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Title

Personal resilience and identity capital among young people leaving care: enhancing identity formation and life chances through involvement in volunteering and social action

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Abstract

This study explored identity capital and personal resilience among care leavers and young people in care engaging in social activities through volunteering. Care leavers and young people in care are disadvantaged developmentally by lack of identity resources and an accelerated transition to independence. This study analysed material from semi-structured interviews to explore the Identity Capital Model and theories of individualisation, agentic identity development and resilience in explaining the identity resources of young people

transitioning out of care. The analysis identified links between the exploration opportunities of volunteering with the development of agentic individualisation and enhanced identity capital. The findings indicate that developmental processes may be enhanced through supported and personalised volunteering opportunities to aid vulnerable young people transitioning out of care.   Young people leaving care can make substantial gains particularly in social capital, personal resilience and identity capital. This study indicates that volunteering opportunities for this group of vulnerable young people may assist in compensating for the lack of resources often experienced by care leavers when transitioning to adulthood.

Keywords: Identity Capital, transition, care leaver, individualisation, volunteering, resilience.

Introduction

Young people leaving out-of-home care (care leavers) in the United Kingdom (UK) face a process that shortens and accelerates their transition to adulthood, in comparison with their home-care peers (Stein 2008). This is problematic because many care leavers are already vulnerable to physical and mental health problems (Baidawi, Mendes and Snow 2014; Barn 2015; Dixon 2008; Hiles et al. 2013; Memarzia et al. 2015; Ward 2011). By age 19, UK care leavers are more likely to be 'not in education, employment or training' (NEET) when compared with home-care peers (Department for Education 2014).

Transitions to adulthood have evolved from stable pre-modern form, to a complex and extended period in the present (Côté 2009). In earlier ages, a more limited range of (local) life-opportunities marked transition to adulthood: familial or community expectation to enter agriculture, industry or household service, and/or marriage and child rearing. In contrast, contemporary liberal societies opportune (but do not necessarily meet) a plethora of individual choices which oblige the individual to respond, yet also necessitate their possession of the resources to do so. Transition into adulthood is now noted for instability

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(Luyckx, De White and Goosens 2011) and inequality of opportunity within social and physical environments (Ungar 2015).

Care leavers experiencing environmental and emotional instability struggle to accumulate the positive support networks (Hiles et al. 2013) required for utilising development opportunities. Such lack of support is associated with social exclusion (Jackson and Cameron 2012), and necessitates that relevant professionals facilitate development of social connections (Singer, Berzin and Hokanson 2013; Rogers 2011).

Current policy and practice

This report is of part of a wider project evaluating provision of volunteering opportunities to young care leavers as part of the UK Cabinet Office Centre for Social Action. The UK government seeks to provide improved support for care leavers through sustained support after age 18, utilising community resources. The overall project aimed to measure the impacts of social action on personal resilience, social capital, wellbeing and access to education, training and employment (HM Government 2014). The Boom project, run by Greater Manchester Youth Network (GMYN), offers volunteering opportunities to in-care and care-leaving young people. Boom (in-care) and Boom+ (care leavers) are age-determined activity groups for 13-21 year-olds. Volunteering opportunities are matched to the young people for suitability, with support given by GMYN throughout the activity.

The outcomes of the wider aims are reported elsewhere (see Cumbers et al. in review). This paper reports the specific findings in relation to identity, individualisation and personal resilience.

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Theoretical background

Psychosocial theories of identity development can be sourced to Erikson's dichotomous epigenetic stage model of drives and environmental influences, locating adolescence at the stage of identity acquisition versus role confusion (Erikson 1950, 1968). Marcia (1966) expanded this into four-status outcomes: identity achievement (commitment following exploration and experimentation), foreclosure (premature commitment), moratorium (ongoing experimentation or avoidance) and diffusion (identity confusion). Later theories emphasise the necessary interactions between agency and opportunity to explore (Luyckx, De White, & Goosens 2011), interpersonal relationships (Lerner 2006) and resources and empowerment from the social environment (Ungar 2011). This study focuses on the interactive elements on intra-personal factors, accepting that environmental and social inequality present the pre-existing and continuing contexts of adversity for this population group.

