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Edited by

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Editors' Letter

Dear Readers,

We are delighted to present Issue 4 of Sentio on the theme of 'Resilience'. Sentio is an online interdisciplinary journal led by doctoral researchers that are part of the ESRC-funded South East Network for Social Sciences (SeNSS) Doctoral Training Partnership. The journal was launched in 2018 and is published annually online. Sentio – or 'I sense' – aims to bring together interdisciplinary perspectives on a topical issue or interest. To that end each Issue is comprised of three sections, namely Articles, Features, and Reflections. First, the Articles section provides doctoral researchers a space to publish early-stage ideas, theories or emergent findings from empirical research, or summaries of doctoral thesis chapters. Second, the Features section contains interviews, reviews of recent publications, and commentaries on current debates in relation to the Issue's theme. Finally, the third section, Reflections, attends to personal insights derived from all stages of the research process as well as the life and work of a doctoral researcher.

This year's theme, "resilience", was decided upon after having just come out of a long stretch of pandemic lockdowns. It was our intention to highlight the ways in which human beings have the capacity to adapt through practices of resilience, despite being confronted with change in all aspects of life. Over the course of this issue's production, we have continued to face the ongoing aftermath of Covid-19, we have witnessed the outbreak of a war in Ukraine, and we have been constantly thrown through collective unrest, marked by political turbulence, climate emergency, and threats of economic crisis. Turmoil is enduring.

These changes and challenges have foregrounded responses of resilience at local and global levels. The articles we present you with demonstrate the potential for strength and flexibility in the face of evolving conditions by exposing the tenacity of governments, local communities, institutions, corporations, and individuals alike. They also invite spaces for the reconfiguration of normative behaviours, practices and knowledge. We hope the present issue serves as a record of the multifaced interpretations and practices of resilience. We invite readers to reflect on these contributions, on the tenacity of humankind in times of adversity and transformation, and how these knowledges might critically impact research processes.

Articles

Resilience can be viewed through many lenses, as our articles section shows. The resilience of entire countries is explored in our first two articles. The first article by De Rogatis adds to the literature surrounding resilience of countries to sanctions by exploring the resilience of the EU as a sender country and the effect this has on the success of sanctions. Meanwhile, Ferradj-Ota explores the resilience of the EU and People's Republic of China in the aftermath of the covid-19 pandemic and the implications this has had for relations between the two. A key facet of resilience however is that it is a product of both the individual, their environment and other factors. Expanding our conception of resilience to identify new and novel ways to increase an individual's resilience as well as that of organisations is the key

recommendation emerging from our third article, in which Scott utilises field theory and applies it to resilience within organisations. Similarly, our fourth article by Foden explores the concepts of 'hard' and 'soft' resilience and how humanitarian actors might operationalise resilience in humanitarian shelter and settlement responses. In our fifth article Bowen explores the implications of how portrayals of the resilience of single mothers are interpreted by audiences within dramedy series *SMILF* and *Better Things*. Finally, the lens is turned to resilience on the part of researchers, with Nakou exploring the adaptation from offline to online focus groups as a way to overcome the challenges of the covid-19 pandemic, and the benefits of their use.

Features

In our five feature pieces for this year's issue, we see a variety of interpretations and uses of the term 'resilience' across a range of disciplines. Firstly, In Georgiou and Pantos' feature, resilience is discussed through the lens of policy making, showing how scenario planning can be used as a tool for testing the ability of certain networks, from public health to transport, to withstand a range of potential stresses. From there, by drawing on Bruce Bruce Braun, Victor Tan explores and contextualised the intertwined nature of humans and the environment in relation to resilience and sustainability. Here, resilience is referred to as a positive change aimed towards the overcoming of adversity. Through the use of COVID-19 and the Ukraine conflict as two contemporary examples, Tan shows the benefits of community-led examples of resilience, and makes recommendations related to education to be orientated to such. Using a similar interpretation of resilience, Emma Wilson focuses on resilience as a context specific, community-based concept, showing how such an understanding of resilience can help us better understand rates of self-harm and suicide rates both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Moving away from the understanding of resilience as a universal good, Elle Wills then calls attention to the rise in resilience rhetoric and the deficit neoliberal notion of resilience which places an unfair burden on individuals, often adopted by HEIs to whitewash over the rising crisis of mental health of staff and students. Joanes and Joyce, employing a feminist geographical approach and based on some online surveys, build on the conceptualisation of resilience, arguing that accessibility, flexibility, and equality for all staff and students should be prioritized over the metrics, outputs, and profit which are fundamental to current framings of resilience. This can only be achieved, they continue, by collectively resisting the current and oppressive structures academics are subjected to.

Reflections

This section reflects how experiences of resilience are shaped by research. For example, in the conversational style reflection by Ahmed and McGowan, they reflect on the meaning of the word resilience for their research and research practices. For the reflection written by Nakou, this reflects her own position as a researcher when conducting (insider) focus groups. Both highlight resilience in different ways, but unite when reflecting on the power of resilience in their research. Additionally, contributors to the reflections section this year also explored the many emotional aspects of resilience and the PhD journey, such as Alyce's

personal journey researching child sex abuse whilst navigating doing research during the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as Luo's personal journey navigating the ebbs and flows of being an international PhD student in the UK during Covid-19. Finally, resilience is reflected upon in Ghaffar's contribution, highlighting the darker side of the construction of both resilience and the millennial 'snowflake' in the context of austerity and affective economies.

Concluding Remarks

We as the editorial team are deeply appreciative of the enthusiasm and commitment demonstrated by authors and peer reviewers. We want to thank those that have supported this Issue of Sentio; members of the Sentio Advisory Board, Professor Alan Pickering (Goldsmiths, University of London), Professor Laura Camfield (University of East Anglia), Dr May Seitanidi (University of Kent) and Professor Ismene Gizelia (University of Essex); Paul Newman and Felicity Szesnat; and our authors and peer reviewers. Thanks to all involved, your continued support and encouragement have helped to make the publication of this Issue of Sentio possible.

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Articles

Resilience In Economic Sanctions: The Neglected Relationship Between Resiliency And Credibility In The EU

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Abstract

Most research in International Political Economy has studied the economic resilience of the countries affected by international sanctions. However, few articles reasoned on the attributes that sanctioners need to reach their foreign policy targets. Indeed, economic resilience against the spill-over effects of sanctions is paramount. For this reason, this study investigates the interaction between resiliency and credibility in the EU when implementing economic and financial penalties and their success. The article qualitatively assesses how resilience changes the success probabilities of sanctions. The analysis compares various EU sanctions against economically influential countries, namely Russia, Iran, and Turkey. Therefore, the interaction between diverse economic counter-effects and European resilience affects the probability of effective coercion. Resiliency is measured as the swift capacity to diversify the imports of raw materials and the policy implemented by the EU to withstand detrimental sanctioning feedback. Indeed, this is a reliable operationalization of the aggregate capacity of sanctioning countries to reduce sanction costs. This contribution helps understand the efficacy of the EU sanctions. This paper provides insights into how the EU can create a more independent and resilient economic and political system capable of resisting shocks in financial markets and domestic politics. Furthermore, with greater resilience, the EU penalties will be more credible and, thus, more efficacious in the long term.

Introduction

Recently, sanctions have become highly debated due to the Western imposition following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Many argue the impossibility of forecasting the outcome of this new trend due to the critical role of Russia in the global economy[1] and the pandemic that disrupted global supply chains. However, most scholars neglected or shadowed crucial features that explain sanction imposition and failure. Therefore, this article seeks to uncover a new, additional viewpoint that could aid other researchers in understanding the political and economic interests and features governing sanctioning regimes.

Firstly, this paper surveys the scholarship regarding economic sanctions, focusing on new trends in the literature and the role of credibility and resiliency. Then, the article posits a correlation between credibility and resiliency in sender countries. The second section provides empirical evidence by studying EU sanctions against Iran, Turkey, and Russia. In conclusion, the EU is economically but not politically resilient. Indeed, it can withstand economic damages, but Brussels is more likely to de-escalate politically costly conflicts.

1 Despite Western sanctions, McCharty et al. (2019) demonstrated that Russia remains pivotal in the raw materials, energy, and agricultural markets. Further, Russia is deeply interconnected and far from isolated from the international community and global economy (Cohen, 2018).

Why Resiliency in Economic Sanctions?

Most research on sanctions focused on the target country's characteristics (e.g., Lacy & Niou, 2004; Naghavi & Pignataro, 2015). For example, some studies discovered that domestic political institutions, such as institutional executive constraints (Allen, 2008) and democracy (Lektzian & Souva, 2007), influence imposition and effectiveness of sanctions. Other research focused on the importance of multilateralism for generating successful sanctioning regimes during (Bayard et al., 1983) or after the Cold War (Drezner, 2000), like international information policies enforcing cooperation (Kaempfer & Lowenberg, 1999; Martin, 1993). Finally, other studies focused on the strategic decisions made by governmental actors when deciding whether impose or not and acquiesce or resist sanctions (see: Drezner, 2003; Lacy & Niou, 2004; Smith, 1995). For this reason, game models are widely implemented to examine the decisions of rational actors (Bapat & Kwon, 2015; Hovi et al., 2005; Krustev, 2010; Morgan & Kobayashi, 2021) due to their advantages in explaining strategic behavior (Tsebelis, 1990). Indeed, these studies disclose similar assumptions regarding rational actors' characteristics but, regrettably, have some weaknesses. Firstly, the choice of their premises or assumptions directly influences these models, thus losing internal and empirical validity. Then, various models lead to different conclusions regarding what to expect from senders and targets and whether threats and sanctions are effective. Finally, they rarely implement states' perceptions of each other, especially regarding how the target understands the sending coalition.

New research highlights the importance of individual actors in sanction imposition. For instance, Bapat and Kwon (2015) proved that sanctions are effective against countries where the sender possesses a moderate share of the target's market, demonstrating that macro-level theorizations may be ineffective in explaining sanctions outcomes. Similarly, Morgan and Kobayashi (2021) illustrated that the most studied variables in economic sanctions, as in the Threat and Imposition of Economic Sanctions dataset, are insignificant since neglect individual actors' roles, particularly international-oriented businesses, in enhancing restrictions by restraining from finding ways around regulations. Indeed, most economic activity is generated by relationships between firms and individuals rather than governments (Early, 2009; Morgan & Bapat, 2003). Thus, sanctions must be enforced to avoid illicit transactions with the target (Early, 2011; McLean & Whang, 2010). Consequently, sanctions' success depends on the enforcement capabilities of countries in legally forcing individuals to revoke all economic relations with the target through evasion detection and punishment systems (Bapat & Kwon, 2015). However, sanctions create market imperfections reducing productivity and competition levels of the sender's firms and generating domestic distributional effects since some entrepreneurs can profit from these occasions (Stiglitz, 1989; DeGennaro, 2005).

This article argues that more attention is required to the politics and economics of sanctioners. Indeed, Kaempfer and Lowenberg (2007) analyzed economic sanctions as a function of the authority of competing interest groups within sanctioners. Economic sanctions create two socio-economic mechanisms in targets: compensation for the losses with higher taxation and societal fragmentation due to the uneven allocation of the financial distress (Naghavi & Pignataro, 2015). However, this mechanism can happen when senders experience feedback effects from their sanctions. Indeed, Giumelli (2017) demonstrated that

each European country experiences different redistributive impacts because EU members have diverse trade relations with Moscow. Therefore, export countries might miss their revenues due to trade restrictions, while import countries might suffer from higher prices and lower supply availability. Further, each economic sector is differently affected based on its exposition with the targeted state and ability to enter new markets and supply chains.

Furthermore, the length of the sanction episode is important, together with the dispute salience (Drezner, 2000). Indeed, there is a more muscular international response when targets violate territorial sovereignty according to Westphalian principles (Drezner, 2000). Many researchers implemented in their research designs various measurements of issue salience as a proxy of the willingness to resist or impose sanctions for lengthier periods. Ang and Peksen (2007) demonstrated that issue salience is a significant predictor of sanction success, while others discovered similar findings implementing the costs that senders and targets are willing to pay due to the sanctions (e.g., Bonetti, 1998; Dashti-Gibson et al., 1997).

As far as this study is concerned, no study unified the previous theorizations on sanctioners and how targets strategically interact with them. However, there are some forerunners in this "sender perspective." For example, Krustev (2010) demonstrated that "sender states do not formulate their sanctions objectives solely based on their domestically induced preferences, but also react to the international constraints imposed by the target's ability to resist economic coercion" (p. 165). Firstly, sanctioners decide whether to impose sanctions based on the costs and success probability (Jing et al., 2003; Morgan & Schwebach, 1997). However, economic costs can be elevated due to indirect impacts (Giumelli & Ivan, 2013), and thus, senders can be recalcitrant (Kaempfer & Lowenberg, 1988, 1989). Nevertheless, some issues cannot be neglected, especially regarding security concerns generating a "moral duty" to react, and sender's resiliency is pivotal in understanding what happens afterward. If targets doubt the sender's credibility, they hold the sanction costs and counteract. By contrast, if the imposition is credible, targets acquiesce. Indeed, targets analyze the past behavior of sanctioners when deciding on compliance (Peterson, 2013). Resiliency derives from the sender's resolve in internally imposing sanctions and supporting the macroeconomic costs and as companies' and interest groups' decisions to follow governmental directives at the micro level. This theorization shifts the attention to sanctioners rather than targets, as most literature instead did (see: Drezner, 2003; Lacy & Niou, 2004; Smith, 1995). In this context, resiliency is the capacity of industries to rapidly adapt to new realities and situations (Naghavi & Pignataro, 2015) and of governments and mass media to make the public opinion accept sanction costs (Giumelli, 2017).[2] Furthermore, resiliency derives from legitimacy levels and, therefore, is higher in capable democracies (Galtung, 1967). Regrettably, this effect is not studied when democratic countries, like an EU coalition, are the senders of economic sanctions, hindering the conclusions of most studies. Individuals and private firms pay the financial costs, which increases expenses and reduces profits for economic actors (Morgan & Kobayashi, 2021). Therefore, the structural economic characteristic of the sender generates different distributional outcomes and weaknesses that targeted states counter-exploit (Giumelli, 2017).

2 Due to space limitations, this article focuses only on the first resiliency mechanism. Some scholars demonstrated that the rally-round-the-flag effect "allow[s] leaders to use sanctions as a scapegoat for any difficulties that may or may not have been caused by the sanctions" (Frye, 2017), thus generating a national unification during crises. This effect could occur in sender and target countries when defending their strategic decisions to limit sanction costs.

Deductively, target countries could reduce sanction effectiveness by manipulating valuable resources. Indeed, if sanctioners depend on imports of materials essential for their economy, then the sanctioned state can suspend exports, creating discomfort. If sanctioners can quickly obtain new suppliers (high economic resilience), they are more credible since capable of bare the sanction costs. Similarly, sanctioners can be threatened by the release of migrants held in the territory of the target, thus lowering sender's credibility. Secondly, issue salience is pivotal. Indeed, if countries impose sanctions on matters they consider irrelevant, they will probably discard them as soon as preventing pursuing other interests. Therefore, this battle could occur in cases where targets have valuable commodities for the relation with senders and when issue salience is high, as examined below.

Resiliency, Sanctions, and the EU

This study analyzes EU sanctions against three autocracies: Iran, Turkey, and Russia. The qualitative design examines whether target countries decide to resist sanctions based on sender's credibility and resiliency. Resiliency is qualitatively measured based on two crucial topics in the EU. The European dependency on external energy supplies, especially natural gas and oil (European Commission, 2022a; eurostat, 2022b), and the fear of a new migration crisis (UN DESA, 2020; UNHRC, 2022). Indeed, this article follows the "most-likely" design described by Levy (2008). Firstly, focusing only on the EU for a limited period reduces the factors needed for the analysis. Secondly, the EU had to impose various sanctions due to issue significance in all three scenarios. Finally, the sanction's outcome varies. Therefore, this is a compelling starting point for further studies regarding the effectiveness and imposition of EU sanctions.[3]

Iran

Since 2006, the EU has implemented the strategies pursued by the UN and other states to stop Iran's nuclear facilities from enriching uranium (European Council, 2022a). Indeed, the EU implemented numerous autonomous financial limitations and penalties. Recently, Brussels has imposed new sanctions to force Iran rejoin the nuclear agreement, crucial for regional security (DW News, 2021). Furthermore, the European Council decided to extend restrictions due to poor human rights records (European Council, 2021). Currently, the EU forbids exporting everything that could aid the repression of dissidents and protestors and restricts the financing possibility and exports for Iranian companies. However, most trade restrictions imposed are currently lifted following the diplomatic success of the Iran Nuclear Deal (JPCOA agreement).

Following the previous theorization, the issue at stake is pivotal, and therefore, the EU could not postpone any imposition, mainly because Brussels has viewed Iran as a nuclear threat since 2003 (Sperling, 2015). Indeed, the EU considers nuclear proliferation a security threat, especially when Brussels depends on resource imports from that region (Portela & Kienzle, 2015). The EU started tortuous international cooperation to restrict Iran's nuclear program, passing numerous resolutions condemning Teheran's proliferation policies (Sperling, 2015; NTI 2022).[4] In 2012, Teheran tried to counterattack by blocking oil selling, restricting travel, and outlawing imports from sanctioners (Kushner, 2012). However, Iran represented only a small percentage of EU resource imports, as shown in Figure 1.[5] Further, the EU reacted

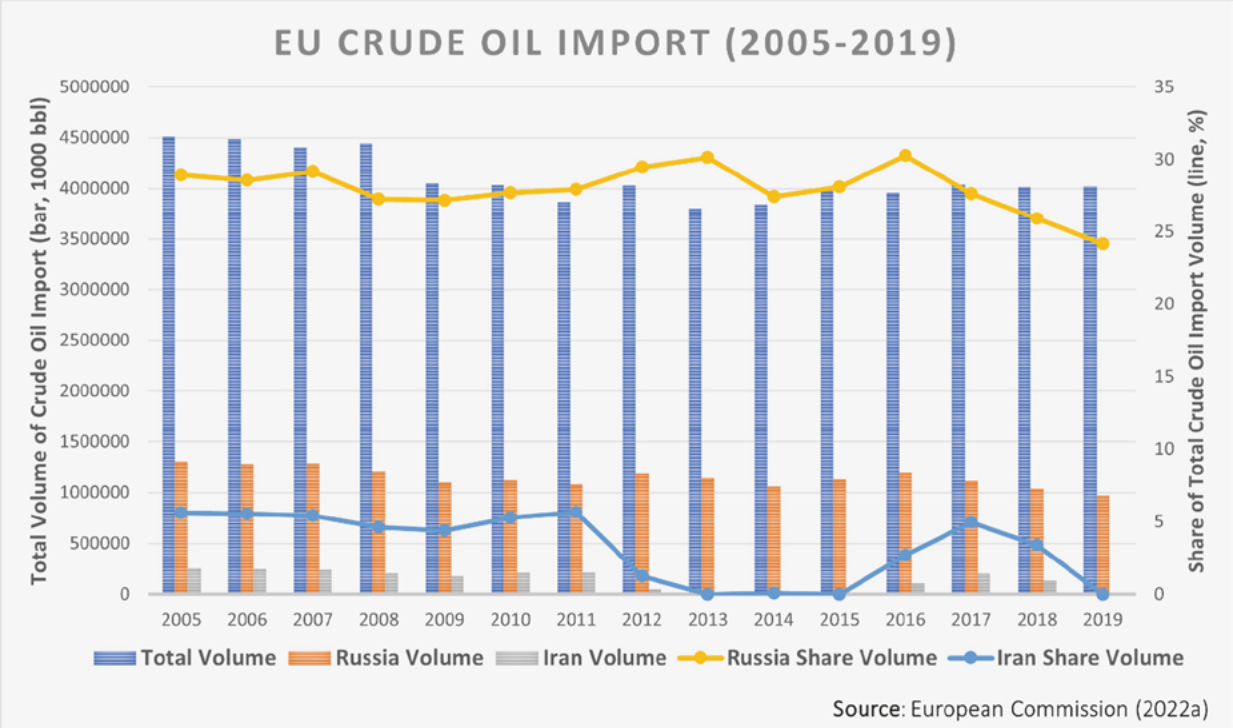
3 For additional information on EU sanctions, see: European Commission (2022).

4 NTI (2022) collects a review of the most salient event regarding the EU policy against nuclear proliferation and its aim to reduce nuclear threats.

5 In Figure 1, Turkey is absent since not exporting oil to the EU. Similarly, Iran is absent in Figure 2.

swiftly by opening new supply opportunities, especially Russia (Acevedo & Lorca-Susino, 2021). Although the EU was experiencing one of its worst economic crises, Iran could not threaten the community's resiliency. The EU found new hydrocarbon suppliers and had weak connections with Iran (eurostat, 2022a). For this reason, sanctions were successful, and Teheran signed the JPCOA agreement regarding pacific nuclear proliferation. In this case, the EU was a credible subject, and Iranian politicians noted that the EU economic resiliency was affected more by the Euro crisis than by their counterstrategy.

Figure 1: EU Crude Oil Import as Total Volume, Russia and Iran Volume, and Russia and Iran Share



Source: European Commission (2022a)

Turkey

Turkey and Cyprus have ongoing tensions due to drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean. Thus, the EU decided to sanction those activities threatening territorial and energy security (Waheed et al., 2021). Indeed, maritime borders and energy resources are critical for the EU policy agenda. Despite the issue's strikingness, Brussels tried to quickly de-escalate by lobbying for a hotline with Turkey (BBC, 2020). Furthermore, sanctions arrived only years after the first condemnations of Turkish illegal operations, and they were connected to Ankara's involvement in the Syrian war (Hungerford et al., 2019). Brussels condemned Turkey for its military actions, accusing Erdogan of undermining the progress made in defeating the Islamic caliphate (European Council, 2019). However, "while the EU publicly condemned Turkey's operations in northern Syria, its discourse has not been backed by concrete action nor a persuasive engagement with Turkey" (Gurkan, 2019). Furthermore, Europe has a harsher sanction plan on hold since fearing the repercussions in terms of the disruption in trade relationships and the Turkish holding of migrants (Siebold, 2021). Indeed, the EU fears that Turkey could release 3.6 million migrants held in its domain following a deal stipulated in 2016 (Tubakovic & Murray, 2017).

In this scenario, Europe's resiliency was threatened, and established economic sanctions were unproductive. Turkey could reliably counter-threaten the EU through the menace of releasing all the migrants from the Syrian war and the Libyan civil conflict. However, Brussels had to react against the expansion of Turkish drilling activities. During an escalation in 2020, Turkey allowed the passage of thousands of migrants to Greece (Al Jazeera, 2020), a real threat to the EU (Amnesty International, 2020). Although Turkey exports natural gas to the EU, it supplies a small percentage of it, as illustrated in Figure 2. By contrast, Figure 3 shows that Turkey holds the highest number of refugees and migrants inclined to migrate to Europe. Therefore, the EU de-escalated the situation following Merkel's recommendation after her experience with the 2015 migrant wave in Germany (Emmott et al., 2021). This time, Turkey was prepared for EU sanctions and knew that Brussels was ineffective due to its low political credibility in its migration management.

The EU political structure refused to adapt to accommodate migrants, providing a bargaining chip for Ankara. Indeed, as demonstrated by the recent Ukrainian crisis, European institutions could bare the political and economic costs of migrants, but at that time, public opinion was against it. Europeans fear the migrants hosted in Turkey due to diffused Islamophobia and terrorism threats (Khalid, 2022). Therefore, public opinion perceived those migrants as different, while identified Ukrainians as similar. Indeed, some European commentators defined Ukrainians as "'civilized,' 'middle-class,' and 'prosperous,' and different from 'third-world nations,'" while some politicians defined them as "Europeans" (Sajjad, 2022). Further, Ukrainians have the right to enter the EU for up to 90 days without a visa, while other migrants cannot. Consequently, the EU is not credible when sanctioning Turkey because it lacks the internal consensus needed, fearing protests by a population that still maintains double ethical standards (Zhou et al., 2022).

Figure 2: EU Natural Gas Import as Turkey and Russia Share

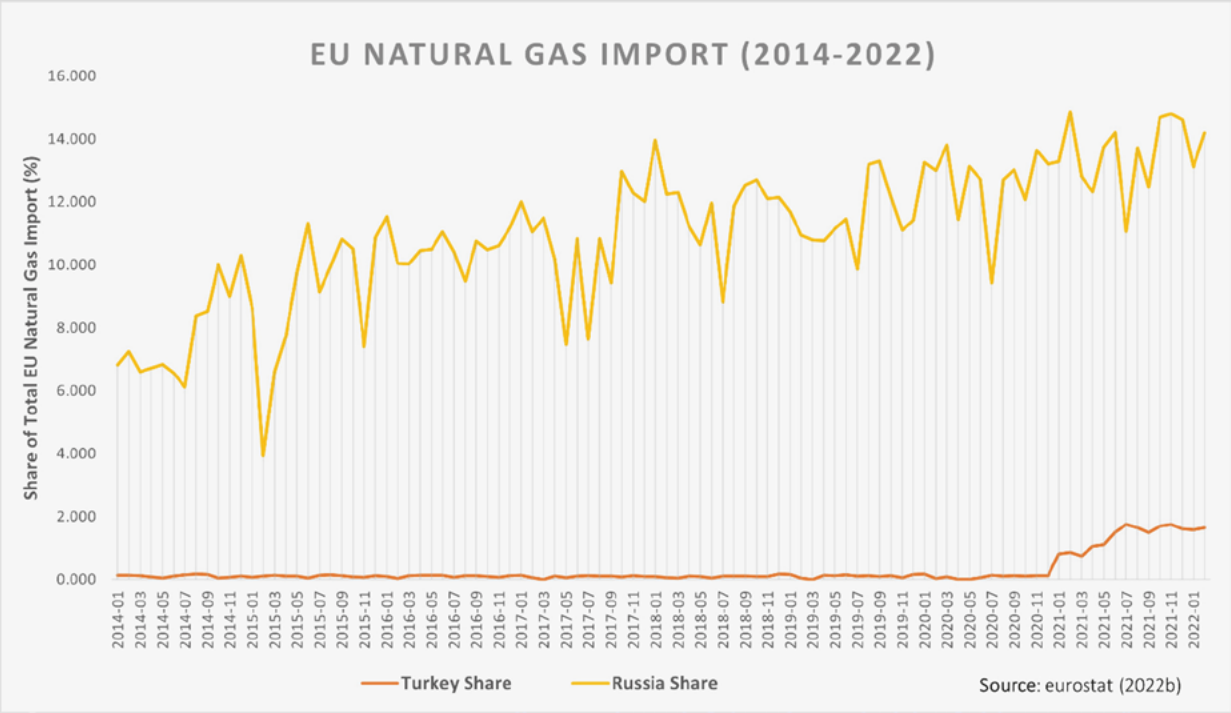
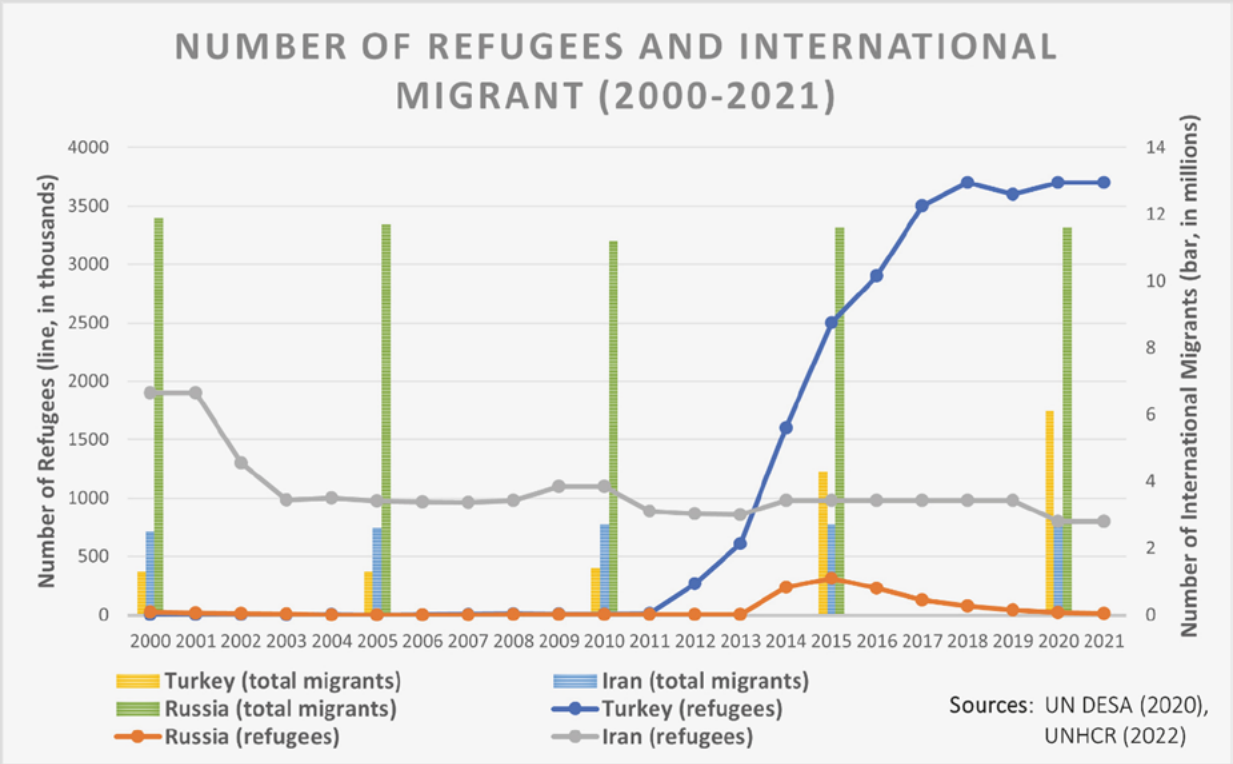


Figure 3: Number of Refugees (lines) and International Migrants (bars)



Russia

The EU imposed sanctions in 2014 when Moscow invaded the Crimean Peninsula and slowly expanded them (European Council, 2022c). The EU enforced six legislations against Russia after the war in Ukraine to inflict severe economic consequences (European Council, 2022b). However, the sanction layout "is designed to maximize the negative impact of the sanctions for the Russian economy while limiting the consequences for EU businesses and citizens" (European Council, 2022b). Indeed, there are many hesitations regarding banning Russian oil and gas, two commodities still too precious for Europe (Barigazzi, 2022; Strupczewski, 2022). Oil, however, is more fungible since it is easier to transport meaning Brussels can still stock it up with higher prices. By contrast, natural gas arrives through pipelines, transforming it into a regional commodity (Webber, 2022). Alternatives are available, such as a new deal with Iran, decarbonization, an expansion of US exports, and pressures on Saudi Arabia, but none is short-term (Montgomery, 2022). Overall, the EU can partially alter its dependency on new markets and can invest in different technologies and new international relations. However, European countries are experiencing economic distress due to rampant inflation and market uncertainties. Many are also suffering political crises, like Italy, which must solve economic challenges amid rising social tensions (Fonte & Weid, 2022). Indeed, "hedged funds have lined up the biggest bet against Italian government bonds since the global financial crisis on rising concerns over political turmoil in Rome and the country's dependence on Russian gas imports" (Fletcher & Asgari, 2022). If other European countries should start to face similar challenges, then they might try to lobby inside European institutions for a more appeasing policy toward Russia.

