

Thesis title:

**The University Bubble:**

**Undergraduate students' perceptions and experiences of 'risk' / 'risks' during their transition to, through and beyond university.**

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risks during their transitions to, through and beyond university.**  
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The original contribution of this thesis is a new theorisation of a 'bubble' to develop understanding of student experiences, and more besides. This thesis applies the 'bubble' to student perception and experience of risk, during their transition to, through and beyond university. There is a growing body of research detailing wider changes in the HE landscape (neo-liberalisation, consumerisation, marketisation, 1990s expansion, widening participation policies since 1997, tuition fee rise). There is less in human geography which attends to students' everyday lives. That which exists, often separates traditional and non-traditional experiences, predominantly focusing on the latter and on first year, often homogenising the traditional student experience. This PhD uncovers complexities of 'traditional' student experiences, concentrating on undergraduates' perceptions and experiences of risk.

This thesis draws on data from a participatory research project, involving undergraduates as co-researchers, and participants, all self-identifying as 'traditional' students (in ways contrasting to literature). Contextually, this research was conducted during the tuition fee rise in the UK, so includes students paying lower and higher fees.

The major findings and contributions of this thesis rest in a four-fold conceptualisation of the university bubble. Firstly, the bubble as a tantalising place of play, presenting risk as an exciting, new opportunity. Secondly, the bubble as spatially and relationally bound, protecting from risk, but acknowledging these boundaries may be stretched and malleable. Thirdly, the bubble generates risks through affective atmospheres, but these atmospheres overlap and interact. Fourthly, the temporary and fragile nature of the bubble, highlighting experiences of intense time, time out of time, imagined futures and how elements of the bubble persist. Through this conceptualisation of a bubble this research extends work on risk to consider a more relational and emotional approach to students' lives, offering fluidity in meaning. It builds on existing transitions literature, assessing student experience of risk in relation to understandings of 'emerging adulthood', and how in a period of heightened anxiety the move to embrace risk extends far beyond this 'youthful' period, as we are offered constant opportunities to re-shape our identities. It questions this notion of transitions to focus on the everyday experiences and temporalities as a university student.

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## Abbreviations

UKHE	United Kingdom Higher Education
HE	Higher Education
TLR/RLTS	Teaching led research/Research led teaching session
ULGS	University Life Game session
ILHI	Individual life history interview
NOD	Naturally occurring data
DE	Diary extract
FG	Focus group

# **1 Introduction**

## **1.1 Why me?**

As an undergraduate I became interested in students' continuous transient situation; moving away from the parental home, moving house regularly but with returns to the parental home throughout, as well as a more permanent anticipated return after university. However, in Leicester this pattern of transience is not confined to students, but also replicated by wider residential patterns (Burrell, 2016). This triggered my undergraduate dissertation project on "The meaning of home to university students". Through this project, alongside studying youth cultures, and teaching (GCSE and sixth form students) as part of my degree, as well as work with young people in a range of educational settings, I became interested in young people's transitions and education more broadly.

Working as a Youth Engagement Officer and Strategy Lead for Leicester City Council, I worked closely with secondary school pupils across the city. It became increasingly apparent that the rise of tuition fees was a matter of great concern amongst intending students, which steered my curiosity towards university transitions. Whilst in this role, I gained experience of working with young people in both mainstream and SEN schools, and PRUs, from a wide range of backgrounds. The project was over a long period and some students would not be at the schools on completion, so, a more participatory approach enabled them some ownership and input over future changes to their learning environments. Involved in the creation and application of many innovative research methods (as a consequence of working with such a range of students), often coupled with a participatory approach, whilst not ignorant to the challenges, I became an enthusiastic and "unapologetic advocate" (Kindon et al, 2007: p29) for researching in this way, as a more ethical way of engaging young people in research.

Timing was a key factor, as my contract was drawing to a close the opportunity of a funded PhD enabled me the chance to explore these interests. Initially, I had put very little thought into my decision to come to Leicester as an undergraduate. However, as a graduate from the University of Leicester and still living in the city, with a growing fondness for both, I was very aware how my experience at/in Leicester shaped my own life course. Therefore, the prospect of exploring students' transitions to, through and beyond university was too exciting to pass up!

## 1.2 Why now? The current context of UKHE

This section helps to contextualise this project by outlining some of the ongoing changes to the Higher Education (HE) landscape, relevant to this project. The expansion of HE, and the introduction of the post-1992 university, increased institutions offering university education (Kettley, 2007). Alongside this expansion, there were policies to widen participation. These can be grouped as being motivated by and articulating three distinct policy discourses. First, Blair's introduction of a discourse of equality. Second, Blair and Brown's focus on raising aspirations, pushing young people to university as the most "acceptable aspiration" (Warrington, 2008; Brown, 2011: p7; Brown, 2012). Third, the coalition's narrative of fairness aiming for proportional percentages of students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Brown, 2012). The aim of these policies, albeit through different discourses, and various incentivisation schemes (Cochrane and Williams, 2013), was to open up university to those who may not have previously seen university as an option. For example, those from non-traditional backgrounds, underrepresented groups and disadvantaged areas. (Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003; Kettley, 2007; Holdsworth, 2009a; Brown, 2011). There has been a substantial rise in student numbers (Brown, 2011; Holton and Riley, 2013), however, access remains imbalanced (Brown, 2013). In fact, many argue inequalities might have actually been exaggerated further as non-traditional students are much more likely to attend post 1992 institutions (Archer and Hutchings, 2000; Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003; Reay et al, 2009; Kettley and Whitehead, 2011), whilst traditional students still make up the majority in pre-1992 universities (Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005). These changes spiked interest amongst researchers

in the experiences of these 'new', non-traditional students (Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003).

As a result of aims to increase and widen participation in Higher Education, the sector is increasingly neo-liberalised and student experience is becoming increasingly commodified (Read et al, 2003; Molesworth et al, 2009; Holloway et al, 2010; Chatterton, 2010; Walkerdine, 2011; Brown and Carasso, 2013). There is increased pressure on universities to be many things at once, to meet consumer demands (Shore, 2010). These include running as a business where students can buy their education, the quest for new knowledge and leadership through teaching and research excellence, educating people culturally to become citizens, as "polyuniversities" and "multiuniversities", an electronic role offering access worldwide to tools, and outreach work as a resource for local vicinities (Milojevic, 1998: p696-697). For some, this has encouraged instrumental approaches to the degree. Rather than the desire to pursue an intellectual challenge, the degree is seen as a means to an end, with a focus on the end result and employability, as opposed to hopes of increased intellectual capacity and critical thinking (Holdsworth, 2010; Molesworth et al, 2009). The university is packaged as an entire lifestyle (Chatterton, 1999; 2010; Reay, 2003; Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005; Smith and Holt, 2007; Holdsworth, 2009a; 2009b), and the role of students' union is expected to play a substantial part in this (Andersson and Sadgrove, 2012; Brooks et al, 2015a; 2015b; 2016), as students hope to supplement their degree with other experiences (Brown and Hesketh, 2004; Brooks, 2007b). This is not to suggest that all students perceive themselves as consumers (Tomlinson, 2015).

Tuition fees have continued to rise, with the first increase in 2007 (Callender and Jackson, 2005; 2008), and the second in 2012, with anticipated continued increases (Adams, 2016). The latter was expected to exacerbate issues raised in the previous paragraph further, as there were expectations that increased debt might limit mobility of intending students, and alter approaches to university to be more centred on career outcomes (Wakeling and Jeffries, 2013). Students expressed their infuriation through politically charged protests linked to debt (Leicester campaign, 2010; Hopkins

et al, 2012; Brown, 2013; Holton and Riley, 2013), and student support (Allen, 2013). However, numbers progressing to higher education continued to rise. As numbers continue to rise, students represent an increasing proportion of our population; particularly young people, living in university towns and cities (Smith and Holt, 2007; Smith, 2009; Hubbard, 2009), which highlights continued mobility of traditional students.

As this section has illustrated there have been many changes to HE in recent years. Whilst it is important to acknowledge these circumstances, there are concerns that if researchers are too distracted by them, the everyday nuances of students' lives will be overlooked (Holloway et al, 2010; Holton and Riley, 2013). Therefore, the primary focus of this research is on students' everyday lives. This research is unique as it offers insight from both sides of the recent tuition fee rise, including students paying both £3000 and £9000 fees. It also focuses on a self-selecting traditional student population, as a neglected sub group of young people, but a group that continue to make up significant proportions in pre-1992 institutions, such as Leicester. As well as enabling an exploration of the diversity in experience amongst this group, the project also hints at students' understandings of what 'traditional' meant.

### **1.3 Why University of Leicester? The case study site**

Situated in the East Midlands, Leicester city is approximately 73 square kilometres and is the heaviest populated city in the region (Leicester City Council, 2012: p2), with a significantly faster growth pattern compared to most UK urban areas (Leicester City Council, 2012: p4). Leicester is home to a diverse population of 330, 000, including over 50 ethnicities and cultures (Leicester City Council, 2012; BBC, 2012), and over "70 languages and/or dialects" (Leicester City Council, 2008: p10). Leicester is made up of 21 wards, with 52 out of the city's 54 councillors' being Labour (Leicester City Council, 2016a). Wards to the North and West of the City are considered to be more deprived, when compared to the South and East of the city, with exceptions of southern clusters of deprivation such as such as Eyres Monsell. (Hirsch et al, 2014). Traditionally famous for its hosiery, footwear and engineering in the early 19<sup>th</sup> to late 20<sup>th</sup> century

(Leicester City Council, 2016b), the city has enjoyed increasing recognition recently, in the media, and through investment and tourist flows, as a result of the discovery of Richard III's remains and Leicester City FC success. Despite the decline of industry, some well recognised brands remain homed in Leicester, such as Walkers and Next (Leicester City Council, 2016b). Leicester has a younger population when compared to UK city averages (Leicester City Council, 2008: p5; Hirsch et al, 2014), with students making up 12% of the population (University of Leicester, 2015: p53). Whilst Leicester City Council (see Leicester City Council, 2010), along with local employers, and indeed, Leicester University itself (see University of Leicester, 2016b), have made efforts to keep graduates, through various internships and schemes, the east midlands has the lowest rate in the country for retention (Allen, 2015). This suggests that for most graduates either Leicester does not appeal beyond graduation, or that opportunities are slim. Leicester has seen a spike in numbers housed in privately rented accommodation, dramatically more so than the rest of England, with numbers close to tripling since 2001 (Hirsch et al, 2014: p7). It could be speculated that a rise in student numbers has contributed to this increase in some way. The city is home to two Universities: DeMonfort University (gaining its university status in 1992) and the University of Leicester (registered as a university since 1958). Findings in this thesis focus on students attending the University of Leicester. Universities are seen to offer distinct cultures and ways of 'being a student', therefore, unsurprisingly, different institutions often appeal to different students in terms of age, class, ethnicity, local or non- local and so on (Chatterton, 1999; Crozier et al, 2008; Clayton et al, 2009).

Leicester University tends to recruit *traditional* age students, with over 80% under 21 on arrival (Students Union, 2009), with the vast majority leaving their parental home for study. Leicester has a long reputation of a being top 20 university, but in recent years its place in tables has fluctuated. At the beginning of this research 23<sup>rd</sup> (2012), Leicester was ranked ref by the complete university guide, compared with 20<sup>th</sup> (2013), 16<sup>th</sup> (2014), 19<sup>th</sup> (2015), in the following years. The university offers a range of subjects, including Archaeology, Law, Medicine, Maths, Biology, English, and Geography, to name a few. Whilst the university does offer Film Studies and various other non-traditional subjects, the institution's focus is predominantly on what would

typically be labelled academic, rather than vocational subjects. The university hosts just over 20,000 students, approximately half of which are undergraduates. There is a fairly even gender split, across this student population (Students Union, 2009; University of Leicester, 2016a). Based on the most recent statistics 65% of these students are identified white and 32% BME (University of Leicester, 2016a), which is a significant increase on previous years.

The university has several blocks of halls in close proximity to campus. Oadby village is presented as first year accommodation, and homes the majority of first year students in their transition to Leicester, comprising of mostly catered accommodation. Halls within the village vary significantly in cost and aesthetics, with John Foster seen as the most desirable and Mary Gee as the least. These halls are surrounded by hedges and gates and a short 20-minute walk from campus. Within this village, there is also canteen for catered meals, and areas to socialise, including halls bars. Many students travel by the 80 bus to university. However, in recent years as numbers increase, first year students are spread amongst other university accommodation, such as Freemans, Nixon court, Opal Court and Salisbury houses, all of which are more targeted towards postgraduate and international students, are self-catered and closer to campus. Beyond this, students are expected to transition into shared housing for their second and third year. The biggest clusters of student housing are along the edges of Victoria Park, in Clarendon Park and Highfields, with some extending further into Evington, but quite recently these areas have been red taped by the council so houses can no longer be bought to be rented for multiple occupancy. Student housing currently extends out into areas of Knighton, Aylestone and into the city centre. Student housing may continue to extend further out, in response to new imposed restrictions.

#### **1.4 Rationale and Research Aims**

This thesis addresses undergraduate perceptions and experiences during their transition to, through and beyond university. There were three key drivers of this research. Firstly, the distinct lack of research beyond the transition to university and first year experiences, and more specifically, into traditional student experiences.

Section 1.4.1 details how this thesis will contribute to these geographies of students. Secondly, as risk is increasingly positioned as a central component of current society (Lupton, 1999a: pp9-10; Wilkinson, 2001; 2002), positioned as either something to avoid (Beck, 1992; Douglas, 1992; 2003; 2013), or embrace (Lyng, 1990; 2004; 2005; Baker and Simon, 2010), there is a need to move beyond the futuristic and static underpinning of risk, and address the lack of engagement with emotional elements of risk. Section 1.4.2 explains how this thesis extends Douglas' (1992; 2003; 2013) interpretations of risk and otherness and answers Lupton's (2012; 2013b) calls for more emotional understandings of risk, beyond those which separate emotion and rationality (Slovic, 2000; Slovic et al, 2002; 2007). In doing so, the thesis moves beyond static and individualistic notions of risk, by adopting a relational and emotional approach.

Thirdly, the lack of attention given to the liminal period inbetween childhood and adulthood, was a motivator for this research. Section 1.4.3 highlights how this thesis will add to this underdeveloped literature, through a critique of transitions, emphasising the need to focus on everyday experiences and temporalities of young people. Whilst these three factors provided the initial rationale for this project, the participatory nature of this research directed the overall contribution as re-therorisation of a bubble to understand students' experiences. Section 1.3.4 outlines how this thesis contributes to work from the previous three sections, and builds on literatures in geography currently using the analogy of a bubble, to conceptualise university as a bubble.

#### *1.4.1 Geographies of students*

The main driver of this work was to understand how students perceived and experienced risk during their transition to, through and beyond university. There is a significant lack of interrogation into the nuances and complexities of the traditional student experience. Instead, it is often taken for granted or inferred that these students will make automatic and smooth transition to, through, and beyond university (Patinoitis and Holdsworth, 2005), with little allowance for the

heterogeneity of these experiences. With increased consumerisation of 'the university experience', which remains largely focused on the traditional image, there is a further need to explore how students understand these experiences. This research adopted a participatory ethos to ensure the research was centred around the student voice, rather than allowing their voices to be overshadowed, or hidden by broader worries about current HE context (Holloway et al, 2010), which has more commonly been the case (Holton, 2013: p3). Through this, and through a conceptualisation of university as a bubble, this project answers calls for better understanding of what being a student in contemporary HE means (Holton and Riley, 2013: p68).

In addition, work which exists in geography, on risk and studenthood, tends to focus on transition to university, neglecting traditional experiences, in favour of non-traditional students, from whom university is expected to be a riskier transition (Archer and Hutchings, 2000; Reay, 2003; Archer et al, 2005; Clayton et al, 2009). Risks explored are often linked to finances and concerns about fitting into university culture (Archer and Hutchings, 2000; Christie et al, 2001; Archer et al, 2007; Clayton et al, 2009; Reay et al, 2010), or, indeed having to suppress or alter their current identity to do so (Christie et al, 2005). This research enabled students to share ideas on the many different types of risk students may experience, focusing on those that were most important to them. With the exception of Holton's (2013; 2015a) recent work, there is also a lack of research which involves students all the way through their trajectory. Involving students at all stages of their degree, enabled this research to understand how perceptions and experiences of risk evolved across the university passage, or varied at different points.

As applications to HE continue to soar, there is a growing body of work on the impact of student presence in cities, with regard to creation and concentration of segregated residential and social clusters, often portraying students negatively (Hubbard, 2008; Sage et al, 2012a; 2012b), yet little beyond Holton's (2013; 2015a; 2015b) recent work, which offers student opinion on the lived spatialities of studenthood. This project answers calls for further research into understanding every student

experiences (Holloway et al, 2010; Holton and Riley, 2013), prioritising student voice through the participatory approach adopted.

The timely nature of research is important as it involves students paying varying tuition fees, as it took place as the last tuition rise up to £9000 came into play. In addition, university is now, more than ever, positioned as a normalised and/or accepted transition (Patinoitis and Holdsworth, 2005; Brown, 2011), particularly for traditional students. There is, therefore, a significant need, in this current climate, to further understand student experiences in relation to risk. More specifically, how these recent changes have impacted student perceptions and experiences of risk during their transition to, through, and beyond university.

#### 1.4.2 Risk

This research acknowledges the need to re-think risk to consider temporal, relational and spatial elements together. In doing so, it challenges rationalistic and futuristic conceptualisations of risk (for example, those presented by Beck). It builds on geographical work on anticipated futures (such as Anderson, 2010a; 2010b; Evans, 2010; Adey and Anderson, 2012; Amoore, 2013) to highlight the multiple temporalities of risk, through a consideration of how futurities interact with the present.

It challenges individualistic notions of risk, by drawing on and extending Douglas' (1992; 2003; 2013) work on risk and otherness, which hints at relationality of risk through presentation of other as risk. In doing so, it answers Lupton's (2012; 2013b) call for further exploration of emotional elements of risk, which consider the relationality of emotion, affect and feeling. In doing so, it demonstrates the pliability and permeability of these relational boundaries. Through the conceptualisation of a bubble, it furthers this work on risk, to demonstrate how spatial, relational and temporal perceptions and experiences of studenthood, are intertwined to protect against *and* generate risk. In order to do this effectively, it applies and extends work on carnivalesque time-spaces and atmospheres (Anderson, 2009).

### *1.4.3 Transitions*

Whilst there is far-reaching research on children and adults, there is a need to explore the liminal position of young people (Valentine, 2003). This is particularly applicable to university students who are presented as ‘becoming’ adults, on completion of their experience as students (Chatterton, 1999; Kenyon, 1999; Kenyon and Heath, 2001; Hopkins, 2006; Holdsworth, 2009a). The thesis illustrates how age matters in perception and experiences of risk, through a sample of students, aged between 18-25.

University can be an intense experience (Holton, 2015: p25), as student status is ‘time-bound’ and temporary (Field and Morgan-Klein, 2010). This research answers calls for further exploration of temporalities of studenthood (Field and Morgan-Klein, 2010). This research highlights the increasing intensity of the student experience as students progress through their degree, how it may be experienced as carnivalesque ‘time out of time’ (Stallybrass and White, 1986), ‘timepass’ (Jeffrey, 2010a; 2010b) and/or a ‘slow track’ transition (Mackie, 2015), before an expectation of adulthood. It challenges claims that suggest due to its fleeting duration, that it is unlikely to have lasting impacts on identity (Holdsworth, 2006; Holdsworth, 2009a), but considers how although a short period, aspects of the bubble may be carried forward. In doing so, it questions the notion of transitions and instead focuses on how elements of the bubble impact life ‘going on’ (Horton and Kraftl, 2006).

### *1.4.4 Conceptualising university as a Bubble*

This thesis offers a unique exploration of student experience, through the theorisation of a bubble, to describe different elements of students’ perceptions and experiences of university. As all students referred to university as a ‘bubble’ at some point during the data collection, many several times, it was felt by co-researchers and myself that this needed to be reflected in the write up. This was, after all, a participatory project. Therefore, the original contribution of this thesis, is to improve our understanding of student experiences by moving towards a new theorisation of risk.

In order to do this, I combine literatures above (on geography of students, risk and transitions), with the few in geography which reference a 'bubble'. The bubble is presented in a fourfold description. Firstly, the thesis explains the tantalising nature of the bubble, presenting itself as full of possibility and promise, as a place of play, and how students anticipate risk. Secondly, the protective film of the bubble, expected to protect against risk, is explained through an exploration of the relational and spatial boundaries of the bubble, recognising the iridescent nature and malleability of these. Thirdly, how the combination of the tantalising characteristics of the bubble, and the spatial and relational boundaries, might facilitate affective atmospheres of risk, highlighting the emotional and affective geographies of the bubble. Fourthly, the bubble is temporary, burstable; student experiences of university are complex, intense, sometimes full of tension, yet slow as the bubble is floating.

#### *1.4.5 Research Aims*

This thesis makes an original contribution to knowledge by exploring undergraduate student perceptions and experiences of risk, during their transition, to, through and beyond university, via the theorisation of university as a bubble. Employing a participatory approach, the research ensured the themes articulated were led, and seen as the most important, by students themselves. In doing so, this research addressed three aims:

- 1) To explore undergraduate students' perceptions of risk before arrival, during their transition to university
- 2) To explore students' perceptions and experiences of risk during their time at/transition through university
- 3) To explore students' perceptions and experiences of risk as they prepare for the transition out of university

## 1.5 Brief overview of methodology

A participatory framework was adopted to explore the aims of this thesis. 9 Co-researchers were involved; 6 of which maintained their engagement until the very end. A five-stage process, taking place from September 2012 to March 2015, (detailed in chapter 3) evolved. These stages included pre-defined participatory methods, made up of 32 individual life history interviews, and 6 discussion groups. A participatory method was designed with co-researchers, as 6 groups played the 'University life' game, as a more visual, creative method. In addition, 4 teaching and research sessions were carried out involving approximately 30 additional participants. Co-researcher kept research diaries which were also used as part of the data collection, alongside naturally occurring data such as informal conversations with co-researchers. The project also made an effort to gather staff views and 4 interviews with colleagues in learning development and careers. The main data collection took place between March 2013 and December 2014, but co-researchers were involved before and beyond these dates. Co-researchers were also involved in recruitment, data collection, analysis, approximately weekly meetings, training sessions and additional project reflections, working together, face to face, for approximately 8 hours a week, sometimes more, or less, dependant on the stage in the project. In total, co-researchers and I worked together for approximately just under 2000 hours, not including any additional work carried out beyond the scenes such as re-reading of training documents, transcribing, rehearsing for interviews and so on. The research was carried out at the University of Leicester; all participants and co-researchers were undergraduates during the time this research was conducted.

## 1.6 Structure of thesis

In order to demonstrate how theorising university as a bubble can improve our understanding of university student experiences of risk during their transition to, through, and beyond university this research draws on a range of literature, some of which, references a bubble. Chapter 2 critiques and extends research on risk, transitions and students, focusing more specifically on how ideas from these have

been utilised by geographers. It draws ideas from these literatures together to work towards a new theorisation of a 'bubble' in order to frame this thesis.

Chapter 3 outlines the participatory approach adopted for this research, highlighting some of the key complexities but also avocations for this approach. The chapter provides justifications for methods chosen: interviews, focus groups, the university life board game, research led teaching/teaching led research sessions, informal conversations and staff interviews. Moving forward, the chapter describes the analysis and dissemination processes, as well as, explaining some of the ethical considerations for this research. It ends with a discussion around positionality and implications of this for the research.

The analysis chapters of this thesis explore university students' perceptions and understanding of risk in the context of their transition to, through and beyond university. Elements of the university as a bubble introduced in chapter 2 are developed using empirical material throughout these chapters.

Chapter 4 interrogates students' perceptions of risk and how they expect to experience it before arrival. The chapter explores the bubble as a tantalising, 'place of play' and how this impacts students' perceptions of risk pre-arrival. It draws attention to students' role in producing and reproducing the bubble as a space of risk.

Chapter 5 explores the relational and spatial boundaries of the bubble, the flexibility of these, but also how these boundaries combined with ideas of play may generate affective atmospheres. This chapter focuses on experiences of risk whilst at university, noting how the bubble provides protection from risk, but also generates its own risks.

Chapter 6 highlights the temporalities of the bubble, drawing inter-disciplinary theorisations of the carnivalesque to explore students' experiences of time out of time, as well as the intensity of time within the bubble. Time is punctuated by moments of intensity through excess and deadlines, but also by students' desire to make the most out of their freedoms in time. The chapter emphasises the fragility of the bubble and how students seek to minimise risk as they prepare for exit.

Chapter 7 draws the thesis to a close, drawing together key characteristics of the bubble analysed in chapters 4-6, to demonstrate how this new conceptualisation of a bubble might help us understand not only student experiences, but more specifically, their perceptions and experiences of risk, and more besides. The chapter also assesses the contribution of the thesis and how its methodology and findings might shape future research.

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter critically synthesises existing literature, whilst explaining how the key concepts of risk, transitions and geographies of university students interlink, and will be used to frame this thesis. Whilst some of these areas offer vibrant literatures more broadly in social sciences, this literature review concentrates on how ideas have been mobilised within human geography. More specifically, the chapter focuses on the literatures which have informed the analysis chapters.

Section 2.2. outlines traditional theorisations of risk as something to avoid or protect against (Beck, 1992; Douglas, 1992; 2002; 2013), before discussing how more recently risk is portrayed as something to embrace (Lyng, 1990; 2004; Baker and Simon, 2010). It critiques and extends the static and individualistic nature of these theories, by adopting a more fluid notion of risk, through a more relational and emotional approach. In doing so, the thesis draws on ideas of carnivalesque time-spaces and atmospheres.

Following this, Section 2.3 examines the concept of transitions. Despite the well-established sub-discipline of children and young people's geographies, there is little discussion specifically on transitions. This section provides a brief overview of transitions literature more broadly in social sciences, discussing the lack of research on the liminal position of young people. University is implied as a transformative transition, beyond which adulthood applies (Chatterton, 1999; Kenyon, 1999; Kenyon and Heath, 2001; Hopkins, 2006; Holdsworth, 2009a). An emphasis on everyday lives of studenthood will enable a better understanding of how the student experience may be understood in the context of the lifecourse.

The final portion of the literature review, Section 2.4, briefly outlines existing research on student experiences in geography. It begins with a brief discussion of affectual and emotional geographies consequential of aspiration raising agendas (Brown, 2011; 2012; 2013; Kintrea et al, 2011; Cairns, 2013; Torres and Wicks-Asbun, 2014; Pimlott-Wilson, 2015; Grant, 2016b), and how this has triggered a growing interest in 'new',

non-traditional student experiences. The section continues with a discussion of the persistence of a traditional socially dominated image (Smith and Holt, 2007; Holdsworth, 2009a; Chatterton, 2010), and the intensification and expansion of social and spatially separated student areas as a result (Smith and Holt, 2007; Chatterton, 2010; Sage et al, 2012; Smith and Hubbard, 2014).

Section 2.5 summarises how this thesis builds on concepts of risk, transitions and studenthood, to form an original contribution to research, through the conceptualisation of university as a bubble.

## **2.2 Re-thinking Risk**

Risk needs to be rethought in terms of emotional and relational aspects. Rather than simply 'something' which the public should seek to avert (Beck, 1992; Douglas, 1992; 2002; 2013) or embrace (Lyng, 1990; 2004; Lupton and Tulloch, 2002b; Baker and Simon, 2010), there is a need to consider the relationality of the emotion, which might deter or inspire risk taking, or which risk taking might provoke. There is a need to understand how relationships with others might not only protect against risk but also construct it. In order to demonstrate this, the following sections discuss current theories on risk, and how this thesis will move these forward through an interrogation of emotional and relational aspects using carnivalesque and atmospheres literatures.

Section 2.2.1 examines dominant discourses of risk as something to avert and protect against. Section 2.2.1.1 begins this discussion with an explanation of how these negative connotations with risk were traditionally coupled with scientific data and calculated probability (Lupton, 2013: p26-35), whereas more recently have been supported by thoughts of possibility (Amoore, 2013). Nevertheless, these ideas present risk as something futuristic to which preventative action can and should be applied. Section 2.2.1.2 builds on these ideas, offering an overview of risk and otherness, where the 'other' is presented as the risk (Douglas, 1992; 2003; 2013). Therefore, the maintenance of boundaries between self and other is important in risk aversion (Douglas, 1992; 2003; 2013). However, more recently literature has discussed a need, and/or desire, to transgress these boundaries (Lupton, 2013a: p229). Lupton

(2013a: p231-235), links this to ideas of carnivalesque, as there is a desire to immerse in the experience of the 'other'.

Section 2.2.2 highlights the move to embrace risk, often through intense embodied experiences, named voluntary risk, through careful negotiation of boundaries (Lyng, 1990; 2004; 2005). This type of risk taking is often linked to hedonistic thrill seeking, but also as a demonstration of neoliberal agenda; a means of progressing the self through accumulation of new skills (Lupton and Tulloch; 2002b: p113-124; Lyng, 2005: p3-17).

Section 2.2.3 furthers the discussion of emotion touched upon by these literatures, noting Lupton's (2012; 2013b) calls for a risk-emotion assemblage, in order to better understand emotional elements of risk. Moving forward, section 2.2.3.1 attends to the lack of deep engagement with relational and emotional elements of risk, and how geographical work on emotion and affect can be used to strengthen and extend this material. In doing so, section 2.2.3.2 discusses how atmospheres literature enables an understanding of how these two concepts meld, and through the utilisation of this theory a better understanding of relationality of emotional elements of risk can be constructed. The section ends by explaining how the bubble's adoption of carnivalesque and atmospheric literatures will enable a deeper understanding how temporal, spatial and relational aspects of risk interact. This discussion is more detailed in section 2.5, describing how the original contribution of this thesis exists in its framing of university experiences through a bubble. In doing so, this section highlights how the analysis of this thesis combines existing literatures on risk, transitions and student geographies literature, along with that which reference bubbles in geography, to create a fourfold bubble framework.

### *2.2.1 Risk as something to avert or protect against*

Risk is viewed as a central component to late modernity, with the word itself used interchangeably with, or to replace hazards, threats, and disasters (Lupton, 1999a: pp9-10; Wilkinson, 2001), applied equally to catastrophic and negative events. Consequentially, individuals increasingly consider themselves as 'at risk' (Wilkinson,

2002: p6). Technological and scientific developments have triggered society's preoccupation with the future (Beck, 1992; Anderson, 2010a; 2010b; Amoore, 2013).

#### 2.2.1.1 The risk society, reflexive modernisation and cultures of precaution.

Beck (1992) insists that late modernity has increased the amount of risks we are exposed to, although, many note Beck's (1992) ideas are overlaid with a lack of empirical evidence to support them (Lash, 1993; Mythen, 2004). Giddens (1991: p3) suggests existing dangers are newly positioned as risks. Nevertheless, anything that threatens or jeopardises this imagined future may be labelled a risk. Advances in science and technology, alongside globalisation and improved communications have boosted our ability to generate knowledge and understanding of risk, as well as human causation (Beck et al, 1994). This has not, however, led to a generic comprehension or certainty of risk. Instead, risks have become more difficult to determine and avert; new risks stretch across and beyond global boundaries with no definite end (Beck, 2006; 2009; Giddens, 1991: p27).

Invisible risks and their effects are heightened through regular dialogues involving the government or scientists, dramatized by the media (Wilkinson, 2002: pp117-126; Lupton and Tulloch, 2001). Media sources are often the primary source via which we absorb new information. The sheer volume of material (television, newspaper, radio, internet, apps etc.) may also heighten a sense of risk on particular topics, especially as some will receive more coverage, or may be exaggerated or distorted to increase audiences. The media therefore manipulates our sense of what is or is not a risk (Wahlberg and Sjoberg, 2000; Joffe, 2003). Increasing discussions of risk promote anxiety towards the unknown, assuming the worst case scenario, resulting in more occasions as risky (Austen, 2009; Furedi, 2006). As a result of these negative connotations coupled with risk, it is viewed as something to avert or to protect against (Beck, 1992; Joffe, 2003; Lupton, 1999a; 1999b; 2013).

Understandings of risk are increasingly fashioned by expert knowledges (Beck, 1992; Wynne, 1996; Giddens, 2013). People's "experiential knowledge" (Tulloch and Lupton, 2003: p3) is no longer seen as reliable. However, expert knowledges are constantly

disputed and reproduced, so, there remains increased uncertainty rather than certainty around risk (Beck et al, 1994). This triggers reflexive modernisation and “self-confrontation” (Beck et al, 1994: p5), testing trust in modern structures, science and expertise, blaming them for their role in creation of multiple risks (Beck, 1996). Individuals are expected to be more reflexive and responsible for digesting the catalogue of knowledges available to them, to make up their own mind about what is or is not risk (Beck et al, 1994; Giddens; 1999). Through appropriate assessment of information risks can be determined, avoided, and a level of certainty instilled (Lash, 2000). These broader political changes are married with those in our personal lives such as increasing precarity in employment (Beck, 2000a), less stability in relationships through decline of traditions such as marriage, increased divorces, and so on, meaning our life paths are no longer linear, but increasingly uncertain and individualised (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Giddens, 1991: pp.32-33).

Beck’s (1992; 2006; 2007; 2009; 2012) work has been critiqued for being too focused on the individual rather than how the individual might interact with his/her social-cultural circumstances. Beck (1992; 2006; 2007; 2009; 2012) tends to neglect how differences such as class, gender, age, ethnicity might shape perceptions and experiences of risk, through access or lack of, to resources to deal with risk, including communication tools or technology (Lash, 1993; Green, 2000; Tulloch and Lupton, 2003: p6; Mythen, 2004; pp.23-29; Lupton 2013a: p156). However, Beck (2007; 2009) argues for the disappearance of otherness as no one can escape risks presented by late modernity (such as climate change), regardless of resources or wealth available at their disposal; but the world is forced to collaborate and co-operate to deal with world risks.

Increasing uncertainty leads to heightened anxiety (Bauman, 1991; 2006; Wilkinson, 2001; 2002), as risk is more difficult to calculate. Knowledges may enable us to mitigate against, or minimise the impact of risk, but only to a certain extent, never fully, as the knowledge is never complete, it is always evolving and uncertain. For some (Furedi, 2006; Anderson, 2010a; Evans, 2010; Amooore, 2013), this generates a

culture of fear and precaution, where we are constantly seeking out ways in which to avoid or lessen our contact with risk, or produce some form of certainty for ourselves.

Geographers contribute to this debate discussing how we anticipate, and therefore, prepare for these unsettling events (Anderson, 2010a; 2010b). Traditionally, discussions of risk position it as a definite danger, which, may be easily calculated through objectivity, evidence and scientific tools; there is an assumption humans can make detached emotionless rational distinctions between what is a risk or not a risk (Lupton, 2013: p26-35). However, the extent and indeterminate nature of modern risks complicate this calculability (Beck, 2007; 2009). For instance, Evans' (2010) work on obesity as an anticipated future risk highlights the difficulty of separating "affective facts" from "scientific truths". Consequentially, a recent shift has been documented from risk as a probability to a possibility. Rather than focusing on the likelihood of a risk, there has been a move to think about the impact if the risk occurs, focusing on possibility, regardless of whether or not the probability is low (Amoore, 2013).

Temporalities of risk are highlighted through this work, as the future folds into the present, as it is implied an 'anticipatory logic' is adopted and transforms into 'anticipatory action'. "Management of future uncertainty in one sense involves bringing it into the present" (Brannen and Nilsen, 2002: p518), as actions in the present are based on anticipation of 'possible' risks, applying precautionary principles (Anderson, 2010a; Amoore, 2013), to their everyday lives. This implies that through managing risk it is no longer a threat and that something only remains a threat if it compromises the imagined future. Answering calls requesting a move beyond the over rationalistic approach to risk, this geographical engagement with anticipatory future risk, opens up an avenue of exploration into the affective nature of these anticipated future risks, as the possibility is felt in the present (Evans, 2010). This thesis then hopes to move beyond rationalistic discussions of risk as a future event, drawing on this geographical literature to consider how these futurities might interact with the present.

### 2.2.1.2 Risk, culture and otherness: creating and maintaining boundaries

This section explains how risk has been interpreted as indivisible from culture; that individuals' perceptions of, and responses to risk, are ensconced through cultural expectations, norms, and scruples of the groups to which we belong, although, variations exist within this (Douglas, 1992; Beck, 2000: p13). This explains why some 'risks' are taken very seriously whilst others are ignored; what may be deemed as risky by one community may be accepted by another and risk varies in seriousness depending on the situation (Beck, 1995: p47; Joffe, 2003; Austen, 2009). For example, in Green et al's (2000; p123) study Muslim boys perceived drug taking as particularly risky, whereas white boys believed it was acceptable if only occasional. Similarly, whilst Mitchell et al (2001; pp228-229) explains that motherhood is commonly identified as risky for teenagers, it is almost romanticised if entered later. Non-adherence to expectations would position an individual as at risk. Those outside of these cultural communities would also be seen as a risk (Douglas, 1992).

Douglas' (1969; 2003; 2013) writings on risk revive ideas from her earlier work on purity, contamination, danger and otherness, erecting boundaries to individual bodies, groups and communities (Lupton, 2006: p13). Risk here acts as blame, as certain groups or establishments are branded as risky or dangerous. People are judged as risk, or not, through "aesthetic and hermeneutic reflexivity", based on gender, sexuality, age, class, the duration of your relationship with them (Lupton, 2013b: p160-162). There is a desire to manage anxiety heightened through ambivalence of modernity by organising things, people, and events into groups (Bauman, 1991: pp1-14). Knowledge in this sense is informing risk judgement not just through belonging to a particular community, but, also through how we interpret ourselves. This is supported by work on sex and egocentricity, suggesting we judge the riskiness of our intimate relations, according to how we see them as different or similar to the self (Skidmore et al, 2000).

There is a consistent message in Douglas' (1969; 1992; 2003; 2013) work that every effort should be made to maintain boundaries, to protect ourselves from risk. Although our understanding of risk is clearly impacted by socio-cultural circumstances,

there is a suggestion that events, activities, and certain groups, can be easily categorised as risk or not as our individual and cultural boundaries are clearly set. Of course, there are risks which confuse these boundaries, but these are likely to quickly be placed outside or othered (Lupton, 2013a: p59). However, there is later (Douglas, 1969: p161; Lupton, 199a: p165; Lupton, 2013a: p229) recognition that the occasional transcendence of boundaries is necessary. For example, in terms of our own bodily boundaries, sex is understood as introducing risk, and should be avoided to preserve purity. But, reproduction is needed in order to continue cultures. Using this example, transgression becomes seen as a privileged and powerful act (Lupton, 2013a: pp229-230).

Recent discussions of risk and embodiment (Tulloch and Lupton, 2002; Lupton, 2012; 2013), hinting at visible and invisible boundaries, extend this notion of transgression. If risk is defined as something which extends our own personal boundaries and expectations of the self as others perceive us, we begin to see further how it may be an embodied experience. This can be developed further through carnivalesque times-spaces (Bakhtin, 1984; Stallybrass and White, 1986: p6), where part of the appeal is to immerse oneself in activities and performance of identities which in other circumstances you would not; in a sense, experience a different body. Threats and deleterious normally associated with risk and impurity can be flipped into something positive, at specified places, and for short durations, as people bask in the idea of them (Lupton, 2013a: p231-235). Transgressions which in ordinary circumstance are feared triggering anxiety or disgust become desired as exciting (Stallybrass and White, 1986: p1-25).

Whilst not referring directly to emotion, Douglas' work on risk offers a starting point for further exploration of the 'emotional' elements of risk, as directed by Lupton (2012; 2013b). Her work on risk and 'blaming' others hints at, although not explicitly, relationality of risk and emotion; that emotions are always relational (Lupton, 2012; 2013a). Douglas (1969; 1992) implies feelings towards others such as anxiety around the unknown are shaped and reinforced by cultural norms, creating boundaries between us and them. Our emotional response to 'other' is already scripted as we

envisage them to be 'risk'. This works to maintain a particular order, and those (human and trans-human) compromising these invisible and physical borders, or which traverse them, pose risk. Therefore, this thesis hopes compliment and extend Douglas' ideas, by considering further the relational emotions generated through these boundaries and how this shapes perception and experience of risk (see section 2.2.3). Moving beyond a static boundary between the self and other, this thesis considers how these boundaries are pliable and permeable, protecting against but also producing risk. In the conceptualisation of a bubble, this thesis extends Douglas' work by understanding how the spatial, relational and temporal come together to protect against and generate risk, using it in combination with theories of carnivalesque and (affective) atmospheres (see section 2.5).

### *2.2.2 Embracing risk: Voluntary risk and pleasure*

Whilst long standing discourses of risk frame it as negative (Douglas, 1992; 2002; 2013; Beck, 1992); something which is feared and individuals should seek to avoid, there has been a more recent move to embrace risk (Baker and Simon, 2010), associated with the post-industrial swing to Neoliberalism (O'Malley, 2008) and a prevailing culture which unveils a desire to "progress ourselves" (Douglas, 1992). Risk is marketed with the perception of reward for participation and there are increasing opportunities to consume risk, with extreme sports being one avenue to do this (Lupton and Tulloch, 2002; Baker and Simon, 2010: p177). Whilst acknowledging young people might be reflexive enough to recognise risk (Giddens, 1990; 1991; Beck, 1992; 2002; Tulloch and Lupton, 2002a), they might choose to take risks anyway (Jones and Raisborough, 2016: p113-133). Scholars such as Beck (1992) might deem this behaviour as irrational, but this behaviour is often rationalised. Risky behaviour may be justified as either trading off one risk against another, whereby in order to minimise one type of risk you may expose yourself to another (Moore and Burgess, 2011), or through the hope of possible beneficial outcomes (Lupton and Tulloch, 2002a; 2002b). Lupton (2013a: p220) notes parallels between these outcomes of risk taking and the need/desire to be adaptable and flexible in the face of current uncertainty. If this risk taking is so carefully calculated, and indeed guided by neo-

liberal agendas, is it still a risk? Or has it become normalised as ordinary and everyday? For example, this intentional boundary crossing might be in pursuit of pleasure, personal growth and cultivation of new skills, characterising the hedonic pleasure seeking generation. Indeed, it is implied risk is a means of escaping the toils of everyday life (Lyng, 1990; 2005; Braun, 2003), but also to gain an enhanced understanding of the self, your limits, likes and dislikes (Lupton and Tulloch, 2002a; 2002b). This type of risk taking is labelled voluntary risk-taking; it is chosen and might include dangerous sports, consuming unhealthy foods, or drugs, for instance (Douglas and Wildavsky, 1983; Tulloch and Lupton, 2003; Lyng 1990; 2005).

The concept of edgework (Lyng, 2005) links voluntary risk taking to careful negotiation and mastery of edges between “chaos and order” (Lyng, 1990: p855; Lyng, 2004: p234). An immersion in dissolution of boundaries, achieving intense embodied experiences, “imparting momentum” (Tulloch and Lupton, 2003: p33). However, with heightened awareness and control of edges (Lyng, 1990; 2004; 2005), so as not to surpass a point of “irreversibility” (Van Ree, 1977; Douglas and Wildavsky, 1983: p21). Voluntary risk taking enables “alterations in perception of time and space and feelings of hyper reality” (Lupton, 2013b: p636), hinting at how risk may be experienced as ‘time out of time’ (Stallybrass and White, 1986). This is expected to increase control on return to ordinary life. Lupton (2013b: p217) notes one failure of existing literature on edgework is that it focuses too heavily on individual experience. There is, therefore, a need to examine the relational experiences of voluntary risk taking. This thesis does this through an examination of how risk is never experienced in isolation but through our relationships with others. It explains how the promotion of traditional studenthood, impacts expectations of collective risk taking, before arrival. It also uncovers emotional and affectual aspects of voluntary risk taking through an explanation of the formation of relational boundaries of the bubble, and how they may protect against some risks, whilst generating others. The thesis also uses affective atmospheres to describe how collective anticipation and experience of risk create atmospheres of risk.

In contrast, involuntary risks are those which are imposed by society (Douglas and Wildavsky, 1983). However, these two types of risk often interact. For example, Douglas and Wildavsky (1983: p16-19) discuss rock climbing as a voluntary risk, yet the chemicals which one might be exposed to whilst rock climbing are involuntary. Therefore, involuntary risks associated with voluntary risks might be invisible or hidden, either because as we have chosen to ignore information available, or because the information is hidden from us. However, it might be these uncertainties and hidden risks which make the risk taking appealing in the first place. This is highlighted by this thesis, as students, in some cases, seek out risk, as “a thirst which arises from novelties, unfamiliar pleasure...all of which lose savour once known” (Durkheim, 1970: p247), and present emotions of boredom as they become more predictable.

### *2.2.3 Risk and emotion*

Risk is commonly framed as negative, arousing unwanted emotions, such as fear and anxiety (Beck, 1992; Wilkinson, 2001; 2001; Furedi, 2006; Bauman, 2006). These are often associated with increasing prevalence of risk, uncertainty and individual responsibility linked to the current context of modernity (Beck, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Risk is often menaced as something which might threaten our emotional wellbeing. Despite this detection of emotion, and often sweeping statements made in risk theory about feelings risk may evoke, there has been a significant lack of real interrogation of the emotional facets of risk (Lupton, 2012; 2013b). With the exception of sociological work on voluntary risk taking (see section 2.2.2), there only exists psychological work, which tends to split emotion and rationality, denoting emotion as an initial reaction to risk, positioned as an inferior form of understanding risk and clouding one’s ability to effectively calculate risk (For example, Slovic et al, 2002; 2007). These literatures whilst attempting to address the lacuna on the emotional elements of risk, tend to fuse emotion, affect and feeling (Lupton, 2013b: p637). Psychological approaches, in particular, are individualistic in thinking about emotion (Lash, 1993; Lupton, 2012; 2013b), with no regard for the relationality of emotion; that we rarely feel or understand our emotion in isolation, but through our relationships with people, place and things. It also forgets how socio-

cultural context steer our understanding of emotion. Instead, emotion exists as a variable that can be measured and its effects calculated. Geographers thinking on emotion is very different, and it is here, that this thesis will make a contribution to this slim existing literature on risk and emotion.

#### 2.2.3.1 Emotion and Affect

Work on geographies of the body and embodiment, aroused interest in emotion and affect. The body was nominated as a location for experiencing emotion and affect, as we traversed through different spaces, reacting to, and connecting with, other bodies, things, material objects, human and trans human (Lupton, 2012; Davidson et al, 2012). Feminist geographers were key drivers in encouraging acknowledgement of emotion, both in researcher reflexivity and understanding empirical material (Davidson and Milligan, 2004; Davidson et al, 2012). The study of identity, albeit indirectly, contributed significantly to an understanding of the relationality of emotion as created through our relations with others, as well as how we interact with human and non-human bodies, objects and things (Davidson and Milligan, 2004; Davidson et al, 2012). Emotion should be understood as not separate from reason (Lupton, 2013b: p641-642) but emotion is equally a way of thinking, knowing, and understanding the world (Davidson and Milligan, 2004; Thrift, 2004: p60; Davidson et al, 2012); without emotion our understanding on topics is unfinished (Anderson and Smith, 2001).

Put simply, emotion is often theorised as something more perceptible (Thein, 2005; Dewsbury, 2009; Pile, 2010). It is the expression of a socially and culturally identifiable feeling (Davidson and Milligan, 2004; McCormack, 2008; Davidson et al, 2012), a visible and capturable affect (Pile, 2010; Curti et al, 2011), often with specific words and languages applied (Kenway and Youdell, 2011: p133). For example, “anger, anxiety, awe.....desire, despair, desperation.... happiness.... joy.... loneliness” and so on (For fuller list, see Pile, 2010: p6). It is a form of knowledge, enabling sense to be made of everyday lives (Anderson & Smith, 2001; Thrift, 2004; Davidson et al, 2012). Often theorised as largely personal, emotion is felt in “contained space” (Thein, 2005: p452), but can also be social, relational, flowing between people (Ahmed, 2004; Kenway and

Youdell, 2011; Lupton, 2012; 2013b), produced and circulating through our relations with others.

Sometimes, application of theories of affect is useful to understand emotion. Emotion is sometimes posed by theory, as in opposition to rationality, meaning emotion is undervalued, gendered and often feminised. (Anderson and Smith, 2001: p7; Thein, 2005: p452). Linked to the crisis in representation, affect became popular as some geographers (particularly non-representational theorists) discussed, the struggle to 'represent' emotion through theories of emotion, noting the inadequacy of words to convey feelings (Harrison, 2007). Theories of emotion were seen as limiting in their capacity to articulate the flow or force linked with the physical manifestations of emotion, before the meaning is dictated by socio-cultural understandings of such feelings (McCormack, 2003: pp495-500).

Straightforwardly, affect encapsulates travelling emotion, (Thein, 2005: p451; Parr, 2005), a feeling or pre-state before it is labelled or understood as an emotion, for some, separating quite definitely emotion as 'thought' after (Pile, 2010). 'Affect' has the ability to 'overflow' (Curti et al, 2011), "beyond or before thought" (Kenway and Youdell, 2011: p133). Affect are emotions as they happen, what it 'feels' like; affect is embodied emotion, felt sensations difficult to describe (Anderson, 2006: p736). For example, blushing, a sudden rush of adrenaline, butterflies, breathlessness and so on. Stretching beyond individual bodies (not necessarily human), affect is transpersonal or trans human (Thrift, 2004; McCormack, 2008). Enabling fluidity affect is continually nascent, evolving (Thrift, 2004) and "creative potential of affect is arrested when one attempts to unify or qualify its positions as personal" (McCormack, 2003: pp495-500). It can be experienced collectively by multiple bodies (Thein, 2005: p450), as bodies evolve as relational processes (Dawney, 2011) interacting with or affected by person, place, things as 'communities of becomings' (Curti and Moreno, 2010: p416).

However, separating emotion and affect in everyday life is not straightforward. Rather, 'emotions' as socially understood, can encourage sensations or 'affects' in the body, and 'affects' experienced by the body can trigger visible display of 'emotions'

(Horton & Kraftl, 2013: p222-243). Importantly then, Thein (2005) draws out one of the main linkages between both emotional and affectual geography. Neither emotion or affect are static, nor individualised concepts, but are socially constructed and informed by both past and present experience, and our relations with others, whether these other be human or trans human (Horton & Kraftl, 2013: p222-243). Their meaning, and our experience of them, can only be understood through a simultaneous engagement with socio-cultural context, relationships and place (Davidson et al, 2012). Geographers explain that to develop a comprehension of these concepts it is vital to appreciate the spatial circumstances within which they form and exist (Davidson and Milligan, 2004).

In her call for an emotion-risk assemblage, Lupton (2012; 2013b), draws on geographical literatures to hint at the importance of place in enabling a deeper understanding of emotion. Although, for straightforwardness she assumes emotion to encapsulate also, affect, and feeling (2012; 2013b). In doing so, she notes how travelling bodies may embody different emotions as they interact with other bodies, both human and trans human, but, also the importance of place in these encounters. She argues that just as 'emotion' is fluid and relational (Lupton, 2012: p5) and informed by socio-cultural context, so too is risk. By adopting an emotional approach to risk, it is possible to understand how emotion and risk interrelate, bringing each other in and out of being (Lupton, 2012: p6-8; 2013b: p640). Drawing on and extending this work, this thesis uses 'affective atmospheres' to draw out the relationality of emotion and risk.

#### 2.2.3.2 Atmospheres

Human geographers have recently sought to confront the historical divide between emotion and affect (Anderson, 2009; Smith et al, 2009; Pile, 2010; Bondi and Davidson, 2011). Indeed, Anderson's (2009) work on 'affective atmospheres' introduced atmospheres as a useful tool to highlight the fuzziness of these divisions. Drawing attention to how the concepts blend (Edensor, 2012: p1103), atmospheres present both as a 'shared affect', but intensities also felt personally through

'experiential weight' (Anderson, 2009; Trigg, 2016: p773), and bodily sensations (Dewsbury, 2009; Anderson, 2014). The elusive, indeterminate, liminality and uncertainty coupled with the concept of atmosphere is, for many, what makes it an attractive concept (Trigg, 2016). Anderson (2009: p79) describes an atmosphere as "unfinished", "forming and deforming, appearing and disappearing as bodies enter in relation to one another", hinting nevertheless at the relationality of these spaces, emphasised by Edensor (2012). Atmospheres come into being as bodies enter, occupy and interact in space (Edensor, 2012; Shaw, 2014), demonstrating affect as the power of relationality; a collective emergence of and experience, yet also on a deeply personal scale (Anderson, 2009). Bissell (2010: p273) describes "a pull or a charge that might emerge in a particular space which might (or might not) generate particular events and actions, feelings and emotions." This demonstrates the capacity of an atmosphere to present possibility for a certain action or alteration in place, forcefully suggesting, through the relational force, but not insisting, as the force may (or may not) be met with passivity and overflow (Bissell, 2010: p280-283).

Relating to Marx ideas on materialism Anderson (2009: p77-78) discusses how these atmospheres are real, with power to "envelope" and "press". Individuals might not physically feel the pressure, but feel its affect, as they are effected by it, and its ability to collectively affect, whilst not dismissing the intimate intensity it unearths. Brennan (2004: p1) notes the literal personal effect, as a smell, for example, may be inhaled by the body. Atmospheres, even if only temporarily, have the capacity, or potential to alter the biochemical make up of individual bodies (Brennan, 2004: p1; Bissell, 2010: p273). It is this potential, but uncertainty, that is important. An atmospheres may occupy or govern space, but does not necessarily consume it (Anderson, 2009; Michel, 2015). It has the potential to change, alter and be felt differently. Whilst embodied, it is not "reducible to" or owned by these individual bodies (Anderson, 2014: p160). Atmospheres only exist as bodies interact with people, places and things, but they are also anticipated, possible to imagine prior to experience. For example, Edensor (2012) discusses the anticipated atmospheres of Blackpool illuminations. It is then through this anticipation, that atmospheres continue to be produced and reproduced.