Identity Capital

Côté (2002, 2005) recognises adolescent individualisation within a continuum of passive acceptance of externally imposed identity, and an active process governed by liberality and personal choice. For Côté, passive, default, individualisation is characterised by the absorption of pre-ordained personhood, acquired from parents or culture, with a subsequent delaying of stable and coherent adult maturity. Agentic individualisation for Côté is governed by opportunity-seeking behaviour, choice and personal growth.

Côté appears to utilise an educational-developmental concept of agency, being the ability to initiate intentional goal-oriented action (Mashford-Scott & Church 2011). While agency is a

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contested concept within social constructionism, this model appears present a continuum of self-determination, affording a relativistic measure of agency.

Cluster analysis by Schwartz, Côté and Arnett (2005) illustrates this continuum, albeit rather dichotomously, as an agentic pathway, linked to exploration, self-esteem, ego strength and internal locus of control, and a default pathway characterised by avoidance, conformity and diffuse identity.

The Identity Capital Model places individualisation in the context of maturation prolonged by continuing education and training (Côté 2002; Côté et al. 2016). Identity capital for Côté (2002) is those resources available internally (intangible identity capital) and externally (tangible identity capital) which aid a young person's navigation between extremes of structured/unstructured identity formation. Identity gains may come from structured forces (e.g. gender, class, family expectations), structured opportunities (e.g. family support, community memberships, external validation), and the personal capital which enables the exercising of agency (e.g. self-esteem, confidence, aspirations). However, identity gains here rely on exposure to opportunities obtained by agentic behaviour, resulting in exploitation of inner resources (e.g. personality and skills) and external resources (e.g. social connections) (Yuan and Sek-yum Ngai 2016).

Social capital

Theories of individualisation enable the mapping of maturational achievements as they interact with internal and external resources. Care leavers may often lack intangible identity capital such as self-esteem and a sense of belonging, and have poor tangible identity capital

(social capital) which would otherwise stem from family support, peer networks and community stability. Agentic behaviour is seen as important in accessing social capital (Côté 2002), psychosocial wellbeing (Tikkanen 2016), identity resolution (Yuan and Sek-yum Ngai 2016) and academic and career achievement (Beal and Crockett 2013). This underlines the necessity of social capital opportunities in order to facilitate individualisation.

Personal Resilience

Resilience is described as a multi-dimensional process of adaptation to adversity involving personal factors and the social and physical environment (Ungar 2015). Resilience is strongly linked to contextual dimensions and access to environmental resources (Unger 2015) therefore, disadvantaged young people are often particularly subject to pre-existing and continuing negative effects (Cicchetti 2013; Ungar 2013). This study separates personal and contextual resilience (addressed here as social capital and opportunity-taking), and focuses on personal resilience factors, termed emotional self-regulation, self-efficacy and self-determination (Cicchetti 2010).

Stein (2006) suggests three types of care leaver resilience: those 'moving on' have had stable experiences and are the most capable of transitioning to independent living; a vulnerable 'survivor' group have experienced disruption and instability of care, while 'victims' have had negative pre-care experiences and a cycle of difficult behaviour and placement failures. 'Survival' was typically found by Hung and Appleton (2016) among care leavers exhibiting day-to-day survival mentality and profound self-reliance, while care leaver 'resilience' for Samuels and Price (2009) tends to be a survivalist mentality, engendered by lack of support and others' expectations of needing to be independent.

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Modifiable resilience factors among disadvantaged young people are associated with experiencing secure attachment, having a sense of control, peer support, and being given an opportunity (Rutter, Giller and Hagell 1998). Newman and Blackburn's in-depth review (2002) identified personal resilience in adversity can be developed through strong social support networks, committed mentoring, positive school and extra-curricular activities, opportunities to develop a sense of mastery, making a difference to others, and being exposed to positive stress.

Aims of this study

The interplay between individualisation and identity capital appears to be an important feature in the development of personal resilience for the emerging adult. Where much research has focused on this interplay in a family setting, (e.g. Billings, Hauser and Allen 2008; Hauser 1991) these theories have not been applied directly to people leaving care. This analysis aims to explore the impacts of enhanced social and identity capital on agentic individualisation and personal resilience among transitioning care leavers.