Russia is defending itself since this is a long-term game. The resistance of the Russian economy derived from a learning strategy and started with the 2008 invasion of Georgian territories (German, 2022). Therefore, "Putin clearly considered western sanctions to be a price worth paying and calculated that western support for Ukraine would not extend to direct military intervention" (German, 2022). Indeed, following the accusations received by many countries, the Kremlin is deciding to withdraw from various international organizations to gain greater economic independence and less international law limitations (Aarup & Furlong, 2022). Although Moscow prepared for the sanctioning regime with defensive economic policies, the EU could not afford to leave it unpunished. However, the Kremlin started to play, like Turkey, a long strategy game knowing the resiliency problem in European polity. Although the Turkish case revealed the EU weaknesses, these new sanctions' scale restricts Moscow's consolation. Indeed, they are without precedents, and the Russian economy cannot sustain them forever (De Rogatis, 2022). Thus, considering both sides, the EU has an advantage regarding its economic and political capacity to resist this shock. However, if more states start to waver following internal social and political resentment, a reduction in the sanctioning level is foreseeable.

Summary and Conclusions

This article hypothesized that targets analyze sanctioners and their capacity to bear sanction costs (resiliency), implementing a long-term strategy. Iran understood that the EU could withstand its counteractions and decided to acquiesce. Turkey knew that Europe was "bluffing" and avoided compliance by threatening the release of migrants. Moscow is gambling that the EU is non-resilient and excessively dependent on Russian imports.[6] Thus, Moscow might resist until one of the two actors falls. Probably, Russia will withdraw first due to EU capacity to alter its commercial networks toward new markets. However, if the political costs deriving from rising inflation and market uncertainties increase exponentially, the EU might retire to a safer position. Eventually, this article argues that Europe can be resilient when faced with economic difficulties while, as with Turkey, it is politically unmalleable during confrontations linked with socio-political issues.

This research delivers some significant remarks. Firstly, greater attention to senders is required. Most studies analyzed the success probability of sanctions but omitting the sender's structural characteristics like its resiliency which is its capacity to adapt to the disruption in relations with the target and feedback effects. Further research should implement various operationalization for resiliency, correlated with interdependence with the global system, capacity to gather public support, or promptness in switching economic relations. Secondly, more attention is needed to the strategic interactions between senders and targets. Although many researchers adopted game-theoretic models, they should include targets' expectations of sanctioners. These models can better display strategic interactions, but they are heavily reliant on the initial premises. Therefore, scholars can improve these models by inserting the correct assumptions and interaction framework to reach most-suited conclusions. Finally, further research could compare the rally-round-the-flag effect between sanctioners and targets and how they affect the endurance of costs. Overall, academics and policymakers should expand their understanding of sanctions and strategic behavior since these are crucial in contemporary politics and economics.

6 In 2021, around 45% of gas and 25% of oil used in Europe is Russian, which is the world's largest exporter. Further, "Russia is the fifth-largest trading partner for exports, and third-largest for imports" of the EU (Edmond, 2022; Al Jazeera, 2022).

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The Pandemic Of Covid-19 And Its Implication To The Sino-European Relation: Political Resilience Put To The Test

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Abstract

In recent years, the growing assertiveness of the People's Republic of China (PRC) have drastically shifted the dynamics of the Sino-European relationship. With European values weakening due to the former US Trump administration, Brexit and Ukrainian war, the EU needs PRC's international engagement to build a resilient international political community. PRC also needs access to the European market to expand outwardly via Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to overcome the stagnation of its domestic economy. In this sensitive phase of Sino-European relations, the pandemic of Covid-19 hit the world. According to Nye and Keohane's complex interdependence theory, the social and economic interconnectedness of the world transcends intergovernmental relationships. During the pandemic, it rather brought a negative impact and weakened political resilience. European countries began to re-examine negative effects of complex interdependence, especially with PRC. The objective of this paper is to examine if the unique phenomenon of the pandemic has altered the trajectory of Sino-European relations. This literature is significant as there has been a lack of scholars in the Social Sciences exploring Sino-European relations specifically from an angle of the Covid-19 pandemic. Actors in question include PRC, the EU and EU member state governments, ambassadors, State Owned Enterprises (SOEs), and private firms. There is no clear theory on how actors react to pandemics in the complex interdependent modern era. Hence, I take an inductive approach by gathering relevant evidence. The main conclusion and implications of this literature are that the actual data shows a decline of Chinese FDIs (Foreign Direct Investments) in Europe after the pandemic. However, the EU increasingly recognizes PRC as a systematic rival and involved parties are raising concern on PRC's influence over Europe.

History of Pandemics and Political resilience

To understand my research question, attention must be paid to how pandemics have affected political resilience in the past. The 2016 EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy defined political resilience as "the ability of states and societies to reform, thus withstanding and recovering from internal and external crisis" (European Union, 2016).

Pandemics such as smallpox, cholera, measles, malaria, plague and polio have historically impacted political resilience. For example, the plague of Cyprian was one of decisive elements for the fall of Roman empire (Drezner, 2020), whilst Spain's invasion into Aztec and Inca civilisations was accelerated by a lethal combination of smallpox and measles. Due to the lack of immunity to yellow fever, Napoleon and his French army allowed Haiti's independence in 1812 (Snowden, 2019).

In the modern era, an increase in human population, expansion into wildlife areas, and increased population densities have led to some medical experts emphasized a thread of zoonotic spillover is now two or three times higher than 40 years ago, with approximately 200 events occurring annually. (Berger & Behn, 2020). Liberalists and neo-liberalists eagerly supported complex interdependence theory, especially since the globalisation in 1980s (Newman & Farrell, 2020). It suggested that international relations are not only driven by intergovernmental interactions with the focus on "security", but also by trans- and non-governmental interactions through "economy and societies". Additionally, states have incentives to reconcile issues through negotiation and settlement to avoid the damage of disrupted relations such as war (*Keohane & Nye, 1997*).

In the outburst of modern pandemics, this interdependence has brought a negative impact, with the dependence on the exchange of people and goods within the manufacturing process weakening political resilience. Some events in the 21st century include SARS in 2003, H1N1 in 2009, MERS in 2012, Ebola in 2014, and Zika in 2016 (Ma et al., 2020; Jamison et al., 2017; Berger & Behn, 2020; Global Preparedness Monitoring Board, 2019). The Covid-19 pandemic was declared officially on March 11, 2020 (Bolder, 2020). COVID-19 brought over 557.9 million cases and took lives of over 6.3 million people globally as of July 2022 (World Health Organization, 2022). This re-opened a discussion to consider how to build a resilient political and economic entity in the face of pandemics. However, there is no clear theory on how actors react to pandemics in the complex interdependent modern era. Hence, I take an inductive approach by gathering relevant evidence from academic papers and journals.

Sino-European relation before the pandemic

To analyze the research question, we need to understand the previous state of Sino-European relation. Their contemporary relation can be divided into 5 major time phases: Before 2003; 2003-2005; 2006-2009; 2010-2015; 2016 onwards.

1. Before 2003

Tiananmen square incident in 1989 caused a rupture of the diplomatic relation until the late 1990s when the EU took an initiative to assist PRC towards modernisation such as its participation in WTO in 2001 (Chen, 2016) (European Commission, 1993). PRC continued its growth by applying "five principles of peaceful co-existence" and Deng's Market reform and open-door policy (Xiaoping, 1974; Hu Jingtao, 2009; Michalski and Pan, 2017).

2. 2003-2005

After the announcement of the EU on a comprehensive strategic partnership with China in 2003, PRC began to place its demand for the EU's abidance by the One-China principle and non-interference on the domestic politics, regarding issues like Taiwan, Tibet, and Dalai clique's separatist activities (Foreign Ministry of China, 2003; Michalski & Pan, 2017). PRC was disappointed by the EU's failure to lift the arms export ban in 2005, and market economy status not being accorded despite PRC being the EU's biggest trade partner (Brown, 2018).

3. 2006-2009

The decision in 2008-2009 of French, German and Danish Prime Minister meeting Dalai Lama caused a temporal break-down of the relation (Jakimów, 2019). The EU was struck by the

financial crisis which weakened the EU's credibility as a cohesive political actor due to the sovereign debt crisis in the Eurozone. The EU began to be more accommodating towards PRC. PRC also has accelerated its FDI into European territory (Wang, 2020).

4. 2010-2015

With the solar panel conflict (2012-2014), PRC tactically deployed a well-targeted probe on the imports of European wine (The Financial Times, 2013; Li, 2013). It threatened to place an official trade complaint over luxury cars from the EU (Pepermans, 2017). It led the German government to turn against the EU Commission (Maull, 2016), and Beijing to treat Berlin as a proxy for Brussels (Kundnani & Parello-Plesner, 2012).

5. 2016 onwards

The 2016 Communication was influenced by the world's shift into the era of eroding confidence in international liberal and democratic order (Brown, 2018). The EU required more than ever China's engagement in the resilient multilateral order in the fear US abandonment (Maher, 2017).

Characteristics of Sino-European relations and Chinese FDI before the pandemic

Leading up to the Covid-19 pandemic the PRC has displayed increased assertiveness in its relationship with the EU, whilst European policies towards PRC are driven by complex and often contradictory commercial considerations (Stumbaum, 2010). The EU was under the fear that its failure to act in a coordinated way reflects the broader trend towards re-nationalisation within the EU. Maull (2017) argues that the characteristics of the EU as a polity *sui generis*, that consists of sovereign member states, demonstrate a different quality of incoherence from what appears in national foreign policies. It leads to a structural asymmetry in favour of China. China's economic power is perceived by the European wider public as a threat to employment (Stokes & Studdart, 2014), but at the same time, certain business, national and local governments are keen to attract it (Maull, 2017). Chinese FDI hit a record high in 2016 with an increase of 37%, exceeding 200billion USD between 2005 and 2016 (Christiansen & Maher, 2017). They invested heavily on infrastructure projects such as ports, airports, the energy sector, telecommunications, and real estate as well as the high value-added area and high-tech companies such as robotics, chemical and semi-conductors (Holslag, 2017). The EU began to recognize a need to protect its strategic sectors like infrastructure and high tech.

Sino-European relation after the pandemic

Overall political atmosphere from Pro- to Anti-China

The pandemic of Covid-19 accelerated the trend of this already uncertain Sino-European relation. Stock markets suffered their worst first quarter since the 2008 financial crisis, with a 21% fall (Georgiadis et al., 2020). China was a producer of supplies of essential medical goods. Over half of the world's medical masks before COVID-19 were produced in China, who effectively bought up the country's entire supply at the time of incident. China also imported a considerable quantity of respirators and other medical supplies from abroad

(Farrell & Newman, 2020). EU's trade ministers on 16th April 2020 agreed on the importantce of diversifying source reducing heavy reliance on external countries for key supply (The Japan Times, 2020).

The EU shifted its policy from pro- to anti-China at the first peak of pandemic in 2020. When Wuhan was hit hardest, the EU provided nearly 60 tonnes of medical material to PRC discreetly at Beijing's request (Small, 2020). When COVID-19 began to reach Europe, PRC lent aid with propaganda causing inflamation of anti-EU sentiments, questioning the very raison d'être for the EU (Seaman, 2020; Bolder et al., 2020; Rankin, 2020). Frontier controls among member states returned (Bolder, 2020). Member states criticized the EU at the beginning of the pandemic for failing to deliver its promise of solidarity over their common fate as it did in the aftermath of WWII.

China left an impression that outsiders to the EU were more helpful than the bloc itself. When Italy called for the EU to use its fiscal tools such as its bailout rescue fund, it was met with skepticism (R. Yacoub & El-Zomor, 2020). It demonstrated the difference in values between northern and southern member states which had already pre-existed before COVID-19. China seized an opportunity to provide relief to the worst hit European countries aiming to polish up the Communist Party's image. Since mid-March in 2020, Chinese medical teams, masks and ventilators draped with Chinese flags arrived at European airports (Brattberg & Corre, 2020).

Italian Foreign Minister, Luigi di Maio, posted a video on facebook praising China for its "solidarity spirit". On the same day, China hosted a video conference for the 17+1 (Current 16+1) group sharing lessons on combatting Covid-19 with Central and Eastern European states. Spain agreed to purchase over half a million masks, 5.5 million test kits and 950 respirators. Other European countries such as Greece, Belgium the Czech Republic, France, Austria and Serbia received help from China as well. Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez also praised China at which point, the European Commission was forced to issue statements that "France and Germany have donated more masks than China did" (European Commission, 2020). A call between Chinese health officials and 10 European countries took place few days later, during which China leveraged its own supposedly successful reponse and its reslience agianst the virus presenting its governance model based on social control and harsh confinement and surveillance. It helped to deflect attention away from the fact that COVID-19 originated in Wuhan and its delay in informing WHO (Brattberg & Le Corre, 2020).

Chinese ambassadors across Europe became highly visible (Bolder et al., 2020). Many of the embassies in Europe recently are run increasingly by hardliners, such as Lu Shaye, an ambassador to France and Monaco since August 2019 (Brattberg & Le Corre, 2020). Lu accused the nursing staffs of abandoning their posts at the elderly housings overnight leaving their elderly patients to die. The President of the EU Chamber of Commerce in China, Joerg Wuttke, stated that the atmosphere in Europe regarding China is toxic due to the extremely aggressive stance and hard-line propaganda taken by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Beijing demonstrating the superiority of Communist party rule over democracy (Small, 2020).

Impact on PRC's FDI in Europe

However, the major concern of the EU is the Chinese purchase of European strategic assets and sectors via SOEs. There is no agreed definition of SOE in international relations today.

However, the closest one was provided in the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) between the EU and PRC, which is not yet signed as of today. The CAI refers to SOEs as "Covered Entities" with criteria to recognize them (Dadush & Sapir, 2021). It includes the power of the state to appoint directors, control the decision of the enterprise through "any other ownership interest" or even "without any ownership stakes". The definition applies at "all levels of government", including local and regional government (Dadush & Sapir, 2021).

Ortega (2020) argued that while the EU wishes China to follow a one Europe policy, EU member states differ in their interests towards China, making it difficult for the EU to excuse a unified policy. Some European countries signed memorandums of understanding (MOUs) with China to participate in BRI (Belt and Road Initiative). It often used a tactic of debt-trap, where it finances infrastructure projects in exchange for use of those space. China will claim an ownership of those spaces in case the loans cannot be repaid. Those investments often neglect socioeconomic and financial stability and result in high indebtedness and a transfer of control over strategic assets and resources where China could potentially station its troops (Bolder, 2020; Silver, Devlin, Huang, 2020; Lišanin & Vukasovic, 2020). Chinese SOEs now control 10% of European port container capacity and are active in the aspiring EU member states of the Western Balkans.

EU member states differ in their interests for Chinese FDI

French President Emmanuel Macron emphasized the necessity to tackle it as one united EU (Ortega, 2020). However, in the event of crises, countries have more tendencies to encourage FDI, especially less developed countries that have less means to compensate for economic losses resulting from the pandemic. For example, the Hungarian government rushed through the Belgrade-Budapest railway deal financed by the Export Bank of China under emergency legislation enacted in response to the pandemic. Riecke (2020) discovered that M&A specialists confirm that SOEs are looking for bargains in Europe. The European Commission issued guidelines for implementation of a common EU investment screen framework adding to the already established an extensive FDI screening process in 2020 (Tonchev, 2020). The EU commissioner and the NATO secretary general warned governments to be extra vigilant in efforts to protect infrastructure and sensitive technologies to enhance resilience against Chinese FDI (Small, 2020). China is pushing its program "Made in China 2025", whereby Beijing aspires to become the world leader in key technologies (Holslag, 2017). The use and deveopment of technologies, such as 5G and AI, accelerated a pre-existing debate in Europe regarding the privacy protection and user and the protection of sensitive governmental information (Klonowska & Bindt, 2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic accelerated the trend of decreasing Chinese FDI

Despite of the high cautions vocalized above, BRI and other Chinese FDI have stalled worldwide after the pandemic. According to the analysis conducted by MERICS, PRC's global outbound M&A activity marked a 14-year low in 2021 with a total M&A transactions just 20 billion EUR, 22% drop from the already weak 2020(MERICS, 2022). Chinese FDI in 2021 specifically in Europe (EU member states and the UK) increased in comparison to 2020. However, it remained on its multi-year downward trajectory since 2016. The share of Chinese SOEs fell into a 20-year low in Europe, decreasing 10% from 2020. A new trend is that there are

more investments on greenfield projects, accounting for a third of all Chinese FDI (MERICS, 2022). Thinktank Bruegel's research (Gracia Herrero, 2022) also shows that the pandemic caused complications for the PRC in evaluating, negotiating and concluding new deals as most in-person exchanges were cut off due to on-going draconian lockdowns in China. Many BRI projects underway before the pandemic appear to have been abandoned with 15 projects worth over 2.4 billion USD facing financial difficulties in 2020. PRC appear to be downsizing BRI projects. These demonstrate the pandemic simply added to the already exisiting trend of decrease in volume for FDI and other BRI projects.

Implication and Conclusion

Under these circumstances, we must contemplate how the EU is able to establish a resilient Europe. The first action required is to reintegrate American presence into the international order with the Biden administration as well as incorporating like-minded countries who face some threat by PRC such as Australia, New Zealand, India, Taiwan, Canada, South Korea, and Japan. It must become an initiator and opinion maker to organize opportunities to discuss PRC, and not only rely on the G7 or G20 summits and NATO. The UK is another key partner as some studies show that it has more consistently seen PRC as an economic opportunity than a security threat (Reilly & Lee, 2013). However, it is the time for the UK to reconsider its positioning as per Russian invasion in Ukraine and China's stance not to criticize Putin. EU can re-approach the UK putting an end to Euroscepticism. Alliance for multilateralism is currently led by Germany and France. EU must take a lead to solicit other member states in this movement to show resilience instead of the individual movement like Lithuania[1]. Finally, EU must continue to engage the PRC on shared challenges such as climate change, counter-piracy, North Korea, and peacekeeping operation so as not to isolate it, fully deploying a "pull and push" effect.

To summarize, my inductive approach to my research question showed the following theory. The actual trend of Chinese FDI in Europe does not equate with the amount of attention the EU and EU member states pay to PRC. The pandemic of Covid-19 had accelerated the existing trends of two things: 1) decrease in any form of Chinese FDI in Europe and 2) the EU recognizing PRC as a systematic rival. Chinese economy is highly likely to be crippled if the governments were to keep enforcing the stringent draconian lockdowns in major cities as it significantly affects the supply chains. Strategies regarding the pandemic management diverged between the EU and PRC. However, from the complex interdependence perspective, it is not ideal simply to close countries because it could weaken not only economic resilience but also solidarity as seen within the EU. Further research is required if the lockdowns and other measures that limited trans- and non- governmental interactions of societies and economy are the direct cause of the toxicity of the current Sino-European relation. States are motivated to stabilize economic uncertainty caused by the recent events including the Covid-19 pandemic. For this reason, as the complex interdependency theory shows, both the EU and PRC are open for a negotiation with the proof of the 23rd EU-China summit that took place on 1 April 2022 (European Commission, 2022). For both the EU and PRC government to build stronger political resilience they will need to learn from the success stories of their counterpart to maneuver their way out of the pandemic. All parties must recognize our

1 In November 2021, Lithuania opened a "Taiwan Representative Office" in Vilnius. Since "Taiwan" was used instead of "Taipei", PRC considered it to be a violation of its One China principle, which led PRC to impose a series of economic coercion and for Lithuania to withdraw from then 17+1 (Andrijauskas, 2022).

common fate by defining our common enemy as the virus and not as each other while un-naively building a way to hedge risks and increase resilience in this complex interdependent world.

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Rethinking Resilience – Using Field Theory To Offer Us An Alternative Perspective

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Abstract

Does resilience reside in an individual or elsewhere? Field Theory (Lewin 1942) challenges a concept of resilience residing in an individual and instead offers a view where resilience is inextricably interconnected with both the individual and all aspects of the field surrounding them. Using field theory as a lens, cause and effect can only be understood in relation to the field conditions that have led to the manifestation of resilience, or lack of. A person's behaviour can only be understood in terms of their inter-dependence with their environment. When working with resilience, if the forces in a field are identified, including past and current perception, it is possible not only to understand why individuals, groups and organisations act with, or without, resilience, but also what forces would need to be diminished or strengthened in order to facilitate behavioural change. Field theory invites the leader, manager, organisation development practitioner and organisational psychologist into considering resilience in a nonlinear way. The implications for understanding resilience within organisations, groups and individuals are important, given the increasingly changing organisational environment, the drive to motivate, develop and retain people within work, and the increasing realisation of how important wellbeing and good mental healthcare within an organisational context. This article encourages the reader to understand resilience in a non-linear, multi cause and effect fashion, where it does not only reside within an individual, but is, in fact, a manifestation of field conditions surrounding that individual.

Background

Kurt Lewin (1890–1947) was the forefather of Field theory. He was one of the leading psychologists of his generation (Marrow 1969; Tolman 1948). His work provided the foundations of Organisation Development (OD) and is still considered by many as central to it (Boje et al. 2011; Burnes 2004, 2007; Burnes and Cooke 2012; Cooke 2007; Cummings and Worley 2005).

Lewin developed Field theory over a 25-year period starting in the 1920s (Marrow 1969). Drawing on unified field theory in physics, he argued that the order of coexisting facts in a psychological or social situation can be viewed as a life space (Lewin 1939). Field theory played a central part in all Lewin's work by allowing him and his associates to understand the forces that sustained undesired behaviours, and to identify those forces that would need to be either strengthened or weakened in order to bring about desired behaviours (M. Lewin 1998). His yardstick for relevance was that his approach to change should enable individuals and groups to understand and restructure their perceptions of the world around them (Burnes 2007; Lewin 1942).

Resilience

Resilience has long been seen as the ability to bounce back following adverse events and resume previously known functioning (Lengnick-Hall, Beck and Lengnick-Hall 2011: Richardson 2002). This view of resilience seems to draw on assumptions based upon notions of positively coping, and hardiness when exposed to adverse happenings (Waugh, Fredrickson and Taylor 2008). More recent views have described resilience as a way in which people, groups and organisations have used the situation to adapt, transform and identify opportunities and also to prepare for future adverse conditions (Lee, Vargo and Sevill 2013; Lengnick-Hall, Beck, and Lengnick-Hall 2011). Kuntz et al (2016: 2017 p224) refer to a definition of resilience that is 'the behavioural capability to leverage work resources in order to ensure continual adaptation, well-being, and growth at work, supported by the organisation'. Buzzanell (2010) further emphasises that resilience can be developed rather than residing in an individual who either possesses it or not. Resilience can have a direct impact on wellbeing, mental health, happiness and consequently people's performance within an organisation. It is therefore a key organisational consideration.

Field theory (Lewin 1947) sees resilience as the ability to identify and recognise aspects of self and the surrounding field (context), which together result in an amount and type of resilience, and then to be choiceful over subsequent actions and behaviours. Resilience can be viewed as a result of what meanings are paid attention to in a current situation, how someone chooses to make contact or engage with the situation, and what lies in or out of awareness (Joyce and Sills 2002). Taking these constructs around resilience allows us a wider, more holistic way of considering any interventions to increase resilience, albeit a considerably more complicated one. The aim of this article in applying field theory to resilience, is to encourage leaders, managers, organisation development practitioners and organisational psychologists to move away from engaging with resilience using dichotomous cause and effect assumptions and interventions, towards viewing and engaging with resilience as a multi-causal, non-static phenomena. This differs from other more formulaic, binary or model-led approaches that are so prevalent today in the understanding of organisational functioning.