Atmospheres may be generated by repeated collective performance of practice or emotion in one place.

Offering an avenue for exploration of temporalities of emotion and affect, atmospheres are time-bound, striking as “temporary configurations of energy and feeling” (Conradson and Latham, 2007: p238). Whilst fleeting, atmospheres are also created and re-created through anticipation, informed by knowledge of past events and expected relational affects of particular spaces (Edensor, 2012). More than this, atmospheres enable a consideration of not only that experienced at the time, but also prolonged feelings as the atmosphere may be embodied through absorption of its material qualities. For example, Feingenbaum and Kanngieser (2015: p81) through a closer observation of atmospheres as a material event, highlight the continued presence of an atmosphere, as material qualities can linger long after it is first felt. Through the example of tear gas, they explain whilst the fog unleashed is momentary, the atmosphere continues to be felt as tear gas can be traced through the body, in a series of psychological and physical health issues. These reminders on the body preserve an atmosphere of terror.

Bohme’s (2006) discussions of architecture and atmospheres brings spatial elements into focus, as he makes specific reference to the spherical configuration, which the affective attributes infuse. Shaw (2014) proposes the purpose of atmosphere is to enhance our understanding of affective experiences of place, by understanding how humans and non human elements interact, within, and with a specific place, to construct an atmosphere. Brennan (2004: p1) informs us that an atmosphere is felt in place, whilst Shaw (2014: p89) confirms “atmospheres are always geographical, controlling but confined to a particular place, and often a period of time.” This is not to suggest, however, that atmosphere is fixed in place, as an atmosphere is not static, but may seep beyond place. Although the notion of encircling suggests an intensification of the atmosphere in place, creating “intensive space times” (Anderson, 2009: p80), the edges to this spherical organisation of affect remain undefined (Schmitz et al, 2011). Atmospheres are diffuse and possible to permeate.

My conceptualisation of the bubble is novel in that it draws together the atmospheres literature and long-standing debates about carnivalesque relations to illustrate how spatial, relational and temporal elements collide and interact in students' experiences of being at university. In doing so, it extends Douglas' (1969; 1992; 2013) ideas on risk and boundaries, highlighting the constant re-negotiations of relational boundaries. It answers Lupton's (2012; 2013b) call for more work on emotional aspects of risk taking through a consideration of emotional and affectual geographies of risk as relational experiences.

### 2.3 Transitions

The sub-discipline of child and 'youth' research is well established in human geography. However, the age bracket "on cusp of childhood and adulthood....16-25" (Valentine, 2003: p39) remains somewhat neglected. With the exception of McDowell's (2002) research on traditional transitions into employment, Valentine's (2003) research on the blurred boundaries between childhood and adulthood, and Jeffrey's (2010c; Jeffrey and McDowell, 2004) work on the complexities of making this transition in the global south, there is very little in geography, which tackles the concept of transitions specifically. This section begins with a very brief overview of how young people are often regarded as *at risk*, or indeed demonised for putting others at risk. In doing so, it draws attention to relevance of age, in shaping our understandings of what is or is not a risk. The section continues by addressing the disparity in definitions of the transitional stage. More specifically, explaining how scholars in geography (Horton and Kraftl, 2006; Hopkins and Pain, 2007; Horton et al, 2008; Evans, 2008; Jeffrey, 2010; Horschellman, 2011), and more broadly in social sciences have sought to go beyond the transitions model, which assumes adulthood as attainable. In also doing so, this section highlights the need to explore the lived experience of the liminal phase, to deepen our understanding.

Closing the transitions section is a discussion of university as a place of transition. As higher education's popularity escalates, possibly due to the difficulties in accessing the traditional route of employment (Jeffrey, 2010a; 2010b), a curiosity is aroused to

explore these institutions, but also how our identities manifest and exist in these places of transition. By focusing on temporalities of studenthood through their everyday experiences, our attention is drawn to seemingly mundane moments, but of significant importance to students themselves.

### *2.3.1 Youth in transition, youth at risk*

Young people are often positioned as 'at risk' or 'a risk' during this period of uncertainty (Pain, 2003a). This leads to increased concerns about the safety of young people but also fear of young people. In order to manage risk, there is closer monitoring of their movements, restricted use of space, and increasing efforts to scrutinise and manage their behaviour (Kelly, 2000; 2003; 2007; Pain, 2003a), positioning young people as "out of control and in need of regulation" (Pain, 2003a: p151). Many spaces which were previously shared with adults, are increasingly regulated, with assumptions that limiting youthful spaces may help control young people. Young people are, therefore, seeking new spaces for which they can claim ownership, both physically, and virtually (Valentine, 1997).

Ideas of young people in need of intervention or protection are not new, but exposed by early understandings of childhood. For example, as children as angels or devils (Valentine, 1996), moral panics of mods and rockers (Cohen, 2002), and so on. However, these conceptualisations of young people might be further exacerbated by dominant discourses shaped by the risk society (Beck, 1992), with some noting young people are exposed to more risks than their parents' generations (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997).

Technological advances such as mobile phones increase fear and anxiety amongst parents, presenting new spaces of risk (Pain et al, 2005). In contrast, young people are confident in technological proficiency, enabling the handling of possible risks, often hiding facts from incompetent parents, to prevent their overreaction (Valentine, 1997; Valentine and Holloway, 2001; Pain et al, 2005; Pain, 2006). This echoes previous hinting that young people are in fact less fearful of uncertainties and taking risks as it has become so normalised and everyday (Roberts, 1995: p122).

These differing attitudes highlight how 'age' matters in our understandings of risk, emphasising the need to explore the meaning of risk in context of life course. This thesis hopes to do this through a focus on traditional age students, positioned as in a liminal state, to see how their perceptions and experiences of risk might be understood in relation to their age. These literatures also highlight a need to consider how confidence in our capability to calculate, manage or avoid 'risk' may impact our perception of what we deem a risk. This thesis addresses this through the spatial, relational and temporal boundaries applied to the bubble by students, and how this impacted their perception and experience of risk.

### *2.3.2 The transitional phase: Is 'youth' extended, fragmented or extinct?*

Traditionally, transitions to adulthood were largely gendered, linear and predictable; parenthood and marriage for women and employment for men indicated a successful shift in status, advocated by life stage models (Valentine, 2003; Westberg, 2004; Bynner, 2005; Blatterer, 2007: p14; Jeffrey, 2010). Sometimes named the 'golden era', the construction of a "continuing occupational identity" was expected, for men at least (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; Arnett, 1998: p295; Beck, 2000: p68; Goodwin and O'Connor, 2005; Bynner, 2005; Blatterer, 2007: p14), which defends the original focus of transitions research on male transitions from school to work (For example Willis, 1977; Mc Dowell, 2002). This linearity has long been challenged, particularly by those explaining the difficulty for some to make this transition (Butcher and Wilton, 2008; Jeffrey, 2010c). The transition to adulthood is no longer simple, nor straightforward, if indeed it ever was (Kintrea et al, 2011). Plurality in transition is commonly linked with ideas of individualisation (Beck, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), as routes are no longer restricted by religious institutions and less restricted by social structures such as class, gender and so on. Instead, individuals are responsible for and have more agency over their biography.

For many, this points to an elongation of the liminal epoch between childhood and adulthood (Arnett, 2001; 2006; Cote, 2002; Valentine, 2003; Hopkins and Pain, 2007; Worth, 2009). Commonly referred to as youth (Pollock, 1997; Valentine, 2003;

Blatterer, 2007; Evans, 2008; Jeffrey, 2010c), although, now often extends into mid 30s (Jeffrey, 2010a). Characterised by partial dependence on parents, emotional instability, freedom, trailing identities, personal discovery, excitement and enjoyment, postponing financial and employment independence and adult responsibilities (Chisholm and Hurrelmann, 1995; Wyn and Dwyer, 2000; Jones, 2002; Westberg, 2004; Arnett, 2006; Blatterer, 2007; Jeffrey, 2010c). A period where identities performed are distinctive and limited to these time spaces, exercised alongside more permanent identities, often through consumption practices (Pollock, 1997; Jones, 2002; Valentine, 2000; 2003). Arnett (2006), called for further division between adolescents and young adults. He proposed 'emerging adults', 18-25, as those who have left school, completed puberty, and have left the parental home or have established more "autonomy" within it. These elongations, however, demonstrate persistence of traditional inequalities, such as class, as preference of deferred employment in pursuit of 'emerging adulthood' is often only possible with parents' financial buffer (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; Bynner, 2005; MacDonald and Marsh, 2005; Walther, 2006). Nevertheless, Arnett (2006) stresses the usefulness of emerging adulthood to refer to an age bracket of young people who may be experiencing similar emotions, whether this be through different ventures.

The complexity of transitions is recognised as young people may experience yo yo, fragmented, reversible transition, claiming adult status by some measurement, but not others (Jones, 2002: p2; Walther, 2006: p121; Molgat, 2007; Molgat and Vezina, 2008; Horscellman, 2011: p379). Some transitions such as leaving home, sex, part time monetary pursuits and adult responsibilities such as caring (Day & Evans, 2015) might be confronted earlier (valentine, 2000; p265, Bynner, 2005). In contrast, delays in marriage, increasing divorce rates, increasing elongation of education (Valentine, 2003; Westberg, 2004; Arnett, 2006) simultaneous education and employment participation (Chisholm and Hurrelmann, 1995), further complicate a notion of 'becoming' with adulthood as a desired destination, once gained permanently retained, (Wyn and Dwyer, 2000; Blatterer, 2007; Worth, 2009: p1050). This presents an argument for 'transitionless' lives (Molgat, 2007).

Indeed, the concept of 'becoming' implying young people are not yet adults (Worth, 2009), was jettisoned by many as it was seen to imply young people lacked a collection of skills, responsibilities such as economic dependence, which may position them as currently incapable, in a period of learning and accumulating experiences in order to develop necessary characteristics to be termed adult (Uprichard, 2008). Becoming suggests a period of transition is coming to 'improve' the current being of the young person. In contrast then, 'being' was a welcome phenomenon (Holloway and Valentine, 2000; Aitken, 2001) in recognising young people's agency and opinion on what it means to be a young person, now in the moment, acknowledging their competencies, and acknowledging them as a human being in their own right rather than as a future adult (Cahill, 2007; Uprichard, 2008; Holloway, 2014: p382).

Often, 'being' tends to focus on the present, whereas 'becoming' focuses on the future (Uprichard, 2008). Horton et al (2008: p342) neatly summarises that all theoretical lenses applied to young people, "as embodied becoming, developmental stages, social transitions, 'growing up', 'coming of age', or simply 'going on'", begin to express, albeit in different ways, certain temporalities in young people's lives. This gives reason to apply the more recent recognition of the value in drawing together these conceptualisations of youth, to deepen our understanding of how lives fold together and therefore the present and future should be considered in unison, interacting and impacting on each other (Uprichard, 2008; Ansell et al, 2014; Holloway, 2014).

This approach can illustrate importance of time as a student and everyday but also what carries forward and how now (the present) is shaped by imaginations of the future. For example, risk is seen as a futuristic thing yet shapes the present as we make choices about this now. As society is now seen as preoccupied with the future, both in terms of envisaging possible risks, but also in terms of pressure to aspire in a particular way, a focus on temporalities rather than being or becoming in isolation enables a better grasp of understanding the liminality of studenthood and how anticipated risks fold into and impact current experiences. A focus on temporalities then enables us to see how our experience of this liminal period is affected by past,

present and future (Brannen and Nilsen, 2002) and indeed how this liminal period is felt as accelerated or slowed (Jeffrey, 2010a), but also the importance of age (Horton et al, 2008: p342).

Furthermore, relevance of transitions is questioned; the word 'transition' as a descriptor, is itself problematic as it signifies considerable progression or advancement in some way but often through ways which actually reproduce rather than transform existing circumstances (Brown et al, 2009). Nevertheless, some scholars have sought to identify key moments or events, to enhance our understanding of young people's lives. For example, 'fateful moments', (Giddens, 1991) 'social milestones' (Chisholm and Hurrellman, 1995), 'critical moments' (Thomsen, 2002), 'vital conjunctures' (Jeffrey, 2010c). Whilst these key thinkers have been important in recognising the transformative potential of moments such as getting married, starting a job, parenthood and education they tend to reference to large scale events.

There has been neglected exploration of "small scale lifestyle changes that may or may not be classed as transitions at all" but "after the event" may "continue to have effects within the ongoingness of everyday lives" (Horton and Kraftl, 2012: p37). Geographers remind us of these subtler, more mundane moments (Horton and Kraftl, 2006) For example, they discuss how wearing glasses or clumsiness might present the same emotions and everyday difficulties in adulthood as it did in childhood. This research is a reminder of the need to study emotions, materialities and embodied dispositions which carry through from childhood to adulthood. This alerts us to continuities in identity across this transition whilst recognising the significance of smaller happenings. This encourages a re-think of typical framings of 'growing-up'. Rather than youths as 'becoming' (Worth, 2009), Horton and Kraftl (2008: p271) draw our attention to how life 'goes on':

"moments of glasses-wearing and clumsiness highlight that one does not necessarily grow up or out of certain bodily capacities, or styles of comportment, or tendencies. Instead, these infect our attempts to go on—to

cope, to make the best of things—in different ways, in different situations. There is no sense of progression, procession or development here, at least, not towards any point.”

Therefore:

“life itself is beset with multiple temporalities, exhibiting different logics and forms of intention (perhaps day-to-day survival), over different timescales (short and long term), attended by various emotional dispositions (despair, anxiety, hope)” (Brown et al, 2012: p1613).

This thesis, therefore, seeks to use the above complications of transitions to better understand the temporalities of the everyday lives of students and their liminal position.

### *2.3.3 University as a place of transition*

Education is key in who we are, and who we become, influencing both collective and individual identities (Willis, 1981; Valentine, 2000; 2003; Jeffrey and McDowell, 2004). University is regarded as a place of transition in the most transformative sense (Brown et al, 2009), as many envisage a big change which helps them adjust, but means students struggle if expectations are not met (Pancer et al, 2000). Many regard university students as adults in becoming, with expectation of adult status on completion (Chatterton, 1999; Kenyon, 1999; Kenyon and Heath, 2001; Hopkins, 2006; Holdsworth, 2009a). This is driven by assumptions of ‘maturation’ (Chatterton, 1999), gained via increased responsibility for domestic life and personal finances, such as managing debt, washing clothes, cooking, (Pancer et al, 2000), and through negotiation of nightscapes (Holton, 2015). This heightened responsibility is often coupled with expectations of moving away from home, and consequential independence (Reay, 2001; Fanthome, 2005; Thomsen and Taylor, 2005; Thomsen, 2007; Holdsworth and Morgan, 2007; Holdsworth, 2009), with 75% continuing to follow this norm (Patinotis and Holdsworth, 2005; Hopkins, 2006). In particular, succeeding halls, the election to live with peers is expected to symbolise the move to

adulthood, with both positive and negative experiences (Kenyon, 1999; Kenyon and Heath, 2001), training students for future negotiations in a “family home” (Wilcox et al, 2005; Lahelma and Gordon, 2003; 2008).

This positioning of students as ‘becoming’ could be criticised for dismissing the importance of who they are right now and what it means to be a student. Recent work has highlighted the importance of further investigation into this period of liminality (Field and Morgan-Klein, 2010; Holton, 2013). The temporality of student status is neglected by current research, but is important in deepening our understanding of experiences of university (Field and Morgan-Klein, 2010). There is a need for further consideration of how students build an identity to “become” students (Field and Morgan-Klein, 2010; Holton, 2013), but also how they anticipate “becoming” “something else”, on exit of university as a transitional space (Chatterton, 1999; Kenyon, 1999; Kenyon and Heath, 2001; Hopkins, 2006; Holdsworth, 2009; Fields and Morgan-Klein, 2010), especially as what it means to be a student is increasingly complex. Indeed, the end of this liminal stage is expected to be greeted with secure employment on graduation (Pationiotis and Holdsworth, 2005; Hopkins, 2006; Warrington, 2008), although, as numbers soar the reality of this is reduced (Holton, 2013).

Increasing normalisation of precarious employment is recognised through ‘flexpolution’ (Waite, 2009), and ‘brasilianisation’ (Beck, 2000) characterised by casualisation of labour, temporary contracts and insecurity; an impact of the wider context of a ‘risk’ and ‘uncertain’ society (Beck, 2000; Furlong and Kelly, 2005; Waite, 2009). Arguably, this ‘fragmented employment is not new (Goodwin and O’Connor, 2005, Fenton and Dermott, 2006), but current circumstances have stretched it beyond twenties, now a necessity rather than a choice to trial careers. (Beck, 2000; Bradley and Devadason, 2008: p122)

In contrast, authors dispute these claims, arguing descriptions of employment precarity are exaggerated, lacking empirical support and that educational attainment continues to increase chances of job stability (Heery and Salmon, 2000; Doogan,

2001). With increasing precarity characterising the job market, but particularly lower skilled labour force (Furlong and Kelly, 2005) and increasing numbers occupying service roles, is university a means of preventing or postponing this situation? However, Bradley and Devadason (2008: p125) quoting figures from HESA imply only 21% of graduates obtain “graduate jobs”. Exploring the employment trajectories of young people, they coin the term “the adaptable generation” (Bradley and Devadason, 2008: p537), highlighting how young people are increasingly resourceful and unfearful of possible employment precarity, as this state is prolonged and normalised. Is university perceived to increase stability? Or enhance career flexibility? Or simply a means of buying thinking time?

Leccardi (2005; 2006) suggests young people envisage temporality and instability in their futures, and so intentionally swap commitment and permanency for current opportunity, in the hope of ‘gratification’ from an uncertain future. He notes a need to be patient and flexible, admitting the slowed pace with which goals might be achieved coupled with determination to compete with others to reach their desired destination. Mackie (2015), proposes university as a form of “slow track”, transition to employment, envisaged as an avenue of security (Finn, 2016). In which case, can university be seen as ‘passing time’ (Jeffrey, 2010a; Evans, 2008)? Doing something productive in a period of ‘nothingness’, where there is ‘nowt to do’ and ‘nowhere to go’? (Evans, 2008). Youth as a period of simply ‘passing time’ might be filled by constructive activities such as gaining a degree (Jeffrey, 2010), yet is punctuated with varieties of ‘timepass’ (Jeffrey, 2010a; 2010b). Young people are seen to be in a liminal state, caught in prolonged ‘waiting’, aiming and hoping to be successful in careers, yet with depleting opportunities for employment (Jeffrey, 2010b; Li, 2012).

Jeffrey (2010a), in discussing experiences of Meerut’s students, discusses how young men continued to pursue qualifications often into their 30s, as it enabled them to feel as if they were working towards something worthwhile. This was despite comprehension that accumulation of more degrees was not like to increase chances of respectful employment. Nevertheless, these young men saw this as a more productive way of ‘passing time’, as they waited for career opportunities to improve,

simultaneously hopeful and cynical about their futures. Li (2012: p106) notes the prevalence of worries amongst Toronto students with regard to employment stability, coupled with hopefulness, determination and belief in neoliberalist values of individualised responsibility for social mobility and success, anticipated through education and extra-curricular CV enhancing activities.

Mackie (2015) also notes that whilst there is recognition of diversity in transitions, government policy and support remain aligned to linear transitions, as young people are urged to make the 'right' transitions, centred around 'acceptable aspirations' of education and employment (Brown, 2011: p7). Those not entering or completing expected transitions at appropriate times are seen as 'stuck in transition' (Butcher and Wilton, 2007), or become labelled as 'at risk' (Kelly, 1999). With policies encouraging aspirations and University presented as a demonstration of success of these aspirations (despite evidence that there remains unequal access), this thesis asks whether university can now be categorised as a normalised transition? How has this positioning of university as an "acceptable aspiration" (Brown, 2011: p7) influenced previous understandings of university as a risk (Archer and Hutchings, 2000; Crozier et al, 2008)? University as 'waiting' insinuates that eventually 'transition' as progression will be made into employment (Jeffrey, 2010; Li, 2012). As periods in education might be extended to 'pass time' does this create a new way of being 'stuck'? At what point does 'passing time' and 'waiting', "not yet, become not ever?" (Li, 2012),

Rather than choosing between the debates of being and becoming this thesis recognises that indeed both were important to students. By focusing on the everyday studenthood and temporalities within this, for example, the student experience, timetabled social events and academic deadlines, and so on this thesis hopes to draw attention to the temporalities of this liminal time, within which past, present and future lives may fold into one another. For example, the bubble as a place of play resonates with ideas of emerging adulthood, but how students anticipate and choose to interact with this place of play, is clearly framed by past experiences and future hopes. Whilst there is much research on being/becoming there is less on the liminal position in between, or that draws from both literatures (Valentine, 2003; Uprichard,

2008). This thesis will address this gap through a focus on traditional age university students between 18-25, an age group often associated with not being quite adult, but in a period of becoming.

## 2.4 Geographies of students

There is a mounting attention paid to young people and education within geography. For example, with regard to rethinking educational spaces (schools); the social, spatial and academic structuring and the students within them, (Holloway et al, 2010; Den Besten et al, 2013; Kraftl, 2013) and the impact of educational spaces on identity formation and maintenance (Collins and Coleman, 2008). As part of this burgeoning work in geographies of education, there remains little research on university students' everyday experiences as these are often overshadowed by broader concerns with changing HE (Holloway et al, 2010) or more prominent voices (Holton, 2013). However, this area is rapidly gaining momentum, and there is a large body of work more broadly in social sciences. This section, therefore, applies Hansom Theim's (2009) recognition that in order to deepen understanding borders of the discipline need to be traversed, drawing on sociological work, where relevant, to highlight ideas utilised later in the analysis.

### 2.4.1 *Aspiring to Higher education*

The expansion of HE, particularly since the restructuring in the early 1990s, has contributed to a greater number of institutions offering a university education. A key driver of this expansion was to generate citizens able and eager to compete in a growing knowledge economy (Brown, 2013; Holton and Riley, 2013; Carins, 2013; Torres and Wicks-Asbun, 2014). A natural accompaniment to this increase in the number of HE institutions is a large increase in the number of university students (Duke-Williams, 2009; Chatterton, 2010; Brown, 2011; Sage et al, 2012; Holton and Riley, 2013). There were previous efforts to widen participation, with regard to gender and ethnicity, but, accompanying the 90s expansion of the higher education sector came a further collection of widening participation policies and incentives. Since 1997, there has been a big push to encourage engagement in HE among young people from

non-traditional backgrounds, under-represented groups and disadvantaged areas (Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003; Kettley, 2007; Brown, 2011). This has encouraged an exploration of emotional and affectual geographies of neoliberalist agendas on young people's subjectivities (Brown, 2011; 2012; 2013; Kintrea et al, 2011; Cairns, 2013; Torres and Wicks-Asbun, 2014; Pimlott-Wilson, 2015; Grant, 2016b).

Brown (2012) links the widening participation agenda to amplification of aspirations among young people with clearly defined ideas of what is an "acceptable aspiration" (Brown, 2011: p7). Policies breed "aspirational citizens" in an "aspiration nation", redirecting hopes, particularly of those from non-traditional backgrounds; young people are directed to be responsible and accountable for their own social mobility, coached into higher education under the illusion it will indemnify this (Raco, 2009; Brown, 2011; Kintrea et al, 2011; Torres and Wicks-Asbun, 2014; Pimlott-Wilson, 2015). Encouraged to be preoccupied by and considerate of the future, authors demonstrate the affective impact of neoliberalism on young people, as young people hoping to go to university internalise worries about personal responsibility for success or failure (Torres and Wicks-Asbun, 2014; Pimlott-Wilson, 2015).

Our attention is drawn to the temporalities of young people's lives, as they anticipate negative emotions they expect to feel, if they are unable to reach these collective. Young people seek ways to pre-empt and prepare for possibilities, but with underlying hope that "hard work" will pay off (Valentine and Harris, 2014; Pimlott-Wilson, 2015). Despite evidence for feelings of individualised responsibility for success and self reliance, young people also expressed irritation towards the government through tuition fee protests and cuts to education (Brown, 2011; Hopkins et al, 2012).

Aware that without financial help transitions would be much more difficult and complicated, there remains an expectation among young people that the government should provide this (Brown, 2013), combined with anticipated anger should their aspirations not materialise (Pimlott-Wilson, 2015). However, evidence suggests that despite fee rises record numbers of students progress to higher education (Adams and Weale, 2015). Although, research on the previous fee rise, recognises that those from

lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to be impacted by fee rises as they are more fearful of debt, perceiving it as a bigger risk (Callendar and Jackson, 2005). Is there then an assumption that fee rise will have no impact on the middle class traditional student transitions to university? This thesis will contribute to these debates by focusing on university student experiences, enabling reflection on perceptions before university, how these materialise or do not in experiences of and anticipated direction beyond.

#### *2.4.2 Transitions to university and risk*

Linked to section 2.3.3 this section focuses on the actual decision to go to university and the transition there, with envisaged risks, rather than university as a route to adulthood. Whilst there is a growing attention paid to non-traditional transitions to university, with regard to risks (For example, Archer and Hutchings, 2000; Reay et al, 2003; Reay et al, 2009; 2010), traditional student experiences are neglected, as university is seen as a normalised rather than risky occasion for these students (Patinoitis and Holdsworth, 2005). Undeniably, the expansion of higher education combined with widening participation policies have made a significant contribution to opening up higher education to those who might not have previously considered university as an option, and numbers of non-traditional students attending university has risen (Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003).

Success in terms of heightened aspirations may have been achieved, but access remains unbalanced and inconstant (Brown, 2013), with some arguing these circumstances have actually enhanced inequality (Brown and Carasso, 2013), as 'class' remains dominant in feelings of inclusion or exclusion (Rogaly and Taylor, 2015). Many allude to the consequent creation of a two tier system (Archer and Hutchings, 2000; Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003; Reay et al, 2009). Diversity and increasing non-traditional students' numbers are more common in post 1992 institutions (Reay et al 2009; Holton and Riley, 2013), whilst traditional students still make up the majority in many institutions (Patinoitis and Holdsworth, 2005). In addition, suggestions are made

that university services remain tailored to this traditional group (Sovic, 2009), yet research detailing traditional student experience is lacking.

The transition to university is met by mixed emotions by most; predominantly, excitement and fear (Sovic, 2009). Excitement elicited by anticipation of building new friendships and networks (Brooks, 2002), alongside the promise of 24-hour party culture (Andersson et al, 2012), and associated transient thrills of sex and drinking (Archer and Hutchings, 2000), and student discounts (Hopkins, 2006). Dominant fears or *risks* focused on moving away from home, financial burden associated with university (Archer and Hutchings, 2000; Hopkins, 2006), but also a nervousness about the anticipated change in academic practice (Archer and Hutchings, 2000; Read, 2003; Scalon et al, 2007; Leese, 2010).

To date, there has been significant engagement (through the filter of sociology) with students' adjustment to university as a new academic environment, particularly in relation to non-traditional students, as they are seen as at higher risk of dropping out or finding difficulty adjusting (Christie et al, 2001; Brooks, 2003a; Christie and Munro, 2003; Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003). Many authors suggested non-traditional students would be concerned or worried by these changes (Scalon et al, 2007; Read et al, 2003). There was an assumption non-traditional students would be unprepared for this changing educational arena struggling with independent learning and high volume of work. (Cook and Leckley, 1999; Crisp et al, 2009). Alternatively, some studies stated that non-traditional students (specifically, working class) concern, may mean students adapt better, despite an initial lack of resources or unpreparedness through their increased hunger for success (Leathwood et al, 2003; Reay, 2009). Traditional students' experiences remain absent from this literature as it was taken for granted they had an ingrained ability to adapt and achieve academically.

Non-traditional students are documented as having more complicated *riskier* transitions than traditional student counterparts (Archer and Hutchings, 2000; Clayton et al, 2009; Holdsworth, 2009a; 2009b). It is assumed that they may not comply with these mainstream ideals of studenthood detailed as generating excitement, or expect

to significantly transform identity in order to fit in (Reay et al, 2010), but also that the risks listed above may be felt more deeply. This has led to an influx of interest in non-traditional student experiences (mature, local, working class, lack of previous knowledge of Higher Education), appreciating the diversity and complexity in experience of this group (Read et al, 2003; Patinotis and Holdsworth, 2005; Reay et al, 2010; Leese, 2010; Mangan et al, 2010). In particular, attention has been paid to influence of familial background, with much stress on disparities between different classes and cultures. Students are often portrayed as being at a disadvantage, often discussed in terms of capital and habitus (Leese, 2010), embedded in social class (Holton and Riley, 2013).

University is seen as more of a *risk* for students choosing to steer away from traditional working class norms, to venture into the unfamiliar space of Higher Education (Archer and Hutchings, 2000; Crozier et al, 2008; Clayton et al, 2009; Reay et al, 2009), as they may lack initial identity capital including parental financial assistance (economic capital), and family knowledge or experience of university (cultural capital) (Christie and Munro, 2003; Holdsworth, 2009a; 2009b). Non-traditional students for these reasons amongst others often remain at home, although, not always (Leathwood and O Connell, 2003; Crozier et al, 2008; Palmer et al, 2009; Taulke-Johnson, 2010). There has been moves beyond the static notion of capital (Reay, 2004) to express how it may develop social capital on arrival at university through self-motivation of adopting the necessary habitus (Reay et al, 2009) or through identifying difference but using it as a form of social capital (Holton, 2016).

A chief desire of these young people is to achieve more than their parents, as Higher Education stimulates “intergenerational ambition” (Brown, 2013), with pressure placed on these young people to achieve upward social mobility for themselves but also to “improve family social standing” (Archer and Hutchings, 2000; Holdsworth, 2005, Patinotis and holdsworth 2005). Higher education is labelled a ‘consumer product’ (Read et al, 2003), implying intending students have choice. However, due to the dominance of the traditional student image, particularly whiteness and middle-

classness (Andersson et al, 2012: p506), and presentation of university as a child less space (Hook, 2016), imparted in promotional tools, such as prospectus and open days, from some institutions, non-traditional students feel pushed to alternatives (most likely post 1992 institutions) where integration is uncomplicated (Reay et al, 2009; 2010). As spatial mobility is also promoted in aspirational agendas. as an important part of upward mobility through educational achievement, those that chose to stay locally are perceived to be at disadvantage, not gaining the full experience of being a student (Holdsworth, 2006).

In contrast, traditional students are assumed to make a smooth transition to HE, from a family with previous higher education knowledge (Pationitis and Holdsworth, 2005), and to a more highly ranked institution than their peers (Read et al, 2003), more likely to view university with a sense of entitlement (Holdsworth, 2006; 2009a) and aware how to utilise opportunities for future benefit (Brooks, 2007b; Holdsworth, 2010). Therefore, there is no literature that details how 'traditional' students specifically might perceive and/or experience *risk through this transition to university*, or how there might be overlap between the experiences of traditional and non-traditional students. There is, therefore, a need to explore traditional student experiences of transition to education and perceptions and experiences of risk. This would also allow students to reflect on how their expectations of risk before arrival influenced their perceptions and experiences of risk at university.

#### *2.4.3 Spatialities of the student experience: A prevailing 'traditional' stereotype*

As a result of government aims to increase and widen participation in Higher Education, the sector is increasingly neo-liberalised and student experience is becoming increasingly commodified (Reay et al, 2003; Molesworth et al, 2009; Chatterton, 2010; Walkerdine, 2011; Holloway et al, Tomlinson, 2015; Nixon et al, 2016). The diversification of the student body has widened the consumption opportunities offered (Andersson et al, 2012), and university is presented as a liberal and inclusive place (Hopkins, 2010). However, performance of traditional student identity through particular consumption practices such as drinking powerfully persist

(Hollands, 2002), and the prevailing dominance of drinking culture (or at least perceived) leaves many students feeling out of place or excluded (Hopkins, 2010; Madriaga, 2010). University is marketed as an entire lifestyle: 'the student experience'.

Universities are expected to train new students in university culture, with "traditional" expectations more prominent in some institutions (Chatterton, 1999; Brooks and Waters, 2009; Clayton et al, 2009; Brooks et al, 2015b; 2016). This student culture includes: exclusive social behaviours such as drinking and sexual flings, student specific mannerisms, student appropriate attire such as joggers, adhering to the student mindset (Chatterton, 1999; 2010; Smith and Holt, 2007; Crozier et al, 2008) and through this a network of new friends (Brooks, 2002; Wilcox et al, 2005; Fanthom, 2005; Sovic, 2009). A lifestyle targeting traditional, young (18-21), unmarried, middle class, white student experience with the accompanied expectation of leaving home to attend their chosen institution (Chatterton, 1999; Chatterton, 2010; Reay, 2003; Holdsworth, 2005, 2009a, 2009b, Smith and Holt, 2007; Holton, 2013). University is promoted as independence, a chance to "start over", through moving away from home into university accommodation (Brooks, 2002; Fanthome, 2005). Spatial mobility is seen as superior to staying at home and local mobility is often perceived as immobility (Holdsworth, 2006; Holton, 2013), often meaning those living at home for their duration of their studies are perceived as having a second rate experience, isolated from opportunistic social indulgences (Holdsworth, 2006; Christie, 2007; Christie et al, 2008; Reay et al, 2010).

With moving away still idealised, and as numbers continue to rise, students represent an increasing proportion of our population; particularly young people, living in university towns and cities. (smith, smith and holt, Hubbard). As student communities swell, boundaries between local and student become more defined (Kenyon, 1997; Chatterton, 1999; Palmer et al, 2009, Kenna, 2011), segregating students, albeit sometimes unintentionally (Fincher and Shaw, 2009). There are many studies exploring growth of residential studentified areas (Smith, 2002; Allinson, 2006; Russo and Tatjer, 2007; Hubbard, 2008; 2009; Munro and Livingstone, 2011; Kenna, 2011;

Sage et al, 2012a; 2012b; Smith and Hubbard, 2014). Students are blamed for anti-social behaviour, noise, increased burglaries, strains on parking, neglected properties, house prices leading to displacement of local residents, introduction of unsavoury tenants by councils (Smith and Holt, 2007; Hubbard, 2008; Munro and Livingstone, 2011), student centred services given precedence over local facilities (Chatterton, 1999; Chatterton and Hollands 2002; Allinson, 2006; Munro and Livingstone, 2011).

However, students' perspectives are often overshadowed by more authoritative and dominant opinions. For example, those of local residents, businesses, landlords, university staff, letting agents and so on (Chatterton; 2000; Chatterton and Hollands, 2003; Allinson 2006; Hubbard, 2008; Munro and livingstone 2011). There is work to be done to explore students themselves experience these enclaves. This thesis will do this through understanding the how the spatial boundaries of the bubble impact student experience, and risk, particularly, when combined also with temporal and relational experience.

This student "monoculture" (Allinson, 2006), however, is not uniformly accessed or normalised for all. Cultures remain largely gendered; laddishness, whilst demonised by the media plays a significant role in breeding heavy drinking cultures and derogatory perceptions of and actions towards female students (Phipps and Young, 2015; Phipps, 2016). Although recent female drinking and sexual behaviour mirrors that of their male counterparts (Dempster, 2011; Hubbard, 2013) women were expected to perform tamer versions of these aspects of student identity (Dempster, 2011; Hubbard, 2013). The lifestyle is not cheap, therefore, is more likely to be accessed by middle class students, sometimes causing tension among student groups as friends could not empathise with monetary situations (Andersson et al, 2012). There is evidence to suggest many young people take up part time work, in order to afford this experience, however, this is not to position students as consumers without agency but active in how, if they choose to, access more funds, through loans, part-time work, overdrafts, parental financial support and so on (Smith and Taylor, 1996; Christie et al, 2001; Christie and Munro, 2003).

This literature homogenises traditional student experiences, assuming that traditional students desire and adhere to this identity and that traditional students have an automatic smooth transition into this identity. Whilst many have warned against the dangers in homogenising the experiences of this traditional student population, stereotyping them as binge drinking louts (Holloway, 2010), and expressed the need to move beyond the binary of traditional/ non-traditional (Holton, 2013) there remains little research that explores traditional student experiences and the changing nature of what it means to be a student in order to do this.

In summary, this section has demonstrated there is a growing body of literature on geographies of students. As a result of the diversification of the student body encouraged by widening participation policies there has been an increased interest in exploration of non-traditional student experiences, with a particular focus on the transition to university and first year experiences or integration. Besides Holton's (2013; 2015a; 2015b) recent work there is less which seeks to go beyond the traditional/non-traditional binary, or that includes students' experiences as they progress through their university trajectory and very little that seeks to uncover the complexity of traditional students' experiences. Instead, that which exists on traditional student experiences tends to homogenise this group, continuing a stereotype which privileges drinking as a large part of the student experience, despite calls to move beyond this to recognise the diversity of this group (Holloway et al, 2010).

Discussions of risk are often confined to non-traditional student experiences regarding finances and decisions to remain at home, again alluding to uncomplicated transitions made by traditional students. Whilst there is evidence that further commodification of the university experience has reinforced the traditional student experience as "the student experience", and as numbers of students continue to increase attention has been paid to social-spatial clusterings of students, both residential and leisure facilities. These literatures tend to focus on the impact on local communities, privileging the voices of businesses, landlords, and local residents over students (Chatterton; 2000; Chatterton and Hollands, 2003; Allinson 2006; Hubbard, 2008; Munro and Livingstone 2011).

This project is, therefore, unique in not only offering students a voice in these debates but by placing them at the centre of this research methodologically as co-researchers, allowing a theoretical understanding of their experiences through their own eyes. It is unique in that rather than the research being directed by a set agenda, the participatory approach enabled students to determine the direction of the project enabling an exploration of what was important to them in terms of their student experience. Consequentially, the focus of this project became about university as a “bubble”, as this was a powerfully reoccurring theme amongst all students. The next section details how this thesis through a conceptualisation of a bubble provides a new framework by which a deeper understanding of student experience can be gained.

## 2.5 Conceptualising the bubble

Based on the above literatures, this section offers a theorisation of ‘the bubble’ that extends the little conceptual work that exists around this term (See Fainstein and Judd, 1999; Butler, 2003; Holton, 2015; Browne and Bakshi, 2013; 2016). The commonality between these studies is, that in all cases, ‘bubbles’ tend to attract and provide services to exclusive groups. The bubble refers to a desire to immerse in culture of ‘us’, which, in some cases leads to intentional self-segregation for arguments of convenience, collective identity assertion, protection and acceptance. This thesis adopts and extends the notion of a ‘bubble’ as *all* students at some point in the data collection phases referred to the (not necessarily their) university experience as a bubble. This was key in students’ perceptions and experiences of risk.

This section emphasises the chief contribution of this thesis by outlining how working towards this new theorisation of bubbles can enhance our understanding of student experiences, more specifically their perceptions and experiences of risk, and more besides. The four sub sections are representative of the different ways in which students alluded to this metaphorical image but also how this way impacted their perceptions and experiences of risk. Section 2.6.1 discusses the tantalising nature of the bubble as a place of play. Section 2.6.2 explores the protective film of the bubble, introducing its fragility; the bubble is spatially and relationally bound. Section 2.6.3

explains how the bubble brings affective atmospheres into being. Section 2.6.4 draws attention to the temporality and fragility of the bubble. Section 2.6.5 demonstrates how elements of the bubble are intertwined.

### *2.5.1 The bubble as a tantalising 'place of play'*

This section explores the university 'bubble' as a tantalising 'place of play'. The bubble is glistening, mysterious, new and full of opportunity and promise. Fainstein and Judd's (1999) depiction of a bubble as segregated 'places of play', provides a useful starting point. They describe how the 'bubble' is experienced through standardised consumption to excess, targeted at specific audiences. This section connects these debates with those emerging in geography on the commodification of studenthood (Chatterton, 2010; Smith and Hubbard, 2014), and sociological literatures regarding voluntary risk (Douglas and Wildavsky, 1983; Lyng, 2005) and emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000; 2006), to conceptualise the bubble as a place of play. The section also draws on aspirations literature (Brown, 2011; Pimlott-Wilson, 2015) in order to demonstrate the bubble as tantalising, as an avenue to adulthood, with hopes of employment opportunities on completion (Pationiotis and Holdsworth, 2005; Hopkins, 2006; Warrington, 2008).

Cities have long been spaces of consumption (Chatterton and Hollands, 2003), but more recent commodification of student life has etched out areas in these existing landscapes, to service the 'distinctive' social needs and desires of students (Chatterton, 1999; Smith and Holt, 2007; Sage et al, 2012; Smith and Hubbard, 2014). As evident through the changing context of UKHE (discussed in chapter1) universities are now compelled to 'sell' 'the university experience' rather than just the quality and content of degrees (Chatterton and Hollands, 2003; Holdsworth, 2009a; Chatterton, 2010). Some of these opportunities for consumption might be considered as voluntary risks such as drinking; risk here too becomes part of the experience which can be purchased (Lyng, 2005: p233).

The promotion of these social activities suggests there is a 'right way' to consume and to 'be' a student (Smith and Holt, 2007; Holdsworth, 2009; Chatterton, 2010) enables

a bubble to come into being. Especially, as standardisation is implied by the “definitive article” in “the university experience” (Holdsworth, 2009a), albeit with differing expectations according to gender and class (Hubbard, 2013; Phipps, 2016), as females are not expected to participate in binge drinking and risky sexual encounters to the same extent as men. How might this impact how students perceive university and risks associated? How might this impact students’ perceptions of what is a risk and how they should be a student? Does this promotion lead to a degree of predictability in consumption; “controlled excess” (Lyng, 2005: p233) or “riskless risk” (Hubbard, 2002)? If risk is classed as something uncertain or unknown (Beck, 1992) how does this predictability impact perceptions of risk? As increasing accent is placed on the social aspects of student life are social risks more or less visible in student perceptions before arrival? Does anticipation heighten or minimise a sense of risk? Is there an increased desire to participate in risk to achieve the real university experience? The bubble is tantalising, aiming to lure students in through perceived new chances to play, which may or may not materialise. The bubble is shiny, new and exciting.

Despite diversification of the student body, it is widely recognised that the ‘typical’ traditional student identity maintains prevalence, often skewing our view on how students engage with HE, and re-enforcing stereotypes (Chatterton, 2010; Holdsworth 2009a), although, evidence illustrates experiences are far more varied than these images infer (Chatterton and Hollands, 2003; Holloway et al, 2010). Students ‘buy into a lifestyle’ (Smith and Holt, 2007: p150): moving away from the parental home, with hopes of increased social opportunities, experimentation, fun, freedom and ideas of identity re-creation (Chatterton, 1999; Chatterton and Hollands, 2003; Hopkins, 2006; Holdsworth, 2009; Waters et al, 2011). It has been implied that students may be more aware of their financial situation (with reference to housing decisions), following the fee rise (Sage et al, 2012), will students desire to consume increase as they seek value for money or a desire to get the ‘full’ experience? Is the bubble tantalising as scholars note the heightened emphasis on the social side of studenthood is a “seductive” marketing tool (Holdsworth, 2009a; Chatterton, 2010), referred to as ‘playtime’ (Chatterton, 1999)?

This consumption begins before arrival at university as students make choices about which university to go to. For example, different universities offer very different cultures (Clayton et al, 2009), with many studies noting students choose universities where they hope to 'fit in' (for example: Reay, et al, 2010), demonstrating that not all bubbles are as easily permeated. This highlights how the iridescent nature of the bubble as they same bubble might appear differently to different students; some bubbles might seem more tantalising than others. Do different universities pose different risks and does this impact how students choose where to 'play'? How do students position and perceive Leicester in comparison to other universities in terms of risk?

In addition, there is increasing recognition that consumption has become a more prominent component of youth identity (Valentine, 2000; Hollands, 2002; Chatterton and Hollands, 2003). University is sometimes presented as an "extension of youth" (Hopkins, 2006: p245), with many features of the 'student experience' resonating with themes of emerging adulthood (discussed in section 2.3). This highlights the youthful nature of 'bubbles' associated with playtime. University is often associated with the expectation of "proper adulthood" upon completion (Hopkins, 2006: p245; Holdsworth, 2009a). Is university therefore, a last chance to play, and a means of suspending adulthood?

University could then be positioned as slow track to adulthood (Mackie, 2015), as many students believe it might enhance possibility of increased earnings or 'better' chances of employment (Patinoitis and Holdsworth, 2005). There is evidence students have absorbed some neoliberal ideals of individualised responsibility for educational achievement and aspirations (Pimlott-Wilson, 2015). In contrast anger at educational cuts and increases in tuition fee rise, demonstrate awareness that these hopes are not as easily attainable, especially as numbers of graduates increase, yet graduate level jobs do not match up (Hopkins et al, 2012). Is the bubble tantalising as whilst there are hopes a degree might lead to better employment prospects with increasing competition these hopes might not be obtainable?

However, this is not to suggest that students do not have agency in how these ‘places of play’ come into being and how they interact with risk within them in order to sustain them. Indeed, the bubble is fragile, it relies on people coming to the place to consume in an expected way. It is the continued production and reproduction of these places that stimulates places of risk and enables engagement with risk. How is the bubble bought into being through student anticipation of and interaction with it? This highlights the fragility of the bubble as there is increasing competition between universities to recruit and retain students. This demonstrates the mould ability of these bubbles by consumers, in this case students, as bubbles morph according to market/students’ needs and desires (Chatterton, 1999; Smith and Holt, 2007; Sage et al, 2012; Smith and Hubbard, 2014).

### *2.5.2 The bubble as spatially and relationally bound*

This section draws together existing literatures in human geography detailing the ‘bubble ‘as enabling a sense of ‘safety and protection’ (Browne and Bakshi, 2013: p256; 2016), filled with ‘people like us’ (Butler, 2003: p2469), geographically separated with limited mobility beyond these regions (Holton, 2015: p25). It combines these literatures with Douglas’ (1992) ideas of risk and otherness (see section 2.2.1), but moves beyond the implied static notion of these to explain how the boundaries of the bubble are pliable and permeable, if treated carefully, through careful negotiations with others inside (students) and outside (non-students) of the boundaries.

Whilst ideas of students’ segregation from, and tensions with, local communities, creating ‘exclusive geographies’ for and by students are not new (Chatterton, 1999; Holdsworth, 2006), the socio-spatial separation of students has spread and intensified as a result of “relentless commodification of student housing and student hood” (Smith and Hubbard, 2014: p99). Indeed, Chatterton (2010: p511) notes:

“Whole swathes of city centres become dedicated to servicing students, especially in terms of retail, entertainment, and leisure. Pubs, bars nightclubs and fast-food and other retail outlets all pitch themselves at this lucrative, sociable, dependable consumer population.”

The segregation of social as well as residential lives, is thought to enhance a sense of belonging to the student community, intensifying the 'student experience' through increased student centric activities (Chatterton, 1999; Chatterton and Hollands 2003; Holdsworth, 2006; Smith and Holt, 2007; Holdsworth 2009; Holton, 2013). Whilst students might be spatially separated, the bubble remains transparent and their actions still observed by outsiders. Performances of studenthood do not align with ideals of local residents (Hubbard, 2013) and students are blamed for anti-social behaviour, degradation of environments, lack of parking and so on (Sage et al, 2012). How does this transparency and tension impact the spatialities of university life and associated risks?

Douglas' ideas on risk and otherness (see section 2.2 for more details) suggest that the maintenance of such barriers is important as the 'other' (anyone not adhering to the 'in' community) is often seen as risk and risk is seen as something we should advert or protect against (Joffe, 2003; Douglas, 2013; Douglas and Wildavsky, 1983). However, bubbles may be permeated if treated carefully. For example, local students might traverse these spatial boundaries, as they belong to both student and non-student groups (Holdsworth, 2006), or for purposes such as employment (Holdsworth, 2009), or 3<sup>rd</sup> year might explore beyond student zones as they prepare to shed their student identity (Holton, 2013). How might bubbles then split and re-join as students traverse through the city and beyond carrying elements of the bubble with them?

Institutionalised university space (such as the campus or halls) is presented as 'safe' (Chatterton, 1999; Smith and Holt, 2007; Smith and Hubbard, 2014). This suggests the protective film of the bubble, but, bubbles have thin membranes which can easily burst. For example, as entertainment is increasingly farmed out to other organisations, increasing "private players" in universities, (Chatterton, 2010), meaning students areas still defined but as sporadic patches across the city, how might this test the strength of this protective film? The bubble is stretched, but how far before it bursts?

Outside organisations might be tempted to target traditional students who (Chatterton, 1999)? This highlights how the view of bubbles from the outside might appear as a joined up spherical whole, it might be segmented, actually full of tension inside. The bubble is fragile and easily distorted by outside factors. Hopkins' discusses how attempts to maintain feelings of safety through increased surveillance after 9/11 disrupted the 'harmonious' campus for some Muslim students as felt 'othered' and avoided areas for fear of being labelled a risk. This highlights how Bubbles are iridescent. The same bubble can appear differently if viewed from opposing angles or obscured by light. It might be perceived and experienced differently by different students at different times, or perceived and experienced differently by the same group of students at different times. The fragility of the bubble's thin membrane and its ability to mutate are highlighted here as Muslim students here quickly feel placed outside of the protective bubble, as events outside permeate and re-define relational boundaries of the bubble, so this institutional space is no longer safe to them. This extends Douglas' rather static notion of fixed boundaries. The boundaries of the bubble are not fixed but are malleable, often morphing as boundaries are reconfigured according to interactions between the student body and with non-students. For example, sometimes uni experience is interrupted by things happening at home or outside university experience.

This section has hinted at the determinate/indeterminate boundaries of the bubble as they are impacted by the evolving spatial spread of student services and through students' relations with each other, but also with those outside. This next section builds on this through an exploration of the emotional and affective elements of the bubble.

### *2.5.3 Affective atmospheres of the bubble*

Fainstein and Judd (1999: p266) describe the 'bubble' as a "kinetic environment" which, "insists that to be there is to participate in excitement". This section develops these ideas through an exploration of how emotional and affective elements of the bubble might interact to generate atmospheres.

As stated earlier in the literature review, despite the extensive engagement with emotion and affect in human geography and more broadly in the social sciences there has been little attempt to engage with the emotional dimensions of risk. Drawing on Lupton's work (1998; 2012; 2013a) which draws attention to this lacuna this thesis seeks to move work on risk forward to consider a more relational and emotional approach. In order to do this, I draw on ideas of atmosphere. Traditionally, emotional and affectual geographies have remained largely separated, but more recent critiques have challenged this disrelation (Anderson, 2009; Smith, 2009; Pile, 2010; Bondi and Davidson, 2011) arguing it is beneficial to explore how the two concepts meld (Edensor, 2012). This has inspired an "atmospheric turn" (Trigg, 2016), as scholars seek to acknowledge the intertwining of emotion and affect using the concept of atmosphere. Anderson's (2009) work on 'affective atmospheres' has been a key driver of this. He uses Bohme's work which develops ideas on architecture and atmosphere to highlight the "spatiality of atmospheres" (Anderson, 2009: p80). Whilst atmos relates to the "emotive tone permeating" (Bohme 2002: p5), blurring boundaries between emotion and affect, sphere refers to the spherical configuration in which this atmos occupies space (Anderson, 2009: p80). Bubbles share these characteristics as their circular shape encapsulates a particular atmos by which students may be both affected or effected, but unlike the bubble it is diffuse, not fixed in space. It is the ambiguity and fluidity around this term which is attractive in order to draw attention to the temporalities associated with students' perceptions and experience of risk.

Earlier sections mentioned the intensification of student experience through increasingly segregated student centric social and spatial activities. This thesis explores students' allusion to the contagious element of risk, and how university simultaneously protects against and generates 'risk' using the notion of '*affective atmospheres*'. It explores how these affective atmospheres are anticipated and reproduced (Edensor, 2012) through mass performance of particular risks in these spaces. How might the promotion of typical student behaviours and the spatial segregation implied earlier create particular atmospheres of studenthood?

#### 2.5.4 *The bubble as temporary and fragile*

This section demonstrates how this thesis draws attention to the temporalities of risk and student experience. In order to do this, it combines the future orientated positioning of risk, and how the anticipation of this future impacts the current lived experience of studenthood as an “intensive experience” (Holdsworth, 2009; Holton, 2015: p25), as notions of accelerated time suggest the need to pack more into the present (Brannen and Nilsen, 2002). It draws on carnivalesque literature to illustrate how peak experiences of studenthood might be experienced as time out of time, the bubble as a carnivalesque space “different from the outside world” (Browne and Baskhi, 2013: p256), an “illusionary world”, separated from reality. In contrast, it acknowledges how university might be experienced as simply time-passing (Jeffrey, 2010a), a temporary period of time with a firm end point, but the permeability and fragility of the bubble as time is easily interrupted (Daly, 1996).

Bubbles are ephemeral; bubbles may stretch/expand for a period of time but eventually burst. Indeed, in the case of Leicester, it may be argued graduates are unlikely to remain in their university city post completion of their degree (Allen, 2015) as its perceived purpose has expired. This not only spatially compartmentalises their experience but also hints that the (student) bubble is known to be temporary and time-limited. Indeed, Fields and Morgan-Klein (2010) acknowledge that whilst studenthood is “bounded by time” current research does not acknowledge this as a crucial part of being a student and experiencing university. Some literature notes the continuation of student-like lifestyles beyond graduation, for example, in terms of group living arrangements (Smith and Holt, 2007), whilst others note the parallels in leisure pursuits as student-centric regions also accommodate “pre student” and “post student” (Chatterton, 2010). This implies the termination of student characteristics might not be as clear cut as simply attaining automatic adult status on completion (Holdsworth, 2009). As the bubble bursts how might elements be absorbed, carried forward beyond university? How might awareness of the bubbles’ fragility impact the student experience? It can only expand so much before it bursts or dissolves; there is

a time limit on engagement with excess. Carnavalesque provides a good entry point into the temporality of studenthood and student engagement with risk.