This study uses interview transcripts from a wider project evaluating the benefits of supported volunteering for young care leavers. Interview data were used to explore how well exposure to development opportunities reflects the theoretical frameworks of structured and agentic identity development, individualisation, and personal resilience. Specifically:

1) To investigate whether, and in what ways, volunteering presents opportunities for identity exploration, personal resilience development and the acquisition of social capital

2) To explore the theories of individualisation and identity capital in relation to personal resilience factors.

Method

A pragmatic, qualitative methodology (Mackenzie and Knipe 2006) was developed by NC for the wider project, which identified eight topic areas for exploration, derived chiefly from Office for National Statistics social capital indicators (Foxton and Jones 2011), with supplementary questions added to address personal resilience, life transitions and experiential agency/knowledge. In consultation with project stakeholders, topics were transformed into semi-structured interview questions suitable for this population (Table 1). Field notes were taken during interviewing processes. Qualitative methodologies within a pragmatic paradigm are necessarily problem-centred and orientated to 'real-world' practice evaluation, therefore, the wider mixed-method project reflected both interpretivist and positivist paradigmatic positions.

(Table 1 near here)

Sample

Eight interviewees were purposively selected for interview from a cohort of 18 young care leavers and in-care young people (and their carers) engaged in Boom projects. Cohort total comprised 12 females and 6 males, with an average age as 17.25 (range 14-21). Ten participants recorded a disability (communication, mental health, specific learning disability). Sixteen were white British, one African and one 'not known'. Fourteen were in education while four were NEET.   Potential participants were identified in partnership with statutory

and non-statutory gatekeepers (social care service staff and voluntary sector partners). Participants were selected for their representativeness of the wider Boom/Boom+ cohort and the varied experiences offered by the volunteering programme; nonetheless, as a 'hard-to-reach' cohort, final selection was also mediated by participants' accessibility and their preparedness to provide informed consent.

Data Analysis

Data were collated using QSR NVivo and content analysis applied to interview data and field notes. Themes were derived from Côté's developmental individualisation hypothesis (2002), using the agency-identity model (Schwartz, Côté and Arnett 2005) as a framework (Table 2).

(Table 2 near here)

The agency-identity model was collapsed into key themes: 'exploration' was included with 'exploitation of opportunities', and 'ego strength' merged with 'sense of purpose' and 'surety of identity' (i.e. standing up for oneself and self-representation).

Interviews were conducted by SM and HC with EK or MD present. Analysis was conducted by LW and discussed for model concordance with NC. Researcher bias was managed by separating data collection (interviewers) from analysts (LW and NC). Data interpretation was guided by theories of locus of control, agency/self-efficacy (Rotter 1966; Bandura 1997, 2001) and ego development (Loevinger 1976; Hauser 1991). While these theoretical models limit the interpretation to explanations of psychological development theory, they sustain consistency with the models and theories of individualisation and agency.

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Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was received from a university Research Ethics committee, and scrutinised by stakeholders in the partner agency: this included ongoing consideration of ethical matters (anonymity, confidentiality and data protection) and consideration of safeguarding duties. All fieldworkers were DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) verified. To protect both participants and researchers, face-to-face interviews were undertaken in locations affording privacy, while remaining in close proximity to other researchers and young people. Individual adjustments were made to information giving/consent processes for young people who disclosed reading difficulties, thereby ensuring consent was meaningful and fully informed.

Findings

Eight interviews were conducted with six care leavers (two females) and two in-care young people (two females). Overall, the main finding was that participants experienced personal change and growth associated with the Boom projects. Stages of individualisation were appropriately different between care leavers and in-care participants, but overall the findings indicate that these experiences brought forward opportunities for developmental exploitation. These opportunities appear to have prompted agentic individualization through exploration, the exercising of choice, and development of self-esteem and interpersonal social capital.

Exploration and exploitation of opportunities

Many references indicated that the young people welcomed the opportunity to gain experiences and take a risk. All interviews contained evidence that they experienced an opportunity for exploration, often with positive consequences:

'I'd never done (rock climbing) before, I was a bit nervous at first [ ] I ended up thinking I might as well just do it' (YP1, female, 19yrs).