A constellation of influences on resilience

Field theory gives us a holistic way of understanding the constellation of forces that shape thinking, feeling and behaviour, including resilience. The term *field* is an informing metaphor to capture all the complex interrelated influences that affect individuals, groups and

organisations (Chidiac 2018). Seeing non dichotomously is a first and necessary step to gain understanding (Lewin 1947), that instead of examining resilience in an either/or and cause/effect way, we consider that any situation is a result of intertwining multi-impacting factors and influences. A Field theory lens would challenge any attempt to understand resilience as solely residing within an individual. Instead, there are three areas which form the field (Lewin 1942; Burnes 2019; Clarkson and MacKewn 1994). When questions regarding resilience are asked in relation to the individual alone, we see only part of the picture. Instead, the exploration needs to provide a fuller understanding by firstly exploring dynamics of this person's internal process, how they are experiencing their own resilience. Secondly, the field conditions for them in this situation, what are the influences from the surrounding field or environment. Thirdly, the interaction between their internal process and the external context or field. These three forces result in an equilibrium that results in a level and type of resilience. There is a reciprocal influence relationship between the whole and the parts (Stevenson 2018). An organisational development professional then in exploring resilience with a person, may consider all the possible influences on a situation in the field, how that person is processing this and reacting and then explore how they are relating to these external influences and their resulting resilience.

Lewin saw behaviour as the product of the environment and the way in which individuals interpret external stimuli. Therefore, applying this to a Field theory view of resilience, change in amount and type of resilience can be achieved by change in the individual and/or change in the situation/environment the person exists within. In fact, Lewin argued that it is not sufficient to identify one or two of the forces that impinge on the individual or group. Instead, all the forces, and how they relate to and interact with each other have to be taken into account (Cartwright 1952; Lewin 1939, 1944; Stevenson 2018).

These forces in the field reach a balance or equilibrium, which is dynamic. They are driving and restraining forces. It is from this concept that the model of force field analysis is taken (Burnes and Cooke 2013). In respect of resilience within people and organisations then, the overarching question needs to be, *what are the driving and restraining forces that leads us in this situation to be more or less resilient?* The answer is context dependent. We are dealing with a constantly shifting context/environment, and we need the ability to identify and deal with this, rather than attempt to try and render either ourselves or the situation as unchanging. Consider the latest pandemic as an example and the difference between organisations or individuals that have adapted out of realisation for the field conditions and those who have not. For example, those universities that have successfully moved seminars, tutorials, supervision, library services online and moved to teams/zoom for meetings, compared to those institutions where student teacher interaction was simply suspended for the duration of lockdown, and formal learning opportunities were paused.

A person is never independent or isolated from their field. This has implications for felt *ownership* of resilience. By only examining factors within the individual, there is an implicit assumption that the individual *owns* the resilience, or lack of. Alternatively, if it is explored in the individual as them being 'done to' by factors outside of their control, then this encourages denial that they are a part of it and can lead to a rather disempowered frame of mind.

In truth, a person is always in contact and connected with everything else (Joyce and Sills 2002), although they may not perceive themselves to be or be aware of the connections.

Defining the problem

Problem definition is difficult, as once a problem is named, it can imply a single solution. For example, saying that the problem with the NHS is funding, suggests that more funding will solve all problems. In actuality there is a complexity and uncertainty related to trying to understand problems. It is the same with resilience. Resilient causal factors are multi-faceted and ambiguous. If the forces in a field can be explored and even identified, it would be possible not only to understand why individuals, groups and even entire organisations become non-resilient, but also what forces would need to be diminished or strengthened in order to bring about change (Burnes and Cooke 2013). If personal and situational are not divided, but seen together as an integrated whole, then changes in one part of the field is likely to lead to changes in other parts of the field (Parlett 1997).

The cause-effect thinking, that has pervaded so much of organisational and individual attention, is simply not very effective. Every part of the field impacts on the constellation and therefore no part of the field can be excluded as irrelevant (Lewin 1944). This requires paying attention to what is momentarily or persistently relevant or interesting in the moment, sometimes known as the *here and now*. The past or history is important, however, it is how these past factors manifest themselves in the *present*, that we need to pay attention to (Stevenson 2018; Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman 1951; 1994) and how they impact on our individual and organisational resilience. It is by examining the present here and now experience, where our field awareness is greater and change can be addressed with a closer attention to current needs, rather than historical ones (Nevis 1998, 2001; Stevenson 2018). This allows people and organisations to adapt by much more accurately understanding the conditions around resilience and therefore to consider a wider and more tailored way of intervening for improvements.

Resilience as a dynamic consideration

The field surrounding an individual or organisation is in a continuous state of movement. No two days are ever the exact same. Similarly, resilience, when understood as a capacity to cope with one's place within the field, is not static. The individual forces within the field are themselves subject to change and, as they are constantly interacting with each other, they create a field that is in a continuous state of dynamic equilibrium. As Lewin (1947 p.199) put it: 'Change and constancy are relative concepts; individual and group life is never without change, merely differences in the amount and type of change exist' (Burnes and Cooke 2013).

Aspects of the field emerge in and out of focus as they are perceived to be more or less relevant. How many of us have lost sleep worrying about our work but within a few days it seemingly is less important while a new and different issue emerges? Within this ongoing organising of our field and what we pay attention to, some aspects become *figural* (foreground, in focus) and others *ground* (background, out of focus). Resilience is emergent, dynamic and unfolds into patterns dependent on the environment in which it sits (Poole

2008; Buzzanell 2010). In this sense then, our individual sense making leads to how we react to and interpret events (Parlett 1991). Resilience, or lack of, may often seem out of our control, but our sense making, interpretation and reaction is a choice. People, groups and organisations who are resilient are often able to recognise those elements in the field that might normally be in ground, and consider them as possibly relevant, hence making them figural. This goes some way to helping us understand how individual reactions to an event can be so different. We construct our meaningful perception of objects through selective attention to certain stimuli over others (Spinelli 1989; Clarkson and MacKewn 1994). As this sense making is a moving process, seemingly irrelevant data may emerge into the foreground and change the understanding and reaction to the whole situation. Therefore, what someone may consider to be non-important, may later become significant (Clarkson and MacKewn 1994). This is referred to as the principle of possible relevance (Parlett 1991). Resilience is an emergent process, not a binary on/off phenomenon. This of course has implications for how we address it. An ongoing dynamic set of interventions related to the emerging field constellation, is much more likely to be effective in increasing resilience, than a one-shot intervention based at a single fixed point in time.

The unique sense making and resilience of each person

A person is always actively sense-making as an ongoing process. The meaning that each individual assigns to their perceptual field is unique to that individual. (Clarkson and MacKewn 1994; Perls 1969; Joyce and Sills 2002). Due to this, two people may experience a situation in two very different ways, and subsequently have different kinds and amount of resilience. This goes someway to explaining why the 'one size fits all' interventions such as whole system restructures, compulsory training roll outs, unilateral policy change and whole organisation broadcast communications, often fail, despite good intentions.

Resilience is non-resolvable. It is in a constant state of change. It does not stop or wait for decision makers to formulate an answer. It will never be finished or completed. Any attempt to resolve resilience will change the nature of the issue. In this sense then it is a wicked problem (Rittel and Webber 1972). Intervening in resilience, will change, alter and morph the situation, but it will still be present in some form (Raisio et al 2019). As strength and type of resilience arises from the forces in a person's field, then changes within the field will impact on the amount and type of resilience (Cartwright 1952). It is in understanding the causal factors in the here and now where organisations and individuals within them can build resilience (M. Lewin 1998; Burnes and Cooke 2013). Some commentators (Nevis 1998; Stevenson 2018), believe that change comes from within and spreads throughout the system. However, Lewin (1947) was keen to point out that both internal and external forces are important. In individuals and organisations, reframing is one useful intervention that can change the sense-making, perception and resilience of a situation (Grint 2005; Fairhurst 2005; Maule et al, 2007). For example, as Grint (2008) points out, changing the name of the National Health Service to the National Illness Service, would alter our field, perception and subsequent actions.

Change and resilience

When resilience is seen as a dynamic equilibrium between forces, to bring about change, the balance between the forces which maintain the status quo have to be upset, i.e., unfreezing has to occur (Schein 1996). Therefore, the key change to levels of resilience, is how to unfreeze or upset the forces that are maintaining the equilibrium (Burnes 2019). Of course, as we have experienced with the Covid pandemic, sometimes this equilibrium is changed by circumstances in all our fields, which in many cases has altered the resilience of many individuals, teams and organisations. For example, how people and organisations have adapted to home working, social distancing, less work and leisure travel and environmental impact. How some organisations have re-imagined their offering to fit the new circumstances, such as how universities have moved to more online offerings. We can of course speculate how permanent this resilience will prove to be, but in line with Kuntz et al (2016: 2017) definition of resilience (see page 2), we can clearly see, in some cases, evidence of adaptive behaviours in organisations.

It is during adaptive adjustment, that new ideas, thoughts, experiences and feelings are encountered. At the time of this happening in organisations, it can seem and feel chaotic. But over time, as the new adjustments become the norm, order can re-emerge from the chaos (Bentley 2001). In fact, change at one level of the system impacts on all other levels of the system (Nevis 1998; Stevenson 2018). Does this lead us to consider that *any* change in the system will unbalance the equilibrium? Some of this depends on the strength and permanency of the forces being changed, and the readiness of an organisation to change. To increase resilience, Field theory would not see a single intervention as effective. Instead understanding resilience as multi-causal and hence needing multi-interventions. We become more resilient as we learn to identify and manage the constellation of forces with choice. This includes increased understanding that we as individuals have helped to construct our own experiences via our sense making process, choices and actions (Yalom 1980). Awareness is the precursor to effective action and leads to greater choice (Nevis 1998).

Changing resilience is an iterative process, facilitated by trying things out or experimenting. Experimentation with new forms of experience and perception is a critical source for change. Pilot studies and experimentation are a key source of learning (Nevis 1998; Stevenson 2018). Experimentation also carries risk with it and may be at odds with approaches that seek the silver bullet one-off solution to increase resilience. Resilience sits within a constellation of causal factors and so, when intervening in changing this, we need to consider a constellation of interventions.

Summary

Field theory calls on leaders, managers, organisation development practitioners, HR professionals and organisational psychologists to consider resilience in a nonlinear way. Calling on them to recognise the unique nature of situations, people and resulting resilience. Recognising that fields interconnect, overlap, and co-influence one another and that none sit totally independently. It encourages attention to be paid to the 'here and now' experience in a configuration which is in constant change, rather than a fixed historical construct. Above

all, it encourages a view that the field is organised by factors both internal to a person and external to the situation (Parlett 1997) and as such, interventions should be designed and applied with these assumptions.

Using a Field theory lens will help understanding of the wider influencing factors and forces. It helps organisations adapt by encouraging holistic thinking. It can prevent organisations designing single interventions that only address one aspect of the multi-causal factors. Field theory calls on us to work in a way that sees the possibility that everything or anything has relevance, to have an open and genuine childlike curiosity around the phenomena of resilience, withholding judgement as far as possible. Leaders, managers, organisation development practitioners, HR professionals and organisational psychologists within an organisation are encouraged to use more inclusive thinking. i.e., *'I am part of the situation'* rather than a more projective process which sees it outside of themselves only. We are used to thinking of the world in terms of contrasts, such as mind vs body, internal process vs external influences, work vs real life (a phrase I increasingly hear in organisations) (Parlett 1997). The study of resilience in organisations through a Field theory lens, emphasises the need to view resilience, or indeed any situation, with a unitary outlook that dissolves a dualistic approach (Perls, Hefferline and Goodman 1951, p. 14). In turn, this leads to a more owned view of resilience, where instead of the leaders, managers, organisation development practitioners and organisational psychologists speaking of 'the organisation' and 'management' in a way that implies that they are not themselves an intrinsic part of the forces around a situation (Parlett 1997), it enables us all to understand that each of us are part of a wider inclusive field and as such are more empowered to influence forms and amount of resilience, understanding how to influence self, others and the context in order to achieve this.

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What Makes A House Resilient In Humanitarian Shelter And Settlement Programming?

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Abstract

"Resilience" is a buzzword that is increasing in popularity, particularly in the humanitarian sector. The cost of humanitarian action is increasing year-on-year, and so finding ways to address the underlying causes of disasters and conflict is key to supporting efforts to meet humanitarian need with the limited funding, time, and resources the sector has access to. In line with these concerns, the rise of "resilience humanitarianism" and localisation agendas that focus on community resilience building have seen a move away from traditional response-based humanitarian action towards a longer-term approach. However, the concept of resilience is broad and can be difficult to operationalise, particularly in humanitarian contexts. For shelter actors, the provision of "resilient" housing to affected populations is a core priority. This raises the question: what characteristics should define a "resilient house" in humanitarian contexts? This paper explores the concepts of "hard" and "soft" resilience and lays out the way in which humanitarian actors could start to operationalise resilience to address the core health and wellbeing needs of those affected by humanitarian crises. It ends by examining the wider implications of placing the "resilient" characteristics of affected populations at the heart of humanitarian shelter and settlement responses and explores how this might be enacted in practice.

Operationalising resilience in humanitarian shelter and settlement programming

It has been acknowledged by many that the concept of "resilience" has a broad range of definitions that can complicate its operationalisation in practice (Alexander, 2013; Mahdiani & Ungar, 2021). Due to its flexible definition, "resilience" has become something of a buzz word across many disciplines and sectors, including within the humanitarian space. As humanitarian organisations acknowledge the difficulties of meeting the sheer scale of need in their operational contexts (IFRC, 2019), there is a shifting perspective away from traditional response approaches towards "resilience humanitarianism" that focuses more on strengthening local institutions in their role as first responders to crises (Hilhorst, 2018). This approach aims to break free from the traditional disaster cycle and instead build resilient communities and institutions that can respond more effectively to hazards in the future. However, such thinking still suffers from a difficulty in pinning down exactly what "resilience" means. This paper explores the ways in which the concept of "resilience" has changed as it relates to humanitarian shelter and settlement programming over time and proposes future developments in resilience thinking in humanitarian action.

Particularly in complex environments such as those that humanitarian actors work in, a question of "resilience of what, to what" often emerges (Carpenter et al., 2001; Cutter, 2016). In crisis contexts, there is usually at least one incredibly salient hazard which actors are hoping to respond to. For example, it might be understandable to assume that a community that has just been devastated by a cyclone would want support in rebuilding cyclone-resistant houses and schools to replace what was lost. However, research in Andhra Pradesh found that this was not the case. Bosher (2011) found that strongly built, cyclone-resistant housing did not meet the needs of community members for the majority of the time they were living in them. Reinforced concrete houses were considered too hot in summer, too cold in winter, prone to damp, and expensive. As a result, residents were forced to reconstruct their own traditionally built homes next to those inappropriate alternatives (p248 – 251). This example is one of many that humanitarian practitioners themselves have also acknowledged, most notably in the shelter cluster, which has a primary responsibility to provide a physical dwelling for people displaced in humanitarian crises (Global Shelter Cluster, 2018).

Opdyke, Goldwyn & Javernick-Will (2021) have noted that the divide between humanitarian and development practices has led to an artificial divergence in research and learning between "shelter" and "housing" practitioners, which has prevented a more detailed understanding of how shelter and settlement action influences affected communities in the long-term. These different uses of terminology means that there is sometimes a disconnect between the goals of shelter actors, and the long-term development needs of the affected community (Lloyd-Jones, 2006). In a notable attempt to address this, recent practitioner-led research initiatives from the shelter sector have highlighted the wider impacts of shelter provision in humanitarian action (InterAction, 2021). This discussion has drawn attention to the way in which shelter action is framed, leading to a shift amongst sector practitioners towards a "homes and communities" approach (Catholic Relief Services, 2020; Global Shelter Cluster, 2021). The sector is acknowledging that shelter practitioners, far from simply providing four walls and a roof for affected individuals, should in fact be aiming to facilitate the reconstruction of homes that meet all the needs of their inhabitants.

"Hard" and "soft" resilience

This shifting perspective on humanitarian shelter and settlement action also requires a re-evaluation of what is meant by "resilient" housing. In discussing the characteristics of a truly "resilient" home, it is necessary to make a distinction between two very different types of resilience. The first, "hard resilience" refers to the structural strength of a building and can be seen as the direct inverse of what engineers would refer to as "fragility". Hard resilience is the capacity of a building to withstand an extreme hazard (Proag, 2014). "Soft resilience", on the other hand, is a more inclusive definition that examines the ability of a system to recover from a shock, incorporating the influence of a building's supporting systems in its potential for providing security (Proag, 2014; Tien et al., 2018; Pagano et al., 2018). Soft resilience goes beyond structural resilience in the face of hazards to consider the way in which housing can facilitate the development of resilient households and communities.

It is important to note that even in locations where extreme hazards are a real physical risk to housing, such events are still rarely the primary risk to community members. Whilst a severe

earthquake such as the one that devastated Haiti in 2010 can kill and displace hundreds of thousands in an instant (Benet, 2020), such events are infrequent, and unsuitable housing situations cause significant harm even in the absence of such disasters. In order to consider resilience in a broader sense, Klein, Nicholls & Thomalla (2003) have argued that we should move away from focusing on the hazards themselves, and instead look at resilience as a system attribute that can protect from and support recovery after various events. This has implications for how resilience should be viewed in housing. A cyclone-resistant home that leads to negative health outcomes for inhabitants because of poor indoor air quality and excessive indoor temperatures is not resilient by this definition.

For example, the health impact of poor-quality housing goes far beyond just exposure to risks from external natural hazards to include risks from the building itself. In the UK alone, it is estimated that the cost of poor-quality housing to society is in excess of £18 billion, and injuries and illnesses stemming from poor housing cost the healthcare system £1.6 billion annually (Roys et al., 2016). Addressing this level of harm as a result of inadequate housing is difficult for the humanitarian sector, who do not have the same access to data on the impact of housing issues on their inhabitants. However, reports from InterAction (Kelling, 2020) and Care International / Oxford Brookes (Webb, Weinstein Sheffield & Flinn, 2020) demonstrate that housing in humanitarian settings can also influence health outcomes in significant ways for inhabitants. Webb et al. (2021) have called for a stronger focus on the environmental health implications of shelter action, arguing that using an "environmental health lens" in humanitarian practice could lead to more resilient and sustainable housing outcomes.

Expanding on this call for a greater prioritisation of health considerations in shelter and settlement practice, Webb & Weinstein Sheffield (2021) also highlight the links between good quality housing and mental wellbeing. This is important because mental health in post-disaster contexts is still often misunderstood. The report highlights that often it is not the crisis situation itself that can lead to a decline in mental health or psychosocial wellbeing in affected persons, but rather daily stressors such as poor housing quality or lack of access to services such as water, energy, or sanitation (p16, also see Allen et al. 2014; Logie et al., 2020).

Providing housing in a way that supports mental health is also key to fostering strong community ties, which can support collective resilience in affected communities. As Parrack et al. (2021) detail, good quality shelter programming can support recovery if it fosters community-building activities, especially when wellbeing and social inclusion factors are considered. Their chapter was included in InterAction's (2021) *Roadmap for Research*, which laid out important questions that need to be addressed in humanitarian shelter and settlement action, and this issue of soft resilience factors in housing fall under many of the chapters. For Parrack et al., focusing on how shelter and settlement operations can support social cohesion and long-term community development can improve the outcomes for disaster- or conflict-affected people. The issue is a lack of a clear understanding of the wider impact of shelter operations, particularly in relation to the way in which shelter and housing solutions are provided.

By situating housing within the context of the wider neighbourhood, in relation to both the surrounding environment and the community dynamics a household finds itself in,

this more inclusive definition of resilience can be explored. Build Change (2021) highlighted this concept of resilience in their *Guide to Resilient Housing* report, which laid out a series of criteria by which housing could be considered resilient. In addition to housing being disaster resistant and secure, the report also highlights the importance of sustainability, affordability, adaptability, locally appropriate design, and health considerations as being key components of a resilient house (p5). Including these factors in the definition of a resilient house allows for a more holistic view of what is required to ensure that the long-term needs of inhabitants are being met.

Whilst there is still significant research to be done in the shelter sector in order to better understand how shelter programmes can foster resilience (as laid out in InterAction, 2021), practitioners can look to the definitions of resilient housing found in development contexts and the Global North, such as that laid out by Build Change (2021). With a growing consensus that shelter can be one of the most important catalysts for longer-term recovery in affected populations (ShelterBox, 2019; O'Connell & Doberstein, 2022) the need to make sure we are maximising the impact of shelter response is key to humanitarian success. It is also important to acknowledge that the so-called "temporary" or "transitional" shelters that comprise humanitarian response often become much longer-term houses (Tafti & Bashiri, 2021; Lines, Walker & Yore, 2022) and that we therefore should aim to reach the same standards as we would expect of permanent housing outside of humanitarian contexts (Opdyke, Goldwyn & Javernick-Will, 2021).

Resilience as a characteristic of affected communities

This issue of defining and operationalising concepts is not unique to the physical structure of the house. So far, we have discussed "resilience" as it relates to the physical characteristics of the house (hard resilience) and how the process of creating the house can support the development of better wellbeing outcomes, livelihood opportunities, and community connections for its inhabitants (soft resilience). But, as Cheek and Chmutina (2022) have laid out in their discussion of the "resilient city" and how such a concept is measured in action, there are many other considerations determining what is meant by resilience in both humanitarian and development contexts. In concluding their paper, they ask the question "Are concepts like resilience located in the physical infrastructure of specific places, or are they a quality of the people located there?" (p10). This is a particularly important question for humanitarians to use to frame the outcomes of their programmes.

Humanitarians can and have moved on from simple examination of the structural strength of their shelter towards considering the wider social, environmental, and economic resilience of their operations. However, by considering resilience as a quality of the affected population themselves rather than as a property of the shelter or house that is delivered, the focus of shelter operations may shift away from deliverables and towards the process itself. There has been significant discussion in the sector of shelter as a "process" that can help or hinder the transition from immediate post-disaster response to longer-term community development, depending on how shelter programmes are enacted (George, 2021). By considering shelter as a process, the concept of resilience can be shifted even further from the hard structural characteristics of housing, or even static characteristics of a neighbourhood or community.

Instead, measuring resilience can be seen as measuring the capacity of a community to maintain and build-upon the initial shelter solution provided by aid agencies, as the emergency response phase ends and long-term development processes begin (Lloyd-Jones, 2006).

This is complicated by the different ways that "resilience" is operationalised when thinking about structures (such as houses) versus when discussing social systems (like communities). As Nightingale (2018) highlights, using more traditional definitions of resilience based in ecological approaches does not translate well into applications on social systems, and can contribute to "a fundamental devaluing and sidelining of local people's own understandings of community, flexibility, adaptation and livelihood security" (P186). The undervaluing of local knowledge is a criticism that has been levelled at the international humanitarian community from various sides (Šakić Trogrlić et al. 2021; Paige, 2021; Tharakan, 2015), and the shelter sector itself has acknowledged a need to better incorporate local capacities into its response (Caimi, 2015; Campbell, 2017).

In particular, through global agreements like the Grand Bargain, announced at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, the need for much greater local ownership of responses and recovery was acknowledged through the localisation agenda (Australian Aid et al., 2016). The discussion around localisation of humanitarian action stretches beyond the scope of this paper, but identifying the importance of placing local actors, and in particular members of affected communities, in the centre of humanitarian response is key to developing policies and actions that can support resilience-building in households. A locally led humanitarian response helps to ensure that "resilient" characteristics of affected peoples can be incorporated into action, benefitting from the inclusion of local knowledge in construction techniques, material use, and much more (MacRae, 2008).

To effectively engage with local knowledge and local capacities first requires a better understanding of exactly what local knowledge is and how it is generated (Nightingale, 2018; Šakić Trogrlić et al., 2021). Perhaps most importantly for the international humanitarian sector is developing a stronger understanding of exactly how local knowledge can be integrated into action. As Hermans et al. (2022) highlight, local knowledge is often seen as distinct from scientific knowledge and can be undervalued or even disregarded in favour of technical knowledge generated externally to the affected community. This limits the capacity of humanitarian organisations to meaningfully engage with local actors and local capacities, both stifling the success of the localisation agenda as laid out in the Grand Bargain, and more importantly reducing the effectiveness of action within a given context.

The Global Shelter Cluster has taken practical steps to better support local knowledge and local resilience measures in practice, through the release of their *Pathways Home* guidance document for shelter self-recovery, which suggests a "genuine people-led approach to supporting recovery where power and control remain in the hands of crisis-affected populations" (Global Shelter Cluster, 2022, p6). This guide represents an important step towards integrating local knowledge into humanitarian action, with a focus on how external actors and NGOs can facilitate self-recovery by affected populations, rather than leading the response themselves. Such practical guidance is in line with calls from academics for local

strategies to be better applied in disaster risk reduction, arguing that a move away from the technocratic approach to resilience and risk mitigation is required in order to empower affected populations (Hadlos, Opdyke & Hadigheh, 2022).

Returning to the idea of resilience as "a quality of the people located there" (Cheek & Chmutina, 2022) therefore raises interesting questions for humanitarian shelter and settlement actors. There is significant evidence to suggest that poorly administered humanitarian programming can in fact undermine local economies (Khaled, 2021), weaken pre-existing social ties and support networks (Zhang, 2016), and sometimes lead to aid dependency (Moss et al., 2006). This is often the outcome of top-down, externally administered projects that fail to engage meaningfully with local actors and local knowledge.

For humanitarian actors then, it maybe is more appropriate to consider the resilience factors that support the development of the communities in which they are working, rather than the resilience of the housing materials, construction methods, planning and operational activities that they are responsible for. Achieving this would be a great success of "resilience humanitarianism" (Hilhorst, 2018).

Recommendations for resilient housing in the shelter sector

A "resilient house" in a humanitarian context therefore requires significantly more than a strong structural capacity. Whilst the definition of resilience is still one that can be criticised as being too broad to inform action, by exploring the differing concepts of "hard" and "soft" resilience characteristics and how they relate to the wellbeing and health of inhabitants, we can begin to take a more holistic approach to building long-term household and community development in post-disaster contexts. By interrogating what we really mean when we use the term "resilience" in these contexts, we might be able to move towards a more locally appropriate, community-led, and sustainable form of shelter activity.

This more inclusive operationalisation of "resilience" in the shelter and settlement sector would require a shift in action based on a broader understanding of resilience measures. As discussed above, the sector has already evolved far beyond the traditional "hard resilience" that focused solely on structural elements of housing, towards a "soft resilience" approach that includes the health and wellbeing of inhabitants, and the social impacts of the shelter process on communities. A further step towards considering shelter as a process that is shaped by affected communities would be to consider not just the resilient characteristics of affected groups, but also how shelter actors engaging with them influence these characteristics. The *Pathways Home* report mentioned above lays out some of the potential steps to achieving this (Global Shelter Cluster, 2022), but the most important key recommendations for practice based on this approach might include:

- Prioritise local knowledge and support local actors in decision-making.
- Enable a flexible response model that can adapt to local priorities.
- Treat shelter as a process, rather than a product.
- Take steps to better understand the co-benefits of improved housing to inhabitants.
- Consider alternative metrics for success based on priorities of the affected population.

These are broad suggestions for what might constitute an inclusive resilience approach for shelter action. What might at first seem to be an academic discussion of the definition of "resilience" in fact has many implications for the way in which shelter and settlement actors engage with affected communities, and ultimately, how housing is provided both in immediate post-disaster response and over the lifetime of affected communities.

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The Voyeurism Of Survival: Classed Resilience In Single Mother Led TV Dramedies

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Abstract

This article examines representations of resilient single motherhood in TV dramatic comedy, arguing that the classed narratives of the struggles of single mothers told in these shows through the management of sex and economy can result in voyeuristic interpretations of survival, which I term 'survival voyeurism', in which female struggle is fetishized and resulting exploitations normalized, or even romanticised. Focusing on two popular American TV dramedy series, *SMILF* (2017) and *Better Things* (2016), I discuss both how classed portrayals of resilience are depicted and interpreted by audiences, centring vulnerability as an area of either increased, or decreased relatability and empathy from the viewer, connecting this to fetishizing audience interpretations.