The ephemeral nature of being a student might offer justification for “carnavalesque” (Stallybrass, and White, 1986; Bakhtin, 1984; Hubbard, 2013) behaviour, which students might not ordinarily partake in. University may be seen as a period of elated freedom. The theory of emerging adulthood supports this temporary suspension of conservative norms suggesting that experimentation is expected at the age of traditional student sample (18-25). Students therefore may excuse their risky behaviour as this epoch of their life course is typically associated with risky play? Does studenthood become an opportunity to take risks before returning to more conservative performances of identity and behaviour expectations after university?

Another temporality felt and experienced, therefore, might be carnivalesque moments as risk taking might feel like ‘time out of time’ in which other rules apply. Bakhtin (1984: p10) describes carnival as time out of time; “*temporary liberation*” and a space in which norms and values are temporarily flouted. Excessive bodies are normalised within this spatial and time bound arena (Hubbard, 2011). Therefore, it can be assumed risky behaviours which, in ordinary circumstances might trigger disgust and anxiety become desired and exciting, as carnival inspires that “swept away feeling” (Lupton and Tulloch, 2002: p121). Lupton (2013a: p231-237), discusses how the gradual decline in carnival up to 18th lead to its reputation as a ‘festival of the other’. Although, traces remain in late modern society, carnival is now a temporary, guilty pleasure quarantined in specific times and places. For example, seaside towns, theme parks, music festivals, fun fairs and so on. How might then the spatial segregation of students create specific temporalities within them?

In addition, the spatial separation of carnival as a “wild zone” (Stanley, 1996) links neatly to the allusion that university experiences are predominantly self-segregated from the wider community, existing in a bubble (Chatterton, 1999). University could be viewed as a “*wild zone*”. How might the spatialities of studenthood create specific temporalities? In his discussion of perceptions of youth as ‘at risk’ Kelly (2012) uses

the term wild zone in a similar fashion. His application of this term relates to both the spatiality of areas occupied by youth as well as their behaviour which is seen as uncontrollable, turbulent and unpredictable in contradiction to their peers dwelling in 'tame' zones, following normalised pathways. In this sense, the timebound spatial student bubble can be seen as a way of engaging in a 'wild' zone in the metaphorical sense in a 'tame' space. If this carnivalesque behaviour is expected and restricted to time as a student in student centric spaces is it still risky?

Risk is commonly positioned as something in the future (Beck, 1992; 2012); more recently perceived as something possible, rather than reasoned through probability (Amoore, 2013). Authors suggest this has led to anticipatory action or a culture of caution (Furedi, 2006; Richter et al, 2006). Indeed, it is well documented that students may choose to remain at home for the duration of their studies in order to minimise financial risks and to maintain a sense of security. Others discuss how students anticipate future emotions associated with ideas of failure if they cannot achieve aspirations set. Again, they seek to pre-empt these and therefore put in place coping mechanisms. How might students anticipate, pre-empt and prepare for risk? Or is risk always something which must be futuristic and anticipated? How might anticipation of risks at university impact how they expect to experience risk at university and affect how they prepare for it in the present? Or how might experiences of risk at university impact how students envisage dealing with risk beyond university?

### **2.6.5 Combining all elements of the bubble**

All elements described above interact and overlap. Although references to all elements might be apparent in all analysis chapters, for simplicity's sake, this thesis addresses each in turn through the analysis chapters before bringing them together in the conclusion. Chapter 4 focuses on the tantalising nature of the bubble as a place of play as students anticipate their transition to the bubble. Chapter 5 focuses on the bubble as relationally and spatially bound. It then highlights how ideas of the bubble as a place of play, alongside its relational and spatial boundaries generate affective atmospheres as students negotiate their transition through the bubble. Chapter 6

continues by addressing the temporalities of the bubble hinted at previously through the discussion of atmospheres and expected transition out of the bubble. Chapter 7 draws these elements of the bubble together to highlight the main contribution of this thesis in re-theorising 'bubble' we can better understand student experiences. More specifically, student perceptions and experience of risk. This concept of the bubble might be applied to more besides.

### **3 Methodology**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This research adopted a participatory approach, working with undergraduate co-researchers, from October 2012 to March 2015. The reasoning for this was firstly to favour student voices, as the first project in geography, which uses this approach valuing students as key in understanding of their own experiences. It was hoped by adopting this approach co-researchers and participants could explore risk, risky behaviour and their experiences of this, without being burdened with or lead by the researchers overarching theoretical perspective. Pain (2004b) notes methods employing the participatory perspective are well matched to studies of social geography where exploring participant's interactions with and experiences in space form a large chunk of the research agenda (Pain, 2004b). As this project examined students' interactions with, and experiences of risk and risky behaviour in the university space, the participatory approach is appropriate. In addition, 'students as partners' is also stressed as a major concern for the Higher Education Academy (2016). As this project directly discusses the lives of students at university, it only seems obvious to include them as 'partners' or participants in the process. Further reasoning for each method individually are offered in the remainder of this chapter.

Data collection included 32 individual life history interviews (each lasting approximately 1-3 hours), 6 focus groups (with between 4 and 8 students for duration of 2-3 hours), 6 university life game sessions (with between 3 and 5 students with most sessions lasting 2 hours plus), 4 research led teaching/teaching led research sessions (with approximately 30 geography undergraduates, lasting between 1-2 hours), 6 co-researcher diaries, informal conversations and research discussions with co-researchers and 4 interviews with university staff members (lasting approximately 30 minutes each). This chapter critically examines the methodological approach and data collection techniques adopted for this research.

From this point forward, this chapter is divided into seven main sections. Section 3.2 offers discussion on sample and access including reasons for choosing University of

Leicester, Undergraduate students and how participants were accessed. Section 3.3 explains the participatory approach which, framed the methods used in this project and the importance of co-researchers as part of this. Section 3.4 outlines the stages of the data collection process and the methods employed with a desire to maintain a participatory ethos. Section 3.5 describes the analysis of data collected. Section 3.6 outlines dissemination of the research to date and projected. Section 3.7 provides an overview of traditional ethical considerations in line with ESRC guidelines. Section 3.8 provides reflections on my positionality, before Section 3.9 briefly summarises the chapter.

## 3.2 Sample and access

This section communicates the original hopes of a comparative study between University of Leicester and DeMonfort University. Following an explanation of recruitment difficulties at DeMonfort, the section outlines the reasons for choosing University of Leicester and ‘traditional’ undergraduates. It continues to discuss the details of the sample of undergraduate students involved in the research and how initial participants and co-researchers were accessed.

### *3.2.1 From a comparative to a single-site study: the significance of ‘volunteering’ experience in recruiting participants*

Previous research in geography, and social sciences more broadly has commonly considered either pre or post 1992 institutions almost in isolation. On the occasions they are explored together, researchers have tended to focus on northern post 1992, alongside elite southern universities (For example, Clayton et al, 2009), rather than comparisons of two institutions in the same region or city. Research on Midlands Universities has largely focused on residential experiences, often regarding reasons for and impacts of studentification (see work by Darren Smith and Phil Hubbard). Initially, this project sought its uniqueness in being locative, using two universities from the same midlands city; Leicester (1994 group, at time project commenced) and DeMonfort (Alliance group, at time project commenced), generating a relatively broad, but also convenient sample. The idea behind this was that it would enable

exploration of student experience in two very different institutions, offering different courses and composed of a very different student make up, yet within the same city. However, after approximately 6 months of attempted recruitment at DeMonfort University, it was proving extremely time consuming with little result. There are many possible reasons for this. Firstly, I did not have insider knowledge of the institution, although, I had tried to gain as much information as possible from family and friends studying and working at the institution, in addition to that available online.

Secondly, the students' union told us that they struggled to gather student engagement in their voluntary associations, explaining that this was fairly common in post 1992 institutions. This tallies with Holdsworth (2010) and Holdsworth and Brewis' (2014) findings that volunteering rates vary dramatically according to institution culture. In their work, they do acknowledge the further breakdown of factors such as age, class, ethnicity and so on within this naming reasons why students choose to volunteer and what students choose to volunteer for (Holdsworth, 2010; Holdsworth and Brewis, 2014). Had there been time, it would be useful to use this data to understand in more detail the difference in response rate between the two universities, especially through a more detailed exploration of the student body demographics. However, this is something I would be keen to explore at a later date.

Additionally, the hike in applications from University of Leicester students, to offer their time as volunteers may have been influenced by institution changes. For example, during the period within which this research was carried out, the student's union was rebuilt at University of Leicester. The building remains central to campus but the facilities within it are much more easily accessible and highly visible. The previous student arc (for associations only), for instance, was situated at the end of a long corridor near the accommodation office. It was unlikely you would visit the arc without purpose. Now, the arc is situated on the balcony of the student social area in the students' union, with a clearly branded bright green logo outside. This space is now used by both societies and associations, so it is more likely that if you are using the space for one you will be aware of others existence. The careers facility at the university had also moved to a more centralised space on campus, at the time of this

research (now where 'The Shop' is located). It is possible that this has encouraged students to consider volunteering to enhance their cv as the relocation of this service has resulted in more thinking about employment. This is speculation rather than evidence based analysis of involvement, but nevertheless it is important to acknowledge that these changes may have impacted the students involved in this research.

Students at DeMonfort told us that they were more interested in paid employment rather than voluntary experience. Students we spoke soon lost interest as they realised they would not be paid. There did seem to be rivalry between the two institutions (more than I had been aware of previously) as the Leicester email address listed as contact seemed to trigger disengagement. It is possible the time of year heightened this, as when we were recruiting was close to varsity events (sports competitions between the two universities). The period of recruitment also overlapped with sabbatical campaigns and re-freshers so it is possible students were sick of receiving leaflets or being pestered on campus. Despite this, two keen co-researchers were recruited. They told us that they believed the disproportional interest was due to majority of courses at DeMonfort having substantial contact hours and placement years meaning students had less time to offer. These reasons provide some tentative explanations for the lack of engagement from DeMonfort students. However, there may be many more reasons for individual students not wanting to be involved.

With two DeMonfort co-researchers on side, and friends at DeMonfort, we continued attempts to recruit more participants. However, the numbers recruited were slim and would not have been enough to feasibly enable a comparison between the two institutions. We decided as a team (including two co-researchers at DeMonfort), that rather than continuing a comparative study, with largely disproportional representation from each university, to abandon recruitment efforts at DeMonfort University, and focus on a more in-depth study of University of Leicester. The two initial co-researchers from De-Monfort were invited to continue participation in training events should they wish but they declined.

### *3.2.2 The University of Leicester Case Study*

All participants and co-researchers were undergraduate students at University of Leicester when recruited for this project. In addition to those already mentioned at the start of this section, University of Leicester was chosen for multiple reasons. Firstly, it hosts largely a traditional student population, but at the time of this research recruited fairly locally with high proportions of students living away from home but with parental homes within a 100mile radius (or so perceived by students involved at the study at the time). Analysis section 4.5 picks up on this. Secondly, my knowledge and experience of living in Leicester as an undergraduate student hoped to enhance my ability to appreciate and empathise with the current students using my own experience. It is expected a deeper understanding of the research topic may develop “where the researcher has an area of shared identity with her research subjects” (Doucet and Mauthner, 2008: p333). This is further bolstered by Bennett’s (2004) claim that it is important to use reflection on our own experience and emotion as empathy might generate a unique and more involved or deeper sense of understanding. Thirdly, University of Leicester was also convenient to fit in with teaching constraints, minimising travel costs and time, and enabling full immersion in the participatory process.

### *3.2.3 ‘Traditional’ Undergraduate students*

As noted in the literature review, a substantial amount of research exists on non-traditional student experiences such as non-white, working class, mature students (Archer and Hutchings, 2000; Reay, 2003; Christie and Munro, 2003; Holdsworth, 2006; 2009; Christie et al, 2008; Reay et al, 2010; Hopkins ,2010) particularly surrounding transition to university and first year experience. Despite a growing engagement with geographies of university students in more recent years, with the exception of Holton (2013), there remains an absence of studies inclusive of student experience beyond first year. Whilst research acknowledges the continued dominance of traditional studenthood, there remains a significant lack of research on specifically

traditional students' experiences, beyond residential experience (with the exception of Chatterton, 1999), and none at all which involves students as co-researchers.

Consequentially, this project focuses on undergraduates from all years of their degree, in the hope of building an understanding of the transition to, through and beyond university. The intention was to target 'traditional' students as a neglected category of students.

Chatterton (1999: p117-118) refers to traditional students as typically white, middle class and/or upper class, 18-21 years old, and living away from the parental home. He further suggests that they are likely to immerse themselves in the consumer culture linked to creating a traditional identity, including forms of fashion and youth culture, such as clubbing. This definition tends to merge student background and student behaviours into one definition. Students involved were all aged 18-24 and living away from home (at recruitment stage, at least), as this project was interested in university as a transitional period, in the context of the life course. However, the range of students that nominated themselves as "traditional" students to take part in the project, did not necessarily fit the definitions in the literature. For example, whilst the original students to be recruited were all living away from home at the time of recruitment, the full sample did not remain so for the duration of their degree. All but one student in the sample were adamant that moving away from home was an important element of being a student, and indeed, a crucial element of a "traditional" student identity. However, this move from home could happen either at the beginning of their degree for the full three years, or at the beginning of their degree for only the first year, or later in their degree for a set period. Put simply, as long as students experienced living away from home for some or all of their degree they considered themselves "traditional" students. Some level of independence was expected of "traditional students", commonly achieved through this move away from home.

Additionally, traditional students are expected to have some familial background of Higher Education. To date, it has been assumed that this must be parental. However, some students in this sample were the first generation to go to university, but as their

sibling or older friends had already been to university, they categorised themselves as traditional. Therefore, students in this sample were from a wide range of backgrounds, not necessarily white (although predominantly white) or middle class, as these characteristics were not envisaged as important in claiming a traditional student identity. With regard to being 18-21, some students in this sample crept over this age bracket, up to 24, as actual age was not necessarily important by them in adopting traditional student status but being young, via being youthful in behaviour and/or in appearance was.

Interestingly, students described behaviours which they deemed typical of student life when explaining how they fitted a traditional student identity. This, in combination with further discrepancies above raise questions as to whether or not 'traditional' remains a useful descriptor of student experience, or whether we should be turning to typical/ non-typical to distinguish meaning in university experience. There is a clear need to acknowledge how the increasing diversification of student populations, incentivises a re-investigation of the meaning and/or significance of this term, or at least students understanding of what a 'traditional' student is. Indeed, the only attributes which maintained relevance to 'traditional' students were being young and living away from home, as the self-selected sample included a broad mix of students from different class, ethnicity, gender groups, all of which considered themselves to be having a traditional student experience. This is discussed further in the conclusions of this thesis.

#### *3.2.4 Sampling techniques applied to recruit co-researchers and student participants*

Initially purposeful sampling was employed to recruit co-researchers and student participants. Once recruited co-researchers helped with the recruitment of student participants. There were set characteristics for 'who' the project hoped to include, in order to successfully capture traditional transitions. Students needed to be between 18-24, classed as a home undergraduate student, currently studying at the university, be living away from home, and identify themselves as a traditional student. The research also included convenience sampling (Bryman, 2015: p187). Recruitment was

dependent on students' availability to take part in all stages of data collection, but, also on students' presence in lectures when we did shout outs, attention to emails advertising the research, those who happened to be in the SU, or on campus whilst we were recruiting in person, and so on. Further participants were also recruited using snowball technique (Bryman, 2015: p 415). As co-researchers became interested in the project they helped advertise through their Facebook and twitter and their own subject lectures so the remaining few were gathered from snowball sampling.

As mentioned earlier, recent work (Holdsworth, 2010; Holdsworth and Brewis, 2014) on student volunteering highlights the likelihood of some students to volunteer over others. In order to combat this, the project was advertised through a variety of mediums, to access the widest range of students possible. Aware that the project was asking a lot from the participants, especially the coresearchers, there was risk of disengagement. Therefore, various rewards were offered (such as training, references), whilst also being as honest and up front as possible at the start about what participation would involve. The sample was over 18 and did not fall under 2005 Mental Capacity Act. In the tradition of qualitative research, the project was not seeking to be wholly representative of the traditional student population, but hoped to gather a broad sample covering a range of disciplines, to uncover deeper meanings. Participation was voluntary and free from any coercion. There was no financial incentive for taking part.

### *3.2.5 Advertising and Recruitment process*

Existing knowledge of and links at the University of Leicester; in particular, students' union sabbatical officers, associations and societies, former colleagues across the institution and my position as PhD student, enhanced the feasibility of this project.

Initial hopes were that the project would generate interest from at least 30 undergraduate students. This target was reached and actually superseded when further students were involved through research/teaching sessions, and interest generated through the blog, Facebook and word of mouth. Co-researchers and participants were initially accessed in the same ways; using flyers and talking to

students across campus, through presentations at student parliament and in lectures, via email using student union associations and societies, department emails, announcements on the university website as well as email through 'Insider', posters across campus, and word of mouth. Co-researchers once recruited also supported the recruitment of student participants. Gatekeepers included lecturers or admin staff of departments and presidents of associations and societies who sent emails on my behalf or invited their students to participate in my study. To avoid coercion gatekeepers were only forwarded pre-worded emails therefore control was maintained over what was said.

In addition, although Madge et al (2009) air concerns about using Facebook for academic purposes, as students view it as a more personal space and an escape from work, co-researchers recruited suggested Facebook as a fast and effective way to reach large numbers of students. Therefore, further recruitment of participants was carried out through the university Facebook accounts, through my own research account and co-researcher personal accounts (which was their choice). Interested students were requested to fill in a register your interest form, which helped provide meta-data for this project, but also check that students matched our target sample. The form also provided information and asked questions about their desired involvement and reasons for this; how much or little they wish to participate, the roles available and their preferences, their skills and interests, contact details, course information, whether or not they would be interested in being a co-researcher, gender, ethnicity, age and so on. Students were then contacted via email and invited to meet. More details about how co-researchers follows in section 3.3.1.

### **3.3 Participatory approach**

There has been a rise in participatory methodological practices placing young people as key decision makers and equal colleagues in the research process (Cahill, 2007; Heath et al, 2009; Holland et al, 2010). Fuller and Kitchin (2004) refer to this as a "participatory turn" triggered by the need to rethink the way in which we 'do' human geography, due to worries about the lack of opportunity presented by the cultural

turn, in terms of academic and applied outputs of research. This project was guided by a participatory ethos, not following a rigid set of practices, or aiming to achieve a “gold standard” (Kesby et al ,2005: p162), but ready to adapt and evolve as necessary throughout the process.

Participatory research, was chosen for this project, as more than a methodology, but an ethical responsibility and moral promise, encouraging a shared process, exercising equality not authority (Pain, 2004b; Cahill, 2007; Breitbart, 2010), to value students as the expert in their own experience, in the co-production of knowledge (Cahill, 2007). The hope was to include those (students) affected by the issues discussed, as co-researchers and participants, before and beyond the data collection stage; viewing the final outcome as a collaborative effort (Breitbart, 2010; Pain 2004b; Heath et al, 2009: p69). Although types and levels of participation varied, and so might not necessarily match the ideals of participation offered by hierarchical models (see Shier, 2009; Wong et al, 2010), overall the project was successful in maintaining a participatory ethos. It is important to make clear here, that this project involved participatory research rather than participatory action research. The aim was to involve young people (in this case students) throughout the process, but the research is not claiming to have any transformative outcome for those researched or their university life. Having said this, efforts have been made to disseminate this research as widely as possible and explore its practical application.

As is probably obvious, I, like Kindon et al (2007: p29), am an “unapologetic advocate of participation”, but also like these key scholars in the field, I am not suggesting that participatory methods are without problems. Many scholars have discussed the complexities of this type of research. For example, differing levels of commitment by participants may lead to dominance of one viewpoint (Breitbart, 2010), participants may take advantage of the shared power (Gallagher, 2008) moral and ethical values may vary between researcher and co researchers (Pain, 2004), and it is difficult to balance the power between participants themselves. Cooke and Kothari (2001) stress a need to explore further power and marginalisation of participants. In a pessimistic tone, they suggest that throughout the research process it is rarely possible to gain

whole group agreement on decisions, so outcomes might not satisfy or reflect the opinions of all involved.

Whilst I acknowledge the need to reflect on power relations, I do not agree that participation is the 'new tyranny' which only reinforces historical hierarchical research relationships. Indeed, all methodologies have strengths and weaknesses and the participatory approach by attempting to address the initial power imbalances and be inclusive, must still be acknowledged as more ethically desirable (Pain and Francis, 2003b). The next sub-section begins to talk about the practicalities of this approach and working with co-researchers.

### *3.3.1 Co-researchers*

Working with co-researchers was key to the participatory ethos of this project. Whilst studies with school students about university have adopted participatory methods (Hopkin, 2006; Grant, 2016), they are keen to acknowledge the distinction between participatory methods and a participatory approach. This is the first study that works directly with university students as co-researchers, led by a participatory approach. This is a key contribution of this thesis to work on student experiences. It recognised the competence and responsibility of these students as co-researchers, as specialists in explaining and interpreting their own experiences and feelings (Cahill, 2007). The project sought to be equally guided by the ideas and opinions of students involved and the main researcher (me). All students that expressed an interest were invited to an informal meeting, to find out more about the project and the differences between the roles available (co-researcher or participant). The meeting was held in the students' union and those interested were then asked to complete a register your interest form (see section 3.2.4 for more details), if they had not already. This was also an opportunity to see how the group interacted and gelled with one another.

From the initial interest, a mixed gender group of 6 were chosen as co-researchers according to the strengths and interests they have listed on the initial form, and displayed in first meetings, in the hope of generating effective group dynamics. A reserve list was created in case those initially chosen as co-researchers for any reason

are unable to take part. Advice on group work denotes as few as 2, and up to 12, people generates effective group work (Hopkins, 2007). Six was somewhere in the middle, and a size I felt comfortable and confident working alongside, without it becoming too overwhelming and time consuming (Hopkins, 2007).

However, the original group rose to 9, after participants expressed a desire to be involved further after initial interviews. The group size then fell to 6 as students graduated or could no longer be involved due to other commitments. The comic illustrator also became a co-researcher towards the latter part of the analysis process. The group involved students from 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year studying a range of subjects including Geography, English, History, Criminology and Psychology. All co-researchers were between 18-24, of mixed gender and ethnic background and undergraduate students at the University of Leicester. Out of the 9 that were recruited 6 maintained their involvement until the end of the project. Not all of these 6 were part of the original group. Co-researchers were involved for the full duration of the project from designing the methodology and refining research questions to data generation, through to analysis, dissemination and write up.

The co-researchers were recruited between October and December 2012 working with me throughout to autumn term to recruit participants and to finalise the methodology. I was keen to involve the students at this early stage to check methods were appropriate, as the students picked on things I had not, and to provide them with a sense of ownership and responsibility, which helped motivation and perseverance in later stages (Alderson, 2001; Pain and Francis, 2003; Pain, 2004b; Kirby, 2004). Researchers were encouraged to be reflective of the process all the way through, and to offer comments on successes and failures.

Methods were designed, piloted and trailed with the co-researchers. We then worked together to make any necessary alterations. Training was also provided (see table 1 in section 3.4.1) to ensure ethical guidelines were followed and there was consistency in the way the data is collected. Training was undertaken at appropriate points in the research rather than all at once. Training was informal and interactive as evidence

suggests formality dilutes initial excitement about the project, triggering loss of motivation (Heath et al, 2009; p65) and defeats the aim of allowing them to develop their own ways in which to explore the topic through the chosen methods. (Holland et al, 2010; p369) Training also involved co-researchers providing feedback on my performance as a researcher using our chosen techniques. Whilst some note 'time-consuming training' to ensure consistency as a negative of working with co-researchers (Smith et al, 2002; p196), it is likely that young people may enhance the research through insider skills, i.e.: knowing the language, slang, shared experiences, knowledge of current university activities (Smith et al, 2002; p198).

Kilpatrick et al (2007) draw attention to the wealth of suggestions as how and why we should 'do' participatory research, but moan there is less consideration for the complications of the multifariousness nature of this approach in reality. Researchers begin to explore the difficulties of participatory research noting the need for increased flexibility and a relaxed attitude to timetabled sessions due to late arrivals, poor turnouts or last minute cancellations meaning there was often need to re-arrange, varying reasons for and levels of motivation, retention, shifting power, research competence and training, issues with consistency, assumptions of empathy, feelings of distance for research sessions carried out by others (Kirby et al, 2004; Smith et al, 2002; Bell, 2011).

Whilst I can relate to many of these concerns raised, I would pause before portraying these as negative or as specific to participatory research. In fact, I would suggest they are common considerations for all research. However, I think that the complexity of these issues in this project forced greater and more frequent reflexivity, from all involved, which I would only see as beneficial. Although, I cannot deny the time-consuming nature of participatory research I still maintain that it was not only appropriate but valuable. The next section details explore the methods chosen in accordance with this participatory ethos.

### 3.4 Choosing methods

Petrie et al (2006) remind us that participatory research is much more than simply identifying methods which we believe to be inclusive and participatory. Instead, as mentioned in the previous section it is an ethos applied throughout our research. Some methodologies such as creative methods are assumed to invoke a more participatory environment. For instance, Pain (2004b) notes creative methods are commonly associated with a participatory approach as they offer alternative forms of expression beyond verbal techniques such as interviews, encouraging participation from a wider audience and those less comfortable with intense verbal communication (Pain, 2004b). However, Ennew and Beazley (2006) emphasis it is less about the method but more about what we do with the method:

'No method is inherently participatory; it depends how a method is used' (Ennew and Beazley, 2006: p 192).

Therefore, some methods such as those more creative might lend themselves more easily to participation, but it should not be assumed they guarantee participation. It is less about the 'methods chosen' and more that, whatever methods are chosen are used in a way that is appropriate for participants. The following sections highlights the range of methods employed by this research, (some traditional, some innovative) and attempts made to ensure they are in keeping with the participatory ethos.

#### 3.4.1 *Qualitative methods*

Qualitative methodologies are often associated with the cultural turn in human geography. The cultural turn was a call for more humanistic geography in the 1970s. More than numbers (Philip, 1998: p266), qualitative methodologies bring the human into being, promoted as a reaction to what Ley (1981: p250) described as "quantitative juggernaut of spatial science" which appeared to "abolish human intentionality, culture and man himself."

Demonstrating my commitment to a participatory mind-set, evidence suggests the most plentiful and powerful illustrations of participatory research have involved qualitative methods. (Pain, 2004b; p656). Indeed, Pile (1991: p458) describes qualitative research methods as “less authorial, authoritative and authoritarian”, which supports goals of this project to co-construct knowledge through a shared process. Qualitative methods are popular and successful in both educational studies and research with young people offering a more personal approach, as they promote the development of deeper explanations and meanings through their techniques. This research seeks to uncover in depth experiences, perceptions and feelings, in the tradition of qualitative social-scientific research, rather than to be wholly representative.

Acknowledging emotion as an integral part of the research process (Gilbert, 2001), Qualitative methodology marks itself most appropriate for this research as students discuss possibly emotional and embodied experiences of risk as part of their university journey. A combination of qualitative methods will be employed as recommended by Pain and Francis (2003b) in order to produce “more fertile” data (Cassel and Symon, 2004; p43). Figure 1 (overleaf) shows the relationship between the different methods used whilst Table 1 (overleaf) presents an overview of the research process from participant recruitment to dissemination. It also includes training requests and sessions with co-researchers and highlights the ‘messy’ nature of participatory research. The following sub sections then highlight each stage of the data collection process in turn.

September 2012	Upgrade
October 2012	First round of Ethical approval
October -December 2012	<p>Register your interest forms</p> <p>Meeting with interested co-researchers (12)</p> <p>Selection of co-researchers (6)</p> <p>Recruitment of Some Participants</p> <p>Presentation of research proposal with co-researchers</p> <p>Introduction to participatory approach</p> <p>Re-modelling of stage 1 methodology and research aims with co-researchers</p> <p>Ethics training for co-researchers</p> <p>Second round of ethical approval completed with co-researchers</p>
January- March 2013	<p>Training on qualitative research for co-researchers</p> <p>Designing interviews</p> <p>Interview training for co-researchers</p> <p>Launch of blog</p> <p>Pilot interviews</p> <p>Additional Co-researcher (female)</p> <p>Continued recruitment of participants</p> <p>Co-researcher diaries</p> <p>Co-researcher weekly meetings start</p>
March-June 2013	<p>Research Facebook account</p> <p>Minute taking training for co-researchers</p> <p>Social media for research/work purposes training for co-researchers</p>

	<p>Continued recruitment of participants</p> <p>Additional Co-researcher (female)</p> <p>Additional Co-researcher (male)</p> <p>Life history individual interviews began</p> <p>Designing and creation of game</p> <p>Pilot focus groups</p> <p>Transcription training for co-researchers</p>
July to September 2013	<p>Transcribing of interviews begins</p> <p>Writing for blogs training for co-researchers</p> <p>Focus groups began</p> <p>Game sessions began</p> <p>Key themes of interviews discussions</p>
October – December 2013	<p>NVivo training for co-researchers</p> <p>Analysing qualitative research training</p> <p>Remaining interviews continued</p> <p>Focus groups continued</p> <p>Game sessions continued</p> <p>Blogging of key themes</p> <p>Research led teaching/Teaching led research sessions (2)</p>
January- March 2014	<p>Word as a long document training</p> <p>Dissemination decisions</p> <p>Remaining interviews</p> <p>Focus groups continued</p> <p>Game sessions continued</p>

	<p>Transcription of all data continued</p> <p>Analysis and discussions</p>
March-June 2014	<p>Transferable skills training and discussions</p> <p>STARs training</p> <p>Postgraduate research application process</p> <p>Analysis and discussions</p>
July- September 2014	<p>Some co-researchers graduated (maintained involvement over summer)</p> <p>Analysis and discussions</p>
October-December 2014	<p>Research led teaching/Teaching led research sessions (2)</p> <p>Analysis and discussions</p>
January-March 2015	<p>Analysis and discussions</p> <p>Discussions on skills development</p>

Table 1 Details of participatory process and data collection



Figure 1 A diagram to show the relationship between each method

### 3.4.2 *Stage 1: Pre-defined participatory methods*

This first stage of the method collection consisted of pre-defined core methods, namely interviews and focus groups. The methods themselves (i.e. interviews and focus groups) were not changed to a large extent (to enable 1<sup>st</sup> stage ethical clearance) but was as participatory as possible by working with the co-researchers and participants on details, such as questions or statements posed, the ordering, the location, the duration, how they were or whether they should be recorded and so on. Pilot versions were then carried out with co-researchers and changes were made after group discussions and qualitative research training, such as adding icebreaker questions and prompts and phrases. The next two sub-sections explore the life history interviews and focus groups in more detail.

#### 3.4.2.1 Life history interviews

Life history interviews were adopted as “an internalised narrative integration of past present and anticipated future which provides lives with a sense of unity” (Cassel and Symon, 2004: p34-35). As Finn (2016: p148) notes in her work on personal lives and higher education, “everyday realities of managing spatial and temporal frameworks are informed by past experiences and future anticipations”, therefore this technique is most appropriate for an exploration of the temporalities of student life. This interviewing technique was deemed appropriate and successful with young people. (Heath et al, 2009; p70). It is a narrative interviewing method (Chamberlayne et al, 2000) which enables young people to manage the situation as the storyteller reflecting on specific events, in an order of importance logical to them, which will enable me to notice the hierarchy and context in which risks are placed. As this project involved an emphasis on the life course and transitions, this method was a way of considering the relevance and importance of certain points in the lives of students.

The interviews were semi-structured with topics and very broad questions developed with the core group used as a guide. The guide began with thinking about the journey to university, student life whilst at university and ended by thinking beyond university life and reflecting on risk. Risk was intentionally not defined nor mentioned until the

final 3<sup>rd</sup> of the interview so as not to influence students' discussion of their experience as risky or not. Phrases such as "starting where you like in your own words, I'd like you to tell me about...." (Heath et al, 2009: p83) allowed students to reflect on experiences significant to them. The interviews were useful to discuss more personal experiences in detail (Holland et al, 2010).

In total, there were 32 life history interviews carried out by myself and co-researchers. Each interview lasted between 1-3 hours. All were recorded and notes taken afterwards.

#### 3.4.2.2 Focus groups

Sometimes attacked for their "shallow insight" (Hopkins, 2007; p529) focus groups were used as an effective tool allowing rapid accumulation of information over a short time period. Enabling group discussions of risks which were mentioned in individual interviews, the focus groups were useful to identify further key themes were fleshed out in more detail in further discussions (Alsuutari, Bickman and Brannen, 2008: p358). For example, themes arising in these conversations were used to stimulate discussions with co-researchers and form the scenarios for the game. Literature has evidenced that the supportive atmosphere of peers can boost confidence within the group, minimising the daunting presence of the researcher, as a power shift occurs, generating more in depth responses (O' Connor and Madge, 2003; Hopkins, 2007: p528). The commonality of being students in Leicester seemed to enhance the research process as students empathised with one another's experiences (Hopkins, 2007: p531).

The participants were grouped carefully, where timetabling allowed, to try and create comfortable environments and prevent any participants dominating discussions. Co-researchers suggested personalities that may complement each other and work well together. Friendships formed through these group discussions. As groups worked together throughout the process, I noticed students began to add each other on Facebook, exchange numbers, share experiences of assignments and arrange to meet outside of these groups. Groups that gelled well seemed to be more committed to and

enjoyed the process. Students became more comfortable agreeing with and debating each other's ideas and experiences.

However, power relations amongst peers themselves must be acknowledged as Smith et al (2002; p194) note there are complex power issues between the young people themselves triggered by differences i.e.: age, ethnicity, gender etc. I aimed to address this by working with co-researchers, thinking carefully about how students were matched into groups and discussed preferences with students at the end of the interview, in terms of location, similar year group or not and so on. Interestingly, students policed each other's dominance and attempted to be inclusive asking those that had not contributed what they thought. Students were offered the opportunity to scribe themselves, but felt this would restrict their engagement. Therefore, Students nominated each other to dictate colour co-ordinated key points for me to mind map during the focus group (See example overleaf).



Not all co-researchers wished to facilitate the focus groups whereas others were extremely keen. Therefore, facilitation was shared with those who wished to have a go. Each focus group involved between 4-8 students with the smaller ones being much more fruitful and relaxed. 6 were carried out in total lasting between 2-3 hours. All were recorded and notes taken afterwards. During the focus groups, images, extracts from newspaper articles and some quotes from previous interviews were left on the table. In some groups these were used to provoke conversation as students picked them up. For other groups the images were largely ignored as they were so deeply engaged in the conversation. Students decided how long they dedicated to each topic.

### *3.4.3 Stage 2: Participatory method designed with co-researchers: University life game*

The second stage of the data collection process involved a board game designed with the co-researchers based on discussions of themes raised by stage 1 data collection. All sessions were audio recorded and some photographs taken.

Rather than asking young people for their input on a topic but “with little or no choice.... about the style of communicating it and little or no opportunity to formulate their own opinions” (Heath et al, 2009; p66) I wanted to involve students in how they chose to express their opinions. I had previous experience of participatory techniques with young people post-box discussions, writing diaries, creating films, making posters, mapping techniques, wall splats, and games through modified versions of various traditional board games and popular television series. For example, Building Schools for the Future Monopoly, in a life size walking monopoly board was created, each square representing a subject or a school space. Students had a budget as they passed go and could choose how to spend it according to what they thought would most improve their learning. There were chance cards, which included scenarios such as government cuts, encouraging students to re-evaluate and prioritise. Building Schools for the Future Apprentice, where students were split into two teams, given a budget to spend on improving their school and had to come back into the board room

to argue their pitch. Come Design with Me, where students were worked with art materials to design an ideal learning space.

Evidence suggests these methods may be seen as more “meaningful” approach as the whole body (mind, hands and body) are involved in the expression of thoughts (Gaullett and Holzwarth, 2006). These methods enable young people to grasp ownership over the research process as activities encourage more freedom in the “pace and intensity of data generation”, what they focus on and how they demonstrate their ideas (Heath et al, 2009; p66; Gaullett and Holzwarth, 2006). This may mean that young people may be more inclined to raise private and individual experiences which may be too personal to reveal in oral conversations. These methods therefore offer an alternative way of exploring the emotional dimensions of risk for those who are less comfortable with discussion (Thomas and O Kane, 1998).

Co-researchers and participants had suggested they would like to ‘play’. They suggested that they had really enjoyed working in groups but would like an opportunity to discuss things further, sometimes without having to reference their own experience. A board game was suggested as appropriate and conversations were had about what students liked or disliked about existing board games and how elements might be incorporated or lost. For example, monopoly money and chance cards were seen as fun, as were items that you could collect as you went along. Based on initial findings from focus groups and interviews discussed with researchers, I designed a board game to get students to consider their transition to through and beyond university. It involved real scenarios from interviews and focus groups which were deemed as most typically encountered as part of university life, by the co-researchers. These were then allocated an appropriate year and placed into order. This process was a lengthy one. The first few attempts are illustrated in the following figure:



Figure 3 University Life Game (Pilot 1and 2)

This game is patented. Copyright belongs to the author of this document. This game and/or the concept CANNOT be used without permission, under any circumstances.

The game worked really well as a task centred methods as students were engaged in the game and it enabled more natural conversation as the game encouraged an informal setting. It enabled students to debate opinions across each year, noting whether or not their opinion would alter according to their place in transition. As students worked through the board game, they were also offered post its to comment on anything they did not wish to say out loud or if there were certain scenarios they had not landed on, but had something to say. Students also had paper and pens to scribe monetary transactions on, and additions to their cv. These were not collected at the end. Some students said they felt more comfortable discussing intimate details as they could hide behind the scenario. It enabled reflection and future projection about changing attitudes towards risk. In total 6 game sessions were carried out, each lasting 2 hours plus, and involving 3-5 students. The conversations from the game sessions transcribed and post-it notes collected.

This has been adapted and expanded further since this project and used in workshops with schools, colleges and universities in order to help bridge the gap. It enables students to consider what their aspirations are for their university experience and whether or not university is the right option.

#### *3.4.3.1 Practicalities, locations and procedures for Stages 1 and 2*

The interview was the first data collection to be carried out. The interviewer (either myself or co-researchers) told the interviewees a little about themselves and how they had ended up carrying out this research. All participants read an information sheet. A verbal reminder of what the project was about was then offered with an opportunity to ask questions. The participants were then given more time to re-read the information sheet and consent form before signing. The students were reminded that they may withdraw up to a specified date and if they had any questions throughout the process they shouldn't hesitate to get in touch. For all remaining data collection, students were reminded about the research topic and process at the beginning. They were offered another chance to read the information sheet. Participants including co-researchers were reminded they would be able to withdraw data at any point up to

January 2014. It was explained beyond this point it would be difficult to differentiate their personal data from the analysis.

A selection of snacks and drinks were provided and/or the researcher offered to buy coffee as a thank you for their time, as some effort to “recompense the individuals who are prepared to answer intrusive questions from social scientists” (McDowell 2001: p90). Participants were also told any housekeeping necessities such as fire exits and the nearest toilet. A safe working code of conduct was created, to be followed by all co-researchers and participants throughout the process. As the project involved discussing issues which may be of sensitive nature participants were reminded they do not have to answer any questions they do not wish to. One student was removed from the research as a participant after his initial interview and was not involved in any further data collection or in the analysis. Fortunately, no one else acted inappropriately and so no one was removed from the research as a participant. Participants were reminded that they should also respect the privacy and confidentiality of other participants outside of data collection sessions. Respect and empathy was shown to all involved at all times by both the researcher, co-researchers and other participants.

All data collection locations (for interviews, focus groups, games and research meetings) were decided between the participant and the researcher, in the hope of finding a space as natural as possible (Heath et al, 2009: p93). Locations included the students’ union, meeting rooms within the students’ union, the music room, my teaching office, library group study rooms, the postgraduate room in the library, the library café, coffee shops near campus, researcher’s home and one over skype. The majority, however, were carried out in meeting rooms in the SU as students liked that it was quiet, they could bring their own food as well as indulgence in the refreshments provided, toilets were close and they had found a new space to study. Students also preferred these as they were unlikely to be passed by other students they knew. This highlights my readiness to work with young people on their terms in their chosen spaces (Leyshon, 2002) whilst also acknowledging the practicalities of space for interview, as conducting pilot interviews in coffee shops was not relaxing as

the background noise made it difficult to hear and consequentially, transcription was a nightmare

All data collected was securely stored in accordance with the 1988 Data Protection Act. Data was saved on an encrypted memory stick and a password protected laptop, both of which are on my person at all times. All participants were reminded that discussions during project sessions must be kept confidential. Students were offered access to a summary, a full transcript and recording of their own interview, and any other data collection recordings they had been involved in, although the vast majority declined. Students were invited to comment on key themes through the blog (see section 3.5.3) and occasional invitations to co-researcher meetings and via email/research Facebook account. Many of the themes arising informed focus group discussions. There was a debriefing session which all participants were invited to if they wish to be involved.

#### *3.4.4 Stage 3: Research lead teaching/teaching led research sessions*

Throughout my PhD I was employed as a Graduate Teaching Assistant at the University of Leicester. As part of my teaching allocation I taught 'geographies of students' sessions to 3<sup>rd</sup> year undergraduates for two consecutive years. These teaching sessions formed a third stage of my data collection. Before each session students were briefed about the project; informed that the information collected in these sessions could be used as part of the project and consent forms were filled out accordingly. Students were also told that if they no longer wanted their thoughts used as part of the project were asked simply to take their diagrams at the end of the session, mostly because these would very shortly become unidentifiable.

These teaching sessions added to the data collection, but, also enabled dissemination and a critical discussion of my research with geography students as part of the 'politics of identity' module. The sessions followed interactive lecture and seminar format and ran twice over two years. Each year involved approximately 30 students. The first year were much more willing to be involved and interested in the research. This is interesting as the second year were the first students paying the new increased fees.

Their paper articulations of their experiences were much more formal and structured, also opting mostly for black pen, white paper over post it notes and colour.

Before the session students were asked to keep a diary of a week of their life as a university student. These were not used as part of the data collection but to facilitate discussions. Each session began with an overview of student geographies more generally as part of their module. Next, students discussed their own experience in smaller groups. I circulated around the groups throughout the session. The session was not recorded. Instead, students created mind maps, posters and notes of their thoughts; some wanting to answer specific questions offered, others wanting to contribute new themes of significance raised in their diaries. These were collected and used as data, with students' permission. I also jotted down my own notes and any significant quotes. Towards the end of the session, I talked through my own data collection and had a discussion with the students. These sessions were not only helpful in securing more data, especially from 3<sup>rd</sup> years, but also helped further strengthen existing data as students offered their interpretations. In this sense, these sessions served as part of the analysis process. The last sessions were particularly helpful/reassuring as they presented the same themes as data collection from the previous stages from up to and over a year previously.

Reminded that we must not forget "the importance of the visual within contemporary society" (Heath et al, 2009; p166), these visual displays of word helped trigger further discussions (as with Worth, 2011 life maps) however, they will also include thoughts participants are reluctant to explain orally, for various reasons such as verbal ability or sensitivity (Gaunlett and Holzwarth, 2006; Worth, 2011).

#### *3.4.5 Stage 4: Informal conversations and reflections with/by co-researchers*

Conversations with co-researchers both formal and informal, played larger part in data collection than I had anticipated. Co-researchers and I met once a week throughout the project and were often on contact via email, phone, text and Facebook. The frequency of contact and medium was decided by co-researchers. Location of group meetings was decided together. Meetings were initially minuted but as time went on this was felt to hinder the process, diminishing enjoyment though forced formality. Instead, individuals simply made a note of their own 'actions'.

Some co-researchers also kept a journal of their experiences as students and as co-researchers. Elements of these were discussed as a group and incorporated into the analysis for this project and some researchers handed them over to be counted as data collection. These diaries were also used for students to reflect on their experience as co-researchers in terms of employability and transferable skills. For some, it also became a written record of how they had developed as researchers, and students, as well as a documentation of career and personal goals and how these had evolved over the process. Later, co-researchers also diagrammed some of their thoughts on the process, as shown in the figure on the following page.



### *3.4.6 Stage 5: Staff Interviews*

Interviews were carried out with relevant staff from learning development and careers. Attempts were made to include welfare but times did not match up. The purpose of this fifth stage was to consider whether there was disparity between staff and student perception of their experience, the risks they were exposed to and how they negotiated these said risks. Although, there are not specific quotes from these interviews used in my thesis they have helped inform the analysis and the practical implications of this research. It is hoped a deeper analysis of these interviews could be developed in future work.

## **3.5 Analysis**

Holland et al (2001) note analysis as the most crucial stage for a participatory approach as this is often where information may be incorrectly interpreted by the researcher if there is no involvement from the young people. It was the intention of this project to involve students as much' as possible in this vital stage; I wanted the students themselves to explore and debate their ideas and understanding of risk at university, whilst they are still going through it. Students had opportunity to offer opinions on the data during teaching led research/ research led teaching sessions, via the blog, via the research Facebook account, and through discussions with co-researchers. Co-researchers were involved throughout the analysis stages described in the sub-sections below.

### *3.5.1 Listening and transcribing*

Each interview, focus group and game session was recorded by a Dictaphone. Recordings were mostly successful, although, some locations of interviews enabled much clearer recordings. Before transcribing, I read any notes either myself or co-researchers had made about the interview, as well as making a mental note of the duration and location of the interview. I listened to each interview recording, in full, making brief notes before transcribing. As I did this, I tried to consider pauses, tone, excitement or reluctance to disclose much information. This enabled me to fully

immerse in listening, without previous pressure of checking the Dictaphone was recording, and the distraction of transcribing verbatim whilst listening.

Next, the co-researchers and I divided up interviews for transcription. Co-researchers were given the option to transcribe their own interviews, where they had been interviewee or interviewer, or a different interview selected at random. These decisions more frequently came down to time available with co-researchers selecting longer or shorter interviews according to their other commitments. I still transcribed the majority of interviews. To ensure consistency it was important that a uniform approach was agreed for all transcriptions. In order to achieve this, all co-researchers were asked to transcribe their first interview without guidelines. Predictably, each co-researcher transcribed their interview in a slightly different way. These first transcripts formed part of a training session on, enabling us to identify what was important to highlight through transcription and how we would do this. By agreeing a single uniform approach to transcription, consistency was ensured whilst still allowing co-researchers to be fully immersed in this process. I also read over transcripts, whilst replaying audio files and clarified anything I needed to with co-researchers.

Originally, as a group we had not intended to transcribe all data collection verbatim but instead only type verbatim extracts relevant to developing themes. Despite our initial grumbles about the transcribing process, due to its tedious nature, but also due to the fear of the identity of the participant lost in the silencing of their voice as it is scribbled onto paper, actually as a team we decided it was necessary to really get to know the data. As we were all transcribing different interviews, and in order to prevent distancing from some over others, we had regular meetings to discuss key themes and anything significant that had happened in data collection sessions, to enable us all to be as familiar with the data as possible.

Meta data was recorded on an excel file including pseudonyms from the beginning of the data collection process. All students were offered the chance to choose their own pseudonyms to protect their identity but to allow them to identify themselves and offer critique if there was perceived mis-interpretation of their voice. Some students

did not want to choose their own pseudonyms. This was also respected. It was also agreed that meta-data file would only be accessed by myself, but could be discussed with co-researchers.

### *3.5.2 Thematic analysis, Coding and emerging themes*

As a group we all coded one interview by hand (which was used as part of a thematic analysis and coding training session). We then met to discuss key themes. All co-researchers received NVivo training and had a go at using the software with the first interview they transcribed. However, NVivo was quickly discarded as it kept corrupting files, but more importantly, because, I felt it created distance between researchers and the data, and we could not highlight data in the way we wished. Co-researchers were not happy with the formality they felt NVivo added to the research process. I found that I felt more connected with my data and remembered much more about participants, and discussions with them when using pens, paper, post-its, highlighters, scissors and theme piles. Therefore, a more hands-on approach to data analysis was adopted, which made this process much more enjoyable as I revelled in not having to be tied to a computer. This technique allowed real immersion in the analysis process. It also meant that co-researchers were contributing a little bit to the analysis of each transcript rather than working on one at a time separately.

Transcripts were highlighted and memos made in the margins about key themes. Mini post-it notes were then used to tag and highlight key themes on the transcripts. Scissors were used to physically cut up transcripts and put them into piles. A blackboard was used to begin grouping these themes together and co-researchers could come and annotate round them. Once themes were agreed, transcripts were revisited and this process was repeated to ensure no key themes were lost and that no information relating to key themes had been missed. I also found that co-researchers were more involved in this hands-on approach as they were able to drop in and out whilst I was carrying out this process, when they wished without feeling pressured to complete an interview by a certain date. They also described it as much more fun!

Whilst some argue (Heath et al, 2009) that analysis involves research skills which co-researchers do not possess, as a reason not to include young people in this process, I argue that actually working with university students is slightly different, as most, and indeed all working on this project, receive some research training as part of their degree, meaning they have some background knowledge, built on through training.

More importantly, involving students in the analysis stage lead to re-framing of the thesis to enhance understanding of university as a bubble, not just as a metaphor, but with a focus on students' lived experience. Whilst I acknowledged the importance of the bubble to the university experience, I cannot guarantee that it would have shaped the project to the same extent without co-researchers highlighting that this was crucial to the project. To them, it was what made the findings accessible beyond the academy. The bubble enabled students to understand the findings of the project, in a way that made sense to them. Co-researchers also thought the bubble was something that people wanted to read about and would remember. Therefore, the hope was the bubble not only deepened understanding of the lived experience of studenthood but also could help the project make a real impact.

### *3.5.3 Blog*

An online blog was developed to gather interest in the project. As key themes from the data collection phase emerged it was hoped the blog would enable students a space to offer their interpretations of participants' experiences of university.

WordPress was decided as a suitable platform for the blog by myself and the co-researchers. A blog was chosen as many young people use the internet, in particular social networking sites, as part of everyday life and so it was considered to be a youth friendly approach (Snee, 2012). As a means of managing the blog content, I was the only person with password access to this blog. If students wish to raise a particular issue for discussion it must be emailed to me first. Students were therefore only be able to comment on the key themes I or co-researchers post rather than post these themselves. Students were made aware that comments they make on this blog may be used for research purposes including different forms of dissemination not only

through the PhD thesis but possibly through performances, newspaper articles, papers published, films created depending on decisions made by participants and the co-researchers. Students were made aware that the blog is public. WordPress was used not only because of its easy access but also because it helps prevent inappropriate or random posts as a new commenter must be approved before their post is made live.

This method hoped to offer flexibility as there are no geographical limitations in online research (O'Connor and Madge, 2003; Snee, 2012; p181) meaning students could continue to contribute to the project if they returned home out of term time.

Presented as an opportunity to engage a wider audience, beyond those participating in the research, the blog, along with instructions on how to access it was promoted by the same means used initially to recruit participants (see section 3.2.4). The blog was a good way to consider whether themes raised were relevant to the wider student body or confined to the sample of this project. It enabled students that may not have had the time or desire to engage in the whole process an opportunity to offer their opinion. This was important to the participatory ethos of this project.

The blog was deliberately written in a conversational style containing posts by myself and co-researchers to encourage participation. However, although lots of people read the blog there were very few that left comments. As a group we tried to encourage comments advertising on the research Facebook account, on co-researchers own personal Facebook accounts and by chatting to participants and students generally about the blog. Interestingly, it seemed students were keen to discuss the findings but without exposing themselves online. Students deleting comments were understood as asserting their right to withdraw from this particular part of the process.

The blog soon lost momentum and was replaced with more informal discussions with co-researchers. On reflection, we thought inclusion of videos and more visual material might have improved interest but by this stage as we were all involved in transcription and analysis there was not the time to dedicate to doing this well. This is not to discount blogging as a useful research tool, rather, if I was to do it again I would do it very differently.

### 3.6 Dissemination

It is recommended that young people are considered as the first audience; that the findings are displayed to them before others i.e. before journal articles and the completion of the thesis (Heath et al, 2009: p69). The blog was successful to some extent in doing this as mentioned in the previous section numbers of readers were high although comments were low. Alternative forms of dissemination were discussed with the co-researchers; a discussion of these makes up the remainder of the section. The aim here was to maintain a participatory ethos by disseminating findings in a variety of formats to reach as wider audience as possible, and be as accessible as possible, particularly those who are likely to be interested in and affected by the research outcomes.

As well as traditional dissemination by thesis, the research has been shared with both academic and non-academic communities. This has included formal conference presentations, adult learning sessions, discussions with Leicester University staff such as the vice chancellor (in post at the time of this research), the careers team, learning development and meetings to inform the development of the LEAP (Leicester enhanced access programme).

In the hope that this research can be utilised within the educational community, I have worked with schools to form a series of sessions based on the findings from this PhD. This began with informal presentations to school leadership teams to inform them of the research findings. As a result of this initial dissemination through presentation, I have worked with schools to develop sessions which they see as most beneficial for their students. For example, the university life game has been used in sessions with large groups of students to encourage them to think carefully about their transition to, through and beyond university.

This research has also been disseminated to the teaching sessions detailed in section 3.4.4. It has also informed my current practice in CAN DO sessions with academic staff working towards HEA fellowship, through my involvement in a first year experience and student academic success projects, as well as group and individual teaching

sessions with university students and changes to Learning Development service provision.

### **3.7 Ethical considerations**

This project was passed to the University of Leicester Ethics committee twice. Firstly, for the initial proposal and secondly when the methods were agreed with the co-researchers. The co-researchers received ethics training and were involved in the ethical approval process. The project gained approval and adhered to ESRC ethical guidelines. The section details some issues encountered during the research.

#### **3.7.1 Recruitment and sample**

All participants were briefly reminded what the project was about and of their right to withdraw at key moments in the research process. Participants were also asked to respect one another's views and confidentiality. They were invited to choose their own pseudonyms so that whilst their identity was protected they could check their views were accurately portrayed.

