had received refugee status, which allowed them to focus more on their lives and settling in England. They were aged 18-19 and originally came from Eritrea, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. All of the girls were housed through Haven, although three of them had previous experience in foster care in the UK, and all attended the same local large further education college.

This chapter considers the various, unique ways that Nia, Lina, Raisa, and Talia constructed spaces of learning and belonging within the diverse contexts of their different college courses, various learning approaches and styles, and the opportunities which were accessible

or known to each of them. Learning is an inevitable part of settling and navigating a new country and culture, and in each of their stories, there was a focus on learning English in order to become more proficient and capable of furthering their current education or career ambitions and to access the community's people and shops more comfortably and easily. Where their experiences and constructions diverged can in part be attributed to their various social connections with a more settled person who could facilitate their participation into the wider community, as Pastoor (2017) suggests can be done for unaccompanied young people. This facilitation occurred largely through introduction to other people or groups and through the opportunity to practice and improve their English language skills. Where there were no such social connections and facilitation, it was less likely that opportunities for learning and socializing would be found. Beyond facilitation, the primary means by which the girls learned English and English cultural practices and behaviors was through immersion and doing, an understanding supported by the underlying social nature of learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Intentionality also played a role in their learning as they, to varying degrees, sought out opportunities to practice English, pursued independent learning activities (reading, watching movies, using subtitles), and even shared their own culture and heritage through encounters of cultural exchange with peers, social workers, or foster families. Common components of the spaces of interaction in which the girls felt included were mutual respect and adaptation, which conveyed an invitation to construct belonging together. Where there was no sense of mutuality, there was exclusion and a feeling of unbelonging. Where there was racism or discrimination, the UK's 'hostile environment' was reflected and perpetuated. The diversity of the girls' experiences and constructions further evidences the heterogeneity amongst unaccompanied young people and the need to more consistently consider that diversity in research and practice. Again, this thesis utilizes Massey's (2005) understanding of space as the product of interactions between people.

2. Nia

Nia was an 18-year-old from Eritrea. She was waiting for her asylum claim to be processed when I met her in mid 2017 as a volunteer and she received refugee status within several months. She was studying at college on a Level 1 Care course and taking a math class and

had recently transitioned from an ESOL class to a General English² class by the start of the research project. Nia spoke two languages, Tigrinya and the English she was learning. When Nia arrived in England, she was 16 years old and was placed in foster care, although she rarely spoke of her fostering experience. At the time of the research, she had been in the supported accommodation managed by Haven for about one year and was sharing a house with Raisa and Talia and a fourth young woman who was not involved in this research project.

2.1. Learning opportunities

Nia began building an identity as a learner from a young age and shared in her stories an eagerness to learn. She attended formal schooling in Eritrea for several years, saying, “*I growing up in countryside, so I started [school] seven, when I was seven*” (Nia session 3). At school, she studied subjects in the Tigrinyan language such as math, science, and Tigrinya itself and learned very basic English vocabulary, saying, “*just we didn’t use to talk [in English], and we know like the things, for example just like ‘dog’ ...I know just [their] name*” (Nia session 3). Nia recalled enjoying school and repeatedly said, “*I was good student in my country*” despite occasional corporal punishment, which was “*no helpful, but sometimes is good to learn*” (Nia session 3). These school-related memories convey a generally positive picture of Nia as a learner and a formal school setting was not the only place she learned. While she was a self-professed “*good student*” at school, growing up she also had an uncle who supported her with her schoolwork, saying, “*...I have uncle in my country...he done or just finished...university...he was really good at like everything study, and he’s help me every night...with my homework, and with any, something drawing, like that...*” (Nia session 3). This support for schooling at home contributed to Nia’s identity as a learner by promoting a value for learning, which she could grow and develop. Echoing Brown et al.’s (1989) understanding of the situatedness of knowledge and its link to culture and context, Nia spoke of her mother and cooking, saying, “*She didn’t teach me, but just like I saw her when she did*

² Nia did not seem to know the exact title of her English class, although she stated that it was not an ESOL class (because she had already done that) and not a GCSE English class. After looking through the English classes on offer on her college’s website, I concluded that she was likely in a General English class. According to the website, this type of class is multinational, and does not appear to be aimed at ‘native’ English speakers. It has the aim to develop English language skills for everyday use.

things” (Nia session 3). In this way, Nia spoke of learning to cook, a cultural and domestic practice, through observation of her mother who she stated was the most important person to her, that mothers were really important “*for everyone.*” Although she shared little about her family and life in Eritrea, her tone in that moment conveyed that it was ‘obvious’ that mothers were important and thus so was her mother, who remained in Eritrea with Nia’s younger sisters. In just the few minutes that Nia spoke about her family, it was as though she were remembering the good of what was, saying how important her mother was, while simultaneously experiencing the loss of what was not anymore in her desire to change the subject. This echoes Rishbeth and Finney's (2006) research around the nostalgia of refugees, which suggests that memories of home are particularly complex for those who have experienced forced migration.

Following her experiences learning at school, at home, and with her uncle in Eritrea, Nia demonstrated a strong drive to learn in England, saying, “*You know I really want try everything because to improve my English*” (Nia session 4). Her drive to learn resonated with what Bourdieu (1986) calls an embodied capital, which an individual accumulates through an investment of personal time and labor and which can then be employed by the individual either consciously or unconsciously. Nia appeared to draw on this capital, her drive to learn, to invest in English language learning by taking advantage of opportunities presented to her and by independently pursuing language practice activities. Nia’s employment of her drive to learn contributed to her more advanced English language level and she occasionally acted as a translator in the research sessions. Investing in language learning may also be seen as investment in one’s identity (Norton Peirce, 1995) and Nia, who stated she had “*problems with the English [language]*” (Nia session 3), showed that she was investing in her desired identity to become a confident and competent English speaker.

Learning through immersion and observation provided Nia with opportunities to improve her English, consume new vocabulary and information in her daily life, and seek clarification when she needed it, as described in the following quote:

Yeah it’s good learning like hearing in the street or in the shop maybe, everywhere when you walk around. It’s really good...If you, if you have people to help you when you hear [something you don’t understand]and I ask you like that, it’s really...good...In class, no I have no confidence to speak or to like communicate

easily with people so just for me, just outside maybe just walking around and I hear them and, or I translate, or I ask people. (Nia session 1)

This resonates with Lave and Wenger's (1991) approach to learning as a situated activity, and in the same way she learned cultural and domestic practices by observing her mother, so Nia observed those around her in England and actively learned new words and pronunciations, culture and behavior, all the while growing her cultural capital. Nia's words also convey that from her perspective learning in situ through immersion was more helpful and productive than formal classroom learning where she felt limited in her confidence and consequently participated less.

As she felt more confident outside the classroom, Nia pursued independent learning activities through mediums of entertainment such as movies, music, and books. She enjoyed watching romantic English films especially as she could easily understand them and learn about English culture, saying:

...I saw and I learn a lot from that...they teenagers, they have boyfriends, like they going out with much older than from them...and family didn't like it...So, I don't know, I learn a lot...and I understand very clear in that movie I saw, it's really nice, and it help me to understand. They speak like slowly... (Nia session 1)

In this way, she listened to and practiced English on her own time and continued to learn English cultural practices and behaviors. Similarly, music was another activity through which Nia purposefully chose to engage with English, not only listening but watching music videos online with subtitles, as she would with films, saying, *"It's really helpful when learn English...you can learn hearing and writing"* (Nia session 1). Nia loved to read, although she acknowledged that some books were more helpful to learn than others, saying, *"I read a lot, a lot but sometimes, you know, can't help you, sometimes help you lot"* (Nia session 1). Her favorite book was *How to be an Alien in England: A Guide to the English* by Angela Kiss, which she described as *"really nice."* It pokes fun at English stereotypes and explicitly highlights more tacit English practices such as never skipping the queue, and so this book was a resource for the English language *and* cultural practices and behaviors. Nia's resourcefulness functioned as an embodied capital which she drew on to advance her English language through activities such as discovering new books and utilizing subtitles. The attitude with which she independently pursued her own learning also resonates with Rana et

al.'s (2011) work with unaccompanied youth in the USA, which suggests that resourcefulness can contribute to educational success in the country of asylum. While within the scope of this research project it is hard to say how Nia's resourcefulness exactly affected her educational success at college, it was clear that it did help her to improve her English vocabulary.

At a local adult education and community center to which Nia was directed by her former foster carer, she developed a close relationship with an older, English volunteer, Mary, who met with her once a week for almost two years to practice English. Nia was able to understand not only the words Mary used, but the way she explained things, saying, *"...I have a book and she [and] I read and she study [with] me the pronoun and the explanation, something like that. And then...we started to, she help with my stuff, explain [to me] or homework to do, something like that"* (Nia session 6). As she and Nia constructed a space together through their interaction, the volunteer, Mary, was what Pastoor (2017) describes as a facilitator or someone who can scaffold an unaccompanied young person's involvement in the wider community. Nia developed a strong emotional attachment to Mary, saying, *"really, really, she's still nice, I love her really, oh my God"* (Nia session 3). This resonated with Smyth et al.'s (2015) suggestion that a supportive adult or mentor was essential to wellbeing and functioned as a mental health buffer against stress in the life of an unaccompanied youth. At the center, there was another woman who supported Nia's interest in becoming a pharmacist and gave her two relevant books to read. As Nia described it, *"...she say to me, 'It's really helpful if you read it. If you interest, we can take you to participate [with] the university student'...Something like this say to me, oh my God, I really, really want to and it's really good for me..."* (Nia session 6). The support for her interest seemed to give Nia a confidence boost and it was clear that Nia loved the community center and that it was important to her as she said, *"...it's free. They help you for bus pass, for drink, they're really nice...They have everything, they have computer and writing, typing computer and after that, print it, and I take to college. By the way, I really loooove them"* (Nia session 6).

In another example of Nia taking the initiative, there was an occasion in one of the research sessions in which she resisted me and pushed me to justify a question that I asked. Our exchange went as follows:

Anna: ...do you think different about England now than when you first came to England?

Nia: What? What do you say?...I don't know why you ask question like that because this one is different completely, like this question. (Nia session 9)

The question was attempting to broach the topic of how, or if, the girls' experiences of belonging might have changed over time. When Nia resisted, I was taken aback at her accusatory tone, unsure if I had brought up something sensitive or traumatic, but Raisa was also present, unconcerned, and did answer the question. I explained why I thought the question was relevant to the research, and Nia was satisfied to continue. In hindsight, I realize the question was poorly phrased and the topic was changed abruptly (previously we had been on a tangent about clay used in building houses; perhaps Nia was even enjoying that conversation). As the only girl in the project to push back, Nia was appropriately critical of my query given the stressful kind of interviews and questioning she is likely to have endured as part of her asylum application in England (Sinha and Back, 2014).

In Nia's local area, there was a small community group of around 25 Eritreans who would gather monthly. For Nia it was a space of belonging in which she could maintain a connection to her cultural identity as an Eritrean, and she spent time constructing and investing in those social bonds within the community. As she stated:

We have every month, just we meet all of us, every month, and we cooking...like we, they, rent like hall...like for Christmas, and we chat, something like that...it's like 25 [people] something like that...there is old people...I don't know their age but you know, in community there is children, there is like our age, your age, something like that. (Nia session 2)

In this way, Nia indicated that the bonds she formed with the group were intentionally established around a shared cultural heritage. With them, she built social bonds, which involve the formation of reciprocity and trust (Putnam, 2000) and can support an individual's wellbeing, mental health, and sense of belonging (Ndofor-Tah et al., 2019). The group spoke their first language Tigrinya together and ate traditional foods together when they met regularly and for special events and holidays such as Christmas and Easter, which Nia commented was “*special, like [having] our country food, really interesting and nice to have that*” (Nia session 2). These interactions in which the community members engaged with

traditions familiar and special to them occurred far from their country of origin and in a place where they may have been positioned as ‘outsiders,’ making that time together all the more meaningful. Outside of the monthly gatherings, members of the group met occasionally, as Nia stated, “*we just outside have a coffee, something like that*” (Nia session 2). For Nia, it was also important to speak Tigrinya with others as a way to stay connected with her first language, indicating the value she held for her Eritrean heritage and culture. In her words, “*...you don't need just English, English, English, English. You need to, you know, you need, your language. It's important and you have to speak with like my language friends...of course, yeah, very important...I want [to know] both of them [Tigrinya and English], you know...*” (Nia session 4). Maintaining a first or heritage language can play an important role in retaining a connection to one’s cultural identity (Otcu, 2010) and for young refugees, positively impact confidence and success in school (Hek, 2005). Nia’s aspiration to be competent in both Tigrinya and English reflected a desire both to remain connected to her heritage and to develop new connections in England. This echoes Ní Raghallaigh and Gilligan’s (2010) understanding of an integration strategy in which unaccompanied young people may want to maintain ties with their heritage culture and identity and simultaneously identify with their new community.

2.2. Imagining the future

In one of our research sessions, we talked about the girls’ goals, hopes, and dreams. Similar to the unaccompanied youth in Sweden in Wernesjö's (2019) work who desire a ‘normal’ life of safety and tranquility, Nia indicated a desire to have a sense of normality in her life in England, which spoke significantly to the ‘irregularity’ of her disrupted life as she stated, “*I want all of them for future...work, friend, job, married, education, children, family*” (Nia session 6). In their research with unaccompanied girls undergoing the asylum process in Finland, Kohli and Kaukko (2017) discuss the uncertainty and waiting that the girls encountered. While Nia had passed that particular part of the asylum process and been granted refugee status, there remained in her words an element of that waiting, waiting for her life to feel more ‘normal’ and have ‘regular’ components such as a job, family, or children, perhaps similar to the ‘regular’ family she left in Eritrea. There was a sadness to her statement, to her wish for a family and children, remembering that she was separated from her family. Although Nia rarely spoke of the family she left behind, there was a poignancy in

the consideration that her desire for a ‘regular’ family life may live in her mind alongside memories of her family left behind.

In order to achieve these desires in her future, Nia spoke of her need to improve her English, saying, “*Everyone needs to improve English, that the first goal... Yeah for after two years, I want be work in childcare*” (Nia session 4), as childcare is a common job coming out of the Care course she was on. However, Nia was ambitious and she spoke several times of her ultimate desire to become a pharmacist saying:

I want to be like work in pharmacist, you know...my English not enough at the moment...I will see by the way if I will have a good English [in the future]...That's not my work, but my dream...You know there is a lot of words to have for medication. Lot. It's not easy, so I will see, you know, I will try my best. (Nia session 6)

She wished to pursue a specific career in pharmacy but also recognized that her language skills were a barrier to the pursuit of this career. This supports Stevenson and Willott's (2007) finding that young refugees in the UK have high aspirations for higher education despite facing many barriers, one of which is developing adequate language skills to pass required assessments. So, while Nia was able to articulate what she wished for her future, there remained a waiting and uncertainty as to whether those aspirations would come to fruition.

3. Lina

Lina was a 19-year-old from Eritrea who was learning English and spoke Tigrinya and had attended formal schooling in Eritrea for several years, although she did not speak of her life there except to mention that she had a mother and sister still in Eritrea. When Lina arrived in England, she was placed in a foster family before moving into semi-independent accommodation with Haven through which she received a flat to herself, which was uncommon, but which she really enjoyed. At the time of the research, she was studying on a Beauty Therapy course at college and taking a General English class (likely similar to Nia's). Lina did not appear confident speaking English and was often quiet, which made it a challenge to engage with her at times, although she would begin to relax as the other girls spoke during the research sessions.

3.1. Cultural exchange as a space of learning

Cultural knowledge is not only helpful in understanding how to practically live in a new place or culture but may also contribute to a sense of inclusion as familiarity with cultural expectations and understandings is increased. As Nia improved her cultural knowledge through such mediums as movies and books, so Lina, in her own way, both improved her knowledge of English practices and customs and shared her own heritage and culture through cultural exchanges around food and music. While Nia was more active and independent in her learning, Lina learned not necessarily by seeking out opportunities, but rather by taking advantage of the interactions that came her way to acquire new information. One such exchange revolved around a tacit English cultural practice which Lina did not immediately understand on arrival in England but had to learn. The following quote highlights the understanding in England that an offer of food may only be made once and the contrasting custom in Eritrean culture of offering food to a guest many times. As Lina described it:

...you have to ask like lot time [to a guest in Eritrea and say] 'please to eat' ...when I came the first [to] England, you know, is my foster [mother], she's ask me [once] everyday, like 'Lina, do you want dinner?' ...Sometime I'm like 'yeah, I'm hungry' [or] '...No, that's fine' ...she doesn't know [what] I'm thinking, you know...[you need] ask lot time, you know. (Lina session 5)

Lina and her foster mother seemed unaware that their expectations in this situation were different. However, over time meals became a space of inclusion, as Lina said, “*when I eat lunch time long time, she's eat with me, or dinner too*” (Lina session 5). Emond et al. (2014) suggest that the sharing of food between vulnerable children and the adults who care for them can be a demonstration of care in that time is intentionally taken to be together. Similarly, Lina's foster mother chose to sit with her and appeared to make a conscious effort to participate in her life, showing the ongoing construction of their space of inclusion.

Another moment of understanding centered on the use of a fork and knife, a practical and necessary skill in England. Laughingly, Lina recounted being caught eating with her hands by her foster mother:

...when I came England, you know, I can't eat like this [with fork and knife] ...my foster she told me one day when she's out from ...dining room...when she's going the kitchen, I did like this, by my hand [miming eating with her hands]. When she's back,

'What are you doing?' she say me...[because] I'm start eating by hand. (Lina session 5)

This small interaction with her foster mother led Lina to pursue a new and practical skill which would allow her to more comfortably access places and contribute to a sense of inclusion when she knew how to use customary English utensils, as she did by the time of the research. On another occasion of cultural exchange, however, her foster mother was the one to learn about traditional Eritrean food and practices. Lina described how she made the bread-like injera and a thick stew and how her foster mother did not know how to eat in the customary Eritrean way, saying:

[I made] injera, beef something...she's eat by...[she eat] by the spoon. She's take by this hand injera, she doing like this [miming scooping stew with a spoon and biting injera alternately]...but she loves, she love injera, every time...really, I was laughing with my [foster] when she did like this. (Lina session 5)

Her foster mother was willing to try Eritrean food and liked it, demonstrating admiration for Lina's cultural food and identity, which Ní Raghallaigh and Sirriyeh (2015) state is often valued and appreciated by unaccompanied young people in cross-cultural care. Similarly, Lina's social worker enjoyed traditional Eritrean food and knew how to eat it in the customary way, as Lina said, *"My social worker she's eat with me when I have meeting with her. She's eating like me, no?...the same like me..."* (Lina session 5). These moments demonstrate a two-way exchange where cultural learning and inclusion were realized in both directions. They also bring attention to the significance of food, which arose unexpectedly in this research project. Lina's stories of connection and exchange over food echo research, which suggests that in the cases of children and young people seeking asylum in a new country, food can be a tool to communicate that a foster home is a safe place (Kohli et al., 2010). Kohli et al. (2010, p. 233) propose that food "is related to many aspects of finding sanctuary, negotiating belonging within the foster family, and can powerfully evoke being at 'home' in a new land." Similarly, Lina negotiated spaces of belonging as inclusion and comfort with her foster mother and with her social worker over practices of food.

Like Nia, Lina enjoyed watching films, finding them to be a helpful resource for linguistic and cultural learning. She particularly enjoyed watching with other people in case she needed to ask for clarification, saying, *"I like watch [movie] with people...sometimes if I don't*

understand what...[the movie] saying, I want it...maybe if he [a generic person] better [in English] than me, he with me, I can ask him..." (Lina session 1). In this, Lina's learning preferences seemed distinct from Nia's more solitary activities in that she indicated her desire to increase her linguistic and cultural knowledge through interaction and exchange with others, even when watching a film. In another example of cultural exchange with an English peer from college, Lina successfully communicated in English by sharing Eritrean music, saying:

...one boy I know him...he listen [to] me...music, like Eritrean music. And then he say me what's her [the singer's] name...I write for him her name and then he search in youtube...when he's in the car, he's [play] the music like Eritrean...Eritrean music and then he's understanding. He's listen Tigrinya... (Lina session 1)

Lina's words spoke of a space of inclusion with a college peer where she interacted in a fun and positive way, sharing a piece of her culture and communicating successfully in her additional language, English, which Gardner (1985) suggests can increase a person's confidence. One of Haven's key workers, Sam, also spoke of music and how it helped him to build rapport with the young people in his charge and often put a smile on their faces. He made a point to be familiar with popular musical artists from countries his young people were likely to come from such as Eritrea and Afghanistan, suggesting this as a way to affirm the young people and show value for their cultures and languages. This echoes Lina's experience of sharing Eritrean music with a peer who demonstrated an appreciation for it, even looking it up online on his own time.

3.2. Learning unbelonging

Lina also shared her experiences of racism and discrimination from peers at college, believing it was because she could not speak an advanced enough level of English and that "you don't have anything" if you cannot speak English properly. According to Lina, part of being able to speak English has to do with confidence as "*The important is confidence...you have to do what you want...I don't have confidence...*" (Lina session 5). She spoke of not being confident enough to speak up while girls in her class laughed at her English, saying, "*For example, in my course hair dressing, I know two girls, they are English...if you speak some mistake, the girls, they [look at] each other, they laugh...I can't speak with them, I can't speak...I don't like...*" (Lina session 5). Weber (2015) considers how standards of

language and accent are often used today to discriminate against others, resonating with Lina's experience of being effectively silenced and excluded if she made a mistake in English. Lina spoke admiringly of another Eritrean girl in her class who angrily and confidently questioned "*why? why?*" when the English girls made fun of their English, almost aspiring to be able to do so herself. Norton Peirce (1995) suggests that some migrants desire to improve their English for the purpose of being able to defend themselves verbally, a desire which highlights a tension of the politics of belonging playing out in the daily lives of those like unaccompanied girls. Yuval-Davis (2006) considers that tension in that even after the granting of refugee status by the state, such as the girls had, there exist additional layers of belonging to be 'achieved' in order to be accepted into society. She suggests that a common language is often one such thing demanded of people in order to "be entitled to belong...to the collectivity" (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 209), which speaks to the exclusion Lina experienced because she was perceived to lack the common language of English.