Crucially, this article makes the point that in the context of neoliberalism and popular misogyny and without feminists having control over interpretation, feminist narratives of dramatic comedies may reinforce normative structures of sex, economy and exploitation, despite been widely credited with challenging social norms and presenting social issues.

Introduction

Resilience has often been emphasised as a core characteristic of TV single mothers (Cheeseman, 2010:8; Bowie, 2019), affording them moral value through hard work in paid and/or domestic labour, through bearing the emotional burden of lone-parenting and in navigating community relationships. Such imagery may contradict general political rhetoric, journalism and reality TV, which routinely portrays (working-class) single mothers as work-shy, dependant, uncouth and irresponsible (Gold, 2011; Cohen, 1972:2) Yet the notion of 'the struggle of single motherhood' endures. Even media texts that are socially critical, with a view to unpacking stereotypes, may end up repeating existing structural narratives, if they are 'pre-reflective or […] achieved through dialogue vitiated by unfairness, coercion, or inequality', writes Nancy Fraser (Fraser, 2013:30). Through stories of the resilient mother and her struggles, the nuclear family and often the interconnected 'separate spheres' (Fraser, 2016) model, which have been sold relentlessly to the public through advertising, politics, film and entertainment media (Heınemann, 2018; Tımke and Barr, 2017), are reinforced as the ideal site for social reproduction. Whilst single mothers in televised entertainment media are rarely viewed as 'a threat to societal values' (Cohen, 2002:1) in the same way that 'real life' single mothers are often portrayed in the media, the single mother headed family, through presentation of struggle, may still serve as a cautionary tale in favour of the nuclear family; a 'visible reminder of what we should not be' (Cohen, 2002:2).

Moreover, resilient single motherhood has become fetishized through tropes of survival and self-actualisation, which are articulated in single mother-led dramedy through struggles in sex and economy. These struggles are connected to the characters morality, as described in McRobbie's 'new sexual contract' which details how, in post-feminist ideology, feminine worth is deeply connected to careful management of finances and sexuality (McRobbie, 2009:54-5). As on-screen single mothers are shown to 'struggle socially, sexually and financially' (Feasey, 2012:73), this can position them in a precarious social position, which is enhanced for black and working-class single mothers who are more routinely cast in harrowing situations of basic survival. I argue that such portrayals can fall into a category I term 'survival voyeurism', in which audiences fetishize tales of survival. Literature on reality TV shows has already substantiated the idea that viewers desire on-screen competition as a facet of neoliberal thinking (Grazien, 2010:69), whilst 'survival television', such as *Born Survivor* and *Extreme Survival*, has been critiqued as 'dovetail(ing) with the shadowy side of neoliberalism, ennobling a precarious, self-punishing mode of existence in which one struggles to maintain one's present position rather than improve it' (Davidson, 2020:475).

Through the examination of single-mother led dramatic comedies *SMILF* (2017) and *Better Things* (2016), which explore themes of sex and economy from differing class positions and follow the conventions of the genre of dramedy in challenging social norms and presenting different family structures (Rabonovitz, 1989, Feasey, 2012:32), I argue that this journey of survival of single motherhood becomes fetishized, specifically in those less self-actualising representations where the mothers social position is in constant jeopardy, and upward social mobility remains elusive.

This, I assert, contributes to the socio-political normalisation of sexual exploitation of financially insecure women, who are routinely depicted in troubling sexual encounters as a result of financial insecurity. In the same vein as Nicole Rousseau's historic womanist analysis, which identifies the centrality of struggle in representations of black motherhood in different eras of American film and connects it with reforms to the welfare state, I connect survival voyeurism to meritocratic ideals in the era of austerity, and the potentially dangerous consequences of fetishizing female survival, drawing also on connections between survival TV and primitive masculinity. Whilst this article focuses on classed differences in portrayals of single mothers in dramatic comedy, it also considers the interconnection, and similarities in class and race issues, specifically in terms of portrayals of survival.

It is worth noting that whilst broadly in genres such as film, black single mothers feature prominently in survival narratives, they are often invisible in more everyday storylines found in TV dramatic comedy. In fact, Kerry Washington in *Little Fires Everywhere* (2020) is reported to be the first black female lead in a US drama in 40 years (Mathis, 2016), which is why, whilst this article considers race in narratives of resilience in TV dramatic comedy, there are no specific media texts to draw from.

A history of resilience in TV comedies/dramas featuring single mothers

In the 1960s and 70s television's early representations of single motherhood such as *Alice* (1976), *Julia* (1968-1971) and *What's Happening?* (1976) tended to portray resilience through the drudging endurance of low-paid blue-collar work, and the emotional impact of bereavement or desertion by a spouse. Through their portrayal of hard-working, self-sacrificial single mothers – narratives that often voyeuristically tied the mothers' survival with a stoic, de-sexualised drudgery – these shows were broadly supportive of reforms connected with the Civil Rights and women's movements, which saw greater benefits for single mothers, and allowed black women access to the welfare state (Hill-Collins, 2000:78-9), at a time when the public was becoming more receptive to issues of race and gender inequality.

As political rhetoric and ideas of what constitutes female morality shifted in line with neoliberal values of choice, individuality and self-sufficiency, resilient single mothers became delineated as having more individual agency and self-determination, primarily in areas of finance, employment and sexuality, than the widowed or deserted single mothers of the late 1960s/early 1970s. Changes in workplace opportunities, sexual freedom and greater ease of divorce meant that rates of single motherhood increased from 1970s onwards (Stevenson and Wolfers, 2007), whilst flourishing neoliberalism repositioned resilience as a self-actualizing process in which single mothers were responsible not just for parenting or providing their child's basic needs, but also for their own personal development (Barkın and Wısnor, 2013). Such self-actualising narratives tended to cast white, middle-class women as 'the ideal subjects of resilience' (Gill and Orgad, 2018:480). Single mothers in this era of comedy-drama were mostly white, and already possessed comfort and economic security through their professional careers (*Friends* (1994), *Murphy Brown* (1988), *SATC* (1998), *Frasier* (1993)). They continued to flourish after single parenthood and were able to date responsibly and have active social lives (some ultimately reuniting with their child's father). Many were single mothers by choice, speaking to the new morality of self-determination, whilst also only promoting single motherhood as a rational choice for those with the financial backing and community support to make it work.

Meanwhile, working-class mothers had largely moved from the position of protagonist to minor supporting role. Their resilience remained tied to low-paid labour, and often enduring their wayward children's exploits of criminality, drug use and teen pregnancy (as in *Cheers* (1982) and *Two and a Half Men* (2003)). This resonates with what Nicole Rousseau refers to in her analysis of films featuring black mothers during the welfare reform of the 90s as the 'surviving the black mother' trope. Focusing on 'hood films', such as *Menace II Society* (1993), *Juice* (1992) and *Boyz n the Hood* (1991), she notes how these films associate 'black boys road to ruin' with 'poor, inferior or deficient, and at other times … evil, awful or wicked' parenting by black mothers – who she also notes, are often absent during the film (Rousseau, 2013:461). Such images were reversed in the case of TV's white, working-class single mother, in that it was typically the children who are not visible in the show, and the mother – usually portrayed as more victim than villain – was able to appear as a successful subject through resilient hard work. However, her absence from the home was also framed as resulting in problems,

supporting an ongoing political narrative of child 'neglect' at the hands of single mothers, one informing various eras of welfare reform through classed and racialized narratives.

In the current era, which follows more than a decade of welfare reform in the name of 'austerity' since 2008's financial crisis, working-class, and to a much lesser extent, black mothers have returned to the small screen in lead roles in the genres of comedy and drama. They are given interesting and ambivalent roles, often challenging neoliberal ideas, and are used to exploring themes of racism, class inequality and stigmatization. As a significant segment of public opinion, on both sides of the Atlantic, has become more critical of government in light of increasing food insecurity, homelessness and impoverished public services, and as issues of race have been emphasised through BLM, dramatic comedy has been given license to explore these issues through single mothers, one of the groups hardest hit by austerity measures. Recent shows such as *SMILF* (2016) and *Little Fires Everywhere* (2020) have responded to this context, by showing working-class and black mothers in positions where daily routines are often marred by experiences of class or racial inequality or stigmatization.

The distinct difference in the 'struggle of needs' (Fraser, 2013:53-82) experienced by black and working-class mothers, and that experienced by white, middle-class mothers divides what Brunsdon terms 'heroine television', whereby 'women dominate the screen space, juggling work and family commitments, moving between relationships and trying to cope with the day-to-day routine of parenting' (Feasey, 2012:72), into narratives of survival and self-actualisation. In contrast to representations of middle-class 'yummy mummies' (Littler, 2013), whose resilience is geared more towards self-care and work/life balance, working-class single mothers may at times find themselves in cycles of despair in which demise is ever on the horizon, most prominently in the form of potential loss of children (*Weeds* (2005), *Little Fires Everywhere* (2020), *Maid* (2021)). Amy Benfor's argument that: 'the lack of single mothers on screen might be due to the fact that this figure is seen to struggle socially, sexually or financially, without the necessary glamour, gloss or escapism that is central to much contemporary programming' supports the idea of struggling single motherhood as being undesirable, whilst also affirming classed moral hierarchies of resilience, that place 'poor, and specifically single mothers needing welfare benefits or other forms of social support … as lacking resilience and the ability to bounce back' (Gill and Orgad, 2018:480).

Self-actualisation and survival as classed modes of resilience

By comparing two American dramedies, *SMILF* and *Better Things*, in more detail, we can see how contemporary narratives of resilient single motherhood differ according to class and opportunity. *Better Things* features Sam Fox as a recently divorced single mother of three teen/pre-teen daughters, trying to juggle work, parenting and community responsibility, whilst also taking time for herself to date and socialise. Sam is very financially secure, having made her fortune as a child star, and thus, she can now, as a result of economic stability, weather the precariousness of being an ageing B-list actress in LA, a close community network of family, friends and fellow celebrities also providing support and respite as she struggles with the chaos of parenting in the big city. Bridgette Bird, in *SMILF*, sits at the other end of the economic spectrum. Young, unemployed and living in insecure accommodation

in a gentrified area of Boston, where she is increasingly an outsider, she perpetually struggles to meet normative expectations of motherhood, much of her energy spent managing an eating disorder that has emerged as the result of childhood sexual abuse, and is triggered at times of stress, particularly that related to sexual activity and shame. Whilst both mothers are essentially indulging in many of the same hedonistic behaviours and dealing with the same issues – using sex as a form of escapism, managing minor acting careers and dealing with difficult mothers – class differences inform what are either presented as acts of resilience, troubles/annoyance that provoke resilience, or failures to be resilient. Whilst Sam's vulnerability is often framed as necessary, even beneficial to her parenting, in Bridgette these same behaviours are framed as disturbing, exemplifying the divide between what Sarah Banet-Weiser describes as 'Can do girls' – 'white, middle class … confident, empowered, entrepreneurial, filled with capacity', and 'at risk girls', 'typically a girl of colour or a working-class girl, and one who thus is seen as more susceptible to poverty, drugs, early pregnancy and fewer career goals and ambitions' (Banet-Weiser, 2018:28).

In both TV shows, the protagonists engage in sexual relationships with men they are not really interested in as a way of relieving the mixture of chaos and mundanity that is present in their parenting lives. Sam is afforded this vulnerability, and the audience is invited to admire and sympathise with her as she arranges clandestine hook-ups whilst her daughter is in the car; and she appears to be more than in control when she takes to task a casual lover, stating that she will simply 'get an Uber' home, when he leaves her stranded following her rant (*Better Things*, FX, Season 2, episode 2, 2016). Ultimately, her emotional resilience and financial stability, trump her vulnerability as a lonely single mother, allowing the audience to laugh at her dating experience. Bridgette's sexual exploits, on the other hand, make for much more worrying viewing. Whilst none of her partners are particularly alarming, Bridgette's low sense of self-worth affects her behaviour in these relationships, contributing to a cycle she quips as 'eat and porn' in which she will emotionally compensate for her misguided escapades by binge-eating and vomiting. Survival, for Bridgette is deeply entwined 'with the painful, unpleasant and humiliating', her resilience of which offers an 'ambiguous neoliberal form of utopia', in which, according to Joe Davidson, 'indignities undergone … chim(e) with the emphasis on the precarious, individual and competitive struggle for self-preservation as a model of human fulfilment in neoliberalism' (Davidson, 2020:476). Throughout her struggles, Bridgette maintains a 'positive mental attitude' that, as Barbara Ehrenreich argues 'has made itself useful as an apology for the crueller aspects of the market economy' (Gill and Orgad, 2022:17).

The social connection between sex, economy and exploitation is explicitly commented on in the third episode of season 1 of *SMILF*, which documents Bridgette's experiences with the 'new sexual contract' alongside her friends Eliza and Nelson. Whilst Eliza and Nelson, as middle-class women, are shown to use their sexuality to their own financial advantage during the episode as a result of possessing necessary characteristics of 'confidence, creativity and entrepreneurship' associated with McRobbie's 'phallic girl' (McRobbie, 2009:83), (although there are variations in outcomes according to race, Eliza's body, as a large, black, woman is placed within the confines of fetishism when she sets up an internet channel in which she provocatively overeats) Bridgette, lacking in class privilege is pushed towards more basic, and

less safe, transactions of sex and economy when the male employment advisor at the agency she has visited, sensing her vulnerability, asks her if she would consider prostitution. Here, intersectional characteristics of class, race and gender generate differing templates of taking control of the male gaze. The extent to which each of these transactions is safe, profitable and empowering, differs according to the women's social position.

Power structures in audience consumption

In making struggle central to narrative, contemporary TV dramatic comedies assert definite 'television/viewer' (Livingstone, 1989) power structures, that are foundational in the audience's voyeurism of on-screen survival. Both critic and fan reviews of *SMILF*, positive and negative, demonstrated a distinct power dynamic between the audience and the character of Bridgette, in which the viewer sits in a position of power, privilege and anxiety. Acknowledging Bridgette's survival, and praising her resilience, whilst, for the most part, ignoring the systems that are causing her to struggle, critics describe the show as 'rough, but scrappy' (Livingstone, 1989), declaring that they are 'rooting' for Bridgette, which, whilst seemingly positive, demonstrates the distance between themselves and the representation, as well as their enthrallment of the process of survival. The response to the situations that play out on screen are largely sympathetic, rather than empathetic. Fan responses, whilst divided, followed a similar pattern, with viewers asserting that Bridgette was 'at her best when she is trying to be better' (Rottentomatoes.com). Those that were particularly contemptuous focused on Bridgette's sexuality and economic position, blaming her for her own circumstances (Rottentomatoes.com, imdb.com), and demonstrating that without feminists having control of interpretation (Fraser, 2013:48), exploration of resilience in these areas, can often result, particularly in neoliberal societies, in the struggle being fetishized, and subsequent exploitation viewed as the subjects 'own fault'.

Contrarily, more self-actualising depictions of motherhood, such as the televised images of celebrity motherhood shown to the participants of Rebecca Feasey's research, *Mothers on Mothers*, receive a more empathetic response when discussing their struggles, and are considered relatable by viewers. Participants in Feasey's study who were asked their opinions on televised images of celebrity mothers, felt reassured in their own parenting by seeing someone 'successful' experiencing the same struggles as themselves (Feasey, 2016:103). Vulnerability, therefore, *is*, as Gill and Orgad note 'a site of privilege' (Gill and Orgad, 2022:75) in which, not only are only certain women afforded vulnerability, but in which those whose vulnerabilities are not understood or empathised with may be objectified by the viewer who sits in a position of privilege. In seeing representations with greater struggles than their own, viewers questioned: 'could I do that?', cited by Mark Jenkins as 'the inescapable question' posed by voyeurs of survival to themselves (Jenkins, 2003), ultimately knowing that they do not have to. The presence of *resistance* to struggle, as demonstrated above, provides both reassurance and aversion, to the viewer, themes explored by scholars of voyeurism such as Carrabine (Carrabine, 2014) or Fenichal (Metzl, 2004:415), according to classed television/viewer power structures.

Most importantly, fetishizing, rather than empathizing with survival, particularly through struggles of sex and economy, has real world consequences. It is no coincidence, that

'contemporary ideals' of 'passion, grit, confidence, and resilience have flourished in the context of austerity and worsening inequality' (Gill and Orgad, 2022:17), encouraging women to do what it takes to survive, but of course, the will to survive takes on different meanings according to class position. As austerity has worsened, stories of single mothers driven to sex work due to poverty, termed 'survival sex' (Ellen, 2019) have been prevalent in both UK and US journalism, some of which are positive in nature, selling sex work in the same way that it was sold to Bridget, as flexible, profitable and empowering (Witt, 2019). As male-centred survival shows are being connected to a 'primitive masculinity', that couples ideals of 'self-reliance' with a 'fearless pioneering disposition' (Davidson, 2020:481), I note the similar fearlessness of on-screen working-class mothers in survival narratives, such as in *SMILF*, *Weeds* and in films such as *The Florida Project* (2017) and *I, Daniel Blake* (2016), who display persistent courage, and are willing to do whatever it takes to maintain the survival of themselves and their child, even as they lose sexual agency in favour of financial gain. As such, I argue that these narratives, in the context of neoliberalism and popular misogynistic readings in which independent women pose a threat to masculinity, without the economic merit of self-reliance, reinforce the idea that women who are seemingly not self-reliant also have reduced sexual agency, and are therefore vulnerable to exploitation.

Conclusion

Contemporary dramedy presents resilient single motherhood through narratives of struggle that, whilst classed through tropes of self-actualization and survival, often investigate, and shed light on important social issues. However, despite the feminist intentions behind these media texts, without feminists having control over interpretation, struggles in sex and economy may be interpreted through a neoliberal or misogynistic lens, reinforcing exploitative norms and ideals, and becoming fetishized by audiences, resulting in 'survival voyeurism'. The purpose of the essay is not to lambast dramedy, that often brings to life social structures of oppression, but to make the point that without sufficiently addressing, and making strange, the attitudes that make these structures of exploitation possible, these narratives may reinforce or normalise the issues they seek to change.

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Resilience In Qualitative Research During Covid-19: The Case Of Online Focus Groups

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Abstract

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, face-to-face academic research was suspended. Qualitative researchers were exploring alternative ways to conduct meaningful research and develop resilience during a global health crisis. This paper discusses the strategic design of the research protocol as well as the benefits and challenges of conducting online focus groups during COVID-19, contributing to the growing amount of literature on the lessons learnt from this emergency mode of conducting fieldwork and its implications on the data.

Beyond the use of online focus groups as a practical intervention during the pandemic, this article reflects on the distinct benefits online focus groups present and the ways these inform qualitative research practice involving young people. Online focus groups offered plenty of opportunities for dynamic discussions and active engagement, promoted participants' agency and empowerment in the discussion and indicated suitability to research young people due to their familiarity with internet technologies and the representativeness of their daily social interactions (especially during the pandemic). The data used stems from my doctoral research investigating young people's attitudes towards 'Brexit and Europe'.

Introduction

During the COVID-19 pandemic, face-to-face fieldwork was suspended and replaced by online research. Despite having initially planned to conduct in-person research, I had to reshape my methods design to ensure safe, rigorous, and meaningful qualitative data while completing the research process during the pandemic. In the first section, I discuss the resilient strategy I developed to conduct Online Focus Groups (OFGs) during a time of crisis by adapting the research protocol and planning group activities using the ZOOM platform. In the second section, I critically analyse the use of OFGs, the benefits and challenges these offer and finally, I provide practical recommendations for future research involving young people.

Conducting OFGs was underestimated in the past and was mostly chosen to reach participants in geographically disperse locations (Han et al., 2019) or members of online communities (Steward & Shamdasani, 2017). Although OFGs are limited to potential participants who can reliably use Internet Communication Technologies (ICTs), most young people are competent and confident web users and as video conferencing software improves the opportunity to conduct OFGs steadily increases (Rezabek, 2000). OFGs can therefore complement, but also replicate and at times improve (Braun et al., 2017) traditional Focus Groups (FGs), especially when this concerns research with young people.

The research

In this paper, I am reflecting on the data I collected for my doctoral study exploring young people's attitudes towards 'Brexit and Europe' based on 20 OFGs with young Europeans (18-30 years old), conducted during 2020. Each discussion involved approximately 5 participants, who were recruited online through social media and student forums following a snowball/referral process upon ethics clearance and GDPR compliance. Due to the pandemic, gaining face-to-face access to student communities and universities was unfeasible and the opportunity to advertise the study online using 'chain referral' (Guest et al., 2013) proved invaluable in the recruitment process, given that young people have strong, digital social networks (Steward & Shamdasani, 2017). Moreover, e-recruiting was compatible with the remote data-collection and suitable for the target population (Boydell et al., 2014) as participation required viability of engaging online (Rezabek, 2000) and utilising ZOOM (Archibald et al., 2019). FGs are helpful to explore attitudes, perceptions, feelings, and ideas about a specific topic (Krueger, 1994), and therefore were chosen for my research investigating young voters' views on 'EU membership and referenda' and their (political) identities' construction. ZOOM was selected as it quickly became popular during the lockdown and could securely record and save live sessions (Archibald et al., 2019).

Developing a OFGs protocol

FGs can be seen and used as simulations of everyday discourses and conversations (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996). Due to the lack of face-to-face interaction, I built resilience to design and conduct OFGs in ways that encouraged participants' interaction and benefited from mediated communication. Thus, I decided to incorporate the ZOOM features at the heart of the OFGs protocol in line with the principles and purposes of traditional FGs. Below I am reflecting on the adaptation of OFGs lifecycle using the ZOOM features to make the participants feel comfortable and actively participate in the discussion.

The Welcome & logistics

Prior to the OFGs, I had frequent email communication with the participants to inform them about the study, the meeting arrangements and provide instructions on how to use ZOOM. When the participants joined the meeting, they were placed in a digital waiting room so I could allow each participant to enter individually and greet them personally. This was particularly helpful to briefly meet the participants and make them feel comfortable, ask questions, or raise concerns. Moreover, during this time we had the chance to check the audio-visual equipment and resolve technical issues. Each participant was then placed in a private breakout room until the start of the OFG to complete the required documentation and allow them time to familiarise themselves with ZOOM. Participants could ask me to join their room if any queries came up, and I could broadcast a message to all participants in different rooms regarding the remaining time for the discussion. This procedure was particularly beneficial to establish a friendly and comfortable environment for the participants.

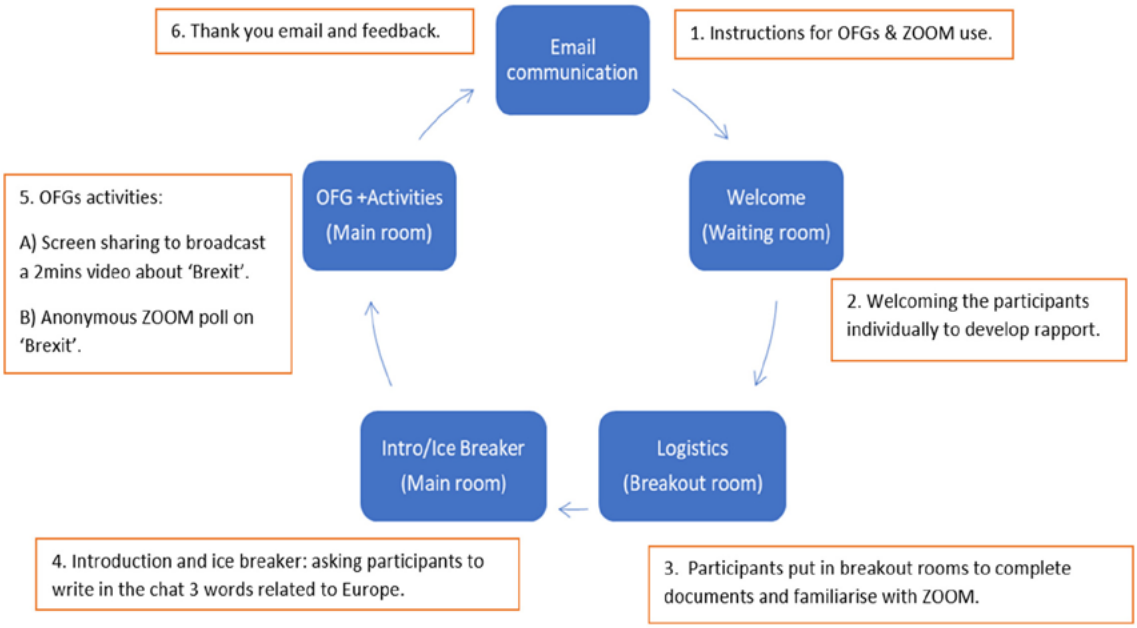

Figure 1: OFGs life cycle using ZOOM features

Stimulating activities online

The OFGs guide included open-ended questions to motivate participants' engagement, but also incorporated activities to inspire creative participation and stimulating discussion. The OFGs started with an ice-breaking activity inviting participants to describe what 'Europe' means to them by writing three words in the chat. The icebreaker gave the participants time to self-reflect on how they see 'Europe' and read others' answers. Then I invited them to further elaborate on their choices, introducing the main discussion. In one of the OFGs someone listed: 'EU', 'institutions', 'Angela Merkel' and when I asked them to explain why, they responded:

> *U.: I don't know. You mentioned the EU and just suddenly, I just thought 'Angela Merkel' because that's kind of who you think about, right? ((laughs and 'like' reactions))*

This example shows how participants spontaneously, nevertheless purposively, chose a representative figure of the 'EU institutions', which generates interesting areas to explore and offers a smooth transition to the group discussion. Ice-breaking activities can be more creative in a digital context and allow the members to share their views and create rapport (Lathen & Laestadius, 2021).

Another activity to promote interaction was sharing my screen to broadcast a 2minute video depicting the removal of the UK flag from the European Council in Brussels after the official 'Brexit' (January 2020). The participants then reflected on the video, conveying their emotions and perceptions, which enriched the group discussion. The following example illustrates how strong feelings of sadness and embarrassment were expressed with humour:

J.: I agree with S., it made me feel sad seeing that flag being taken down and removed from all of the other flags, like there was sort of a sense of solidarity left with the other flags. I suppose at least they had the courtesy to fold it up! ((laughs))

((Everyone laughs loudly and use of 'like' emoticons))

J.: Just throw it across the room! ((laughs)) (...) But now, I don't know. Yeah, a mixture of feelings and sort of an embarrassment of being part of the United Kingdom and a bit also of sadness.

Evidently, stimulating activities inspire the participants to divulge their views but also elements of their personality, contributing to the group dynamics and motivating members to chat informally about the topic.

The last activity was a ZOOM poll about 'Brexit', asking what the participants would vote in a second referendum and whether 'Brexit' should be reconsidered due to the pandemic. These activities were designated and launched to provide more opportunities for reflections on 'Brexit and Europe'. For instance, the poll towards the end of the OFGs was an entertaining activity that reminded the participants of the actual referendum and led them to negotiate their understanding of 'European memberships and referenda' in spontaneous ways.

H: I think... it's funny, actually, because I wasn't expecting a poll. I don't think we shoul have had a second referendum. I wanted to remain, but I'd be disrespecting the views of people who really believed in what they voted for in 2016. I think if I was offered the chance, I'd say we should remain, but I don't think we should reconsider.

This example discloses a great deal about the participant's internal conflicts and arbitration of identity and allowed me to witness the language used to articulate their world view.

Planning OFGs activities is extremely useful in observing digital interactions, social norms, and power play within the group, especially among young people who interact comfortably in digital contexts. These interactions would be more difficult, disruptive and time consuming in a face-to-face setting but were practically feasible and efficient in the online environment. Furthermore, utilising ZOOM features was a resilient strategy to establish rapport with the participants and collect rich data despite the lack of in-person interaction. Nevertheless, some of the ZOOM features could be improved to facilitate OFGs. For example, the poll results and use of emoticons/reactions button were not captured in the recording, which hindered me to visualise this data. Additionally, participants who used their phone to join the OFGs reported difficulties using the chat function and voting in the poll. Ensuring that ZOOM users can access the platform features regardless of the device they utilize is another issue that could be resolved.