Attempts were made to access as much of the target student population as possible through different advertising streams and the combination of different methods to try and attract a range of students. Aware that I was asking a lot from the participants, especially the core group there was risk of disengagement. I tried to combat this through various rewards whilst also being as honest and up front as possible at the start about what participation would involve. My sample was over 18 and did not fall under 2005 Mental Capacity Act. Given the sample size I was not seeking to be representative but hoping to gather a broad sample considering age covering a range of disciplines. Participation was voluntary and free from any coercion. There was no financial incentive for taking part. All students were met in person to discuss the research project before their participation was agreed or not.

#### **3.7.2 Co-researcher and Participant Roles**

Co-researcher and participant roles were distinct from one another. However, these two roles were included in the same ethical process and guidelines mentioned previously. With regard to students I teach wishing to be involved, I ensured there was

no conflict of interest. For example, marking and coursework procedures could not be discussed in my presence. All co-researchers received ethics training to maintain consistency in co-operation with ethical guidelines.

There are many different articulations of what participation 'should' look like (for examples see Shier, 2009; Wong et al, 2010) TYPE pyramid for examples), often implying particular forms of participation as in some way more valuable or better than others. In the case of this project, the 'level' of participation naturally fluctuated. For example, in regard to student lives there was less engagement during exam periods or as students had assessment deadlines, but also at different stages of the research process students' interests varied. There was also unexpected commitment to continued participation in holiday periods and beyond graduation. For me, this presented some ethical issues as some co-researchers were much more immersed and involved in the process than others. I did not want these co-researchers to feel that the work was unfairly distributed, but made conscious effort to ensure students were happy with their own and others commitment to project. This was dealt with through ongoing conversations with co-researchers, both individually and as a group to ensure they were happy with how I was tackling these issues. Students contribution was appreciated through certificates, references, training requested relevant to research project but also beyond in terms of their transition out of the bubble.

The natural fluctuation did not (to me) make this project any less participatory or the participation any less valuable. Instead, I have adopted a similar approach to Jupp (2007), Cahill (2007) and colleagues recognising that instead of presenting the improbability of reaching the unattainable ideals as a problem, to acknowledge the complexities as an asset of the participatory research process. Rather than seeing the unexpected or difficult moments as failures, like Jupp (2007: p2389), I valued these junctures as a point of reflection and project re-evaluation. These interruptions in the research process were useful to "open up forms of knowledge which are more embodied and situated" Jupp (2007: p2389).

### **3.7.3 Emotional or Physical harm**

A safe working code of conduct was created, to be followed by all co-researchers and participants throughout the process. As the project involved discussing issues which may be of sensitive nature participants were reminded they do not have to answer any questions they do not wish to. Comfort breaks were taken whenever necessary. Housekeeping notices were given at the beginning of each session to ensure participants comfort. Relations between peers were monitored. One student was removed from the research as a participant after his initial interview and was not involved in any further data collection or in the analysis. After this incident, co-researchers and I had discussions about how we could ensure they were comfortable and safe when interviewing alone. There was an interview schedule and whatsapp group so all co-researchers and myself were contactable and knew each other's whereabouts. The rooms used could be passed subtly to check all was ok without disturbing the data collection.

Fortunately, no one else acted inappropriately and so no one was removed from the research as a participant. Participants were also reminded that they should also respect the privacy and confidentiality of participants outside of data collection sessions. Respect and empathy was shown to all involved at all times by both the researcher, co-researchers and other participants. There was possible risk of stress, in the case of the co-researchers, due to managing project commitments with other obligations. By making clear at the start, health comes first so people should alert me if they were feeling under pressure or could not make a session. When this happened, arrangements were made and we had another team member on back up. Sessions with co-researchers were not at set times each week but flexible and agreed weekly depending on schedules. The team bonded extremely quickly and looked out for each other's welfare. Honesty was the team policy and co-researchers adhered to this.

### 3.8 Positionality

The cultural turn in geography, encouraged by feminist research pushed for more reflection in research. In addition to the mounting adoption of qualitative techniques, researchers are encouraged to acknowledge the subjectivity of their standpoint and critically reflect on their position (Finlay, 2008). Emphasis was placed on the impact of positionality, relationships, emotion, and power on the research process but also how we perceive and understand the data we have gathered. This section discusses some additional points about my positionality in this research, besides those already acknowledged throughout this chapter.

Firstly, I was very conscious that whilst my experience as a former student at Leicester might enhance my ability to empathise and understand students' situation, I did not want this to cloud or obscure what I was hearing. Therefore, in order to ensure I wasn't just listening, but really actively listening, I exercised King's (1996) notion of effective attending. This extends listening to incorporate body language such as eye contact, how I was sat, gestures and so on. In doing so, I tried to be mindful of the importance of "effective non-verbal communication" (Lampard and Pole, 2015: p144). This became, to me, even more important as the research process covered some topics, which might be regarded as sensitive and sometimes raw emotions expressed were clearly felt by other participants and by myself, as lingering flashes of affect seemed to generate an atmosphere, as students empathised with one another as they shared their stories. I tried to be empathetic, honest and open throughout the process. I reminded students they did not have to continue the interview if they did not wish, and offered an option of a break. I was also careful to reiterate students were able to have a copy of the transcript and/or recording if they wished and had a right to withdraw.

By admitting my own emotions to the students and drawing on my own experiences as a student in Leicester, such as leaving home, negotiations in student homes, making ends meet, involvement in societies, balancing multiple deadlines and so on (and encouraging researchers to do the same), I aimed to gain a deeper insight into the

topic. Using memories and feelings triggered by listening to their stories co-researchers and I hoped to be able to use our own emotions to get a deeper understanding of participants'. This is supported by previous research by Bennett (2004; 2009). Working with co-researchers really helped enable this debate, as we were able to discuss themes and the generation of atmospheres in group situations undeniably played a part in those that stood out as important.

Secondly, I was very aware the role of personality (Moser, 2007) played on choosing methods initially, but also in managing the research process and relationships. I was confident working with young people as colleagues. I also found that my flexible approach alongside my willingness to enable real friendships to develop when working with co-researchers enhanced the feasibility and success of the participatory approach. I was happy for the structure to unfold organically without a desire to control. This generated honest and open relationships, which in turn I feel helped co-researchers maintain enthusiasm as they felt their views and concerns were really being listened to.

It could also be argued that being a female, had some influence over the participants recruited as many of the co-researchers and just over two thirds of participants were female.

### **3.9 Summary**

To summarise, this research adopted a participatory approach, working with undergraduates as co-researchers, throughout all stages of the process. It is the first project (in geography at least) to involve University students as co-researchers and this is one of the key contributions of this thesis. Whilst not denying the complications this approach may present, and indeed, its time-consuming nature, I remain a wholehearted supporter for researching in this way. Not only did it make the process much more enjoyable, but the dedication of the co-researchers served as a real-life reminder that the research was important and relevant to students.

The project utilised more traditional qualitative methods such as life history interview and focus groups, in combination with more creative methods such as the university life game and the teaching led research/ research led teaching sessions. This enabled students several opportunities to talk about and/or illustrate different aspects of their experience and as a result of the duration of the project captured each student at different points in their university journey. The analysis which follows draws on themes which were discussed at length with co-researchers and seen as the most important in facilitating the conceptualisation of university as a bubble.

## **4 The tantalising bubble: Perceptions of the bubble before arrival**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter addresses the tantalising nature of the bubble, as framed in chapter 2, through the hope of employment and opportunities to play. It presents a discussion of students' expectations of the bubble before arrival. The chapter begins Section 4.2 with an exploration of how normalisation of HE through aspirational agendas have positioned university as tantalising bubble, full of possibility and promise, therefore, the lesser risk. Section 4.3 considers how the university bubble is bought into being. Utilising the concept 'place of play', it considers how students' expectations of exposure to, and engagement with specific risks, dominant their visions of their experience even before arrival. It argues the media, university culture, and family, not only facilitate imaginations of university as a place of play, but also conjure up expectations of where and how students should play. Section 4.4 addresses how students seek to manage the risks associated with university mentioned in the previous two sections by careful consideration of universities reputations and the scale on which they might encounter risk. Some university bubbles were more tantalising and glistening than others. It discusses how careful calculation and navigation of expected risks before arrival help students' find suitable entry into the bubble. In particular, it highlights the importance of place in how students anticipate risks and choose Leicester as a place which enabled management of these. It highlights the significance of place in students' expectations of risk, and as students take steps to manage exposure to risk before arrival.

In engaging in these debates, this chapter is informed by 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year students' reflections on their journey to university from life history interviews, focus groups, game sessions and research led teaching/teaching led research sessions (RLT/TLRS). It is relevant to mention 1<sup>st</sup> year students involved were paying the new £9000 tuition fees.

#### 4.2 The tantalising bubble: "It'll be worth it" University as a generational risk

Below is a picture from RLT/TLRS that encapsulates a conversation with a group of third year students reflecting on their decision to come to University:

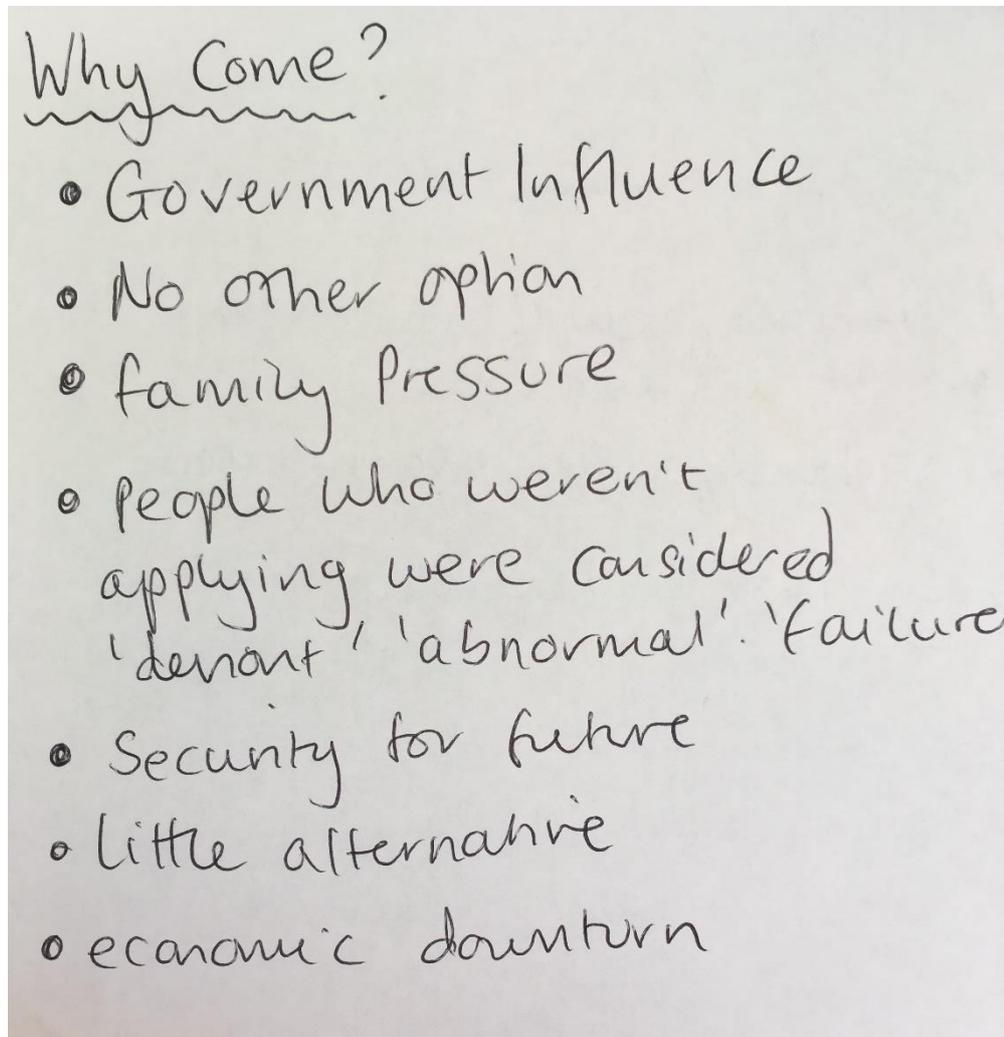


Figure 5 Reflection on decision to come to university RLT/TLRS

This RLT/TLRS image concisely sums up themes discussed in detail in stages 1 and 2 of the data collection process, which confirms the continued validity of ideas raised a year or so previous to this, but also demonstrates that decisions to come to university were as a result of a culmination of factors, rather than any one individually.

This section discusses these ideas to demonstrate how the bubble is made tantalising, through current aspirational agendas, and the influence of tuition fee rise, on how

risky students envisaged this transition to be. University is now an expected destination, a “natural progression” (Pationitis and Holdsworth, 2005: p88), after school or college and widely promoted in schools as the only “acceptable aspiration” (Brown, 2011: p7). The section begins with a discussion of the combined pressure from the government and schools, as a result of widening participation and HE expansion goals, meant that university is becoming seen as a compulsory option. The need for further qualifications is intensified as a means to secure employment. The section continues to highlight the tantalising nature of the bubble, as students expressed that the only way to prevent or at least postpone precarity, was to embark on higher education, identifying a degree as the minimum requirement for all avenues of employment. The section ends with a discussion of fees as an inevitable risk. This section therefore sheds light on students’ perceptions and experiences of choosing to come to university as an expected risk.

Importantly, this research took place during the early years of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Government in the UK, so students’ comments reflect their views before the recent proposals to remove the tuition fees cap, and the modification of maintenance grants into loans. However, during this research the removal of the cap on student numbers estimated target rises of approximately 60,000 students, in the academic year 2015/2016 (Hurst, 2013; Garner, 2014).

*4.2.1 “It’s like the norm to go to University. The government are pushing. Schools are trying to push.” The transparency of the bubble enabled riskless risks through predictability.*

This sub section explains how students viewed university as the lesser risk, as it was increasingly normalised as a next step. Accompanied by the expansion of the Higher Education sector, there has been a continued push, both by old and current governments, to increase and widen participation in higher education (Raco, 2009; Brown, 2011; 2012; 2013; Holton and Riley, 2013). The current government might now indicate a change of direction. This sub section recognises students’ awareness of the increasing attention paid to a governmental desire, to increase and widen transitions

to University, including the pressure placed on schools and the consequent impact on their own choices to continue to higher education. Employing Douglas' (1969; 1992; 2003; 2013) ideas on risk, the sub section explores how students perceived university, to an extent, as a transition already selected by socio-cultural expectations and norms, despite the fact that participation in Higher Education remains at approximately 50% 17-30 year olds (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2014).

In particular, students demonstrated wider consciousness of influences beyond themselves, dictating their chosen pathways and associated risks. This identified students not as "unintentional risk takers", (Douglas, 1992: p13), but mindful of current contexts, and consequent risks pushed upon them. For many students, it was felt timing and content of next steps after school had seemingly already been decided for young people; the risk of not pursuing higher education was too great. It is important to bear in mind the nature of the sample here (see section 3.2.3). Students involved in this study all identified themselves as traditional students, therefore, may according to previous studies (Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005; Holdsworth, 2009a; 2009b), have been more likely to go to university, regardless of initiatives to widen and increase participation. This is not to suggest students failed to recognise alternative options available, or that young people don't hold accompanying agency to make decisions to follow these alternatives. Students told me that young people are placed under pressure by a number of outside agencies to pick university, but also that they are opting for university, as a less risky option.

Many perceived university as the only 'acceptable aspiration' (Brown, 2011: p7), noting there was little or in fact non-existent support for alternative pathways such as college courses, apprenticeships, or immediate transition into employment. As students recalled their journey to university, it was not only the commonality of this route, but, early socialisation into this one imagined aspiration that fated university as an unquestioned "norm", or as a universalised form of hope (Kraftl, 2008) with students' commenting:

“Going to university is *ingrained within you from about year 8*. Like with, (pause) you’re doing your GCSEs, to do your A levels, to get to university. (longer pause) But, *I didn’t really think about it then.*”

(Verity, 3rd year, ILHI, emphasis added)

“Well I went to a grammar school, so erm, it was expected you’d go to University. They didn’t quite know what to do if you were like oh actually I wanna get a job, so there wasn’t really that choice. It’s like, the norm to go to University. *The government are pushing. Schools are trying to push*, especially grammar schools. I wasn’t pressured into it, but it’s also the whole thing about now you, *you need a degree don’t you? It’s sort of standard.*”

(Katie, 2nd year, ILHI, emphasis added)

“I went to a fairly normal comprehensive school, really big. We were quite lucky that we had lots of *teachers that were willing to push you*. It was just a fairly normal school so. Erm, but also in that respect *a lot of people did go to uni, so that was quite normal* and there were systems in place to help you. I can’t see myself in a job where I didn’t need to go. So in that respect, *even if I didn’t enjoy it, it’s kind of a necessity*. I guess I’d have to go.”

(Harriet, 2nd year, ILHI, emphasis added)

Present in the above extracts, is a sense of fatalism or simple accordance. Indeed, Amy’s quote shows how schools are encouraging this career focused thinking, much earlier, suggesting university was almost a rite of passage. This was mentioned by the majority in the life history interviews, which enabled students to take charge of what they talked about. This highlights how this pushing to university was seen as important as when given the space to reflect on their journey to university this was prevalent in most reflections. Therefore, University emerges as an unavoidable risk, naturalised as the next step (Patinoitis and Holdsworth, 2005). Lupton (1999a; p109), discusses we have

“accepted the notion that one should make oneself aware of risks and act in accordance with experts’ advice so as to prevent or diminish the impact of risk”.

Therefore, students embarking on university, might have felt a diluted sense of risk as they had followed expert advice; the experts being the government and the school. Furthermore, the decision to come to university might have been somewhere in between Douglas and Wildavsky (1983: p16-29) distinction between ‘voluntary’ (chosen) and ‘involuntary’ (imposed) risks. Whilst acknowledging these boundaries are not often clear cut, they have argued that we cannot accept blame or full responsibility for risks that are involuntary. On the one hand, students were embarking on a university education as a calculated voluntary risk, as a consequence the lack of support for alternative options from school. The push from the government to increase and widen participation in Higher Education meant students perceived university as their only option. Consequentially, in part this ‘voluntary’ risk was in fact ‘involuntary’. This provided reassurance as students alone could not be held responsible for consequences of their choice.

University was presented as an easier option as there was much support available for this transition, so it was easier than opting for an unassisted transition into alternatives. Students also noted the reassurance in following a normalised path, reassurance that all students would be in it together:

“The process was all really supportive and I guess I never thought I was not gonna come to university. It was all quite easy and reassuring actually, especially cuz, *everyone was doing it at the same time* and all the teachers were really supportive.”

(Lydia, 3rd year, ILHI)

Tracey reiterates the opinion of many as she discusses how the feeling of risk is minimised through collective participation.

*“At least if you go to uni we’re all in the same boat, it’s the lesser risk.”*

(Tracey, 3rd year, ILHI)

Certainly, there was a sense of “unity in experience” (Douglas, 1969: p2) and reassurance in being part of this collective as “risk is shared over more than one body” (Lupton and Tulloch, 2002a: p334). It could be argued that this need for reassurance fits with assumptions of insecure anxious individuals, created by the “reflexive modernity” (Beck et al, 1994), generating a culture of fear, anxiety and precaution (Richter et al, 2002; Wilkinson, 2002; Furedi, 2006). In other words, this accordance with expectation and collective participation, was in fact a way of not having to choose, as students were faced with an overwhelming amount of risks and uncertainties (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; Melucci, 1996: p45). This provides some evidence for risk avoidance.

In the above ways, university became a safe and more certain option, in comparison to the fear sparked by the unknown risk students exposed themselves to if an alternate was chosen. University was at least a way of postponing the unknown, as students noted its predictability and temporary certainty. Similarly, this connection between fear and the future was something which was also recognised by Anderson (2010a; 2010b), as although he does not explicitly refer to risk, he reviewed the need to mitigate ‘risks’ such as climate change and obesity. He elucidated we anticipate possible future risks, therefore, seek ways in which to prepare for or manage these future risks.

Beck’s (2012) useful differentiation between future (immediate future-to happen soon- something we seek to control-often fairly predictable), and future future (so distant it may cause fear to think about as it is so uncertain and often associated with inaction presently as a consequence), with regard to risk is useful here. Therefore, in relation to my research, students’ means of managing ‘future future’ (Beck, 2012) uncertain risks, was to immerse themselves in necessary immediate ‘future’ risks, (in this case university). This offered not necessarily protection, but at least predictability or certainty for at least a few years, and an option to postpone thinking of risks

beyond this. However, as dominant discourses of risk have portrayed risk taking as negative, was coming to university still a 'risk', as it seemed it had been calculated as the safe option? These students were hopeful that *it would pay off*, or was at least better than alternatives, presenting some sort of certainty about the immediate future, as they knew they would be doing a degree for at least the next three years. Relating to Anderson's (2010a; 2010b) work as it doesn't threaten or interrupt the future, but serves to protect against the future future, that Beck (2012) alludes to as unpredictable by postponing it, therefore was university a risk at all? It is with this idea of preventing or postponing future future risks that I move onto discuss the risk of precarity.

#### 4.2.2 *University: Postponing or preventing risk of perceived economic risks*

Students' decision to come to university was, for some, a means of managing perceived economic risks. Waite (2009) acknowledged the invisibility of *precarity* from human geography research, whilst noticing the emerging interest from other social sciences, in using this term. This sub-section extends existing work, on perceived employment issues, applying the term precarity specifically to the current 'brazillianization' (Beck, 2000a) and 'flexploitation' (Waite, 2009), used to describe zero hours, temporary, fixed term contracts, and jumping from job to job, heightening anxiety through increasingly uncertain and unsecure career paths. These circumstances were thought to be reflective of wider concerns of risk and anxiety (Beck, 2000a; Furlong and Kelly, 2005; Waite, 2009). Although, this disjointed type of employment is not new (Goodwin and O'Connor, 2005; Fenton and Dermott, 2006), it was seen as a significant risk, which students sought to avoid. Indeed, for many students, opting to come to university was a means of postponing (fear of the future) or preventing (hope for the future) the risk of precarity; precarity being an anticipated future risk. Initially, at least, students were lulled in by the tantalising nature of the bubble, with the promise, or at least possibility of a secure and stable future:

"You know: a good job, a career, security; university offers opportunity for a better lifestyle."

(Margaret, 1<sup>st</sup> year, ILHI)

“You’re *risking* a lot of your time, energy, and money, doing something that doesn’t always pay off for everyone, so just coming to uni, but usually a positive risk. *It’ll be worth it?*”

(Harriet, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, Humanities, ILHI)

“Well a degree equals opportunity, basically. But, the way the *current climate* is and the way unemployment is, erm.”

(Steve, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, ILHI, emphasis added)

“Erm I guess the whole idea of getting getting a good job really, but, I’ve got *very cynical over the last two years*. Yeah, I came to university, I think, because I knew I could do it. I wanted to be challenged intellectually, and *yes the oo I’ll get a job, but obviously is that really happening now?* I’ve just become a huge cynic.”

(Amy, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, ILHI, emphasis added)

The above quotes demonstrate how both students, at least at the beginning of their university trajectories, believed a university degree guaranteed a *good career*, with higher earnings. The life history interviews demonstrated that this was an important theme but also enabled an understanding of how reflection and feelings on this altered significantly over time. They showed how whilst ideals of employment and post-university life remained at the forefront of student thoughts, their views on these varied and for different reasons. Hopeful that university would *open doors*, and would improve their career prospects, and long-term earnings, students believed by embarking on this immediate risk they were minimising the future risk of precarity, as hinted at in Steve’s understanding of the *current climate*. Indeed, Harriet is particularly optimistic that through hard work her risk *will pay off*. This highlights that at least at the beginning of their trajectories views shared by students replicated those by intending students, that their ability to pre-empt the possibility of precarity would pay

off (Valentine and Harris, 2014; Pimlott-Wilson, 2015). Her selection of the word 'usually' implies that there remains an expectation amongst students that university will pay off for the majority.

However, as the latter quotes demonstrate as students journeyed through their degree, they no longer anticipated the future to materialise in the way they first imagined. Instead, they became increasingly mindful that competition between graduates has amplified whilst opportunities are depleting. They had performed "anticipatory action" (Anderson, 2010a: p788), acting to "protect" an imagined future, but the future whilst rendered present through the decision to come to university, remained "absent" as these hopes to preserve an envisaged transition to employment as not yet happened and may not ever (Anderson, 2010a: pp788-789). It was apparent through this selection of quotes that hopefulness about the future dissipated, as students progressed through university, possibly beginning to reflect on their decision to come, as riskier than perceived at the time of application. The bubble was no longer shiny and new and full of promise but the tantalising nature was highlighted. However, students seemed to remain hopeful that university offered a better chance:

"I believed in the impossible dream, I had been sold. It takes a long time to realise that that's just naïve, it's *just not like that now*. Obviously, I *still kind of believe university will get me a better job*, even if I am jumping around all the time, *otherwise I wouldn't be trying so hard*. It's the *best option* available to me. *By not going, I'd be in a riskier position.*"

(Co-researcher, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, DE)

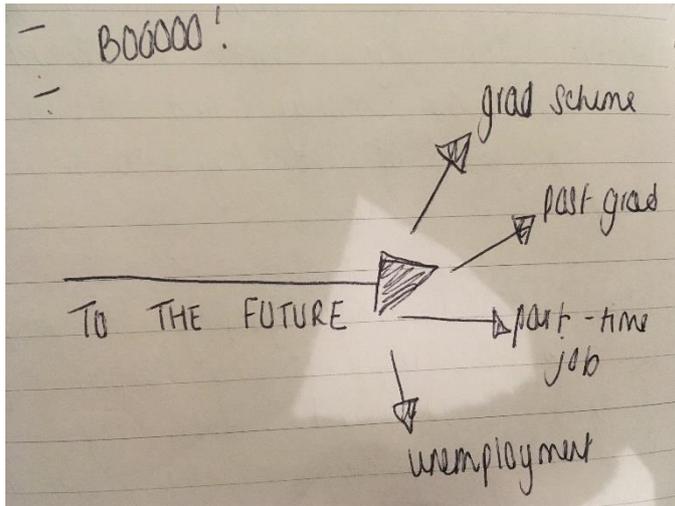


Figure 6 Co-researcher Diary extract on future

These diary extracts show how a student's expectation of employment becomes increasingly pessimistic. Nevertheless, they remained faithful to the university promise; gaining a degree provided some sort of reassurance. In fact, this was something that this co-researcher had not mentioned explicitly in data collection sessions. For her, the diary was a safe space to offer raw and honest opinions, which she felt were important to include in the research, reflecting her views. These views echoed that of many others in closer to the end of their degree but these concerns were not always expressed out loud as students were reluctant to admit the extent to which these fears were felt. Instead, there was a sense of embarrassment this co-researcher later explained that they did not want to admit how much they still believed or were hopeful in the power of the bubble to enable achievements.

Gemma, touched on the popularity of this view in a University Life Game session (ULGS) as she described how a degree at least put them on "a level playing field". Archer et al (2003: p135), noted the "overcrowded job market" and the "risk of being overqualified" as a reason to disregard university, as further qualifications no longer guaranteed higher paid, or more secure employment. In contrast, for students in this study, Archer et al's (2003: p135), claim only further supported university as the only option; without a degree they could not compete in an overcrowded job market where 'everyone has a degree, it's like the minimum', as Harriet articulated in her ILHI. Archer et al's (2003) notion of being 'overqualified' was shunned as everyone

was now 'qualified'. This resonated with earlier work by Brown (2013: p425) whereby students in his sample stated "without a degree you're out of luck". Further reiterating choosing university felt like the only option, Sophie explained:

"All of the people I have met, that are doing jobs that I want to do, have got degrees, and so, I thought the sort of job I want I clearly need one."

(Sophie, 2nd year, ILHI)

Students recognised that a university degree, was becoming increasingly standard criteria for many jobs, even for those where previously practical skills may have been preferable. This statement shows comparison with others in this stage one method, hinting at how students understood their experiences as relational, providing support for using further methods enabling to comparison and contrast with each others experiences. Students whose parents had not been to university emphasised how their parents would now need a degree for their current jobs. Therefore, during discussions around future stability, Katie implied, to have a better chance of a stable career, university seemed like the only option:

"I remember my dad was saying that, for his job, that he's done for thirty years, working for the Civil Service, if he quit his job, and wanted it back he'd need a degree, *he'd need a degree to do his own job*. Yeah, and my dad was like, I've done this a fair few years – why would I need a degree? It's not like a job that really requires a degree. But, I knew I had to get one. Like *people just go to Uni cause that's how it is. It's weird not to go to uni*".

(Katie, 2nd year, ILHI, emphasis added)

Katie valued her dad's career stability and felt that to have any chance of achieving this for herself she needed a degree. The continuing importance of family background, expectations and experiences of their career trajectories was emphasised here (Pimlott-Wilson, 2011). Students hoped to achieve at least their parents' status. As traditional transitions from school to work were increasingly rare, in order to do the

same jobs now, the majority would need a degree as specifications and expectations on starting these careers had altered. The risk of coming to university was positively portrayed here as a means of managing the risk of a precarious job market; university was combined with a hope for a better outcome. Students implied that university would offer them advantageous positions in a precarious labour market; a better chance of success and a stable income through flexibility.

“I *didn't want* to go straight into an internship, or yeah, yeah apprentice, no, apprenticeship isn't it, yeah, you know, or just a *normal job* yeah because I think you just *get stuck*. Yeah, whereas university, yeah, you can go so much more places really.”

(Sarah, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, ILHI, emphasis added)

“Erm I felt like that was the only way I was gonna become *successful*, the only way I'd have, (long pause) like *sustainable income*, like a chance at a *substantial amount of income*.”

(Karin, 1<sup>st</sup> year, ILHI)

Students felt that although the likelihood of them being in the same job for a sustained period was slim, due to the current climate, but a degree enabled them flexibility. This flexibility was important in different ways. For Karin, it offered the chance of sustainable employment, a way to better her chances against precarity. Whereas Sarah believed having a degree meant you were not tied to a single career or 'stuck'. This is interesting, as Sarah, positioned having the same job for life as stuck, perhaps as a consequence of how progress was positioned by school, and/or the university careers service (which she worked for). For both, a degree presented them with an ability to move from one contract or one job to another more easily, and *success* seemed to *equate a good career*. There was more *open* to graduates than to those with specific or no qualifications. Students hoped there was more room for sideways movement in the job market with a degree, therefore preventing the risk of precarity:

“Like, I know I’ll be jumping around from job to job. That’s just how it is nowadays but you’ve gotta go where the jobs are. At least a degree gives you that choice, you know I can be flexible with the transferable skills they always go on about. Without uni what skills have you got to transfer.”

(Co-researcher, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, conversation, NOD)

This naturally occurring data encouraged more honest and open conversations revealing how students although in front of peers seemed hopeful but slightly pessimistic that in fact they still believed to a large extent that the degree would change their chances for the better. However, for some, University was also then a way in which to not necessarily prevent but at least postpone risk which seemed increasingly inevitable, the risk of precarity. University would at least temporarily delay entry into a precarious workforce:

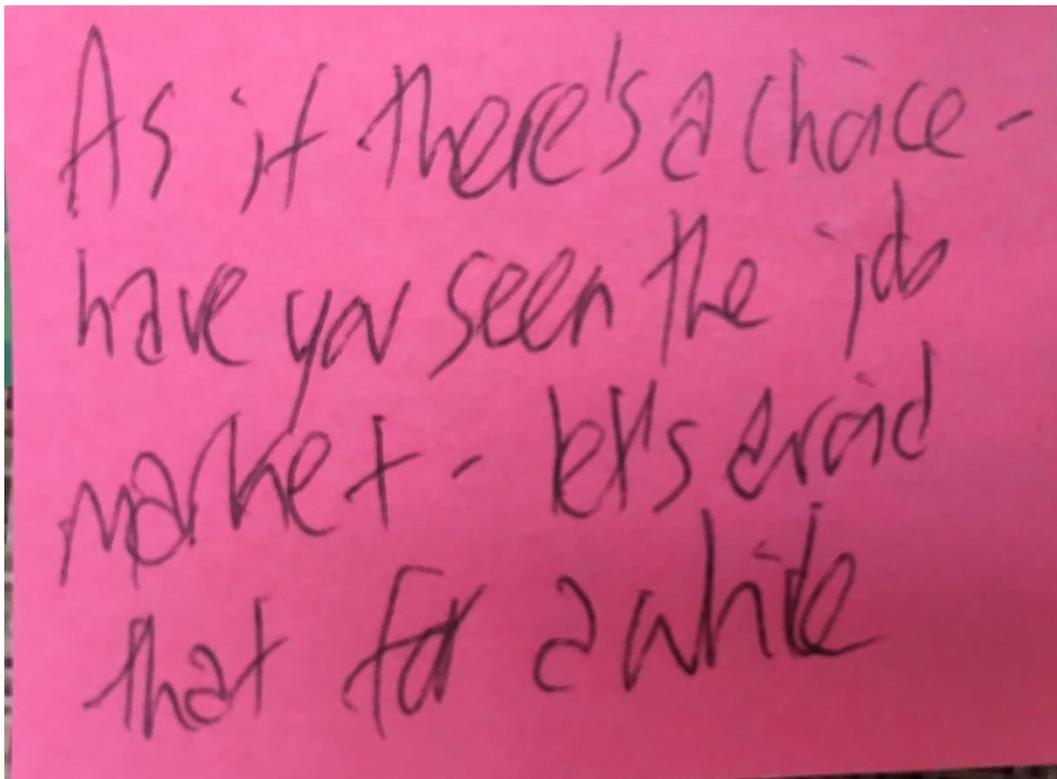


Figure 7 Tom, 3rd year, Opinion on job market, ULGS

Beck’s (2012) distinction between the “future” (easier to predict) and the “future future” (unknown), mentioned above, is useful here. The anxiety around the possible

precarity in the 'future future' caused students to focus on the immediate future, which allowed them to gain a sense of control over the future future. This resonated with Richer et al's (2006) ideas about the 'culture of precaution', due to a heightened anxiety as part of Beck's (1992) risk society we act now to preserve or protect against possible future risks. For example, the students here are taking the safer option of coming to university to protect against or postpone future precarity. Risk participation was as a result of both hope and fear for the future; hope that immediate risk taking may minimise future risks such as precarity but also fear of future risks such as precarity have triggered immediate risks taking of coming to university. With this discussion of increasing precarity and recognition that a degree no longer confirms a job, the next section moves on, considering university as a financial risk in light of the recent tuition fee rise.

#### *4.2.3 Tuition fee rise as an inevitable risk: "People still don't really have the option"*

This sub-section explores students' understanding of how the tuition fee rise might have influenced students' expectations and imaginations of HE. Finances have long been acknowledged as a concern for intending university students' (Christie et al, 2001; Christie and Munro, 2003), but with an assumption that traditional students are more likely to be accepting and less fearful of this debt. There is a growing body of literature investigating students' attitudes towards debt (Christie et al, 2001; Christie and Munro, 2003; Magan et al, 2010; Haultain et al, 2010; Wakeling and Jeffries, 2013), some which has suggested 'economic rationality' does not discourage participation in HE, particularly as many are unaware of the finer details of loan repayments but also support available in terms of bursaries (Magan et al, 2010). There was speculation that the tuition fee rise would have a significant impact on numbers progressing to higher education institutions; assumptions that the increasing financial risk and burden of debt would deter students from making university applications. Whilst there is evidence to suggest that students are disgruntled and alarmed by the most recent tuition fees rise (Hopkins et al, 2012), at the time of this study and current figures suggest that transition to higher education among traditional age student figures continued to climb (Adams and Weale, 2015). Although, there has been

discussion about how this rise in fees further positions students as consumers research has not yet addressed how these changes might impact the everyday experiences of university students. Literature which exists around tuition fees refers to the previous fee rise (Callendar and Jackson, 2005; 2008). This sub-section begins to address this gap through a consideration of how fees were imagined as an *inevitable risk*.

This research took place at an important moment in terms of the financing of UKHE. Taking place during the implementation of tuition fee rises in the UK, participants included a mixture of students paying £3000 and £9000 tuition fees. However, the research was conducted before the more recent eradication of the cap. Over 80% of students involved in this research had been involved in campaigns and protests against tuition fees. Despite this, the rise had not impacted their decision to come to university. Students believed there was no *real* alternative. Regardless of the cost of university, *it was riskier not to go*, as everybody was expected to go to university (See section 4.2.1). Coming to university was an *inevitable risk*, so, *tuition fees by default became an inevitable risk*. For many students, there was a sense of frustration as they felt although the fee rise obviously meant that coming to university seemed like an even bigger risk, it was still the 'only option', as demonstrated by the conversation below:

"The real hypocrisy of it. They've put the fees up but *they haven't really offered an alternative.*"

(Amy, 3rd year, FG, emphasis added)

"I mean I just think cus there's higher fees people still don't really have the option. They're in the same position just paying 9 grand as we were paying 3. *Just because it's more expensive, they don't really have the option not to go still. Just cus it's more expensive, it doesn't change the situation.*"

(Nicole, 2nd year, FG, emphasis added)

“I know the fees have gone up, but it still hasn’t changed the fact that it’s the norm. You have to find a way. *I think it’s unfair the people running the Government are the ones who didn’t pay anything*, and now they’re forcing us all to go. I think that whole like.... the whole fact that like Uni costs so much is sort of put aside by the importance of getting a degree.”

(Katie, 2nd year, FG, emphasis added)

The above quotes highlight how although students may have in part bought into individualised responsibility for social mobility through education, and the need for a degree in the *knowledge economy*. There was still a large expectation on the government to scaffold this transition; a responsibility of care. There was an expectation that it was the government’s responsibility to find alternatives, and that students felt let down that there was not a *real* alternative. Although students were clearly aggravated by the rise, they had resigned to the fact they could not change the situation so instead had to put up with it. Indeed, the focus groups, such as the above conversation highlighted the domino effect of student opinion. Through enabling students to discuss their experiences together, they showed how students expressed ideas and these ideas quickly spread across the student body, hinting at a relational experience.

There was also a continued sense of fatalism and a blasé approach to the fees as students accepted student debt as the norm. The amount was almost seen as irrelevant (see Nicole’s comment) as the importance of obtaining a degree overtook the cost (see Katie’s comment). It is also important to note here that Amy, Nicole and Katie were all paying £3000 tuition fees. However, all participants were in agreement that the “need” for a degree superposed any worry over fees. Christie and Munro (2003) at the time of the previous tuition fee rise noted students becoming more accepting of debt, as it is normalised. This was, too, noticeable in the above quotes. Building on this argument, Amy (see comment below) felt that collective participation and accordance with expectations had minimised the feeling of risk. £9000 Tuition fees were viewed and normalised as a collective generational risk. As Amy continued:

“Everybody sort of gets stuck into it, so you think *everyone’s guna have that much debt*, and it makes you *feel better*. Everyone does have the same amount of debt.”

(Amy, 3rd year, FG, emphasis added)

Amy demonstrated the feeling of reassurance through collective participation minimised the feeling of risk. Indeed, this may reflect a wider generational attitude towards debt as risk, as the wider normalisation of debt in society has meant that students are less fearful of it. For example, consumer culture meant students had grown up in an era of increased credit, higher purchase, and finance so they do not feel alone in their burden of debt, but instead it was normalised as part of everyday life. Students were less worried about debt as it was more normalised to consume now and pay later. Indeed, many have noted the increasing role of consumption in the identities of young people (Willis, 1990; Hollands 1995; Valentine, 2000). The picture below demonstrates how students’ thought about the loan in this way:

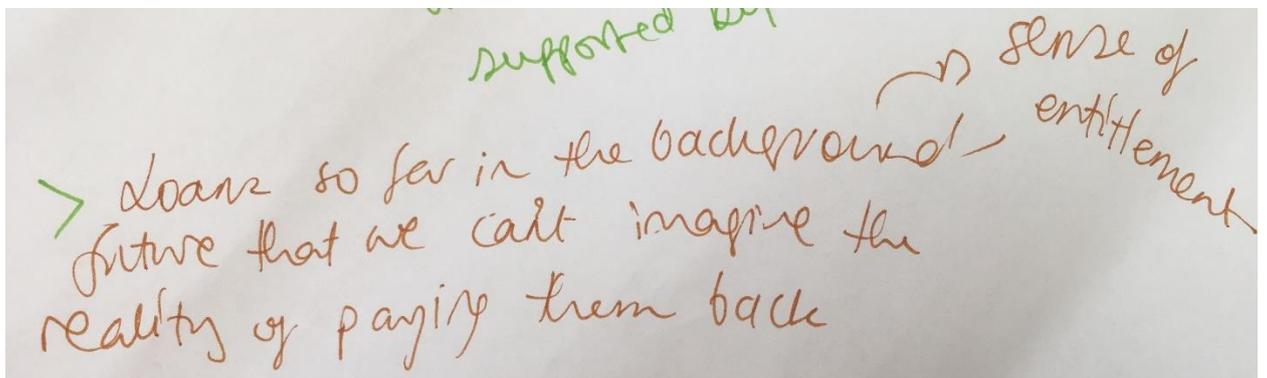


Figure 8 Reflection on tuition fee rise, Mixed gender group, RLT/TLRS

“I don’t even own my phone! Everything is monthly these days. Our whole lives are on loan.”

(Peter, 1<sup>st</sup> year, ULGS)

The above picture from a TLR/RLTS (with 3<sup>rd</sup> year students, the first set of students to have paid the £9000) implied financial risks of debt were not an immediate concern

(but a postponed future future risk that might not materialise), but that coming to university (an immediate future risk), as explained earlier by Amy and Katie, to gain a degree was. The TLR/RLTS session enabled, in this circumstance, as they involved only 3<sup>rd</sup> years, an understanding that even as the possibility of the loan came closer it was still seen as a future risk. This showed how first and third year students had similar takes on this topic.

This highlights management of greater 'future future' risks, such as debt, by only focusing on the immediate 'future' risk of not having a degree. There is a sense of postponement as students focus only on the immediate. This was further reflected as students were confused about how the debt worked:

"I don't know about you, but for me, you don't see that money at all, for me personally, like I think I'll deal with that later and it doesn't impact my finances now. Like for us paying about 3.5 grand in fees, we don't have to start paying it back until, is it 16 thousand?" (Others in group speculate to 15 thousand)

(Katie, 2nd year, FG)

"But for people going up to 9 grand, that's 21. And I was trying to work it out, it's not much of your income each month or whatever, so for me personally, I'm like, that's something for the future (waits for reassurance), yeah?"

(Steve, 2nd year, FG)

"It's written off isn't it after 25 years?"

(Sarah, 2nd year, FG)

"When mum was looking at it, it was like you don't start paying till you earn 20 grand? And you pay a tiny amount, and you'd only ever end up paying it all back, if you earn a lot of money?"

(Amy, 2nd year, FG)

“I’ve never bothered to work out how much I owe?”

(Samantha, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, FG)

The above focus group conversation highlighted how students were not completely sure of the total amount they had borrowed or exactly how it was paid back. This emphasised that this wasn’t an immediate concern or worry, but something for the future. Students when talking seemed to gain reassurance from each other, that they were all uncertain, all in the same situation, but also sought reassurance from me and also through their parents’ knowledge. There was a continued sense of reassurance through normalisation of the debt and collective involvement that seemed to minimise the risk.

Despite the fact students did not think the fees had impacted their personal choices to come to University, there was concern that the fees might change how intending students would now perceive university. Students hoped tuition fee rise could, in fact, encourage young people to consider their options in more detail, despite having earlier admitted that they themselves did not do this. Students feared that those more aware of money risk would be put off university for the wrong reasons, whereas those that ‘have’ money may continue to university for the wrong reasons, as the game session below highlights:

“People are automatically gonna think I shouldn’t go to uni. Is it worth the money? Maybe I shouldn’t go to uni, rather than maybe I shouldn’t go to uni because I don’t need to or I don’t want to.”

(Nicole, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, ULGS)

“I think our culture, it’s too often we’re *shoe horned* into it, and people aren’t really given the opportunity to think about it. Whereas now because it is so much money, and they have more to lose, well, maybe they need to explore other avenues before deciding whether or not to go to uni.”

(Amy, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, ULGS, emphasis added)

“I think it will put off more people for the wrong reasons. It’s putting off people because of money. More people might not go because of the money, and so many people will go despite the money thing. Some might write it off, before even thinking about it.”

(Michelle, 2nd year, ULGS)

“I suppose it cuts out people who are more aware of risk.”

Sophie (2nd year)

“It can often cut out the wrong people. It’s not cutting out people who have loads of money that don’t really care, they’re gonna go anyway, whether they want to or not.”

Harriet (2nd year)

There was an expectation that students should consider the end result of university, in terms of career, much more before arrival, as it was perceived as risky just to go and get degree for the sake of it, but student that commented this admitted they did not do this:

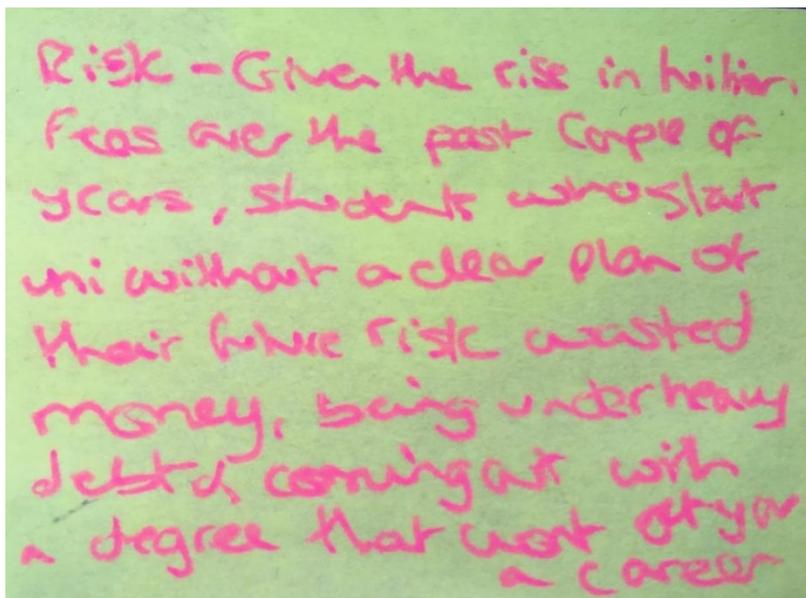


Figure 9 Tuition fee discussion, ULGS

The above illustration from the game shows how this method helped students consider their current reactions to scenarios but also how these compared with how they expected prospective students to consider these risks. It also evidences how perceptions on the same scenario might transform through their university journey.

To summarise, in this section university was perceived as the 'only' option, although, it is still only approximately 50% of this age cohort (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2014) that progress to HE. It has been considered as both a voluntary and involuntary risk, the only "acceptable aspiration" (Brown, 2011: p7), for young people. The feeling of risk here was minimised through normalisation and reassurance in collective participation. Attending university was seen as a lesser risk, for this sample of traditional students, than not going. Through this, the tantalising nature of the bubble was evident. Although students stressed they did not believe it would guarantee them a good job, they were definitely still hopeful it would put them in a better position. Students were hopeful that at best it might prevent precarity, or at worst, at least postpone it. In this circumstance, immediate risk was used to manage more serious future risk, so a risk hierarchy becomes apparent, with a focus on the here and now. Tuition fee rise was expected to heighten the feeling of risk in terms of university, but, again, students were reassured by collective participation, and wider normalisation of debt, so the feeling of risk was minimised.

#### **4.3 How Bubbles come into being: University as a place and a time to play**

Fainstein and Judd's (1999: pp261-272) conjecturing of the tourist city as a 'place of play' is useful as a point of departure, for my analysis of how students imagined the University as a place to play (see chapter 2). In particular, Fainstein and Judd (1999) discussed 'bubbles' as deliberately re-invented areas. These 'bubbles' were seen to be cut off from ordinary life, yet present an opportunity, and a desire, for extreme consumption, as their engulfing atmosphere of excitement presents consumption as irresistible. It was inferred that it was only through consumption to excess that one can experience fully these "emotionally pleasurable" sites, and they were purposefully advertised this way in order to encourage people to consume (Urry, 2007: p79). This

section then critically evaluates how this notion of a “place of play” might be applicable to the University bubble. The university experience has been increasingly commodified (Chatterton, 2010; Smith and Hubbard, 2014), something students have bought into, irrespective of rising tuition fees. The bubble was alluring as it drew students in with this expectation of opportunity to engage to excess, in ‘edgework’ (risky behaviour which transgresses personal boundaries), on arrival, such as binge drinking, drug taking and so on. Accordingly, risks were presented as a commodity, a product to be desired and consumed, and university as a place in which this consumption is possible.

In combination then with this development of university as a “place to play”, it can be envisaged as a “time to play.” Indeed, the wealth of literature existing on transitions determines 18-25 as a period of ‘emerging adulthood’, as a time of enjoyment and personal discovery before committing to adult responsibilities (Wyn and Dwyer, 2000; Westberg, 2004; Bynner, 2005; Arnett, 2006; 2014; Blatterer, 2007). This implied an expectation of this behaviour at this age, which strengthens the normalisation of risky behaviour at university, as it was envisaged as a “time to play”, as well as a “place to play”. The bubble was presented as somewhere fun and playful.

This section therefore joins together these two ideas to think about how images of studenthood pre-arrival bring the tantalising nature of the university bubble into being. It explores how dominant discourses of traditional studenthood through the media and marketing materials, generate and normalise, university as a place of play. It also considers how these materials and expectations of culture combine with familial influence on how students expect to play. In order to do this, this section draws upon students’ expectations of binge drinking, as when asked specifically about risk, this was the first mentioned by the majority.

#### *4.3.1 Media reproduces expectations of university as a place of play*

It has been widely claimed young people are more exposed and vulnerable to risk than previously, or more likely to engage in risky behaviours in modern society (Beck, 1992; Furlong and Cartmel, 1997). Young people have been often demonised as indulging

in behaviour to excess, rather than moderation, particularly with regard to drinking and drugs, “characterised as risky consumers” (Ettore and Miles, 2002: p175). More specifically, university students have been often singled out as a particularly deviant group, and commonly coupled with risky behaviour. For example, Hubbard (2013: pp265-282) discussed how reportage on the event “Carnage” only aggravated the already negative stereotypical image in the media as students were presented as “disorderly”, “bodies of disgust”. Students’ engagement in excess binge drinking was further demonised, through this prejudiced media coverage of carnage events. In particular, he noted how students joined traditionally slandered groups, such as working class men, as their behaviour comes under increasing scrutiny, and portrayed as immoral. This was due to non-conformation with “white, middle class, heteronormative ideals” (Hubbard, 2013: p282) of more civilised drinking. He explained moral panics about young people’s drinking, were especially harsh on female drinking increasingly mimetic of male drinking cultures. This sub section explores how dominant discourses of university students’ excessive engagement in risky behaviour impacted students’ expectations of university’s drinking culture, as a risk.

Students were aware of the negative reputation as ‘bodies of disgust’, which preceded them. References were made to moral panics in the media, particularly newspapers, but also television series such as ‘fresh meat’, and various documentaries about university life at different institutions, one of which was Leicester’s own. They insisted these media sources all implied binge drinking played a dominant role in student life. They also referred to recent films such as ‘American pie’, and more recently ‘bad neighbours’, which featured students as “alcoholic layabouts” (Silver and Silver, 1997: p14). This influenced students’ expectations of freshers, as life history interviews encouraged students to remember their expectations pre-arrival:

“Drink like a maniac, do crazy things and have a great time playing around”

(Marie, 1<sup>st</sup>, ILHI)

The comment evidenced that alcohol's portrayal in the media had some impact on students' expectations of university. Scholars writing on risk and media, have suggested, risks are often magnified in order to boost audiences; that our perception of risk are swollen through the sheer volume of media sources we are exposed to, repeating the same information (Wahlberg and Sjoberg, 2000; Joffee, 2003). This means we hear or see the same story several times over in slightly different formats. There was some evidence that students' awareness of drinking, as a risk, was heightened through this media exposure, as students when beginning to discuss risk immediately began conversations with expectations around student binge drinking culture. In fact, assumptions were made that binge drinking was seen as a 'definite' risk of studenthood. Josie explained her perceptions of studenthood from the media:

“Well, at least in the public eye, people think typical students drink, you know, spend the taxpayer's money on drink, going out, you know, irresponsible. So, to some extent, I expected that and me to turn into that.”