Discrimination and racism appeared to extend beyond challenges of the English language as Lina described being laughed at by the same two English girls even as her teacher complimented her work, saying:

If you doing some hair, and like good things...if you doing nicely, you know, if the teacher if she say 'nice hair'...they [two English girls] look angry. One day she [the teacher] say, last year...I practice in the hair, and then I did new style something and then she say them 'Oh look, [at] Lina. You have to take picture from this, you know, because you have to learn from her'...They laughing, you know, and then teacher she say them, 'Why you laughing'... (Lina session 5)

Lina shared a similar story in which on a separate occasion the same two English girls laughed at her speaking English, and Lina noted that the teacher in that case "*She doesn't speak them, she just don't care*" (Lina session 5). In this way, Lina highlighted the disparate responses of two separate teachers with different attitudes toward resisting discrimination and bullying. In her research with refugee youth adapting to UK secondary school, Hastings (2012) highlights that refugee youth are at a greater risk of bullying than their British counterparts, which was apparent in Lina's accounts of being made to feel unwelcome above. Hastings (2012) also suggests that teachers should play a role in protecting refugee students from bullying, which highlights the two very different responses Lina noted from her teachers. Indicating other experiences of discrimination, Lina said, "*You know, you have to*

respect them, but they don't have [to] respect us, you know. Still some English people, they doing like this, the girls. Not just [to] us" (Lina session 5). She recognized the inequality in the expectation that she should respect English people, but they did not have to show that same respect to her. Her understanding revealed a lack of reciprocity in her own experiences and her perception that the onus to adapt was on her, an onus which has often been placed on migrants and those newer to a society (Casey, 2016).

4. Raisa

Raisa was a 19-year-old from Sudan who informed me that she spoke Amharic the most fluently, Arabic and Tigrinya conversationally, and was learning English. She was born in Eritrea but left for Sudan as a child, likely fleeing Eritrea's totalitarian government, which has been in place for more than 25 years (Steadman, 2019). This is why she speaks Tigrinya, the same first language as Nia and Lina, but not as fluently. Upon arrival in England, Raisa was placed immediately into supported accommodation with Haven, not a foster home, perhaps because she was already a mother of a five-year-old daughter still living in Sudan. A fostering situation may not have been considered suitable as it could have positioned her as more of a 'child' in the fostering relationship when she already had a child of her own. When I met her, Raisa came across as a confident person, although her English language level was lower than the other girls, and she was always happy to speak with me and laughed easily and often. At the time of the research, she was enrolled on the same Level 1 Care course as Nia and stated that she was also taking an ESOL class and a math class.

4.1. Spaces of learning

Unlike the other three girls, Raisa did not attend any formal schooling in Sudan, which appeared to impact on her experiences of settling, learning, and belonging in England. Indeed, research reports that limited pre-migration education negatively affects refugee youth in the UK by disadvantaging their settling as they struggle to access English language classes and other education and training due to low levels of literacy, amongst other challenges (Morrice et al., 2019). Growing up, Raisa learned through situated activities and observation at home and from neighbors in her community, from the languages she spoke to domestic practices to cultural and personal practices such as how to pray and understand the Bible.

Raisa was expected to contribute to her household in Sudan from an early age and learned domestic practices by observing and then doing, as she described:

...my grandmother...she [knows] how to cook, she's teach me...when she's tired, I do for her...injera, like one day we eat together...All things I know...In Africa when you eight and seven, you do anything. You work anything. If you no work, hit...[age] seven, you do yourself. You wash something, you take something, and you clean house... (Raisa session 7)

Raisa's words reveal her grandmother as a primary source of domestic learning and the serious culture of work in which she was raised. Like Lave's (1996) apprentice tailors, Raisa was not necessarily intentionally taught, but rather learned a way of doing things as she watched and did them alongside her grandmother and others in the community. She also described learning different languages through speaking and listening predominantly with her grandmother, saying:

Just my grandmother and my grandmother friends...Them teach me and some Amharic and like religion...They teach me...[Bible in] Amharic and Tigrinya...they speak Amharic and Tigrinya...My grandmother never wrote, and they teach me and I never go to school there...she's speak with me Arabic, my grandmother...and she's teach me sometimes Tigrinya...Just not spelling, just she's teach me by...speaking and listening. (Raisa session 7)

As her grandmother could not write, Raisa learned some writing through her church beginning around the age of ten, saying, "...I think better, this church, listen good and like writing something...they help...just not good...My writ[ing] is bad...no[t] like this Amharic they learning at school, oh they write very good...just [a little] Arabic now...I'm writing slow, just no fast" (Raisa session 7). Although Raisa suggested that people learning at school wrote better than she did, she also spoke of periodically having 'lessons' with her neighbors in Sudan in which someone would teach the others a little writing in one of their homes. While Raisa did not attend formal schooling, it was clear that her mother placed a value on learning, as Raisa stated, "...my mother, she do like this [make traditional Eritrean] coffee...and neighbors come and...[she say] 'Raisa, Raisa, come on, come on, you do something for learning'" (Raisa session 7). In this way, through community support and interaction, she acquired a basic understanding of writing and a value for learning.

Of the four girls in the research project, Raisa was the only one to share anything about her migratory journey, in which she made her way from Sudan to Libya to Italy and to France before arriving in England. For four months of that time she was stuck in what was likely a detention center in Libya, saying:

...when [in] the Libya...I don't know...like big house [warehouse]... 750 people and together...sit in there have some Eritrean people learning...also teacher together...some people, yeah, some people, sometime cry, sometime learn and sometime pray, oh my God...a lot of people together...a lot of people die. (Raisa session 7)

Her account resembles the Libyan detention camp described by an Eritrean refugee in a Guardian article in November 2018, which said, “The place we are living in is like a cave. There are no windows. There is no fresh air. We share beds, cups, almost everything. To pass time we pray in the morning. We sit. We sleep. It’s dark inside all day” (Issak, 2018). Similarly, Raisa noted that many people in detention with her did things together such as learning, teaching, praying, and crying. Of her overall journey, Raisa said:

Hard for me, I think, this, my life, oh my God. My life, really, really hard, oh my God. Just thank you God. Nothing to do...Jesus help me, a lot of things. When I was [in] Libya, that was hard oh my God. And sea, Mediterranean Sea, beach, big beach. Jesus [a]live me. Jesus [a]live me, oh my God. (Raisa session 7)

Crossing the Mediterranean Sea has become notoriously dangerous for migrants and refugees with the UNHCR reporting that more than 2,200 people died attempting to cross in 2018 alone (UNHCR, 2019). Amidst such hardships during her migration, Raisa occasionally found opportunities to construct small spaces of learning and belonging as in Italy when she met an Italian man who was working for the Red Cross. He taught her the English alphabet and gave her a paper with the alphabet and as she described it, “*He’s teach me and he’s give me paper for ABCD something. I take [it] all the time with me and all the time when I’m sleep, I’m read it, and go sleep...really they nice, Italian person*” (Raisa session 7). In what was possibly one of her first English ‘lessons,’ Raisa built a brief, but inclusive space with this Red Cross worker, remembered fondly alongside the hardships of migration. While Wessendorf and Phillimore (2018) suggest that fleeting encounters can be positively influential during the process of settlement, it was clear that one such encounter was also

meaningful for Raisa during migration as it provided her a moment of respite and inclusion and equipped her with some practical and helpful knowledge.

All the girls encountered similar difficulties on arrival in England as they were unfamiliar with the language and culture and customs, and needed to be shown how to navigate their new community. The other three girls were placed in foster homes when they arrived, in which they could observe, for various periods of time, how their foster carers conducted daily tasks. However, Raisa was placed directly in supported accommodation and her stories indicate that she acquired cultural knowledge and practices in England through alternative spaces of interaction, at times with her key worker at Haven. Of her early days in England, Raisa stated, “*All the time key worker [with me], no going alone...yeah first time [to the shop] with key worker, you know...I'm not going alone...she's teach me, the first key worker, anything she's do, [I] copy, you know...*” (Raisa session 7). In this way, doing daily activities and tasks with her key worker, she began to learn English cultural practices and customs, reminiscent of the way she learned at home and in her community in Sudan, through doing. Part of her cultural understanding also came from her surprise at the support she received in England and her perception of the relative equality of opportunity for both rich and poor, as she said:

...surprise to me just person[s] ...nice really, honest, nice person...[I do] not speak with them, just [they] don't point [at] you...before I don't know...[about] England, Italy or France...I know now...they help you and very nice...government help you, you can learn. You can [until] 18 [get] support here...that's nice surprise...if you want to learn, if you want to work, they help you...Africa...your life good just only rich people...not rich, no good for you, nobody help you...here, rich and...poor and together, same, you know, same... (Raisa session 7)

Raisa compared her views of England with her experiences in Sudan, particularly happy in the understanding that she could receive support to learn or work in England more than in Sudan. This highlighted the way in which she learned through observation and being situated in an English community in that only after arriving did she learn about England or English people. Upon arrival, however, her limited English functioned as a barrier to accessing places and opportunities, which is a common challenge for newly arrived refugees and migrants and they often need support to do so (Dryden-Peterson, 2015). Due to this, Raisa seemed to occupy a relatively small personal world, stating, “*I have confidence, just I don't have*

enough English” (Raisa session 5). In this way, she linked her lack of English to being unable to go out or utilize public transportation by herself, saying:

...you don't know English and places, still place I'm not going there...this hard...Now still I know [certain] place, just Aldi and my home and library and the shopping center. I don't know any [other] place...I can't [go on the bus alone]. Just going by, no far away, just this park, come and back, come and back...just walking. If you go by bus, we're lost. (Raisa session 7)

Her words illustrated the small world she inhabited, accessible primarily by walking, which greatly limited her, and even when using public transportation, she desired to have someone with her as she did not feel confident. While there were learning moments with her key worker, overall Raisa indicated that she was quite limited by her low level of English. She expressed her desire to improve her English, saying, “*...I don't have enough English, and I want to learn more, and support, I want...support more,*” (Raisa session 11) and noting, “*I don't [have] friend [who] speak English. I have only [friends who] speak my language, is call by my language [on the phone]. I never speak by English*” (Raisa session 4). A recent survey reveals that many refugees do not feel they have received enough English language provision or support to learn the language (Refugee Action, 2019). Similarly, there appeared to be few opportunities that existed, or of which Raisa was aware, to engage with to improve and practice her English. The one exception to this of which I was aware was Raisa's voluntary involvement in the mentoring program through Haven which initially brought us together, a program to connect unaccompanied young people with a local volunteer person.

4.2. Struggling to imagine the future

While Raisa had the desire to learn and live in England, her focus and mental health suffered as she felt deeply the absence of her family, which impacted negatively on opportunities for learning and belonging in her present life. At college, she struggled to learn as she was distracted by missing her daughter and could not concentrate, saying:

Cause, confuse, Anna...I'm not learn...I miss my child, my daughter long time. Yeah that why...I'm not, I'm not helpful. [I see] people and no discuss, just...peoples look [at] me, Raisa...like that...and sometimes I'm going college and then I'm confuse there... (Raisa session 6)

Separation from family can contribute to poor mental health and wellbeing, a struggle which can be common amongst unaccompanied young refugees (Vervliet et al., 2014). It was clear Raisa was deeply distressed about being separated from her child and was unable to focus on her present and learning at college. Choummanivong et al. (2014) emphasize the importance of family reunification on the wellbeing of refugees, and indeed, Raisa's greatest desire was to be with her child again, 'doing' her identity as a mother. Without her child, it was as though she were on hold, as she stated, "*I want to find my child, my daughter first, and then get my hopes...find my hopes and I will...I will play with her...being together. That my hopes*" (Raisa session 6). As it was, she spent much time alone and sleeping, behaviors which could indicate poor mental health and when I was with her, she often acted sleepy, yawning and checking the time on her phone. Perhaps this tiredness and low mood also contributed to her lack of participation in learning and connecting opportunities, which in turn led to fewer chances to access other resources and further social connections, and so on in a seemingly negative feedback loop.

Desiring deeply to be with her family and for her identities as a mother and wife to be fulfilled in a more tangible way again, Raisa dreamed out loud of when she would be reunited with her family, saying, "*Yeah I want to [make traditional coffee]. I want to come all time in my life and when the future, and maybe my daughter is come [to England], and maybe my husband's come, then maybe you come [visit]...*" (Raisa session 11). Similarly, she reminisced about relaxing and drinking coffee together with family and friends, saying:

I did in my house yesterday morning and I sit there. I did coffee, [nice] clothes...and you hairs very nice and you do makeup good...oh my God, very nice...you sit, do popcorn here and coffee here, and see anything, very nice...breakfast, they do like that, coffee and something, [with] neighbor, not alone, you see...like popcorn and pancakes and things like that, and neighbors come, children, very nice...together.
(Raisa session 11)

The company of community seemed very important, and Raisa's words indicated a nostalgia for what was and for the possibility of creating it again in the future. Isfahani (2008) writes of nostalgia as the pain and suffering of being away from home, and how this was experienced by a young refugee woman, suggesting that she did not simply miss her physical home, but yearned for "...the connection, bond, and sense of herself in the past before the separation..."

(Isfahani, 2008, p. 84). In a similar way, Raisa did not seem to miss the physical place of Sudan, but the familial and community connections and belonging that she remembered.

While it seemed challenging for Raisa to imagine the future beyond being reunited with her daughter and family, she was able to articulate that she would like to work as a childcare worker or midwife in England. Her Care course set her up to pursue work in childcare, and as she stated, “*children good because...it’s fun with them*” (Raisa session 4), but her longer-term employment goal was to work as a midwife because “*I love babies*” (Raisa session 6). Her desires for future employment perhaps stemmed from who she was as a mother missing her child, as though her identity as a mother were bleeding into her desire to work with children. However, Raisa acknowledged it would be challenging to become a midwife because she would need a university degree and as Stevenson and Willott (2007) note, young refugees often struggle to achieve their high educational aspirations as they often lack English proficiency, knowledge of the education system and requirements, and the finances necessary to pursue a university degree.

5. Talia

Talia was an 18-year-old from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) who spoke French and Lingala and was learning English. When I met her, Talia was in her first year of studying on a Travel and Tourism course and attended a General English class (perhaps similar to Nia’s) and GCSE math class. She had a higher level of English than the other girls and came across as confident and funny. Talia did not speak of her family in the DRC except to mention that she had had a little sister who had passed away. She did, however, speak of school in the DRC which she began at age five and attended for eight years, predominantly in a teacher-centered pedagogy. In her school, there were 50-70 students to each teacher, and no opportunities to ask questions. School was taught in French and the shared Latin alphabet likely made it easier for her to learn English compared to Nia, Lina, and Raisa whose first languages of Amharic and Tigrinya use the Ge’ez script. As she did not share any first languages with the other girls and could only speak with them in English; there was an occasion in which the other girls were speaking Tigrinya and Talia commented that “*yeah they’re always like that*” (Talia session 4), referring to them laughing together while she seemed to observe from the outside. In this way, Talia occupied a unique position in the

research group, slightly out of sync with the other girls. At the time, she shared an accommodation with Nia and Raisa and they appeared to get on well, but her comment revealed a position just outside the circle of Nia-Raisa-Lina. Talia appeared to recognize the moments when she was on the ‘outside,’ and while neither intentional nor malicious on the other girls’ parts, it effectively excluded Talia from their conversation. This highlights the heterogeneity of unaccompanied young people in England and for Talia, that sometimes resulted in a temporary space of exclusion.

5.1. Spaces of learning

Talia developed a deep connection with her foster family, constructing with them a space of learning and belonging. Placed with them on arrival in England, Talia remained with the family until she turned 18 and then maintained a close relationship with them, a relationship of around two and a half years at the time of the research. Her foster mother originally came to England from India 25 years prior while her foster father was English, and both were Catholic like Talia and so introduced her to their English-language Catholic church near where they lived. Talia’s stories spoke of becoming very much ‘part of the family’ as her foster family helped her to settle in England, a large part of which was learning English, as she stated, “...my foster family just helped me too, just English, all English all the time” (Talia session 10). It was clear that Talia had a fun relationship with the family as they teased each other about their accents, which Talia herself laughed about while sharing:

...my foster dad’s English accent...sometimes they were fighting because if my foster mom asks me something in English, she said it wrong and then my foster dad say, ‘She can’t learn English with you because you always say the wrong stuff’ ...my mom, foster mom has strong accent. (Talia session 10)

Talia’s laughter about the situation revealed her understanding that her foster parents were poking fun at each other, and it became apparent that that comfortable environment extended to Talia as well. Her foster family treated her as they treated their biological daughter, as Talia stated, “...with my foster dad, if I go, sometimes if I go to college, he just take all my dirty clothes and then wash for me. When I come back, I find everything clean” (Talia session 10). On another occasion, her foster mother visited India for two weeks and Talia took over cooking for her foster dad and the couple’s young daughter, saying, “...I just cooked for everybody and just make rice and pasta...and chips. I just make chips for my foster dad. They

have one girl, she's ten years now and I cook for them" (Talía session 10). From her words, it seemed that Talía slipped relatively easily and comfortably into the family and they embraced her.

In interviews with carers and unaccompanied youth in England and Ireland, Sirriyeh and Ní Raghallaigh (2018) found that the provision of legal, social, and emotional recognition by carers was important in supporting the young person's adaptation to a new country and community, and also the transition into adulthood. Emotional recognition refers to providing reliable and constant affection and can play a large role in building self-confidence. This was a recognition that Talía received, especially from her foster mother, and she commented that *"...She's really good, I love her"* (Talía session 10). The two of them constructed a deep connection as her foster mother perhaps understood what it was like to be new to England and to settle, having been new herself some 25 years prior. Eide and Hjern (2013) also assert that caregivers who create and maintain lasting social connections with unaccompanied young people are very important in helping them reach their full potential. This resonated with Talía's relationship with her foster mother whom she called *"mama,"* saying, *"...when my foster mother called me, I say mama, and then [s]he say, [s]he was so, so happy to be like that..."* (Talía session 10). In this way, her words revealed a belonging and inclusion lovingly offered and happily received, echoing Wade et al.'s (2012) confirmation that good foster care has the potential to make a positive impact in the life of an unaccompanied young person.

When she turned 18, Talía was encouraged to move from her foster family's home to supported accommodation with the aim to facilitate her living more independently and being able to care for herself as a young adult in England. In her own words:

...they said it was not easy to move but...my social worker told me that, 'If you want to stay here, stay, but if you want to move, it's very good for you because you're gonna grow up more'...but it's very busy to live...I just find my school and then I eat. I'm watch [TV], my bed I sleep while I watch TV...you have to cook...cleaning the kitchen and the toilet, I don't like. (Talía session 10)

At the time of the research, Talía had been living in supported accommodation through Haven for three or four months and she was clear in her dislike of certain aspects of more independent living such as cooking and cleaning for herself. Moving from a foster home to more independent housing can be a challenging part of the transition to adulthood for

unaccompanied young people and Sirriyeh and Ní Raghallaigh (2018) suggest that foster carers can be tremendously influential in supporting this transition to adulthood. Throughout this transition “The importance of continuity of care/love cannot be overestimated, especially when young people are moving to difficult post-18 conditions” (Sirriyeh and Ní Raghallaigh, 2018, p. 95). As an unaccompanied youth like Talia ages out of care and leaves a foster home, the need for a lasting and caring relationship does not diminish, but rather becomes all the more significant and important as entitlement to support also decreases at that time (Meloni and Chase, 2017). Additionally, a foster carer may be able to maintain a close relationship with a young person in a way that perhaps a social worker may be discouraged or prevented from doing (Sirriyeh and Ní Raghallaigh, 2018). In Talia’s case, she maintained a familial kind of space with her foster family after moving out, seeing them regularly, saying, “*they’re still my family, they call me all the time*” (Talia session 10). As Lina found food to be an important point of connection, so Talia, too, connected with her foster mother over food. Her foster mother made sure Talia was eating even after she moved out of the house, as Talia described it:

...she loves cooking...all the time if I go there, she just puts in front of me food and then says ‘take it because I know you never cook.’ If she call me, she ask me, ‘What are you cooking?’ I say I just make pasta. She say, ‘Always having pasta’...She just makes if I go there. She makes food because she knows I will go there and then she give me. (Talia session 10)

The exchange is reminiscent of the way that many British mothers might speak with their children who have gone away to university or moved out of their parent’s house, checking to make sure that their adult daughter is eating enough. It is a lovely encounter which demonstrates well the familial kind of relationship Talia had with her foster family, and the comfortable and secure belonging built on deep affection and care which their emotional recognition of Talia continued to provide.

Due to her sufficient command of English and subsequent ability to communicate and comprehend relatively easily, Talia was able to convey humor in a way which the other girls could not in English. One of our research sessions occurred on a particularly dark and cold winter evening with a chance of snow the following day and Talia humorously spoke of her strong dislike of cold English winters and the make-believe illness she would have to avoid going out in it, saying:

No, don't have college, God...I just say to God, please, I can't go to college...they gonna close tomorrow because tomorrow is going to snow like really bad...even it don't, I won't go because I feel sick now. I think tomorrow I will be very sick...I know my body...I know if I will be sick...I start tomorrow to Monday I will be sick, I won't go to school on Monday...my sickness is just sleeping. (Talía session 4)

Not relayed in the above quote are the other girls laughing as Talía described how she was going to avoid the very cold weather by staying home and not attending college. She did not actually feel sick but knew that it would be a good excuse to provide her teachers, and she humorously talked through her 'future' of being ill. In his research with Central American migrants traveling north, Van Ramshorst (2019) writes of how humor and laughter can contribute to a sense of solidarity and bring people together. In a similar way, the collective laughter at Talía's story established a period of joined laughter and humor between the girls where everyone was relaxed and simply enjoyed a funny story. Her words also demonstrate her command of English and her cultural knowledge and understanding of how to use humor well and appropriately in English to connect with others and support everyone to feel included in the moment.