OFGs merits and shortcomings

OFGs Benefits	OFGs Challenges
Flexibility, time, and cost efficiency	Dependence on ICTs
Multi-modal, creative, and dynamic interaction	Lacking in-person interaction
Agency and empowerment of participants	Limited control of the moderator
Representativeness of social interaction during the pandemic/young peoples' socialisation	Appropriate for specific groups/individuals in the post-pandemic era

Figure 2: OFGs Benefits and challenges

Conducting OFGs offers opportunities to qualitative researchers that should survive going forward and inform methodological literature in the post-pandemic era. However, it is important to consider the challenges that come with this mode of data collection. Recent research has emphasized the increased flexibility and convenience of OFGs, as well as the time and cost efficiency for both researchers and participants (Archibald et al., 2019). However, relying on ICTs is challenging as internet/technology failure might disrupt the data collection process (Lathen & Laestadius, 2021). Moreover, it requires the moderator's ability to trouble shoot and provide technical support to participants (Falter, et al., 2022). The key advantages of OFGs were the participants' multi-modal interaction, increased empowerment, and the representativeness of their social interaction during the pandemic and beyond.

1. Multi-modal and creative participation

Studies that compared the quality of data generated face-to-face and online reported few differences in the richness of data (Daniels et al. 2019). Platforms like ZOOM facilitate multi-modal interaction among the participants (using their mic and video, using the chat, raising hand for turn-taking etc.) as well as inclusion of visual cues and nonverbal communication (use of emoticons and video). These interactions are invaluable as they mimic real life and provide insight into participants' vocabularies, ideas, and reflections. Although lacking in-person interaction, the use of technology is helpful to capture the group dynamics.

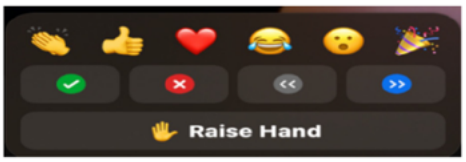

Figure 3: Zoom reaction buttons for participants interaction during the online focus group.

During OFGs, the participants could add points in the chat and use emoji reactions to demonstrate agreement, enthusiasm, or hesitation, without interrupting. This was a helpful interactive procedure which allowed participants to communicate their views, build solidarity

and signal me who would like to talk next, especially for participants who were not using their camera during the discussion. The group consensus was (in)formed by the use of emoticons which signified the discursive (re)production of social realities among the group members and encouraged further explanations.

B.: I feel that the UK has always been Euro-sceptic and distant (...)

R.: I can see that you got 'likes' and 'claps' from everyone! M., you clapped; would you like to add anything?

M. (Audio contribution): Yes, I 100% agree with everything said but wanted to offer some further examples (...)

While missing the face-to-face communication which would provide rich data from the participants' facial expressions and body language, the use of digital visual cues complemented the synchronous discussion by indicating the participants' reaction to what was being said. This practice not only mimicked face to face interaction, but for young people who extensively communicate via social media, this might be a more natural, familiar, and spontaneous way to respond to the messages they receive and process.

1. Participants' agency and control

Synchronous OFGs present a democratic potential for flattening the traditional power-structure and increasing the participants' agency and control. This empowerment is proposed by the status of participants' contribution; essentially by using the same platform and tools with the moderator, who holds only few extra tools (ending the meeting or placing participants in the breakout/waiting room). The mode of interaction is also similar to the moderator and the participants can choose to use their mic, camera, chat, or reactions. Of course, the researcher's authority still exists but admits the participants' enhanced sense of involvement and control. This non-threatening and supportive environment helped in the participants' unconstrained engagement and made them feel not only contributors but also collaborators in the research process. The following examples illustrate that participants recognised their impact on the produced data and communicated their contribution in a confident manner, which generated a sense of power and community among them.

T.: For me it was important that I helped with your research; I had a role and impact in the data collection process, and I enjoyed having the chance to discuss things I care about.

S.: We are the best of the best (participants) (...), the team was great!

However, OFGs decrease the control of the researcher in moderating the discussion given the multiple ways participants contribute and navigate the conversation, which would often stray from the key planned topics. This was often the case by the intervention of participants to bring topics that concerned them such as the 'Brexit campaign' allowing them to reframe the discussion. This change of power play in OFGs influences the data collected, the participants' role and increase the opportunities for collaboration among researchers and participants.

2. Representativeness & appropriateness

The FGs location is important as some places, like university settings, represent power and authority (Fox, et al. 2007). A digital setting serves as a neutral space for interaction and deconstructs the traditional FGs hierarchy. According to Kitchin (1998), ICTs offer new, informal social spaces unlike the formality of geographical spaces. Especially with young participants, the digital environment might serve as a more comfortable space for them to interact and discuss their views (Fox, et al. 2007). Young people's ease, familiarity, and preference for mediated communication suggest that mediated modes of research participation might be more suitable for young adults (Han, et al., 2019).

During the pandemic, most social activities were forced to take place online (Falter, et al., 2022). Recent studies suggest that online communication almost replaced face-to-face social interaction (Grech, 2021) and even older generations that might lack familiarity, skills, and enthusiasm for mediated communication, used a variety of online communication modes as a coping strategy to avoid isolation (Xie et al., 2021). Also, it has been argued that COVID-19 developed a new social norm with the use of social media and ICTs to promote public resilience, solidarity, and emotional wellbeing (Bukar, et al., 2021). Focus groups aim to mimic real life and capture semi-naturalistic, daily discussions and social norms. Thus, in the COVID-19 context, OFGs almost fully replicated (mediated) social life, as this was taking place during that period.

In other studies using OFGs during COVID-19, participants reported challenges, such as the disruption of the discussion flow and awkwardness of online conversations (Falter et al., 2022). However, this was not the case in my OFGs as the participants were actively participating in the conversation and shared positive feedback afterwards emphasising their enthusiasm about the discussion and the different views offered. This manifests that young people feel comfortable and intrigued taking part in online conversations unlike '' ZOOM fatigue'' incidents that were reported in other studies (Falter, et al., 2022).

K.: I have participated in research before, but this is the first time I took part in an online discussion, and it was a very positive experience!

A.: Thanks, I really enjoyed participating in your study. I think the discussion was great, it wasn't too long or too short and it was very interactive.

This also suggests that mediated communication and online research participation might be more suitable and preferable for young individuals and groups. Furthermore, the discussion would often go overtime (5-15minutes) as participants were concerned about the topic and wanted to continue the conversation or were asking questions about the study outcomes, the researcher's view, and experience of Brexit etc., which demonstrates that participants were genuinely interested in my research and enjoyed the discussion.

X.: Could you tell us what are other participants' views on Brexit? How do you feel about it?

Conclusion

In this article I have discussed the resilient strategy I developed to respond, adapt, and conduct OFGs, via ZOOM, during the pandemic and offered evidence to illustrate how this produced rich data. Moreover, I explored the benefits and challenges of OFGs drawing upon 20 synchronous OFGs with young Europeans to investigate their attitudes towards 'Brexit and Europe'. I have highlighted three distinct ways in which OFGs benefit research concerning young people emphasizing on the participants' multimodal and creative participation, their increased agency, and control over the discussion, but also the suitability and representativeness of this social group's interaction during the pandemic and beyond. Planning activities and manipulating the platform features worked as a resilient response to conduct OFGs, generate rich data while reflecting the principles and aims of face-to-face FGs and informing future remote qualitative research and youth studies. Consequently, OFGs despite lacking in-person communication, is a research method that should survive going forward as it seems to be preferable for younger individuals and communities, diligently representing their social interaction during the pandemic and in the post-pandemic era.

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Features

A Critical Analysis On The Use Of Scenario Planning As A Policy Making Tool For Resilience

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Abstract

Future thinking 'allow us to anticipate dangerous trends, identify desirable futures and respond appropriately (Riedy, 2009:40). This argument seems to be even more prominent now after the global financial crisis of 2008, Covid-19, together with the rapid technological change which generates increased uncertainty and concern for the future. Based on a literature review, this feature discusses the potential contribution of scenario planning as a practical tool to understand uncertainty and test for resilience, helping policymakers design better policies. This research highlights the importance of scenario design, development and implementation as a tool for resilience testing. Recent examples on scenario application are discussed, capturing the coronavirus pandemic, climate change and sustainability, in addition to financial crises and shocks, catastrophes and cyber/technological risks. The paper adopts an interdisciplinary approach, commenting on the value and use of scenario planning from different angles in relation to resilience, presenting an overview of scenario applications by type of resilience. The focus is placed on UK policy making approaches from the 2008 global financial crisis until the coronavirus pandemic. It adopts the position that the contribution of scenario planning as a practical tool in policymaking in relation to resilience testing is a double-edged sword. This is because while there is a great value of using scenario planning to inform policymaking in the face of growing uncertainty and complexity, adopting scenario planning does not result in automatic gains. Therefore, one should be aware of the associated challenges such as different biases and issues of inclusivity and exclusivity within the process.

Introduction

Scenarios are stories on how the future might develop in specific areas of interest (Rijkens-Klomp, 2012). They are hypothetical constructs, exploring alternative pictures of the world, designed for imagining possibilities. The development of scenario planning as a practical tool reflects the shift away from deterministic forecasting models towards a broader range of futures and possibilities (Van Dorsser et al., 2018). Specifically, the role of scenario planning is to (a) identify possible solutions to policy problems in creative and interactive ways (Volkery & Ribeiro, 2009; Perez-Soba & Maas, 2015), (b) deal with increasing uncertainty and complexity that policymakers face (Bishop et al., 2007; Özkaynak & Rodríguez-Labajos, 2010) and (c), lead to better knowledge regarding the future in a specific policy area, reducing policy myopia (Özkaynak & Rodríguez-Labajos, 2010; Sreeja & Howlett, 2017). Scenario development helps policymakers to develop policies that are resilient across a range of possible futures (HM

Government, 2014). However, there are associated challenges that one must consider when designing scenarios, such as issues of inclusivity or time constraints.

Scenario Planning in Policy Making

Scenarios have become a key tool in policy formulation process as they contribute to the identification of possible solutions to policy problems by exploring the various options available (Perez-Soba & Maas, 2015). Scenario planning allows all policy options to be explored, resulting in an expansion of options for decision making. In this way, it offers a policy space to visualize, rehearse and test the acceptability of different strategies (Volkery and Ribeiro, 2009). At the same time, scenario planning helps to deal with the increasing uncertainty and complexity that policymakers face when designing a policy without resulting to the prediction of the future (Bishop et al., 2007). Similarly, it allows understanding of key uncertainties, consideration of alternative perspectives and greater resilience (Peterson et al., 2003). This is achieved by acknowledging all plausible scenarios, rather than choosing one best scenario. This enhances decision making in the face of potential challenges as more adaptive policies can be created (Van der Steen, 2017). Scenario planning thus encourages new ways of thinking about the future and links the different components and actors within a complex problem to the policy design process (Özkaynak & Rodríguez-Labajos, 2010).

Moreover, this process can lead to better knowledge regarding the future in a specific policy area which in turn can be used to reduce or even eliminate policy myopia (Özkaynak & Rodríguez-Labajos, 2010). This refers to the difficulty of seeing far enough into the future and in enough detail to be able to properly plan in the present (Sreeja and Howlett, 2017) and is often regarded as a reason of policy failure. Scenario planning thus allows for a dynamic policymaking process that is open to feedback and can help to limit the extent of policy failure (Da Costa et al., 2008).

Another valuable aspect of scenario planning lies in what can be gained from the process and the interactions of actors participating in it. A diverse and broad range of actors participating in the process is vital as it enhances its legitimacy (Volkery & Ribeiro, 2009), such as a combination of experts from different fields in government, business, academia, local actors and the civil society (Habegger, 2010). This diversity of participants, Schoemaker (1993) emphasises, can stretch peoples' thinking and challenge mental boundaries. Involving more participants provides access to more worldviews, leading to a more comprehensive map of possible and desirable futures (Riedy, 2009). Similarly, when scenario planning is performed successfully it helps conflict management between diverging societal values, resulting in finding common ground, which also composes a key essence of policymaking (Volkery & Ribeiro, 2009). However, for this to be accomplished, actors who are involved in the process require reflexivity must be aware of their own biases and be willing to listen to others (Volkery & Ribeiro, 2009). Thus, only through a reflexive mutual social learning process amongst actors, we see 'the emergence of common visions' (Habegger, 2010:373).

A final purpose of scenario planning is the ability to transform a situation into something better and less problematic. Kahane (2012) argues that sometimes people find themselves in situations that are too unacceptable, unstable or unsustainable for them to be able to adapt.

Consequently, scenario planning helps to go beyond preparing for the future towards the transformation of it. This process requires involvement from a wide range of actors in order to build a shared understanding of the system that they are part of and wish to influence and transform (Kahane, 2012). Therefore, diversity of participation is crucial as by bringing people with diverse values together to construct potential scenarios, it makes the process more rewarding. Similarly, Bourgeois et al. (2017) emphasise that a co-elaborate scenario planning approach has the potential to empower local actors at grassroots level and see future as an emancipatory and transformative process. They present a co-elaborative scenario building approach, the Participatory Prospective Analysis (PPA) in connecting the future, scenarios, empowerment of local communities and organisations via action research (Bourgeois et al., 2017). In such cases, empowerment lies in the capacity of different actors to reshape the future rather than to adapt to pre-defined futures shaped by others (Vervoort et al., 2015). Indeed, Bourgeois et al. (2017) note that this is a common problem as local communities are rarely empowered to envision better futures themselves. In such cases, participatory scenario planning can help to mobilize action and strengthen local agency in policymaking (Volkery & Ribeiro, 2009).

Despite being a widespread method for improving decision making processes however, there are many dangers, limits and challenges to adopting scenario planning. One of the strongest challenges is the issue of participation and questions of inclusivity and exclusivity (Wilkinson et al., 2013; O'Brien, 2016; Ossewaarde, 2017). Ideally, a wide variety of actors participating in a scenario planning is required, as well as actors' ability and willingness to imagine a wide range of new futures (Volkery and Ribeiro, 2009). However, this is not an easy task and deciding what possible futures are plausible or desirable often invokes fundamental questions of power (Rickards et al., 2014b). In this sense, scenario planning is limited to constructing futures which reflect the current situation with the power structure remaining the same (Ossewaarde, 2017). Consequently, there is a need to pay attention to the questions of 'whose future is being planned, by whom, for whom and to what ultimate end?' (O' Brien, 2016: 341). Another challenge for the scenario planning is that often it can be a time-consuming process. For instance, it takes time to get to know each other and develop a mutual understanding and trusting working relationship (Rickards et al., 2014b). Also, getting people to think beyond what is familiar is a challenge and takes time as many emotions are involved including fear or embarrassment (Rickards et al., 2014b).

UK Scenario Cases

This section introduces the different types of scenarios developed by policy makers in the UK from the global financial crisis of 2008 until the coronavirus pandemic of 2020. While the purpose of each scenario differs, their aim to understand future uncertainty, while testing for resilience, is similar. There are different types of scenarios developed for different uses, capturing a range of multiple types of resilience, such as financial, climate and environmental resilience. The scenarios presented are segmented into two categories: (i) strategic planning, from environmental protection to healthcare, (ii) financial sector resilience.

Perhaps the most famous scenarios are those linked to the environment and climate from the Environment Agency and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

(DEFRA) (Environment Agency, 2002; 2014; 2019), particularly about flood and coast risk management under long-term investment scenarios. Reed et al. (2009), for example, draw possible futures for UK uplands, presenting different scenarios and their benefits. Their study adds to the analysis of scenario methods for policy evaluation regarding governments' strategy for uplands. In a different direction, numerical scenarios of the future of UK's system of cities, exploring three scenarios and their implications on the future ways of living in cities, economics and systems of governance are presented by Swain and Steenmans (2016).

Zanni et al. (2017) use scenario methods to examine the resilience of the UK transport network. Their study investigates the future resilience of the UK transport network in the face of climate change to support infrastructure planning decisions. The application of scenarios in this case aims to support policy makers to increase resilience to extreme weather in transport infrastructure strategies (Zanni et al., 2017). The future of UK rail until 2065 has also been examined using scenarios, giving an insight into rail networks and infrastructure to understand capacity, investments and stations, overall supporting the network's resilience (Bouwman & Worthington, 2015; 2016).

Scenarios have also been widely used in public health (Schreuder, 1995). The use of scenarios from health authorities to explore alternative futures for contingency and resilience planning, allowing preparation for events causing strain to the system (Schreuder, 1995). This was evident during the coronavirus pandemic with Covid-19 scenarios performed by the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) (SAGE, 2022). In relation to Covid-19, scenario planning was conducted for operational considerations and capacity of the National Healthcare System (NHS) within short, medium and long-term timeframes (SP-M-0, 2020). Examining a range of possibilities, from best to worst case scenarios for the emergence of new variants, transmission, hospitalisation etc., public health authorities and policy makers were able to test the resilience of the system and make strategic decisions to prepare for all events. Recognising the element of uncertainty of those scenarios with varying degrees of likelihood, the possible futures and plausible courses of the pandemic allow planning and preparation to reinforce the NHS, adding to its resilience (S-P-0, 2020).

In relation to financial services stress testing, there are scenarios for the UK economy generated by the Financial Policy Committee (FPC) and the Monetary Policy Committee of the Bank of England (FPC, 2021). Stress testing constitutes a core part of the bank regulatory toolkit as part of prudential regulation and supervision in measuring the resilience to adverse scenarios such as recessions, having evolved significantly following the 2008 global financial crisis (Dent et al., 2016). Severe but plausible scenarios are often prescribed for the systemic financial services to test the financial stability implications and resilience against key risks on a regular basis. The standard scenario capturing the macroeconomic outlook and economic conditions, focusing on market and credit risks, is the solvency stress test and the annual cyclical scenario (BoE, 2021a). Additional scenario examples include the Liquidity Biennial Exploratory Scenario for liquidity risks, with a material liquidity lasting 90 days preceded by a nine-month recovery period, simultaneously effecting the major UK banks and cyber stress tests for disruption to operations and data integrity implications (FPC, 2021). Here, operational resilience and operational disruption are used to test tolerances of financial services (Strange, 2020).

Scenarios: Concluding Remarks

Scenario planning helps to deal with uncertainty and complexity as it allows different futures to be envisioned, ultimately resulting in better decision making. Diverse participation is a key to scenario planning, as it can challenge and stretch people's thinking although in many cases this cannot be easily achieved. Equally important is the capacity of the scenario planning as a transforming and empowering process for different actors. Despite its value, scenario planning entails many challenges that should be acknowledged such as time constraints, questions of participation or misuses of it. Therefore, there is value in using scenario planning as a practical tool to inform policy as long as policymakers are aware of the challenges of using it and the reasons for adopting it. The use of scenario planning in policy making has been intensified in the past decade. Specifically, multiple examples of scenarios were discussed ranging from transport infrastructure, rail network and public health to financial services, demonstrating how scenario planning is used for resilience in UK policy making, to support strategic decisions and planning. The proliferation of scenarios is going to be further increased as we navigate uncertainty, anticipating more dynamic and complex scenarios to prepare for future challenges.

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From The Future To The Present: Socioecological Transformation

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Abstract

In the article 'Futures: Imagining Socioecological Transformation – An Introduction' by Bruce Braun, the concept put forth with adaptation from the writings of Latour (2013), explores socioecological developments from a traditionally inverse position. Traditional sociological perspectives are informed by the past where prior experiences prepare humans, as knowledge-based entities, in navigating societal developments and effects. The concept of an inversed-informed position in the current affairs of the world becomes increasingly relevant and important, evident in the theme highlighted by COP26 held in Glasgow on the 'code red climate emergency' under the Covid-19 pandemic. Events that were outwardly localized within certain regions resulted in repercussions on a global scale that was unprecedented in the past, of which two will be discussed; Covid-19 and the Ukraine conflict. The paper features a further discussion of different paradigms, in addition to what was raised by Braun with context to resilience and sustainability: (1) the context of a highly connected world in terms of social, political, and economic; (2) humans as the only dependent variable of change. The paper will end with suggestions for policymakers and relevant organizations by noting developments in different fields that present as contextually intertwined.

Keywords: *resilience, ecology, development, sustainability, futures-transformation*

Introduction

In volume 105, Issue 2 of the Annals of the Association of American Geographers, the theme of 'Futures' was discussed from a myriad of paradigms to address new challenges and developments that preludes an increasingly predictable future. As an introduction, Braun quoted Latour's (2013) perspective, which was considerably provocative perspective during his time:

> *'Action cannot be delayed because time does not flow from the present to the future – as if we had to choose between scenarios, hoping for the best – but as if time flowed from what is coming.' – Latour, 2013*

The introduction sets the context for the theme of the journal, highlighting a limitation of human development in a geographical context, mirroring the understanding of social sciences. Context, while often encompassing different scenarios, is a primary cornerstone of almost all taxonomy of science regardless of physical, biological or psychological. The crux of what the journal highlighted was the untenable notion that human development can continue to advance without consideration of the increasing signs of a converging world.

The journal organized the articles and presented four perspectives of future inquiry through a thematic consensus: Knowing Socioecological Futures, The Politics of Socioecological Transformation, Imagined Futures: Art, Film and Literature and Experiments in Socioecological Change. Knowing Socioecological Futures highlighted perspectives from the bottom-up of which the smallest unit of the society, the people, adapt and evolve through historical context. It highlights the importance of knowledge acquisition and development, through the most important medium – human. The Politics of Socioecological Transformation demonstrates the intricacies of the connection of environment to politics, and how they paradoxically revolve around each other. Where people are determined to be the medium of change, politics, in form of governance, is the amalgamated force of humans that leads to consolidated shifts in forms of consumption habits and climate justice. Imagined Futures: Art, Film and Literature depict the creative ideas presented in various media forms, which are seemingly increasingly plausible against the otherwise 'sci-fi'. Where politics presents as a statutory body and arts as the abstract, arts cast new possibilities of the imagined future. Experiments in Socioecological Change provide exemplars where changes are advent in smaller nucleated social settings of education and households. Braun noted from the articles submitted, that regional representation covers America, Europe and Australia predominantly with the lack of representation from other regions flagrant. The absence brings about considerations in the development of academia from those regions as gaps in the existing body of knowledge, indirectly suggesting that the focus of scholars and academics within those regions has either advanced to or yet to embrace this avenue of socio-development.

The journal noted two themes from the submissions: (1) that socioecological transformations are coming, although the form and shape are not easily predicted; and (2) that socioecological changes are also necessary if we are to avoid catastrophic futures. The relation of how context, presented by current world developments, and sustainability considerations contribute to the development of resilience becomes imperative. The paper puts forth further discussion of two other meanings that can be understood from the paper: (1) evidence suggests a highly connected world in terms of social, political, and economic that must be equally addressed in the triumvirate; and that (2) human, are the only dependent variable of change. They will be discussed broadly, in addition to what was raised by Braun, with context to resilience and sustainability.

Resilience

While there are many discussions on how to define resilience, consensus would agree on resilience being an aspect that embodies processes. The processes in referral refer to the (1) positive and healthy (2) adaptation or integration (3) overtime in face of (4) adversities (Southwick et al., 2014, Pisano, 2012, Kantabutra & Ketprapakorn, 2021, Barrett et al., 2021). The four distinct dependent clauses create a complex construct of dynamic relations between multiple variables of determinants: (1) 'positive and healthy' highlights the importance of functions that are beneficial in nature; (2) 'adaption or integration' emphasizes the need for functions to be engaged by both internal and external human operations; (3) 'over time' stresses the need for those functions to correspondingly sustain chronological influences and fluctuations given how circumstances can change and evolve; (4) 'adversities' represents the

actual challenges and tests of those functions in the real-world context. From a social science perspective, resilience can be understood as a social process where conditional events and processes must occur for it to fulfil its developmental purpose. An important consideration, as with all social science perspectives, is the context in which these conditional events and processes occur under.

Upon analysing all the articles, at least two more distinct themes can be interpreted from Futures: Imagining Socioecological Transformation: (1) evidence suggests a highly connected world in terms of social, political, and economic that must be equally addressed in the triumvirate; and that (2) human, are the only dependent variable of change. Both the interpreted theme addresses the context for the development of resilience, with the entirety of the world viewed as a singular context, and humans are the sole architect that can react correspondingly or construct the future. Socioecology views the ability of humans to adapt and respond to the environment, which eventually also shapes the environment, as the core that drives human development (Oishi & Graham, 2010, Stokols, Lejano & Hipp, 2013).

Futures provided the different paradigms of connections in the social, political, economic, and environmental aspects. From the social and political paradigm, the involvement and effects of the distinct levels of society were evident from households (Chapter 5, 20, 21), to larger communities (Chapter 3, 4, 18, 19), to the global political context (Chapter 6, 8, 9). Economic viability has increasingly gained stake-hold in social and political development due to the realistic aspect of it as a condition for survivability. The environment paradigm and its dependency on the political sphere were highlighted in almost all the submitted articles where a constant underlying theme was that the notion of a 'natural environment' is no longer as justifiable as a notion. Humans in the current age have attained the capability and resources to alter most natural environment should they wish to, that the meta decision made to preserve the environment is thus humanely deterministic. Where concepts of ecology revolve around 'organism', 'relations', and 'environment', the current development of human society reached an unprecedented convergence where geographic and political boundaries are no longer as distinct. Rather than individual constructs that can develop in silos, the enmeshment of repercussions details the need for consideration in totality. Post the publishing of Futures, two global events occurred that validated the considerations that Futures seek to illuminate: the Covid-19 pandemic and the Ukraine-Russia conflict.

Adversities

Following the theory of resilience, adversities represent the actual test of how adaptive or integrated the developed strategies are in a cyclical process that recalibrates with new systemic addresses. From a bioecology perspective, the grim results of adversity that cannot be overcome would signify the end of the biosystem and the advent of a new biosystem would take over.

Covid-19

In late 2019, the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, more commonly known as Covid-19, began to spread globally, resulting in a pandemic that registered over 500 million confirmed cases and claimed 6 million lives as of April 2022 (Weekly Epidemiological Update on COVID-19 –

27 April 2022, 2022). The pandemic exposed weaknesses as well as advantages of the current human-ecological systems, of which when discussed with objectivity, the following can be posited: the deep level of connection between nature and humans, the advanced global transport system, and the connectedness of the global capitals (Lunstrum et al., 2021). Wong (2021) highlighted how the manifestation of zoonotic viruses such as Covid-19 and SARS revealed the deep ties between humans and nature. The nature of the contact that allowed such viruses to evolve highlights the proximity of human-nature contact. The speed of how fast the virus spread to all parts of the world and how ineffective steps were to combat the spread was, indirectly highlighted the effectiveness of the global transport infrastructure and the dependency on the economic system. The 2020 Goalkeepers Report by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation reports findings that in the first 25 weeks of the rampant spread of the virus, the world's development was set back by 25 years (Paun, 2020, Newey & Nuki, 2020). The environment inversely benefited from the pandemic with records of reduction of pollution between 25-30% on carbon indicators around the world (Berman & Ebisu, 2020, Muhammad, Long & Salman, 2020).

Ukraine Conflict

24 February 2022 marked the escalation of the Ukraine-Russia conflict that generated a momentous shift in the stance of world powers that, as of the writing of the paper, still developing (The Ukraine Crisis, n.d). Understanding the collateral of what the conflict meant with objectivity, was the global inflation of fossil fuels and a global food security crisis (Rojansky, 2016, Conant, 2022). The conflict exposed the frail economic and social systems which were crafted based on trade relations supported by the geopolitical stability of the past. With Ukraine being the major exporter of wheat, corn and sunflower oil, with Russia closely behind, it created a vacuum in food commodities around the world upon the start of the conflict (World Bank, 2022). Russia, being the third-largest petroleum and liquid fuels producer in the world, also created an outage in the energy-demand-intensive society since the start of the conflict, causing inflation of energy prices across the globe.