'I never used to do the group things I do now, I just used to do the one-to-one, but when I started doing Boom + I was like 'what the hell' and got stuck in doing the group stuff' (YP8, male, care leaver, 18yrs).

These examples indicate a change of perspective from a state of moratorium in which the young person appears 'stuck' or 'waiting', to one of risk-taking and exploration when presented with an opportunity.

Identity and interpersonal social capital

Nearly all participants or their carers identified inter-personal change:

'I feel like I've got more open I can just go out and meet new mates' (YP2, male, 18yrs).

'Boom+ is good because it makes me mature. [ ] .. I'm more confident to talk to people because I was before... 'I shouldn't even come here'. But now I can talk to people easily and I've learnt a lot of things here being in Boom' (YP7, male, 18yrs).

'I left school with rubbish GCSEs [ ] I did something negative then but look at me now, I'm doing something positive. [ ] ..it's helped me to build up my confidence, helped me to speak to other people and share my opinions..' (YP6, female, 17yrs).

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Field note: interview with withdrawn, shy female (YP3, 14yrs):

S5 (foster-carer) reports: She would never have done this (abseiling). She didn't do it at first; she was the last person to do it, but once she'd done it she wanted to do it again and again. So that gave her lots of confidence.

There is interplay evidenced here between exposure to social networks, development of personal capital (confidence) and agentic behaviour in being able to exploit opportunities. This highlights that the epigenetic process of identity requires internal conditions for exploration such as confidence and secure attachment, and external factors such as the provision of safe opportunities to engage in developmental work. YP3's evidence above also illustrates a feedback loop of successful exploring with increased confidence and further exploration.

Ego strength, self-esteem and confidence

Many participants implied increased confidence, self-esteem, and ego strength, often expressed through limited language (*italicised)*:

'at first we thought we weren't going to raise any money but then when we got the certificates we were proper proud we did this, put all our hard work into it, so we felt really *happy*..'

'we made some cakes for people with dementia, when we went there it was pretty heart-breaking [ ] when they saw the younger ones they started crying, that made us

more heartbroken, [ ] we've never experienced that before, [ ] we went walk-about and gave them cake, talked to them and that's what we did, that was pretty good *fun*' (YP2, male, 18yrs).

The use of the words 'happy' and 'fun' suggests development of self-esteem and ego strength in contexts of adversity (hard work and emotional challenge). The description of 'fun' here is particularly noticeable in recognition of the growth of personal strength in the face of what was otherwise a challenging encounter.

Internal locus of control and exercising choice

As suggested by Rutter et al. (1998), having a sense of control is important for personal resilience. However, Côté s agentic behaviour is clearly a form of internal locus of control in that a sense of being able to control one's own actions and environment is agentic. There were several indications among older participants of enjoying control, or frustration at not having control:

'..if you ask me a question I will just give the answer straightaway you know, so they make me to be more confident when I'm saying something and *they give me that power* to express myself every time in any situation' (YP7, male, 18yrs, recent immigrant to UK).

'Soon as I'm 21 I don't have a social worker' [ ]. (Q: How does that feel?) 'Relieved because I've had that most of my life, it will be good to fend for myself, *it's what I want to do now* but I can't [ ] because staff at my house say, 'he's doing that' [ ], so I don't really have a choice at the moment'. (Asked what he would want to do..) 'Like

teenage things smoking weed, drinking, stuff like that [ ] it's a teenager thing and I'm

a teenager I want to do it, can I live my teenage life and they're just like 'no', it is a

very parent thing (YP8, male, 18yrs).

'..my idea is, *I'm going to do this* as volunteer work and then if I'm really into it [ ] go

back to (peer mentor) and say I want to make a job out of this how do I go about it'

(YP6, female, 21yrs).

The frustration of not being able to exercise agentic behaviour (YP8) suggests internal need

to exercise personal choice and control, and contrasts with expressions and recognition of

gaining personal control and having agency. The expression of agentic behaviour for YP6

indicates an easy confidence in already having agency. Examples from YP6 and YP7 go

further in demonstrating awareness of having gained agency (power).