Like Lina and Nia, Talía loved listening to music and constructed her own opportunities to learn and connect through both English and Congolese music. She described her favorite music, saying:

I listen to Congolese music. I listen to every music if I like it...yeah [I listen to music in English]...I have like, my like Little Mix...a British group...and I like Beyoncé...[Congolese music] very, very the best one...[my favorite artist is] Fally Ipupa...very big, the most popular one...[I listen] every morning if...I don't have something to do. Nighttime before going to bed, just if I don't [listen], I can't sleep. I just put it on, my headphones in bed, I sleep. (Talía session 10)

While music served one function of helping her to relax or fall asleep, and as something from which she simply derived pleasure, a compelling notion was what English music could do for her that Congolese music could not, and vice versa. She shared that Congolese music was a mix of French, Lingala, and sometimes English. In this way, it was multilingual, reflecting Congolese culture, a connection to her home country, culture, and language/s, and it was her favorite kind of music, "the best one." Barrett et al. (2010) measured the strength of nostalgia in response to different music and found that nostalgia was strongest when music was

familiar and autobiographically salient, that is, relevant to the listener's lived experiences. This resonates with how Talia seemed to use Congolese music and its melodies and lyrics and rhythms to build a moment in which she could experience being Congolese, experience a sense of home in her mind. Marsh (2017) suggests that for many refugee children, music is an important part of human experience and can support connection with others and develop self-esteem and identity, including cultural identity, amongst other things. Similar to Talia, music connected Lina with her home, and in her case, was used as a medium to share a piece of her cultural identity with an English peer. Alternatively, it seemed that English language music could 'do' something different, but also beneficial and positive for Talia, in creating an environment to practice and improve her English. Nia also listened to English music because she both enjoyed it and actively desired to practice English, for which she also utilized subtitles. Understanding this, it would have been enlightening to investigate when Talia (and the other girls) chose to listen to English music or Congolese music, but that was not within the scope of this research.

5.2. Facilitation of diverse social connections

More than the other girls in the research, Talia appeared to have quite varied social connections, largely due to her foster family and better command of English. Wade et al. (2012) report that many foster carers in their UK study actively helped the young people in their care to establish social connections outside of the foster home in order to facilitate integration and belonging. This practice was reflected in Talia's foster family, who deliberately introduced her to individuals and groups, facilitating her participation in the wider community. One such connection was made when Talia's foster mother introduced her to an older Congolese woman at their church, Karen, who had lived in the UK for more than ten years. Zetter et al. (2006) suggest that shared ethnicity can establish a context in which a social bond can grow bonding capital as it provides membership to a group which can be accessed for support or material needs. While Talia's relationship with Karen arose as one of very few relationships she had with others from the DRC, she appeared to draw on this capital in a story she shared about a new, surprising experience she had in England and how Karen helped her to understand it, saying:

...here [England] for the first time, I was to the shopping center...then I was watching for the bus and then I saw one boy in front of me. He was waiting for the bus too and

after one, like two minutes, one boy came and then they kiss each other, like they get married. So I nearly fall down...she [Karen] told me that here, I have to find it very natural...now I'm used to it cause I just find it very normal. So it's not even my business. (Talía session 10)

While two men kissing is now normal in English culture and society, it was a new experience for Talía and she was able to draw on her connection with Karen, utilizing Karen's greater cultural understanding and shared background as a resource to make sense of what she had seen. Beyond Karen, Talía spent little time with others from the DRC, saying, *"I have Congolese friends but they are not my age, just 25, they are married...I never go there [with a Congolese community] because they don't do anything...they are not on my age...but I have some, the girl who does my hair [is Congolese]..."* (Talía session 10). She was aware of a Congolese community group, but often chose not to meet with them as they were not close to her age and did not do any activities of interest to her. In contrast, Nia experienced closer social bonds with other Eritreans through a community group and her church (discussed in the following chapter) but had fewer connections in the wider English community than Talía.

The National Citizen Service (NCS) was a group through which Talía co-constructed a space of belonging and inclusion with a peer group. Talía's foster family connected her with the NCS, a British program which brings together young people aged 15-17 for a period of three to four weeks with the aim to provide new experiences and connections for them such as completing activities and community improvement projects. In her own words, Talía described what the NCS does and how she felt about participating:

They just go out, they go to live somewhere like...for holiday like one week and then you do some...exercise...climbing to the mountain...in my group...it was just like British people. I was just the one who can't speak English, you know. You see this girl here [gesturing to girl she greeted when we walked into the café], yeah I meet her there...they always knew I can't speak good English so...if I talk, they just listen. Even I say rubbish stuff, they listen and I say [to myself], 'Ok, that's good.' (Talía session 4)

While her time with the NCS began by setting her apart linguistically and culturally from the majority British born in her group, by the end she had established social bridges with her peers and built a space of inclusion with them. Beirens et al. (2007) suggest that the formation of social bridges can result from the promotion of peer relationships, intercultural learning, and even non-verbal communication in the cases of low English proficiency and can

serve to mitigate the social exclusion of refugee young people. For Talia, the NCS provided such opportunities and she spoke positively of being welcomed and included by her British peers and even being able to speak imperfect English without judgment or ridicule. Her experience stands in stark contrast to Lina's experiences of discrimination from English peers at college and illustrates the potential of peer connection to boost confidence and contribute to the construction of safe and comfortable spaces where unaccompanied young people may even practice English. In fact, during one of our research sessions, Talia actually ran into and greeted a young British woman she had met through the NCS. A social group for young people in foster care provided another opportunity for Talia to meet and interact through fun activities with other young people who were largely British. Like the NCS, this opportunity was facilitated by her foster family to provide her with additional social connections external to the home to continue settling in England. As Talia stated:

...something like fostering people, just like you know, if you are, if you live with foster family, they don't mind if you are British or no, but if you just live with foster family, they do like some activities and then you can go away with them, or go to the cinema, stuff like that...to keep them just busy. (Talia session 4)

As Beirens et al. (2007) note, social bridges, such as Talia had the opportunity to establish with the other fostered young people in this group, can lessen social exclusion. A social group for fostered youth did indeed support such interaction and allowed Talia another outlet to mix with English peers, use her English, and simply enjoy fun activities amidst daily stresses of adapting to England.

Overall, Talia appeared to have a varied group of friends, seemingly more so than the other girls in the research project, perhaps due to the facilitation of her foster family and more advanced level of English. She once laughingly exaggerated that she had 100 friends, although she quickly amended that number to 25 saying that was enough for her and confidently listed them, saying:

I have Spanish friend, Oman friend, English friend, Eritrean friend, Tigrinyan friend, Congolese friend, French friend, Turkish friend, Algerian friend, African girl...I have all these friends...Arabic friends...Amharic friends...with French, can speak French. With Congolese, you can speak French and my language. With all of you, just English. (Talia session 4)

Her statement demonstrated that because her friends came from many different places and linguistic backgrounds, English was most often the common language by which she communicated, which evidenced her ability to communicate and connect in English, although she spoke her first languages when she could. In these connections and friendships, belonging and inclusion were expressed in her happiness and laughter with others, as Talia described, *“really happy if I just laugh with my friends...If I'm to college, and then they [friends] do some stuff funny, and then I will laugh and then it makes me happy all the day. I just go home, I think about that stuff...I don't know...what else can make me happy?...yeah, I love laughing”* (Talia session 10). Her words suggested that laughter functioned as a binding element, a glue of sorts, to bring or hold her together with others, resonating with Coser's (1959) research on the social function of laughter to minimize social distance. For Talia, laughter did just that, helping to break down potential social barriers and contributing to spaces of belonging and inclusion.

6. Conclusion

While this chapter explored each of the four girls' individual stories, experiences, and constructions, it also demonstrated an overall theme which arose as common across all of them: learning to live in England. The girls needed to acquire practical knowledge around the English language and English cultural customs and practices, and access to this kind of knowledge and information was either facilitated or hindered at different times and in different ways. I found that there was one social connection more significant than any other in each girl's shared experiences who, to varying degrees, facilitated an increase in her English language and cultural knowledge; Nia had Mary, the volunteer, Lina her foster mother, Raisa her key worker, and Talia her foster mother. These individuals and the girls' interactions with them highlighted that learning is a product of social interaction (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and always occurring, whether or not it is conscious or intentional. The increase in language and/or cultural understanding which resulted from these interactions appeared often to increase the girls' confidence and allow them a period of acceptance, inclusion, and even enjoyment, and seemed to pave the way for further belonging to be built by the girls. The findings revealed both a breadth in the variety of ways to learn and a depth to the impact it had on the girls' constructions. I was struck by the way even brief moments of interaction and learning could permit the construction of a space of belonging as inclusion

and comfort. It is understood, then, that learning is a part of the construction of belonging, that belonging cannot be constructed without interaction and an exchange of understanding.

The following chapter discusses further findings around common spaces of interaction which the girls encountered in England – college, faith, and the practice of food. The chapter compares and contrasts how the girls formed social connections and constructed belonging within those spaces. The chapter also presents a section on Haven's support for the integration and belonging of their unaccompanied young people.

Chapter Five: Common spaces of interaction

“When you go church, you maybe you forget bad things and forget bad things do, and more relax...you pray...” (Raisa session 11)

1. Introduction

The previous chapter introduced Nia, Lina, Raisa, and Talia and their unique stories, and the spaces they constructed through interactions in which belonging was cultivated or impeded. This chapter draws out the significant spaces which were common across the girls’ stories and within which they formed social connections and subsequently constructed spaces of belonging to varying degrees. These common spaces were college, faith, and, unexpectedly, the practice of food. The first section focuses on college in which the girls’ identities as English language learners played a role in how they formed social bonds and social bridges and subsequently how they felt inclusion or exclusion. The section suggests that a higher language level may be necessary to establish social bridges with non-language learners such as English peers. The second section centers on faith where the girls’ identities as Orthodox Christians and a Catholic impacted on how they established (or not) social connections and constructed with them a sense of home, familiarity, and comfort. It confirms existing research which proposes that practicing a faith can activate a sense of belonging, be a source of comfort, and provide a supportive environment for unaccompanied young people who lack familial support. The third section on the practice of food highlights the girls’ experiences of interaction around food and desires to build a sense of togetherness with others over meals. The section suggests that food practices may be one way to bridge the divide between people of different cultural or linguistic backgrounds. Finally, this chapter presents a section on Haven and how it supports the integration and belonging of its unaccompanied young people, including the girls in this research project. This support is considered through the perspectives of the key workers interviewed for this project and the three primary themes which emerged in their interviews: the importance of forming social connections to support belonging and integration, the challenge of managing young people’s expectations, and perceived differences between the experiences of unaccompanied girls and boys.

2. Belonging in college

This section explores the girls' constructions and experiences of belonging in a college setting and how their identities as English language learners impacted on their opportunities to form social connections. Their identities as English language learners were in part influenced by their different language backgrounds (Amharic, Tigrinya, French) and levels of formal schooling prior to migration. Literature demonstrates that a lack of language competency in the country of asylum's language is a barrier for most unaccompanied young people settling and returning to education. Thommessen and Todd (2018) discuss how the lack of language is about more than the language itself, but rather the inability to access anything that requires communication. A low level of English can hinder such things as access to education, academic achievement, and social connections, amongst other things (Morrice et al., 2019). Being English language learners seemed to impact the most on Nia, Lina, and Raisa's college-related experiences of belonging and inclusion while Talia, who had a higher level of English, did not seem to face the same challenges. Her experiences are primarily discussed as a separate case further down.

In the previous chapter we saw that Nia and Raisa were studying on the same Care course while Lina studied on a Beauty Therapy course, both of which were predominantly made up of English young people, and each girl reported being in a math class. At the time of the research, Raisa was in an ESOL class while Nia and Lina reported being in a General English class, although the experiences they shared were often of their previous ESOL class, and as noted in the previous chapter, the General English class appeared to be multinational and aimed at 'non-native' English speakers. Their ESOL classes dually functioned as both a barrier and a pathway to settling, integration, and belonging. ESOL was designed to teach them the English language, but did so in a silo, isolating them from opportunities to practice in a more natural way the very English language and culture they were working to learn, something all too common for refugee populations (Morrice and Sandri, 2018). Nia, Lina, and Raisa had similar experiences and often agreed on the overarching idea that a low level of English led to a low level of confidence communicating in English and to difficulties making friends with English students. The girls appeared conscious of their identities as English language learners and how that positioned them in the college setting, and they spoke of their experiences of belonging primarily in terms of their interactions with other students

who fell into two categories: other international ESOL students and English peers. With other ESOL students, they more easily formed social bonds based on the shared identity of being English language learners. Alternately, the girls were often unable to establish social bridges with English peers. When I inquired about the friends they had made at college, the girls' replies reflected this idea, as in the following excerpt:

Anna: *Have you also made maybe friends at college?...*

Nia: *No really, no friends, just normal*

Raisa: *Yeah, no friends...*

Nia: *I've got friends in ESOL, but I don't have in Care class...my class is, they're really, really naughty. I don't like them by the way...care class...*

Raisa: *Just like they're not friendly*

Nia: *Yeah. For me, it's fine, for me. Even for teacher, if she say to them 'please do that' they say 'nooo' just like that. So, it's fine for me, but we no friends [Nia laughs]. That means they're not really [friends], they hate me and I hate them...*

Raisa: *No, they're no good people, just you can't...with them you know*

Nia: *I can't make friends with them*

Talia: *...you say something, they start laughing. That's why it makes you very...*

Nia: *Yeah*

Talia: *They're a bit naughty*

Nia: *Very rude (session 4)*

Overall, the exchange above conveyed a sense of racism and discrimination against the girls and the way they spoke English, which resulted in social exclusion in their Care course and made it essentially impossible for them to construct a sense of belonging as inclusion in that situation. This resonates with Weber's (2015) work on the increasing use of language to discriminate against migrants. ESOL peers, in contrast, were perhaps more willing to communicate and connect despite limited English because they were also English language learners and at one point Nia stated that “...*the good thing is they [international students] understand you*” (Nia session 5). In integration literature, there is a two-way element of reciprocity or “mutual accommodation” to connecting socially (Ager and Strang, 2008), which appeared to be lacking as the girls' Care peers were described as “*very rude*” and “*no good people*” who seemed not to want to engage with the girls. The excerpt above painted the

Care course as an unwelcoming space of interaction in which Nia and Raisa experienced exclusion and discrimination and were provided few to no opportunities to develop social bridges.

Raisa further described not being able to speak with English peers, saying, “...*English people speak loud and doesn't speak with us ...not much [speak] with them, you know, no more speak...no listen to me. I'm speak with them. [They say] 'What did you say? What did you say?' you see...because my English not direct...*” (Raisa session 11). She used the phrase “*what did you say?*” with a tone which implied that English peers asked it with some hostility and little care for the reply. Echoing Raisa, Pastoor shares a story from her research with unaccompanied youth in Norway in which an unaccompanied Afghan boy had trouble socializing with his Norwegian peers in school, saying, “You must take the initiative to go to them and talk with them. You may go to them – once, twice, even three times, too. However, when they do not show any interest to talk with you, it gets a bit boring” (Pastoor, 2017, p. 155). The disinterest or unwillingness of Norwegian youth to engage with this unaccompanied boy resembles the English youth in Raisa’s statement. It was a clear lack of reciprocity to engage, regardless of the intentions being neutral or deliberately malicious. The girls struggled to not only make a connection with, but even speak with English peers at college, seemingly because there was an unwillingness on the part of the English students to reciprocate the effort. Nia suggested that her and the other girls’ limited English was the problem in some of these situations, saying:

You know, the only problem because the language, you know. If you have fluent language, like example, fluent English you can talk to them by yourself, you don't need help from other people. So if you respond them that 'why you doing that' and then explain that the problem and why they laugh for you, they can't do it next time. But the only problem now is you know, we can't talk to them properly, that's why [Lina nodding and saying 'yeah' in agreement]. (Nia session 5)

Nia’s words suggested that the girls were taking everything on themselves, taking the blame for other people’s prejudice toward them. While their limited English was *a* challenge it was far from the *only* problem. Rather a deep-seated issue appeared to be some of the English students’ discrimination or racism seen as a lack of reciprocation or lack of willingness to make an effort to mutually accommodate. It was a natural reaction, then, for Nia (and the others) to desire to have more fluent English in order to “*talk to them by yourself, you don't*

need help from other people.” While it is a valid desire to be able to speak up for oneself, Nia’s understanding of the situation painted the picture of an unaccompanied girl who had already endured trauma, survived severe disruptions to her life, and still held herself, and her own limited language, responsible for someone else’s reaction to her attempts to communicate in English. Nia, Lina, and Raisa’s words revealed that many of their experiences in the college setting were about being excluded and denied belonging without even a chance to form social bridges with English peers. In this way, they were learning from some of their English peers that they did not belong, were not welcome, and were not worth the effort of speaking to.

Talia’s experiences at college appeared less impacted by her identity as an English language learner as she had a more advanced English than the other girls and had got to a point where her English could ‘pass’ more easily in the community. At the time of the research, she reported being in a General English class alongside her math class and college course, Travel and Tourism. Talia’s overall more positive experiences at college are likely attributable to several factors. Many refugees experience challenges with formal education in their country of settlement due to a lack of familiarity with the UK education system and little to no English which can cause further barriers to accessing education and other learning opportunities (Morrice and Sandri, 2018). However, this did not appear to have been the case for Talia as she did have about eight years of formal education in the DRC, more than the other girls, and was taught in and spoke French, a language which shares the Latin alphabet with English while Amharic and Tigrinya do not. These factors likely supported her settling into college in England as she appeared to have adjusted more easily than the other girls. This was observed most clearly in the sense of camaraderie in her stories and support from her classmates, including English speaking peers with whom she appeared to have formed social bridges. It appeared that in these situations, Talia’s interactions with English peers built up her confidence which led to further opportunities to interact which increased her confidence, and so on in a positive feedback loop. In this way, Talia was able to construct belonging and inclusion aided perhaps by her easy sense of humor.

Talia spoke of positive interactions with her classmates in the following excerpt. We had just spoken about students in the other girls’ classes being naughty, and Talia contrasted that with her classmates on her course, saying:

But in my class is not like that. You know, when I start my class, we were like 24 students in class and then like 14 British in my class, and then they were nice. They just, if you don't know something, they just help you, you know... They know that you can't speak your English. English is not your first language, so they just keep helping you. If they got out, they can call you go with them like to the canteen, stuff like that. We are just friends. Even they do party, they just invite you... Yeah, but no we, they're just two groups, 12, 12 and then in my class, I got like 3, 4, 5 British but they are lovely. (Talía session 4)

Her description of her classmates stands in stark contrast to the other girls' classmates. Talía spoke of her British classmates helping her with her English, which was very different from the ridicule the other girls spoke of, and her descriptors of “*nice*” and “*lovely*” reveal a positive space of belonging constructed with her classmates, which was warm and inclusive. Unlike in the experiences of Nia, Lina, and Raisa, we see here what it can look like when that two-way aspect of mutual accommodation is enacted and an unaccompanied girl's efforts and desire to connect are reciprocated. The accepting space of interaction built with her classmates extended beyond the setting of the college classroom to social gatherings such as parties and online as well, as Talía stated, “*...I have some British students in my class...in my English class and my course...like friends... We have like one Snapchat group and then we talk...I have Snapchat, I love that. We have a group on Snap and we talk yeah*” (Talía session 10). In this way, we see that Talía experienced a consistent inclusion and belonging with English peers at college in the classroom, outside the classroom, and online. This suggests that a certain level of language may be required to enable the building of social bridges with ‘native’ English speakers. Talía also had the fortune to meet another international student who was not in any of her classes with whom she could speak French, which attests to how a shared language can support the formation of social bonds. Their initial meeting is best understood as what Wessendorf and Phillimore (2018) call a serendipitous encounter, although it developed into what they describe as a deep friendship, as Talía called this girl her “*good friend*” (Talía session 10). Wessendorf and Phillimore (2018) suggest both the encounter and friendship can aid refugees in becoming more socially embedded and settled in their country of asylum, which appeared to be the case for Talía. Talía did not share any negative experiences in the college setting, but conveyed rather, her ability and the opportunities she had to form both social bonds and social bridges with many of her peers.

In this section, we see that college is a space which can either enable or hinder the formation of different social connections and subsequently the construction of an unaccompanied girl's sense of belonging. The college space primarily allowed the girls to make social connections with English peers and other international ESOL peers. Nia, Raisa, and Lina predominantly formed social bonds with other ESOL students based on the shared identity of being an English language learner. Simultaneously, that same identity appeared in part to prevent them from establishing social bridges with non-language learners such as English peers as in this case it set them apart and made them vulnerable to discrimination and exclusion. In contrast, Talia formed social bridges with many of her English classmates despite her identity as an English language learner, which suggests that a higher level of English such as hers may be necessary to bridge that divide in a college setting. A key contributor to her successful social bridges seemed to be the mutual accommodation from her English peers, who were willing to help her with her English and did not discriminate against her, but rather constructed with her a space of belonging and inclusion, all of which helped to more socially embed Talia within the setting of college.

Literature which speaks to the experiences of refugee and unaccompanied youth within a formal education setting in their country of asylum tends to focus on academic challenges and achievements, including how a lack of language can hinder learning and opportunities. My research confirms the challenges of unaccompanied youth related to a lack of language and contributes to understandings of unaccompanied young people's lived experiences in formal education by exploring the types of social connections they may establish and their constructions of belonging through inclusion. It provides a view of how social connections in the college setting can differ and subsequently either hinder or enable an unaccompanied girl's construction of belonging. Through Talia's case, my research also confirms the heterogeneity of unaccompanied young people's experiences and highlights the benefits of mutual accommodation.