Resilience-led Transformation

The adversities presented by Covid-19 and the Ukraine Conflict accentuated propositions for the reconsideration of how resilience and human society shape the environment for the society to thrive. When understood as a process that must embody dynamism to react to adversities, resilience must account for elements that span across institutions, epistemology, and scale-related boundaries (Stokols, Lejano & Hipp, 2013). Addressing resilience must be conducted in the spectrum of the construct of the society; social, political, and economic. Such was the failure of the early policies adopted against Covid-19 seen in many countries which created more predicaments than answered, and the Ukraine-Russia conflict where the political boundaries were tested. The lesson learnt, was that a consensus of collective response was necessary and that any individually separated effort will simply lead to the failure of the entire global system. Abel et.al highlighted the key roles of human, social, physical, and financial capitals in the resilience of socioecological systems (Abel, Cumming & Anderies, 2006). The ESDN Quarterly Report 2012 noted the importance of governance to reach an equilibrium of the conservationists, developers, and communities to build a robust

foundation that can manage adversities that arises (Pisano, 2012). All factors of management, however, circle back to sustainability as the core principle which presides over all four dependent clauses of resilience as a basic criterion. Such was also highlighted by the United Nations which developed the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 (United Nations Development Programme, 2015).

From the macro to the micro, the resilience of smaller social units at the community level can be observed from their response to disasters as first respondents. Research has shown that self-efficacy and collective efficacy plays a vital role in crisis management (Sulkowski &Lazarus 2013, Southwick et al., 2014, Barrett et al., 2021). Collective efficacy in crisis response increases the speed of response and recovery from disaster, whether natural or manmade (Maguire & Hagan, 2007, Sulkowski & Lazarus, 2013, Imperiale & Vanclay, 2016). Imperiale and Vanclay researched post-disaster communities and found that community resilience emerges in times of crisis and, that enabling them contributes directly to sustainable development. Even when humans are unable to control all earthly responses, we are the only dependent variable when adversities ensue, evident in the environmental recovery during the Covid pandemic, and cannot shrink our roles as architects and directors of pre, during and post-event. The building of resilience, as human capital, should thus start with education as the fundamental (Maguire & Hagan, 2007, Stokols, Lejano & Hipp, 2013, Sulkowski & Lazarus, 2013). Serving as the platform where knowledge is cultivated and grown, the role that education plays in society as stems of development must be supported and bolstered.

Afterword

The human-nature environment interpretations of today, where the boundaries are understood to be merged, puts human activities as the directors of development, thus also as custodians of earthly environment. Further research and developments in empirical-based predictive research, specific to natural sciences, need to be taken to inform humanity as a totality to respond to challenges presented in the current world. With education serving as the basis for informed decision-making, the conscious stance of placing humans as the determiners of the future will keep us vigilant. Futures reminds humans of our roles, whether macro or micro, in dictating the emergent future.

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Exploring The Role Of Resilience In Rates Of Self-Harm And Suicide During The Covid-19 Pandemic And Beyond

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Abstract

Self-harm, as defined here, includes 'self-poisoning or self-injury, irrespective of the apparent purpose of the act'. Although it is distinct from suicidal thoughts and behaviours, there is overlap, with research suggesting it can act a precursor to future suicide. The start of the COVID-19 pandemic saw much discussion about the potential impact on suicide in the United Kingdom. Two years on, and rates of self-harm and suicidal thoughts and behaviours have been mixed, tentatively failing to find substantial changes from pre-pandemic levels, despite periods of lockdown and months of uncertainty. Resilience provides a lens to consider these emerging findings, by considering the protective factors that support individuals from adverse outcomes of challenging situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Drawing on models of resilience (Masten et al., 2021; Stainton et al., 2019), this paper explores how this complex, multi-faceted construct may begin to explain the trends emerging from the COVID-19 literature, while also providing considerations for the post-pandemic years. Challenges for current resilience research are presented, such as the limits of static measures of resilience and the need for methods that capture the nature of resilience as being a multisystem, dynamic process. The article concludes that antecedents for self-harm and suicidality are wide-ranging, with resilience to these thoughts and behaviours existing in an interconnecting web of levels across society. It is, however, difficult to fully assess these networks with the measures of resilience that are most widely used. The intra- and inter-personal challenges and inequalities that existed pre-pandemic may be exacerbated as the longer-term economic repercussions become known; thus, highlighting the importance of heightened solidarity and support to promote and protect resilience in individuals and communities most at risk of self-harm and suicide. To do this, we must take advantage of longitudinal studies using methods such as Experience Sampling Methodology (i.e., digital diaries) to fully understand the interaction of risk and protective factors across contexts and time.

Introduction

Self-harm (i.e., 'self-poisoning or self-injury, irrespective of the apparent purpose of the act') and suicide were major public health concerns even before the COVID-19 pandemic (Hawton et al., 2003; Tsiachristas et al., 2017). Globally, 700,000 people die from suicide each year and previous research suggests that people with a history of self-harm have a 30 times greater risk of suicide (Hawton et al., 2020; Hawton et al., 2012; World Health Organization, 2021). It was feared that COVID-19 may particularly affect people vulnerable to self-harm and suicide due to containment measures such as self-isolation and social distancing, as well as disruption to services, and economic uncertainty (Keyworth et al., 2022).

Figure 1: COVID-19 lockdown policies in the UK

Theoretical background

Drawing on the interpersonal theory of suicidal behaviours (Joiner, 2007), two key psychological components are perceived burdensomeness and sense of low belonging. Job losses and inability to provide for oneself and loved ones may contribute to perceived burdensomeness (Gratz et al., 2020). Moreover, work and friendship are important sources of social connection, providing a sense of belonging (Van Orden et al., 2010; Zareian & Klonsky, 2020). Stay-at-home orders limited meaningful relationships with others, particularly for individuals living alone or in challenging environments (Gratz et al., 2020).

Similarly, self-harm is often seen as a maladaptive coping strategy for dealing with the negative affect arising from a combination of interpersonal and intrapersonal factors (Chapman et al., 2006; Klonsky, 2007; Nock, 2009). The circumstances for self-harm are heightened by the interaction of distal and proximal events (O'Connor & Nock, 2014), and the

influx of negative proximal events at the start of the pandemic was of great concern for rates of self-harm, especially for those already vulnerable (Fegert et al., 2020).

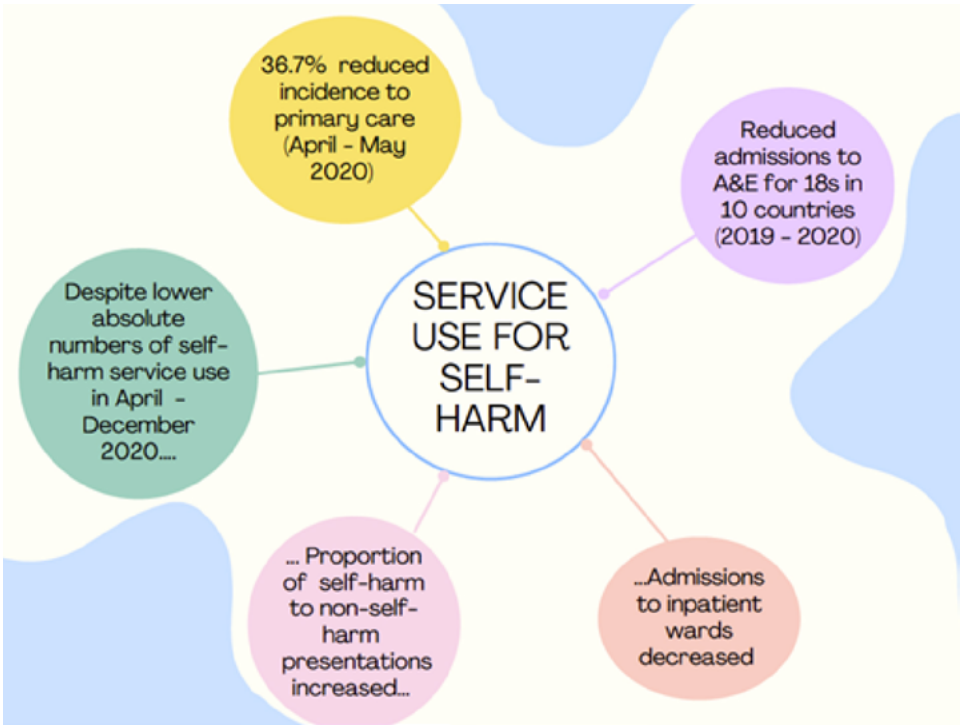
Self-harm and suicide during the COVID-19 pandemic

Despite these strong theoretical concerns, overall rates of self-harm and suicidal thoughts and behaviours during the COVID-19 pandemic have been mixed in the United Kingdom (UK), tentatively failing to find substantial changes from pre-pandemic levels, despite periods of lockdown and months of uncertainty (Carr et al., 2021; John et al., 2020). These conclusions are largely based on case series and service utilisation (e.g., visits to emergency departments or primary care services). Limited numbers of high quality observational studies with participant-reported measures have pre-pandemic data for comparison (Knipe et al., 2021; Rogers et al., 2021).

Service use

During the early stages of the pandemic, and waves that included nationwide stay-at-home orders, absolute numbers of presentations to UK mental health services for self-harm and suicide decreased or remained the same as previous years (DelPozo-Banos et al., 2022; Ougrin, 2020; Shields et al., 2021). Possible explanations include not wanting to be add to NHS pressures, fear of contracting COVID-19 in hospital (Pirkis et al., 2021; Wasserman et al., 2020), and stricter requirements for inpatient admission (DelPozo-Banos et al., 2022). Self-harm presentations in primary care returned to pre-pandemic levels in September 2020 (i.e., the wider reopening of services and society; Carr et al., 2021).

Figure 2: Service use for self-harm



Suicide rates
Using data from official government sources, a study of 21 middle-high income countries found that rates of suicide did not change, or dropped, between April to July 2020 compared to 3 months before the COVID-19 pandemic (Pirkis et al., 2021). In England and Wales, data from the Office for National Statistics (2022) reported a 9.2% decrease in suicides between April and December 2020, compared to the corresponding 2019 period. Male suicides were lower during this period than 2018 and 2019, whereas female rates showed no statistically significant changes. Month-by-month trends did not find any peaks of suicide during periods of greatest lockdown measures.

Self-harm and suicidal ideation
Despite decreased service use and completed suicides, level of suicidal thoughts and community distress may have increased compared to pre-pandemic levels, according to self-report questionnaires (John et al., 2020). Distress may have been further heightened in individuals with a history of self-harm and greater COVID-19-specific fear (Keyworth et al., 2022).

I. Disproportionate impact within sociodemographic groups
UK-based studies found that lockdown may adversely impact certain groups, with an increase in self-harm presentations by boys and looked after children during strict lockdowns, and a decrease in attendance by children from deprived neighbourhoods (Wong et al., 2022). During the first national lockdown, past week suicidal ideation increased with highest rates for young people, individuals with low socio-economic status and those with pre-existing mental health problems (O'Connor et al., 2021). Across the six weeks, the same study did not find significant differences in past-week self-reported self-harm and suicide attempts.

II. Comparison with previous epidemics
Overall, findings match trends found in previous infectious disease epidemics, such as SARS and Ebola, for suicide attempts (using data from coroner's reports and hospital-level data), self-harm (primarily presentations to emergency departments) and self-reported thoughts of self-harm/suicide (Rogers et al., 2021). Case studies have found similar antecedents to suicidal thoughts and acts: fear of infection, financial struggles, social isolation (John et al., 2020; Rogers et al., 2021).

Introducing resilience: some definitions

Resilience provides a lens to consider these emerging findings and future directions, by considering the protective factors that support individuals from adverse outcomes of challenging situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic. There is some consensus that resilience is a dynamic process rather than a static personality trait (Anderson & Priebe, 2021; Fritz et al., 2018; Masten et al., 2021). Resilience is commonly conceptualised as overcoming or bouncing back from the distress that results from adversity rather than an absence of psychopathology or withstanding adversity with minimal distress (Anderson & Priebe, 2021; Mesman et al., 2021). Most researchers agree that resilience is comprised of two components: 1) adversity, which can range from traumatic life events to daily hassles, and 2) positive adaptation, tailored to the adversity being faced and the cultural frame the competence

occurs (i.e., an ecologically sensitive approach or emic perspective; Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013; Mesman et al., 2021).

Resilience is perhaps best understood as a multimodal or multisystemic, dynamic process, underpinned by several protective mechanisms that work together across individuals and communities (Masten et al., 2021; Stainton et al., 2019). As a dynamic concept, resilience can fluctuate over time, but adaptation to adversity can be improved through the implementation of resilience-enhancing factors (e.g., helpful coping skills, social support), existing at an individual and community level (Fritz et al., 2018).

Resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic

Resilience-enhancing factors during the pandemic included harnessing social support via technology, spirituality, and distraction techniques such as work or education (Labrague, 2021; Ogueji et al., 2021; Simblett et al., 2021). Triggers for self-harm and suicide are wide-ranging, with protective factors expected to vary within and between people (Ernst et al., 2022; Khan & Ungar, 2021; Zadravec Šedivy et al., 2017). Indeed, some triggers for young people who self-harm (e.g., bullying or school pressures) may have reduced during the initial periods of lockdown, cautiously providing a possible explanation for reduced presentations to hospital between March and May 2020 compared to 2019 (Ougrin, 2020).

Drawing on Walsh's (2015) work on family belief systems that foster resilience, protective factors include meaning-making of adversity, hope and spirituality. Families incorporating changes into their new routine may have better adapted to adversity (Prime et al., 2020). Staying at home and a slower pace of life may have reduced some triggers for self-harm and suicidal thoughts and behaviours. Family identification was found to protect against suicidal thoughts and behaviours resulting from financial stress during the COVID-19 pandemic (Stevenson & Wakefield, 2021). For others, particularly those in unsafe (e.g., domestic violence), unstable or lone households, the risk may have increased, especially if access to resilience-enhancing factors (e.g., access to outside support networks or services) was greatly reduced (Paul & Fancourt, 2022).

Resilience across cultures and contexts: Research gaps

Resilience-enhancing factors may vary across cultures. A review of resilience to self-harm within marginalised youths in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) before the COVID-19 pandemic found that social support, positive youth development and religiosity were the most reported protective factors (Khan & Ungar, 2021). The review highlighted a gap in our knowledge of non-Western countries and it is unclear if these protective strategies could be used during periods of social distancing and lockdown in LMICs. This is particularly important given that poorer, rural communities face connectivity barriers, such as access to telehealth care, remote education, or social contact via social networking and technology (Esteban-Navarro et al., 2020; Hirko et al., 2020).

Unfortunately, most research on suicidality during COVID-19 has been conducted in high-income countries (Pirkis et al., 2021), and studies in LMICs have been rated of poorer quality

(Knipe et al., 2021). This is concerning, given that 77% of global suicides are thought to occur in LMICs and the economic impact of the pandemic makes LMICs particularly vulnerable to an increase in suicide (Shoib et al., 2022; World Health Organization, 2021). Understanding the role of community resilience, already identified as a protective measure from previous health epidemics and adversities, may be particularly important in LMICs (Atallah et al., 2018; Hansen-Nord et al., 2016).

Longer-term impact of COVID-19 and the role of resilience

As societies enter post-COVID recovery periods, predicted global recessions will impact many areas of life (Bastiampillai et al., 2020; Efstathiou et al., 2022). This is particularly concerning as the accumulation of multiple stressors pose the greatest risk for self-harm and suicidality (Carbone et al., 2021; McManus et al., 2019). Previous research on cumulative lifetime adversity and resilience in daily life has found a U-shaped relation (Seery & Quinton, 2016; Seery et al., 2010). Specifically, exposure to some lifetime adversity helps people to adapt to recent adverse events in a positive way as compared to experiencing no adversity, but too much lifetime adversity leads to negative outcomes (e.g., distress, posttraumatic stress). Taking a multisystem approach to resilience, increases in adversity across different, networked systems have negative implications for individuals, as it becomes more difficult to withstand the negative effects on their mental health (Masten et al., 2021).

During the pandemic, many Western governments provided financial support to provide against the economic shocks using emergency measures, temporarily alleviating some stressors. In the UK, many of these emergency measures ended in September 2021, and there is a risk that the return of previous or new stressors caused by economic instability (e.g., job insecurity, rising cost of living) may lead to an increase in self-harm and/or suicidality, particularly for people who have experienced high levels of lifetime adversity. Indeed, these trends have been observed in previous economic recessions (Sinyor et al., 2017).

Future research directions and conclusion

Future research should aim to capture resilience in real-time, in different contexts (Anderson & Priebe, 2021; Mesman et al., 2021). Individuals may deal with adverse situations or daily hassles in different ways, and support should be adaptable to these different contexts. Longitudinal studies using Experience Sampling Methodology (i.e., digital diaries) can help us better understand the 'cascade effects' of a stressful event and its link with resilience and mental health (Mesman et al., 2021). Qualitative studies can also explore in greater depth the challenges and resources that individuals draw on during times of adversity. Finally, data on self-harm and suicidality during non-epidemic *and* epidemic periods would better enable comparisons over time and enhance the quality of research evidence (Knipe et al., 2021; Rogers et al., 2021).

To conclude, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on rates of self-harm and suicide is not yet clear. It is a critical time to identify key protective factors for individuals most at risk, drawing on recommendations from comprehensive, high quality research (e.g., Wasserman et al., 2020). There is unlikely to be a single solution and it must be person-centred, requiring

research to better capture resilience as a process rather than a single measure of resilience in one survey, at one point in time. Research should continue to move away from a sole focus on individual psychological resilience, to a multisystem approach that considers community-level factors and the ecosystems in which individuals exist; within and across low-, medium- and high-income countries.

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'Be More Resilient': Is UK Higher Education Whitewashing The Reality Of The Mental Health Crisis With Resilience Rhetoric?

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Abstract

This discussion paper considers the use of resilience rhetoric within the higher education sector. Through analysis of resilience definitions and examples from contemporary research and practice in the sector, it argues that the neoliberal concept is being used to whitewash the mental health needs of staff and students.

Introduction

Institutions have needed to face the growing mental health (MH) crisis, something which central government has put considerable emphasis on from a student perspective. Although strategies and approaches are multistranded and complex, one element of note is the rise of resilience rhetoric. Often resilience, or lack of, is used to explain some of the increase in MH needs and has resulted in institutions giving focus to the term, in everything from staff job descriptions, to learning outcomes, policies, self-help resources and wellbeing workshops. Resilience is, of course, a fundamental life skill that institutions can rightly hope that staff and students possess. However, very often those with MH needs have developed excellent resilience, meaning that factors impacting their MH are pushing their resilience to the limit and exceeding what it is possible to cope with. Therefore, what I seek to argue is that all too frequently, the concept of resilience is misunderstood, misappropriated and unsuitably applied currently within Higher Education (HE). Within this discussion, I will consider the neoliberal use of resilience rhetoric and question whether this is used to whitewash over the causes or impact of MH needs for staff and students, and the responsibility to institutions to reduce or remove stressors which impact their communities.

Resilience rhetoric as a neoliberal concept

Resilience rhetoric is a neoliberal concept which sublimates the inability to demonstrate or build resilience within the individual and omits the complex contextual factors which act externally on that individual, and the responsibility of the systems and structures which underpin these to be forgone (Wrench, Garrett & King, 2014; Schwarz 2018; Zembylas, 2021). Problematically, resilience rhetoric is based on a concept which lacks consensus on its definition (Brewer et al., 2019; Zembylas, 2021). Brewer et al. (2019) suggest that resilience is adaptability or capacity to cope in the face of adverse or stressful events; Schwarz (2018, p.532) goes further and frames resilience as the 'positive adaptation' following adversity and even more positively, Duckworth et al. (2007) define it as the 'perseverance and passion for

long term goals'. There is, in all definitions an assumption that adverse or stressful events are routine or reasonable; they are a part of life. This may be true, but like with the wider adoption of resilience rhetoric, this assumption can be co-opted to normalise extremes and, as Ahmed's (2017, p.189) definition articulates, 'resilience is the requirement to take more pressure; such that the pressure can be gradually increased'. This highlights that there is a shifting baseline with regards to what we consider to be adverse. Nandy, Lodh & Tang (2021) align this to the impact of the recent pandemic and other global and local events through which exhaustion is continual without time or space to rebuild. Whereas Schwarz (2018, p.530) argues that the 'growing rates of mental illness are considered to be an inevitable consequence of the oppressive and exploiting economic conditions under capitalism'. Either way, the result is that year on year, our expectations and acceptance of what is adverse due to extreme exceptionality, or what is adverse as part of our everyday existence are converging.

Ideologically, the preservation of an individual's MH and the development of their resilience is their own responsibility and not that of the society or culture which they inhabit (Wrench, Garrett & King, 2014; Nandy, Lodh & Tang, 2021). This would be fine if there were adequate resources to support someone with the motivation to seek their own solutions to their poor mental health, but currently, the average wait time for non-pharmacological interventions is the worst they've ever been, with one-to-one support being almost non-existent under the current NHS (National Health Service) funding. Equally, the notion of resilience as 'grit,' an attribute which reinforces the norms of stressors present in our society (Zembylas, 2021). Duckworth et al. (2007, p.1088) claim that 'whereas disappointment or boredom signals to others that it is time to change trajectory and cut losses, the gritty individual stays the course.'; being able to persevere in the face of adversity is predicated on a notion of freedom which many simply do not have, due to complex socio-economic factors which undermine a single individual's capacity to 'stay the course'. Grit and resilience may be a luxury some cannot afford; notably, the examples given of those who demonstrate grit are those with privilege e.g., educated white men. The neoliberal use of resilience is therefore potentially reductive as it does not consider the wider contextual factors.

The landscape of Mental Health in HE

Prior to, during, and since, the pandemic, there have been increasing instances of staff and students in HE, experiencing MH difficulties and crises. Government research into young people in HE, found that up to a third experience poor MH, often symptomatically experienced as depression and anxiety (Lewis, McClous & Callender, 2021). In recognition of this, the Office for Students (OFS) recently committed to funding initiatives, as well as identifying and sharing good practices, which specifically address mental health among university students (OFS, 2022). This rise is not limited to our student populations, and staff have mirrored this trend, with dramatic increases in referrals for occupational health and counselling (Morrish & Priaulx, 2020). Although these increases predate the pandemic, it has had a significant impact, which has simultaneously affected individuals and institutions (Jisc & Emerge Education, 2021; Nandy, Lodh & Tang, 2021; Zembylas, 2021; Ang et al., 2022). This is not unique to the HE sectors, with numerous NHS Trusts experiencing years of reduction in funding for mental health services, which has resulted in increases to wait

times for, and a reduction in the quality of, non-pharmacological interventions (The Kings' Fund, 2018). As a consequence, this has left staff and students without the resources to manage their health effectively; the government have made explicit their expectation for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to address the MH needs of their student populations (Department for Education, 2019) and similarly, Jisc & Emerge Education (2021) recommend in their report that HEIs make MH a 'strategic imperative'. Evidently, HEIs are under increased pressure to take active steps in supporting those with mental health needs and produce tangible results which demonstrate their efficacy of these.

This is also evidenced through the practice of HEIs; a cursory google or search in jobs.ac.uk will identify numerous university resources and job descriptions which demonstrate an institutionally sanctioned value on the notion of resilience (Brewer et al., 2019). The University of Southampton (2022) and the University of Suffolk (2022) both have recent job adverts for senior roles in which resilience is designated as a key attribute of any applicant n their advert and job description, respectively. Similarly, Imperial College London (ICL) links resilience with stress under the auspices of self-help for health and wellbeing, reinforcing what many have already commented on, that the neoliberal approach now adopted as a response to increasing MH and stress is to cite the individual (Imperial College London, n.d. (a)). Equally, in the case of ICL, they also provide staff with a guide on burnout and workplace stressors designed to enable staff to take ownership of their needs, with responsibility on management to respond to these (Imperial College London, n.d. (b)). This at least recognises the myriad of external factors which affect any individual negatively and may result in poor mental health. However, the notion of resilience is framed, these examples serve to highlight the pervasive nature of resilience rhetoric, and how this has become normalised within our educational culture. Moreover, this rhetoric places the responsibility on the individual for developing their resilience, potentially whitewashing over the responsibility of institutions to reduce or remove stressors that contribute negatively to the mental health of staff and students.

Whitewashing Mental Health in HE with resilience rhetoric

In order to redress the MH crises, HE sector has responded with a multitude of strategies and interventions to support both staff and students. One of these, is the concept of resilience. There is a wealth of research from the last twenty years which has sought to develop a theoretical framework for building resilience, metrics by which we can measure the efficacy of resilience interventions and empirically prove the value of resilience in addressing MH (Duckworth et al., 2007; Min, Lee & Chae, 2015; Jisc & Emerge Education, 2021). There is a substantial body of evidence which supports these aims; Sood & Sharma (2020) identified that resilience helps to return one to their 'normal state' and 'enhances' personal wellbeing. Duckworth et al. (2007) claim that resilience is equal if not greater as a predictor of success, and Holdsworth, Turner & Scott-Young (2018) found that resilience was a key factor in maintaining wellbeing throughout university life for students. Similarly, Nandy, Lodh & Tang (2021) found that grit was a precursor to success but failed to examine why a student may not persevere or why they disengage, or identify what makes them stay, and at what cost they persevere to their health or social wellbeing. For example, a student may feel more motivated by an engaging and supportive tutor, whereas a member of staff may feel less motivated by

a line manager who bullies. Furthermore, the self-help approach supported by many in the HE sectors expects reams of efficacy, confidence, and motivation, which due to the power imbalance between students or staff and the institution at large, is untenable for most, and would only be diminished with those experiencing poor MH (de la Fuente et al., 2017). This is further reinforced via HE's frequent use of 'the independent learner' as a paramount goal for graduates. Like with resilience, it is not that this in itself is not a valuable attribute, but again, its ambiguity and neoliberal underpinnings go hand in hand with the misappropriation of resilience rhetoric (Wrench, Garrett & King, 2014; Webster & Rivers, 2019).

Within HE, there are numerous stressors and factors which can adversely affect our staff and students (de la Fuente et al., 2017); but should that make them acceptable? There is a danger that where resilience rhetoric is perpetuated, it implies an expectation for inordinate stressors within the daily routine of working or studying. 'The promotion of resilience tacitly assumes social inequalities to be fixed' (Webster & Rivers, 2019, p.4); the neoliberal concept of resilience gives rise to a striking omission regarding the contextual cultural factors which influence an individual (Zembylas, 2021). Wrench, Garrett & King's (2014) study clearly identifies that the process of transitioning to university can constitute an adverse event, resulting in poor mental health and wellbeing. This would surely then suggest to HEIs that they should take preemptive and proactive measures to examine and reduce the impact transition has, as opposed to expecting individuals to improve their own resilience (Sood & Sharma, 2020; Ang et al., 2022).

Many mental health conditions have fluctuating symptoms and do not adhere to a binary notion of being well or unwell, vulnerable, or resilient (Schwarz, 2018). There will be days where even with severe symptoms, students can study and staff can work, but cannot function in other areas of their lives. Those that burn out or cannot continue to tolerate the levels of stress they are subjected to, either by HE or other forces, are reduced to being inadequate, themselves not able to 'cope'. This also raises important questions about how we include people with mental health conditions within our institutions, and what responsibility we take for our communities' health (Webster & Rivers, 2019). In response to this, studies have attempted to suggest ways in which resilience can be used at an institutional level to build resilience, and in turn, improve mental health (Wrench, Garrett & King, 2014; Min, Lee & Chae, 2015; Holdsworth, Turner & Scott-Young, 2018). Notably, Nandy, Lodh & Tang (2021) call for HEIs to undertake suggests that HEIs review their weaknesses focusing on where practices as both employers and educators impact individuals or cause stress, and are there systemic, cultural, and structural changes, which can be made to reduce or remove these, particularly where these may disproportionately affect certain groups.