Tangible identity capital (social capital)

It was clear that these young people already had linking social capital (access to connections)

through their social workers, but both older and younger participants appeared to struggle

with making friends for reasons which varied from changing locations to feeling isolated and

vulnerable:

'With netball (youth club) we just stopped going. [ ] it wasn't the original team that

she had started with, [ ] they formed their own team and sort of left (YP3) out. [ ]

They weren't making her feel part of it, so we just stopped going' (foster-carer to

YP3, female, 14yrs)

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However, most participants described their social world opening up due to increasing interpersonal skills and ego strength:

> '..this has really opened up another world for YP3. It's the confidence and meeting people. She wouldn't have met half these people if it hadn't been for the Boom project' (foster-carer for YP3, female, 14yrs).

> '...now I have got used to being in a group and working all together. When I was in the group at school I got bullied so I turned round and said I don't want to be in that group' (YP1, female, 19yrs).

> 'You meet totally different new people who have got different minds, different opportunities' (YP2, male, 18yrs).

The two in-care young people (YP1 and YP3) illustrate their lack of social capital before joining Boom. Their stories suggest, however, that tangible social capital (meeting people, gaining friends) also impacts on their confidence to exploit further resources (i.e. engaging in groups). YP2 also demonstrates the extension of social capital (bridging capital) through interacting with people outside his usual peer group.

Structured individualisation

Most interviewees were self-selecting, agentic individuators as they had committed themselves to Boom projects. However there was evidence that they had needed the structure of Boom to feel able to take the risk of engaging in activities:

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'I'd never done it before (rock climbing), I was a bit nervous. *The staff encouraged me* to do it' (YP1, female, 19yrs).

'..I learnt that I have got skills I didn't think I had, *through encouragement and motivation* to do tasks' (YP1, female, 19yrs).

(foster-carer) '..she did face-painting for the people coming in [ ]. You know what you want to do. Go on, tell S. 'I *want to be a make-up artist'* (YP3, female, 14yrs).

'I was dead eager to get in there, get it done, *do what I'm supposed to be doing...*' (YP2, male, 18yrs).

External structure may have provided permission to exploit opportunities. Project members appear to be vital for engagement or motivation in the first two examples. However, YP3 and YP2 are also demonstrating conformity to roles (albeit at different developmental stages). Most telling is YP2's need for conformity within the volunteering activity (*do what I'm supposed to be doing*). This evidence also indicates the epigenetic nature of maturation through the need and use of structured support such as being given the role of face-painter (tangible capital), and for the development of identity factors such as confidence and self-esteem (intangible capital).

Other examples demonstrate the transition from previous identity moratorium before Boom:

'I never used to talk to many people, I just wanted to keep myself to myself, do whatever. [When] I moved to B, I didn't really know anyone so I thought *I'll just stay here, go to college and go home, just stay in my room'* (YP 2, male, 18yrs).

'I look back and I think '*alright I was negative then but look at me now',* I'm doing something more positive and it's pushed me' (YP6, female, 21yrs).

One individual (YP4, female, 16yrs) demonstrated a marked identity vulnerability, particularly through avoidance coping and diffusion. This appeared to be embedded in anxious attachment. This individual was 'hard to reach' and refused to be recorded, but presented for interview on second appointment. All data were collected through observation, discussion with her project worker and field notes. There is evidence of foreclosure, poor ego strength, premature self-identification and role conformity:

Field note:

The interview took place with YP4 looking down most of the time and having the hood of her track suit up. YP4 commented that she hadn't had anything to eat the whole day. I ask her if she didn't even have breakfast and she said, '*no, I'm a fussy eater'.* I offer her my apple and I've brought some chocolates, but she refused them, saying '*I don't eat fruit'.*

The self-labelling could indicate premature foreclosure, but here is more suggestive of immaturity and marked ego-defence. Further statements demonstrate a lack of commitment to the Boom experiences through avoidance behaviour:

Field note:

As soon as the interview starts [ ] she claims that she doesn't remember them (Boom

activities) and generally says that she cannot say which ones stood out for her, either

in a positive or negative way.