3. Belonging through faith

Faith was another space for interaction which all four girls had in common, which either enabled or hindered the formation of social connections and a sense of belonging. Nia, Lina and Raisa shared the same Orthodox Christian faith and attended the same church in London,

which was conducted in Tigrinya. They traveled every Sunday on the train one and a half hours there and one and a half hours home again. Talia, on the other hand, went to a local Catholic church just a few minutes away, which was conducted in English, and is discussed separately later.

Posselt et al. (2019) suggest that faith (also related to terms ‘religion’ and ‘spirituality’) is an enabler of refugee wellbeing for a variety of reasons such as the social and material support offered by faith communities and the sense of normalcy provided by participation in familiar rituals. Nia, Lina, and Raisa’s experiences echo this, and in this way, their identities as Orthodox Christians led them to not only practice that faith, but to establish social bonds with other Eritreans and other Orthodox Christians, connect with their home country and culture, and practice their first language, all of which contributed to the construction and maintenance of a sense of belonging as inclusion and home. Of the church, Nia stated:

...It's good. It's really nice by the way, to go in church...We, it is like our language, church, and we meet a lot of friends, lot of Eritrean people, really nice... Very sad, nothing to do [with church during the week]...like just every week [Sunday]...just have like lunch, something like that, in Eritrean restaurant...It's good to have...and there is no like, you know, lot of people here [locally] we can meet. And when we meet [other Eritreans], just like we really, really happy. (Nia session 2)

Lina agreed with Nia’s depiction of the church group as welcoming while Raisa added at another time that “*The church you just, nice place, nice...pray together...and eating together. Have food after you pray...*” (Raisa session 7). Attending the church was something they looked forward to, and it was evident that the girls valued the connection to their home culture and to others who understood where they had come from. Ní Raghallaigh and Gilligan's (2010, p. 4) research with unaccompanied children recognizes how often religion has been a dominant part of children’s lives prior to migration, and the way it can serve as a link between their “old and new ‘worlds’.” This resonated with the girls’ experiences of practicing their faith in England in that even while they were practicing it in a new “world,” they had a tie to their old “world” through their fellow Eritreans and the beliefs they shared. Nia contrasted this positive experience with the challenge of meeting people locally, emphasizing how valuable the church was to provide a sense of familiarity and home that could not always be found elsewhere.

As Posselt et al. (2019) suggest, faith may also enable access to a faith community's social and material support. Similarly, the girls' participation in their church contributed to the construction of belonging by functioning as a resource and source of information and social capital for the girls. Other members of the church, also from Eritrea or nearby there, were available to support the girls in better understanding how to navigate the systems of England as many of them had been in England longer than girls. Nia and Lina highlighted this aspect, saying:

Lina: *Yeah they [at the church] did that, like information, more explain about things. Maybe if...they stay like for long time in England, they know how to do it.*

Nia: *...they know the system of the UK, and they just give advice and something like that...it's more helpful for me...because first of all, it's like in my own language, I understand perfect exactly what they say to me, and it's more understanding in my language, and I don't know...they just give us advice that they know about this country. (session 2)*

As Ager and Strang (2008) suggest, a lack of information and understanding of the system is a great barrier to integration for refugees settling in the UK, and one way to minimize this barrier is to provide information in a refugee's first language. A lack of information about many UK systems, then, is a common hurdle for refugees and likewise unaccompanied girls such as Nia, Lina, and Raisa. Participation in a church such as the girls experienced is one way in which this barrier can be minimized as they were able to draw on the social bonds they formed there to inquire and receive more information about England and the systems they must navigate such as education or social welfare payments. While Haven supported the girls with accommodation and information about UK systems and daily living, and did these things the best it could, it was always done in English. As Nia stated, the information shared by others at the church was very beneficial because it was shared in Tigrinya. This seemed to be a comfort to the girls that they could instantly comprehend and in this way, spend more time understanding and processing the information, rather than fearing they had missed something important in translation, as Nia stated, *"it's more understanding in my language."* It also follows that because most of their fellow church members were originally from Eritrea and neighboring nations, they had a similar cultural background to the girls with which they approached what they learned of English culture and systems. That is, a fellow Eritrean who had been in England for many years could likely explain better than an English key worker at Haven how to navigate and understand English culture by anticipating what might be

confusing for Nia, Lina, or Raisa, having been in that same situation. They would likely know what the girls needed to know and what would be most challenging for them and be able to support them through new and transitional hurdles. As Lina said above, *“they know how to do it.”*

Beyond sharing information, the members of the church established the space of interaction as one of belonging and inclusion by supporting each other physically, emotionally, and even financially. Raisa spoke of this, saying, *“...by the way, they nice, respect you and ask you what you need, what you want... maybe some people sick, and some people maybe...they give money something. If you ill, go and hospital, see you in hospital...yeah they very nice people...”* (Raisa session 11). In this way, the social bonds of the faith group manifested in their care for each other, and in being able to rely on each other and turn to each other in times of need. Wessendorf and Phillimore (2018) give a similar example of one of their asylum-seeking participants who found a church in England to be instrumental as a supportive platform for church members to assist each other through the sharing of information and resources. Not only was he able to receive assistance and advice, but he was pleased to be able to pay it forward later for others who were newly arrived in the area. This is consistent with Nia, Lina, and Raisa’s stories of their church, in which others who had been living in England longer could and did advise and support the girls.

While their time within the church appeared to be positive, there were a couple of potential barriers – distance, time, and cost – which could have potentially kept Nia, Lina, and Raisa from participating in their church. As mentioned earlier, the Orthodox Christian church was not local and the girls had to travel to get there, three hours roundtrip, which they did, demonstrating a serious commitment to their identities as Orthodox Christians and the further access that granted them. Of the three girls, the travel time seemed to affect Raisa the most, as she said, *“I want to move London...cause church...because here, every Sunday I'm tired going there...and very expensive money. Still now, social service give me ticket”* (Raisa session 11). Here she was referring to the fact that social services paid for the train tickets every week, which demonstrated a positive and tangible way that the local authority supported the girls’ cultural and faith identities. However, Raisa stated that occurred *“still now,”* understanding that as she got older, her support would decrease. For this reason, and to shorten her travel time, she desired to move physically closer to the church. So, while at the

time of the research these barriers were not enough to dissuade the girls from participating in their church, there was the possibility that they could in the future. As unaccompanied young people, the girls had financial support from social services, but as they continue to age and eventually lose that monetary assistance, the cost barrier may take effect. Although, there is also the possibility that as the girls continue to settle in England, they may very well uproot and move, as Raisa already desired to do, which could alleviate some of these barriers e.g. shorter travel time and decreased travel cost.

As mentioned above, Talia stood out as having had a different experience through her identity as a Catholic and seemed to construct belonging in a more limited way in her faith group, or not as deeply as the other three girls. As Talia was Catholic, there were more churches available to her, and closer to where she lived, although primarily conducted in English. So, she had easier access than the other girls with regard to time, distance, and cost and, in fact, her foster family introduced her to the church which they attended themselves. While these aspects could suggest that Talia might be able to form bonds more conveniently in the church, she actually spoke of certain things in an almost negative way, saying what was not, rather than what was, and did not convey a similar happiness and feeling of being included as deeply in her church as Nia, Lina, and Raisa experienced. The following excerpt illustrates Talia's general experience in church in England:

I was Catholic but here when I came, I just find Catholic church, and then it's just the same as mine, but here of course in English...it was like boring [going to the Catholic church in England]...cause they never sing...no, it's just [they do] sing but no like Congo...very boring...No [one] like my age. I don't know but here [in England], I see like people with my age, they don't go to church...because to this church, I just meet like old girl, old woman, yeah. My foster mom's friends, stuff like that, but no like church people from my age... (Talia session 10)

In contrast to the other girls' experiences, Talia conveyed a lack of connection with others at church because as she described it, there were no other young people around her age to engage with as she perceived that English youth did not really attend the church. A significantly higher percentage of people in the DRC (95%) than in the UK (30%) report feeling religious (Smith, 2018), which may have been why Talia met few English young people at the church. Likewise, while the other girls were able to connect to their home country culture, faith, and language through their church, Talia's English Catholic church

seemed to have few Congolese people. So, although her identity as a Catholic led her to a Catholic church, other factors at play hindered her sense of inclusion. In particular, she noted the difference in music between her church in the DRC and the church in England, saying that the music and singing at the English church was boring, and suggesting that music in her experience at her Congolese church was livelier or more participative. Wild-Wood (2008, p. 174) echoes this observation of “lively, emotive worship music” in the Congolese church in her research on Christian identity and migration in the DRC. So, while Talia could practice her faith in England with other Catholics, her overall faith experience was distinctly different from what she knew before, and the description of her English church experience spoke of very few social connections formed and consequently less of a sense of being included.

In this section, we see that faith is a space which can either hinder or facilitate the formation of social connections and consequently a sense of belonging as inclusion, home, and familiarity. Nia, Lina, and Raisa’s faith space supported them to form social bonds based on the shared identities as Orthodox Christians and Eritreans. In this way, their faith created opportunities to not only bond over the faith itself, but to bond over shared cultural and linguistic identities as well. For Talia, the faith space seemed alternately to hinder the formation of social connections with other (largely English) Catholics because cultural aspects, such as music, of the English Catholic church were noticeably different from the Congolese Catholic church Talia had participated in before. Additionally, the demographic makeup of the church group was different from her church experiences in the DRC and there were no young people around Talia’s age that she could befriend. So, while Talia had access to a Catholic church and could practice her faith, the church group was not made up of Congolese or young people and did not support additional cultural or linguistic ties for her as the other girls had at their church. Therefore, while the girls’ identities as Orthodox Christians and a Catholic granted them access to churches, it did not necessarily guarantee the formation of social connections or a sense of inclusion beyond that.

There is a small but growing body of literature around the importance of faith for unaccompanied young people, which is supported by the above discussion. Kohli (2011) found that for unaccompanied young people in the UK, religion plays a role in both activating and maintaining a sense of belonging, and providing comfort in a potentially hostile environment while Carlson et al. (2012, p. 7) describe faith as a “source of comfort

and encouragement” in their research with unaccompanied refugee children in the United States. Both of these pieces of research resonate with Nia, Lina, and Raisa’s experiences practicing their faith with other Orthodox Christians and Eritreans as they were provided with the comfort of familiar language and culture in a country where they experienced periods of exclusion and being located outside the local culture and language. The church was a refuge in which to breathe easy in a hostile environment. Likewise, Ní Raghallaigh and Gilligan (2010) describe religion as a powerful coping strategy that provides unaccompanied children with not only a sense of continuity and stability, but also companionship and distraction from struggles in their daily lives. ‘Continuity’ conveys well the experience of being able to connect parts of one’s old life with parts of one’s new life, just as Nia, Raisa, and Lina were able to link cultural, linguistic, and faith experiences within the church group in England to their experiences from their home countries. In contrast to the continuity the other girls seemed to experience, Talia appeared to encounter in part a sense of discontinuity or disconnect at her church. Apart from the faith itself, Talia indicated that she had little in common with anyone at the church. While this does not indicate any diminishing of her faith or what or how she believed, it did appear to hinder her making social connections and consequently feeling more included at church.

Adults and social institutions such as a church or school can stand in for family as a protective barrier against adverse outcomes in the country of settlement (Carlson et al., 2012). As unaccompanied young people are often without their nuclear or extended families, they lack that daily support and cultural learning which would primarily occur within the home. My research supports this understanding that faith may function to fill part of the void left in an unaccompanied young person’s life. For Nia, Lina, and Raisa, the cultural and linguistic familiarity of their church provided one such environment of support and cultural learning which they did not have with their families at the time. Alternately, Talia’s case suggests that a faith space may not always serve as a partial stand in for family and home culture. There is diversity in faith, from different religions to the different denominations within them; diversity in what is available to young people, either locally or distantly; diversity in the variation of churches as culturally English or culturally from another country or region. It cannot be assumed that any unaccompanied young person who follows a faith will be able to establish a sense of belonging as there are other factors at play. However, while assumptions should not be made about what unaccompanied young people might need,

support for religious or cultural identities should always be offered. This may be in the form of social services paying for train tickets as they did for Nia, Raisa, and Lina, or it could be a foster carer introducing a young person to a potential church to attend as happened with Talia. I suggest that this is about the provision of opportunities for an unaccompanied young person to engage and grow in the ways they choose, and that faith is one example of how a young person may choose to engage in their country of settlement.

4. Belonging through the practice of food

Food and food practices came up repeatedly in conversation with the girls as an unexpected space where the construction of belonging was either supported or hindered through social connections. As it was not a theme or topic I anticipated, the girls and I stumbled upon it while brainstorming together, and we were often eating or drinking, which perhaps contributed to its emergence in our conversations. As we continued to talk about food practices, I observed how impactful those experiences were in constructing spaces of belonging. Punch et al. (2009) write of the strong connective value of eating with others, suggesting that especially for refugee children, food and meals can function as a medium through which people make social connections and in this way, “food is a means to belong” (Punch et al., 2010, p. 230). The formation of social connections was apparent in many of the girls’ stories around food practices in the demonstrations of care and affection which subsequently encouraged a sense of belonging as inclusion. However, drawing out differences between their experiences of food practices in England and in their home countries highlighted the moments in which they lacked the feeling of belonging, familiarity, and home that can occur around the sharing of food or a meal.

One such difference we discussed was around hospitality as when someone visits another person’s house and is offered food or drink, which in the girls’ home culture was meant to make the guest feel welcome and comfortable and cared for, and to foster a sense of inclusion for all. In the following excerpt, Nia explains her understanding of hospitality and etiquette toward guests:

By the way, Anna, this question is to ask for people just for [being] respectful, you know. ‘Do you want this?’ If she [the guest] say to me ‘no,’ I say ‘Please? You have to eat because you come from outside’ and something like that. You have to say that.

In here, in this country, no one tell me that 'please doing this.' There is people very, very kind, people they say to you like that. But most people they don't ask you 'please eat' like that 'please because you doing this and you doing this,' and then no one like this. But in my country, just to like, you know to show them respectful, you say 'please can you eat this? Please because you come from outside and the sunny outside, and drink.' Just like that... Yeah you want them comfortable...normally just people they can't sit comfortable, but maybe they feel shy something like that, timid like that, you have to say, you can say 'Do you want tea drink?' something like that... (Nia session 5)

There was a sense of missing that kind of interaction in Nia's words – "*in this country, no one tell me that 'please doing this'*" – as she highlighted her understanding of hospitality as a sign of respect and the difference in this she perceived between Eritrea and England. Raisa added that "*In the Eritrea, no just ask...do you want food? Do you want drink?...Important you give for them. Important guest eat, go, you know is important...any peoples come your house...you eat something, yeah*" (Raisa session 5), agreeing that it was culturally correct to provide for a guest, and seeming happy that she should do that well, and be able to provide for others in that way. To this, Lina, laughing, added, "*No, you have to ask them, but you have to ask like lot times...*" (Lina session 5) as though rather than simply asking, it was imploring. Their comments highlighted a cultural expectation to provide for guests which spoke to an aspect of performing belonging. That is, imploring guests to eat and drink was a practice 'done' and performed by those belonging to the girls' culture. Anything less than imploring seemed almost to demonstrate a lack of care for the guest in one's home. It came across, then, not only as an offering of hospitality, but an opportunity to experience togetherness, to commune together in a comfortable, inclusive way. This echoes Neely et al.'s (2014) review of the literature on social relationships and young people's food practices, in which they discovered that the sharing of resources was a sign of friendship as "consuming a meal together also strengthens relationships" (Neely et al., 2014, p. 54). For the girls, repeatedly offering one's own food resources was an offer of something deeper than nourishment. It was an offer to be together and construct a space of inclusion, and as the girls spoke about this, it seemed that they desired not only to receive that care and inclusion, but to offer it to others. Overall, it seemed that the girls most often experienced a lack of what they understood as hospitality in England where it had existed previously for them.

Another difference between their experiences in England and their home countries that Nia, Lina, and Raisa noted was a communal way of eating together from one plate. Neely et al.

(2014) echo this communal togetherness, saying, “Food by itself was not seen as something that made it feel like home. A sense of togetherness was created through the relationships and feelings associated with food” (Neely et al., 2014, p. 56). In this way, food practice is a space for the construction of an affective belonging, a belonging as emotion and desire. This excerpt with the girls illustrates this idea:

Nia: ...when I came here I don't eat, like I don't eat with the people that I were live with them, just I make it by myself and I, at anytime that I want to eat, just make it and eat it...I think...but actually, you know, in my country we eat together. And here, first time you can't eat as you eat in back home because it's like that...if you eat something alone, I don't know. It just like that. You eat very, very small

Anna: Do you girls like to share food like with a group of people? Do you like having that option of everything on the table?

Lina: Yeah, one plate

Nia: You still eat...If people, for example, if I go her [Lina's] house...we can eat together. But like people that come from here, is maybe they don't like to eat together or something like that, but people, if they like to eat together, we can eat. Very, very nice...[We can eat together at] homes, not in the restaurant...We did like that...We already shared before pizza (session 5)

The way in which Nia spoke of a sense of togetherness over communal eating emitted a kind of nostalgia or feeling of desire for how things were, for the familiar comfort of being with others. Nia's statement of “*you eat something alone...you eat very, very small*” evoked a feeling of separateness, as if a person eats because it is necessary, but there is no enjoyment in eating alone. Nia also referenced her experience of first arriving in England, saying, “*I don't eat with the people that I were live with them, just I make it by myself,*” suggesting that she was responsible to make food for herself and often was alone to do so. Nia was initially placed in a foster home on arrival, although she did not stay long and did not speak about it. Her statement here revealed that there was perhaps a lack of comfort or connection with her initial foster carers, and that she felt alone and ate alone. This would have stood out in contrast to her previous life experiences of eating and communing together in her home country. Although, Nia did point out that even in the research space conversing right there, she and Lina had shared one pizza from the same plate, which they likely enjoyed as “*very, very nice*” (Nia). As it happened on that occasion, their actions realized their desire for communion and belonging through food.

The idea of eating together with others produced a happier tone in our conversations. In our research space it was sometimes challenging to gather thoughts from all the girls, but on this topic, every girl present was in agreement that communing over food felt happy and felt like inclusion. In this way, the food itself was not important, but rather its power as a space of gathering. As the girls stated:

Raisa: *Sharing chips...sharing food, yeah, it is important...cause we...together... Yeah like now*

Lina: *If you eat together, you like be happy...*

Nia: *Not in this country [the girls all laugh]*

Lina: *Yeah in my country is like this, you know. If, if people, some friendly eat with you, it's like more learn a lot...Sometimes like English people they ask you, do you want dinner?...Just one time they ask you, you know. If I say them no, that's it. They can't repeat... (session 5)*

The girls' words resonate with Kohli et al.'s (2010) research with unaccompanied young people in care in the UK, which suggests that food has a power to evoke a sense of home, familiarity, comfort, and belonging. They propose that food "is full of significance for asylum seeking children as a way of sustaining the shoots of recovery and re-growth, because it symbolises the surrender and recapture of the smell, taste and texture of ordinary life..." (Kohli et al., 2010, p. 234). This sentiment echoed in the girls' stories, thoughts, and experiences of food practices as they enjoyed the idea and practice of eating together, even from the same plate, as was once more regular for them. Food practice was a space in which they indicated a desire to once again feel a sense of home, familiarity, and belonging.

Alternately, at the end of the above excerpt, Lina said, "*Sometimes like English people they ask you, do you want dinner?...Just one time they ask you, you know. If I say them no, that's it. They can't repeat...*" (Lina session 5). This revealed what could have been a misunderstanding that had the unfortunate and unintentional effect of promoting exclusion. There is a seemingly common tacit understanding in English culture that if someone says no to something (e.g. a dinner invitation), they are simply not interested. The answer is taken at face value, and the asker does not feel the need to ask again as would be more customary in Eritrean culture according to the girls' previous discussions. Perhaps this was not understood

by Lina or the other girls and was perceived as rudeness or exclusion. Punch et al. (2010) found in their work with vulnerable children in a UK care home that “interactions around food are consequently interpreted from different perspectives and can involve multiple meanings” (Punch et al., 2010, p. 227). Similarly, Nia, Lina, and Raisa approached food practices from a different perspective than some of the English people they encountered. In part due to lower levels of English and subsequent limited interaction with English people, Nia, Lina, and Raisa appeared to have somewhat limited experience with English culture at the time of the research. As a non-British individual, what I know personally of English culture is of hospitality and the offering of tea or a beverage to anyone who enters the house, sometimes even workers such as plumbers or electricians. However, it was likely that my experiences with English people and in English homes were different from the girls and certainly that contributed to our different understandings.

In some instances, food practice provided an opportunity for the girls to shine, so to speak. These were situations of food practice which seemed not only to affirm their belonging and connection to their home country and culture, but also to position them as experts on Eritrean practices and customs. This seemed especially significant in England, where they were not often positioned as experts, and moments of cultural exchange allowed the girls to become conveyers of information and learning, not only consumers. For example, within our research space, there arose an opportunity for the girls to teach me how to eat traditional Eritrean stew and injera, and they were not only happy and willing to instruct me, but kind about it. It was as though they desired for me to be included with them in that way, as though extending an invitation to me to belong at that time. When asked how they might teach English people to eat together as they do, Nia gave this thoughtful and considered response:

I would say just first, I would ask them to have one plate for all of us, and also have to explain them what, how to eat...That's good idea because if they don't like eat [like this], leave them [laughing]...Let them they eat alone because they grow by this [way], so, you know, it's hard to change or it's harder to eat the first time with people...One day, you know, when I was with people, just with [foster] family here, and I go to [get] injera from London and I make it at home, and they really want to eat, my family...and I make and I give them [they] just like eat, no together...we didn't eat together, just alone...they like it, they really like it. (Nia session 5)

Her reply had many components to it and acknowledged multiple ways of practicing food. It first located Nia as an expert who could teach others how to eat from one plate, to take injera

in hand and scoop from a communal portion of stew. For her, this had a sense togetherness which lacked when eating from individual plates or eating alone. She also empathetically acknowledged that that could be challenging to learn as, according to her, English people had been raised to be more accustomed to eating alone. Her empathy suggested that she remembered her own experience of having to adapt to eating alone. Nia also briefly mentioned her former foster family to give the example that they expressed interest in trying injera and did, which again positioned Nia as an expert. However, the potential togetherness she could have experienced in that moment of sharing injera was cut short as the foster family simply took the injera away to eat, and Nia was once again left alone. This was perhaps a missed opportunity to socially connect.