Nandy, Lodh & Tang (2021) highlight that recovery models following the pandemic are focused on individuals, and not institutions. However, throughout the pandemic what we have learnt is that health and wellbeing are largely not in the control of a single individual and that actions were taken by governments, such as lockdowns, or the choices by communities, such as mass vaccinations or wearing of PPE (Personal Protective Equipment), demonstrates that the fate of our health and wellbeing is inextricably linked, intertwined, and entrenched within a myriad of connections with the world around us. Why then are mental health

and resilience not considered on the same terms? Schwarz (2018) deploys the analogy of the impact of homophobia on mental health, and looks at the individual experiencing vulnerability, or lack of resilience – as having MH difficulties, we are decontextualising the vulnerability and failing to make systemic change to reduce or remove the stressor. More concerning is that resilience rhetoric can entrench the status quo, even when this oppresses or disadvantages particular groups (Schwarz 2018; Zembylas, 2021). This is supported by Min, Lee & Chae (2015) who found that non-traditional students from widening participation backgrounds were often more resilient; presumably, because they have had to encounter adversity due to social inequalities.

Conclusion

Like its failure to consider a wider context, resilience rhetoric can also fail to address the complexity of mental health. If we begin to stipulate resilience as a core aptitude of staff and students, we risk excluding those who we perceive to lack these qualities, those who fall foul of structural inequalities. This paper has not sought to denigrate the value of resilience in supporting mental health, but rather calls attention to the rise in resilience rhetoric and the deficit neoliberal notion of resilience which places an unfair burden on individuals and is often adopted by HEIs to whitewash over the rising crisis of mental health within their communities. As Jisc & Emerge Education (2021, p.8) articulate, 'inclusivity [is] recognising that people face unequal challenges to their mental health and those may be HE-specific and be personal, cultural or structural', and therefore institutions need to consider how they are taking responsibility for the complex and structural stressors and what actions they are taking to respond to the MH needs of students and staff.

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At Breaking Point: An Intervention On Resilience Within The UK Academy

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Abstract

Resilience has become something of a buzzword within and beyond the academy, with the concept being applied to diverse contexts of endurance, particularly related to national security, climate change, and more recently Covid-19. However, despite the growing popularity of 'resilience approaches', considerably less work has accounted for the role of resilience within the context of academia itself. In the wake of Covid-19 and in light of the ongoing University and College Union (UCU) strike actions across the UK, this commentary reflects upon how resilience manifests within the academy, specifically focusing on our own institution, Royal Holloway.

Through this commentary, we contribute to resilience scholarship by employing a feminist geographical approach that accounts for multi-scalar power relations and acknowledges that multiple resiliences co-exist. We begin by thinking about resilience at the institutional level (the university and its departments) before considering resilience at the individual level (staff, students, their physical/mental well-being, and the role of unions), drawing out how these multiple forms of resilience interact. In doing so, we seek to subvert traditional narratives of resilience that are often romanticized under patriarchal capitalism (and within the neoliberal university) which reduces resilience to purely individualistic endeavors and equates personal value to research outputs and academic results. We conclude with a hopeful reflection on a more just and equitable academic future that is built upon and fostered by, the collective resilience of student-staff solidarity.

At Breaking Point: An intervention on resilience within the UK academy

By drawing on Weichselgartner and Kelman (2015), we define resilience as "the ability of materials, individuals, organizations … to withstand severe conditions and to absorb shocks." (p.251). We explore resilience at both the institutional and individual level to outline two key interventions while adopting a feminist geographical approach. Firstly, we challenge the romanticization of resilience as a positive endeavor that perpetuates the neoliberal status quo. Secondly, we expose the multiple manifestations of resilience that exist in the academy. We recognize that while our commentary is specific to RHUL we hope it may resonate with(in) other institutions across the UK and beyond. Moreover, we emphasize that this work only scratches the surface of these important debates and is by no means comprehensive: instead, we hope that it will provoke further discussions and actions regarding resilience within the academy.

Feminist Geographical Approach

This commentary contributes to resilience scholarship by employing two key tenets of feminist geographical thinking. Firstly, it is essential to pay attention to scale. Acknowledging that the 'big global' and 'intimate local' are not separate, binary entities but co-constituted (Mountz and Hyndman, 2006), this enables us to trace multi-scalar connections between different spaces and actors while making visible lived experiences (Massaro and Williams, 2013). Furthermore, in line with feminist thinking that challenges binaries more broadly, we can expose the multiple forms and subjectivities of resilience as situated, dynamic, and embodied (Vrasti and Michelsen, 2017; MacLeavy et al., 2021), to consider how different manifestations of resilience co-exist and interact with one another in the academy.

Secondly, feminist geography compels us to be continuously reflexive of our positionalities when writing this commentary as all knowledge is situated and embodied (Sultana, 2007). We are first-year PhD researchers, who receive funding, and have completed previous studies together at RHUL. Although we have our own experiences of resilience, we acknowledge that these will be different to staff who are employed on either casual or permanent contracts and we do not have to fear reprisal in the same way.

Institutional

The onset of Covid-19 and subsequent shutdown of many sectors have seen discussions of resilience come to the fore and academia has been no exception. In line with traditional resilience narratives, the external 'shock' of Covid-19 has undermined the security and general functionality of universities and academic institutions. Our institution sought to mitigate disruption to students' learning by implementing measures including shifting to online learning; issuing blanket extensions for coursework; and, introducing alternative assessments instead of in-person exams.

These short-term adaptations showed the university's ability as a whole to absorb unexpected shocks and continue running effectively, essentially demonstrating its resilience. Indeed, the efforts of the staff were regularly praised by senior management, with the Senior Vice Principal (Education) stating that "[a]s a college, we were agile, innovative, and flexible and it is to everyone's credit… that the year was so successful." (Knowles, 2021). The language within this quote, as well as that contained within other statements, is consistent with wider narratives which position resilience as a purely positive endeavor. However, in line with both Critical Resilience scholars who reject resilience as an inherently normative and conservative concept deeply aligned with the neoliberal status quo, and feminist geographical thinking that centres on a scale to reveal multiple resiliences, we seek to challenge such framings concerning the university (Joseph, 2013; MacKinnon and Derickson, 2013; Slater, 2014).

Firstly, the resilience of the neoliberal university is predicated on the ability to endure and survive external changes but ultimately return to and maintain pre-existing systems (Raco and Street, 2012). In other words, rather than using the 'shock' of the pandemic as an opportunity to deploy new and more radical teaching models and organizational structures, the majority of measures introduced were seen as only temporary, to eventually return to the pre-pandemic 'business as usual'.

Online (and later hybrid) learning ensured the remote delivery of lectures and seminars which, although not without drawbacks (e.g. technology divide, lack of a safe/quiet environment to work, difficulties in adapting content for online teaching), has been praised as an accessible alternative, particularly for those who struggle with mobility on/to campus, are clinically vulnerable, have care responsibilities, and/or commute long distances. Yet, as society continues to adjust to living with Covid-19, RHUL is encouraging (and in some cases, mandating) a return to face-to-face learning under the guise of providing 'high-quality education', inadvertently undoing previous efforts to facilitate accessible learning and working. We cannot ignore the financially driven motivations behind this decision as students and staff contribute to the campus economy. Although we do not wish to ignore the varying preferences of both students and staff, the resilience of RHUL building back and returning to 'normal' perpetuates existing inequalities (Harrison, 2012).

Secondly, resilience in the neoliberal university is multiple, with different forms and manifestations co-existing, interacting, and, at times, conflicting with one another, which compels us to confront who is resilience for and to what end (Cretney, 2014; Cutter, 2016; Wilson, 2018). We recognize that the resilience of the university as a whole cannot be viewed in isolation: this resilience is co-constituted by, and grounded in, the diverse resilience(s) of departments, services, and unions within.

In June 2021, we were informed of 'academic realignments', targeting the six smallest departments on campus for mass staff redundancies (Layzell, 2021; RHUL UCU, 2021). These revelations came following the extensive adjustments and adaptations performed throughout the pandemic, with departments expected to deliver teaching that paralleled pre-pandemic standards. These decisions were (dubiously) portrayed as necessary to ensure that RHUL could withstand the economic disruption of Covid. In other words, the resilience of the university came into conflict with the resilience(s) of specific departments, with institutional interests around efficiency and finance prioritized over the livelihoods of staff. Here, we see how the concept of resilience, contrary to being a positive endeavor, can be exploited, being used to justify cutbacks and cast off people who are ostensibly resilient to maintain, and even deepen, the neoliberal status quo (Slater, 2014).

Individual

In line with our feminist geographical approach, we now attend to resilience at the individual level. Within academia, the so-called resilience of individuals is praised, encouraged, and romanticized with the ability to persevere through adverse conditions and shocks, and the personal sacrifices made to enable this, are cast as desirable and necessary. However, tied up with this are problems involving individualism, isolation, competition, and entrenched hierarchies that create and deepen existing inequalities. Given that universities are "centred around whiteness and masculinity" (Oliver and Morris, 2020: 765), and we would also argue ability, cis-normativity, and Anglophone/Global North epistemologies, those of us who do not 'belong' are continuously excluded from these spaces in ways which necessitate additional and different kinds of resilience(s).

There is an expectation that minorities must perform resilience in the same way and to the same standard as able-bodied cis white men in the face of external shocks and

conditions. For example, we might consider how the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the gendered nature of care labour within the university, with women staff often taking on more childcare and household responsibilities than their male counterparts whilst continuing to work from home (Augustus, 2021). In other words, we as minorities must undergo the additional work of being resilient to internal institutional environments which are not built for us and, in many ways, actually work against us. As we struggle to exist within these spaces, we are continuously exposed to institutional violence (Ahmed, 2012) and made to feel "uncomfortable, exposed, visible, different when [we] take up space" (Ahmed, 2007: 158), raising questions of how and when we distinguish resilience from survival. This was emphasized by an anonymous participant in an online survey we conducted:

> *"It is those [of us] subjected to violence who must show ongoing resilience in the face of multiple forms of oppression … we do not get a break, [...] we are expected to be constantly high achieving through it all."*

This once again illustrates that resilience, despite its romanticization as a positive endeavor, for many of us is a difficult, lonely, and painful struggle that is a prerequisite of being in academia. Indeed, academia relies and thrives upon these individualistic and, at times, competing resiliences, often at the expense of personal wellbeing (Lashuel, 2020).

Multiple studies have revealed widespread mental health issues amongst both staff (Guthrie et al., 2017; Bourgeault, Mantler and Power, 2021) and students (Rawlins, 2019; Cage et al., 2021) within Higher Education, with anxiety, depression, and burnout particularly common. This was further highlighted by two anonymous participants reflecting on their experiences of resilience:

> *"Experiencing burnout over and over again, and having no choice in the matter, otherwise you fail, and everyone is pretty much expected to do it."*

> *"[My] resilience is dwindling and I don't want to be resilient anymore but I also love and enjoy researching"*

Resilience alone is not a solution and there is widespread agreement that robust action needs to be undertaken to tackle these systemic conditions: we wholeheartedly agree with the rallying cry that 'staff working conditions are students' learning conditions', as these struggles are fundamentally interlinked.

This feeds into wider industrial action from UCU, specifically the Four Fights dispute which ties together pay, equality, casualization, and unmanageable workloads (see UCU, 2022). While we acknowledge that all staff continue to juggle both formally recognized responsibilities (e.g. teaching, research outputs, tutoring, admin), and more informal, 'invisible' labor (e.g. mentoring, caregiving, pastoral support), the burden of the latter predominantly falls upon minorities, demanding them to be (more) resilient. And yet, it is the very same staff taking on these additional responsibilities who are on precarious, short-term contracts, compromising their ability to be resilient (Mason and Megoran, 2021). As Ahn et al. (2021) argue, there is a need to move beyond individualistic resilience (as it serves to maintain and uphold oppressive

structures) to instead pursue a collective, community-based resilience or perhaps even resistance.

Conclusion

We have sought to subvert traditional narratives of resilience, which are romanticized under patriarchal capitalism and within the neoliberal academy, demand adaptations to fit and maintain this (broken) system. These structures, which reduce resilience to a purely individualistic endeavor and equate personal value to research outputs and academic results, must be countered. We believe there is scope to move beyond resilience and instead consider when and where it must become resistance. Rather than us being resilient to the existing conditions and struggles of the academy, academic conventions and institutions themselves should be challenged and reworked to fit our individual and collective needs for how *we* want to study, do research, and teach. Accessibility, flexibility, and equality for *all* staff and students should be prioritized over the metrics, outputs, and profit which are fundamental to current framings of resilience, something which can only be achieved by collectively resisting the current and oppressive structures we are subjected to.

To conclude, we briefly outline two interventions which could act as starting points towards securing a more just and equitable academic future, and we hope might provoke further thought, discussion, and action.

1. Challenge the entrenched hierarchies and rankings within the academy, both between institutions and within them. Abolish the Research Excellence Framework and other metrics which pit departments and institutions against each other and perpetuate the need to be resilient and competitive.

2. Listen to staff and students by addressing the demands of the UCU, eliminating precarious contracts and tackling unmanageable workloads in order to cultivate a careful and care-full academy without the existing barriers which undermine survival and wellbeing.

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Reflections

Researching "Resilience": Reflections From The Field, Past And Present

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Abstract

In this discussion, Sabrina Ahmed and William McGowan look forwards and backwards, respectively, at two research projects focused on the knotty, contested, and ubiquitous concept of "resilience". While McGowan's research into survivors of political violence and terrorism has come to an end, Ahmed's empirical work looking at the impacts of security and counter-terrorism policies on the refugee community in Bangladesh is still in motion. In this discussion, the two researchers reflect on how they both grapple with this idea of resilience as researchers, at the beginning and ends of their respective research journeys, including the ways they approach their fieldwork. Touching on a variety of topics, from vernacular understandings of security, to bringing differing degrees of professional experience to bear on their current understandings of resilience, the piece is written as a back-and-forth dialogic engagement with the subject, making for a lively and readable contribution. Although focusing on resilience specifically, the piece will be of interest to anyone thinking through questions of epistemology, methodology, and method from a variety of disciplines more broadly.

Background to our discussion

Reflecting on the experiences of working with this idea of 'resilience' in our respective projects, we talked at length and together arrived at three key themes that resonated for us in shared, yet distinct, ways. Firstly, that history and historical precedents shape and mould the people we are today and the kinds of practical action that may or may not become assimilated into the burgeoning discourses of 'resilience' around us. For Sabrina, this revolves around refugees in Bangladesh, while for William this revolved around survivors of political violence and terrorism in the UK and Ireland. William recently published a book entitled *Victims of Political Violence and Terrorism: Making Up Resilient Survivors* (McGowan, 2022) on this very topical yet contested subject. Secondly, that this discourse is itself mediated partly through language and typically driven by contemporary ways of understanding the self. And thirdly, that within this discursive framing of human traits there exists a clear contradiction, a paradox, which simultaneously casts populations, sometimes even the same population, as both 'vulnerable' (to which they must build sufficient 'resilience') and yet dangerous or 'risky' (against which they must resist, again somehow using 'resilience') – on the schizophrenic characteristics of security interventions, see Aradau (2004). In the next section, we will say a little about each in-turn, where we reflect on our understanding of 'resilience' in our respective research contexts.

In Conversation about 'Resilience': from Global North to Global South

SA: What made you write this book and would you elaborate on your epistemological approach?

WM: My research into 'resilience' started life as a PhD project back in 2014 and I eventually wrote this work up into the book (McGowan, 2022). Its subtitle, *Making Up Resilient Survivors*, is a nod to the work of philosopher Ian Hacking (1995; 2002), whose notion of 'Making Up People' became an extremely useful way for me to try and tease apart what 'resilience' might mean when applied to a group of political violence and terrorism survivors seeking the support of fellow survivors at a small, dedicated non-governmental organisation (NGO) in the UK. Hacking has used this overarching approach to research disabled people, children with autism, pregnant teenagers, people with 'multiple personality disorder', and many more phenomena besides. He draws on a number of philosophical and sociological traditions to explore how people negotiate information about themselves as *particular kinds* of people. Knowledge about who we are, or who we were, or who we might be, is constantly changing and evolving, in part because we never have the luxury of stepping outside of ourselves while making sense of it. This is why Hacking (1995) talks of 'looping effects' of human kinds. They are human kinds because we are talking about people and their behaviours, identities, or narrated experiences, rather than *comparatively* more stable phenomena from the natural world ('natural kinds').

The looping effect refers to how knowledge and information about who we are as people soon become outdated. As people behave in new ways, so too must information about people change. These are enmeshed. Human behaviours drive change in the information and knowledge (or discourses) we have of ourselves, but changing information, knowledge, and discourses also effect changes in how we behave. Utilising this framework for thinking about resilience, I realised how fraught it would be to make judgements about 'being' in the worlds of my participants (their ontology – their reality, as experienced by them) simply based on what they told me about themselves, as many studies drawing on interview data and ethnography tend to. Of course, we can sympathise, empathise, and always attempt to understand lives other than our own, but that isn't really what I mean. As an empirical sociologist, partly influenced by (but not effectively executing!) principles from phenomenology and ethnomethodology, I would argue that these can only ever amount to approximations, to more or less compelling descriptions, which readers (in the case of my book) have little ability to challenge or reinterpret for themselves in any particularly transparent way. This is not me trying to diminish my research but I do think we should be realistic and modest as social scientists about the extent to which we can legitimately claim to 'speak for' our participants and their experiences.

Simply deciphering how other people feel is not a simple matter at all, of course, but at least knowing that the ways we know ourselves *as ourselves* is not static brought some sort of respite against the struggle that is finishing a PhD. Sometimes you just need a

way through. Anyway, my point in the book is that whether we like it or not (I strongly tend not to), 'resilience' discourse is now ubiquitous in a range of local settings, and this furnishes practical opportunities for people – in this case, 'survivors of terrorism', but we could think about this in a whole host of other contexts – to engage with, and sometimes to embrace, certain ideals about how they could live. Does that make sense? How about your project?

SA: This is interesting what you just said about knowledge and discourse, which are again subject to change and interpretation. For this reason, I think considering history is important to understanding resilience in a given context. For my PhD project, I was and still am trying to understand resilience within a community that has been historically persecuted by their state, does not have any official citizenship in their own country, and does not even possess a formal refugee status in the country they are living in currently. In August 2017, more than one million Rohingya refugees fled across the border into Bangladesh to escape a deadly military crackdown by the Myanmar government (Zaman et al., 2020: 1). In early 2018, while I was working with the UN in the Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh, I found myself inwardly questioning how they were going to survive in what we used to call 'relocation shelters' – waterlogged floors, plastic sheets as walls, and four poles to support the tarpaulin above their heads. It was during the cyclone and flooding period; we were relocating them from a landslide-prone camp to a safer camp, known back then as the 'Camp 20 extension'. This "safer camp" was built after clearing thousands of acres of forest and levelling up hills that were once one of the key migration routes for elephants. Standing there in my gumboots, which were at least 4/5 inches below the ground, asking myself what will happen to these families after dark, I was asked by one Rohingya teenage mother if they are going to get a "chala" – a bamboo sheet for the floor so that she can sit and lay with her children. That was when it struck me. I thought they must have some in-built strength, perhaps akin to what we might call "resilience".

Against this backdrop, Rohingya refugees are dealing with the past trauma of military persecution, murder, rape and gender-based violence, the ongoing crisis in the camps, including competition over food and natural resources, disease, organised crime, camp politics, targeted measures from the law enforcing agencies, among many other uncertainties. Before attempting to develop our understanding of resilience within the population who are living in these camps, we must ask ourselves "what does resilience refer to" (Brassett et al., 2013: 221)? Why does this history matter so much?

WM: Yeah, I think that's really important. One critique often levelled at resilience discourse is that it replaces tangible, material support with moralising calls for self-help and a positive mental attitude (see, for example, Harrison, 2013). The way I have phrased this is an oversimplification, but the shift to 'building resilience' certainly resonates differently depending on existing levels of material support and the historical precedents this discourse dovetails. In the UK, 'resilience' seemed synonymous with the post-2008 crash and subsequent austerity agenda, in which the government massively shrunk local council budgets while encouraging them to think creatively, spend thriftily, and

adapt accordingly. Critics frequently contrast this with the post-Second World War social welfare consensus – in reality, a short-lived period of around three decades.

SA: In Bangladesh, the practical manifestation of 'resilience discourse', for example through the work of non-state interventions, NGO work, and international aid, similarly implicates the country's economy and contemporary state formation. Here the word seems synonymous with other ambiguous slogans of the international NGO industrial complex, such as 'sustainable development', 'peacebuilding', or 'self-sufficiency' (Fernando, 2011: 274). Communities located in the Global South, such as refugees living in Bangladesh, might find it odd when the government attempts to apply this term, either to 'build resilience' in a crisis, or to invoke the term 'while in fact pursuing other objectives' (Hardy 2015: 91), without knowing the contested historical background that placed the particular community in that particular crisis. Yet, they are unlikely to see it as something new, given their tacit knowledge of post-colonial, global inequalities. This is one of the reasons I am drawing on a post-colonial vernacular approach in my upcoming ethnographic fieldwork for my PhD where I will be engaging with the Rohingya refugee community in their language, while working in the same camps with them. For me, at an immediately interpersonal level, researching resilience, besides all other similarly contested concepts and discourse, raises a crucial question: how do you know when people are talking about the thing you call resilience unless they use the word 'resilience' themselves?

WM: Yeah, this was certainly an issue for me – decisions concerning language and the degree to which I introduced 'resilience' to the research setting, or else attempted to look for its natural occurrence in text and talk. One way is simply to look for human traits in response to adversity, whether they are spoken about explicitly, observed during fieldwork, or which seem to cohere with the supposedly desirable traits known as 'resilience' found within policy documents, therapeutic manuals, or any other source of discursive knowledge. This is one sort of methodological compromise I reached in the book anyway.

SA: For me, from my previous experience of working in the development sector in Bangladesh, I have seen national and international NGOs distributing translated handouts (from English) among the flood-affected community to 'tick the box' for understanding their level of "resilience". The Bangla translation of "resilience" means "tolerance" in English, which does not carry the same connotation. Asking someone to be able to adapt, bounce-back, or cope, while problematic, at least implicitly admits the reality of their adversity. Asking someone in dire need of help to be tolerant, arguably performs an even more pacifying role. Survey questionnaires like that, where the local community ticks the boxes without fully understanding the meaning, are widely used to measure "resilience", amongst many other similar ideas, by NGOs. This is something to consider when, as academics, we work with non-English speaking communities in different countries across the globe. Is "resilience" something that can be measured or evaluated this way? Shall we try to measure it anyway? As I will be working with the Rohingya community who speaks neither English nor my language (Bangla), in my opinion, it is better to engage the vernaculars discursively to recognise their perception

of "coping mechanisms". Linguistic knowledge is therefore important for academics who want to develop a discursive understanding of any contested topic such as "resilience".

WM: Yeah, so reframing your language to better describe the actual thing you want to know more about – in this case, literally how the refugee community are being treated, how they are suffering, and how they are surviving?

SA: Yes and so methodologically, in my view, ethnography (including but not limited to ethnographic observation and interviews) has to be the key approach to understanding a community and their daily experiences without imposing alien topics by handing over abstract survey questions.

WM: We previously spoke about this idea of a dialectic between simultaneously so-called 'risky' and 'vulnerable' populations, especially in relation to your case study. Can you say a bit about that?

SA: I think this theme is perhaps more relevant to security and terrorism discourse. The Rohingya community are concurrently dubbed a "security threat" and "vulnerable" to different threats (for example, terrorism and criminal recruitment, amongst others) by the policymakers and law enforcing agencies in Bangladesh. This is problematic as, firstly, contested phrasing like this creates a discursive negative identity of the community in question by labelling them as "threat" related to the thesis of "suspect community" in the UK context (Hillyard, 1993). Secondly, labelling them as "vulnerable" is accommodative to develop "security infused" (countering-)terrorism policies (Pettinger, 2020: 135) targeted towards the Rohingya community which securitise the refugee population – either from the threats or as threats. To 'securitise' means presenting something as an existential danger, typically driven by powerful elites who stoke the fear of such danger using language to turn a political problem into a threat to security (Buzan and Weaver, 1998). A similar dialectic is applicable to "resilience" in this securitised setting. For example, when scholars and humanitarian actors make recommendations such as "promoting social cohesion, peaceful coexistence, reduction of tensions, and enhancement of resilience between the host and refugee population" (Olney, 2019: 10) – it is important to consider a few things from a critical point of view – how shall we measure the promotion of "resilience" in such securitised context? How can we ensure that these resilience-focused policies will not create further anxiety and fear between the host and the refugee communities where the latter is already labelled as a "security threat"?

Concluding Thoughts

Our engagements with the idea of resilience have oscillated between two extremes. On the one hand, resilience might be thought of as an ordinary way of describing human strength in the face of adversity. However, as we have discussed, this common conceptualisation among policymakers, academics, practitioners, charities, and self-help moguls is inherently moulded in English-speaking and typically Westocentric contexts. On the other, resilience functions as a metaphorical and euphemistic way of enunciating hegemonic values among civil society.

Neither verbal and written language, nor any other communication of values, is capable of containing human activity in advance and so 'resilience' may have little, or lots of relevance in practice, depending on local and sequential activity, as both past (McGowan) and present (Ahmed) PhD projects alluded to here surely attest. One of the themes running through McGowan (2022) is that both the usual advocates of 'resilience' discourse and their usual critics frequently miss the mark in this regard. One group bestows way too much importance on it, while the other often ignores its real manifestations because it isn't a discourse they wish to promote. As ever, it is at the intersection between these normative ideals that people live their everyday lives.

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Reflections On 'Insider Focus Groups'

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Abstract

This reflective paper draws from the experiences of a female qualitative researcher exploring the opportunities and challenges of following an insider's perspective when conducting doctoral research. The study uses data produced through online focus group discussions during the COVID-19 pandemic, exploring the attitudes of young people towards Brexit and Europe. The combination of shared characteristics (age, status, nationality) with researcher/participant power dynamics proved to deconstruct traditional hierarchies in the focus groups, allowing participants to establish their expertise on the topic and bring their own agenda to the discussion, while limiting the researcher's control and increasing unpredictability during insider focus groups. This work adds to the debate about the impact of the insider's viewpoint, and the ways in which we can develop resilience to overcome the challenges associated with this mode of research conduction, emphasising on the researcher's flexibility and reflexivity.

Introduction

The relationship between researcher(s) and research participant(s) has been a recurrent theme in methodological literature (Råheim et al., 2016) since their respective positionalities influence the way they engage with each other in qualitative research (Ayrton, 2019). *Insider focus groups* are hugely shaped by the participants' 'self' and social interaction, creating rich data, but also limiting the researchers' control. Resilient responses to this unpredictability vary; here, I suggest embracing flexibility and reflexivity despite lacking control. This reflective paper discusses the commonalities I shared with my research participants, the implications our shared identities had on the power dynamics during the data-collection and offers a differed interpretation of researcher's resilience when following an insider's perspective.