(Josie, 3rd year, ILHI)

From Josie's quote, assumptions could have been made that students would consequentially perceive “binge drinking” as a big risk. This homogenisation of students' drinking culture in the media reinforced an anticipated collective identity, and way of 'being a student'. Indeed, Josie expected to *turn into* what she had seen in the media. The media may build and reproduce bubbles of consumption, as students felt they had to drink to be 'proper' students. Bubbles are created before arrival through these media portrayals. Indeed, despite the diversification of students in recent years the traditional consumption patterns with regard to drinking have continued to dominate student culture (Chatterton and Hollands, 2002: p98). This presented an argument for media's governing of student risk-taking, as there was encouragement to consume in a particular way. Highlighted in chapter two, continued commodification of studenthood, has meant drinking culture continues to be the 'seductive' image on the face of student experience (Holdsworth, 2009a; Chatterton, 2010). This made the risk consumption predictable and so easily governed. However,

this was not to suggest that students did not have choice and agency over their consumption. It soon became apparent the majority of students were observant of how facts and figures are often manipulated to boost audiences, or exaggerated due to the diverse range of media sources distributing the same information (Wahlberg and Sjoberg, 2000; Joffe, 2003). Whilst the life history interviews showed how the media had an influence the group situation of the RLT/TLRS made students reflect on why as they debated to what extent it influenced them and/or was true. In a 3<sup>rd</sup> year session students noted:

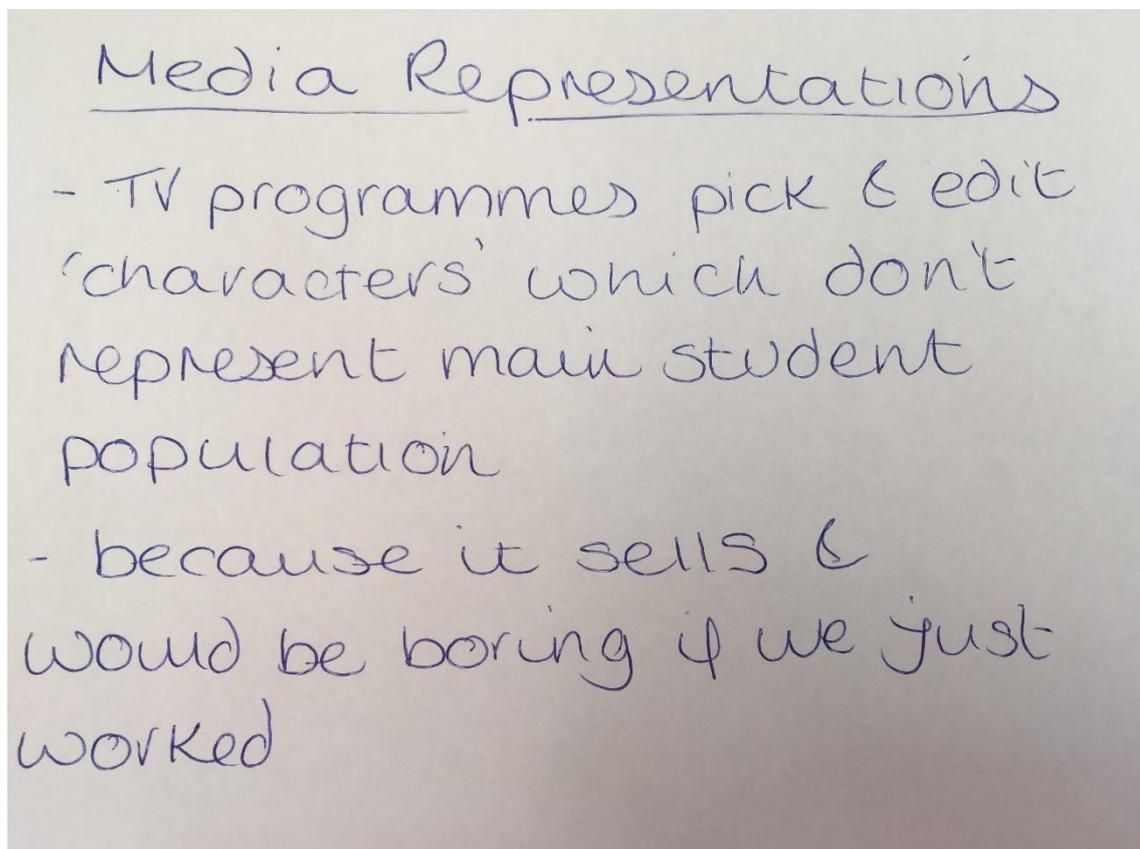


Figure 10 Influence of media on perceptions of studenthood, RLT/TLRS

Although, students felt portrayals were unfair, the media had heightened their expectations of drinking before arrival. However, it had not heightened the sense of risk around this behaviour. In fact, a more apathetic attitude had grown amongst students, as they discounted media's reports of student drinking cultures, positioning them as "exaggerated cases" or "extreme events". This homogenous portrayal of students as binge drinkers by various media formats (from newspapers to television

documentaries), rather than increasing students' sense of risk seemed to offer further reassurance. The sheer volume of students' expected to engage in binge drinking as suggested by the media, provided reassurance as the extreme consequences portrayed in the media were highly unlikely to happen to them. Fern expressed this, in reference to a recent newspaper article, featuring the drowning of a rugby student as a result of falling into a river drunk:

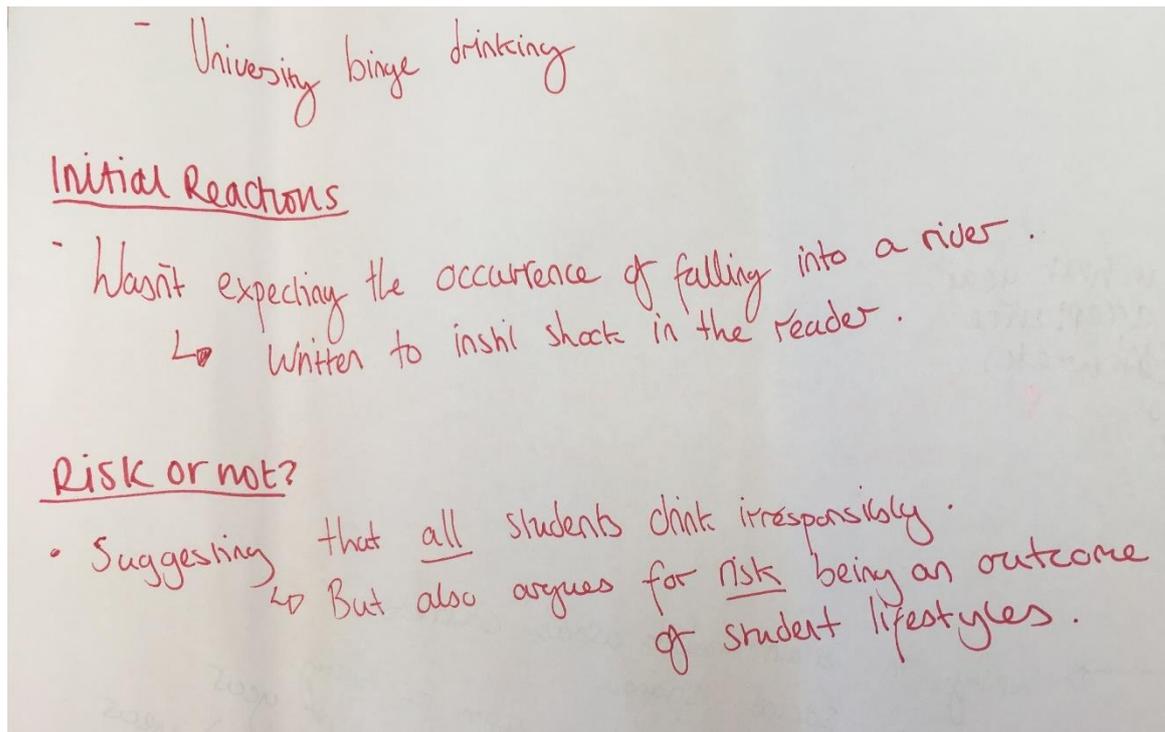


Figure 11 Fern, 3rd, Reaction to newspaper headline on binge drinking, RLT/TLRS

Fern, along with many of her peers, was annoyed by the newspaper article, (visibly so: rolling eyes, placing their face in their hands, deep sighs, one student simply drawing a big cross over the script) suggesting it was a very unlikely occurrence; it was written to instil shock, an isolated and extremely rare incident. Whilst life history interviews demonstrated how the media might have had an impact on perceptions of drinking and studenthood, these RLT/TLRS sessions were useful to show how this in fact lowered drinking in the hierarchy of risk. As we discussed this article, students felt they were unfairly stereotyped and labelled as living risky lifestyles. Not denying they drank heavily, but that these occurrences were rare, but intense, and it was the

intense 'all out' image captured, that lead to negative press as if it was a regular performance.

Consequentially, students explained this stereotyping was not going to stop them from drinking, or increase feelings of risk, as they were sure that students received more bad press when it came to binge drinking. This distancing of media reports from their personal experience had in fact served to reproduce these dominant student cultures of risk with regard to drinking culture. This was how bubbles of play had formed, as students built this imaginary shield between how they expected to experience this risk, and how it was portrayed in the media. Students continued to consume in this way, sustaining drinking cultures, as feelings of risk were overlooked.

Also, highlighted here was awareness of how anticipated experiences of these "places of play" differed in reality. Rather than discouraging participation, this dominant discourse in the media had the opposite impact. The amplification of drinking as a risk had not promoted anxiety and fear, as suggested by Austen (2009) and Furedi (2006) in their articulation of how media might impact our perception of risk. Instead, this elaboration had eased the feeling of risk amongst students as it was an expected risky behaviour, yet the associated severe consequences could be snubbed as simply the media looking for stories that would sell. This served to preserve the fragile bubbles as students continued to sustain these leisure markets.

Interestingly, some students noted how this consuming media coverage on drinking had almost closed them to other risks they might be exposed to at university. Nathan commented:

"In fact, I wasn't really prepared at all for other risks, if you like, because all you hear is about is drinking."

(Nathan, 1<sup>st</sup> year, ILHI)

And other students documented their expectations:

Expectations  
Fun, going out  
Did not consider all the  
hard work / stress

Figure 12 Reflection on expectations pre-arrival, RLT/TLRS



Figure 13 Reflections on expectations focused on social aspects, RLT/TLRS

In this sense, the over magnification of one risk by the media, had in fact not only meant students disregarded the possible scale of the risk, but also that they considered other risks less. Nathan continued to explain whilst he was prepared for social elements of university, he was less prepared for the academic side and accompanying risks. This presented the dazzling nature of the bubble's shine, as academic risks were hidden by the shiny, tantalising nature of social risk. This presented non-social risks higher up the hierarchy as they involved more uncertainty and triggered consequent anxiety.

"I packed my paracetamol (laughs), I didn't pack my anxiety pills. I'm joking. I'm not. I wasn't prepared for how intense the work was going to be, and negotiating houses, and stuff so earlier, with people you don't really know. I've not done this before. Just thought yeah, I'll come here and have a good time, have a think before I get a job,"

(Co-researcher, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, DE) This co-researcher did, in fact, decide to discontinue her participation in the project as workload pressure had become too much.

University's presentation as a place of play meant these students felt inadequately equipped to deal with non-playful elements. This might have been because as noted earlier in this sub-section images of students working hard doesn't sell. The next section continues to highlight the assumptions of universities and university cultures in promoting and normalising 'play'.

#### *4.3.2 University and/or University Culture: promotes and normalises play but also creates bubbles of where to play*

Many scholars have noted the role educational institutions may play in the creating and maintaining collective and individual identities of young people (Valentine, 2000). Chatterton (1999: p120) has described this as an expected "learning the rules" of student life. Earlier research supported these claims, stating when choosing to go to university you "buy into a particular lifestyle", acting as a reflexive consumer, and

immersing first into the social experience (Smith and Holt, 2007: p150-151). Students were creating particular identities for themselves through their consumption practices. In this case, in terms of drinking practices they were expressing a particular way of 'being a student' and belonging. This could have been considered as taking part in relational consumption.

University was branded as a 'place of play', purposefully promoted in this way in order to encourage students to consume in risk, in a particular way. By becoming a university student, you were agreeing to accept these behaviours as the 'norm'. In the same way that tourists wanted to consume in tourist areas of the city in order to fully experience the place, students too felt the university reinforced "drinking is an important aspect of student life" (Dempster, 2011: p640). In this sample, students noted, there was an expectation to be a 'proper' university student and to consume in this place of play fully you would consume this drinking culture. This quickly became apparent in my research as students were aware not only of pressure to come to university, but also of the assumption that they would partake in student 'typical' behaviours on arrival. Indeed, students noted how drinking was promoted even before arrival, generating an expectation of exposure to this risk. This sub section details how students perceived the role of the university and university culture more broadly played in training them into a particular type of studenthood before arrival.

The university was perceived to play a substantial role marketing a 'typical' student life through leaflets sent, information offered on open days, student life talks and so on, teaching expectations of student behaviour prior to arrival. The university provided some marketing materials, (requested for this project) but they were unable to provide information posted to students pre-arrival, or on open days. Students emphasised the "university culture breeds risk and risk takers" (Candice, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, ILHI), facilitating participation through the normalisation and promotion of feelings and behaviours. Students insisted they were sold this notion of university as a place of play by the university before arrival:

“The university definitely promotes it. Like you expect to do all these fab new things you’ve not done before. You get sent loads of stuff advertising it too. Like freshers and that.”

(James, 1<sup>st</sup> year, ILHI)

This quote illustrated the tantalising nature of the bubble, luring students in with the hope of consumption. This highlighted the changing nature of HE (expansion, marketisation, commodification, neo-liberalisation etc.); universities are now compelled to ‘sell’ the ‘experience’. Students are placed as consumers, and universities as businesses, hoping to sell their product (the product being the student experience). In this context then, risk was as an opportunity to engage in activities offered by the university, advertised as a something to embrace (Baker and Simon, 2010: p1-27), rather than to be feared (Furedi, 2006). Being a student, was performed through consuming place. The students’ union, in particular, was central to the experience, and advertised as a place of play, through all it had to offer. The university presented opportunities and ideas of play before arrival, as students received information about all associations and societies they could become involved in, and this formed a large proportion of material sent to them. The prospectus also advertised its music venue listing acts and promoting this venue as somewhere fun offering further opportunities for consumption. It noted the students’ union *will* play an important role in student life (University of Leicester, 2015: p29) suggesting students should engage with the opportunities it offered. Students were excited about new opportunities, largely centred around the ‘social’ experience:

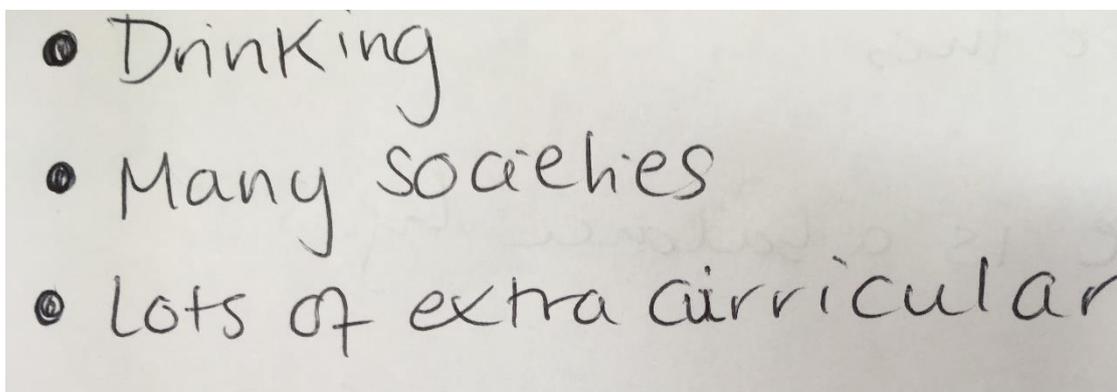
- 
- A photograph of a whiteboard with three handwritten bullet points in black marker. The points are: 'Drinking', 'Many societies', and 'Lots of extra curricular'. The handwriting is casual and slightly slanted.
- Drinking
  - Many societies
  - Lots of extra curricular

Figure 14 Discussion of expectations of university in RLT/TLRS

The bubble here resonated with Fainstein and Judd's (1999) depiction as 'place of play', filled with opportunities to consume, and in order to fully experience place you must consume in a standardised way. As part of this place of play, students insinuated that the university had a role in advertising drinking as a normalised, 'part and parcel' (Sarah, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, FG) of university life. Similarly, Beth and Diane commented:

"Everything's kinda centred around drinking. Monday republic, Tuesday mosh, Wednesday red Leicester, Thursday socho, Friday shabang. And it's all stuff you *have* to drink for."

(Beth, 1st year, FG, emphasis added)

"So basically promoting that's what you *should* do. If you don't do it, that's a bit weird, or people perceive you as, that's a bit strange. Even the local shops do."

(Diane, 2nd year, FG, emphasis added)

In fact, the prospectus only made a passing reference to 'club nights' offered at the O2 and drinking was again only briefly mentioned when discussing Leicester's food and drink. It did not encourage binge drinking, nor does the university. The nights mentioned above were evidence of club promoters and local businesses "cashing in on an easy crowd" (Candice, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, ILHI), further reinforcing dominant images of studenthood, centred around drinking, regardless of how often students individually engaged in this behaviour. However, the prospectus did refer you to the students' union website. At the time of this research, the students' union website detailed many opportunities to consume in 'freshers' week. Pages (see figures 8-12 below) dedicated to drinking events heavily outweighed non-drinking events (interestingly, emphasis has changed more recently):

**fresh festival 2014**

IF YOU WANT TO GUARANTEE YOU GET IN THE BIGGEST AND BEST EVENTS THAT WE HAVE LISTED FOR YOU DURING **FRESH FESTIVAL 2014**, THE ONLY WAY TO DO SO IS TO BUY A FRESH FESTIVAL WRISTBAND.

SO WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR? WITH 17 EVENTS INCLUDED, IT WORKS OUT AT LESS THAN £3 PER EVENT, SO FOR THE PRICE OF ONE, WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR? BUY YOURS NOW!

[WWW.LEICESTERUNION.COM/FRESH](http://WWW.LEICESTERUNION.COM/FRESH)

EVENTS INCLUDED ON THE FRESH FESTIVAL WRISTBAND ARE...

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Figure 15 Advertising for freshers on SU website

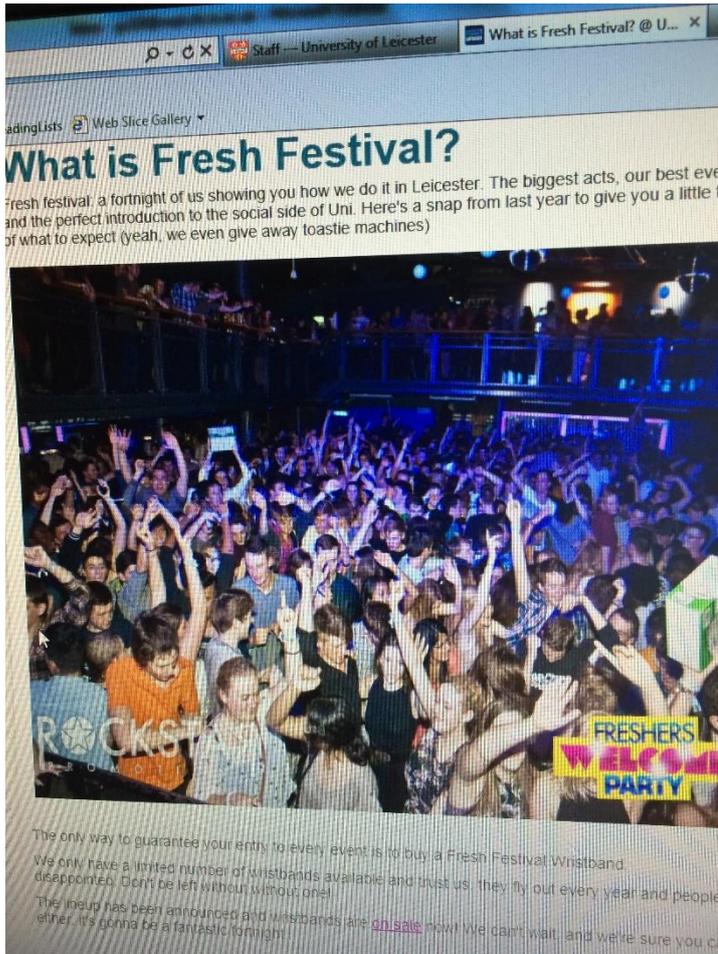


Figure 16 Freshers party advertised on SU website

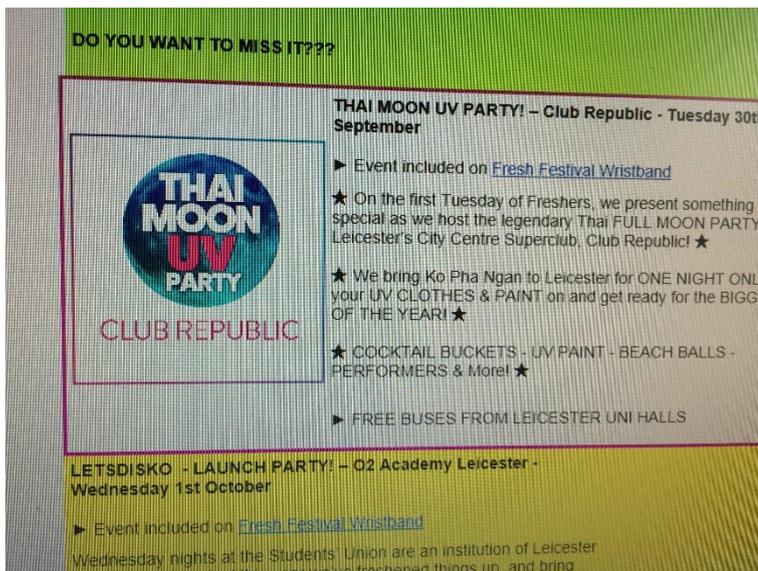


Figure 17 List of events on freshers seen to be largely centred on drinking

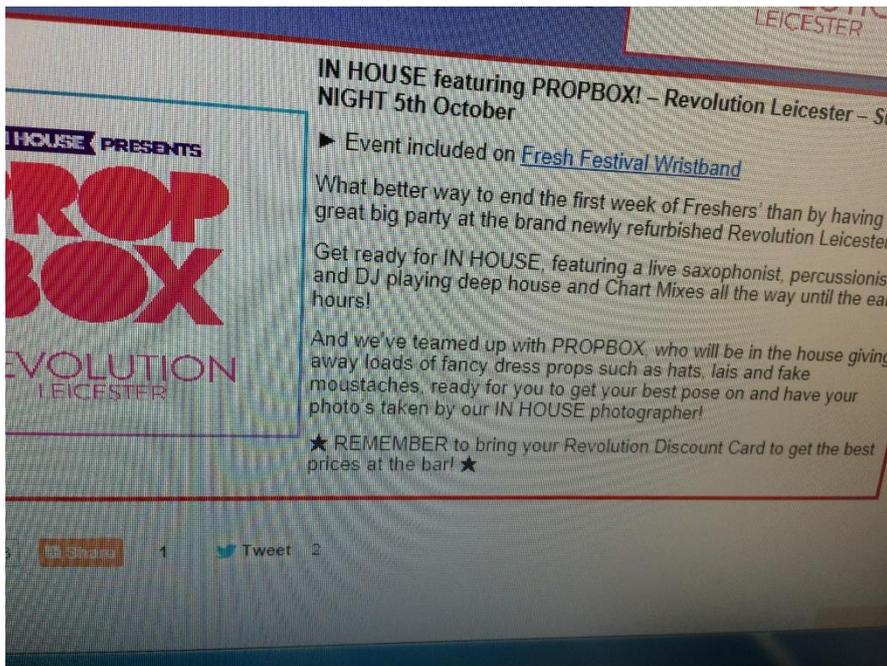


Figure 18 Further advertising of freshers seen to be centred around drinking

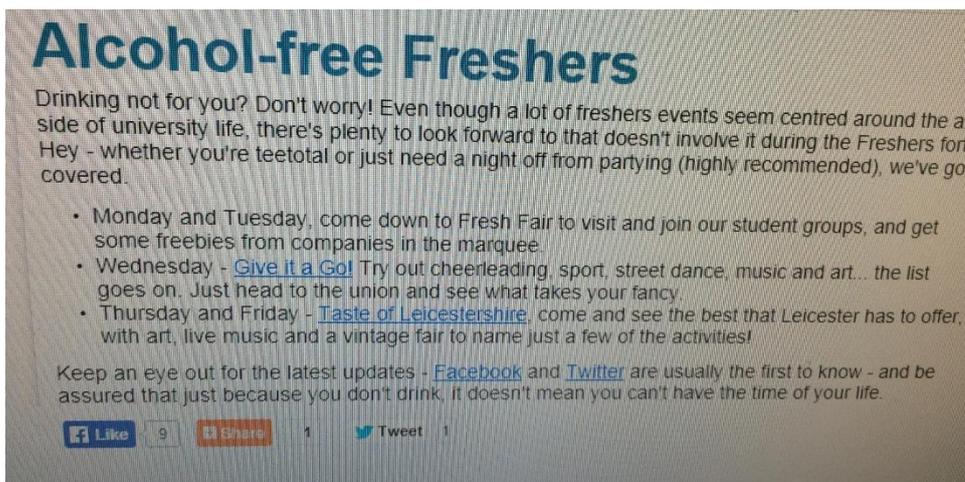


Figure 19 Small amount of room dedicated to alcohol free events

Students might, therefore, have been forgiven for interpreting this as the 'university' making assumptions most students would drink, given the little room dedicated to alcohol free freshers and the un-exciting page it was presented on in comparison. But, this also highlighted how students understood 'university' beyond institutional space and advertising materials (see chapter 5). More recently, the website was altered so students would really have to really hunt for the word clubbing when looking at o2 venue section. However, the specific wording in this section could *still* be

misinterpreted as it states: “It would be rude not to mention the club nights”. There also remained several club nights advertised on a rolling tab on the homepage. Nevertheless, the idea that the university normalised binge drinking before arrival was not actually evidenced in the university promotional material. Including this material enabled a better understanding of how visual material influenced understandings of risk and assumptions of participation before arrival. It helped develop an understanding of the often-literal interpretations made by students. This encouraged a deeper investigation into what “university” actually encompassed. Students previous understanding of student ‘typical’ behaviour, as deemed by the media, might then have influenced their understanding of this material. James recalled the open day he attended:

“When I went to look around the students’ union and I saw what they were offering. Like this is where we have our nights out (hand gesture). Leicester. The actual tour of the o2 being one of the proudest things of the students’ union. This is where we have our nights out, and as much as that was a very small part of the day, it plays in your mind that this is the centre of the union. It is the centre of campus. And it plays in your mind is this going to be the focal point? Seeing it promoted on open days”.

(James, 1<sup>st</sup> year, ILHI)

James was particularly worried about the students’ union being the focal point, because, for James this signified drinking. Although, the tour of the O2 was a very small part of the day, this was what James had remembered, and what had stood out to him. James’ sense of this risk had been further heightened by the O2’s geographical location, central on campus. James described his delicate relationship with alcohol, that he was a non-drinker and that his family would have not tolerated his involvement in this culture. For him, it could never be ‘play’. James may have therefore been hyper-sensitive to the information offered about club nights, as for him, drinking was a big concern. The next section begins to explore the influence of family in what risks students should or should not play with further.

#### 4.3.3 Family Influence on how students should or should not play

The following sub section hints at the penetrability of the bubble even before entrance; that it was influenced by outside. It examines how family members guided ideas of (how to) play before arrival at University. Douglas (1960; 1992; 2013) previously explained how our understanding of risk has primarily been shaped by the socio-cultural groups within which we exist. This has led to collective expectations of how we perceive and react in response to risk. Therefore, a risk hierarchy may have been evident as some risks were unheeded, whilst some may be overplayed, in line with cultural context and community beliefs. Non-adherence to expectations would have placed the individual as at risk. Whilst students' families had not necessarily impacted their choice on whether or not to come to university, family remained influential in how students expected to engage with the university experience (Holloway et al, 2010). In particular, the extent to which some students considered something as risk, or not, and the extent to which they expected to engage with specific risks was heavily influenced by family. Therefore, this sub-section explores family funnelling of how students thought they *should or should not* play, using the example of binge drinking to illustrate this.

Students commented on how excessive drinking was reinforced through family perceptions of university students' behaviour pre-arrival:

“Like my mum. (Long pause) People that aren't at university think we just drink all the time, even though we don't, like, (pause) even my mum says that. You're portrayed like that anyway, so might as well.” (frustrated tone)

(Cat, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, ILHI)

Cat was fairly frustrated by her mother's dismissal and negative impression of studenthood and assumptions about drinking. Her comment demonstrated the iridescent nature of the bubble from the outside, as Cat and her mum anticipated different experiences. However, Cat noted this had encouraged heavy drinking; rather than dissuading her this had triggered her rather fatalist attitude towards drinking. For

another student, John (2<sup>nd</sup> year), his family viewed this drinking culture as more exciting. In particular, his grandparents enjoyed watching foolish student antics on television and he wanted to be able to please his grandparents. He noted how his grandparents viewed students “wildcats”, “getting up to mischief”; “they’d watched all the programmes”. University was imagined as exciting by his grandparents, demonstrating the tantalising and glistening appearance of the bubble from the outside. He did not want to disappoint them. He explained how he “wanted to make freshers good”, so he would have *wild* stories to tell them. For John, binge drinking was seen as exciting and playful, associated with being youthful. Therefore, this risk taking was seen as much more harmless play, expected by university students. Although, both families had illustrated very different opinions of student engagement with alcohol, it was clear, as advocated by Beth (1<sup>st</sup> year, ILHI), binge drinking was “not completely new. It was still like a familiar idea.” Out of all risks mentioned, drinking was the most normalised. Students had expected to participate in binge drinking. For many, this dispelled feelings of risk. It was not only the normalisation of student drinking, but the wider normalisation of drinking within families that diluted feelings of risk. As the following focus group extract implied:

“Parents have alcohol and don’t do drugs.”

(Diane, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, FG)

“Like, you get brought up around drink. Like my mum might have a glass of wine, or my dad will go to the pub.”

(Michelle, 1<sup>st</sup> year, FG)

“Yeah. Hmmm.Yeah.”

(All)

“Like, families have alcohol as a celebration together, but, you don’t get a line of coke out at Christmas dinner!”

(Cat, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, FG)

Everyone laughs

“But, obviously you have a glass of wine,”

(Cat, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, FG)

“If something had gone wrong, like you’ve seen your parents be addicted to something. You might follow in their footsteps or you might think how badly it went and go the other way.”

(Karin, 1<sup>st</sup>, FG)

From the above extract, an obvious hierarchy was evidenced. In fact, the focus groups were useful allowed students to compare and debate experiences of particular risks raised in life history interviews, to see how ‘typical’ these perceptions and experiences were of studenthood. Drinking was normalised so students were less likely to consider it as a risk. It could be deemed what Hubbard (2002) detailed as a ‘riskless risk’, whilst not risk free, the sense of risk is diminished through familiarity, and predictability of performance. However, for most, drugs were not something they had seen their parents involved in, nor were they familiar so automatically they climbed in hierarchy. However, as Katie talked about parent addiction, her perception of risk was different as she was aware of the impact it may have on others’ lives. Nevertheless, what was clear was that parental involvement with particular risks played a big part in how students perceived particular risks and how they anticipated their involvement. Most saw drinking as a lesser risk because it was something which was familiar. They felt the outcomes were more predictable in terms of being sick, hangovers and so they were prepared and understood how to deal with any repercussions. The following conversation from a focus groups illustrated this:

“You know how to deal with another drunk person. We’ve all been there.”

(Harriet, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, FG)

“Yeah get them water, get them outside.”

(Amy, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, FG)

“If their sick, hold their hair. (laughs) You know what to do, its familiar.”

(Samantha, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, FG)

“Yeah whereas other risks, you might be like oooh I’m not sure I can help but I’ll do what I can.”

(Harriet, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, FG)

However, for others there were clear expectations from home that they should not engage with this risk, and drinking was much further up a hierarchical scale. Margaret (1<sup>st</sup> year, ILHI) discussed the pressure from her mum to join a church the moment she reached university. Margaret explained how her mums’ instructions were very clear. She must attend church whilst she was at university, so she was not tempted by these risks. Her mum had links in the area, and would also attend her chosen university church occasionally, to ‘check’ on her. From the quote below, Margaret was curious and eager to ‘play’ and consume what university has to offer. However, she was very aware of the penetrability and transparency of the bubble:

“You know. I wonder what it’s like, I’m curious. I’d like to experience it, just once. But, she would know, you know. You think you’re all wrapped up away from everyone and everything but they can see it. oooo they can see it. She’d smell it (laughs). Instinct. She would know. Knowing my luck, she’d turn up just as I thought about pouring that glass. It’s like jumping out of a plane without a parachute (pulls worried face) It might be fun for the freefall but you know that’s a nasty mess when you hit the bottom. And I love my mum more than the idea of the freefall. My faith, my parachute.”

(Margaret, 1<sup>st</sup> year, ILHI)

The bubble was evermore tantalising to Margaret as she anticipated to be encircled by temptation, but it was always just out of reach. She could see it, she could imagine it, yet she could not enter that bubble. For her, the student bubble was expected to be tormenting, as there were many opportunities within which she could engage, but would not be able to experience fully. These opportunities for play were seen as simply just 'too risky'. Her relationship with her mum and her faith was important to her. She acknowledged the long-standing support and hope the church had provided her and that no *play* was worth the risk of losing this. Whilst she was sad she could not engage fully in what she deemed as a typical university experience she felt the risk was too large as she valued so much the protection she felt from her existing support network. It enabled stability and support which she thought would help her get through her degree. Importantly, there is a clear distinction here between different terminology. For example, Margaret believed she was having a traditional but not typical experience, which pushes a need to understand the complexity and relevance of these terms further.

For Margaret, this 'place of play' was a test. The bubble was glistening and alluring; the bubble was tempting yet she must remain disciplined and not engage in it. The bubble was teasing, full of opportunity to be steered in the wrong direction, and she must avoid it; she must let it float away. It was a test of her faith and her identity as a Christian. As she noted, "being a Christian is all I know, I can't wreck that". Risk here was something to avoid, not necessarily because of the possible outcomes such as hangovers, which she was actually eager to experience, but because the idea of getting caught meant risking losing everything she knew. Whilst drinking was not an option, interestingly, this student sought alternative and subtle ways to 'play' with her identity (some of which arguably much more dangerous, such as starving for 'fashion') and anticipated negotiations with her mum further down the line. She was also very aware of jeopardising her sister's chances of university should she 'mess up'. The expectation of engagement with binge drinking was very different for this student, but it remained clear that family was largely influential in our perceptions of risk before arrival. This extended beyond parents and grandparents as many students also explained the influence of keeping up with the social experiences of siblings, or

pressure from aunties and uncles to focus on the degree. This discussion demonstrates how important the initial life history interviews were in gathering detailed narratives of elements of students' lives that they believed contributed to who they were as students and what it meant to be a university student. They were crucial in getting to know students, building rapport and understanding the background story which impacted their current lives as students.

To summarise this section highlighted how the bubble comes into being through portrayals before arrival which push a particular way of being a student, minimising a sense of risk when behaviour in these anticipated ways. The university was perceived to have a large role in further normalising this behaviour. Family influence demonstrated the penetrability of the bubble as previous ideas of risk seep into the bubble experience.

#### **4.4 Finding suitable entry into the bubble: Leicester as a *safe* risk**

Going to different universities might pose very different encounters with risk-taking. As highlighted by the previous two sections (4.2 and 4.3) the risk to come to university was seen as increasingly inevitable and it was also expected that students would engage in or at least witness particular risks such as binge drinking on arrival. Clayton et al (2009) in their study of experiences at four different institutions noted that different institutions would vary in the experiences they promoted and provided. This is relevant to mention here as students were also very aware of the disparity in experience across institutions. Accordingly, students' expectations varied according to specific universities with some seen as located within riskier cities or themselves with a riskier reputation. It was clear the expectations of scale of risks varied according to university location and the university. The following section explores ways in which students carefully calculated a suitable entry point into the more generic bubble of 'student life'. Leicester was consciously chosen by undergraduates as a way of managing risk which they may encounter and the extent to which they were expected to engage. This section then explores the importance of 'place' in expectations of

experience of risk. In the figure below, there is a flavour of the reasons students chose Leicester:

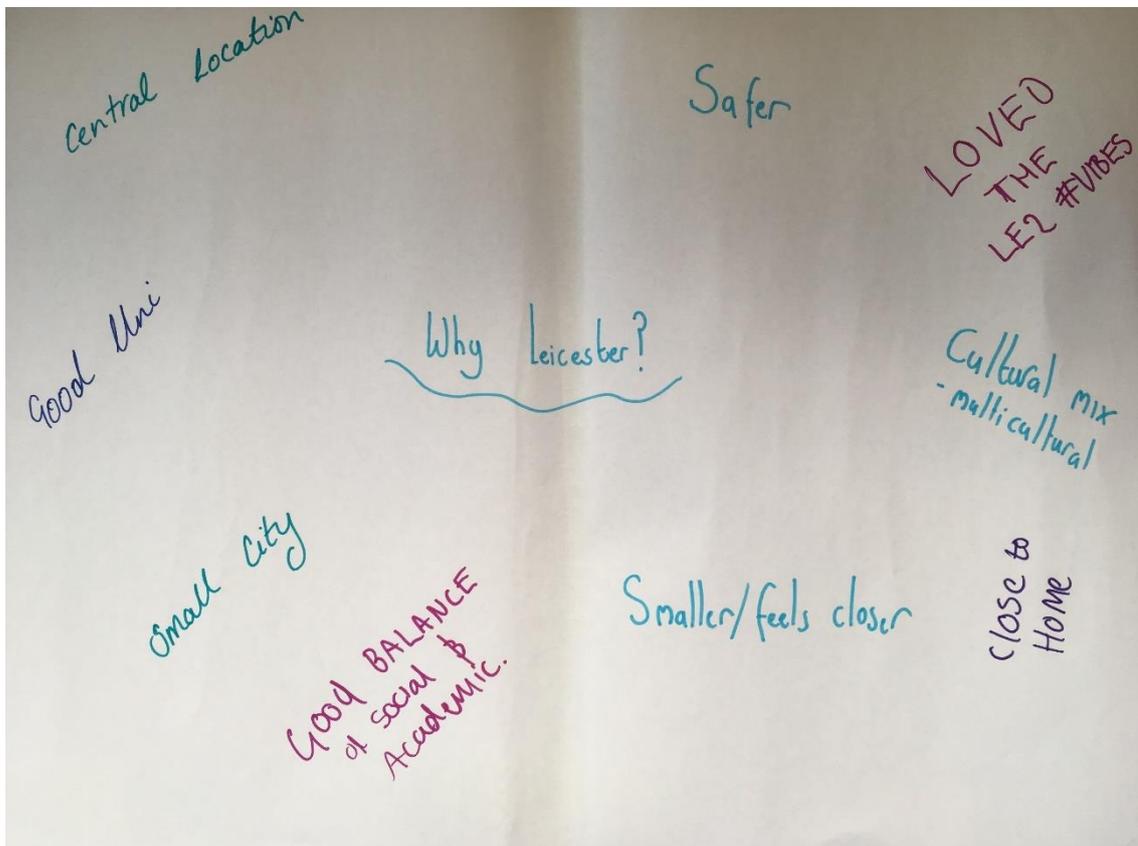


Figure 20 Why Leicester? RLT/TLRS

The RLT/TLRS was useful in producing visual reiterations of themes raised previously, to verify these themes remained important to students years after the first data collection stage.

#### 4.4.1 A sense of home: Proximity and Familiarity

Recent work in human geography has discussed how students may opt to remain living at their current 'home' for the duration of their university studies (Clayton et al, 2009; Holdsworth, 2009a; 2009b). Focusing on traditional students these studies have highlighted reasons for staying at home were to limit financial risks and emotional risks through stability and continuity through the maintenance of existing emotional networks (Clayton et al, 2009; Holdsworth, 2009a; 2009b). This section extends this work, by explaining how traditional students also seek to carefully navigate their

transition in terms of risk, challenging the expectation that traditional students make smooth natural transitions (Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005).

Significantly, a major finding was that rather than students increasingly emphasising the choice to live at, or commutable distance from home, students stressed the need to move away from home. However, choosing Leicester as a small, city which enabled a sense of home and familiarity quickly, but offering enough to 'play'. Moving away guaranteed the 'full experience', which relates back to wanting to experience the 'place of play' (see 4.3), but also as an important stepping stone associated with learning to be an adult (Chatterton, 1999; Kenyon, 1999; Kenyon and Heath, 2001; Hopkins, 2006; Holdsworth, 2009a). Indeed, Helena detailed her disappointment in not flying far enough from the nest:

"I was like Leicester it is, but no I wanted to go away cuz in my mind you know the further away I go away the more it's like I've flown the nest you know".

(Helena, 1st year, ILHI)

Many students wanted to defend their choice, despite not being asked specifically why they chose Leicester. Helena did this through describing the commonality of this desire to "fly the nest" yet at the same time a need to be close to home:

"Most people I know are from quite local to Leicester. Say like, Peterborough, Nottingham, Birmingham. Like, most people are maybe from a hundred-mile radius."

(Helena, 1st year, ILHI)

Although, there was this perceived need to move away from home in order to 'do' student life 'properly' (Holdsworth, 2006), careful consideration had been given to the institution's location and reputation when making university applications, in relation to risk. As students had described their journey of coming to university the majority automatically began to defend their choice, explaining what led them to this midland city as a 'safe space'. Students felt reassured by Leicester as it was described as having

a “sense of home.” For some, this sense of home was about proximity to their current parental home. Helena rationalised her decision to come to Leicester rather than fly further from the nest:

(Sigh) “It’s that nice distance away but I can go back if I want to. (Pause) Or need to. (Pause) Just in case”.

(Helena, 1st year, ILHI)

Helena seemed reluctant to admit, and almost embarrassed to tell me that part of her reasoning for Leicester was that she might need to return to the nest; the reassurance and security offered by the proximity was important to her. This demonstrated some evidence of a ‘culture of precaution’ (Furedi, 2006); students were cautious in the university location they chose, staying closer to home for reasons of stability and support ‘just in case’. Participating in, ‘anticipatory action’ (Anderson, 2010a) students sought to protect against or prepare for risks currently undetermined. This was highlighted by Helena’s articulation of reassurance in being close to home so that if things did go wrong she was close to home, to what she knew and to the emotional support networks she had previously relied on. This supported previous work by Clayton et al (2009), suggesting that movement from the familiar (home) too unfamiliar (university) caused anxiety, so students often managed this by choosing to remain at home where familiar networks can provide stability through studies. Whilst, students in my sample had not opted to stay at home, some had chosen an institution which was close in proximity to these established support networks, and also a location which offered reassurance through similarities with “home”. Here the sense of risk was minimised through reassurance. Risk was the “unknown” (Beck, 1992).

Meanwhile, some had not chosen Leicester for its proximity to home but for its similarities with home, perceived as a *smaller city so less of a culture shock*. This was a way of maintaining some continuity through familiarity. Sophie (below) saw coming to university as a risk, but, also as an opportunity. She was excited by the possibilities of the new social life she could embark on:

“I could have fun safely here, but, with a bit of green and peace. I live in a rural area so I’m not used to being with people all the time, at home. I was a bit worried it was going to be a culture shock living in a city. That was one of the reasons I liked Leicester because it didn’t feel that much like a city. Like I went to see Manchester and thought oh my god this seems a bit much. O M G, it felt so big. It felt worse than London. Leicester felt like there was more green in it, and a bit less of a shock compared to Shropshire. Now I feel a bit weird when I go home. I really love it here, really like it now, which is sad because I love Shropshire, but I need something more exciting now, at least for a while.”

(Sophie, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, ILHI)

Whilst Sophie (above) had been excited to engage with the risk of coming university, and certain, expected, risks on arrival, she had chosen Leicester as a way of managing these feelings of risk, as it enabled an almost a “mimetic” sense of place (Holton, 2015b: p824). The similarities in the landscape made this entry into the bubble less daunting as it minimised change and provided reassurance through this connection with past (home) and future (university) place. There was a sense of familiarity but also something new as Leicester offered a happy medium between rurality and urban life. A further sense of reassurance was offered by the smells from the bakery on the university open day, offering a reminder of home for Sophie:

“Just the smell of Sainsbury’s bakery, a little bit of fuzzy warmth, just reminded me of home. Dad used to work in a bakery.”

(Sophie, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, ILHI)

Place here became important as the feeling of risk was minimised by choosing a place which offered reassurance through similarities or continuities with home and a reminder of the support relationships. Holton (2015a: p22) discussed how limited connections with a place may mean that you have a more fragile sense of place. This could enhance the fragility of the bubble. Leicester was thought through its similarities with home generate a deeper sense of place and belonging. Therefore, minimising the

sense of risk through familiar, as Skidmore (2000) noted that our perception of risk is often weakened through familiarity. But what was interesting was that students weren't basing these choice locations on actual connections with the place in terms of they had visited Leicester before or had family there, like in previous studies but through a feeling. Connection to these places was based on previous experiences of similar spaces rather than their actual experience of this place. Is our perception of risk based on feeling?

Helena and Sophie's desire and/or need for reassurance either through proximity to home or similarity with home showed be evidence of a need for security and stability, because during this period of Beck's (1992) "reflexive modernity", it has been argued we have become anxious individuals and therefore this has generated a need to be cautious (Wilkinson, 2002; Furedi, 2006; Richter et al, 2006; Anderson, 2010a; 2010b). This provides nuance to expectations that students incentivisation for staying local was likely to be for monetary reasons, particularly in light of the tuition fee rise.

It is important to reiterate here the timely nature of this research in taking place during the tuition fee rise to £9000 meaning participants included those paying both current fees (£9000) and older fees (£3000). Students were not choosing to stay close to home or attend somewhere which offered familiarity in terms of envisaged monetary risks or financial burdens implicated by the loans and indeed noted in previous studies but through concerns of a need for emotional support during this transitional period. There was a balance between the excitement of something new and the security of something old, somewhere that was already familiar and so they felt they could fit. A need for balance is continued in the next sub section which discusses students' desire to play but on a safe scale.

#### *4.4.2 Temptation and risk on a smaller scale*

In this sub-section we further see the relevance of Clayton et al's (2009) claim that different universities present different experiences. Students opted for Leicester as a place to engage with some risks over others, but also as means of managing risks on a scale which they feel comfortable with. Many students noted Leicester's size as

important. The size of the city itself was reassuring as it was a place where any risks encountered were expected to be on a much smaller scale. Therefore, risks seemed easier to negotiate, but, at the same time Leicester was not so small that it did not offer the opportunity to take these risks. As participants commented:

“I think Leicester is up there with the big cities. It’s safe, diverse and offers so much.”

(Steve, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, ILHI)

“Leicester is small.... but not too small.”

(Beth, 1<sup>st</sup> year, ILHI)

Steve linked Leicester’s size to temptation to engage in risky behaviour. He explained his hope to strike a balance between academic studies and the anticipated social experience at university. For Steve, Leicester was a conscious decision to limit the temptation of ‘going out’. He believed that by choosing Leicester he would be able to manage risks associated with drinking in particular. He linked drinking with casual encounters, spending more than he could afford and possibly risking the overall achievement of gaining his degree. As the conversation continued, it became clear that Leicester offered opportunity to engage in drinking and associated risks with the expectation of a better nightlife than universities such as Warwick. However, it did so on a smaller scale than Nottingham or Manchester, or Leeds, meaning the temptation to engage in this risk as frequently would be less. Therefore, his degree attainment would not be threatened.

“Yeah, it’s one of the main reasons why I chose Leicester, umm, right. I put down Manchester, Nottingham, Leeds. They’re 3 major cities, big cities. And I can’t really say no to a night out. And I know that Leeds that is a big drinking city. I should say uni. And one of my sister’s friends went to Manchester, heard it was a big drinking place. I chose Nottingham for a bit of a weird reason coz I heard it has more girls to men! (laughs) .... don’t think it would be that great

risk wise. I'd presume I'd be out more and spending more. And as I said at the start, I can't risk that. I've come to value education and what it can do for you. I don't really want to be out all the time, umm, and I know the temptation to go out in those places would be huge. But I presume, when you compare it (Leicester) to Oceania in Nottingham, or the massive clubs in Manchester, I presume it's not gonna be quite as good as those places. And that's good in the education sense. And then who knows what could have happened if I'd gone to those universities. I could have dropped out. I could have failed. I dunno. (pauses) You never know what could happen: could get in fights, could get knocked out (nervously laughs). There's so many variables that could change. And you know Leicester, it's not as bad as Warwick in terms of, nightlife. Coventry, obviously! And I hear places like Buckinghamshire and Essex, they're quiet as. They're not as in your face or adventurous as say, Sheffield. So, (pauses), yeah, I don't think it would have been as beneficial to me. Coz at the end of the day, everyone comes to uni to learn. No one goes to uni and thinks, I'm gonna spend 3 years partying. If they do that, then (long pause) I can't imagine many people would do that, but umm. And it's a good uni. (pause) Leicester was the safe choice. (Short Pause) Not too much or too little."

(Steve, 2nd year, ILHI)

Indeed, from Steve's quote risk was perceived as a definite thing as articulated by Beck (1992); risk was something that we can and should control. Steve's reasoning reflected theories of individualisation, that we are self-governing individuals with responsibility to be informed, and to manage and navigate risks accordingly. Risk was acknowledged as something to embrace whilst also implementing a level of self-control. There was an expectation to indulge to excess but only with reasonable frequency so as not to cross the line between normal and abnormal (Reith, 2005: p227-245). Further to this, Reith (2005: p227-245) implied this was predictable in today's consumer culture, as we are captured in an indeterminate state between inherited traits of modernity's self-control, and late modernity's preoccupation with

pleasure seeking and personal gratification. Indeed, Steve's statement echoes this liminality, also highlighting the relevance of the bubble as a transitional space.

Steve demonstrated efforts of self-governance of risk. The life history interviews were particularly useful in this instance, in building relationships, getting to know participants through their decision processes. By enabling them to explore topics in their own words, for durations of their choice, Steve was given the space to verbally express how he weighed up his choice rather than simply offering a brief summary. By choosing Leicester, he had made a conscious decision to limit his exposure in both frequency and scale to drinking as a risk, but, also risks which might occur as a consequence, such as spending too much, one night stands and so on, should he not implement this self-control. In this sense, his choosing of Leicester could be considered a risk ritual. Moore and Burgess (2011) described these risk rituals as practices we may put in place or things we might do to minimise the possible implications of risks.

They did not suggest that people have a desire to avoid risks but instead take precautionary measures to make them feel less risky. They explained how some of these rituals such as covering your drink to prevent spiking might be influenced by the media. Indeed, it could be argued that Steve's choice of Leicester was influenced by the marketing material which conjured up this particular image of Leicester as balanced. On the one hand Steve admitted he was lured in by "24-hour party culture". On the other hand he demonstrated Anderson's (2010a; 2010b) discussion of preparedness through anticipating risks which may be associated with this should he be exposed to excess continuously without restraint. This further supports ideas of a culture of precaution. (Furedi, 2006; Richter et al, 2006). Steve anticipated drinking as a risk, but a future risk which might interrupt his imagined future future of getting a degree. Therefore he chose Leicester as a calculated risk to minimise the impact of risks he expected to encounter at university. Beth supported this as she discussed not only the reduction in temptation that Steve noted but also the difference in types of risk that students' were expected to engage in at different universities. In particular, she made reference to Leeds' reputation for drug taking. She liked that at Leicester

she has the opportunity to engage in this risky behaviour if she choose as a “voluntary risk” but she will not feel obliged:

“Leeds is like this massive drug thing going on. Yeah there was a bit in their local newspaper about it how its turned into party drug capital ye laughs and things like md and shit and everyone takes it. You go to a tamer uni and you’re not gonna be doing it I guess or its gonna be harder for you to do that. .... You can take the risks but there not so in your face.”

(Beth, 1<sup>st</sup> year, ILHI)

There was further recognition here of the balanced reputation of Leicester. Leicester was chosen as it provided opportunity to consume but not too uncontrollable or to excess as discussed earlier this demonstrates how young people are now caught between a desire to consume but also a need to control their risk taking (Reith, 2005: p227-249).

There was an element of striking a balance as students discuss the need or desire to indulge in these risks as supported by literature discussing risk taking for pleasure (Braun,2003; Lyng, 2005). In contrast, there was also a need to advert or protect themselves against risk, controlling the scale and types of risk they expected to encounter, to an extent by choosing Leicester as a ‘safe space’. Further to this, what was interesting about Steve’s attempt at self-governance was that it was based on his feeling rather than actual hard facts. In fact, the different drinking cultures promoted by different universities had become a proxy for the size of the city.

In summary, this section explored the expectation of risk and scale, how students consciously chose Leicester as a safer place, a smaller scale. They could experience risks to an extent, frequency and scale they thought was safe. However, careful calculation in this section seems to be based on feelings of reassurance not necessarily ‘hard facts’.

#### 4.5 Conclusion

Firstly, the chapter addressed the tantalising nature of university, as it explored how the university was perceived to offer the promise of employment and adulthood on completion. Although, university might still be perceived as a risk the transparency (or so perceived) of the bubble means the risk was largely predictable. The mass transition of students to higher education, albeit with different starting points and diverse experiences of this transition, created a sense of collectivity that minimised risk. University was normalised as a slow track transition through which students hope to postpone or prevent precarious employment. Therefore, tuition fees became more of an inevitable risk. Nevertheless, risk taking was clearly seen as necessary, in order to progress. Some students noted that the need for a degree superseded any worry over financial burdens of increased tuition fees. Students' views to some extent, echoed neo-liberal ideas in that it was individuals' responsibility to make themselves socially mobile. But, there was also an expectation from students that they would and should be supported, as they were ushered into this prescribed pathway, and angered at the government for not offering alternatives.

Secondly, the chapter addressed the tantalising bubble as a place of play, with alluring new opportunities to take risks. It examined how bubbles may have come into being according to how the university experience was sold and commodified. And consequentially, how students 'expect' to experience risk. Using binge drinking as an example, the chapter explained how some risks are not only normalised by the media, but also how this normalisation – rather than triggering panic – actually reproduced bubbles of play. It did this through the anticipation of unity in experience, as students are presented as marginalised, othered group *together*. The chapter highlighted how these assumed freedoms may, or may not, be restricted by norms placed on the student experience, but also by family. In doing so, the chapter demonstrated how norms might alert attention to glistening elements of the bubble such as play yet, distract our attention from other risks, such as academic risks. It also discussed how these might be just out of research for some students, as the transparency and permeability of the bubble was demonstrated through Margaret's example.

Whilst there has been interest in the impact of these changes on HE (Chatterton, 2010; Holton and Riley, 2013; 2014) there is less which draws these literatures together to consider how these changes impact the everyday experiences of 'traditional' university students. There is a wealth of literature which details the diversity of experience in non-traditional student populations (For example, Archer and Hutchings, 2000; Reay et al, 2003; Reay et al, 2009; 2010) and which details the 'student experience' (Chatterton, 1999; Holdsworth, 2006; Holdsworth, 2009a). But, that which discusses traditional students is still dominated by stereotypical images (Chatterton, 1999; 2010; Holloway et al, 2010). Unsurprisingly, this discourse preoccupied intending students' imaginations. This chapter has drawn attention to how this impacted students' perceptions and experiences of risk as a consequence.