Talia appeared to experience belonging and inclusion through food practices differently from the other girls, sharing positive interactions of food practice with her foster family and sharing a more negative experience of being unable to eat with other unaccompanied girls because she did not like their traditional food. Talia recounted moments of cultural exchange and appreciation with her foster family, saying, *“I make plantains for them...my foster mom showed me how to cook Indian rice. It's better than Congolese rice, that's why I just like to eat [at] their house”* (Talia session 10). Talia both tried something new, cooking Indian rice, and also shared something new, plantains, with her foster family. These occasions spoke of a desire and willingness to spend time together, which demonstrated value for each other. It showed that her foster family valued Talia's heritage and what she brought to their family, not only including her in the family, but inviting her to contribute to it. Talia's experiences resonate with Sirriyeh's (2013) description of unaccompanied young people's “like-family placement” in foster care in England, which not only points to foster carers making food for young people, but also suggests “incorporating young people's food practices within existing family food practices” (Sirriyeh, 2013, p. 9). In this way, young people are invited to become active members in the house and to experience an element of ‘normal’ family life, something which can be absent in the disrupted life of an unaccompanied young person. After Talia moved into semi-independent accommodation with Haven, her foster mother continued to provide food for her which perpetuated Talia's inclusion in the family and as cooking was something that Talia personally disliked, this display of affection must have been particularly special for her.

On the other hand, Talia had a less positive experience with food when she first met Nia and Raisa before she moved into Haven's semi-independent accommodation with them. The following excerpt describes her first meeting with them when they invited her to a party at their house:

...the first time I met them, I was living with my foster mom and then they had a party here [at their house] and they call me and then I go there. They just eat injera. I didn't eat basically...I went home and then I start asking for food and then my foster mom tell me, asking me, 'But you went to the party, why didn't you eat there?' I said, 'They cooked so hot food, I didn't eat there because it was so hot.' (Talia session 10)

The Eritrean food and flavors were too hot and spicy for Talia, so that she could not eat it. While they may have been in the same room and sat at the same table, they did not experience the same kind of togetherness that was comprised of eating and sharing the same food that Nia, Lina, and Raisa spoke of enjoying and valuing earlier. Talia's description of the party conveyed a lack of enjoyment, and perhaps a more limited connection with the other girls because of that. Talia explained that the next time she went to a party at the other girls' house, her foster mother suggested she eat before going. While food and food practices are not the only glue for a social connection or friendship, they can be influential and may have contributed in part to Talia's experiences just on the edge of the Nia-Lina-Raisa circle.

In this section, we see that food practice may either enable or impede the establishment of social connections and consequently a sense of belonging as inclusion or home. For Nia, Raisa, and Lina, the practice of food often served to affirm their bonds with each other and perpetuate a feeling of home and familiarity as they came from the same cultural background with the same cultural expectations, and so could relax in those moments and not have to learn new customs. The practice of food also allowed Talia and Lina to form social bridges with their foster families, which suggests that food practice may be one way to bridge a divide between people of different languages and cultures. Alternately, Nia was hindered from forming a social bridge with her foster carer through food practice due to the carer's desire or habit to eat alone which subsequently left Nia alone to eat as well. In a way, Talia, too, was prevented from developing a deeper bond and sense of inclusion with the other girls over the practice of food as Eritrean food was too spicy for her and she could not join in and enjoy it with them.

My research confirms existing literature which suggests that food has the ability to symbolically convey feelings and emotions, to welcome and to communicate an invitation to belong (Emond et al., 2014; Kohli et al., 2010; Punch et al., 2009, 2010). My research also contributes to understandings of food practice for unaccompanied young people by suggesting that food practices can affect social relationships and a sense of inclusion and belonging when the unaccompanied young person is located as an expert in situations regarding their home country food and food practices. This experience can occur when they share their culture's food, and even more when they 'teach' about the food and food practices to others such as a foster carer or social worker or peer. Just as Talia was able to share plantains with her foster family, Nia was able to introduce injera to her foster family, and Lina was able to share injera and Eritrean stew with her foster mother in the previous chapter. When we spoke about it in the research session, Nia, Raisa, and Lina were very open and happy to teach me how to eat Eritrean food in the customary way, which we did within a couple weeks of that conversation. They shone there as they were the experts and could establish themselves as confident and competent in an environment where they were not often positioned as such. This also demonstrated the importance of recognizing and valuing the cultural background of an unaccompanied young person and its potential to boost their confidence. Sirriyeh's (2013) research touches on this with regard to the importance of unaccompanied young people in care being able to include some of their own food practices into their foster family's food practices, as Talia was able to do.

5. Haven: supporting integration

This section is written up separately with the intent to provide additional context around the girls' lives as shared in this thesis and does not attempt to integrate with the analysis of the girls' data. Haven as an organization was another space which all the girls encountered and through which they interacted with their key workers. In my conversations with the girls, it was interesting to note how little they spoke of Haven and their key workers, as though Haven and their key workers filled a practical and necessary role but were not necessarily emotionally attached to or close with the girls. I do not believe this diminished the work of Haven or reflected on the key workers' commitment to their work with unaccompanied young people, but rather it shed some light on the feel of the relationships between young people and key workers. As an organization, Haven provided their unaccompanied young

people with support and further opportunities to settle and integrate in their local community. The role of Haven's key workers, as mentioned in chapter three, was to work directly with unaccompanied young people to empower them to become independent adults in England by guiding them in their daily lives to do such things as attend college or navigate social welfare payments. This section considers the interviews I conducted with four key workers and is written up separately in order to preserve the voices of the girls as primary throughout the majority of this thesis. At the time of the research, key workers Sam, Laura, and Paul were working at Haven with unaccompanied young people aged 16-21, and Sara was a former Haven key worker who had recently transitioned into the position of a personal advisor (PA) in a neighboring local authority. I had previously met Sara at Haven when I began volunteering, but by the time I started interviewing participants, she had transitioned into the role of a PA where she primarily supported young people aged 18-21 who had aged out of local authority care. She also worked with social workers to support and prepare 17-year-olds to transition out of care and from having a social worker to having a PA. While her current caseload was made up of both British born and unaccompanied youth, we focused on the unaccompanied young people.

These key workers' perspectives provide insight into the experiences of unaccompanied young people, although I note that I did not speak with them specifically about the four unaccompanied girls who participated in my research in order to maintain confidentiality. Devenney (2020) suggests that professionals such as social workers, and similarly key workers and PAs, may develop either strong, familial-type bonds with unaccompanied young people they support, or establish less emotional relationships which are still highly valued for their practical support. Conversely, Chase (2010) warns that unaccompanied young people may not necessarily trust such professionals due to mistrust of the system or feeling as though they are being monitored by the system. In the case of the girls and key workers in this research project, I got the feeling that their relationships were as Devenney suggests, less emotional but valued for their practical support. They had the sense of being somewhat 'parental' in nature or what I describe as 'friendly supervision' as the key workers were called to do such things as discourage late night parties at the young people's supported accommodation or support them in opening a bank account. As noted in chapter three, each key worker at Haven had a caseload of several young people with whom they met weekly for 2-10 hours each, although, one key worker noted that, "*Historically we've always delivered*

more hours than we're paid to deliver. It's just if you track the actual hours spent by young people, I guess it's a great bang for buck for social services" (Paul). This in part reflects a gap between the support and contact hours that unaccompanied young people actually need and what they often receive, as social services only paid for a certain level of support when, in fact, key workers believed that many young people needed more. Haven appeared to try to fill in some of that gap despite not being paid for it, which perhaps pointed to the key workers' commitment to their work with the young people and explained Haven's use of volunteers. The key workers had also all previously achieved higher education degrees in social work, human rights, clinical psychology, and development and emergencies, which further suggested their interest in and desire to engage with issues around young people and social justice.

A challenge to key working and supporting the integration of the young people appeared to be limitations in funding, as mentioned above that key workers often worked more hours than Haven was paid to by the local authority. Another potential challenge was some re-structuring that seemed to be occurring at Haven while I volunteered and researched there as I witnessed staff come and go, and shift positions. One of the key workers mentioned in an interview that, *"...there's a bit of a change up here right now, so it's all being formalized exactly where we all stand..."* (Paul). This perhaps disrupted their work and interactions with the young people as some of the key workers and other Haven staff moved around the organization.

In the interviews with Sam, Laura, Paul, and Sara, three primary themes emerged in their work with and support of the young people. One was around the importance of forming social connections to support belonging and integration, which was in part promoted through the support of young people's religious and cultural identities, as demonstrated in Nia, Lina, and Raisa's experiences being supported to attend church in London. A second theme considered the challenge of managing the young people's expectations as they often arrived at Haven with high or unrealistic expectations, which the key workers had to moderate. The third theme looked at the key workers' perceived differences between the experiences of unaccompanied girls and boys with a focus on the resilience of girls.

As the first theme, the key workers emphasized the importance of forming social connections to support belonging and integration and suggested that the main avenues through which young people made social connections were college, sports activities, and religious and cultural communities. Just within Haven, socializing between the unaccompanied young people of different nationalities, ethnicities, and backgrounds was promoted by organizing an informal, weekly football get together. Although, research suggests that female refugees are less likely to participate in sports than their male counterparts (Doidge and Sandri, 2018) and the four girls in this research study appeared uninterested in participating in sporting activities. So, while Haven's girls were certainly not barred from the football get together, they seemed unlikely to participate. This could suggest that Haven generally focused its activities, whether intentionally or not, around the interests of the boys as they account for the majority of Haven's unaccompanied young people. To my knowledge, there were no activities offered by Haven specifically for the girls.

The program through which I volunteered with Haven was also intentionally designed to support the young people's belonging and integration in the community through connection with a local volunteer. It explicitly aimed for a young person and a volunteer to meet weekly one-to-one and for the volunteer to provide informal support for everyday things related to living in the community such as going to a shop, chatting over a coffee or tea, or even working on college assignments. In these ways, a sense of inclusion in the local community was meant to be supported through the formation of a relationship with a local person and through further practice of the English language and through improved understanding of local behaviors and customs.

Another way that key workers encouraged social connections and integration was through support of the young people's religious and cultural identities by means of participation in faith and cultural communities, which was highlighted as a priority for both Haven and the local authority, as mentioned in the local context in chapter one. Although one key worker stated that funding for the support of these identities “...*hugely depends on the local authority and here we are quite lucky with like they are very supportive, more so than I think many other places*” (Laura). This financial support was evident in that social services funded Nia, Raisa, and Lina's train tickets to London to attend their church each week. The key

workers expressed concern that funding cuts resulting from austerity measures could begin to impact on this kind of support for their unaccompanied young people.

Another theme and significant challenge the key workers noted in our interviews was managing the young people's expectations. They found that the young people often came to them with high or unrealistic expectations such as being able to quickly progress through education to become engineers, doctors, or pilots, or being able to work immediately on arrival in the UK, or having a flat to themselves through Haven's supported accommodation. Literature demonstrates that unaccompanied young people often have expectations put upon them by others, such as family or educators (Meloni, 2019), or the professionals in their lives (Chase et al., 2019). It is also recognized that refugees value education and often have high aspirations for their own education despite the many barriers in their way (Dryden-Peterson, 2017; Stevenson and Willott, 2007). Of the four girls in this project, just Nia and Raisa seemed to have somewhat high aspirations for work, saying that they would like to work as a pharmacist and midwife respectively, but they were aware that that meant a university degree and that they did not have sufficient English to pursue such courses at that time. Perhaps by the time I met them, they had had sufficient time to moderate any expectations they had on arrival in the UK. However, the key workers' interviews echoed this understanding of high or unrealistic expectations. In their work with unaccompanied youth, managing these expectations meant disappointing the young people at times and perhaps contributed to the 'parental' element in their relationships. For example, many of the young people who came to Haven from foster care had fostering relationships which had broken down in part because they wanted more independence. However, upon arriving at Haven, key workers needed to support them to understand that supported accommodation has its own challenges around managing one's daily life through cooking, cleaning, getting along with housemates, or more independently attending appointments. Hopkins and Hill identified a lack of understanding around expectations and suggested that unaccompanied young people needed to be spoken with plainly and clearly around the "reality of their expectations in their new lives" (Hopkins and Hill, 2010, p. 404). The key workers at Haven tried to fill in this gap in their work with unaccompanied young people.

Finally, the key workers spoke of the differences they perceived in the ways that unaccompanied girls and boys settle and integrate. Haven worked with some 20-30

unaccompanied girls and boys throughout the research and they were accommodated in 4-6 houses managed by Haven. Of the total young people, 4-5 were girls, and they lived in a girls-only house and Lina separately had a flat to herself. As most of Haven's key workers were female, the unaccompanied boys had either male or female key workers while the unaccompanied girls always had a female key worker. The key workers suggested that overall the girls were more resilient than the boys as a result of having already lived somewhat tougher lives than the boys. The following excerpt explains:

...many of the women...if they come from cultures where there's an inequality between men and women, maybe women have become more accepting of the fact that not everything is great...so women can kind of accept that things are a bit rubbish sometimes, but you grin and bear it. I think that may be what some of them do.
(Laura)

Hodes et al. (2008) found that symptoms of PTSD were higher amongst their participant unaccompanied girls than boys, which could indeed suggest that the girls had experienced more hardship than the boys in some way. However, the key workers in this study perceived higher resilience and higher independence in their unaccompanied girls withstanding the limbo of their asylum claims better and learning independent living skills (ILSs) more easily or willingly than most of the boys. Some boys' seeming reluctance to learn ILSs was attributed to having likely grown up in a more patriarchal culture, as suggested, "*...that's what boys struggle with maybe at the beginning, with taking responsibility that they...associated to women back in their countries*" (Sara). Key workers also perceived that the girls formed social connections differently, that they established groups and friends with whom they could talk about feelings and cultivate a support network to share the burdens of daily life and contribute to a more positive mental state. Larkin (2015), too, found that unaccompanied girls were perceived by social workers to be more able or willing to verbalize their emotions than unaccompanied boys. Perhaps such support networks contributed to what was perceived as greater resilience as the girls did not feel so alone in their struggles. Alternately, key workers suggested that more macho attitudes contributed to the mental health challenges faced by the boys as there was perhaps less of a support network and subsequently less emotional and mental support. This echoes research which proposes that 'the status of men' can be lost in forced migration and impact negatively on self-esteem or mental health (Kaiser, 2016).

This idea of girls having greater resilience resonates with my own overall sense of the girls in this research project as I perceived that they just kept going forward and kept wanting to learn. In spite of Raisa's separation from her daughter and sometimes low mood, she always had a smile for me and was happy to spend time together. I perceived Nia as fiercely independent and very eager to learn. Talia laughed often with me and was keen to share with me the things she enjoyed such as her favorite music. While the most reserved of the four, Lina had a sense of calmly and steadily moving forward about her. All of this conveyed to me a sense of the girls' resilience and capacity to keep going despite their hardships.

6. Conclusion

College, faith, and the practice of food were three key spaces in which the girls formed social bonds and social bridges. In their interactions with these social connections the girls learned both where they were welcome and included and where they were not. Within the college setting, their identities as English language learners played a role in the girls' constructions of belonging. Nia, Lina, and Raisa were able to establish social bonds with other international ESOL peers and feel included with them, but struggled to form social bridges with English peers as they were excluded or discriminated against. Talia appeared to form social bridges with her English peers at college and build spaces of inclusion, which suggests that in that setting a higher language level such as hers may be necessary to establish those social bridges. Within the faith space, Nia, Lina, and Raisa learned that they were welcome not only to practice their faith identities, but to feel included in a community and to maintain ties to their home country faith, culture, and language, and they appeared to find comfort in performing and taking part in the familiar customs of their faith and culture. Conversely, Talia's identity as a Catholic may have led her to a church to practice her faith, but cultural differences between the Congolese Catholic and English Catholic experiences prevented her from constructing a sense of inclusion to the same depth as the other girls, which highlights how influential shared culture can be in the formation of social connections. The practice of food unexpectedly provided a welcoming space for some of the girls and their foster carers to share their culture's cuisines and form social bridges, which suggests the power of food practice for bridging linguistic and cultural barriers, even if temporarily. Alternately, Nia, Lina, and Raisa also learned that the practice of food could be a space of unbelonging at times as they missed a sense of community, home, and familiarity. Haven had the aim to

support their unaccompanied young people's senses of being included and settled into the local community, but it seemed that at times the activities provided by Haven were more geared toward the boys, and perhaps unintentionally excluded the girls they supported, which in part suggests a gap in the provision of care for unaccompanied girls.

The following chapter concludes this thesis, revisits the research questions and lays out the contributions to knowledge this thesis has made. It also considers the limitations of this research project, the implications for research and practice, and suggests possibilities for future research.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

“Belonging is a term that resonates. Ambiguous, exclusionary, reductionist, open, expansive, tentative, enduring, hopeful, caring, in place, with place, as place – belonging surprises.”
(Wright, 2015, p. 14)

1. Introduction

As Wright’s quote suggests, experiences of belonging can range widely from inclusion through care to exclusion through discrimination. The stories of Nia, Lina, Raisa, and Talia have demonstrated the various ways in which belonging can be constructed. Alongside these four girls, this thesis explored how they constructed and experienced a sense of belonging, and was guided by an overall ethnographic and methodological approach based on social constructionism, a young person’s UNCRC based “right to be properly researched” (Beazley et al., 2009), and relational ethics (Ellis, 2007). The research project was conducted against a backdrop of record numbers of people forcibly displaced worldwide, and a heavy tension between the UK’s ‘hostile environment’ and the duty of care which local authorities have for unaccompanied children and young people in the UK. The project set belonging at the center of a conceptual framework which also involved social connections, space, identity, and learning to explore the constructions and experiences of the four unaccompanied girls. The previous two chapters presented the findings of this project, findings unique to each girl’s story and findings of common spaces in which the girls’ constructions of belonging were compared and contrasted to further understand the various ways and settings in which an unaccompanied young person can experience belonging. This concluding chapter revisits the research questions and considers the substantive contributions to knowledge this thesis has made. Finally, this chapter discusses limitations of the study, implications for research practice, and areas for future research.

2. Research questions revisited

This research project was guided by an overarching research question: *How do unaccompanied girls in England construct and experience a sense of belonging?* The purpose of this question was to capture an important aspect of the process of settlement and integration that an unaccompanied girl endures, acknowledging that after reaching a country of asylum, such as England, her journey is far from over. There is often still a long road

ahead of learning a new language, new cultural practices and behaviors, and learning with and through countless new people. However, settling somewhere new is much more than just new experiences, but also encompasses a deeply affective element in the constant (re)construction of a sense of belonging in spaces with others. For unaccompanied girls in a new environment, it can be especially challenging to build a space of belonging and inclusion alongside learning how to simply live day to day. This thesis sought to improve understanding of the girls' constructions and experiences of belonging and contribute to improved practice with unaccompanied girls. The following sub-questions help to answer the overall question:

1. *What is the nature of the spaces of interaction within which an unaccompanied girl may construct a sense of belonging?*

Throughout this project, I used Massey's (2005) understanding of space as "a product of relations;" that is, space as produced in the interactions between people, and under constant re-construction (Massey, 2005, p. 11). These were not geographical spaces, but rather abstract spaces created in a moment in time in the interaction between people. The spaces of interaction in which the girls in this research project did construct belonging and feel included were shown to involve efforts not just from the girls, but from those with whom they interacted. Efforts from other people revolved around kindness, respect, and a willingness to engage with the girls at their English language level. These characteristics spoke largely of the two-way quality of belonging and integration, of a "mutual accommodation" (Ager and Strang, 2008, p.177) in which both parties adapt to make room for each other or meet one another in the middle. Similarly, Wessendorf and Phillimore (2018) refer to this two-way understanding as a "mutual sense of being human," framed as being felt between a newcomer and a more long-term resident of a community where the onus to adapt does not lie solely on the newcomer. In this, we understand that Nia, Lina, Raisa, and Talia's feelings of belonging were more than just the result of positive interaction, but almost a manifestation of what it means to be human. In the phrase "informal reciprocity," borrowed from Godbout (2005), Phillimore et al. (2018) suggest that both givers and receivers of knowledge and resources benefit from an exchange, if in different ways, which resonates with the ideas of mutuality and the two-way aspect of belonging and integration. The spaces of inclusion and belonging that the girls in this project constructed

within their interactions with other people, then, included this sense of mutual accommodation and reciprocity.