Focus groups are usually seen as semi-formal discussions in which the moderator observes and navigates the conversation (Krueger, 1994), often conceptualised as a research site and not simply as a research tool (Hollander, 2004). When the moderator is a member of the group, the power dynamics are subverted, and participants' interaction might resemble everyday discussions that take place in a non-threatening environment. The use of insider focus groups as a research method aims to limit the inherent power imbalance in research contexts (Råheim et al., 2016) and enables the participants to create a collective consensus through uncensored debate and discussion (Walters, 2020). Nevertheless, relinquishing control and confessing moments of vulnerability in research remains a difficult conversation especially when robust qualitative research has been interlinked with anticipation/calculation of participants' responses (Rahman et al., 2021) and the production of resilient solutions to moderate group discussions. In this paper, I argue that resilience in my insider research

occurred by accepting the unpredictability of participants' (inter)action and my limited control as the researcher and by reflecting on the implications the reversed power play had on the fieldwork.

The study

My research investigates young people's views on 'EU memberships and referenda' using the case of 'Brexit' based on 20 online focus groups conducted during 2020. In my study, I was an insider; a member of the communities I was researching with shared culture, language, and social status. Unsurprisingly, plenty of the interests, concerns, and the complexity of belonging to social groups that concerned the participants resonated with me especially in an era of uncertainty with the unforeseen implications of COVID-19 and 'Brexit'. The participants (including the researcher) were current students or recent graduates in London between 18-30 years old. Therefore, most of us raised concerns around the academic and professional opportunities in the UK and the impact 'Brexit' might have on the social, political, and academic life. Furthermore, our lived experiences were often informed by our field of studies and experiences, including living within a pandemic, and being urged to adapt and transit our study, and social interactions to the digital environment. Although the researchers' status as insiders/outsiders might change from one moment to another (Merton, 1972), I argue that sharing social characteristics and actively participating in the lived experiences of the group (Griffith, 1998) specify my 'research insiderness'.

Inside(r) focus groups

Insider focus groups, thanks to the redressed hierarchies, can transform the participants from 'informants' to 'experts' in the research process (Walters, 2020). Due to the informal setting, participants are more likely to feel comfortable and confident sharing personal views and experiences, but also establishing their expertise on the topic. In my study, the participants reflected on their own knowledge, expertise in their field, and social contexts to support their claims and justify their views based on evidence. Thus, 'Europe' and 'Brexit' were presented and discussed from different perspectives: legal, financial, political, philosophical, sociological etc. based on the participants' academic background which stimulated the discussion and the negotiation of meaning in context, while requiring minimum intervention from the moderator.

These sophisticated, theory-informed, and evidence-based arguments along with the participants' own research, understanding, and application of existing literature to articulate 'Europe', 'Brexit', and its implications, produced rich data and offered new, unexpected insights to explore, which were entirely data-driven. Unavoidably, during the focus groups the participants' expertise was evident so I would embrace it to demonstrate their impact on the data and encourage them to further elaborate by sharing their conceptualised views. Admitting the participants' expertise often indicated my unfamiliarity with specific terms and existing literature (for example European laws in relation to Brexit), which exposed my vulnerability in moderating a discussion among experts (in their field), but ultimately allowed the participants to take a position of authority in the focus group (Harrison & Ogden, 2021). This also demonstrated that the participants saw me as a member of the group instead of an

'expert', someone with 'greater knowledge' or 'in charge' of the discussion.

Previous qualitative research suggests that participants' response and interaction is unpredictable and emphasizes the researcher's need to waive control (Walters, 2020) and allow participants to orchestrate the conversation. During insider research, not only the discussion might be diverted from the planned topic guide/questions, but the participants might bring their own agenda (Råheim et al., 2016) to seize the discussion and take it in new directions. In my research, it was evident that the participants came prepared to raise specific issues that concerned them, which is exactly what I had hoped- that the focus groups would operate as a platform for the elucidation of participants' priorities. For example, when discussing the implications of 'Brexit', one participant made comparisons between the 'Brexit' and the 'Scottish referendum' reflecting on the possibility of (and their preference for) an 'Independent Scotland', which motivated others to question whether this 'Independent Scotland' would be part of the EU. Her response was:

> *This is, obviously, an emotionally strong and poetic way to communicate her view, but it was one of the key phrases used by the Scottish National Party in their 'Remain' campaign, too. This does not diminish by any means the validity and significance of this point but illustrates that the participants joined the discussion having decided not only 'what to talk about' but also how to frame their arguments. Furthermore, it provides interesting insights in the ways the participant articulates and negotiates her identity and expresses her sense of belonging to specific groups and communities. This phrase generated an extended discussion about the role of Scotland within the UK and invited others to ask questions, get in her shoes and reflect on 'Brexit' from a different point of view. In addition, this example illustrates the co-construction of meaning in group discussions by the selection of specific words, phrases, and examples to communicate understandings, experiences, and world views.*

Conclusion

Insider focus groups cannot fully remove the researchers' control but can reduce the traditional power dynamics in research and allow the participants to shape the conversation. The unpredictability of insider research is often combined by resilient strategies; for example, to minimize, maximize, incorporate, or utilise 'insiderness' (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2013) in relation to the researchers' experience and power. In my case, resilience did not emerge as a problem-based response; it was simply developed by embracing my limited control in insider research and by allowing as much freedom and space as possible for the participants to take the lead. Being transparent and reflective was the way to cope with uncertainty and produce rich data in insider focus groups. This approach might not be appropriate in every setting, but I hope that this reflective piece will encourage other insider researchers to explore ways that could empower the participants/communities involved, build resilience to deal with uncertainty in focus groups and integrate critical reflection in the research practice.

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Resilience As Recovery, Not Just Resistance

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Abstract

Being a PhD candidate, qualitatively analysing transcripts of Child Sex Abuse (CSA) during lockdown, demanded resilience. As I am myself a Survivor of CSA, the potential for traumatic-distress triggering was magnified, but I felt confident, having managed my own life-course traumatic-distress with resilience practises such as gardening, walking, journaling, therapy and, of course, meditation and yoga, as my day job is teaching mindfulness-based approaches. But the pandemic handed me a further lesson in resilience when my back gave way, and I succumbed to shingles. I was shocked, disappointed even, in my body. Hubris about the strength and discipline which I hitherto conflated with resilience, realigned as I was forced to learn new ways to resilience *in the midst* of difficulty. This was a trap door through which I dropped to appreciate the resilience offered by self-compassion, self-care, receiving the kindness of others and the resultant gratitude. Resilience is as much about personal growth as personal protection. My reflective piece would discuss self-support for researchers whose work touches their own lived experience of difficulty.

As a researcher of child sex abuse resilience was always going to be important; as a survivor myself, even more so. I had thought when I started my studies, that my own life-long journey learning to manage trauma distress equipped me with resilience. In March 2020, just as Covid made muted lockdowns into reality, I had 17 transcripts from fellow survivors to analyse for my PhD and suddenly endless time and space for the task. My participant-survivors spoke of the meaning they made of interactions with service providers they experienced as untrustworthy, and listening to their struggles brought me a few more lessons in resilience.

When a survivor of abuse researches her own subject, some people will fear bias and a hindering relativism but following on the epoch changing accomplishments of feminist, disability, queer and colonial studies, "Mad Studies", is now finding its place as a valid and respected epistemological approach. The subjective "lived experience" as it is named, of human distress and mental suffering of those working within the "Mad Studies" paradigm of research and activism is robustly informed by theoretical and philosophical foundations that win it a seat at the academic table (Beresford & Russo, 2022). People sometimes ask me, is "Mad" an acronym; it isn't, it is a reclaiming of the word just like Queer studies and Black Lives Matter. But to generate respected scholarship, students and academics with lived experience from histories of distress, need resilience because when we have been subjected to inter-personal violence, be it as witness or directly victimised, we may be left traumatised.

Trauma is its own weird phenomena, with its own awful hallmarks: trauma runs in deep channels through the entire body, physically and mental-emotionally and small present moment occurrences which bear any resemblance to the original abuse may trigger visceral responses of overwhelm, dread, shame, pounding gut-clenching fear, avoidance, or a shutting

off into the numbness of dislocation from place and time in the "safety" of dissociation. In a nutshell, listening to other survivors talk about their experiences of abuse represents a massive challenge to resilience for a researcher living with her own history of such events.

But I felt equipped: I had built my own resilience through life-long daily meditation and yoga practices; both of which I teach. Mindfulness's first message is to notice when the mind is not in the present moment and bring it back into contact with something, anything, 'here' 'now', be that the breath, your feet on the floor, or the sound of birds singing. From this steady place it is possible to make wise choices, to take a break, have a stretch, drink some water etc. The veracity of this simple practice of noticing and choosing a steadying focus is proven through the prolific success of mindfulness in myriad fields of human endeavour, supported by burgeoning peer reviewed research (Hölzel et al., 2011).

While analysing I used this approach all day long; knowing when I was getting overwhelmed or had shifted into fight-and-flight mechanisms of visceral clench, was the doorway though which I'd step away from it. As I worked my way thought the transcripts, I used this simple but powerful tool to guide me towards taking care of myself. This, and my daily routine which has shaped my life for more than 35 years of rising early to do yoga, walk the dog in nature, meditate, and start at my computer alive with the freshness of gratitude towards what is good in this world. I make myself sound like some sort of paragon of virtue; I'm not! Trauma demanded I invested time and energy beyond the enjoyment of such things as a route to staying safe, and resilience has grown as the years went by.

Resilience isn't just about staying safe, it is also about finding one's way back from the knocks of adversity. I got triggered numerous times by the repeated listening to survivor experience. When in trauma distress there is an ancient Buddhist 'linking' practice which I use whenever I feel the rise of fear and it allows the triggered trauma distress to find its way back to grounded stability. 'Linking' uses self-awareness of the distress to be held in the context of the bigger picture of other present moment aspects of experience that are safe (Treleaven, 2018). This I use when teaching students and I employed the technique for myself as I sat at my desk listening and contemplating the appalling and disgusting depravity of some adults against the innocence of children, the ruination of lives and loves and human hearts in favour of selfish pleasures.

Maybe it was this, the enormity of human meanness, that tipped me: I had thought I was doing rather well with managing my resilience, but then I wasn't. Something went under the radar of my awareness and knocked me over. A bad night with an accidental incident reminiscent of other fear filled nights triggered horror and hideous traumatic distress and well and truly 'got me': I succumbed to a bad back. Such small words 'bad back' – anyone who has had one will concur, the pain was indescribable, I have no words. But as the back pain eased and I found a way up from my nest on the sitting room floor, shingles hit. The physical pain of toxins pouring down nerve pathways was one thing but the pain to my ego was possibly equally damning! Me! All these years bouncing back from adversity, all these years teaching others to do the same. The hubris of my former self was not lost on me and came like a self-wielded machete to take out my knees from under me. Why does the inner critic feel the need to step forward just at the time when what we truly need is the loving

mother? What I needed was mother and most possibly a better version than the fallible one real life had given me. Had I got the wrong end of the stick about resilience? It began to feel that way. For me – and in many dictionary definitions, resilience is portrayed as an ability to bounce back from adversity. But this episode helped me to see that there may be an important omission in this conceptualisation: that of time frame. Looking back from the distance of nearly two years I see that I did indeed recover, but there was no bouncing! It was a slow and laborious climb out of despair and discomfort. It took many (many) small yet significant acts of self-love and self-care and self-compassion to move through and beyond. Firstly and maybe most significantly, was to befriend that ugly self-critic and help her see that while she thought she was helping by telling me off for being a flake, she really wasn't. I came to see, pretty quickly, that this part of me (my inner critic) was just as scared as the rest of me, and that her only tune was the well-worn internalised battle cry of my father, "stiffen your upper lip, nose to the grindstone" and in the spirit of the blitz, endure. I wonder if I am alone or if for others too resilience and an ignoring endurance have accidentally been conflated.

Hugging the inner critic and telling her she was also welcome at the board-room table with the many different parts of my internal world, became a crucial act of kindness to myself. Everything in me was showing up – the traumatised child, the rational academic, the spiritual mindfulness teacher, the 50-something-year-old woman who had lived through and survived other disasters. My inner yogi had to learn afresh micro-movements to discovered through all too real 'mistakes' of what was, and what was not, possible in a broken body. Patience. That, it seems to me, is the conjoined twin of resilience. All these parts now had to be listened to and included in the journey back to my desk and the transcripts. It took time. It took the help of family and friends. It took my son-in-law, and daughter, both committed Buddhist practitioners, to remind me of so many other teachings beyond mindfulness which point to freedom from pain. And there were moments (extended moments) that I more than hated. I resented the abuse that laid me open to such a downfall, and I hated the perpetrators that had handed me this path, "but honestly", my rational part would reply while metaphorically hugging my resentful prickly self, "which human do you know who hasn't got ill, had back pain, shingles and worse, much worse; what of your friends who have lived with and died from cancer?". The ancient practice of Tonglen (Chodron, 2003) became a daily friend; the knowing that I was not alone, that out there on this planet others were prostrate in pain, also crying out for help, and also being held in compassion and cared for by loved ones.

I offer this refection to other academics and students working in what has been colloquially labelled "me-search". In choosing our subject aren't we all having our interest ignited and motivated by some part of our own history? And for those working more explicitly in fields drawing on lived experience of our own suffering.

When resilience is heralded as armour plating against adversity it belies the reality of the brilliance of human hearts and minds which can recover with self-compassion, and the gentle touch of care. I am not saying that we do not bear the scars when research touches beyond our academic persona. And these scars can be opened up again and again; I know mine do, but as survivor-researchers we can rise and turn pain into the power needed to make a difference. I am happy to say that I recovered fully, will submit my thesis in the coming year,

and hope to continue to work as a survivor-researcher changing people's understanding of child sex abuse.

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Building Resilience From Adversities: Perspectives From A Final Year International Student

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Abstract

With my doctoral studies coming to an end, I find that a recurring theme of my journey so far is probably resilience. To me, being resilient means that you are able to endure and overcome hardships, which in turn allows for a greater scope for personal growth and development. In this short article, I reflect upon two personal stories as an international student. The first one happened at the early stage of my study, when I struggled to narrow my research topic and plagued with constant self-doubts. The second story came much later after the Covid-19 outbreak. Whilst adapting to this 'new normal', I had to contend with the anxieties of thesis writing coupled with the constant barrage of negative news headlines and homesickness. These were the moments that almost made me give up, but I am glad that I did not. Looking back now, these experiences have taught me to be resilient, especially through tough times. Finally, I would like to tell my fellow PhD students who may be in a similar position to me: you are not alone, do not give up and do seek help if things become too overwhelming. I believe we can all overcome the challenges we are facing now, hang in there and these experiences will in turn build your resilience and serve you well in the future. Just as Friedrich Nietzsche's (1888) famous saying goes, 'what does not kill you makes you stronger'.

Main text

Resilience can mean different things to different people. In the higher education context, although no shared definition of resilience exists, resilience can be seen as 'a dynamic process of positive adaptation in the face of adversity or challenge' (Brewer et al, 2019, p1114). In line with this, from an educational psychology perspective, there are two crucial elements when defining resilience, one is the exposure to severe adversities or threats, and another is the evidence of positive adaptation to these adversities or threats (Toland & Carrigan, 2011). However, I would like to add that successful adaptation also builds an individual's resilience. Therefore, to me, being resilient means that you are able to endure and overcome hardships, which in turn allows for a greater scope for personal growth and development. This reflection piece is based on two personal stories which I considered have shown resilience.

I still remember the sizzling summer a few years ago when I was working non-stop as an English teacher in Nanjing, China. Earlier that year, I had just returned to China after obtaining my master's degree in Northern England. Just like many graduates, it seemed that I was either looking for a job or looking to continue my studies. I tried both. My teaching career started off quickly after I passed my probationary period, but I was getting no luck with PhD applications. However, an email caught my attention in one of those busy days; it was a reminder asking if I am going to accept my PhD offer. The decision did not take long to

make. A month later, I arrived in the UK. Although it is said that international students could be faced with unique challenges such as language barriers, adjustment to the host country's academic expectations and social-cultural integration (Ecochard & Fotheringham, 2017). I was adapting fine thanks to the 'rehearsal' of my master's study experiences in the UK. However, the first couple of months of my doctoral study was less than satisfactory: I was struggling with the work, in particular, narrowing down my research topic. The struggle was most likely coupled with the drastic shift from being a novice teacher to a PhD student. Or perhaps it was the homesickness. At that time, all these adversities made me question myself – Why did I want to do this PhD? Was this a bad decision to return to academia? Would it be better if I stayed in my job and lived in my comfort zone in China? Am I really good enough for this? Emotionally, I found myself feeling lost and in constant self-doubts. Academically, I seemed unable to pin down my research topic which made me worry further about my PhD probation results. However, thankfully I decided not to battle this by myself but talk to my colleagues about my thoughts and worries. It turned out I was not alone, even the change from a teacher to a PhD student is not rare, many people have had working experiences before. After these conversations, I was feeling less stressed and continued to work towards my goal. I eventually bounced back with a refined research proposal way ahead of the deadline and passed my probation review. Now I know it is common for early-stage PhD students to experience the feelings of being 'lost'. If anything, by facing those difficulties, it forced me to make positive adaptations and in turn built my resilience. This was the very first moment of my doctoral study that I made a positive adaptation by communicating with my peers and staying consistent despite facing challenges.

Fast forward to present, the Covid-19 pandemic has greatly impacted our lives in one way or another. Even now, the third year into the pandemic, we are still experiencing its aftermath. As an international student, I have not been able to visit my family back in China since the outbreak. During this time, international students were faced with greater challenges than domestic students due to being far away from their support system (Koo, Yao, & Gong, 2021). What was even worse, the racial discrimination towards Chinese and people of East Asian origin increased globally (Devakumar, Shannon, Bhopal, & Abubakar, 2020). Whilst suffering from loneliness and isolation during lockdowns, I was bombarded with negative news about people who looked like me getting attacked, even in the UK (Gao & Sai, 2021). All of this had a negative impact on my mental health. Meanwhile, my doctoral study entered another important phase - writing up. However, by this point, I was anxious to the point that I often fell behind my writing schedule, which resulted in a vicious cycle of worrying. Although it is said that many PhD students were struggling with mental health problems such as anxiety (Van Der Heijde, Douwes, & Vonk, 2019). I was not aware of how 'ill' I was mentally until much later. Thankfully, I am in a better place after receiving professional help. Although my academic progress is delayed, it does not mean I am bound to 'fail.' Reflecting back, I am glad that I did not give up on my studies even though I was exposed to the challenge of completing my PhD during Covid-19 with my impaired mental health. I made a positive adaptation by seeking professional help for my wellbeing despite the stigma of help-seeking may still exist in today's society. Moreover, the experiences I have gained and the lessons I have learnt from my battles with these difficulties probably helped to build my resilience. If I ever found myself in similar situations again, I would be able to face it with a better mentality.

This was the second moment I have shown resilience as a doctoral student, my positive adaptation made me more confident and resilient.

Lastly, as suggested in the literature, resilience plays a vital role in higher education students' success (Brewer et al, 2019). We doctoral students could be in extra need of resilience building as it is possible for us to encounter all kinds of adversities during the long PhD journey. Through my two personal stories, I showed the moments of me as an international doctoral student being resilient despite facing challenges: one at the beginning of my study and one at the final stage of my study. Even though I experienced these adversities, I made positive adaptations to tackle them. In addition to the two important aspects of resilience Toland and Carrigan (2011) proposed, I further emphasised that the experiences of the achievement of the positive adaption from adversities will in turn help to build your resilience. Moreover, while not everyone in our community as PhD students or researchers would be willing to discuss their mental health publicly, by sharing my own struggles, I hope to raise mental health awareness and make it a reminder to look after your wellbeing. I would also like to uplift my fellow PhD students' spirits, to whom may find themselves in a similar circumstance as me – you are not alone. Remember it is like the famous Friedrich Nietzsche (1888) saying, 'what does not kill you makes you stronger' and I believe these challenges will better equip us with resilience to tackle bigger challenges in the future.

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Against Resilience: Affective Economies, Austerity And The Millennial 'Snowflake'

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Abstract

From personalised workshops in universities to professional training courses in the workplace, emotional and financial resilience is often lauded as an inner superpower we all possess: a latent muscle to be activated, exercised, and strengthened to see us through in difficult times. There is, however, a darker side to the way in which these imaginaries of resilience have been politicised and moralised in the context of austerity in the UK. Drawing upon Sara Ahmed's (2004) theory of affective economies, I use the construction of the figure of the millennial 'snowflake' as a starting point to unpick how this deliberate misrecognition of the notion of financial and emotional resilience serves as a tool to sew division across our society.

After 12 consecutive years of neoliberal welfare cuts, I can safely say, no irony intended, that I have had my fill of austerity. While terms such as deficit, inflation, spending cuts, and reforms have come to shape our national vocabulary, austerity, however, is, of course, not just a numbers game. Beyond the cold, hard figures of our deeply unequal and divided fiscal economy, there are also richly complex, interconnected and concurrent affective economies of austerity that bear paying attention to. Drawing upon Marx's critique of the logic of capital, in which monetary value becomes attached to commodities through circulation and exchange, allowing money to acquire surplus value, Ahmed (2004) argues that in 'affective economies', feelings and emotions become 'stuck' to particular subjects, objects or spaces. Strikingly, Ahmed (2004: 2) argues that, contrary to common sense, emotions are therefore not innate: they do not 'simply belong to individuals […] and come from within and *then* move outwards towards others', but rather are 'social and cultural practices' which are assigned value *through* their circulation between subjects and objects. In affective economies, language is particularly significant as it has the discursive power to socially shape emotions and 'generate effects' through the repeated attachment and circulation of particular words and language embedded within narratives, allowing, for instance, certain subjects to become imbued with negative affect as bad, whilst others are imbued with positive affect as good objects (Ahmed, 2010: 33).

The term 'snowflake' is one such powerful instance of the way in which affective economies operate to shape the political and social resonance of the notion of resilience in the context of austerity. Over the last decade, across the US and the UK, the derogatory slur has become stubbornly stuck to, and synonymous with, millennials. So much so, that in 2016, Collins English Dictionary (CED) made the term one of their 'words of the year', attributing it specifically to 'the young adults of the 2010s', who are 'viewed as being less resilient and more prone to taking offence than previous generations' (CED, 2016). In particular, millennial 'snowflakes' have been derided across popular discourse for lacking the emotional resilience

and financial restraint to rise to traditional markers of adulthood such as homeownership and stable employment.

The highly politicised term 'snowflake' derives its power from the way it operates as a personal attack against the individual and their apparent failings. Cue here countless articles and offerings of advice, often penned by highly wealthy individuals, to millennial 'snowflakes' to stop complaining about the unaffordability of homeownership which would easily be within their reach if they simply stopped buying so much avocado toast (Levin, 2017). Every few months or so, millennials' apparent overspending on a seemingly inconspicuous everyday item is singled out and castigated as the cause for their inability to afford to get on the housing ladder – see most recently, Kirstie Allsopp, the property show presenter, blaming Netflix subscriptions, take-away coffee and gym memberships (Petter, 2022).

This neoliberal framing of a lack of resilience and financial restraint as an individual deficit or failure, however, deliberately ignores the wider structural inequalities and interconnected nexus of precarity that have come to define the fabric of everyday life for young people within the UK. From the aftershocks of the 2007-08 financial crash and subsequent implementation of welfare-shrinking austerity measures to the rising costs of higher education, rent, and homeownership, young people's economic, employment and housing opportunities across the UK, for example, have worsened in comparison to previous generations. In 2008, prior to the financial crash, for example, the average salary for young graduates was £24,000; if it had kept in line with inflation, it would have risen to about £31,500 in 2018: instead, it was £25,500, reflecting a significant drop in real-terms earnings (Coughlan, 2019). While graduate wages have stagnated, living costs have rapidly increased with the average house price in the UK £234,742 (Gov.uk, 2019), almost 10 times higher than the average graduate salary, and almost three times higher than they were at the start of the century (Corfe, 2018:4). These soaring house prices, relative to incomes, has rendered home ownership unaffordable for many young adults without additional help from the 'bank of mum and dad', even amongst those who have been successful in terms of their educational achievements and level of professional occupation (Lindley and McIntosh, 2019).

Figure 1: Example of a popular snowflake meme (Gatollari 2017)

Disturbingly, however, millennial 'snowflakes' are criticised for being 'too emotional' and 'overly moany' when it comes to protesting, or even simply acknowledging, these inequalities. In other words, their apparent lack of resilience is framed as an inability to practise an austerity of feeling: to adopt a stiff, upper lip and to 'put up or shut up'. This reveals the insidious way in which the notion of resilience has been politicised and co-opted as a silencing tool which serves to corral and belittle the lived experiences of the individual. In doing so, however, it also shuts down the opportunity for healthy debate by refusing to acknowledge the very real impact that austerity and precarity has had on young adults.

Affective economies are, of course, made up of multiple interconnected and circulating components. Though I have so far predominantly focused on the figure of the millennial 'snowflake', it is impossible to do so without mentioning their older, and often equally derided, counterparts, the 'Boomers'. Short for Baby Boomers, the term is often used derogatorily and reductively to refer to the post-war generation who benefitted from free university education, lower housing costs and greater employment security. From countless memes to academic literature, the notion of intergenerational conflict centring around the figures of the 'moany' millennial 'snowflake' and the 'greedy Boomer' has garnered considerable coverage (see for instance, *Theft of a Decade: How the Baby Boomers Stole the Millennials' Economic Future* (Sternberg, 2019) and *The Pinch: How the Baby Boomers Took Their Children's Future – And Why They Should Give It Back* (Willets, 2010)).

Affective economies, and in particular, the circulation of hatred, thrive on this vacuum of nuanced debate. Through the pitting against of the figures of the millennial 'snowflake' and the Baby 'Boomer', for example, we can see how affective economies of hatred work 'by sticking figures together', 'a sticking that creates the very effect of a collective' body (Ahmed, 2004:119). In this instance, the repeated negative attachment of greed to older generations and financial and emotional weakness to millennial 'snowflakes' helps to reductively divide and define generations into 'Boomers' vs. millennial 'snowflakes', both shaping and stoking highly pernicious narratives of intergenerational conflict. As Ahmed (2004: 126) argues, affective economies of hatred rely on this continuous flow of affect between these differentiated bodies:

> *'The impossibility of reducing hate to a particular body allows hate to circulate in an economic sense, working to differentiate some others from other others, a differentiation that is never "over," as it awaits for others who have not yet arrived.'*

Beyond the figure of the millennial 'snowflake', these affective economies of hatred linked to the notion of resilience continue to be used insidiously as a vehicle to differentiate bodies and sew division in the wider context of financial precarity across the UK. As the current cost-of-living crisis deepens, for example, we find, time and time again, the most vulnerable being chastised by the wealthy for their alleged lack of resilience in coping. Can't afford to heat your home because of the soaring cost of electricity? Put on an extra jumper or 'do a few star jumps' we're told by energy companies like SSE (Otte, 2022). Unable to feed yourself or your family without turning to foodbanks? Well, it's because you simply don't how to cook and budget properly according to the Conservative MP, Lee Anderson, who recently claimed it is possible to cook nutritious meals for 30p (Walker, 2022).

This bitter rhetoric, worn stale through years of repetition, attempts to plaster over the ever-deepening inequality that is the growing gulf between wealthy and poor by instead seeking to divide us into those who are apparently smarter, savvier, and simply hardier and those who are both weak and weak-willed. As we saw earlier with unravelling the construction of the figure of the millennial 'snowflake', this positioning of a lack of resilience as a moral failing of the individual serves to deflect attention from the cruelty of politically induced poverty caused by years of austerity. At the same time, however, it also sheds light on the glaring absence of kindness and empathy from those in power in response to the everyday challenges faced by the most vulnerable in our society. Recognising and challenging these problematic and popular narratives attached to the notion of resilience, however, paves the way for us to move away from the divisive economies of hatred fostered by influential figures across politics and the media towards the adoption of kinder economies of care, compassion and empathy.

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