Thirdly, the chapter having alerted us to these two main ways in which the bubble might be tantalising demonstrated how students sought to manage and negotiate these expectations of risk before arrival, demonstrating their choice in how they consume. Making a university application has long been considered a "risky process" (Archer and Hutchings, 2000: p560). However, whilst there is a large volume of non-traditional student accounts positioning their transition to university as complicated and more of a 'risk', traditional students are expected to have an easy/uncomplicated transition. The chapter closed with a consideration of how students sought to find suitable entry into the bubble choosing Leicester to manage their exposure to and engagement with expected risks. The chapter highlighted how students were caught between the traditional need to practice restraint, in combination with, the need to embrace risks. Indeed, Leicester was presented as a safer space in which to experiment with risk in comparison to other institutions. The importance of place was evidenced as the balancing of risks were articulated spatially, through proximity, safety, smallness, familiarity offered by Leicester. Students' choice of place for university was carefully calculated according to perceptions of risks. Place was crucial to students' perception and experience of risk. The evidence presented suggests that traditional students also sought ways in which to make their transition less risky. Leicester as a place played a key part in this.

Students opted for Leicester for reasons such as proximity to the parental home, so its geographical location was important. The physical landscape of Leicester was also important, as similarities with home such as green space operated as reassurance and reminders of home. Atmospheric reminders of home, such as the smell of a bakery nearby the university, also served the purpose of reassurance. The size of Leicester was important, as students noted a feeling of compactness, therefore, expected that the city would therefore be easier to navigate, and get to know, again minimising a feeling of risk. For these reasons, Leicester was positioned as a safer space within which to experiment with risk.

In addition, Leicester's perceived size, became a proxy for perceived exposure to risk. Students carefully anticipated risks at university, therefore, choosing Leicester as it enabled engagement but on a manageable scale. Leicester was seen as offering temptation and opportunity to enjoy social risks but at a scale that would not detract from the main purpose of obtaining a degree. The University itself was also important here as students noted the balanced reputation of Leicester meant that students had an opportunity to engage in risky behaviour, but with limited temptation when compared to other universities. This is where the next chapter begins, considering University as a safe space within which to take risks.

## **5 Experiencing the University Bubble: Simultaneous protection against and production of risk**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The main contribution of this chapter is to critically analyse how the film of the bubble is created through both relational and spatial boundaries, albeit pliable and permeable. Whilst this film provides a layer of protection against risk, it also facilitates generation of risk within it. I argue that within these relational and spatial boundaries affective atmospheres of risk are produced and re-produced, through anticipation of and consequent repetitive performance of certain behaviours.

Firstly, the chapter extends existing debates referring to the socio-spatial separation of students in cities (Chatterton, 1999; 2010; Smith and Holt, 2007; Sage et al, 2012a; 2012b), prioritising student voice on their experience of these areas, rather than the voice of local residents, businesses and so on discussing the impact of students (Chatterton; 2000; Chatterton and Hollands, 2003; Allinson 2006; Hubbard, 2008; Munro and livingstone 2011). It draws on and contributes to previous reference to first years limited mobility as a bubble (Holton, 2015: p25), alongside understandings of a bubble as a space providing “safety and protection” (Browne & Bakshi, 2013: p256; 2016), through separation and/or clustering of “people like us” (Butler, 2003: p2485), often with consumption opportunities aimed at a specific group to outline how spatial and relational boundaries form. In thinking about, this spatial separation we see how places for risk taking are generated and risk within these encouraged and/or expected. This minimises a sense of risk, as specific types of risk become anticipated in these ‘protected’ areas.

Secondly, the chapter explains how the geographical segregation of students in cities builds relational boundaries of the bubble as intensification of student populations in these areas increased feelings of ‘us’ and ‘them’. This builds on Douglas’ (1969; 1992; 2013) ideas of ‘other’ as presenting risk, and the need to preserve boundaries between us and them. Students felt reassured in their risk taking through collective

participation and expectation of shared values of student culture strengthening the protective film of the bubble.

Thirdly, the chapter responds to Lupton's (2012; 2013b) calls for further consideration of the emotional elements of risk, which she uses as a blanket expression to include affect, emotion, and feeling, by discussing how these spatial and relational boundaries, albeit constantly redefined, stimulate affective atmospheres of risk. To do so, the chapter uses Anderson's (2009) work to extend Fainstein and Judd's (1999: p266) depiction of a 'kinetic' bubble which 'insists' on participation.

## 5.2 The protective film of the bubble: 'Parent like' protection and the assumed responsibility of the university

This section provides the beginnings of a discussion on how the protective film of the bubble comes into being. It details students' awareness of their position as 'consumers' in universities and how this presented an expectation that university is a 'safe' space which would and should protect them from risk, particularly risks they believed they had been 'sold', by portrayals of 'the student experience' before arrival. Undergraduates associated a wide range of risks from stress, to binge drinking to changing eating habits, to simply making their way to and from campus with university life. As students began to talk through these different risks there was an emerging theme of reassurance in their assumptions that the university had a responsibility to "look after them". For Amy, this assumption of university as being 'safe' began before arrival at university:

"I think in university there is a kind of hierarchy of staff and students. There is an *expectation from students that they will be looked after*. Especially, (pause) because in the prospectus and everything there are loads of help. Like, the university has nightline and *advertises that*. Like, if you need help come to us and we'll help you get a house. The *selling point* is that the university is there to guide and help you through it. Therefore, that is a safer environment."

(Amy, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, ILHI, emphasis added)

It was a promise laid out by the university, in the prospectus, or so perceived by students. Indeed, Amy, highlights it was a 'selling point'. This links to and extends the argument that some students believed the university was promised as a place of play before arrival (see chapter 4). However, rifling through the prospectus (University of Leicester, 2015) Amy referenced, there was no evidence of these 'promises' made by the university. In fact, there was only a brief description of each support service offered by the university. However, it did note, "you can be assured that there is support and advice on hand if you need it" (University of Leicester, 2015: p59). There was also a speech bubble "looking after you" (University of Leicester, 2015: p39), which detailed the role of residential advisers "to promote a sense of community" to "maintain the safety, health and wellbeing of all students" (University of Leicester, 2015: p39).

The distorting nature of the bubble was evidenced as students could not see clearly from the outside exactly what support would be offered but made assumptions due to the 'shiny' advertisement of university as a place of play. Students seemed to have taken this information literally, in order to absolve themselves of certain responsibilities; the prospectus is therefore misleading, or, students have misinterpreted the information offered. Students were reassured that 'support' was available should they need it. Sold on this initial promise, students' believed the university was prepared for students' risky behaviours of all kinds and would support them accordingly. This was an interesting point in relation to many university's current panics about Competition and Market Authorities legislation and what they say about course content in their prospectuses and websites.

Whilst students hinted at expectations of university providing protection in earlier interviews, the focus groups offered insight into *why* students thought this, as they explored this idea in more detail through group discussion. The focus group discussions confirmed that this was a majority feeling but for slightly different reasons. In a focus group, Amy, Harriet and Samantha explained why they thought they were more exposed to risks at university, but, also were reassured that the university was a "safer environment" within which to engage or encounter risk.

“University is safer environment. Like, the university have an *obligation* and they’d have to provide answers”!

(Amy, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, FG, emphasis added)

“Yeah, it’s *more set up to deal with risk*. It’s *more protected*”.

(Harriet, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, FG, emphasis added)

“Isn’t there even that mini bus”?

(Amy, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, FG)

“The safety bus? I’ve seen it once this term”!

(Samantha, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, FG)

“It’s cheap to get a taxi too and they’re outside”.

(Amy, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, FG)

Indeed, there was an increased expectation of the university’s responsibility to act in a ‘parent-like’ manner to students, with some students referring to university’s role as “mum and dad”. Whilst, Universities do not have any legal responsibility as parents would to children, either in loco parentis or otherwise, since all students are over 18 (although they do have a duty of care), students’ expectations were extremely high and they expected to be looked after. Broader issues of the commodification of university were evident as students’ claimed ‘that’s what we pay for’. This demonstrated students’ awareness of their position as ‘consumers’ and how to use this in their favour. Although, as noted in the previous chapter that students had not been put off coming to university by the tuition fees, students were more aware of gaining ‘value for money’. It was clear in conversations that students did expect more from their experience; in this case in terms of protection. That in fact, Leicester had marketed itself to them in this way initially.

Whilst the bubble in part was created through the normalisation of certain risks by the university and its marketing as a 'place of play', (or so perceived by students, see chapter 4), students' assumed that once inside they could participate safely as the bubble was reinforced through the protective film of the university. The iridescent nature of the bubble is evidenced here through the conflicting demands placed on the university (Shore, 2010), becoming much more than a place of education. Students expected the university to protect them from the risks that they were only earlier expecting the university to provide them with the opportunity to engage in. The characteristics of the bubble were determined by students' position in their transition but can be overlapping and contradictory. This was further validated as students required clarity on exactly what services or support existed, not as a consequence of apathy but confidence in and reassured by assumptions that appropriate resources and services would be available should they need it.

There was evidence not that trust offered immunity from the risk but that it helped manage feelings of anxiety (Giddens, 1990: p35; Lupton, 2013a: p105). Most students had faith in university as experts that would have assessed the risk and made adequate provisions to deal with outcomes. Students had undoubted faith not only in the university's promise but also in their responsibility to protect and their ability to predict and be prepared for possible outcomes of students' risky behaviour. Consequentially, for many students, this constructed university as a place that encouraged them to take risks they might not normally, as they felt protected within the film of the bubble. Within a focus group, Samantha and Harriet (2<sup>nd</sup> years) told me:

"Like, you can get free condoms from the point. There's like that massive fish bowl! They just expect it"!

(Samantha, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, FG)

"If something bad did happen to you when you went back with someone, if you told the union and you knew their name, they would crack down.

Whereas, if it was a stranger ok yeah, you could tell the police, but, unless it

was really serious, the police couldn't do anything. But, it could be less serious here and the union would still take action".

(Harriet, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, FG)

"Yeah, they'd be like omg we can't have this! I was walking upstairs and they've got the clinic or something. The uni is prepared. They're prepared for anything! It's like they're expecting people to go home with each other".

(Samantha, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, FG)

"It's like damage control. All uni is set up to cushion your blow".

(Harriet, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, FG)

From this conversation, it was evident how university is regarded as a safe space in which to experiment with risks (such as one night stands mentioned above). The bubble acted, in this instance, as a 'spring' cushion; the bubble not only softened the 'blow' of risks, catching students as they fall, but enabled them to bounce back to safety. Students were reassured that the university would intervene and look after them should the outcome be unexpected or unwanted. This reassurance minimised the feeling of risk, through reliance and assurance in the university services ability to provide for their needs, no matter what these might be. There was an assumption that the university was prepared for all possible student behaviours and equipped to deal with consequences or intervene as appropriate in order to protect its students. But, this conversation also demonstrated students' vague knowledge of what support was available in reality as Samantha notes 'or something' or what 'action' they expect the university to take.

Students implied they had no need or desire to know more about the services available but simply seemed reassured by their assumptions that there would be support if they needed it. This, in some way, seemed to encourage the risky behaviour of one night stands as students lived up to an expected student identity and the feeling of risk was minimised as a result of the reassurance provided by the faith in the

university services. There were unspoken hints here about an affective atmosphere of risk generated by expectations of behaviour and protection.

Furthermore, as Samantha and Harriet made comparisons with incidents outside university and the police it was clear they believed they were more protected in the university bubble than outside the domains of its protective film. Risk was more than just the action, taking on new meanings as that apparently 'risky' behaviour presents different feelings in different spaces. These ideas of increased protection within the university bubble when compared to the outside were echoed in relation to many different risks, not just 'social' risks, students felt they were exposed to and experiencing at university. Stress was a risk of greatest concern for students of all years. For example, the following focus group's extract highlights how stress was viewed as inevitable risks at university:

"But at university at least you do have, like, *they know* everyone's gonna be stressed. Whether you seek them out or not, there are things there to help you with your stress. Whereas, when you're in the real world you know to get yourself onto a mental health NHS clinic, it's, like, almost impossible. But, at uni it's very easy to go to welfare. Even if you don't go through the whole process. There are people there to kind of relieve your stress, 'cuz they expect you to be stressed. They know that so many people are gonna get depressed and suffer from anxiety and things. And they're kind of set up and have a responsibility to deal with it. Whereas when you're not at university, it's like you against the world, really."

(Natalie, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, FG)

Themes of reassurance and university as a safe space re-emerged in the extract above as Natalie makes comparisons with outside the university bubble. In her differentiation, she stated how in the 'real world' she expected to be less protected and alone when experiencing mental health risks such as stress, anxiety, depression and so on. From her description, which, synthesised the thoughts of the group, she felt safeguarded at the university. This hinted at students' understanding of their position,

holding liminal status, in some way vulnerable and in need of protection, child-like, reiterating suggestions of university as 'parent', as students are not yet fully responsible adults. Instead, by popular perception, students' articulations of their position, resonated with characteristics of 'emerging adults'. In this case, relating to Natalie's statement, experiencing and negotiating a time of emotional instability and in some way an expectation of fragility. Although students felt they may be more exposed to risks, they also felt that there was more support available to help them through these experiences. Therefore, in addition to risks surrounding alcohol or sex (as noted above), there was a belief that the university had a responsibility for its students' mental as well as physical wellbeing. On the one hand, students felt that they may be more exposed to risks such as stress due to a "culmination of things changing" (Natalie, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, FG), but that in fact, it was the safest place in which to be involved in or exposed to risk.

Despite recognition of the availability of welfare services, conversations with students highlighted that they were unlikely to use them, but, just knowing they were there was enough reassurance. This suggests that students were almost choosing to be oblivious or to ignore the possible consequences of their risky behaviour as the university was prepared for them. The university anticipated students' risk taking therefore was prepared for any unsettling consequences (Anderson, 2010a). The bubble was enabling them to transfer responsibility to the university. They believed they were paying for this service. This explained how paying for higher education as a service and an experience, produced certain ways of understanding 'being a student' and the ways in which students related to the university. The commodification of studenthood then not only leads to an expectation of opportunities to take risks as part of the university experience but also an increasing expectation that the university will be prepared for and take anticipatory action to prevent unwanted consequences. The shared responsibility for the outcomes of the risk taking meant that students felt safer to take the risks in the first place as they were less fearful of the possibility of negative outcomes as the university "had their back" (Natalie, 2<sup>nd</sup> year). This presentation of the film of the bubble providing protection was extended in the next section to consider how the social-spatial segregation of students strengthens this film

protecting against risk but also through anticipation of behaviour reproduces spaces of risk.

### 5.3 Spatial boundaries: Providing safe space to take risk

This section combines several literatures to explain the spatial boundaries of the bubble. In doing so, it draws on and extends current ideas of “exclusive geographies” (Chatterton, 1999: p117) of residential and social segregation of studenthood, as devoted to student demands and desires (Chatterton, 2010; Smith and Hubbard, 2014). As highlighted in Chapter 2, whilst segregation of students in cities is not new, these areas have become more pronounced as the tireless commodification of studenthood, has only intensified and extended these areas, targeting both students’ social and residential markets (Smith and Holt, 2007; Chatterton, 2010; Smith and Hubbard, 2014: p99). Through an exploration of how a bubble as a separated space not only generates feeling of “safety and protection” (Browne and Bakshi, 2013: p256; 2016), this section highlights how a normalisation of behaviour within these spaces, reinforced participation in “riskless risk” (Hubbard, 2002). It describes how students practice self-policing of these boundaries and expect protection within these ‘safe and supportive’ (Smith and Holt, 2007: p151; Smith and Hubbard, 2014) spaces, as the responsibility of ‘the university’ was expected to extend to fill these fuzzy boundaries. Although aware of the transparency of the bubble, students’ risky behaviour was reinforced as they see this space as ‘theirs’, heightening participation of risk within these boundaries, but regulating ‘student’ behaviour outside.

#### 5.3.1 *Sticking to the bubble: expectations of behaviour within spatial boundaries*

The social and spatial segregation of students almost automatically created borders to ‘the student experience’, as students’, like in Holton’s (2015: 25-26) study, recognised their limited interaction with much of the city. Holton (2015: p25), albeit fleetingly, touched upon university as a bubble, when discussing students sense of space. Undergraduates in his study described a sense of safety as their movements in first year were easily confined to the ‘student bubble’ of halls and the university; their interaction with the rest of the city was minimal. However, unlike Holton’s study, this

bubbliness was not limited to their first year experience but used as more than a metaphor, to explain lived experience university life as a whole, which helps highlight how the spatial boundaries form and consequentially impacted their perception and experience of risk. In a RLT/TLRS students explained:

“You stick to the bubble, really.”

(John, 2<sup>nd</sup>, ILHI)

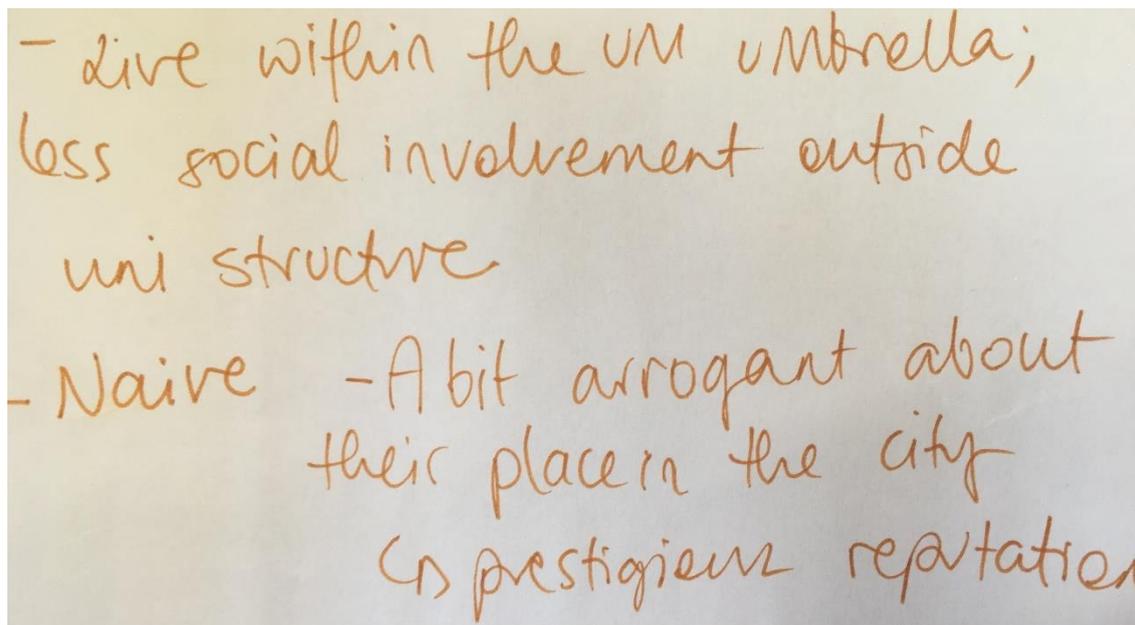


Figure 21 Live within the uni umbrella, RLT/TLRS (Callum's group, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, RLT/TLR)

When asked to unpack what was meant by *university structure*, these students noted many places occupied by students, therefore, seen as part of “studenthood” within the city, where particular behaviours of student life were visible. In this instance, the RLT/TLRS helped students discuss their ideas together, without the researcher present, before explaining in more detail what they meant. Within these intensified student-centric areas, a feeling of reassurance and collective belonging was felt as university *feels* disconnected from the *real* world. Hugh's description of his time in shared residential accommodation illustrated how a combination of factors in one place minimised a sense of risk, but heightened chances of participation:

“I don’t think people really think about it or take notice of all the possibilities (reference to negative consequences of risk taking). You forget that you’re in the real world. I do think it’s like a *protected bubble*. We put ourselves at a lot of *risk* because of that because you’re not aware of anything outside.”

(Hugh, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, ILHI, emphasis added)

Moreover, Hugh implies ‘university’ enabled risk taking as students were able to *forget*, and ignore the outside world, living in an “illusionary” world (Fainstein and Judd, 1999: p266), “different from the outside world”, created by the bubble (Browne and Bakshi, 2013: p256). The literal geographical separation from reality perceived here, permitted students to discount concerns, which may have applied to their risk taking ordinarily. They were able to live in the moment without consideration beyond university life, as they feel protected by the bubble. Student centric spaces were considered important in building a collective student identity. Indeed, in Leicester, emergence and intensification of student culture was further emboldened by the physical location of the University of Leicester student ‘village’, as students noted that as Oadby halls felt physically cut off from the outside world. The isolation of the student village generated a student-only community, it and further reinforced an anticipated idealised studenthood. Within this space, it was assumed normal rules and regulations did not apply. But, a particular way of being a student was expected in this student dominant space (Chatterton, 1999; Holton, 2013; Holdsworth, 2006). For example:

“You’ll see a lot of people socialising, being quite happy, people getting involved in different things. A lot of messing about. Taking cones and putting them on other people’s cars. People came into our kitchen and sprayed shaving foam. Seen a few people here doing Harlem Shake. Make videos, drinking games, ring of fire, pre drinks. Sad to say, but some people getting so drunk they can’t physically function.”

(Marie, 1st year, ILHI)

The above quote was representative of many alluding to typical student images in explanations of expected behaviours in these student centric areas. This also begins to highlight a further need for distinction between understandings of traditional and/or typical studenthood. However, there was a sense of personal distancing from the extremes of culture as Marie was “sad to say” about overindulgence in alcohol consumption.

### *5.3.2 Clearly defined boundaries and place specific risks*

Some students described how “campus feels very safe.” In contradiction to the fuzziness implied by most students that ‘the university’ included many other spaces, the protective boundaries in discussion of the campus, were more clearly defined. For instance:

“Because we’re on campus and all uni buildings, or at least the majority, are kinda together, it does feel that much safer. When you’re on campus that’s definitely uni and you know even if it’s not as controlled (normal rules and regulations do not apply), you definitely feel. (Pause) Like its lit up, and there are people around, like security are around and things. So I think on campus there are like the measures in place to make you not feel at risk, because it is a campus and it makes you feel that much more sheltered.”

(Damien, Year 2, ILHI)

Damien’s quote gave a sense of how physical features of the campus landscape enveloped a bounded, fixed space that was ‘the university’, sectioned off and “sheltered” from the real world. This physical separation from the outside world was one way in which undergraduates implied university was a bubble, not just as an imaginary frame, but separated sometimes in a more tangible fencing through physical buildings. In this instance, there was a definite space which the bubble occupied. The boundaries were more literal here, as the buildings reinforced the film of the bubble. The campus seemed to create a sense of invincibility against risk as the bubble provided immunity, as there was once again an assumption that university was

purposefully built and set up to protect them, meaning that students did not have to consider responsibility for their own risky taking behaviour. For Damien, being on campus immediately re-defined the meaning of risk as students could make a real distinction between university space and associated acceptable behaviours and non-university space. Similarly, in the way Cresswell (1996) noted how 'place' sets clear boundaries for what kind of identity is acceptable, students saw campus as a 'place' where performance of 'traditional' student behaviours (Chatterton, 1999; Holdsworth, 2006; Holton, 2013) were expected. In fact, sometimes, students spoke about risk in simple, place specific ways, compartmentalising risks to certain places, according to these expectations. Different streams of risky behaviour were anticipated in different spaces, within the bubble. For instance, students commented:

"You would not expect someone to be dancing drunk in the library. Or someone stressing over an essay in the O2 students' union".

(Nathan, 1<sup>st</sup>, ILHI)

"You learn to expect certain risks in certain spaces. The O2: drinking. The library: stress. The SU: junk food, procrastination. Student house: drugs, depression, sti's, friendships."

(Gemma, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, FG)

This minimised feeling of risk as they were anticipated. In this instance, risk was easily identifiable as a specific behaviour which "goes on within strictly defined parameters" (Lyng, 2005: p233). Certain behaviours were expected within institutionalised 'safe and supportive' space (Smith and Holt, 2007: p151). These risks were expected and accepted in these spaces as normal. Students were prepared for their exposure or involvement in these risks in these dedicated places, so the feeling of risk was less, as it was anticipated. In contrast to previous work (Anderson, 2010a; 2010b; Amoore, 2013), rather than this anticipation triggering action in the present, as students preempt possibilities, the perceived predictability of these events in certain spaces, led students to believe they were already prepared. Therefore, no action was necessary,

as the anticipation of events presented reassurance rather than insecurity. Therefore, expectation was that protection to minimise negative consequences would be provided by the university, as they too anticipated place specific risks.

Indeed, the importance of place was obvious and had clear boundaries as students discussed their walk to and from university as unsafe as this shared space was open to strangers (as well as students) and felt unprotected. This highlighted the fragility of the bubble, as students crossed in and out of this protected space as part of their everyday studenthood. What was interesting here was that despite recognition of Leicester as an open campus, meaning actually non-students may occupy it at any time, reinforcing the point about fragility, students felt safe as it was student designated and dominated space. There was an assumption that 'the university' would deal with unsafe and unwanted beings in this space:

“I know people can technically wonder on and off campus. (Pause) But, that’s what security’s for...”

(Nathan, 1<sup>st</sup>, ILHI)

This highlighted the deflection of responsibility, that the university would keep students safe. For most, this extended beyond the campus.

### 5.3.3 *The fuzziness of the spatial boundaries, materiality and monitoring*

The space which the protective film encircled demonstrated the fuzziness of the bubble’s boundaries, as students did not make a clear cut distinction between university owned space and non-university owned space. For most, the spatial boundaries, encompassed all areas encountered as part of ‘the student experience’, all loosely labelled ‘the university’. The film stretched beyond the university campus itself and included university halls, clubs on student nights, places with student deals on, and so on. This reiterated the fuzzy boundaries between institutions and their outsides. Consequentially, assumptions of protection by ‘the university’ often spread

to areas 'the university' had little or no control over. For example, Sophie begins a conversation in a focus group about drinking in the O2 venue on campus:

"I think I feel safer out than at a house party."

(Sophie, 2<sup>nd</sup>, FG)

"Yeah, I do. Yeah, at a house party if something goes wrong (eye roll). Like here you just go and get a bouncer. You know, if somethings kicking off. But if its at a house party, what do you do? Like ring the police or something?"

(Samantha, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, FG)

People do crazy things at house parties!

(Sophie, 2<sup>nd</sup>, FG)

"I think cuz when your out, you see the bouncers straight away. And yeah, people do silly things in clubs, but if they do, the bouncers are there that's guna end pretty quickly. The crowd knows that. But if you're at a house party you *don't have bouncers walking around protecting* you or whatever. People think just cuz you're in a house you can do whatever."

(Samantha, 2<sup>nd</sup>, FG, emphasis added)

"*Theres so much stuff you can break in a house too.* Like at uni (referring to o2), its just a room that's dark but in a house there's so much you can break. And also you can take drugs in house parties and there's *not guna be checking* on you, so that can lead to more serious things".

(Amy, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, FG, emphasis added)

"Yeah 'cus *uni's set up* for a night out isn't it".

(Samantha, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, FG, emphasis added)

“You get really *familiar* with the same venues the same bouncers the same people.”

(Harriet, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, FG, emphasis added)

“You even get used to where the taxis are. Like you know if you come out of uni or republic there always just there”.

(Samantha, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, FG)

“Sometimes we’re quite lucky at uni. Safety is put in place that we don’t even notice. *We’re safer*. Like if the bouncers weren’t *here we might have had a problem in the club, but we’ve never had to experience it because the bouncers are always there*”.

(Amy, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, FG, emphasis added)

During this conversation, students made reference to several drinking spaces, including the o2 venue on campus, clubs, and house parties, demonstrating how perception and experience of risk varied according to the spatial context. For example, students explained how binge drinking was much riskier at a house party as the physical space is not set up or prepared for this behaviour, it suddenly seemed riskier. Amy’s reference to ‘break’-ing things highlighted how the materiality of the house heightened a sense of risk. The o2 was seen as better set up to deal with drunk people as it had less things to physically break, either by falling into them and injuring oneself or having to pay damages. In comparison, the o2 was seen as a clearer, more predictable space. Some students in this extract also referred to student club nights, noting the visibility and proximity of support such as bouncers and taxis, creating a safe space to take risks. The familiarity of the space was important as students noted being “used to it”, but part of this was due to their expectation of protection through surveillance and monitoring.

Although students were able to engage in risky behaviour, the risks which they participated in within this space were monitored. The students above felt safer and

knew exactly what risks would be tolerated (alcohol) and those which would not. This hinted at a need to further explore student subjectivities. It is also interesting to note how students in this group appeared to feel 'safer' in commercialised spaces of the pub or clubs in comparison to houses, possibly representative of wider trends of commodification of youth and surveillance of 'their' space. The spaces described above, therefore, enable a "controlled excess" (Lyng, 2005: p233). Whilst students were offered an opportunity to engage in risk taking the type of risk was carefully monitored, therefore, whilst this wild space at first glance, looked as though it enabled transgression, it actually reinforced a set of norms.

#### *5.3.4 Safe spaces of transgression and tension within bubble if established ideals of risk taking are disturbed*

Students were expected to engage in activities such as binge drinking. Therefore it became a "riskless risk" (Hubbard, 2002: p1239), through its predictability on space whilst other risks within this space were still seen as "careless, irresponsible, deviant" (Lupton, 2013a: p203). For instance, drugs, as they challenged the expectation of behaviour in place. Some students went on to describe how they tended to reserve risky behaviour for student centric 'places of play', where a "licensed release" (Stallybrass and White, 1986: p13) was normalised:

"I think at uni, cus so many things are normalised like going out all the time, like drugs. They're more normal here than they are outside of the uni bubble. I think if you become particularly involved in anything, it *becomes really normal to you in uni*. Uni seems safer, but if you carry the same behaviour out of uni it's not erm, not necessarily not safe, but it's (pause), you feel as if its perceived as being riskier. *Inappropriate and not normal.*"

(Tracey, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, ILHI, emphasis added)

"I think any *space outside of uni has risks in that respect or at least it feels like there's greater risks*. I tend to stick to the student bits"

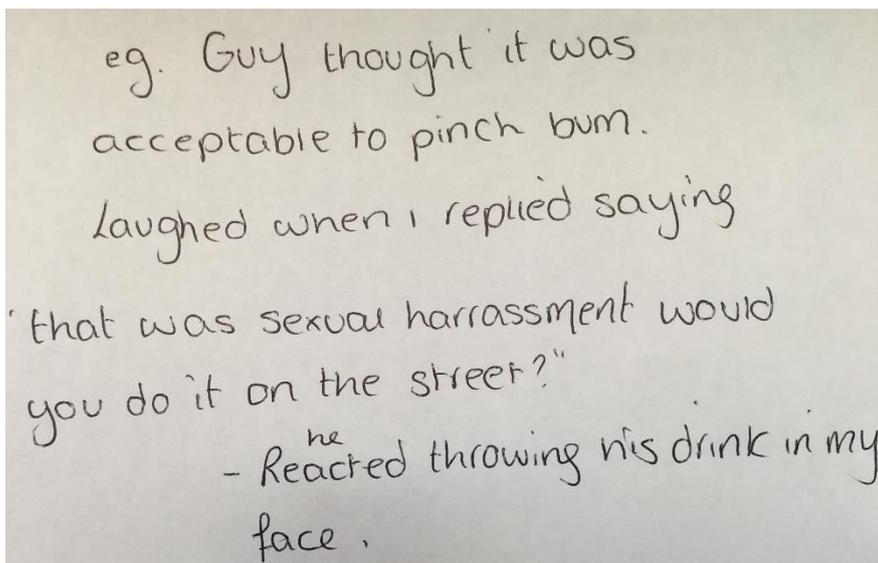
(Nicole, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, ILHI, emphasis added)

These quotes highlight how students practised 'self-segregation', restricting their behaviour to student friendly areas, for reasons of tolerance through normalisation and an accompanying feeling of safety. On the one hand, it was expected, and to some extent encouraged, but within student zones, where the predictability and monitoring of behaviour deemed them almost "riskless" (Hubbard, 2002: p1239). Accordingly, it is useful here to draw on themes raised by 'carnavalesque' (Stallybrass, and White, 1986) literature. Although students were offered this freedom to experiment with 'edgework' (Lyng, 1990; 2005), the spatial boundaries within which it was acceptable were clearly defined.

It was only when student bodies became placed as what Douglas' (1992; Douglas and Wildavsky, 1983) described as 'other', behaviour became risky. For example, Hubbard's (2013) exploration of 'carnage' presented students behaviour at this event as carnivalesque behaviour. Students immersed in this event were posed as "disgust", therefore, behaviour became a risk, as it inflicted Lyng's (1990, 2005: p234) description of "chaos to the established order". Similarly, this was why students did not feel this sense of risk within the student zones as it did not disrupt the norms and expectations of studenthood. Although, there were clearly disparities between students about what were or were not acceptable risks to take. For example, in the earlier focus group conversation, drugs were not acceptable within the student space but above saw drugs as a normalised behaviour of studenthood.

This points to the iridescent nature of the bubble, perceived and experienced differently by different groups; whilst some risks accepted and tolerated, others were not. However, norms were re-inforced through students self-policing. For example, a group of female students in a game session discussed how male students had described "chunder charts" and "bucket list" points as a means of assessing who would move into their next house. The more you were sick and the more women you had sex with without letting them stay the night the more points you scored. If you managed to combine the activities you became king of the chart. There were also

particular female targets, considered hard to get, that if “conquered” automatically promoted students to king. This demonstrates how these spaces were not just about their (apparent) freedom from normal social rules, but were also about the ways in which order (in this case a particular way of being a student) was reinforced. This was further illustrated by the images below:



eg. Guy thought it was acceptable to pinch bum. Laughed when I replied saying 'that was sexual harassment would you do it on the street?' - Reacted <sup>he</sup> throwing his drink in my face.

Figure 22 Reinforcing carnivalesque norms of being a student, RLT/TLRS

This RLT/TLRS extract shows how student identity evolved across the student trajectory as these girls admitted whilst they may have initially been more passive in their reactions, they now actively made clear they did not tolerate this as typical student behaviour.

### 5.3.5 *Student space = student rules*

Students alluded to the transparency of the bubble as they recognised locals' and/or non-students' disapproval of their behaviour, describing it as perceived as “inappropriate or not normal”, as illustrated by Tracey's earlier quote. The figure below demonstrated students' awareness of tensions, but how they perceived locals, rather than students as unreasonable:

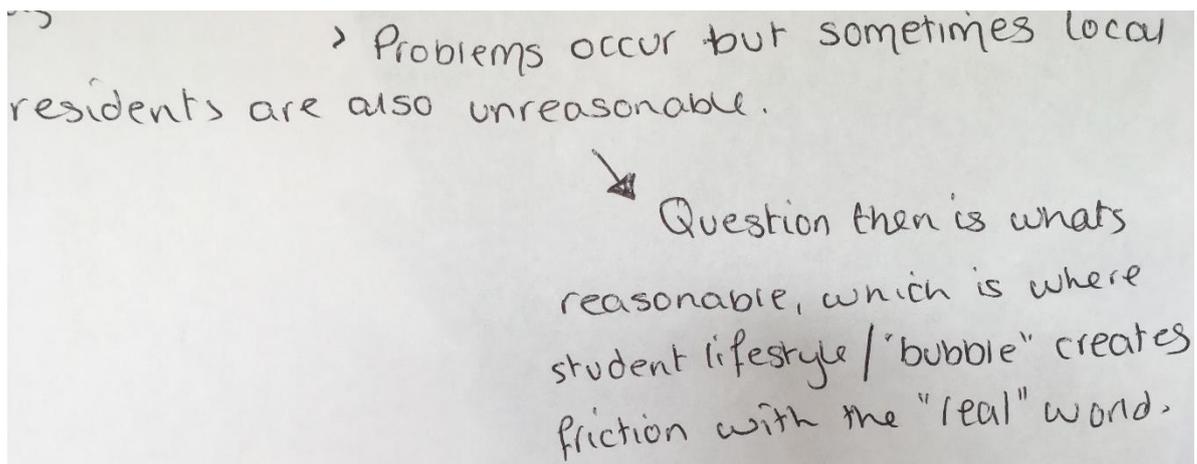


Figure 23 Discussions of tensions with non-students, RLT/TLRS

Indeed, many students saw these student-centric spaces as 'theirs', belonging to students, servicing purely student needs. Indeed, in these carnival spaces, the grotesque body was privileged over the civilised body, adhering to student rather than normal rules. Students therefore, did not see their behaviours as out of place, but in place within these segregated spaces. For example, Clarendon Park, a residential area across the park from the university, was seen as a collection of purposefully built amenities 'for students' and that non-students choosing to live in the area should have been prepared for behaviour:

"If you live in a student area, or near a university I think you have to expect it. You don't have to like it, but you know there are certain things that you're going to have to put up with. We try and be sensitive but they know they can't say much. The local taxi drivers and businesses live for students, they're always saying how quiet it is when we go home, so all the delis and stuff are there because of us. That sounds really bad. I'm just annoyed because we're not bad and last night they moaned because we woke the baby, but we'd told them it was my birthday before. We deserve a night off."

(Coresearcher, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, DE)

The value of the researcher diaries is evidenced here, as they provided a space for honest reflections as themes developed. These diaries not only became more honest

as the process evolved but also offered explanations and researcher interpretations of the views raised by other students.

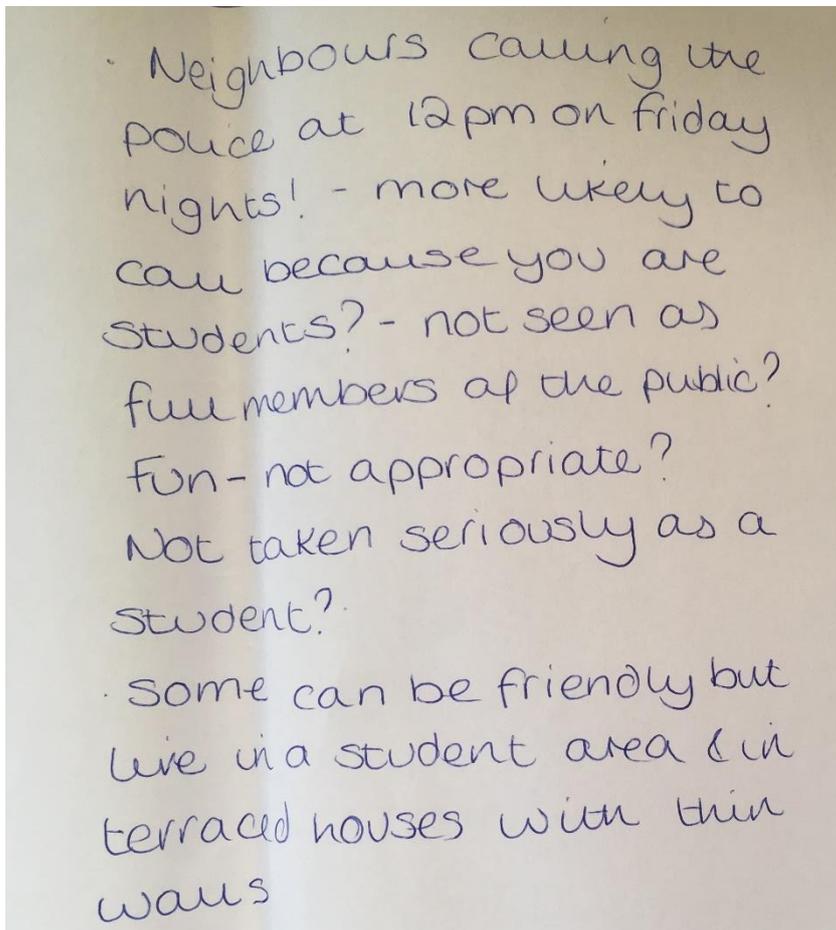


Figure 24 Non-student/Student tension, RLT/TLRS

Here, it was apparent that students felt that this was their territory. They confidently expressed their opinion as they realised their opinion was also reflected by their peers. Indeed, students assumed due to this expectation of student clustering through student lets, student deals on nights out or meals etc that in these spaces the assumed traditional student behaviours and ways of being were anticipated. This creation of specifically student communities and venues meant these spaces were encapsulated by the bubble's imagined spatial boundaries and so became acceptable 'places of play'. It seemed that it was part of the arrogance of living in the bubble to overlook how other populations also share these spaces and assumed they were 'for students'. Indeed, these student spaces provide a reassuring atmosphere almost encouraging risk. 'Ecstatic collectively' (Stamm: 1982: p55) generated through risk

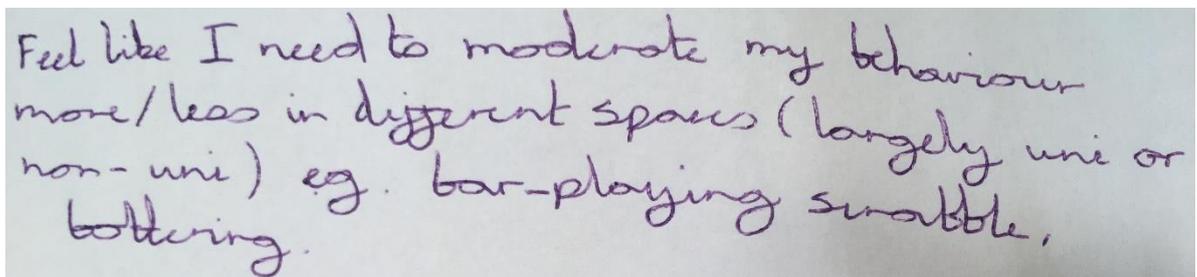
taking of multiple student bodies in this one space, only reinforced ownership of space and the spatial boundaries of the bubble as student restricted movements to these spaces. Although students were aware there were non-students living amongst them, (in areas such as Clarendon Park and Evington), the sheer volume and density of students meant they could maintain this bubble feeling without need to engage with the outside. Sarah, below, talked about her experience of living in Clarendon Park (an area of studentification in Leicester) and touring student “places” such as student specific nights out or places with student offers. She described them as *her own world*:

“I don’t know why but I think you feel like you’re in *your own world* here and it is safer in a sense. Yeah, I think you feel, because you know you go on student nights. Yeah, I think when you feel like students, you feel like students are safe. Umm everybody’s usually so sociable umm are quite nice people so I think you’re always gonna feel safe like say if you get in a taxi with a student like going back to Clarendon Park. I think it’s yeah, being with all the students. Or in student places, that can sort of make you take risk a bit more I think.”

(Sarah, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, ILHI, emphasis added)

### 5.3.6 Moderating behaviour and heightened risk in non-student spaces

In contrast, students talked about how they felt ‘out of place’ in non-student areas, as a group in a teaching led research/ research led teaching session they visually demonstrated a collective portrayal of how their individual experiences and examples connected with one another to strengthen what they saw as bigger themes. They said:



Feel like I need to moderate my behaviour more/less in different spaces (largely uni or non-uni) eg. bar-playing snabble, bolting.

Figure 25 Reflections on need to moderate behaviour outside of student space, RLT/TLRS

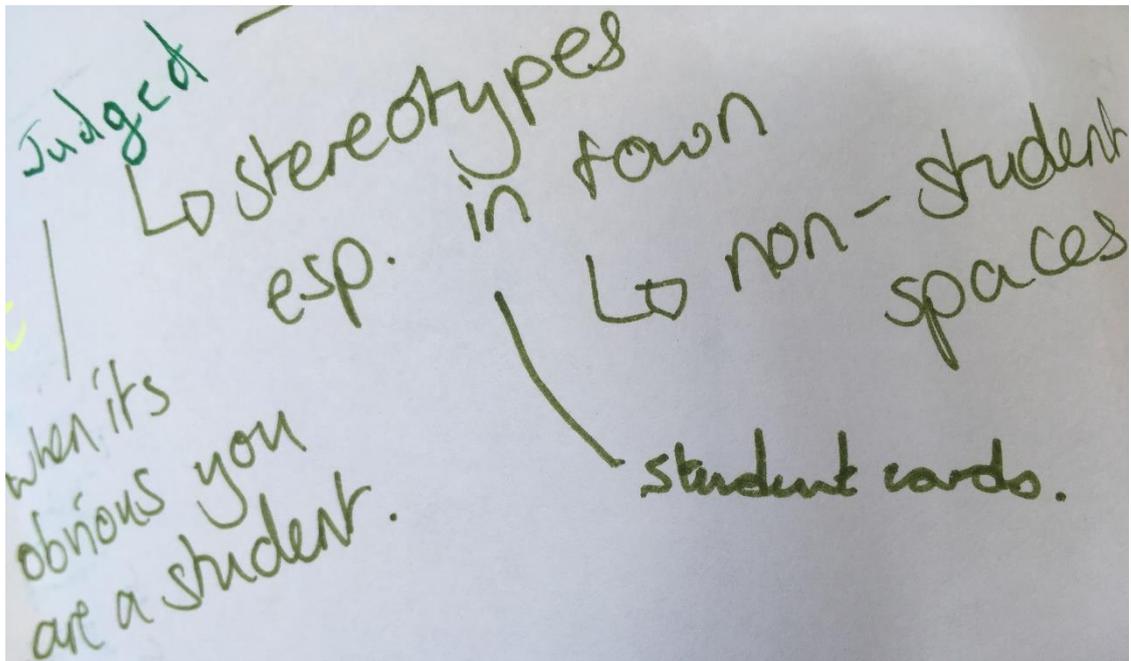


Figure 26 Judged in non-student space, RLT/TLRS

This chimed with Lyngs (1990; 2005) work as he suggested that actually we experience liminality between modernity's overcast of a need to implement self-control and late modernity's hedonistic involvement in excess. Additionally, it provided evidence of Douglas' (1992; Douglas and Wildavsky, 1983) writing on boundaries, contamination and risk, as students only safely expressed their carnivalesque body in student zones, with careful policing of these spatial boundaries. Restraint was practised outside of these zones, so as not to increase the risk of their behaviour by placing themselves as other. Students' sense of risk was immediately highlighted outside of student zones, where student culture was not dominant. To illustrate this point, in discussing the scenario 'waking up in a stranger's bed', students made contrasts with their parental homes as non-student spaces:

"If I was at home \* awkward silence\* (transcribed by co-researcher). If I was at home and my friends told me they slept with people, I would say it was disgusting, but because I'm at university I'm just like never mind. But I would never be like that at home."

(Candice, 2<sup>nd</sup>, ULGS)

“I think people are more likely to have one night stands. Like when I was at home, if we were out at home, and one of my friends went out with a guy I’d be like omg what are you doing? Whereas at uni...”

(Katie, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, ULGS)

“Yeah at uni, it’s like (pause) And? Not everyone does it, but it’s so normal. Everyone’s the same age it seems more like the done thing.”

(Candice, 2<sup>nd</sup>, ULGS)

Indeed, Katie stated how her attitude towards this scenario at university was rather blasé whereas outside university she would find this same behaviour quite shocking or risky. By focusing on scenarios which were seen as typical of student life (using focus group and interview data), the game enabled students to explain their lived experience of the bubble in more detail as they made comparisons with outside. It generated a deeper understanding of how the same behaviour was understood differently within or outside the bubble. Risks such as one night stands were suddenly “riskier” as it was not a normalised or accepted behaviour as it was at university. Student behaviour was not necessarily risky but become risks when out of place. For example, in non-student zones. This reinforces the relational boundaries of the bubble applied by students (which reinforced its protective film-making minimising the feeling of risk within it) as a mechanism of self-governing. Although students were not necessarily pressured to act in a certain way they were encouraged to do so through the norms of mainstream culture. Thus, risk is a socially constructed concept, as here these behaviours did not necessarily feel risky in the unreality of the bubble but only became a risk as they were exposed to the reality of the pressures of societal norms which place such behaviour as disgust. This chimes with Ewald’s (1991: p199) work detailing “nothing is a risk in itself” as he explained things or behaviours only become risk as we construct them as such. This section then shows how risks were bought into being as students considered performance of this behaviour in non-student space.

“You don’t have that understanding that everyone’s there for the same reason, cus they’re not.”

(Harriet, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, ILHI)

Lupton (1998: p1-10) elucidated perception, experience and communication of emotions is highly relational to the space we find ourselves in and how we understand our body in this context. Indeed, this was apparent as emotionality and embodiment of risk was important as students consider the seriousness or hierarchy of risk in relation to their student or non-student surroundings. Actually, there was awareness amongst students to tame their carnivalesque student body accepted in non-student zones and instead revert to a more conservative body. Some students discussed in the game session efforts to hide their student identity. For example, they explained how they would avoid asking for student discount in certain places when they did not want to be identified as a student but wanted to be respected as a customer. This then reiterates the importance of place in our understanding of risk as whether a behaviour is risky or not can only be understood in accordance with how students imagined their body in their surroundings and in relation to others in that specific environment.

In summary, risk taking was understood as spatially bound by both real (in terms of campus buildings etc.) and artificial or imagined (students self-enforced restricted use of space according to student welcome zones) boundaries. Despite the fuzziness and permeability of these boundaries, ‘the university’ was expected to provide a service of protection, through its anticipation and therefore preparatory action of possible events. Within these boundaries, a catalogue of student behaviours associated with a traditional student identity were expected, and normalised therefore minimising a sense of risk through predictability. The intensification of these areas and student numbers has heightened student awareness of their ‘otherness’ within the city. However, students were quick to note that the regularity, in both temporal and moral terms, of risky behaviours was not as perceived but instead exaggerated; due to the sheer volume of students and the segregation of them to these spaces, these risky behaviours appeared to be more prevalent and extreme than perhaps they really

were. Nevertheless, students were not put off by this 'othering', but rather perceived that within 'their space', they were not 'others' but entitled to act in a way in which they were primed. Outside of the university bubble, however, students were likely to regulate their behaviour as the same protection was not available; the behaviour was not expected; therefore, consequences were perceived to be riskier and students were more likely to be othered. The next section continues by looking at the relationalities of these spatial segregations.

#### **5.4 Relational boundaries through expected 'morals' and 'solidarity'**

This section explains how risk was not experienced in isolation but through our relationships with others. This section demonstrates how relational boundaries develop as university students and friends were expected to 'look out for and after each other'. This section seeks to develop Lupton's (2012; 2013a) work through, demonstrating how risk was not only experienced on an individual scale, but "shared over more than one body" (Lupton and Tulloch, 2002a: p334). This section explains how feelings of risk on the one hand are minimised through relationships of reassurance on varying scales, but, also generated risk as students were impacted by others risk taking. This section therefore demonstrates the relationality of risk taking.

Firstly, it considers how the student population as a whole was expected to enhance the protective film of the bubble, by looking out for one another. In this circumstance, non-students were seen as others, therefore a risk.

Secondly, it considers relationships on the more intimate scale of friendship, and how there is a bigger expectation to protect one another from risk. In order to do this, it draws on Douglas' (1969; 1992; 2013) notion of otherness, as risk defining boundaries between the self and other. It extends Douglas' notion of these boundaries to explain how these boundaries are permeable and pliable. The relational boundaries highlighted in this section overlap with the spatial boundaries described in the previous section.

#### 5.4.1 “Students look out for one another”

Through self-segregation (Chatterton, 1999) to student zones studenthood was intensified (Holton, 2015: p25). Feelings of risk were minimised as the creation of student huddles enhanced an ‘all in it together’ atmosphere as students spent little time interacting with non-students but instead spent the majority of their time in these specifically student spaces. This only further escalated feelings of ‘us and them’ as students were branded by non-students who also used “student space”. Students were frustrated by the negative labels, such as being lazy, a nuisance, noise disturbance and so on. Students claimed that the carnivalesque behaviour described in the previous section was not the majority of students, all of the time, but that students tended to stick to student areas. Consequentially, there were always students visibly engaging in these typical activities:

“Students don’t drink all the time but as students tend to hang out in the same places, they are always seen to be drinking. What *they* (reference to all non-students) don’t recognise is it’s not always the same students hanging about, being lazy, or drinking, or that they’re lounging around because they’ve just pulled a week long allnighter. Just because we don’t have regimented work hours doesn’t mean we don’t work just as hard.”

(Diane, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, ILHI, emphasis added)

Relational boundaries overlapped these socio-spatial clusterings as students discussed their relationships with other students, as providing an atmosphere enabling risk taking. There was an expectation that “students look out for each other”. That, at least whilst within these student spaces, there was a sense of cohesiveness amongst the student population, noted as “solidarity in studenthood” in RLT/TLRS. As I questioned students on what they meant by this, it was an expectation that all students shared a common set of morals: open mindedness, non-judgement, empathy, and support. Being surrounded by, and participating in risk with other students minimised feelings of risk, simultaneously, generating spaces within which risk taking was possible and desired. For example, students noted:

“Students aren’t much of a threat, compared with others”

(Fern, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, RLT/TLRS)

This recaps on earlier themes that the boundaries of university as a safe bubble were not only real and imagined physically but also relationally. There was an assumed homogeneity amongst the student population, not in terms of class, gender and ethnicity and so on but a collective ethos or morality applied to studenthood. Students viewed other students as equal to themselves with the commonality and shared experience of being at the same university at the same time provided a sense of cohesiveness, similar to Smith and Holt’s (2007) suggestion that student shared residential experience created unity within students. To give just one example, students expected that on nights out, other students would help them get home should they be too drunk and incapable, or if they needed support for some reason during unsociable hours “someone” would be there:

“If you felt stressed or lonely or drunk at like 4 in the morning, chances are there was probably someone still awake. There was a girl that lived above us and she had the weirdest sleeping patterns ever. So I’d look online and if she was on Facebook I’d be like can I come up? You’d never expect someone to say no.”

(Sophie, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, ILHI)

Additionally, in a more mundane, everyday sense, students’ feeling of risk were limited in relation to other students as they suggested they would leave their valuables in the library whilst they went for lunch.

“Like when you’re in the library and you go to the toilet or even for lunch and I always leave my bag. Because, you know, I can’t be bothered to pack all my stuff up. Then you get those silly leaflets saying virtually stolen! And, it’s like it’s not though is it? I left it in a room full of students, they’re not going to steal my stuff.”