2. *What are the significant social connections in an unaccompanied girl's life and how do they impact on her construction of a sense of belonging?*

Social connections such as social bonds and social bridges were influential in the girls' constructions of belonging as inclusion and home. The following people emerged as significant: foster families, volunteers, a faith group, peers, and to a lesser degree, social workers and key workers. Foster families occupied a unique inbetween position as they were neither professionals nor a connection with whom the girls had necessarily elected to spend time. Although Buehler et al. (2006) discuss the need to clarify the ambiguity of the role of foster carers, Wade et al. (2012) find that many foster carers are willing to adapt and committed to caring for unaccompanied young people, which resonates with moments of inclusion the girls constructed with their foster families. Others who had a positive impact in the girls' lives were those with whom they could elect to spend time so that they perhaps had more control over who would be permitted into their lives and to what extent, such as volunteers, faith groups, and peers. Thommessen and Todd (2018) find that volunteer mentors can provide an opportunity for refugee children to develop meaningful and supportive relationships. Similarly, Kohli (2011) observes that religious groups can support an unaccompanied young person's sense of belonging as home and familiarity in the UK. Same age peers and friends were also present and Valtonen (2014) notes that such interaction with peers can alleviate an unaccompanied youth's isolation and stress, and so contribute to the construction of a sense of belonging and inclusion. While social bonds and social bridges with peers at college were at times challenging for the girls to form, those with whom the girls did form significant social connections supported their sense of inclusion. Social workers and key workers primarily played a practical support role, although the girls' stories did convey moments of inclusion eating and going to the shop with these professionals.

3. *How does learning influence an unaccompanied girl's sense of belonging?*

Many of the stories the girls shared during this research project spoke of learning in situ and through immersion, which helped to improve their English language and cultural understanding and led to further opportunities to interact. These were situations in which the

girls learned where they would be made to feel welcome and included, although, they also learned where they were not welcome through their experiences of exclusion. This resonates with Lave and Wenger's (1991) understanding of learning as a key part of social interaction and identity and as a situated activity, of learning through doing. This kind of learning was evidenced in the interactions through which the girls practiced English and acquired new understandings through shared activities or exchanges, and supported their feelings of being included in the spaces they constructed. Brown et al. (1989) speak of the "situated nature of knowledge" and its intricate tie to context, culture, and activity, a learning through immersion demonstrated in the way Nia and Talia observed what they saw and heard around them on the street. Lave and Wenger's (1991) idea of learning as centripetal movement provides a unique way of understanding the girls' senses of belonging within the English community in which they lived. The image of centripetal movement envisions that a sense of belonging can start 'small' as an 'outsider' at the edge of a community, neither established nor comfortable. With time and increased English language and understanding of English culture, behaviors, and systems, that sense of belonging can wind its way in to become deeper and more 'centered' as an 'insider' in the community rather than restricted to the outer edges of its periphery. In this sense, learning and belonging grew and developed alongside each other through social interaction, and provided opportunities for the girls to continue to build spaces of inclusion with others.

4. How do an unaccompanied girl's identities intersect with her sense of belonging?

Yuval-Davis (2006) suggests that identity is a site in which a sense of belonging can grow. Being an English language learner was an identity which all the girls shared and as identity is not fixed, but rather "situationally salient" (Anthias, 2006), it was an identity which positioned the girls as being either excluded or included depending on the context and who else was present. In understanding that a person also has multiple identities (Yuval-Davis, 2006), the girls' stories spoke of different identities in each of their lives which were "situationally salient" and adapted to different settings. The girls' faith identities as Orthodox Christians and a Catholic provided access to two different churches in which the girls were differently able to construct belonging and inclusion. At her church, Talia struggled to feel included while the other girls felt much more at home in their church. The girls' cultural identities as Eritrean and Congolese intersected with their senses of belonging as inclusion

differently as Nia, Lina, and Raisa found comfort and familiarity with other Eritreans while Talia rarely interacted with other Congolese. Each of the girls spoke of what Guerrero and Tinkler (2010) call “designated identities,” or stories told by a person in the future tense that convey their desires. In this way, the girls’ designated identities conveyed a hope for future belonging as a midwife, a pharmacist, a hairdresser, and airline industry worker. As an unaccompanied girl’s identities are fluid and adapt to various situations (Anthias, 2006), each identity has the potential to provide opportunities for the construction of belonging.

3. Contributions to knowledge

In addition to my responses to my research questions, further contributions to knowledge emerged from my thesis. The overall contribution was to build on the small body of literature which relates specifically to unaccompanied girls (Kaukko, 2016; Kohli and Kaukko, 2017; Ekström et al., 2019). Key contributions, discussed below, were around co-constructing a safe research space with unaccompanied young people, the social impacts of ESOL being taught in a silo, the unexpected significance of temporary spaces of belonging, and the affective influence of long-term spaces of belonging. I additionally reflected on the gendered experiences of unaccompanied young people and on the usefulness of belonging as a lens for research. Furthermore, while this research project did not specifically explore “place-belongingness” (Antonsich, 2010) with the girls, it nevertheless provided some insight into that sense of place-belongingness. Two of the girls voluntarily moved to other places in England after data collection concluded, demonstrating that they perhaps did not feel particularly connected to their local community. Dispersal policies such as the UK’s National Transfer Scheme through which the girls were initially placed are criticized for exacerbating isolation and not taking into account availability of resources at the local level (Griffiths et al., 2006). Three of the girls traveled weekly to a church in London as there was not a suitable church available locally, demonstrating how locality can shape experiences of belonging and integration. As the girls did not initially choose where to live, when an opportunity came for them to assert their agency and choose for themselves, they took it. This provides potential insight into why some of the initial, creative research methods, such as a walk and talk (Trell and Van Hoven, 2010), were not of interest to the girls if they felt no place-belongingness locally. Voluntary relocations may convey that they desired to be

physically closer to people or groups with whom they felt more at home and that they desired to belong to a place of their choosing.

3.1. On co-constructing a safe research space

I set out with the aim to build a relationship with participants and to establish a safe and trusting research space, working alongside them as co-constructors of data and knowledge. The girls became co-constructors not only of the data produced, but of the research space itself. Co-construction of the research space reflects this project's ethos of a young person's UNCRC based "right to be properly researched" (Beazley et al., 2009) and highlights the inclusion of children in the research process as co-producers, and not simply subjects (Lundy, 2007). The "right to be properly researched" also resonates with relational ethics (Ellis, 2007) in research, which seeks a more flexible and empathetic approach to working with vulnerable populations. Particularly with unaccompanied young people, Chase et al. (2019) discuss the need to move away from extractive data collection methods in research and toward an approach of co-construction in order to enable "complex 'stories' to be told and more meaningful representations of young refugees' lives to enter media, public and policy discourse" (Chase et al., 2019, p. 14). Similarly, Sinha and Back (2014) aimed to "reconfigure qualitative research" by involving their young migrant participants in the very writing process and working through questions of responsibility and authorship. Co-construction was a desire from the start of this project to ensure that the floor was always open for the girls' thoughts, opinions, and contributions in whatever form they chose to share them. As I followed these approaches to research, the door was opened to encourage the girls to contribute to and co-construct the research space in ways that made them feel comfortable and safe. When I was with the girls, whether it was one girl or all four, our interactions reaffirmed that the space was a safe one which was being (re)constructed each time we were together. In her research exploring how unaccompanied refugee children use technology and apps, Neag (2019) aimed to establish a safe research space and adapted her research methods to the young people's situation and desires. That meant designing and using artisanal board games to comfortably and casually engage with the young people, allowing them to determine to what extent and in what way to share. Like Neag, I adapted my research methods in order to engage with the girls in a way which was comfortable and familiar to them and contributed to the foundation of a safe space.

Part of co-constructing the research space as a safe space was making sure that the girls as English language learners not only understood the words we were talking about but that they could contribute to that understanding and ask questions if desired. This was an important part of ethically engaging the girls with the themes of the research and we accomplished it, in part, by brainstorming together about key words, as discussed in the methodology chapter. Chase et al. (2019, p. 11) reflect on their methodologies and innovations and challenges in research with unaccompanied young people, saying, "...wherever possible, the choice of methods, should be a dialogical, open process carried out in consultation with research participants." While brainstorming together over an English word on a sheet of paper at a café table may not be precisely the kind of research method to which Chase et al. (2019) are referring, it was an activity undertaken with that same intention: to consult *with* the girls and confirm that they understood the topic so that they could contribute to further understanding of that topic. The co-constructed research space was built on and perpetuated the very characteristics the girls spoke of desiring in a space of belonging – respect, confidence, and being able to make mistakes in English without ridicule. In this way, the research space not only supported the co-production of data, but also manifested that data and the girls' desires *within that very space*. Chase et al. (2019) speak of the need for more reflexive and ethical social science research and Ellis (2007) and Kaukko et al. (2017) of moving beyond "do no harm" to a more relationally focused ethics in research with vulnerable groups, to giving back to participants. Through our co-construction of this research space, we did just that, supporting and perpetuating the girls' desires and needs in the space when it was possible and applicable. Moreover, the open design of co-construction made way for the emergence of unexpected themes such as the practice of food and for the emergence of the girls' agency in the research space.

The humor and laughter the girls and I experienced together contributed to the construction of not only a safe space, but an enjoyable space, something which I suggest is also part of the ethos of relational ethics. Wessendorf and Phillimore (2018) speak of one of their asylum-seeker participants who missed being able to laugh with people when he was new to England, quoting him as saying, "This is one thing I didn't have, to find someone to laugh, someone that you can go to and express your fears, your anxiety, and just have laughter..." (Wessendorf and Phillimore, 2018, p. 132). Being comfortable enough to laugh with

someone can indicate a sense of ease and contribute to a comfortable feeling of being included within a particular setting. On several occasions the girls and I laughed and joked, and this humor was a demonstration of familiarity, of comfort, and of 'fitting in' together in that space that we created. Coser (1959, p. 172) suggests that "To laugh, or to occasion laughter through humor and wit, is to invite those present to come close. Laughter and humor are indeed like an invitation, be it an invitation to dinner, or an invitation to start a conversation: it aims at decreasing social distance." Our laughter together appeared to reduce the social distance between us and open us up to receive each other and our shared words and thoughts as we stitched together a safe, ethical research space where we were comfortable and trusted each other.

Co-constructing the research space, however, was not always easy and it would be wrong to give the impression that it was a process without any hiccups or hesitation. There is more I would have liked to ask the girls but did not because I did not want to "mine for data," as Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) phrase it. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, I felt some unease and discomfort throughout the data collection period and I was very conscious of trying to find a balance between phrasing questions and inquiring sensitively and still asking for personal information and thoughts. A limitation of the approach to "travel" alongside a participant rather than "mine" for data (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009) is that much can go unsaid, that the participant can to a large degree dictate where and to what extent the conversation will go. While the research space was a safe one and I believe the girls were comfortable and willing to be there, it is certain that there is much they did not share about themselves and their lives.

3.2. On ESOL taught in a silo

Many of the experiences of constructing belonging that the girls shared occurred within the setting of college, or rather within the spaces of interaction with peers and teachers, several of which were experiences of exclusion and unbelonging in what should have been a setting of mutual learning. Of her research with refugee youth in UK secondary schools, Hastings (2012, p. 342) concludes that "Learning the language, getting to know and be known by people around them, increasing familiarity with their environment and being listened to and respected by others, were all identified as supporting the development of a sense of belonging

in school.” As in the two-way process of mutual accommodation, Hastings discusses the need for refugee youth to not only get to know others at school but *be known by them*. Considering the college setting as similar to one of Lave and Wenger’s (1991) communities of practice supports this look at spaces of interaction as it takes into account the learning of social interaction, which is neither formal nor taught, but which is acquired through interaction and observation. In the girls’ experiences within the college setting, a mutual accommodation in social interactions was often lacking.

While ESOL supports opportunities for connection with other ESOL students, it is taught in a silo, restricting opportunities for mutual accommodation with ‘mainstream’ students and for more naturally occurring English language practice for ESOL students like the girls. In their research on improving education for students with refugee backgrounds, Morrice and Sandri (2018) state that ESOL can be a barrier to education progression in part because it focuses on English language skills and does not tie in with other academic or vocational material. They suggest that ESOL be taught alongside other subjects in order to “breakdown silos and encourage mixing between students” (Morrice and Sandri, 2018, p. 24). This thesis supports and expands that understanding by considering more closely the social connections and relationships which can occur when there are more occasions for mixing between students and which can lead to further inclusion and integration. The mode of delivery of ESOL, being taught in a silo, seems almost contradictory, and that was illustrated in the girls’ stories as they were aware that they could not meet English people because they were separated from them. There is almost a sense of inequality unintentionally built into the way that ESOL is delivered to learners in that they are taught English, but also set to the side away from the wider student body. The way ESOL is delivered both supports a tool which can facilitate belonging, the English language, and at the same time impedes opportunities to interact and construct that belonging with English speakers. The girls’ experiences demonstrate that they had opportunities to form relationships with fellow ESOL students much more often than with British born English speakers at college.

The girls shared experiences about the wider college setting outside of ESOL, which conveyed moments of discrimination and racism, experiences which taught the girls that they did not belong there according to some students. It is important to note that while Lina was the only girl to speak directly to personal experiences of racism and discrimination, it was far

from likely that she alone experienced such things amongst the girls in this research project. Discrimination, racism, and bullying in school are often difficulties faced by refugee and unaccompanied youth (Correa-Velez et al., 2010; Rutter et al., 2007; Hek, 2005) although Morrice and Sandri (2018) report that where such incidents were reported in their study, the teachers and school addressed them immediately. However, that is not always the case and where present, racism and discrimination can inhibit opportunities for integration and belonging to develop because there is a distinct lack of mutual accommodation. In Lina's case, her teachers' disparate responses to discrimination in the classroom were equally telling as a product of the UK's 'hostile environment' where discrimination may be left unchecked and become normalized. Here, a lack of mutual accommodation not only hurt one person, but also allowed for the perpetuation of an atmosphere of exclusion, a movement of the 'hostile environment' into a classroom which should be safeguarding all its students. Hastings (2012) records bullying toward refugee students in a UK secondary school and cites harmful consequences such as "...decreased self-esteem, a sense of powerlessness, decreased interest in learning and fear" (Hastings, 2012, p. 345). In such situations, an unaccompanied young person can be taught that she does not belong and is unwelcome, even unprotected by an authority figure. An identity as 'other' is imposed on her, denying her a voice and a space to interact. Perhaps opportunities to mix with other students through a more integrated ESOL class could begin to pave a way toward improving situations such as these.

3.3. On temporary spaces of belonging

Temporary spaces have the potential to support and facilitate belonging or provide much needed moments of respite in very challenging circumstances or hostile environments. There were many brief interactions which occurred in the girls' experiences that created positive connections, however momentary. In his research concerning practices of care in an asylum drop-in center in the UK, Darling (2011) discusses the powerful potential of that which is impermanent, saying, "The importance of having a (temporary) space to (co)exist should not be underestimated..." (Darling, 2011, p. 410). Similarly, my research supports the idea that temporary spaces can provide much needed information and resources, allow for a moment of respite or solidarity, and be positively affective. In the girls' experiences, such encounters became significant spaces created within the moments of interaction, and they were often recalled by the girls as good, helpful, or funny.

Understanding the positive potential and impact of temporary spaces of belonging for unaccompanied young people builds largely on the work of Wessendorf and Phillimore's (2018) brief social interactions, Probyn's (1996) surface belonging, and May's (2016) relationship between belonging and time. As discussed in the conceptual framework, Probyn's (1996) work on surface belonging involves the movement of belonging, understanding that it is not always a feeling of deep or permanent belonging, but that belonging 'moves' through changing and shifting. This nature of movement in belonging lends itself to what is temporary and transient, resonating with Wessendorf and Phillimore's (2018) "serendipitous encounters" and "crucial acquaintances" which in their brief interactions create a space where belonging has the potential to exist and a two-way integration is facilitated. Similar to Probyn's (1996) movement of surface belonging, May (2016) understands the movement of belonging through the passing of time. However, in contrast to Wessendorf and Phillimore's (2018) briefer interactions, May's (2016) emphasis is on the enduring belonging of family and long-term friendships. My findings remind us that the social world does not occur only in permanencies, which May's (2016) work does not appear to acknowledge as she refers to the superficiality of temporary belongings and dismisses the fleeting as shallow and less important than enduring belonging. Indeed, the experiences of the girls demonstrated that interactions with the social world include many temporary moments and we cannot discount the real influence that these interactions may have on belonging.

Haven, too, had an element of temporariness to its role in the girls' lives. As a provider of semi-independent accommodation and care for unaccompanied young people aged 16-21 and with the aim to prepare them for independent living, Haven is by design a temporary service. However, part of that temporariness included staff turnover, and in my time with Haven as a volunteer and researcher, I witnessed several staff members come and go, and shift positions within the organization. While this may in part be attributed to some re-structuring of the organization, this movement within Haven also affected the young people and when I met Talia she had already had 4-5 key workers in her first 4-5 months with Haven. However, the services that Haven provides should not be underestimated or diminished in value because they are a temporary service or because they have had staff turnover, as in addition to their aim to prepare young people for independence, there is still the potential for meaningful

connection and the construction of positive spaces in their interactions with young people. Horton and Kraftl's (2009) research at a UK Sure Start Centre for families in deprived areas supports this point through an understanding of what they call "implicit activism," or small moments of activism which are "a kind of ephemeral supplement" (Horton and Kraftl, 2009, p. 21). These small, almost invisible moments of daily interaction were an effect of the caring relationship between the center's employees and service users, and so support an understanding of temporary spaces between service providers and service users as having the potential to convey welcome and construct a sense of inclusion and belonging. Although my own position as a volunteer with Haven was knowingly temporary to myself and Nia and Raisa, there was value in the respite and inclusion found through our temporary activities such as Kohli and Kaukko (2017) found to be true when unaccompanied girls in Finland engaged in temporary pursuits.

Not all temporary spaces are positive or encourage belonging or promote a mutually accommodating integration. Lina's encounters with the English girls at college who laughed at her demonstrate that some temporary spaces of interaction taught the girls that they were unwelcome. Darling (2011) also provides a case in which the removal of a positive temporary space of interaction resulted in a sense of exclusion and a feeling of being pushed to the side. He describes the situation in which an asylum-seeker, Akan, enjoyed voluntarily managing the tea and biscuits area as it kept him busy and helped him to feel useful when he was at the asylum drop-in center. However, this temporary space was taken from him when two older British women came to volunteer and assumed Akan's post in the tea-making area. The removal of Akan's positive temporary space seemed to greatly discourage him and remove a small sense of purpose from his life at the time, and he eventually stopped coming to the center. In this case, the loss of a temporary space had a negative effect.

There is a kind of fragility to the temporary nature of brief spaces and encounters. This does not place a value of 'good' or 'bad' on temporary encounters, but rather highlights that they can be delicate and tenuous, that something has the potential to be made or broken within that momentary space of interaction. Therefore, a temporary space should not be taken lightly simply because it does not last long, but rather, it should be taken seriously *because* it does not last long, and the impact of what occurs in a moment can endure for a long time afterward. There is both a drawing-in and a shying-away to the thought of a brief encounter's

long-term impact, such that constructions of temporary spaces should be considered with thoughtfulness and care.

3.4. On long-term spaces of belonging

One stable, long-term relationship can have a positive and affective influence on the construction of an unaccompanied girl's sense of belonging. This is not in contrast to the powerful potential of temporary spaces of belonging, but rather runs parallel to present a fuller picture of the possibilities of spaces of belonging. Within the field of psychology, Baumeister and Leary's (1995) work on the fundamental human need to belong focuses on long-term, stable connections, or "interpersonal attachments," as a necessity for someone to feel a sense of belonging. Eide and Hjern (2013) state that an unaccompanied young person needs to establish a deep and lasting relationship with someone who cares for them in order to achieve their full potential. These understandings resonate with Nia's and Talia's experiences of having significant caring and lasting relationships with Mary, the volunteer, and the foster mother respectively. These connections make a positive difference as they often contribute to a feeling of belonging and inclusion, and facilitate opportunities for integration into the wider community. This appears to contrast with Raisa's more negative experience in this area. She spent a lot of time isolated and alone after arriving in England and did not appear to establish any stable or long-term relationships. Beirens et al. (2007) suggest that refugee children and youth are often at risk for being socially excluded as they struggle to develop social connections due to problems of harassment and limited access to shops and support, which can lead to isolation, stress, and depression, amongst other things. It cannot be said that Raisa's lack of a good, stable connection with anyone *caused* her isolation and distress, but it can perhaps be suggested that having at least one good, solid relationship may have aided in decreasing her isolation and alleviating some part of her distress.

3.5. Reflecting on gender

The majority of literature around unaccompanied young people researches the experiences of boys as they make up around 89% of unaccompanied youth in the UK (Refugee Council, 2019a) and around 86% of unaccompanied young people in Europe (Eurostat, 2019). Ekström et al. (2019) report that reception systems in Finland and Sweden are designed for

boys while Kohli and Kaukko (2017, p. 3) state that “...refugee research mainly present[s] the voices of male asylum-seekers as a norm and leaves the gendered aspects of forced migration untouched.” Throughout this research, I reflected on how the girls’ stories and experiences may have differed from boys’ experiences as seen within the literature on unaccompanied children and youth. One difference was around sporting activities as the girls in my study were not engaged in and did not show any interest in engaging in sports. This is consistent with the literature suggesting that unaccompanied and refugee boys can more easily join a sporting group and make connections (Doidge and Sandri, 2018).

Unaccompanied girls may even be resistant to participating in activities such as these with boys due to experiences of gender-based violence or because they come from a country where interaction between women and men is more restricted (Kohli and Kaukko, 2017). Due to this, many hobbies and activities offered to unaccompanied youth are often most attractive to boys (Kaukko, 2016). Doidge and Sandri (2018) suggest that there are other barriers for female refugees to engage in sports such as family responsibility, racism, or chauvinism. Perhaps for the girls in this study there were few opportunities to be involved in sporting activities since the attention of refugee outreach has so often been focused on boys. Doidge and Sandri (2018) suggest that female-only sporting sessions could encourage more female engagement.