Field note:

YP4 seems quite interested in being helpful to others or being seen as someone who

supports others. She does not seem to want to acknowledge any weaknesses in herself

and/or her own need of support. [ ] even going to Boom is doing (project worker) a

favour [ ]. I'm wondering if she pretends that she doesn't really care about Boom to

protect herself against the fact that it might not be there in the future and to avoid

disappointment. She also seems to have taken on the role of carer and central person

in her family's life, somebody who is there for others in the absence of her mother

playing that role.

The role of carer is also indicative of conformity. When asked why she returned to Boom

after a break, she avoids demonstrating dependence on others for ego strength:

Field note:

She said that everybody kept 'begging' her to come back, so the decision to go back

was mainly 'to get them off my back'. Clearly this answer is a bit tongue in cheek,

like many of the answers and when I said 'now you're pulling my leg', she said, 'no,

really, they kept asking me'.

However, earlier, she revealed her esteem needs during a bike ride:

Field note:

..she was going at her own pace, being ahead of everybody else. '*Everyone was*

behind me'.

 [ ] she tends to be waving to her foster-carer from the top of the hill when he is still

pushing his bike up the hill, so there is a certain sense of accomplishment and pride in

this.

Lack of agentic behaviour for Côté is marked particularly by an inability to make choices. It

also follows that a young person with a poor a sense of identity (identity diffusion) will find it

difficult to make choices. The lack of owned values or sense of who they are impacts on

decision-making. A comment from YP4's project worker is indicative of YP4's poor ego

strength and difficulty in making choices;

Field note:

EG commented about YP4's inability to make choices. When EG offered her a £10

shopping voucher, she didn't know which shop she wanted it for.

While this difficulty may be avoidance (reluctance to disclose) rather than decision-making,

it is concordant with her general presentation of identity diffusion. She demonstrates only

limited certainty about herself, and these are more indicative of premature foreclosure rather

than positive identity formation:

Field note:

Asked about how she decided to do childcare (for a career), she says she has been '*wanting to do that for ages*'. She refers to having looked after her little sister and little cousin [ ] and says *'I love children'*.

In terms of Stein's care leaver resilience, YP4 demonstrates a level of 'victim' (Stein 2006), having experienced disrupted placements and not being able to develop a sense of trust. There is also evidence of survivalist behaviour (Samuels and Price 2009), through defensiveness, avoidance and foreclosure.

Discussion

This analysis focused on experiences of volunteering and has identified associations with agentic individualisation. This does not demonstrate of course that the individualisation process would not be progressing without these experiences, but participants' testimonies here support the notion that they would not be gaining timely exposure to development opportunities without attending Boom. The key elements that appear to 'work' are the personalised nature of the opportunities offered and the support and motivation from project workers. In this way, the Boom project itself acts as the structured institution from which young people can safely test explore their identities.

To view individualisation as purely dichotomous appears misleading as here it is a graduated epigenetic process, with structure providing building blocks for increasing agentic behaviour. The most vulnerable young person (YP4) demonstrates that structure in the form of conformity (social role) and avoidance (lack of commitment) provides a safe haven, although she is showing some exploratory behaviour by returning to Boom and agreeing to be interviewed.

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This exploration of individualisation among care leavers made use of existing interview data from young people who self-selected, both by joining Boom projects and agreeing to be interviewed. This makes this sample particularly agentic at the outset. However this study has contrasted this sample at different maturation stages and adversity. The material also illustrates links between individualisation, identity capital and personal resilience, as identified in our analysis particularly as ego strength, self-esteem and internal locus of control.

Of the two in-care females, both are at earlier stages of individualisation in that their conformity and foreclosure (e.g. career choice) seem more natural for their ages, and their self-esteem is more reliant on external validation, (abseiling and cycling ahead of others). This external validation can be compared to that of an older care-leaver's internalised integrity, describing volunteering with the homeless:

> 'I didn't tell any of my friends [ ] I'm not one of them people who brag about things and go, 'oh look I'm helping out the homeless'' (YP8, male, 18yrs).

Helping others emerged as a strong self-esteem factor. Although not articulated specifically, it was clear that this gave a sense of pride and achievement. These findings reflect those of Melkman et al. (2015) where benefits to care leavers in helping others included self-efficacy, social connectedness, a sense of purpose, and gaining a sense of 'normality' by reversing the care role.