(Nathan, 1<sup>st</sup> year, ILHI)

These two quotes begin to illustrate how as mentioned above students were expected to “look out for each other”. If, then, students did choose to involve themselves in risky behaviours there was a particular way of doing it as a “student” that was not expected by “non-students.” Indeed, this collective belonging to a larger student body carried with it an expectation of moral behaviour, relevant to all student situations, thought to reflect 100% of the student population. For example, female students in a game session, shared their expectations of this student moral compass with reference to one night stands:

“You never think they’ll nick your stuff if they’re a student. You have the expectation that you’re both after the same thing. Like you’re on a level playing field almost if you’re both a student. You kind of feel like you know them. You’re in the same frame of mind.”

(Natalie, 2<sup>nd</sup>, ULGS)

“You think like oh he goes to the same uni as me, we have similar you know..... I think you’re right I think you feel safer having one night stands with students.”

(Katie, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, ULGS)

“There’s that common ground.”

(Natalie, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, ULGS)

“Yeah you’re more likely to have mutual friends.”

(Diane, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, FG)

“Yeah.”

(All, FG)

“Like if you’re out its obvious you’re looking for the same thing. There’s like that mutual contract like ye this is gonna be a one-night stand. Whereas a stranger in a club you don’t really know what their after.”

(Katie, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, ULGS)

“I think weirdly as well the student body has a reputation to uphold whereas a stranger in a club there not gonna care.”

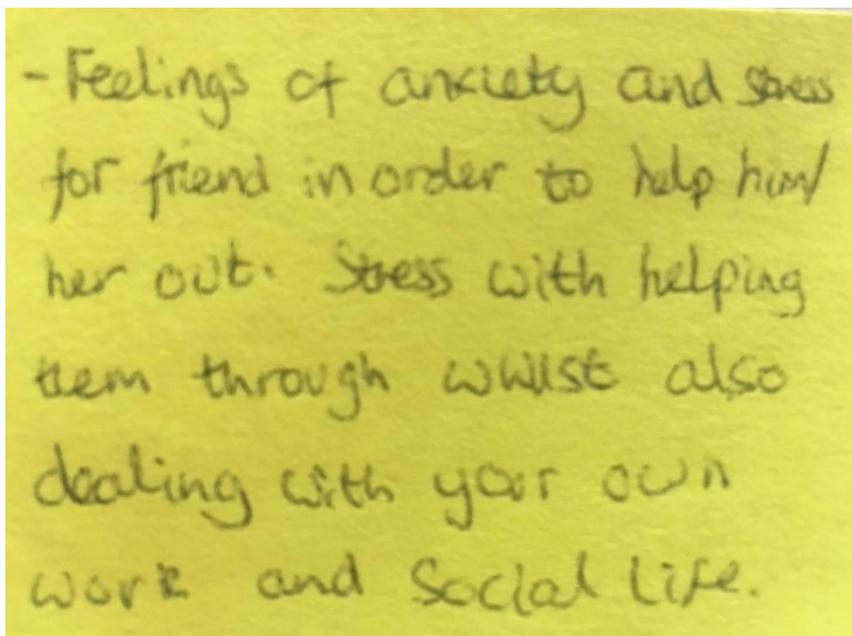
(Natalie, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, ULGS)

This conversation highlights the reassurance provided by an assumed uniform mind-set, which again seemed to encourage students’ self-governing of their risky behaviour, beyond the self-enforced imagined spatial boundaries mentioned in the former section, to include the policing of risk within relational boundaries. Douglas’ (1992; 2013) ideas on risk and otherness fall into place here, demonstrating how risk might be a cultural strategy through which students understood non-students as risky, therefore seeking to maintain relational boundaries by only engaging in risk with students. Non-students were seen to “threaten moral principles”, of the student community (Mythen and Walklate, 2006: p13), as students perceived them as different from themselves and so riskier (Skidmore, 2000). In order to maintain the order of a particular ways of being a student, these relational boundaires were not to be crossed.

Indeed, in the same way that there was an assumption that the university had a responsibility to protect students, there was also an assumption that students themselves had a responsibility to look out for each other. Restricting their risk-taking to the relational boundaries of the bubble, only participating in risks with students minimised feelings of risk whereas when risk taking involved invasion by or exposure to non-student bodies the risk was automatically amplified. This compliments Hubbards’ (2002) notion of ‘riskless risks’ as he described predictability as minimising feelings of possible risks. In this circumstance, it was not only the predictability of the behaviour but the group with which the risky behaviour was carried out.

#### 5.4.2 Friendships as protecting against and generating risk

This notion of responsibility to look after each other was further intensified in smaller friendship groups, as students were expected to 'protect' friends from risk, tightening the relational boundaries. However, through the following discussions of risk it became apparent that relational boundaries not only protected but generated risks as students were affected by friends' participation. Whilst playing the "university life" board game students were given the opportunity to place post it notes on possible risky scenarios. Participants commonly referred to their housemates whilst discussing these risk scenarios and it soon became clear that these friendships were seen as much more than friendships. There was a familial responsibility to look after each other, something much deeper than the shared collection of morals explained earlier. The game session encouraged students to consider their own experience of these scenarios but in fact illuminated how their friends experiences also impacted them, as they drew on stories, with much more emotion than previously, to demonstrate how studenthood was always a relational experience. Two students, in different sessions, described how their friends' behaviour triggered emotions felt on an intensely personal level:



- Feelings of anxiety and stress for friend in order to help him/her out. Stress with helping them through whilst also dealing with your own work and social life.

Figure 27 Emotional impact of friend's risky behaviour, ULGS

A photograph of a handwritten note on a bright green background. The text is written in black ink in a cursive, slightly slanted script. The note reads: "Major pressure on you to try and help him/her and talk to them, see if other friends have noticed".

Figure 28 Discussion of friend's eating disorder, ULGS

As participants talked through this scenario the pace of the dialogue picked up and the panic in their voice could be felt. Students spoke with real rawness about the situations they were experiencing whilst others in the focus groups remained silent as others told their story but made empathetic gestures. Whilst students spoke about scenarios as a group, the post-it notes allowed them to explain further how the scenarios made them feel. Sometimes this was not something they wished to say aloud but wanted to be included in the data collection. There was no expectation that through these friendships there would be resilience to risk but reassurance and support.

Indeed, the above quotes began to demonstrate the affective power of others' risky behaviour. It became apparent that friendship meant whether or not students were participating in the risk themselves, they were still 'affected' by the behaviour. However, students were not always so willing to support but became tired by repeated risky behaviour that despite their efforts to intervene and expression of concerns friends continued to entertain. Whereas the earlier discussion of eating

disorder was seen as a valid risk in need of support, others were more frustrating, seen as selfish. For example, Daniel described how he felt as his friend became addicted to cannabis:

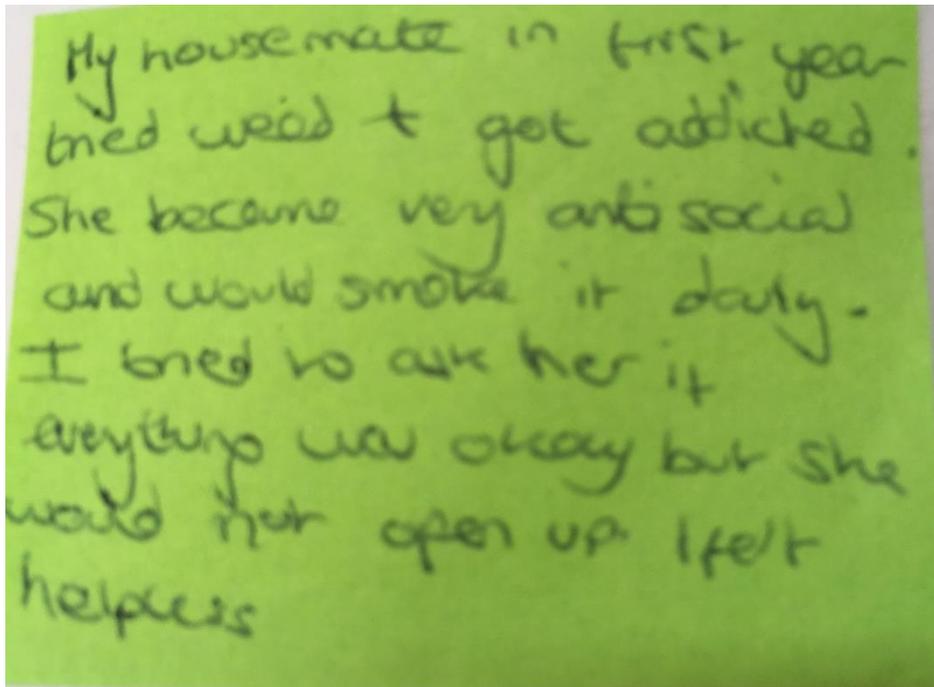


Figure 29 Friend's addiction to cannabis, ULGS

Although Daniel (Figure 16) might not have been participating in the smoking of cannabis directly he was affected by his friend's use of it as he shared his concerns for her wellbeing. Moreover, it soon became apparent the high expectations students had of their university friends to help protect against the most severe consequences of risks, recognise when risks had gone too far and the potent feeling of responsibility students have to protect and support their friends. But, by referring to this behaviour as addiction, Daniel could be said to be asserting his disapproval of his friend's drug use (which had begun to impact on others' lives). Daniel earlier had agreed students had a responsibility to each other and more so to friends yet this post it note revealed how he thought this was only to certain extent.

Dewsbury (2009: p2) noted that friendships "come in and out of being through affect. Indeed, "friendship reminds us that affecting and being affected is indeed emotional

labour” (Bunnell et al, 2012: p491). However, this emotion labour deepens friendship through students’ ability to empathise with each other and ‘really’ understand how the other is feeling. In fact, students not only recognised the emotional labour that they offered but also the support that their friends offered them and their desire to return this support as illustrated from the following extracts below as two friends (both co-researchers) talked separately in interviews with regard to participant recent meltdown over work.

“My god she’s been like so good to me lately. Like I dunno what I’d do without her. I must drain her sometimes. \*laughs\* Like I’ll just text her and she’ll be like just come around for a cup of tea. Like exams and stuff. Cus she’s so organised and I just couldn’t get my head around revising. And I’m getting annoyed at myself, like why aren’t I revising properly? I’ve left it all to the last minute and she’s like just come around Samantha let’s talk about it. But, she’s that organised she’s got everything set out and tells me how she’s done it so I just flip off her. Like she gets it. She completely gets why I’m down. I go heaven and above for my friends. I’m there 110%. I get the most out of talking it out.”

(Sophie, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, ILHI)

“Sophie gets a lot of stress really \*laughs\* She knows it because she’s the one who gets it, like, living with people they sort of get to know like when to leave you or what to do to, because I just like, sometimes you, sometimes you just rant to people. It can make it stronger, because you get to know that person properly and you get to know like umm, yeah how to sort of deal with them.”

(Samantha, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, ILHI)

Indeed, apparent here was the deep reliance on friends to help them manage risks such as stress but also how this strengthened their friendships in ways they had not experienced previously. They could not escape each other’s feelings as they lived together. Therefore saw each other’s stress as something to work through together, making very clear that they would expect the favour to be reciprocated. This

demonstrated evidence of intensification of friendship through the university experience as students aimed to protect one another from harmful risks. Research specifically on the transitions to university has explained how young people develop much deeper relationships with their university peers due to the amount of time they spend with each other but also as a consequence of being friends through an intensely emotional period as part of our transition to adulthood.

Despite this recognition that these new deeper more meaningful friends may overtake parents, siblings and previous friendships in offering advice and guidance and emotional support at this stage (Brooks, 2002; 2007), there is little literature in social sciences that discusses in detail the full extent of this emotional support expected and offered. Brooks (2007) noted the rise in a different type of friendship in this 'new modernity'. As a result of the dissolution of institutions etc., greater reliance was placed on friends. There was an increased need for guidance, emotional reassurance and support from our friendships. These separate discussions of two friends relationships with one another highlighted this intensification of friendship as "families of choice", choosing to care and look after one another, uptaking roles which may have previously been filled by "families of fate" (Pahl and Spencer, 2004). Whilst Sophie spoke with real relief and reassurance knowing she had her friends as support, Samantha spoke with real empathy and confidence that the favour would be returned. This sense of familial responsibility for friends was echoed by all participants, whereas the responsibility for all students through a shared set of values was not. In extending previous discussions of friendships as emotional support (Brooks, 2007), this subsection has highlighted the strength of the affective notion of these friendships.

#### **5.5 'It's like a bubble. You just kinda get sucked in sometimes'. Atmospheres of risk: How the university bubble also produces its own risks**

This section draws on elements of protection and safety offered by the spatiality and relationality of the bubble highlighted previously, but also how the bubble generated its own risks. Pulling together many features of the bubble, it considers the bubble as

an atmosphere of risk. This section draws on theorisations of affective atmospheres offered by Anderson (2009).

“Your kind of day to day life is always in the company of other people. And you’re, even if you’re studying, you’re studying with other people, around you, so all your behaviours have got to be concerned with who else is around you. Other people’s actions affect you and your actions affect them. It’s always a communal existence.”

(Natalie, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, ILHI)

Natalie’s quotation provides an entry-point into a consideration of the shared emotions that constitute part of students’ experiences of risk. Firstly, it tells us that the nature of university life meant that students were often surrounded by other students, and consequentially were impacted by each other’s behaviour. Rather, the bubble is an affective space. Students presented an awareness of an appreciation for the affective notion of behaviours, regardless of whether or not these were envisioned as risky. For example, here it could be assumed that studying in the broader sense was not risky, only when it became coupled with stress. However, what was clear, was how the bubble, through the affective notion of these behaviours, was not only a safe space within which to ‘play’ with risk, but actually produced its own risks through the creation of atmospheres of risk. These atmospheres were defined by their “forming and deforming, appearing and disappearing, as bodies enter in relation with one another” (Anderson, 2009: p79). These atmospheres may have come in and out of being. Daniel illustrated this definition of affective atmospheres as part of a focus group conversation as he discussed his experience of the library:

“I think you get stressed by being around other people as well. Everyone is kind of rubbing each other up. Like, panicking each other. That makes you panic. Yeah, I think being around people can make it worse. I think when you’re together and everybody’s stressed it just gets even worse ’cus you build each other up.”

(Daniel, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, FG)

Clearly, as Daniel talked about his experience in the library, it became evident the bubble cannot be interpreted as simply just a safe space, or as a protective film surrounding students in their risk taking. The bubble was also a space that generated its own risks. David's comments highlighted how stress may be a moving emotion, an energy, or affect (Thrift, 2004) that intensified as it moved between bodies (Ahmed, 2004). This affect became 'affective', as it transformed into an energy with an ability to spread and consume a space (Bohme, 1993: p118-119). This feeling also continued to be felt deeply on a personal level (Anderson, 2009; Trigg, 2016: p773), corresponding with previous illustrations of emotion. To demonstrate how emotion and affect interact and are apparent in unison this sub section continues by utilising the principles of atmosphere.

Anderson's (2009) '*affective atmospheres*' disturbed the traditional demarcation between theorisations of affect as 'impersonal' versus emotion as 'personal'. Atmospheres instead are 'impersonal' in that they can belong to collective situations in the way that many students populate the library as a space at any one time. But, in this study, were also felt as profoundly personal as students noted their own amplified feelings of stress, due to the spread of emotion through the "transmission of affect" from other bodies. An atmosphere was created students "feel another's feelings" (Brennan, 2004: p1), "diffused through" and absorbed by other bodies (Bissel, 2010: p274). Therefore, heightening the potential risk of stress. This harmonises with Bohme's depiction of atmospheres as the simultaneity and shared presence of the self as an emotional, affective being and the "feeling of the presence of something" (Bohme, 2013: no pagination). Therefore, one must be alert to the 'feeling' present in the self but also surrounding the self (Albertsen, 2012: p69).

Additionally, Bohme's discussion of atmospheres as pervading ambiance like a mist or a fog in space (Bohme, 1993: p13-114) is useful as he reflected on the material derivations of "atmos" to fill spaces and "sphere", to draw attention to the spatial capacity of the atmos to encircle. Applying this to the bubble, the bubble was one the

one hand fixed in place; the library, as the atmosphere, filled this space, and whilst it had an ability to its edges remained uncertain. Rather, in the context of this research, using the instance of stress, as not only individual, but also experienced relationally with others, in the sensual space of the library as students described as “rubbing each other up” intensifying the sense of stress, whilst emphasising its material nature. Although, stress might have been impalpable it had a real pressure, or unwelcomed friction, felt as students described its physical ability to “rub”. Indeed, students reference this metaphorical or imagined materiality as they discussed how the library:

“slaps you in the face with stress when you walk in, and you know you’re in the zone.”

(Nicole, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, ILHI)

Through this expression, a sense of how students constructed the materiality of atmospheres in their imagination in order to express its commanding force was understood. The metaphorical use of “slap” enabled a grasp of the material capacity. Risk, was then, not necessarily an emotion, or a thing to be managed, but the atmosphere created by this collective diffusion of emotions in one space.

However, a co-researcher revealed (in her personal diary of her student experience) how competing affective atmospheres may occupy a space at any one time. Whilst the co-researcher agreed earlier in her diary that the library reinforces a sense of stress, she later explained how this affective atmosphere of stress also erected an atmosphere of reassurance. The library created a feeling of calm that almost eliminated the feeling of stress through the knowledge you are not alone:

“Trying to go to the library more so I associate that more with stress and studying rather than with home.....you feel like everyone else there is feeling exactly the same. Makes you feel like you’re not alone”

(Co-researcher, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, DE)

Furthermore, the above quote suggests how in fact the bubble of university, if considered as an 'affective atmosphere' might be a cluster of smaller bubbles, which rub against each other and overlap. In this case, the library as only one small section of the bubble included conflicting atmospheres: inducing stress, but instantaneously reassurance in our own personal emotional reactions to stress as the atmosphere of others stress was felt. The library on the one hand exaggerated the risk of stress, through intensifying personal feelings of stress, but also minimised the risk of this increased stress, through the opposing atmosphere of reassurance as the collective experience of stress as a risk. Moreover, the diary extract showed how affective atmospheres might be compartmentalised and restricted to particular spaces within the larger bubble. This further demonstrated how the university as a bubble itself might be made up of a series of different affective atmospheres of risk which overlap and interact with one another. Again, this reiterated the relationality of risk:

"You kinda get sucked in sometimes."

(Helena, 1<sup>st</sup> year, ILHI)

Nevertheless, this is not to suggest that humans (or more specifically students, in this case) simply walked into and are suddenly 'affected' by these atmospheres (Rose, 2010: p338-339; Bissel, 2010: p280-281). Instead, similarly to how Edensor (2012) described the 'anticipated' atmosphere of Blackpool illuminations, students 'anticipated' atmospheres within this university bubble. For example, in chapter 4, university was explained as a 'place of play', which in turn re-produced expectations and performances of drinking. Moreover, as Fainstein and Judd (1999: p266) described Times Square as "a kinetic environment that overwhelms the visitor and cannot help but participate in the excitement", students too 'anticipate' the students' union to be associated with a sense of belonging through, to borrow from Durkheim, collective effervescence created through drinking. Jayne et al (2010) described how drinking can be a bonding experience, and students insisted they could not help but get "*sucked in*", "primed to act in a particular way" (Bissel, 2010: p270). For example, Nathan explained:

“Just because everyone else is doing it. They cut across that boundary. But, why do they do that? Probably because every other person around them is doing it. But, actually they’re probably all think, well, if you weren’t doing it I wouldn’t do it. They’d probably still have a bit to drink. But, they wouldn’t get legless in a drinking game. But, everyone’s getting involved, and you don’t wanna be left out. You wanna feel included.”

(Nathan, 1<sup>st</sup> year, ILHI)

Indeed, the above quote shows how the affective atmosphere of the students’ union generated that “swept away feeling” (Lupton and Tulloch, 2002b: p121), caught up in “imitative contagion” (Thrift, 2008: p231), and contagious performance (Bissell, 2010). This demonstrates the double nature of the bubble. Like an atmosphere, it too existed permeating through a particular space, but swept up ‘students’ and was expressed through their bodies and their desire for, to borrow from Durkheim, collective effervescence, and belonging. As Trigg (2016: p767) noted an atmosphere “inheres in the world as a spatially extended thing, but it is also taken up in and through the expressiveness of the living body.” The student body became an expression of the atmosphere within which they dwelled. Before the risk was acknowledged, many students noted they get “caught up in the moment”, as Kylie described:

“An unconscious, like copying. You’re not aware of it. Then, suddenly you’re drunk and on the floor.”

(Kylie, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, ILHI)

Drinking to excess here as a risk became almost a mimetic movement governed by the rules of an expected majority within that space. When compared with the previous quote, this risk taking was a performance or assertion of a particular student identity (see Braun, 2003), caused by and reproduced by the affective atmosphere and desire to belong. Students pushed their boundaries as they noted the collective nature of risk enabled them to justify their ‘excessive’ participation. They felt reassurance in that everyone else was also involved. The collective reproduction of behaviour occurs in

these affective environments where a certain behaviour or feeling was anticipated. As in Edensor's (2012) account of Blackpool illuminations the lights, dancing etc. were anticipated. Therefore, atmospheres were continually reproduced, whereas for students the drinking culture was anticipated which reinforced and reproduced a particular way of being a student (Chatterton, 1999; Holton, 2013; Holdsworth, 2006). The more students engage in the same risk in the same place the more the affective atmosphere is anticipated and reproduced. These affective spaces of risk did not just affect a "virginal" individual but involved "recurrences in movement" that were situated in socially and historically constructed behaviour "conditioned by previous experience" (Edensor, 2012: p1114). In this context, risk could be considered to be governed by the rules of the anticipated affective atmosphere. For example, it was the anticipation of students' ways of being within this space. The anticipation of how particular affective atmospheres are perceived and experienced was likely to change according to where the student was in terms of their university career. The next chapter builds on this argument of atmosphere.

## 5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted how the intensification and spread of student spatialities has generated both spatial and relational boundaries. There was an intensification of studenthood, which on one level protected students from risk, as students but also intensified 'the student experience', encouraging risk taking through reassurance in the collective.

In presenting these arguments the chapter extended Douglas' notion of risk. Douglas' (1992; 2013) implied that the maintenance of boundaries between self and other is important in protecting the self against risk. Whilst this data provides some evidence in support of that, it also highlighted the generation and intensification of risk within these relational boundaries. It extended the rather static notion of risk to demonstrate how these relational boundaries are constantly re-defined through students' interactions with those both inside (other students) and outside (non-students). In furthering this argument, through an extension of affective atmospheres (2009) it

explained how it is not only our interaction with humans that matter but also with objects, places and things in generating risk. This chapter has explained the affective notion of risk, as experienced collectively, whether students engaged directly in risky behaviour or not. The next chapter extends these arguments of atmospheres to explain how they are intensified at certain points and manifest in an embodied way towards the end of the trajectory.

## **6 The temporary and fragile bubble: Intensification, continued immersion in a need to prepare for exiting the bubble**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter explores students' recognition of the temporary and fragile nature of the bubble, and how their past, present and future lives are intertwined. Section 6.2 explores the intensification of the bubble at particular points during students' undergraduate trajectories and how they negotiate particular risks as part of this. It discusses the mounting pressure of the bubble as students are caught between a want to engage in last chance revelry, but also a need to knuckle down.

Section 6.3 discusses how risky behaviours, and indeed university itself was experienced as temporary periods of 'time out of time', as carnivalesque moments (Stallybrass and White, 1986). It investigates students' continued immersion in the bubble, intentionally oblivious to life outside, overwhelmed by a desire to consume as much as possible with little regard for any potential consequences.

Section 6.4 demonstrates how students' anticipation of the bursting of the bubble translated into their present experience. It explains how some students attempt to suck as much air from the bubble as possible, sometimes through intense experiences, particularly as they get closer to the end of their degree, but sometimes enjoying time pass (Jeffrey, 2010; Li, 2012), as they begin to notice its fragility. Timepass has been used to refer to young people in India, 'killing time' through various means, such as enjoyable pauses to study such as hanging out with peers, or in a more productive longer term sense, accumulating multiple qualifications whilst waiting for and hoping to gain employment (Jeffrey, 2010a). Whilst generally used to refer to slowness with excess time available, this chapter explains how it might also be used to pack as much as possible into this waiting period (Brannen and Nislen, 2002). Others students were frustrated, by the slowness of the final stages as university feels like it is "taking too long". To close the chapter, section 6.4 emphasises how the fragility of the bubble was accepted as students began to prepare themselves for life outside and search for ways to smooth this transition.

In order to do this, this chapter primarily contributes to on writings on carnivalesque, atmospheres, and transition to tease out the temporalities of student life and risk. In doing so, it also answers calls for further exploration into the time-bound nature of being a student. This chapter draws on the experiences of 2<sup>nd</sup> year and 3<sup>rd</sup> year students, at intense points in their journeys.

## **6.2 Building pressure in the bubble: An intensive time space**

### *6.2.1 Intensification and embodiment of atmospheres*

This section highlights the intensification and the embodiment of atmospheres at particular points in students' trajectories. University can be branded an intense episode of time, with regard to large clusters of students living and socialising in close proximity (Holdsworth, 2009a; Holton, 2015: p25-26), spatially segregated from other communities (Chatterton, 1999; Smith and Holt, 2007; Sage et al, 2012; Smith and Hubbard, 2014). This section builds on ideas raised in chapter 5, through a consideration of university as an "intensive time-space" (Anderson, 2009: p78). Using work on atmospheres to explain how affects may intensify at particular times (Ahmed 2004; Bissell, 2010), for a duration, it discusses the lived experience of time in the bubble. It explains how this intensification impacts perceptions and experiences of risk.

Students identified particular moments in their university trajectories when there was an anticipated escalation in stress. For example, exam season or near coursework deadlines, or more generally as they moved through their degree. As students neared the end of their university experiences there were more deadlines, closer together and students placed more meaning on these deadlines, as there was a reinforced consciousness at this stage of their need to secure a good degree. This in turn generated peak experiences, as students felt this acceleration and intensification of time collectively. Many students noted the academic step up, particularly as they transitioned into their third year:

"I feel like just can't keep up. There's so much to do. It's intense. Constantly racing the clock and I feel like times running away or escaping. I've got another

three essays in 3 weeks, and well, I'm trying to work one now. I know, well, I hope (pauses) oh no it's in 2 weeks, great, lost a week."

(Steve, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, ILHI)

"In the second year, you begin to understand what is needed from you. And then, in third year, it gets a lot more difficult. In terms of workload, and things like that."

(Tracey, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, ILHI)

The above quotes highlight how time seemed to speed up during these periods, where students felt there was so much they needed to squeeze into the present, that they felt they were always racing the clock. There was a shared sense of busyness as a co-researcher noted:

"Busy, Busy, Busy and did I mention busy! First week back and everyone's already stressing! There's already way too much to think about. You can spot a third year. Everyone's just rushing around or generally just seems a bit tense. We all used to stay after the lecture and hang out, now everyone's rushing somewhere, trying to fit it all in. It's just more intense, seems like there's more to be done and less time to do it. Like you'll be chatting and you see people looking at their watch, and it makes you really aware that you've got lots to go and do too. You kind of just vent at each other more now because everyone's worked up about work, it's a bit sad."

(Co-researcher, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, DE)

Intensified atmospheres were often linked to peak experiences, triggered by looming deadlines or exam periods. This implies that atmospheres were not only constructed through relational force of affect (Dawney, 2011), but could also be recognised as "intensive time spaces" (Dufrenne, 1973: p183; Anderson, 2009: p79). There was an intensification of affects within them at certain times (Bissell, 2010: p274), particularly as time was felt to accelerate as students were immersed in their studies (Jeffery,

2010a: p470). For example, from the extract above it became apparent that as students' progressed through their degree, the atmosphere within the bubble intensified. In contrast to expectations and positive emotions anticipated through promotion of university as a place of play, students towards the end of their trajectory tended to focus on different types of risk, namely, those impacting their mental rather than physical health, where negative rather than positive outcomes were anticipated.

The intensification of this atmosphere heightened as the bubble was penetrated from the outside. Students felt there was an underlying pressure from their families to "do well" at university. Sometimes this was voiced explicitly whereas sometimes it was just insinuated. The conversation below demonstrates how students suspected this pressure was something they all shared, regardless of background.

"My sister got a first. And a few weeks before we left, they never normally put pressure on me, they're normally like, you know, do your best it's fine. But my dad once said to me: "no pressure or anything, but Katy got a first, you're hoping for a first aren't you?" And I was like thanks dad, I haven't even got to uni yet and you're already making me think you'll be disappointed if I didn't. Just him planting that seed, made me like, great, this is gonna be an uphill battle".

(Harriet, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, FG)

"My dad's like that. My mum's like do your best and dad's like aim for a first. I'm like you're making this so much harder. I think either way there's pressure. If your parents went to uni or if your parents didn't. They'll be like I finished, but, if they've not, they'll be like, come on, this is your opportunity. Either way they'll be like keep going. Try your best but you can't quit".

(Samantha, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, FG)

The above conversation acknowledged that there may be differing reasons for the familial pressure, but it was experienced collectively by students. The focus groups

were useful here to tease out some of the nuances and complexity of experience grouped by the same theme, in this case family pressure. They helped explained how the same feeling although felt collectively manifested for different reasons. This demonstrates how the bubble could be permeated or pressure placed on it by outside could be felt. These students intentionally sidestepped communication with parents to avoid increased risk of stress. Harriet's parents had not been to university. Harriet was not the first to go to university in her family, as the quote explained her sister had been. The pressure placed on her stemmed from her sister's success. This was fairly common, that students were not necessarily the first in the family, but their generation were the first. Therefore, it became about keeping up with siblings and trusting siblings' experiences as they were competing in the same world, therefore, had more relatable life experiences. These connections were sustained.

In fact, some students became more reliant on siblings throughout their transition, as a co-researcher often referred to her brother as "her guru" in meetings, throughout her experience. The role of siblings has often been underplayed, as much previous research tended to focus on relationships with parents or peers. It was clear in many student stories, siblings were extremely influential in how their university experience played out. Many reported regularly reassurance seeking from their siblings that their experience was "normal", or "enough", both in terms of social experience, but also there was reliance on siblings to help with assignments or for conversations on thinking through future career directions.

Whilst some students recognised the collective affects in generating particular atmospheres, these were also felt on an intensely personal level (Wilkinson, 2016: p4). Students found reassurance in being in the "same boat" as many of their peers, meaning they were able to relate to one another's situation, but the building pressure of the atmosphere within the bubble, was also felt individually. Third year students listed emotions which they thought were typical of how it felt to be a student, but that they were also currently experiencing:

- Stressed
- Underwhelming
- Tired
- Not how shown in the media
- Isolated from non-students
- Tired
- Lonely
- Homesick
- Done with academic stuff

(Description of collective emotions felt by third year students, RLT/TLRS)

This list provides a sense of how as the intensity of the academic workload increased, there was a clear shift in what it meant to be a university student. Whilst students recognised the collective aspects of these emotions, they implied that the way they were felt and experienced were “distinctly personal ways of being” (Anderson, 2006: p737). The presence of ‘affect’, arising from these emotions was, sometimes similar, sometimes very different, rendered the same by the label of emotion, but felt both personally and collectively. To explain this more clearly, it is useful to explore how it physically was felt on the body. Some students in discussion group explained how these emotions were embodied, as students’ increased awareness of academic, rather than social risks was evident. They expressed how university experiences were more frequently punctuated with moments of increased intensity as they progressed through their degree, particularly as third year students, and how this impacted their bodies:

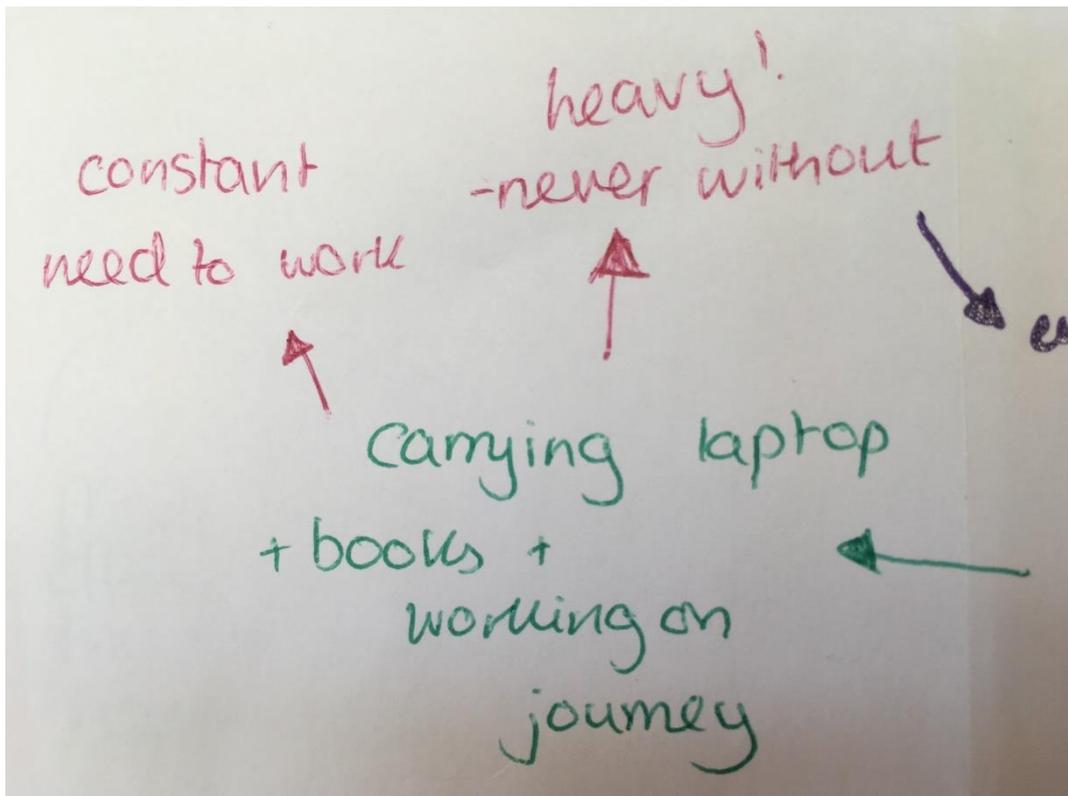


Figure 30: Embodiment of atmosphere, RLT/TLRS

The figure above resonated with many students' descriptions of their third year, as they recognised that they actually felt this increased stress, tiredness and so on through their carrying of laptops and books which they had not done to the same extent previously. There was a sense of the embodied notion of this intensification of affect. Students described how these risks of academic stresses were visible on the body, feeling physically "heavier" than they had done previously. This embodiment of certain risk also draws attention to the role of the body in the lifecourse (Horton and Kraftl, 2006), as university students, placed by literature as becomings (Field and Morgan-Klein, 2010), began to feel growing responsibility actually as physical weight. The pressure to succeed academically was felt through the physical weight on their bodies. Students also talked about consequent risks of migraines or mental health illnesses:

"Yeah, like I know I'm not alone. Everyone's feeling the pressure. You can see it in the just general lack of pride in appearance, people slouching or rolling their shoulders and stuff. Just generally, the burden of this final stretch is heavy.

Some of us are actually heavier! I got fat! But no one's judging, we're not alone in this."

(Amy, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, FG)

"It's weird though because, well my housemate pointed it out. Like I went through a bout of depression, I had it when I was younger. But she said she noticed because I was sleeping a lot. So like you said we're in this together. It's a culmination of different types of stress at once. All those stresses are concentrated in one intense sphere."

(Harriet, 2nd year, FG)

This provides evidence as to how the materiality of the 'weight' of an atmosphere as an intensive time space is embodied, either through weight gain, and heavy burden of the final stretch, or as alluded to in Figure 11 the weight of carrying more.

Atmospheres are described as having an ability to 'envelop' and 'press on a society', with a 'certain force' (ref), but this is meant as a metaphorical explanation. For example, Anderson's (2009) used Marx's expression of materiality to question its actual physical rather than just affectual force:

"the atmosphere in which we live weighs upon every one with a 20,000-pound force, but do you feel it?" (Marx, 1978: p577)

Anderson (2009) explained that Marx suggested that actually we do not 'feel' it, physically. In contrast to these previous remarks about atmospheres material properties, and building on the metaphorical arguments made in chapter 5, about the materiality of atmosphere, where you might not physically feel the force but are still effected by it, the discussion of the diagram above demonstrates how actually the "experiential weight" (Trigg, 2016: p773) of atmosphere, as an intensive time space, is physically felt by the body. At moments when the pressure inside the bubble increases, the atmosphere is physically felt pressing upon the body, not just in a metaphorical sense, but in physical manifestations of aches and pains, from being

slumped over computers, or from carrying books and so on. In fact, some students demonstrated how the force of an atmosphere might not be recognised until it's affect is felt through their individual bodies:

"I think uni is stressful. Like my flatmate a couple of months ago had really bad chest pains and she'd never experienced that before. She went to A and E. but it was during a stressful period, so I think uni in general does effect your mentality. Like definitely since I've come to uni im a lot more stressed than I used to be. My mind, sometimes I do overthink things. Like if I think about the future, I stress out a bit and think what am I guna do. It's really weird. I get really bad nightmares. Stress can have an impact on your sleep I think. It's really weird, like, even if I don't feel stress, but like I literally just have like people nightmares, like people dying, and I wake up in the middle of the night. My head like pounding and I know I must be stressed, but it must be innately like embedded in me. It's really weird, but, so that can impact on my sleep, can impact on your health in that sense."

(Anne, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, FG)

This story of both Anne and her flatmate's experience of stress demonstrated the "affective experience of time space" (McCormack, 2008: p418-419), how the same atmosphere, in this case an intense, stressful time, might manifest slightly differently, as bodies interact and feel the atmosphere in different ways. Anne's description also highlighted how the atmosphere might not come into being, or be recognised as such, until it was experienced first hand (Schmitz et al, 2011: p256; Griffero, 2014). It was implied that sometimes it was only through students' bodies reaction of 'affect' to an atmosphere, the intensity of their emotion (McCormack, 2008), that it could be felt as the atmosphere altered their ability to "affect and be affected" (Bissell, 2010: p274; Anderson, 2014: p10). For example, Anne above noted the interruption to sleep patterns, triggered her to understand the emotion. The intensity of the atmosphere provoked new bodily sensations, so it was harder to recognise the emotion, as personally felt 'affect' of the atmosphere, is felt by the body in "unpredictable ways"

(Michel, 2015: p257). In addition, Anne's description of the intensity of the stress and how it manifested itself was new, "never experienced before", different to what had been experienced by these students previously. It felt risky enough to go to A and E. Instead, the emotion was only recognised once the affect of the atmosphere had, temporarily at least, changed the biochemical composition of the body (Brennan, 2004: p1; Bissell, 2010: p274). For example, through the "chest pains", "pounding head" and so on. Therefore, this impacted students' ability to "let go of the affect by examining its course or allowing the course of other, calmer feelings to asser itself" (Brennan, 2004: p128). The recognition of the atmospheres affect was too late to prevent its extremities.

Students individually felt bodily reactions to an intensified academic atmosphere within the bubble also called into question assumptions that traditional students adapt naturally to the university academic life. Traditional students' experiences remain absent from literature, as it has often been taken for granted they have an ingrained ability to adapt, and achieve, academically, through prior knowledge of the university system. Christie et al (2008), acknowledged balancing social and academic commitments could trigger stress and how integration academically was often an emotional experience involving isolation or excitement. This discussion of intensification of atmospheres has complimented but also extended this sociological work to demonstrate embodied affects of this development of an academic identity.

More than this, even as the atmosphere passed, and affect of stress passed, elements of long term impacts lingered, visibly expressed through the body. For example:

"It's not just whilst you're here through, there's parts of the intense time that will follow us. You spend so long staring at computers and reading, I now need glasses and I used to be fine, physically, but now I get headaches so easily because my bodies like nope I remember this feeling let's take a break so it gives me a headache. But I guess also, we'll always have that, we got through this together and so I hope we stay as close as we are now."

(Co-researcher, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, DE)

This demonstrated how these intense time-spaces of studenthood may have then impacted their 'going on' (Horton and Kraftl, 2006), as they physically transformed the make-up of student bodies (Brennan, 2004: p1), not always just momentarily, but sometimes traces were absorbed by the body in more permanent ways (Feingenbaum and Kanngieser, 2015: p81). This demonstrates that even as students transition out of the bubble, elements may be absorbed by, and change the body. In some cases, whilst the physical effect of the atmosphere was only felt temporarily, students recognised how this feeling may have longer term implications. They saw this as improving their future ability to recognise and cope with these negatives affects, improving their capacity to see them coming and respond (Brennan, 2004), before their negatives affects took hold or escalated. For example, students noted their improved confidence and management of risky situations.

“Personally erm, I think I’ve become more confident. Yeah, maybe not confident but I’ve come to read situations much quicker.”

(Josie, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, ULGS)

The co-researcher diary extract and Josie’s comment implied that whilst student engagement with particular risks might have been assumed to be time-bound, in fact, they may have lasting implications in terms of bodily changes or learned behaviour and coping mechanisms. These may impact how students react to similar risks in the future.

### **6.3 The spatiality of the bubble creates specific temporalities within it**

#### *6.3.1 Timetabled and temporary studenthood*

This section drives forward arguments made in chapter 5, to demonstrate how the spatialities recounted earlier, create specific temporalities within them. It explains how the timetabled use of space, through the student targeted commodification of particular spaces raised in chapter 5, enabled a time-bound engagement with risk. In addition, the temporary nature of being a student, enabled students to engage in risky behaviours, as they were time and spatially bound by the bubble.

There was a degree of whimsicality in students' risk participation as they appeared to 'dive in', only truly considering the risky nature of this brief intemperance of 'excess' (Reith, 2005: p227-245) in momentary reflection afterwards. However, this is not to infer students are "unintentional risktakers" and "basically fools" (Douglas, 1992: p13) but that they chose to immerse themselves in voluntary risks (Douglas, 1992; Braun, 2003; Lyng, 1990; 2005). The ephemeral nature of the risk-taking activities themselves combined with the temporary nature of the bubble (alongside the secure spatiality and relational encouragement or reassurance mentioned in chapter 5) means they were able to plunge in with little regard for the consequences. As a group of students justified their risky behaviour:

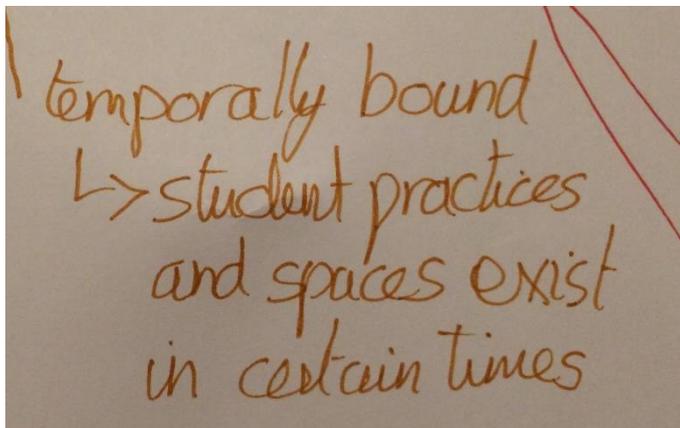


Figure 31 Temporally bound bubble, RLT/TLRS

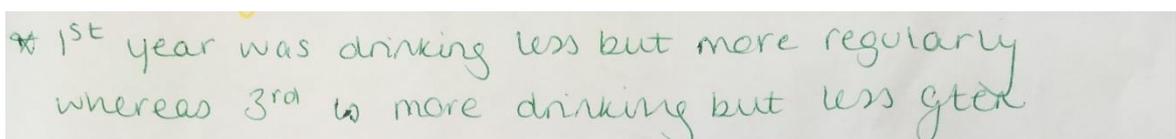


Figure 32 Less often, but more immersive, reflections on drinking, RLT/TLRS

The transgression of regular norms was justified as it was time and spatially specific (Lupton, 1999a: p165). Indeed, 'the activity has a clearly set beginning and end .....beyond which the thrills do not go' (Lyng, 2005: p233). Although, for Lyng (2005: p233) the 'end' of the 'activity' was often linked to cost, for students it was more commonly related to time space. Their participation in risky activities was often restricted to times, either as particular places offer allocated times when they

welcome student presence, or as directed by other commitments as a student, such as deadlines. This was evident as Verity noted the timetabling of her leisure spaces.

“It’s timetabled for you, you don’t even really think of where should we go, you know certain days and times are certain places. You kind of know when you can just completely go for it. Quite often on a Friday we go to a club called Sophbeck erm and that doesn’t start, well, you don’t tend to arrive until 2 in the morning so it doesn’t tend to happen unless you’ve got nothing on the next day. I mean people tend to start drinking at 11 or 12. Depending on the night will drink a lot or a little and will leave at 2. So you’ll be dancing for the next 3 hours and quite often we walk home. Just completely immerse yourself, because it’s only for a set period. But, I think when we do go out because we’ve been working so hard people do tend to go a bit crazy compared to normally if they went out more often.”

(Verity, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, ILHI)

Nevertheless, it was clear this preconceived timebound temporary nature enabled participation in excess beyond their everyday boundaries and that this was made possible by spaces targeted at students at specific times. Students presented a desire to live in the moment. To some extent, this immersion in risk, in periods of intensity, resonated with earlier definitions of risk as “deviant” and “irresponsible” (Lupton, 1999a: p148). For example, risks such as drinking, sexual promiscuity were freely and carelessly engaged in as a result of students’ quest for excitement through this new found freedom. The focus group showed how reflective this opinion was of the student body more broadly, but also how students sought reassurance from each other that they were indeed having a typical experience.

“Like when I’m drunk I’m like ye look at me go and then the next day I’m looking at the bottle like as if I drink half of that in a night. That’s just awful. So bad for you. I was in this taxi the other day and we were talking, he (taxi driver) was like drinking was the devil. You should respect your body. You think about

it when your hanging. Like you think when your hanging, its so bad, but then when your fine again you forget about it.”

(Tracey, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, FG)

“Yeah.”

(Agreement from group, FG)

“You know what I mean?”

(Tracey, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, FG)

“Yeah.”

(Agreement from group, FG)

“If someone gave me a drink now, (laughs) well maybe not right now, but I’d be like yeeah. You sort of forget. It’s like child birth, it’s awful at the time, but then your body forgets about it. If you drink water before you go to bed to it’s kinda fine.

(Tracey, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, FG)

Indeed, their justification exposure to and involvement in risks was temporary and students were only concerned with the immediate gratifications rather than any long-term implications of their behaviour. Expanding on the spatialities of the bubble in chapter 5, not only was transgression limited to safe spaces, but this enabled students to get carried away, as their time in these spaces was also limited. The timetabled nature of these spaces encouraged a whimsical approach to risk taking and more intense experience of these spaces. As they left these risky spaces, their feeling of risk was quickly forgotten. This further explained why behaviour was anticipated in these spaces at particular times.

This also resonates with descriptions of the hedonistic self, typical of modernity (Lupton, 1998; Lupton and Tulloch, 2002a, 2002b; Lyng, 1990; 2005). This encouraged risk taking for immediate experience of benefits such as excitement, and thrill matching (Lyng, 1990; 2005). Students were so pre-concerned with the 'doing' of risk they often only considered its riskiness on reflection. These students only reflected on the risky nature of their behaviour as they were feeling the negative affects on their body, but also as they were reminded of their behaviour by those not consumed by the "swept away" feeling (Lupton and Tulloch, 2002b: p121) of the bubble. For example, in the above conversation it was apparent that as the taxi drivers 'disgust' by drinking, advocating a need to respect your body, had triggered a momentary reflection.

Risk, therefore, was not necessarily, something futuristic (Anderson, 2010a; Beck, 2012) which students sought to avoid, but was only characterised as risky on reflection. However, it was clear these reflection periods were brief before similar risky behaviours were repeated as students were reassured by the timebound nature of these behaviours, as their presence in these spaces was timetabled. There was an additional temporality experienced here. Further to the timebound nature of specific activities (for example, a night out lasting a few hours), many students also alluded to the temporality of the student experience itself:

"Yeah I think there are some risks I have probably taken here that I don't think I would have had I not been at uni. (laughs) Excessive drinking probably one of them. Erm I have done drugs since I've been at uni and I don't think I'd ever ever have even dreamed of it had I not been. But because I'm here. This doesn't last forever. I won't do them after uni. But like I said that's what makes it ok."

(Candice, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, ILHI)

Indeed, Candice's comment suggests how ordinarily she would not have considered taking drugs, but the temporality of her situation, and identity as a university student, minimised this feeling of risk. The life history interviews were particularly useful in

building a sense of time and temporality into students understanding of risk. For example, Candice explained the temporality of her situation meant she could engage more deeply and intensely, albeit for brief periods. She knew her experience of the spatialities in chapter 5 was only temporary, therefore, rationalises behaviour this way. There was a termination date on her involvement in these risks and so they do not seem as dangerous. Candice expressed desire to enjoy and immerse herself in the moment, to enjoy being a university student. She was not considering the long term possible impacts of the drug taking or indeed other behaviours which she perceived as risky such as excessive drinking. Her reasoning being that these 'risks' were expected to end with the cessation of studenthood.

Moreover, the impact was not seen as long lasting but simply part of being a student. She described almost a checklist of 'being a student' through these behaviours. For example, she (and other students) referred to their experience of having 'done drugs', in a rather generic way, as if it was part of the prescribed student experience, rather than being more specific about smoking weed, dropping a pill, or snorting coke etc. It was almost as if she ticked off the experience of 'doing drugs', and excessive drinking, to demonstrate she had had 'the student experience'. Some students continued to explain studenthood was enabling risks in this way, as although students themselves admitted, "it's just so unsustainable" (Candice, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, FG), they continued to adopt a "you only live once" (Candice, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, FG) attitude:

"I think like most courses 1st year doesn't count. Like we went out a lot more all the way through first year. (Laughs) Erm yeah, we all went out a bit more. I think it was a period where we all sort of in the mind-set of someone that sewing their oats, was having a crazy time before second year, where we knew we were guna have to knuckle down. I think everyone had a bit of yeah let's be free and do exactly what they want for a while. But this year, its like the opportunities just weren't there before, so it was like aaaaah you can do this now and then it was easy to do. It felt like what you should be doing. Have some fun before the work gets hard. To make the most of it."

(Lydia, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, ILHI)

“Theres in the back of my mind I’m like you’re not guna be able to do this forever so just. I manage to convince myself its ok.”

(Josie, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, FG)

“It’s kind of the time in your life when you can do that.”

(Lydia, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, FG)

“I guess like one of my friends said she’d never do this when she’s not at uni, but she goes back with people or bring people back now. But you know I don’t think it’s a problem at uni, but when she’s older she won’t do it anymore she’ll settle down and get a job and I dunno.”

(Gemma, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, FG)

The comments outlined here show how some students revelled in their experience as a ‘time out of time’, a period of “carnavalesque”, a “licensed release” (Stallybrass and White, 1986: p13), a “temporary liberation from the prevailing truth of the established order” and “suspension of ...norms” (Bakhtin, 1984: p10). This facilitates further the argument of university as a temporary but permitted time to play away from the norms enforced outside of the bubble. Part of the excitement and thrill was that students were engaging in behaviour unavailable to them previously, they were “crossing boundaries, from a familiar space” (Sibley, 1995: p32). For instance, Lydia noted students were able to immerse in opportunities which weren’t available before. Things which were normally “culturally coded” (Lupton, 1999: p171), as risky and inappropriate behaviours could be celebrated for this select period of time. A comparison with Mazie’s (2005) exploration of “rumspringa” is helpful here. In the same way that Amish teenagers had a while to ‘run free’ in the “devil’s playground” (Walker, 2002), before possibly returning to the church and its associated regulatory lifestyle, university students were using their time to ‘run free’. It was hinted that beyond university they expect to be returning to ordinary conservative, reserved

lifestyles outside of the bubble. Although, these lifestyles might not actually be conservative, students were expecting to have to adhere to stricter rules, and thought they would be under more pressure to apply mainstream behaviour. They envisaged either a similar life to theirs previous to university, or one which eventually replicated their parents.

There was an expectation that as the bubble burst and students left all would resume to normal. This implies that 'student' identities are time and spatially specific, which are only exercised temporarily, alongside chief, constant, permanent identities (Valentine, 2000; 2003). Thus, students made clear that they did not intend to sustain their university 'student' behaviour beyond graduation. Instead they would revert to more conservative ideals demanded by society's expectations post-studenthood. In contrast, to findings suggesting graduates continue some elements of this lifestyle (Butler, Smith and Holt, 2007), such as living with friends and immersion in certain types of consumption practices, as they begin their employment trajectories as graduates, students imagined a cessation on the extremities of these behaviours. Whilst, many students expected certain risks such as stress, drinking and so on might continue after university, they would 'play' in a more reserved manner. The next section goes onto discuss this.

### *6.3.2 We're young, we can bounce back*

The intensity of students' experience of behaviours described as risky in the previous section, was expected to lessen. Therefore feelings of risks associated to dissipate. Student comments implied it would no longer be appropriate or acceptable to engage in these risks in the same way or to the same extent. In fact, some students referred to their parents to explain how age impacted what risky behaviour was appropriate or not.

"When I think of older people taking risks, I believe that the risks that older people take are more significant. The reason being, things like changing jobs- my dad's changed jobs many times, will it work out? Or moving houses, I mean my mum moved me from a school, that was a risk, would I be comfortable doing that, umm, but when I

think about moving houses, changing houses, it's massive if you think about it. My dad went from big companies to small companies that then went bust, out of a job. So that was a risk that didn't pay off, but he's alright now. Umm, he knows he can't do that again, he learnt from the risks. There's more to think about when they take risks, and they're older so they should know more about what's worth taking or not. I think there's more to explain if it doesn't work out. Or more at risk should I say?"