Another gendered element that came up was around domestic and similar skills. In research with unaccompanied girls in a reception center in Finland, Kaukko (2016) engaged in activities with the girls around their own abilities “...such as musical, artistic or domestic skills...” (Kaukko, 2016, p. 189). These included activities like baking, makeup workshops, and arts and crafts, from which the girls desired to exclude boys. This is consistent with Kohli and Kaukko’s (2017) findings that unaccompanied girls may be hesitant to participate in activities with boys. As discussed previously in methodology, the girls in my study were not interested in my initial creative data collection methods, but Kaukko’s work demonstrates that unaccompanied girls do indeed enjoy creative activities. Therefore, in hindsight, I wonder if perhaps my innovative offerings were not the *right* innovative offerings for the girls in my study. Additionally, Raisa had a number of domestic skills around cooking, cleaning, weaving baskets, and making her own clay pottery, skills which key workers suggested were more common to the experiences of unaccompanied girls than boys. However, Raisa did not appear to have many opportunities to capitalize on these skills in the UK as they are perhaps

less common or less valued than in her home country. She spoke of conveniently weaving baskets and making clay pots at home with her grandmother in Sudan, whereas in the UK, such activities would likely need to be accessed through a paid-for arts and crafts class. As investigating this was not within the scope of my project, understanding this better would require further research. In considering all of this and Haven's likely unintentional exclusion of the girls in the activities offered to their young people, I suggest that there is a need to focus on and highlight the desires and interests of unaccompanied girls. There is a need to provide activities which cater to them, rather than unaccompanied young people more generally as that largely ends up excluding the girls from opportunities to engage, connect, or simply have fun.

3.6. Reflecting on belonging

Approaching the end of this project, it is useful to take some time to reflect on belonging. First, on its usefulness as a lens for understanding the experiences of unaccompanied young people, what it has helped this project see, and what it has perhaps prevented this project from understanding better. Second, on the way it has been used alongside the concept of learning, in particular, and the novel idea of 'learning to belong.'

Throughout this project, looking through a lens of belonging encouraged inquiry into social connections and relationships, particularly with whom, when, where, and through what activities belonging was constructed. Belonging has been used to explore the experiences of many groups from migrants (Baak, 2016) to refugees and asylum-seekers (Correa-Velez, 2010) to refugee and unaccompanied children and young people (Kaukko and Wernesjö, 2016), but little has been done which considers belonging in relation to space, something which set this study apart. Within the field of human geography, the phrase "space of belonging" has been used to refer to the creation of material spaces and social spaces for migrants (Ehrkamp and Leitner, 2006), urban spaces in Istanbul (Mills, 2006), affordable housing for farmers in Oregon, USA (Nelson, 2007), and the political marginalization of deaf people in the UK (Valentine and Skelton, 2007). However, none of these references to spaces of belonging are linked to Massey's (2005) use of space. Therefore, what additionally sets this study apart is the use of Massey's (2005, p. 9) understanding of space as a "product of interrelations." Alongside this understanding, belonging has been an especially useful

concept for capturing temporary but influential moments in which an unaccompanied girl experienced a positive social connection, or a brief belonging as a respite in the midst of challenging circumstances. These fleeting belongings can and did provide important data for drawing out and understanding the fuller lived experiences of unaccompanied girls.

‘Belonging’ also has its flaws as a research lens as it presupposes that a sense of belonging must be desired and needed by everyone as Baumeister and Leary (1995) suggest that it is. However, ‘people’ is a catchall term for a diverse group of humans, and “the extent and strength of belonging will vary by individual and group” (Chin, 2019, p. 717). Kelly (2001) points out that some people may be content with fewer connections and have their need to belong met before others. It is necessary, then, for researchers to be aware that the need and desire for belonging will be different for each person and ensure that their approach does not bias one particular understanding of belonging. Additionally, in this study, belonging did not support a deep look at the girls’ academic challenges and achievements. While that was not the aim of this project, a deeper understanding of the girls’ academic endeavors could have helped to provide a fuller picture of their overall experiences.

Throughout this project, belonging was also used alongside the concept of learning, suggesting a novel idea around ‘learning to belong.’ I did not use the phrase ‘learn to belong’ in this thesis as, to my knowledge, learning and belonging have not been conceptualized together in this way before, and a fuller conceptualization of it was not within the scope of my thesis. However, I reflect briefly on it here to submit that this idea should be expanded on in the future as a novel contribution to literature around both belonging and learning. So, what might be involved in ‘learning to belong?’ Upon first hearing this phrase, it may bring to mind that one can simply learn or pick up a few particular behaviors and then belong in a desired way. This is not what I mean by ‘learning to belong.’ Rather, I consider the two-wayness involved in learning as social interaction and in belonging as process. In this way, one perhaps ‘learns to belong’ through social interaction and the consequent development or transformation of one’s own identity. Perhaps there is an element of willingness in allowing oneself to be transformed (through learning through social interaction) in order to become more comfortable in a particular space (or community). Here, I also borrow Kemmis et al.’s (2017, p. 45) metaphor that learning is “‘being stirred’ into practices.” This metaphor provides another layer to the idea of ‘learning to belong’ in that if one ‘learns to belong,’ then

one is being stirred into practices that draw one in to more easily belong to and become part of a community. Perhaps, here, practices are the activity of ‘doing’ belonging, of performing belonging. So, ‘learning to belong,’ at this time, just gently brings together the processes of learning and of belonging and raises more questions than it answers. Again, this novel idea is significant in its newness and because it expands conceptualizations of both belonging and learning. Having come out of research with unaccompanied young people, I suggest that it may also provide a new and unique perspective on migratory experiences and processes of settling such as refugees experience.

4. Limitations of the study

The main limitation of this study was the limited sample size of participants. While I aimed to recruit 8-10 young people, I recruited just four. As I initially intended to recruit both males and females, and Haven worked with 20-30 young people, I thought I only needed to conduct research with the one organization. In hindsight, I would have liked to work with another organization to increase the recruitment pool and produce a comparative study. This could also have facilitated an analytical look at the role of organizations in supporting young people.

Another limitation was Haven’s safeguarding policy which prohibited exchanging personal contact information with participants. Safeguarding policy serves the intention of protecting the unaccompanied young people *and* volunteers at Haven, but in the case of this research, it was also a restriction. It hindered recruitment and I had to rely almost exclusively on my primary contact at Haven to invite young people to meet with me so that I could inform them of my project and invite them to participate. Once the four girls were recruited, the safeguarding policy meant I still needed my Haven contact to set up meetings between the girls and I, even reminding them on the day as they were liable to forget. Fortunately, my Haven contact was understanding and willing to be a frequent go-between. The time and waiting periods included in this kind of long exchange also served to extend the overall fieldwork period and make the actual meetings with participants feel somewhat hurried. Perhaps this had the additional effect of emphasizing the intermediary layer between participants and myself, preventing deeper rapport building.

A final limitation was the turnover and shifting of roles which occurred at Haven while I was there both as researcher and volunteer, discussed earlier. Before starting fieldwork, I was invited to attend a staff meeting at Haven to notify everyone about who I was and what I was doing, and to ask them to speak with their young people about the project to simply garner interest. The staff was keen and asked questions and took the information sheets I gave them. I invited them to contact me with queries or comments as they were more familiar with their young people than I. Throughout fieldwork, there were several new staff who arrived, and I had to re-introduce myself and my project several times, which made it more difficult to ensure that everyone was aware of my project. By the end of fieldwork, there had been enough turnover at the organization that the staff members were not all the same ones I had spoken with in the beginning. I feel that this was a limitation as there was not as much staff involvement as I had hoped for with regard to informing all their young people that my project was even occurring or connecting me with those young people. I am uncertain what exactly I could have done differently to help that happen, but I recognize that it was less than ideal.

5. Implications for policy and practice

This study speaks to policy and practice around education, child welfare and young people, refugee provision, and research practice. However, given the limitations of this study, I suggest that these implications not be overgeneralized or removed too far from the English context.

This project reveals two key points within the field of education. First, around a more integrated ESOL and, second, around teacher training on combatting discrimination and racism. Following on with Morrice and Sandri (2018), I recommend supporting further integration of ESOL into mainstream classes in order to promote regular opportunities for unaccompanied young people to mix with the wider student body, and thereby increase chances for mutual accommodation and the construction of belonging. This builds in more opportunities for English language learners to use the English they are learning and to make more social connections with non-English language learners. I also suggest more training for teachers and educators to learn how to better and more consistently resist and address racist

and discriminatory attitudes and behaviors in the classroom. This ensures that racism and discrimination do not go unchecked and that it is made clear that they are unacceptable.

There are also implications around child welfare and unaccompanied young people, particularly around the transition to adulthood as there are overlapping processes happening as unaccompanied youth turn 18. First, as they become care leavers and, second, as they may experience additional distress and uncertainty if they are still awaiting a decision from the Home Office on their asylum claims. Their transition into adulthood is quite “compressed,” as Roberts et al. (2017) phrase it, relative to non-looked-after youth. The literature already understands that this is quite a challenging time in the life of unaccompanied youth and can even result in young people going ‘missing’ if they have not received a decision on their asylum claim. There have been calls for further research with unaccompanied young people at this stage as much remains unknown. I strongly suggest further that they need better and more specialized preparation to make this transition into adulthood. Unaccompanied young people are reaching the legal age of adulthood in a country and culture to which they are still relatively new and in a language which they are still learning. Talia’s case also provides a unique view into this transitional period in her transition from her foster family’s home to semi-independent accommodation with Haven, which conveys some tension between child welfare and programs such as Staying Put, and an understaffed and underfunded system which may desire Talia’s placement spot for someone else. She stated that her social worker said she would grow up faster if she moved out of her foster family’s home and that that was a positive thing. This seems antithetical to the aim of the Staying Put program, which aims to allow care leavers to more gradually transition into adulthood in a way similar their non-looked-after peers. Talia’s case, then, raises a question around the Staying Put program and the support and promotion of it by social workers and those responsible to communicate with looked-after children. It was unclear if she had been offered that option, which perhaps suggests a need for better promotion of the Staying Put program and improved support for such transitions.

Interaction with looked-after children and young people like unaccompanied youth should be considered an aspect of overarching child welfare. Therefore, with regard to practitioners and others who work in a hands-on position with unaccompanied young people such as social

workers, key workers, or foster carers, the implications suggest the incredible importance and necessity of building spaces *with* unaccompanied young people and the lasting impact they can have. These spaces can be understood as positive interactions, even temporary, and relationships, where an unaccompanied young person can experience belonging and grow confidence in themselves. These spaces should include a mutual accommodation and respect for the unaccompanied young person and a chance for them to practice English and ask questions without ridicule. They may occur by chance or as a result of a young person's own initiative, but practitioners can assist by deliberately providing and supporting opportunities for space-building between unaccompanied young people and others. Opportunities can be provided, for example, through community connection projects or through financial provision to travel to a specific church or group as was provided for Nia, Raisa, and Lina. For practitioners, I additionally recommend that they and organizations that work with unaccompanied girls make a point to discover and support the needs and interests of unaccompanied girls specifically as they appear to often be overlooked in a system largely designed around the needs and interests of boys.

This research project also has implications for refugee provision, primarily around ESOL as a basic provision. In recent years, funding for ESOL for refugees has decreased, in line with tighter restrictions around immigration and a generally hostile environment. ESOL is highly desired by refugees, as stated many times by the girls in this project, and supports integration and opportunities to build a sense of belonging. Unfortunately, it is also highly desired so that English language learners, such as the girls, can speak up and defend themselves verbally. This suggests the learning English and being able to communicate more easily with local communities is both empowering and necessary. Decreased ESOL provision does nothing but disadvantage refugees and other migrants *and* local communities more broadly. It is clear that there is a need for increased funding for ESOL.

This project also speaks to research practices with unaccompanied young people. Following on the challenges of recruitment and setting meetings with the girls, this study highlights flexibility in research, knowing that in pursuit of a young person's "right to be properly researched," an approach must be taken which regularly asks how the young person wants to be engaged. This may mean cutting a meeting short because a young person is uncomfortable or arriving for a meeting knowing that the young person is unlikely to show up. It may mean

adjusting your own schedule for the young person and showing them that you are willing to adapt. It may mean that your time feels wasted. This flexibility is deeply important in research with unaccompanied young people who already have every right to be suspicious of authority figures or figures perceived to be so, such as researchers, and it is essential to building trust and rapport. My project also reveals that classic research methods such as interviews and focus groups are not the enemy of creative, innovative research. It is not a matter of one or the other. For unaccompanied young people, the familiarity of the conversational element of classic methods can support involvement where more innovative methods involving photos or music as prompts may be unfamiliar. That is not to imply that innovative methods are less effective because they may be unfamiliar, but rather to point out that traditional methods need not be considered out-of-date in an academic environment which encourages the use of creative methods. Classic methods can be responsive, and their straightforward natures lends themselves to small and flexible adaptations which can be applied quickly and with little extra effort on the participant's part. One such adaptation that can be used for unaccompanied young people who have low levels of English is the incorporation of collaborative mind maps such as the brainstorming mind maps used in this project. For low level language learners, it is helpful to support listening skills and development with visual cues and associations.

6. Areas for future research

While there is a substantial body of literature on unaccompanied young people in general, there have been significantly fewer studies conducted specifically with unaccompanied girls. Therefore, there are many potential areas for future research. One of those possibilities is to reconnect with the four girls from this study in a few years and explore their experiences of belonging since aging out of care and being in England longer. This would add a longitudinal element to the research and reveal what kind of foundation their earlier experiences provided them to build on. Although it would likely be challenging to find the same girls again due to them aging out of care and losing contact with Haven or going 'missing' from services.

Overall, research with unaccompanied girls would greatly benefit from larger sample sizes, and longitudinal and comparative elements, which could be incorporated into research in a range of contexts from England to broader Europe. Similar to comparative country studies

conducted with the broader population of unaccompanied young people (Sirriyeh and Ní Raghallaigh, 2018), this could enable policies and practices to be shared between nations with an aim to improve provision of care for unaccompanied girls. It would also be useful for future research to involve ‘former’ unaccompanied girls in research conducted with ‘current’ unaccompanied girls in capacities such as a peer researcher, research assistant, or consultant. Just as Morrice et al. (2019) employed resettled refugees as research assistants to conduct research with newer refugees, so, too, could additional insight be provided into the lives of unaccompanied girls. Another avenue for research would be to conduct research very specifically on the impact of gender on the experiences of unaccompanied girls. This would be beneficial as a detailed and comparative look at the experiences of unaccompanied girls verses unaccompanied boys with an aim to better support girls in policy and practice.

Another suggestion for future research revolves around food practices as this was demonstrated to be important in the lives of the girls in my project. There is limited literature on the positive impact of eating together and sharing food for unaccompanied young people specifically (Kohli et al., 2010) and there have already been calls for further research around food practices and vulnerable children and young people (Emond et al., 2014; Punch et al., 2010). It is clear that there is much to explore around the ‘togetherness’ potential of food practices. Furthermore, as mentioned above, the novel idea of ‘learning to belong’ merits considerable further consideration. It is a new concept which seeks to examine how learning and belonging can work together to provide new insight, for example, to processes of migration and settling such as refugees and unaccompanied youth experience.

7. Final remarks

A couple months after completing our research sessions together, Raisa moved away abruptly and unfortunately, I was unable to say goodbye to her. As I understand it, she wanted to be closer to her church and moved closer to it, likely also moving her closer to the people she knew at the church. She left Haven at this time, but, I believe, came to be supported by a similar organization. Nia relocated as I was writing up, moving to be closer to a friend she knew from Eritrea who lived in the north of England and I was able to say goodbye to her. However, in moving she lost the support of Haven and came to be fully on her own as an adult. To my knowledge, Talia remained in the same city, but had moved to her own flat with

Haven, rather than in a shared house, which was to her liking. Lina also remained in the same local area. Unfortunately, I have not communicated with the girls in many months due to Haven's staff turnover because my primary contact left the organization and I lack the girls' personal contact information. Therefore, the people who knew more about my research and what I was doing at Haven were gone, causing me to be known only as a volunteer and limiting my 'in' with the organization, something which continues to speak to the temporariness of life.

In my time with them, I came to know each of the girls as the unique individual she was. They were full of life and dreams and desires, hopes and ambitions. I do not know everything about the girls' lives before England, or why exactly they left their countries, or what their futures will bring. However, what they shared of themselves, what they allowed me to see and experience with them was all heart and perseverance. While this project has ended and I may not see Nia, Lina, Raisa, or Talia again, it is my hope that they may remember their time with me positively and that they live safely and happily.

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Appendices

1. Appendix 1: Information sheet for young people

Information Sheet for Participants

Who am I and what am I doing?

My name is Anna Wharton. I am a PhD student at the University of Sussex. I am doing a research project at the university. I am here with you because I'm interested in how you as an unaccompanied young person create a feeling of belonging here in England. I want to do research *with* you about that subject. I want to spend time with you and get to know you and let you get to know me, and I want to talk with you about ideas like belonging, home, identity, place and community.

This information sheet will tell you everything you need to know about my research project, and then you can decide if you want to participate. We will talk through this information together. Please ask me any questions! ☺

What will you get to do if you participate?

If you participate in this project, you will do fun and creative activities with me and with a group of your peers. Some of these conversations will be audio recorded if you participate. You might do the following:

- Practice your English with me when we talk. No stress! Meet with me and a group of your peers to talk about the research
- Draw a mind map
- Walk around the city with me
- Share songs or objects or photos that you like with me
- Share your thoughts and opinions with me

What will I do if you participate?

- I will aim to write a report for Haven about what you have told me so they can improve or start new services for you and other young people like you. I will not use your names or identifying details in this report.
- I will obtain a degree from the university and maybe I will publish my findings which could benefit young people in other places.

Consent, withdrawal, confidentiality and anonymity

- Consent- If you want to participate, you will need to sign a consent form.

- Withdrawal- You can withdraw from (leave) the project at any time. If you leave the project, you can ask me to not use your information up until the project is over in May or June 2018.
- Confidentiality- I will not tell anyone what you tell me. (*But* if you tell me that you are going to hurt yourself or someone else, or that you will commit a crime, I will have to tell Haven.)
- Anonymity- When I write about the research project, I will not use your real name. I will protect your identity so nobody knows who I wrote about.

Who has approved this?

The University of Sussex has approved me to do this research. Haven has approved me to talk with you. However, if you become distressed when you are talking with me, we will stop talking; and I will inform Haven. Haven will then check on you and make sure you are okay.

Contact

You can contact me through Haven.

Now?

If you want to participate in the research, I will ask you to sign a consent form.

OR

If you don't know yet, you can have one week to think about it or ask me any other questions.

Thank you for your time and attention!

Do you have any questions for me? ☺

2. Appendix 2: Creative menu of activities

List of Activities

What you need to do:

1. Write your name on this paper on the line below ☺
2. Choose two or more activities on this paper that you want to do, and tick the white box on the right ☑
3. Give this paper to your key worker or Anna, and they will find a day and time that is okay for you ☺
4. Relax and have fun! ☺

Your Name: _____

Activity 1 – Print Your Photos For Free!

Who?	Only Anna and you
What will we do?	We will walk around the city or your neighborhood and walk to some places that you like and take some photos of places and things you like. We can talk about why you like these places and things. You only need to tell me what you want to tell me. Then we will print some of your favorite photos to look at (it's free!), and you can take them home. ☺
Food and drinks	Tea, coffee or hot chocolate to keep us warm- you can choose! ☺

☐

Activity 2 – Learn To Do Social Mapping In English

Who?	Anna and a group of young people
What will we do?	We will get together to eat some pizza and you will learn how to draw a social map of things and people that are important to you. I will show you how to do this by making my own map of things and people that are important to me. I will take a picture of your map, but you can keep the map. ☺
Food and drinks	Pizza or something similar! ☺

☐

Activity 3 – Discover New Music In English and Share Your Favorite Music

Who?	Anna and a group of young people
What will we do?	I will bring some photos and objects and English songs that are important to me and that I like. I will show them to you. I would like to know what you think of these things! This can help you learn some new English vocabulary and hear some music in English that you might not know. And if you want, I

☐

	would like you to share some photos, objects or songs (in any language!) that you like! I would like to know what is important to you and what you like and why! 😊
Food and drinks	Pizza or something similar! 😊

Activity 4 – Learn To Map Places In English

Who?	Only Anna and you
What will we do?	We will take a walk around the area and look at places that are important to you or that you like. Then we will sit down (and have coffee or tea or whatever you would like) and you will learn how to map places in a city with English vocabulary. I will take a picture of your map, but you can keep the map with the new English words on it. 😊
Food and drinks	Tea, coffee or hot chocolate to keep us warm- you can choose! 😊



3. Appendix 3: Consent form

Consent Form for Research Participants

Research Project Title:

Unaccompanied Young People: Constructing Belonging

Project Approval Reference:

ER/AW448/1

1. I understand what the research project to be conducted by the researcher, Anna Wharton, is and I agree to participate in the research project.
2. I understand that participating means I might do the following:
 - I might meet with Anna and other young people to talk
 - I might learn about different kinds of mapping
 - I might share my thoughts and opinions with Anna
 - I might take a walk around the local city with Anna
3. I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I can leave the project at any time.
4. I understand that my name will remain anonymous when Anna writes or speaks about the research project.
5. I understand that my information is confidential.
6. I understand that my conversations with Anna might be audio recorded unless I say otherwise.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

4. Appendix 4: Information sheet for key workers

Information Sheet for Key Workers

Hello, my name is Anna Wharton. I am currently working on a PhD at the University of Sussex. This information sheet will share with you the outline of my research study and invite you to participate in the research study with me. From the start, I want to make it clear that the safety, security and best interests of any unaccompanied young people with whom I come into contact are my highest priority. I do not approach these interactions lightly. I am also separately volunteering with the young people on my own time.

Title of the study:

Unaccompanied Young People: Constructing Belonging

About the study:

This study is looking into feelings of belonging and identity in the broader areas of place and learning. That is, how is a sense of belonging constructed by unaccompanied young people in the south of England? I have invited the young people to be involved in this study by working alongside me to answer this question, primarily through casual conversation over food and/or tea/coffee. I am also inviting key workers who work or have worked with the young people, such as yourself, to be involved through conversation over food and/or tea/coffee.