Supported volunteering appears to provide many of the personal resilience factors for Stein's 'survivors' (Stein 2006). They are experiencing a sense of control, peer support and opportunity (Rutter, Giller and Hagell 1998), and appear to benefit from committed mentoring, extra-curricular activities (engendering a sense of mastery), helping others, and exposure to positive stress (Newman and Blackburn 2002). Additionally, many of the young people attest particularly to the intangible identity capital in gaining confidence and communication skills, enabling exploitation of the opportunities presented.

One aim of this study was to explore interactions between individualisation processes, identity capital and personal resilience. Findings indicate agentic identity opportunities can engender both internal and external identity capital, and their relationship appears epigenetic in that gains are dually incremental and co-dependent. Individualisation and resilience literature suggests there is overlap between the two, with definitions of resilience clearly identified in individualisation theory, albeit using different terminologies. This study also demonstrates that personal resilience, in the form of self-esteem (confidence), ego strength (integrity and sense of purpose) and self-determination (agency) is also dependent on individualisation opportunities and identity capital.

Pragmatic efforts to replicate the extended maturation process for care leavers in the UK may reduce the survivalist self-reliance that engenders premature identity resolution and foreclosure. Measured graduation towards individualisation appears to need continued support during exposure to opportunities for safe exploration; replicating graduation from the parental home. Examining the role of supported volunteering for care leavers found these exposures provide opportunities for the individualisation process, and at different stages of maturity.

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Limitations of the study.

This study used pre-existing data collected for a compatible research aim. This limited the sample size and representation of younger people in care. However, the main findings from this study stem from the care leavers, with evidence from those in care providing a contrast to the care leavers' stage of development. This study does not explore participants' social context, so excludes examination of environmental factors of personal resilience, though our findings suggest that these young people have existing social capital, which may be a factor in enabling their access to Boom.

Conclusion

Supported volunteering appears to provide opportunities and structure to facilitate agentic behaviour for care leavers. Social action through volunteering may provide an esteem factor via the rewards received from helping others, and gaining a sense of achievement. Volunteering activities and ongoing support may enhance social capital through group work, communication and interpersonal skills, with a resulting increase in confidence and self-belief. At the same time, it is likely that supported volunteering facilitates exposure to agentic development opportunities.

However, agentic individualisation for this group appears to need support through structured activity and motivation to compensate for existing intra-personal disadvantages. These are likely to be lack of confidence and self-esteem, poor interpersonal skills, especially for those who are at a more vulnerable stage of individualisation.

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Table 1: Interview themes

Theme	Exemplary question
1 Bonding social capital (with peers)	Think of something you found really fun, challenging or difficult during the project, who would you tell first about this, and why?

2 Bridging social capital (with others)	Think about where you live/where spend the most time. Who, in your opinion, are the most important people in your area?
3 Linking social capital (access to power)	Imagine you are having problems with […] Imagine you've been in touch, but nobody has got back to you, what next?
4 Transitions	Thinking back over your time being part of the project, did you surprise yourself by doing something new or unexpected?
5 Personal resilience	Did anything during the project make you stretch your talents to their limit?
6 Reflecting	If you were asked to list three things you have found out about yourself during this project, what would they be?
7 Evaluating services	Could you tell someone what you would change about the project, given the chance?
8 Influencing/helping others	If you had known at the beginning what you know now, what might you advise a friend in the same situation as you to do?

Table 2: Framework adapted from Côté's individualisation hypothesis & Schwartz, Côté and Arnett (2005) Agency-identity model.

Structured	**Agentic**

Conforming (to normatives)	Internal locus of control (sense of control and self-determination)
Foreclosure (premature self identification or commitment)	Exploration, exploitation of opportunities (approach coping)
Avoiding (avoidance coping)	Ego strength (surety of identity, sense of purpose)
Moratorium (delaying, lack of commitment)	self esteem (pride, enjoying helping others, feeling good about oneself)
Diffuse role/identity – confusion	Choice/flexibility (able to decide for oneself)
	confidence
	commitment (decision-making, absorption)