(Steve, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, ILHI)

These comments suggested that, there was an expectation that whilst participation in social risks might diminish beyond studenthood, risk itself would maintain relevance to everyday life (Lupton and Tulloch, 2002a; 2002b). But, students envisaged the possibility of new risks in more serious ways, with expectations of 'adult' responsibilities. However, some students implied that their parents still engaged in risky behaviour similar to that associated with studenthood, but it could not be as extreme or as frequent and there were limits as to what was acceptable.

"Like obviously mum still goes out and has a few glasses. Well, actually she does pot quite a lot. But you know what I mean, if people knew that they'd probably react a bit like ooh. And she takes like forever to recover at Christmas. I just think it's a bit different when you're older. Your body doesn't react as well. And it's like I said a bit more ooooh."

(Harriet, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, ILHI)

Illustrated in the quote above and common among respondents, was the importance of age in how behaviours were perceived as risk in the first place and consequentially how they should or should not be played out. There was an expectation that parents should behave in a way that was appropriate for their age. Indeed, for most students, their 'youth', in addition to their student status, provided reassurance in their risk taking. Illustrated by the extract below is how students' sense of youth warranted their behaviour through the following focus group conversation:

“You’re young you so just sorta think it’s not guna happen to me.”

(Kimberley, 2<sup>nd</sup>, ILHI)

“Unhealthy stuff, like the eating badly. I guess the risk always seemed a lot less because we’re relatively young and relatively healthy still, so the risk seems like a lot less than it would in like ten years perhaps but still there’s definitely risk involved.”

(Damien, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, FG)

There was a sense of immunity or invincibility to the consequences of this behaviour as their age along with the temporary nature of indulgence was noted as lessening the feeling of risk. Therefore, this would suggest that youth adjourned the “risk” connotation of this behaviour until later in life. There was an assumption that their bodies would be able to recover from any damage due to their youthfulness. Indeed, to fortify this argument it is useful to relate students’ comments about these behaviours feeling less risky due to their age to Mitchell et al’s (2001) writing on young mothers to help clarify the importance of acknowledging how age and students’ transitional position impacts perception and experience of risk. Mitchell et al (2001) discussed the portrayal of young mothers as having made a risky choice yet later in life having a child was seen as a perfectly natural choice, therefore, not a risk. Comparably, students imagined their behaviour right now as perfectly natural. It aligned closely to expectations of young people in transitions literature as ‘emerging adults’(Arnett, 2001, 2006; Bynner, 2005), and as ‘risky’ consumers (Ettore and Miles, 2002: p175). Therefore, the behaviour, although sometimes demonised (Hubbard, 2013), was normalised for this age group. Indeed, it may have been deemed ‘riskless risk’ (Hubbard, 2002) because of its predictability.

Studenthood offered care free freedom but still with a presumption that the behaviour would cease with the adoption of adult status. Although, I do not wish to imply that adult status was something which students would automatically be granted upon graduation, nor that once acquired it is permanently retained as not all students

envisaged themselves as adults upon completion of university. Instead, simply that getting older would heighten the risk factor of these behaviours. However, students did note their need to experiment with risks, during this period, and the value of doing so, in order to learn:

“I think risks are important. Like when you’re younger you run fast and then you fall over and you learn oh ok that’s my limit. And it’s the same here. You drink too much, or leave an assignment to late and you learn, you know, for the future. From the past, and for the future.”

(Gemma, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, ILHI)

This quote implies elements of reversibility and irreversibility, sometimes linked to voluntary risk taking (Douglas and Wildavsky’s (1983: pp21-23). Rather than a need to avoid risky behaviours, there was a need to test the boundaries. The student above insinuated you only know once you have gone too far once you have crossed that point, yet you do not know where the line is until crossed. Therefore, crossing the line might be necessary in order to learn. In these circumstances, risk is presented as something to embrace, through which, students learnt their own limits (Tulloch and Lupton, 2002b). Rather than careful negotiation of the edges (Lyng, 2005), however, studenthood presented an opportunity to go beyond these limits, through “intentional boundary crossing”, as risk became a “privileged act” (Lupton and Tulloch, 2002b: p113-124), enabled by youth and studenthood. What might normally be irreversible was rendered reversible through the ‘bounce back’ ability inferred by the youth applied to studenthood.

However, this is not to imply that this knowledge obtained through risk taking, transmuted to maturation, as a student claimed, supported by opinions of his peers, “In fact I’ve probably become less mature”. Other students made similar claims in a RLT/TLRS:

- felt like I've gone in reverse, ~~to the~~ first year I felt that I wasn't comfortable enough with the people around me ~~now~~ to experiment with new experiences like ~~and~~ alcohol. Now with adulthood impending, feel like I need to make the most of my youth.

Figure 33 Thoughts on transitioning out of the bubble, RLT/TLRS

These statements and an associated mentality question assumptions of adulthood on completion of university (Chatterton, 1999; Hopkins, 2006; Holdsworth, 2009a; Fields and Morgan-Klein, 2010). It might be understood that some students might in fact, in a similar way to how not all rumspringa teenagers return to armish life, not choose to return to conservative norms they envisaged but instead, after a taste of 'carnival', present a desire to stay or at least return. This was supported by some students' reluctance to terminate their time as a student:

"I'm looking mainly at going to do a Masters. I still really, really, maybe in a years' time I'll have had enough, but I don't think I'm ready to leave uni yet. Definitely become quite attached. I don't like the idea of removing yourself from all these opportunities."

(Josie, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, ILHI)

#### 6.4 Anticipated rupture and residue of the bubble

This section highlights how the manifestation of fear and anxiety about the anticipated burst of the bubble impacted students' engagement with risk, particularly towards the end of their student trajectories. Firstly, the section discusses some students' panic in packing as much as possible into the present, compared with others' frustration in 'waiting' for the bubble to burst, adding to understandings of the temporalities of studenthood. Secondly, the section discusses students attempts to reconnect with life outside the bubble, and anticipation of dispersal of friendship groups, contributing to research on friendships in transition.

#### 6.4.1 *Packing into the present and moments of 'Timepass'*

This sub section outlines how the anticipated rupture of the bubble translated into accelerated time for some students wanting to fill this time with productive activity, whilst others were agitated by the duration of 'timepass' (Jeffrey, 2010a; 2010b), felt through boredom of waiting in the final stages. In contrast, some saw this period of waiting as a welcomed sense of calm and peace before the next rush. This adds to Jeffrey's (2010a; 2010b) work on timepass with Meerut students. By using the concept in a different context, I draw out similarities and differences, furthering our understanding of what it means to be a student in current UKHE.

For some students, the anticipated future rupture of the bubble transmuted into a manifestation of fear and anxiety in the present. There was a real sense of immediacy and need to immerse in the present, as some students explained their involvement with risk at university. Candice talked anxiously about a real need to take advantage of the opportunities she had whilst here at university:

“Just wanting to get the best out of every opportunity that they have whether that be socialising or working. I know that when I'm not here I'm not gonna have this. That doesn't just mean going out. You're just very aware that you're never gonna be in this situation again. You can do so many activities or things to get involved in so many things. You won't have the same freedom or free time or flexibility in any other time in your life. I think there's a big desire to make the most out of that. It's typical of I think most students. That kind of element of something organised and quite supported that you can't really get anywhere else. I don't want to leave the ability to do loads of things at uni and the support to do so. There's always someone to help you if things go wrong. You might as well try to and stuff cuz if you're not gonna try now you know when are you gonna try it?”

(Candice, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, ILHI)

Candice's dialogue gives a sense of her awareness of time. In one sense, she was aware of time rapidly running away from her; the bubble was temporary and there was an expectation that she would not have the same control over her time in the future. Her awareness of her temporary student status transformed into a need to cram as much as possible into the present. She showed her awareness of the university as a "time-bound" experience and anticipated that future experiences of time would be much more structured, or less flexible. Therefore, she felt obliged to make productive use of her time, to take full advantage and "make the most" of the excess time she was currently offered. However, this time was timetabled as the activities she attempted to cram in were organised for her, which helped her structure her time.

Furthermore, Candice highlighted risks (here in a broader sense as trying something new regardless of socially or academically related) as an opportunity at university. She articulated the need to 'embrace' risk, as it was the only time in her life she felt she could push her own boundaries, and try new things, whilst being supported to do so. Referring back to the safety net of the university should *things go wrong*, *University was perceived as a supported period of time, therefore, enabled risk taking.* Candice, like many students was attracted to university as a "place of play" (explained in chapter 4), and how it may suck you in (chapter 5), and wished to get the most out of her stay in a place (university in this instance), whilst the opportunity was available.

Whilst for Candice this accelerated sense of time was about packing as much as possible into the present, in terms of varied experiences, mostly for enjoyment, for others this accelerated period of time was seen as a last chance to make themselves more "employable". As the tantalising and obscuring nature of the bubble became apparent, students became more worried about opportunity, or indeed the lack of, in the graduate labour market. These students hoped to cram as much as they could into their experience in their final moments:

"I was just cruising until now, but now I'm 100mph until the end. Adding anything and everything on my cv. You know make it worth it."

(James, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, ILHI)

“Just trying to get involved in lots of things to get a flavour for what I like and what I don’t like. I guess find out what I’m good at and hopefully try and gain some direction that way. I don’t really know what I want to do so hopefully this will help me figure that out.”

(Katie, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, ILHI)

James, above, to some extent, demonstrated a desire to justify his decision to come to university overall, by finding ways to show that regardless of whether or not he secured graduate level employment it was in some way ‘worth it’. Whereas, Katie, was undecided about what career she hoped for and so sought to figure this out through trialling as many activities as possible. For some students, it wasn’t simply about packing in all they could, but who they were involved in these activities with:

“I think there’s so many other interesting things to do when you’re at uni, than actually your degree. That sounds really awful, but it’s true. You feel like you should be with your friends, cus you know when I go home they might not be there, or when I finish this degree when this is all over I might not see them again.”

(Amy, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, ILHI)

This demonstrates an anticipated dispersal of friends after university, as like Holton’s (2013: p191-194) study they did not envisage remaining in their university after completion. For both Candice, James, Katie, and Amy, time seems to be accelerated, as they aimed to fill their time in the bubble in meaningful ways. For others, there was a sense of ‘timepass’ (Jeffrey, 2010b) as they were simply waiting for the experience to end, noting the time as repeated, the same, pointless:

“The more I went out the less fun it became.”

(Diane, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, FG)

“I get bored of it. It’s not like im getting excited for anything anymore. I’m spending money and nights would be average anyway. It just gets samey. Samey. Like the same music, the same club.”

(Gemma, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, FG)

“I think at the moment theres nothing left here for me. I know that sounds really dramatic but there’s no risk here. I feel like these last couple of weeks are quite pointless. There’s nothing for me to grab onto, nothing for me to take a risk with, so I’m looking forward to university to end so something new can start so you will be faced with a whole new lot of risk and opportunity and you can take them as you please.”

(Amy, 3<sup>rd</sup>, ILHI)

Whilst the life history interview here was useful in giving a sense of time, the focus groups helped build an understanding how typical these feelings were. For these students, time was frustratingly slow and without new opportunities available seemed pointless. These students were experiencing what Jeffrey (2010b: p76) described as “an expanse of featureless time”, as university became a “container space designed to hold their body” (Bissell, 2007: p285), in this prolonged ‘waiting’. Those consumptions which initially made the bubble appealing had lost their novelty and had become predictable and boring. Risk cannot be separated from emotion as it became clear that it is emotion, more specifically, the emotions of boredom and disappointment. Therefore, these moments are full of potential affective moments (Bissell, 2007) as this waiting does not necessarily as it suggests, render the body still or inactive, but instead the body was active through the intense emotions provoked by students’ frustration, boredom, disappointment and so on. Also evidenced in these quotes, was how there was an expectation that beyond university there would be something for them to ‘grab onto’ or be excited about. Moreover, there was a sense of anticipated progression beyond the bubble in these quotes but a vagueness as to how or where. For some this was also evident as they envisaged where they will be in 5 and 10 years time.

#### 6.4.2 Rebuilding connections outside the bubble

This sub section highlights how in contrast to statements from students earlier in their trajectories, 3<sup>rd</sup> year students, particularly those within the last few months of their degrees highlighted the renegotiation of parental relationships. It also emphasises the anticipated dispersal of university friendship groups and how students expected to manage these as they prepared for departure of this transitional space.

As stress and workload became overwhelming there was a need to fall back on these firmly rooted support networks. At this stage, home became important to manage their stress as it provided escape and perspective. Some students, therefore, began rebuilding connections with home and many noted more frequent visits. These students noted that being at home allowed them to see the world outside of university and that their parents, in particular, helped relieve stress.

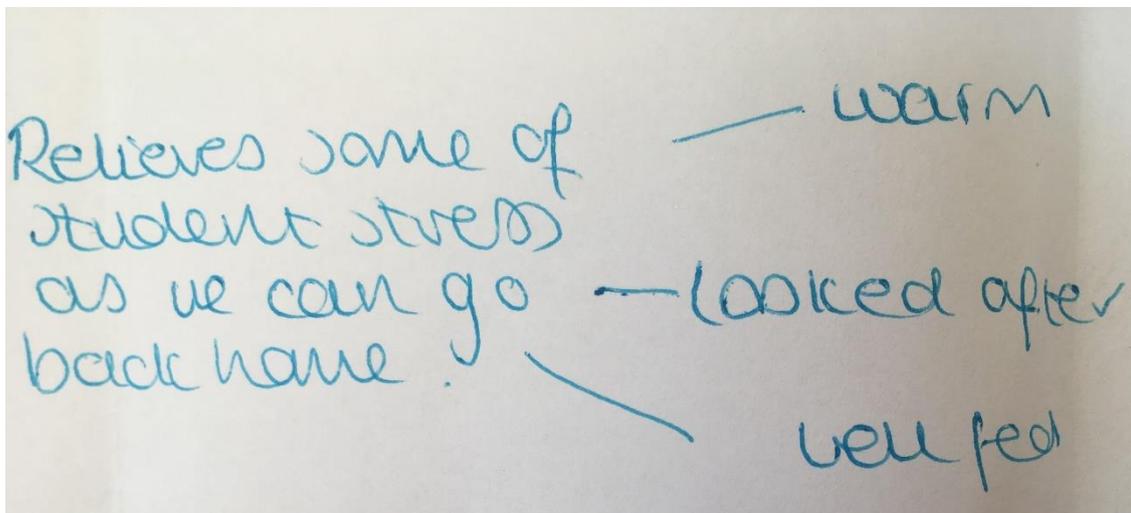


Figure 34 Parents and home relieving stress, Mixed gender group, RLT/TLRS

Handwritten notes in red ink on a white background. The text reads: "Loneliness - hard to manage friends and work. Never seeing people that much. ↳ makes homesickness strong - miss home a lot. Homelessness more prominent in 3rd year."

Figure 35 Loneliness and homesickness, girls group, 3rd year, RLT/TLRS

This echoes findings from previous research suggesting that those that move away from home for a significant amount of time may find that they come to rebuild these connections as the time or distance away has presented a chance for reflection (Holton, 2015b: p828). Indeed, the above figures resonated with these earlier findings as during intense periods some students found a new appreciation for home and the comfort it could provide. During these sessions students explained that reforming bonds with those at home and more frequent visits to home for support at this time relieved some of the tension inside the bubble. As they anticipated the burst of the bubble and the consequent dispersal of university friends all over the country they sought to re-connect with what they saw as more permanent relationships, particularly family. Some students recounted temporary dodging of parents (and other relatives of their parents' generation or older) had actually been a way of managing risk, as students noted they were preventing "flipping out" at parents during intense periods. In doing so, they believed they were preserving these important relationships for the long term. Students noted how their increased contact with family nearing the end of their degree meant previous overwhelming pressure (and reason for initial distancing from home earlier in students' trajectories), from family, became a

motivating force to complete the degree. This pressure worked to drive students closer to the at end, through fear of letting family down. As Steve commented:

“That potential failure letting you down, can drive you. My mum always talks about having the picture on of the wall of me having graduated. You’ve got that pressure.”

(Steve, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, ILHI)

For a few students rather than simply beginning to re-connect with those at home (through increased communication or visits) they in fact decided to move home for their final year of study. This was for similar reasons of reassurance and perspective from home. Students reasons for living at home in this research were not about minimising financial risks but instead about a calculated decision to manage expected emotional risks such as stress and anxiety.

“I appreciate home more in a way, I appreciate what it’s like to have people that really care around. I can come home and cut off. And parents worries helps you gain perspective.”

(Denise, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, RLT/TLRS)

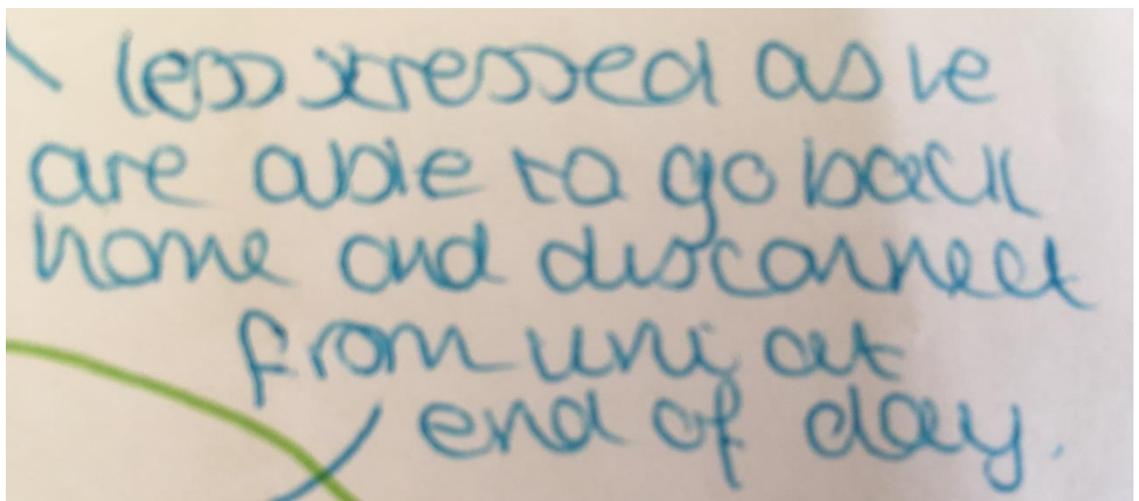


Figure 36 Cut off from stress, RLT/TLRS

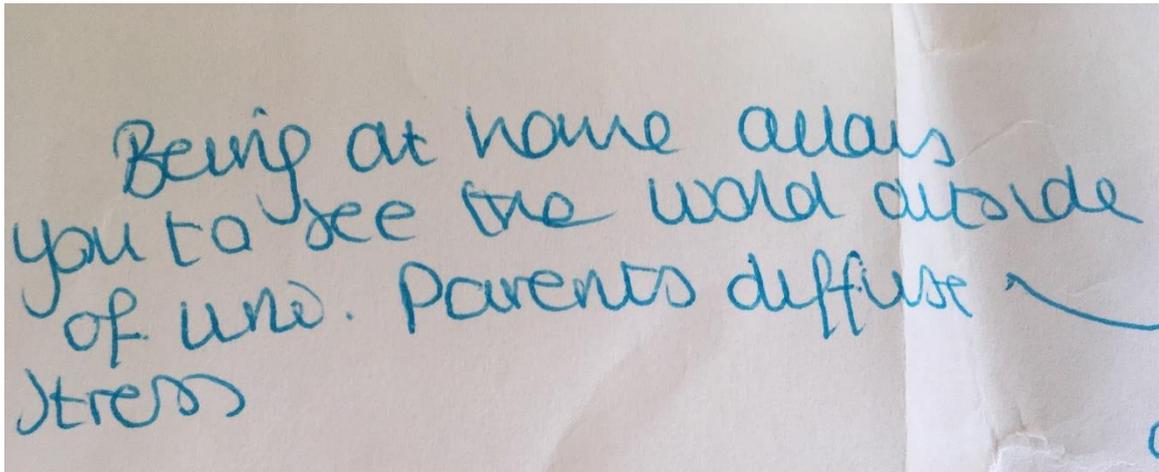


Figure 37 Parents diffuse stress, RLT/TLRS

As Denise (3<sup>rd</sup> year, RLT/TLRS) explained in using the figure above it was clear home enabled a sense of reassurance and a physical escape or separation from the 'stress' of university. This compartmentalisation of stress within the university space, enabled this student to manage it as a risk. Returning home enabled her to control stress levels through her new-found perspective on her situation as a university student. Being a university student no longer consumed her identity. This extends work on local/non-traditional students suggesting that university is only segment of student's lives, that in fact it is not all encompassing (Crozier et al, 2008). This decision to move home after moving away muddies the waters of the traditional/ non-traditional binary. The timing of this RLT/TLRS, in the case of this particular student's narrative, was particularly useful as she had just completed the return to her family home, which she had decided to make just after stage 2, therefore was able to discuss this decision making process and how this had changed her student experience.

For other students, the anticipated dispersal of university friends meant they sought to re-built and re-negotiate their place in friendship groups at home, expressing anxiety, as they were anxious about where they would now fit:

"Going back home is awkward, cus whilst you're in the social group, you're not. Obviously there's the stories, bits of banter, jokes that you miss and you're just

there like, ha ha, what's happened here? Someone's got to spend 5-10 minutes explaining what's happened and by then, everyone's off playing pool, joke's dead. I find that happens quite a lot. So I'm trying to go home a bit more to kind of re-build that I guess. I don't want to go back to nothing."

(Daniel, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, ILHI)

Whereas Daniel had been keen to rebuild his relationships with friends at home, some students' felt that they had grown too far apart from friends at home. The risk of coming to university was employed by students' as a comparative measure as students' seemed to no longer value or respect their friends' choices but saw theirs as superior. This builds upon earlier arguments in chapter 5 detailing the socio-spatial segregation of students meant they became so immersed in the bubble they were less able to identify with non-student lives and spaces. Their view of the outside world was distorted and obscured by the glazed coating of the bubble. Students believed that somehow their life experiences within the bubble and their engagement with risk somehow were more valuable than the experiences of their friends that had not opted to go to university.

"Umm, I mean, I feel- it sounds bad, my friends aren't really connected with the world. Their days consist of waking up, go to work, come home. Umm, and occasional sporting activities. But really, nothing else changes. Like, umm, I don't know how they feel, but at least I have a sense that I can achieve something, if I get a degree, you know, I'd feel like I'd achieved massively. But, my friends, umm, I know a lot of them are bored in their jobs. Stuck."

(Lydia, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, ILHI)

Students commonly advocated how the bubble was "cut off from reality" (see section 5.3), but, in the above quote Lydia shunned her friends for not being connected to the real world. She implied that somehow her experience of the bubble actually means she was 'better' connected to the world. For example, she suggested that her life could change as a consequence of her degree whilst her friend is stuck. This suggested

that university enabled her a 'transformative' transition (Brown et al, 2012), that students still believe in the tantalising promise of the bubble, with prospects of career and increased opportunities (Patinoitis and Holdsworth, 2005). For these reasons, Lydia was adamant that she did not want to return to where she felt she would be stuck:

"I still probably be in England somewhere, but somewhere different, like I won't be in Derby (parental home) or Leicester. I wanna go somewhere different. I wanna have a new experience. I think it's good, because, it's scary but that's how you advance. I think that's another thing, going back to my friends at home I think they're just happy being at home and not moving somewhere else, do you know what I mean? I don't want to get stuck. I think when you go to university you're like 'omg' like come to a new city. I want to see other stuff so I think, yeah I can't go home. I don't want to revert back."

(Lydia, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, ILHI)

Lydia, expressed a desire to carry elements of the bubble forward as she transitioned out, highlighted by her hopes of continuing to 'advance', through her experience of new places. In comparison some students were much more hopeful about the continuation of the friendships after uni, with co-researchers noting that they still expected to "turn to each other for the bigger things in life." Some students also noted that this was one of the reasons they came to university and were excited excited about the dispersal as they would have new places to visit and how this made them feel better connected to the world:

"Almost to have friends in other places, other than home. Like in Shropshire, I don't have a friend that lives more than 30 miles away from me, not that I talk to often anyway. To feel part of the world properly. I mean now that I've got friends in Plymouth, or like Edinburgh, like real real friends, you know, it feels a lot more like your part of a bigger community, which is really nice. And they're my family, you always visit family."

## 6.5 Conclusions

In Summary, this chapter teased out some of the lived temporalities of student life. Firstly, it documents the increasing intensity of the atmosphere within the bubble at particular points across the university journey, most notably, exam season or near assignment deadlines, and more generally as student progress through their degree placing more meaning on these. During these periods of heightened periods of pressure the materiality of the atmosphere is felt. Extending arguments made in chapter 5, about metaphorical statements about how students explained they felt certain atmospheres, this chapter demonstrates how this materiality is sometimes felt much more literally. For example, students highlight how the physical weight of carrying more books and laptops, meant they felt physically heavier during these periods. During this intensification of pressure in the bubble, students sought to manage risk.

However, this is not to suggest that university is always intense, not at all. In fact, even these moments of increased intensity were punctuated by and simultaneous to 'timepass' and interruption.

Next, the chapter addressed university as 'time out of time', a temporary engagement with excessive behaviour, through a 'swept away feeling', momentarily stepping out of reality, and only considering behaviour as risky on reflection. There was a further temporality experienced as the duration of studenthood and university itself is expressed a 'time out of time', where normal rules do not apply and after which students envisage returning to conservative norms. Within the student experience, students note how risky behaviours themselves are timebound. Nevertheless, immersion with risk is justified through the desire to 'dive' whilst they are enabled to do so. There is a degree of reversibility expected from the risk taking as some students make assumptions that their youth enables a 'bouncebackability' from any risk.

In these first two sections, the chapter hinted at students' anticipation of a total rupture; as the bubble bursts, life would be completely different. The last section expands on this, addressing students' present reactions to the anticipated rupture of the bubble. For some students, the anticipated rupture, manifested a certain anxiety meaning students felt an overwhelming desire to cram as much as possible into the present, to make the most of their experience. Whilst for some this was engaging in all the opportunities and activities university had to offer, for others it was more about 'who' they were spending their time with. However, whilst many noted this need to immerse in these final moments others were bored of waiting to exit the bubble, which manifested as frustration in the present. Lastly, the chapter considered how the anticipated dispersal of university friendship groups, for some, translates into a strong desire to re-connect with both family and friends at home. For others, there was a want to maintain distance from home so as not to revert back to a previous identity, through which students imagine being stuck.

## 7 Conclusions

### 7.1 Introduction

This thesis has addressed spatial, relational, and temporal aspects of risk and risky behaviour, during students' transition to, through, and beyond university. In order to address the above, the main aims of this research were:

- 1) To explore undergraduate students' perceptions of risk before arrival, during their transition to university
- 2) To explore students' perceptions and experiences of risk during their time at/transition through university
- 3) To explore students' perceptions and experiences of risk as they prepare for the transition out of university

In exploring these aims, a key motivation of this research was the participatory ethos, researching *with*, rather than *on* students, to ensure the themes articulated were those that were most important to students themselves. Therefore, as the 'bubble' was seen as most appropriate to students, in answering these aims, it became the central focus for this write up. Consequentially, the major findings and primary contributions of this thesis rest in the fourfold schematisation of the university bubble, which has enhanced understanding of the student experience, and more besides. This chapter discusses the main contributions of this research, before offering recommendations for future research.

### 7.2 Main Contributions

As I demonstrated in the literature review chapter, there are burgeoning (but underdeveloped) literatures on the geographies of students, particularly with relation to traditional student voice. There remains a paucity, with the exception of Holton's (2013; 2015a; 2015b) recent research, which goes beyond the transition to university, and first year experience. Therefore, the originality of this work has been demonstrated through its involvement of undergraduates across their trajectory. This project is unique in exercising a participatory approach. Whilst some researchers in

geography (Hopkins, 2006; Grant, 2016a) have implemented participatory methods in their discussions with young people about university, they are careful to note the difference between a participatory methodology and a participatory approach (See Hopkins, 2006: p242). However, neither have been employed when working with university students themselves. Therefore, I have offered an original contribution in applying a full participatory approach, working with undergraduate co-researchers, to better understand student experiences. It has been important to reveal nuances in the journey through university, rather than a previous focus by researchers and university services on the transition to university, in terms of getting students to university and the transition beyond in terms of career trajectories.

In addressing the first aim of this thesis, I have contributed to existing work on the transition to university and risk by focusing on a self-selecting traditional student population. In doing so, I have emphasised the complexity and heterogeneity of experience within this group. Therefore, I have agreed with calls to move beyond this binary (Holton, 2013), as students in this sample challenge its original meaning, noting only age and moving away from home as key factors in what it means to be a traditional student.

Whilst previous work has centred on non-traditional student experiences, emphasising the risky nature of this transition for these students, this research has added to these debates by challenging assumptions about the ease of a traditional student transition. In chapter 4, I highlighted how traditional students also navigate this transition with careful thought, according to perceived risks, and how they anticipate these will play out. In doing so, I have expanded research which has highlighted financial and emotional factors, as well as ideas of fitting or mis-fitting, as risks during this transition, amongst the non-traditional student population (Reay et al, 2010), to understanding how the commodification of student lifestyles has impacted students' perception of risk.

In doing so, I have highlighted an important need to re-think the terminology applied student experience, with a possibility of moving from traditional/non-traditional, to

typical or non-typical. In the case of the sample in this project, the lines between traditional and typical are blurred. For example, students commonly referred to behaviours which they perceived to be typical of student life, when explaining their 'traditional' identity. This complicates the previous neat categorisation of student experience as traditional or non-traditional. Questions are also raised about how students determine what is meant by being 'first in the family' when they are not necessarily the first in their family to go to university, which would automatically grant non-traditional status, but are part of the first-generation to participate in higher education. Whilst the academic literature and institutional policies might assume non-traditional status of these students, some of these students believe that their sibling attending university may have created a normalised trajectory for them.

Student understanding of traditional, on the whole, seemed to be what they regarded as pre-determined identity, based on how they arrived at university. For example, being young, living away from home, with some previous (family) experience of university, although what constituted previous experience varied. For many participants, 'typical studenthood,' referred to how they experienced, or expected to experience studenthood. In this project, I have highlighted a need to move beyond the traditional/ non-traditional binary as students may move between the historic meanings of these groups throughout their degree. Instead, this thesis has opened up a need for further exploration into the disparity between universities' understanding of terms applied to student experience and how students themselves understand these terms.

Through an explanation of the university as a tantalising place of play, I have demonstrated how the continued dominance of the social aspects of being a student (Chatterton, 1999; Chatterton, 2010), particularly with regard to binge drinking, presented by the media, the university and family knowledge, distracted attention away from other risks. Students felt this meant they were underprepared for other risks which were less prominent in discourses of university pre-arrival. For example, risks such as stress and anxiety. In addition, students' distancing of media reports from their personal experience, reinforced and normalised these risky behaviours. I have,

therefore, highlighted how bubbles boundaries were imagined even before arrival, as students constructed an imaginary barrier between their expected experiences of risk and the medias articulations.

I have argued that the perception of university as a place of play had further implications for traditional students' transition to university, making some 'bubbles' more appealing than others. As students anticipated drinking as a key risk, which they linked to casual encounters, spending more than they could afford and possibly risking the overall achievement of gaining his degree, they sought to manage this. By choosing Leicester as a place which enabled engagement in these risks, but on a scale which was manageable. In doing so, I have highlighted importance of a geographical approach, as students' choice of place for university was carefully calculated according to perceptions of risks.

In addition to this, chapter 4 argued as the university was perceived as playing a large role in promoting what risks were acceptable, therefore how students should play within the bubble. Chapter 5 explained how this perception of play in promotional tools, translated into an expectation by students that the university had a responsibility to protect them, and be prepared for any consequences which may arise. In fact, students felt that the university had promised to do this, as wording on the students' union website and in the university prospectus was sometimes taken literally. For example, students noted phrases such as "you can be assured that there is support and advice on hand if you need it" (University of Leicester, 2015: p59). These findings are particularly relevant with recent Competition and market Authorities consumer laws advice for universities (CMA, 2015), to ensure they do not break consumer protection laws and further advice on rights for students as 'consumers' (CMA, 2015). Through a discussion of the spatialities of studenthood, I have argued this expectation of protection against risk was perceived to extend far beyond university owned property.

In addressing the second aim of this thesis, I have contributed to discussions on the socio-spatial geographies of studenthood, both in how they are perceived before

arrival, and how this impacts expectation and experience of risk throughout students' transition. To date, work reflecting on this socio-spatial separation has tended to prioritise non-student voice, such as landlords, business and so on, discussing student impacts as fairly negative (Chatterton; 2000; Chatterton and Hollands, 2003; Allinson 2006; Hubbard, 2008; Munro and Livingstone, 2011). Therefore, this thesis contributes to a better understand of the spatialities of university life, by giving precedence to student voice.

I argued in chapter 5, these increasingly distinctive student centric enclaves, carved out in cities, intensifying the socio-spatial separation of studenthood, operate as almost automatically creating boundaries to the bubble. Indeed, the spatial separation of the student population, encouraged a disconnect from the real world. For many students, this facilitated risky behaviour. Within these spaces, students were keen to build and replicate a collective traditional identity.

I have contributed to carnivalesque time-spaces here, as whilst students acknowledged that risks weren't necessarily greater outside, student zones were a safer space for risk taking as transgression in these carnival spaces was expected. Similarly, to how carnival is presented as a "licensed release" (Stallybrass and White, 1986: p13), within a confined space, but at the same time only reinforces a particular order. Indeed, students policed their own behaviour to maintain the dominance of a particular way of being a student. For example, through expected male but not female participation in chunder charts. Tensions within the bubble are highlighted within the bubble, as not all students adhere to these norms, furthering emphasising the need to explore the diverse experiences of this group. Some students presented an awareness that the bubble was shared by non-students, but the sheer volume and density of students meant it was seen as owned by the student population, therefore student rules applied. However, students did seek to tame their carnivalesque bodies outside carnival spaces where they perceived students to be out of place.

For some students, these carnival spaces led to risk being interpreted in simple, place specific ways. For example, the o2 venue was coupled with drinking. There is a small

contribution made here to work on anticipation and risk. In this instance, rather than anticipation of possible future risks triggering preventative or precautionary action, the anticipation of risk provides reassurance, and in some circumstances, further encourages risky behaviour as risks are confined to spaces in which they are expected so their predictability renders them, to some extent, riskless (Hubbard, 2002).

In chapter 5, I have moved risk theory forward moving beyond individualistic, futuristic, static notions of risk, through a more relational and fluid understanding of risk. This connects the spatial and relational boundaries. Reacting to Lupton's (2012; 2013a) desire for more work to be done into the emotional elements of risk, the thesis used geographical understandings of emotion and affect, to explain how these influence our perception of risk. Drawing on and extending the notion of affective atmosphere (Anderson, 2009), the thesis explains how the spatial and relational boundaries, do not only protect, but also generate their own risks. It explains this through the affective notion of multiple bodies anticipation and performance of risk, in place. It challenges the notion of risk as an anticipated future event by demonstrating how it is rendered present through anticipatory action. However, in contributing to these literatures anticipation (Anderson, 2010a; Amoore, 2013), the thesis highlights how anticipation of risk does not always translate into anticipatory action but can provide reassurance through predictability, or the uncertainty can be part of the excitement which encourages risk taking.

In addressing the third aim of the thesis, I have argued how the spatialities of studenthood alluded to in chapter 5, create specific temporalities within the bubble, as students near the end of university. I have made further contributions to affective atmospheres through empirical evidence of how they many develop as intense time-spaces (Anderson, 2009). I evidenced this through students' explanations of how peak experiences within the bubble are experienced collectively to generate a feeling of intense accelerated time. In chapter 6, I challenged ideas that the materiality of atmospheres can only be felt metaphorically (Anderson, 2009), by demonstrating how the intensive time spaces of third year are felt as a physical weight on the body. I argued that you do not have to remain in presence of the atmosphere to feel its

affect, that how it changes your body may be more than momentary as residue of the bubble is expected to linger in physical manifestations on the body, such as wearing glasses, but also in preparing students for managing future risks as they note a growth in confidence in managing risky situations.

There is a lack of exploration of the liminal period of 'youth' (Valentine, 2003). Through a focus on traditional age students, this thesis has contributed to our understanding of this age group. More specifically, how age contributes to perceptions and experiences of risk. For example, students perceived reversibility and bouncebackability with regard to consequences of risk. In doing so, chapter 6 also addressed the temporalities of student life, responding to appeals for more research into the time-bound nature of being a student. I have argued how the anticipated burst of the bubble, manifested as anxiety and fear to create specific temporalities in the present, such an immersion in the bubble as time out of time. Through discussions of the anticipated burst of the bubble, the concept of transitions was challenged and instead attention drawn to the ways in which the past, and future fold into the present, enabling a deeper understanding of what it means to be a student.

The four elements described do not act in isolation but together to contribute to our understanding of university as a bubble. In summary, the concept of the bubble has been useful in drawing attention to, and drawing together, spatial, temporal and relational aspects of university to better understand student experience. This conceptualisation of a bubble does not necessarily limit itself to the university experience, but may be useful an applied to other phenomena beyond this project. For example, it could be utilised to frame and understand other periods of transition, temporalities such as waiting for or tantalising notion of particular futures, periods of intensity or fragility, spatial and social segregation, and relationality of experiences.

### **7.3 Recommendations for future research**

This thesis has raised issues which may benefit from further research. Firstly, when speaking about risk students immediately considered risks which they perceived as related to their social experience at university. It was only during periods of intensity,

in the latter part of their degree, in particular, that students recognised risks associated with their academic experiences. Students alluded to their lack of preparation for academic studenthood. Therefore, further research could explore academic risks associated with university life; how students anticipate (or do not), and prepare for these.

I have opened up avenues for further exploration of the affective notion of risk, affective atmospheres, through which risk is anticipated, experienced and reproduced. Relating to student experience, further research could explore how these affective atmospheres might be experienced differently through a comparison with other insitutions.

This project had focused on undergraduate students experience of risk. It would be interesting to see how intending students anticipate and how recent graduates reflect on their student experiences.

## 8 Appendices

### 8.1 Sample details

Year of study	Gender	Ethnicity
3	Female	White British
2	Female	White British
2	Female	White British
3	Female	White British
3	Female	White British
1	Female	Black or Black British Caribbean
2	Male	White British
2	Female	White British
3	Female	White British
2	Female	White British
2	Female	Black or Black British Caribbean
1	Female	Mixed- white and Asian
2	Female	White British
1	Male	Mixed- White and Asian
2	Female	White British
3	Female	Mixed- White and Asian
1	Male	White British
2	Female	Black or Black British Caribbean
2	Female	Other White Background
1	Female	Other Ethnic Background
2	Female	White British
1	Male	White British
2	Male	White Welsh
2	Female	Asian or Asian British-Pakistani
1	Female	Asian or Asian British-Pakistani
1	Female	Black or Black British African
1	Male	White British
2	Male	White British
1	Male	White British
3	Male	Mixed- White and Asian
1	Female	Asian or Asian British-Pakistani
2	Female	Black or Black British Caribbean

Familial experience: Over two thirds had parents who had attended University. The remainder had sibling or other family members that had been to university.

Living away from home: At the time of recruitment all but one lived away from home.

Ethnicity: Whilst predominantly White British the sample included students from a range of ethnic backgrounds.

Age: 18-24 (majority 18-21).

Degree subject: Students involved were undertaking degrees in a broad range of subjects. Many were from social science, arts and humanities, biological sciences and psychology backgrounds. There were less from science and engineering backgrounds, with the exception of geography and biology students.

Gender: Over two thirds of the original sample were female. However, this was better balanced through RLT/TLRS.

Year of study: Approximately half of the sample were in second year and one third in first year when recruited. There were less in 3<sup>rd</sup> year but this was better balanced through RLT/TLRS.

Socio-economic background: Students were from a range of backgrounds.

## 8.2 Participant Information sheet and consent form

### ***Participant information sheet***

#### Purpose of this information sheet

I would be extremely grateful for your participation in this project but before you decide whether or not you would like to be involved it is important that you understand the nature of the research and what your participation may involve. Please read the following information carefully and ask any necessary questions.

#### About the team

I am Grace Sykes. I am a PhD student and teaching assistant from the Department of Geography, University of Leicester. I will be working with a team of undergraduate students from DeMonfort University and University of Leicester – one of which could be you.

#### About the project

The project is funded through a university studentship and hopes to be as participatory as possible, offering undergraduate students a chance to talk about university life from their perspective. In particular, it focuses on the perceptions of and everyday experiences of university and associated behaviours or feelings. This might include socialising, binge drinking, changing eating habits, stress, hooking up cultures and finances, or anything that shapes and/or is important to your experience as a student. Exploring these feelings and behaviours through a variety of methods the project aims to uncover a deeper understanding of students' perceptions and experiences of risk during their transition to, through and beyond university. To what extent are these behaviours risks and why or when are they perceived as risks, if at all? Does that make university a risky space? What does risk mean to you? Are these feelings and behaviours part of the student identity? What are the emotional dimensions of these behaviours and feelings? Are they a natural part of this phase? This section may seem vague and is intentionally so as it the focus of the project is expected to shift to prioritise what you feel is important to your university experience.

If you are interested in exploring these topics please read on and see how you can get involved.

#### Your involvement

There are many ways to get involved with the project.

##### 1) As a co-researcher (more involvement ):

This will enable you to be a key decision maker from creating the methods, through to the data collection, analysis and dissemination of findings. You will be working together with me and other core team members throughout the project, (involved in interviews, focus groups and participatory methods created together) both as a researcher and the researched. It will require approximately 2 hours weekly. However, this is not set but will be confirmed once the core group have been recruited so we can work out together what best suits your schedules. The hours involved will be flexible according to the needs of the core group and the project.

##### As a participant (less involvement ):

You will be involved in interviews, focus groups and participatory methods (tbc). These can be scheduled at times to suit you and offer you the opportunity to have your say without the responsibility of the core team. You will also be able to be involved in the analysis, if you wish, through blog discussions and dissemination of key themes as they arise.

### **How will this benefit you?**

#### Skills you could develop:

- Communication- oral and written.
- Initiative and creativity
- Leadership and supervising
- Planning and Organising
- Problem Solving and Decision Making
- Teamwork

#### Experience:

- Meeting new people
- Volunteering
- Research

#### Training (Co-researchers only) :

- Ethics training
- Research training

#### Other:

Your contribution will be appreciated through certificates and references. Refreshments may also be provided. There will be no financial incentives.

#### The information collected and your right to withdraw

Interviews, focus groups and participatory sessions will be audio recorded by the research team. Some sessions will be video recorded and photos taken with permission. A transcript of all or part of your comments will be created and available on request. Anonymised sections of transcripts or summaries may be used to inform blog discussions. These comments along with video recordings and photos may be used in my PhD thesis, written and visual work, reports, publications, a comic and any other forms of dissemination arising from this research.

All data collected will be securely stored in accordance with the 1988 Data Protection Act. Data collected may be processed manually and with the aid of computer software.

#### Contact information

If you would like more information about the project or how to get involved please don't hesitate to contact me.

Grace Sykes, Department of Geography, University of Leicester, University Road Leicester, LE1 7RH

**Email:** \*\*\*\*\* **Telephone:** \*\*\*\*\*

**Consent form**

Given the multifaceted nature of this project once you have read the information sheet and agree to take part in this project on the conditions described, please take time to fill in the tick or mark boxes as appropriate then print and sign your name in the spaces provided below.

	Yes	No
• I have read and understood the participant information sheet and have had an opportunity to ask questions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I agree to take part in the project described in the above information sheet including the task centred methods etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I agree to be a co-researcher/participant/blog contributor. (Delete as appropriate)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I agree to sessions being audio recorded.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I agree to photographs being taken.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I agree to some sessions being video recorded.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I agree to the use of audio recordings to be used in the blogs for further discussions as well as my PhD thesis, written and visual work, reports, publications, and any other forms of dissemination arising from this research.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I agree to the use of video recordings to be used in the blogs for further discussions as well as my PhD thesis, written and visual work, reports, publications, and any other forms of dissemination arising from this research.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I agree to the use of photographs to be used in the blogs for further discussions as well as my PhD thesis, written and visual work, reports, publications, and any other forms of dissemination arising from this research.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I agree to comments made in sessions to be used in the blogs for further discussions as well as my PhD thesis, written and visual work, reports, publications, and any other forms of dissemination arising from this research.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I agree comments, photographs, audio and video recordings may be used in discussions with the core group to analyse data gathered.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please note that even after signing this, you still have the right to withdraw up until January 2014 as after this date it may be problematic differentiating your individual data from the analysis.

Print Name.....

Signature.....

Date.....

### 8.3 Register your interest form

Register your interest form: Undergraduate students' perceptions and experiences of risk associated with university, exploring identity, transitions and emotions.

Please complete the following details and tick boxes as appropriate. If you have any questions as you complete the form please ask.

First name.....

Last Name.....

Gender

Male

Female

Prefer not to say

Which year of study are you?

Year 1

Year 2

Year 3

Other (please state).....

I would describe my ethnic origin as.....

White – British
White – English
White – Irish
White – Scottish
White – Welsh
Irish Traveller
Other White background
Black or Black British – Caribbean
Black or Black British - African
Other Black background
Asian or Asian British – Indian
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi
Other Asian background
Chinese
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean
Mixed – White and Black African
Mixed – White and Asian
Other Mixed background
Other Ethnic background

I do not wish to say

Degree title:

.....

Contact details:

Email:

.....  
.....

Term time address:

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

I do not wish to disclose my term time address

Do you continue to live in this address in university holidays?

Yes

No

Telephone number:

.....

Below are some questions which will enable me to place you in a role most suited to your interests, needs and strengths. They may also be used as data should you chose to take part in this project after our initial meeting.

Would you describe yourself as a 'traditional' student? If yes, why?

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How would you define a 'traditional' student?

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.....

Previous research describes a traditional student as typically white, middle class and/or upper class, 18-21 years old, and living away from the parental home. He further suggests that they are likely to immerse themselves in the consumer culture linked to creating a traditional identity, including forms of fashion and youth culture, such as clubbing (Chatterton, 1999: p117-118). To what extent would you say you fit this traditional student identity? And what elements do you feel are or are not important to a traditional student identity?

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Why are you interested in being involved in this research?

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Which role do you feel you would be most suited to and why?

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.....  
.....

Would you be happy to participate in focus groups?

Yes

No

Would you be happy to participate in interviews?

Yes

No

Would you be happy to participate in task centred research workshops? These may involve cartoon strips, written pieces, posters, film making, mapping activities, adapted board games or television series, and so on. They will be decided by the co-researchers and myself.

Yes

No

How many hours are you willing to contribute to the project? Weekly? Monthly?

Termly?

.....  
.....

How long are you hoping to be involved in the project for? (just this academic year, for the duration of your course, as long as necessary)

.....  
.....  
.....

What are your interests and hobbies? What are you involved in at university and outside of university?.....

.....  
.....  
.....

What are you hoping to get out of participating in this project?

New Skills

New friends

Research experience

Work experience

Volunteer experience

To enhance my employability

To contribute to Leicester award

Other (please specify)

.....  
.....  
.....

Do you have any experience you feel would be useful to the research?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

What are your strengths and weaknesses?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

Have you ever been convicted of a criminal offence in the UK (for which you are still subject to a period of rehabilitation under the terms of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974) or in any other country?

Yes

No

If YES, please provide details.....

.....  
.....  
.....

Thank you for your interest and time. You will hear from me soon.

## 8.4 Interview questions

The following questions were only used as a rough guide for natural developing conversations.

**Interview- (bold definitely asked- normal font as prompt/probes as conversation naturally develops- order subject to change according to conversation flow)**

### **Tell me about your story of coming to university**

- Talk to me about your personal background. What do you feel has helped or hindered the process?
- Do you know anyone else that has been to university?
- What did you expect from university?
- Why did you come to university?
  
- How did you feel when you first came to university?
- Talk me through your feelings over your first few months at university
- How do you feel you have adapted to university life?
- What has helped you settle in?
  
- Did you move away for university? Where are you from originally?
- Tell me a bit more about your living arrangements (Where are you living whilst you study? halls, shared house, home Who do you live with?)
  
- How are you funding your studies? Do you have a student loan?
- Has the increase in tuition fees affected you?

### **Talk to me about a week in your life at university**

- What is your daily routine?
- What do you do with your time?
- What do you eat?
- Do you work?
- Do you go out?
- Are you involved in any sports?
- Do you attend lectures and seminars?
- Are you involved in any societies?
  
- How much time would you spend doing each activity?
  
- Where do you spend most of your time? On campus? At university? In Leicester generally?
  
- How do you think your life is different to someone the same age not at university?
- How has your life changed since coming to university?
  
- How do you access support or services when things go wrong?

- Do you know what is available to you?
- Do you feel safe at university?
  
- Do you think your experience would be different in another city? Or at another university?

**Talk to me about what you think makes a typical university student.**

- Why do you think this?
- What percentage of students do you think fits what you have described?
- How do you feel about this image?
- Do any elements of this describe you?
- Describe your university experience in comparison to what you think is the typical university student
- Do you think the typical student in first year is different to the typical student in 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> year? Why? How?
- Talk me through some typical behaviours you see whilst at university.

**Looking forward, what are you hoping to achieve/get from your university experience**

- What aspirations do you have?
- What do you hope to do after university?
- In 1 year? 5 years? 10 years?

-----**BREAK**-----  
-----

**Offer refreshments and some time out. They may or may not want to take this.**

**See overleaf for next questions.**

**Now reflecting on what we have discussed I would like to talk a little bit more about your university experience and risk.**

**Talk to me about what you think risk means.**

- Tell me more about that. Give examples of something you might perceive as a risk.
- Considering the example you have given do you think risk is always negative/positive thing?
- So if you had to define risk in a sentence what would you say?
- What do you think affects how people understand risk?
- Why do you think this?

**In terms of your personal experience can you talk to me a little bit more about your experience of risk at university?**

- Tell me about any **situations or behaviours or feelings** you think are or might become risks or risky. Do you engage in these? Are there others which you do not engage in?
- Why are they risky?
- To what extent are they risky?
- When do they become risky?
- Why do you think people participate in these “risks”?
- Why do you participate in these risks?
- How does involvement in these risks make you feel?
- Are there any other risky behaviours associated with the ones you have already mentioned?
- Do you find risky behaviours often occur together?
- Besides the risks you have mentioned are there any others you can think of related to any aspect of university? For example, socially, academically, personally?
- Are there any particular spaces you think are particularly risky? On campus? Or off campus but part of your university life? Why?
- Placing the risks you have mentioned on a scale where would you place each one? Extreme risk? Average risk? Small risk?
- Are you affected more by or involved in risk more at University?
- What do you think affects how you experience these risks?
- Had you ever thought about university as a risky space before this interview?

**Thinking about risks associated with university what role might risk taking play in the life course?**

- Is risk taking limited to young people?
  - Do you feel young people of the same age experience the same risks, in the same way?
  - Are your perceptions and experiences are different to any other young person that is not at university?
  - Do you feel risky behaviour is more likely at university as opposed to any other life period? Why?
  - Do you think you have become a riskier person at university? Yes/no? Why?
  - Do you think the way you perceive risks mentioned has or will change over time? How? Why?
- 
- **In the focus groups we will talk more about themes raised in these interviews.**
  - **Ask availability for the first few weeks back after easter for focus group and creative sessions.**

## 8.5 Focus group topics and prompts

Students were given topics to discuss which were raised as risks in interviews. These included: drinking, drugs, relationships. Isolation/belonging, money/finances, stress/mental health, eating habits. They were asked to discuss these in relation to their experiences. Quotes from interviews and articles were scattered on the table in case students wished to use these to prompt conversation. Questions were also offered as prompts when necessary but the focus groups were largely unstructured with students directing what they talked about and for how long.

Questions to use as prompts/probe, only if and when necessary:

What was your initial reaction?

How did the headline/abstract/image make you feel?

How would you react if this was you in the situation?

Have you ever been in a situation similar to this? How does your experience compare?

Is this an example of risk? Why? Why not?

If yes what made this an example of risk? When does something become a risk?

Why do you/ and or others participate in this risk?

What are the positives/negatives of this scenario?

Scattered prompts and probes:

Cheers! Binge drinking students happier with university life (headline and article)

University binge drinking culture attacked by coroner after student death (headline and article)

“Drugs aren’t as much of a risk as alcohol because there more a one off, just testing things out and no one really knows the impact of them yet.” (Interview quote)

One in four students suffer mental illness, psychiatrists say (Headline)

Students and depression: the struggle to survive (Headline and article)

Students caught having sex on CCTV at Exeter safe sex ball (Image)

“Eventhough we are not at the same university, my boyfriend is my biggest support at university. He makes me feel confident to be me, not peer pressured to be anyone else or do anything I don’t want to.” (Interview quote)

“Young people, especially women tend to become more body conscious upon university admission.” (Interview quote)

“You expect students to be binge eaters, especially when they are stressed but I don’t know many like that. I try my hardest to be healthy.” (Interview quote)

“Facebook is a more extrovert you. It’s an image you are happy to let everyone see. It’s part of the belonging.” (Interview quote)

“I lose countless hours on the internet, especially refreshing facebook.” (Interview quote)

“I never thinking about my loan but I worry about money every single day.” (Interview quote)

“Some students in Glasgow are employed up to 28 hours a week. The majority of students categorised as working over the recommended guidelines are working class. However, this pattern may be subject to change as rising tuition fees place increasing economic strain on all households. Participating in employment is seen as more of a necessity for working class students whereas may be viewed as a simply experience for more affluent.” (Smith and Taylor, 1999)

“Many restrict their choice to those where integration would be uncomplicated; where there are” “people like them” to “initiate belonging” (Archer and Hutchings, 2000: p555)

“Reflected as a place of diversity, acceptance and unity, university may also be a space of rejection, loneliness or non-belonging.” (Hopkins, 2011: pp157-169)

“Keeping up with the expected student image is so important but I don’t know why.”  
(Interview quote)

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