Your involvement:

I would love to speak with you about your perspectives on working with unaccompanied young people. ☺

And, should you also have any concerns, questions or comments regarding the study overall or the young people's involvement, please do get in touch with me.

Consent, withdrawal and confidentiality:

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. If you agree to participate, I will ask you to sign a consent form.

You also have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, or to withdraw your data contribution up to the completion of official data collection in May or June 2018.

Confidentiality and anonymity are also top priorities. Anything you choose to share with me will remain confidential. I will use pseudonyms in writing up the final results and findings of the research study.

Purpose for and results of the study:

This research endeavors to create a space for unaccompanied young people to speak in a positive way about how they create a sense of belonging in a new place, and for key workers to speak on their perspectives working with unaccompanied young people.

The aim is to continue positive, forward looking research with this group of young people and to have an impact at the local, organizational level.

I acknowledge that this study will result in a PhD and potential publications for me. However, I do not aim for the results and findings of this study to end there. I will also aim to create a final report for the organization with the goal of collaboratively encouraging and promoting the creation or improvement of services which facilitate belonging not only at this particular organization but similar organizations throughout the UK. I do not yet have a plan for disseminating this information beyond this organization, but it is my hope that I might work collaboratively with this organization to share the results of this study.

Time period:

I need to complete data collection by the end of May 2018.

Research funding and approval:

This research is funded by the Chancellor's International Research Scholarship, and has been approved by the University of Sussex' Cross-Schools Research Ethics Committee (C-REC).

Contact information:

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Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or comments about this study or myself.

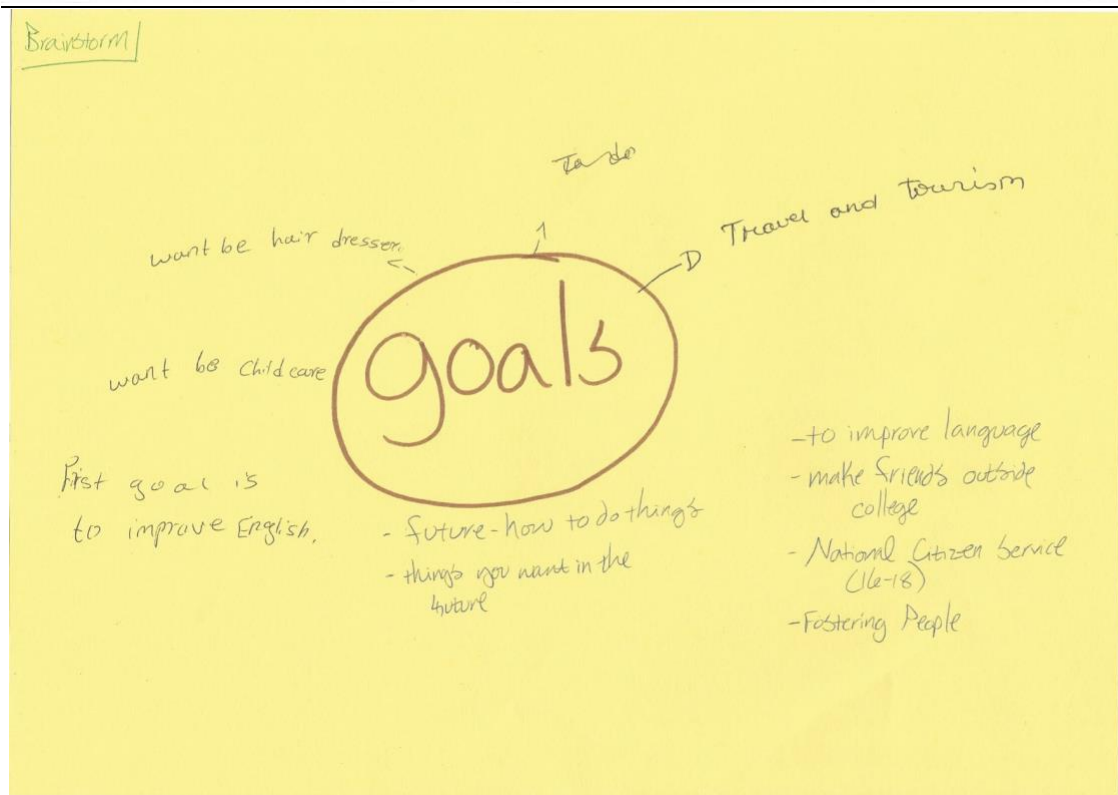
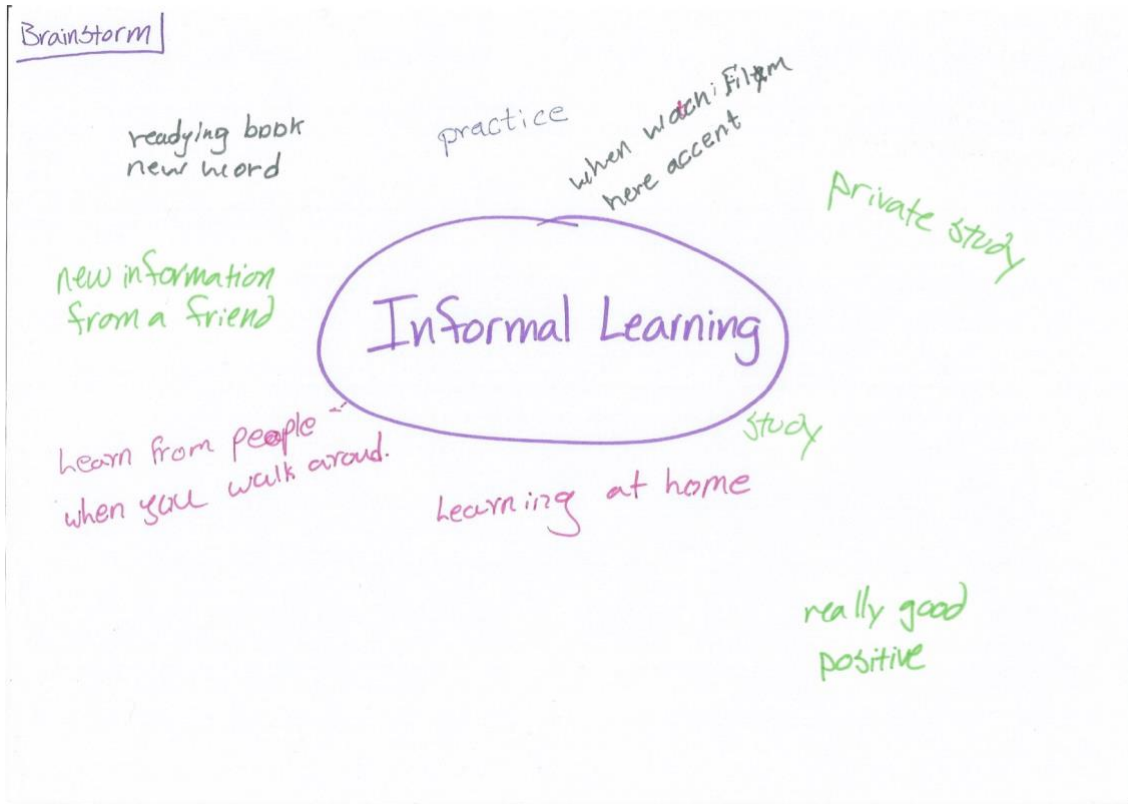
5. Appendix 5: Themes and prompts for young people

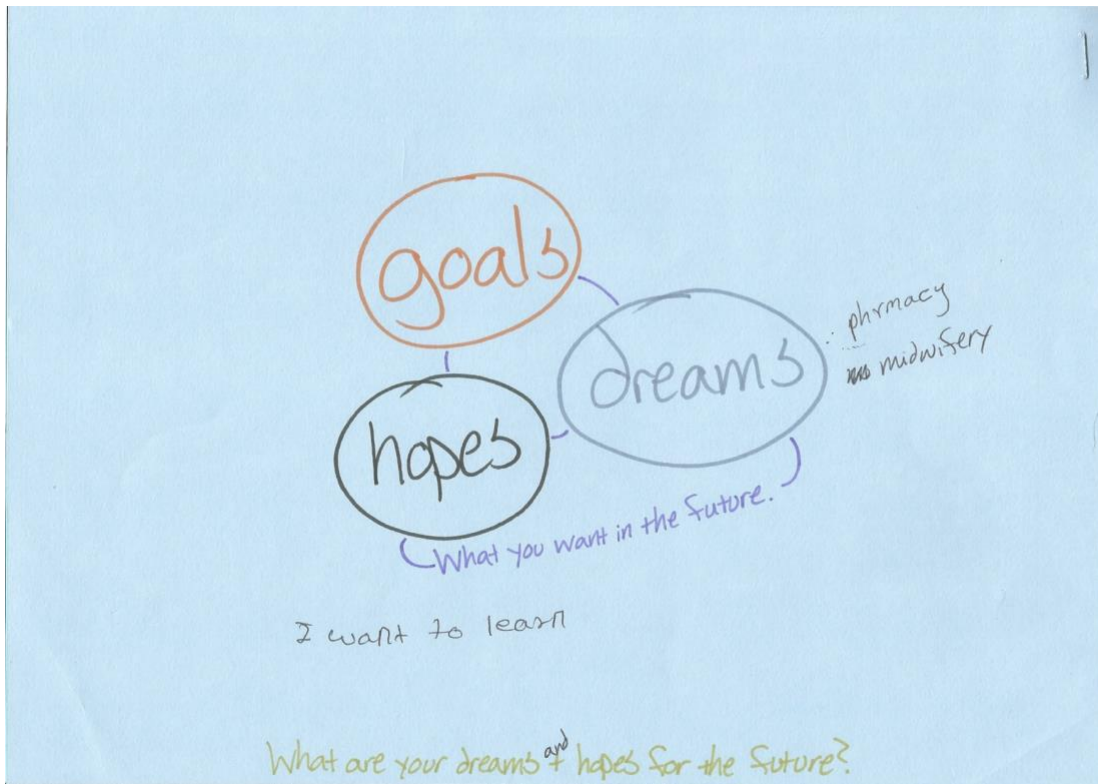
11 Research sessions with young people	
Session	Theme/topic and prompting questions
1	Mind map- brainstorm learning What do you do for fun? Where do you learn? At college or outside of college?
2	Mind map- social maps Are there people who are important to you? Are there places that are important to you? Are there things that are important to you?
3	Conversation around learning history (only 1 girl showed up) Opportunities for education in the past? Who did/do you learn from? When you need to know something, who do you ask?
4	Mind map- brainstorm goals How did you decide on your college course? What will you do when you finish college?
5	Mind map- brainstorm belonging Where are you happy/comfortable here? Do you ever feel left out of things or lonely? Is it easy for you to make friends?
6	Mind map- brainstorm goals/hopes/dreams What are your dreams and hopes for the future? What do you want in the future?
7	Conversation around learning history (only 1 girl showed up) Opportunities for education in the past? Who did/do you learn from? When you need to know something, who do you ask?
8	Mind map- learning lines What I learned/did when I was young... What I learn/do now... What I want to learn/do...
9	Mind map- brainstorm identity What are the important parts of me? How do I see myself?
10	Conversation around learning history (only 1 girl showed up) Opportunities for education in the past? Who did/do you learn from? When you need to know something, who do you ask?
11	Conversation around support (only 1 girl showed up) Who supports you? What support have you received in UK? What has been good? What do you want more of?

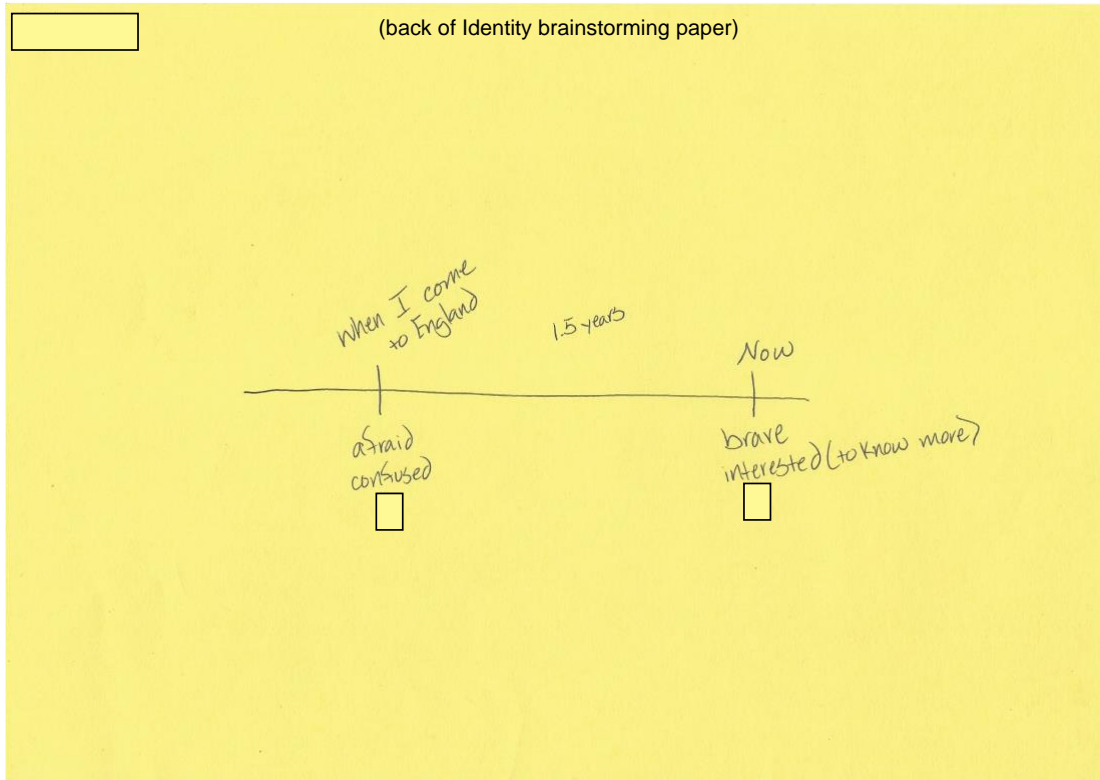
6. Appendix 6: Questions for key workers

1. For the recording, can you tell me your name and a bit about yourself?
2. How long have you been working with Haven?
3. How did you get into this work? Why?
4. What exactly does your job entail?
5. What does Haven offer for the young people it supports?
6. What services do the young people most often take advantage of? Why do you think that is?
7. Haven supports both girls and boys- how many of each? How is it that girls come to Haven? As there are so few of them compared to the boys in the UK.
8. Does Haven provide any guidance in future planning? How?
9. Do you see any difference in the way that you or Haven works with the girls and with the boys?
10. Do you see any difference in the working relationship between male or female project workers working with the male or female young people?
11. The research project revolves around the idea of belonging- how do you see that develop in some of the young people? Do you see a difference between the girls and boys in this regard?
12. Learning is a major theme in the research. Do you see the young people taking advantage of opportunities they come across? Do you see any difference between the girls and boys in taking advantage of these opportunities?
13. Who do you perceive is influential in the lives of the young people as they're settling here? People either here in the area or in other places in the world? (People like you or social workers, teachers or peers, or family or friends, home community groups, etc.) How? Do you see any difference between the girls and boys in this area?
14. When the young people are granted status, do you see any change in their attitude or spirits or what they're looking for in their life? What might those changes look like? The girls in particular?
15. Do you perceive a "forward looking" in the young people? As in looking to the future with goals or dreams or hopes? Both short and long term. Do you see any difference between the girls and boys in this area?

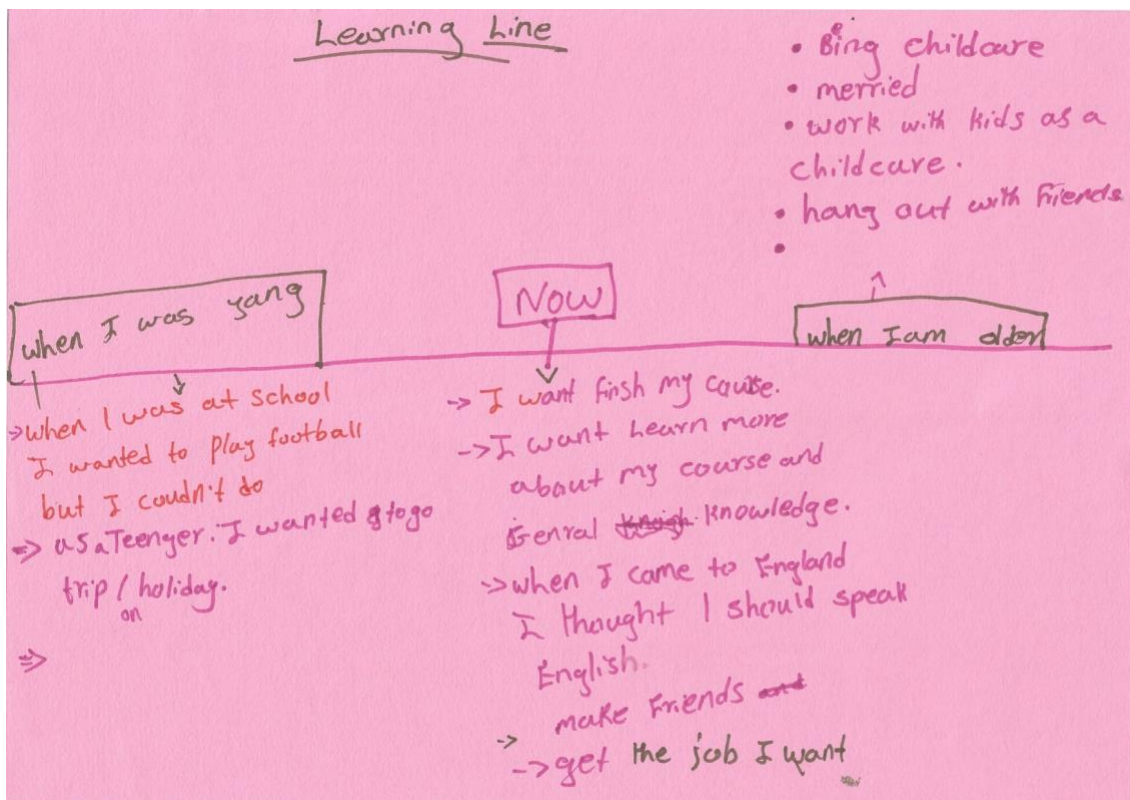
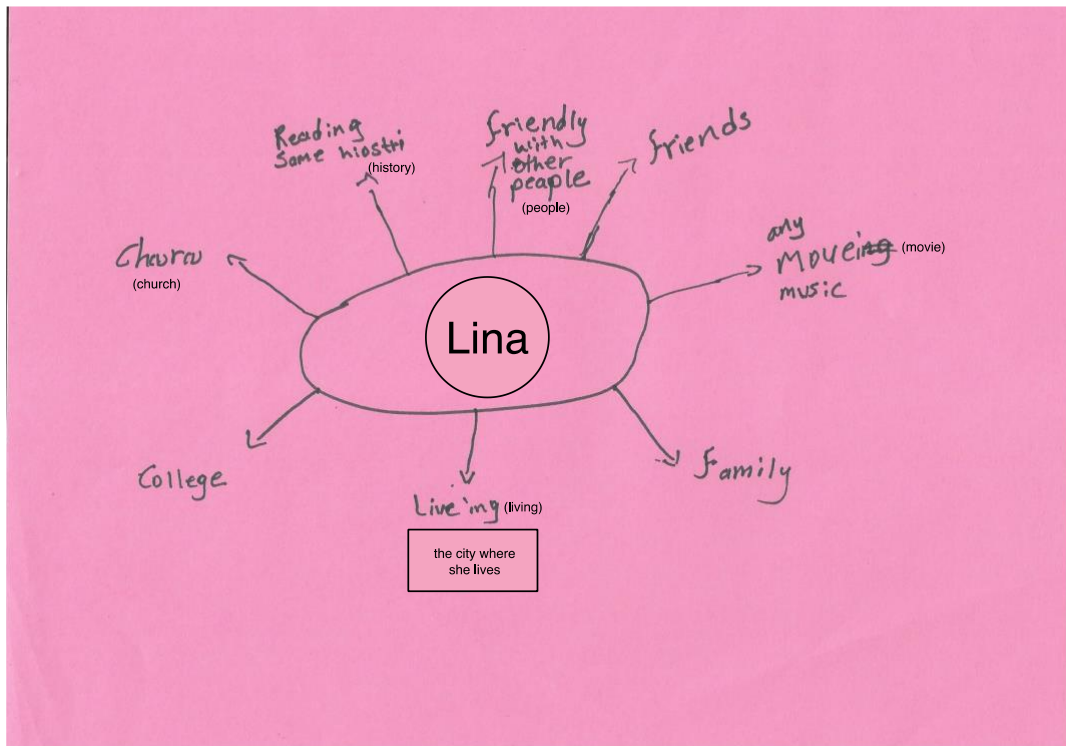
7. Appendix 7: Brainstorming mind maps







8. Appendix 8: Mind maps



Learning Line

When I was	Now (Now)	When I am older
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When I was child When I was in my country When I want school, (went school) When I ^(left) my country When I ^(think) about my future ^(future) I went football when I was young ^(football) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Study College ^(study) holiday visit friend. I ^(enjoy) study hair and beauty course ^(course) Look after my self think future ^(future) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> working hair and beauty. married in 26 year old. ⁽²⁶⁾ see my mum and sister.

Learning Line

When I was young	Now	When I am older
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I want to be Singer and I want to do playing piano. I want to be make pottery. I was Thinking ^(young) to how can learning about new education ^(education) I want to learn for care people. when start job. I want to help ^(help) family and to help ^(help) my self. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> when I am older