THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

"What if you don't feel 'disadvantaged' and you're being called that?": **an exploration of young people's perspectives on the 'disadvantaged' label in an English secondary school.**

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Abstract

In education policy, the term 'disadvantaged' is used to label young people who face socio-economic inequity and thus, in schools where policy is enacted. This thesis argues that the 'disadvantaged' label is problematic as it implies that young people are the *problem to be fixed* in an otherwise well-functioning education system and fails to acknowledge the role wider social inequalities play in their socio-economic disadvancement – a construct and alternative term to 'disadvantaged' that the thesis proposes to use as a lens through which to view the reality of the setbacks young people face. Using a socially critical approach, the study seeks to develop understandings of how being labelled in education policy as 'disadvantaged' is perceived by the young people who are labelled as such. Based on qualitative research in an English secondary school utilising semi-structured interviews and participatory tools, this study explores how the 'disadvantaged' label is understood from the perspectives of young people who are very often the subjects of 'disadvantaged' policy rather than valued agents. The voices of the young people involved offer important insights into how the 'disadvantaged' label may confer shame and stigma on to them, including implying that they are to blame for their own marginalisation through deficit narratives. The study proposes that opportunities should be created for young people to have agency in how they are described and also offers understanding on the implications the 'disadvantaged' label has for schools that are enacting policy.

Key words: disadvantaged, young people, education policy, shame, stigma, agency

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. Background and context

In the UK, like many other countries, the field of education has been increasingly exposed to neoliberal governance (Davies and Bansel, 2007; Ball, 2012; Baltodano, 2012; Hastings, 2019). Neoliberalism seeks to frame the purpose of education in investment terms made in the development of human capital, as education is valued as relative to young people's prospects for future earnings. This narrowed view challenges the purpose of education and the relationship between schools, democracy, and government (Hastings, 2019).

Since the 1980s, successive governments have endeavoured to calibrate the public sector with private sector principles to reduce waste and ineffectiveness in society. This has resulted in educational strategy and policy being underpinned by a neoliberal agenda that measures success through the mantras of efficiency, performance and standards (Adams, 2016). Education has recently become driven by competition and accountability, with educational output quantified by performance objectives that are centrally monitored (Greany and Higham, 2018; Holloway and Brass, 2018; Fan and Liang, 2020). Current educational policy interprets educational advancement in politically driven ways with statistical methods and measures determining performance (Adams, 2016). Students' attainment is judged against national examinations; teacher performance is judged against appraisal mechanisms and examination results; institutions are judged by schools' inspectorates; and nations are judged by ranking systems such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD)'s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA[1]) (Stewart, 2015; Adams, 2016; Taylor, 2016; Leckie and Goldstein, 2017).

1.1.1. The attainment gap

Within this arena that is focused on young people's academic performance, there exists a gap in attainment that is widely accepted as based on the socio-economic background of students, namely between those from 'disadvantaged' backgrounds and their non-'disadvantaged' peers (Cooper and Stewart, 2017; Treanor, 2017; Crenna-Jennings, 2018;

[1] The PISA ranking measures 15-year-olds' ability to use their reading, mathematics and science knowledge and skills.

Jerrim et al., 2018). Educational research has reported that, worldwide, young people who face socio-economic 'disadvantage' are less likely than average to engage with education (Harwell and LeBeau, 2010). The UK education system in particular has one of the steepest socio-economic gradients among economically developed countries (OECD, 2018). Educational inequalities appear as soon as children begin their Early Years Foundation Stage education at age three and continue to widen as young people grow up (Clegg et al., 2017). The achievement gap is commonly considered to widen during young people's secondary phase experience and how this can be reversed remains an inconclusive area of research (Clifton and Cook, 2012; Hirsch and Darton, 2016).

On average, the reading skills of young people who come from 'disadvantaged' backgrounds are more than two years behind those from non-'disadvantaged' families, a gap twice as wide as in similarly developed countries (Crenna-Jennings, 2018). Furthermore, young people from non-'disadvantaged' backgrounds are 1.63 times more likely to achieve a Grade 5 at GCSE[2] - equivalent to the pre-2017 Grade C and a requirement for many further education courses (Burgess and Thompson, 2019). Also, there is a significant socio-economic difference in access to post-secondary education in England (Jerrim et al., 2015). Much research reveals that educational inequity among young people continues into adulthood and, in turn, affects the educational opportunities and outcomes of their own children (Blanden and Gibbons, 2006; Cassen and Kingdon, 2007; Horgan, 2007; Hirsch and Darton, 2016).

1.1.2. Fixing the problem

A neoliberal model assumes a transformation in the relationship between education and social justice, through the belief that all can succeed regardless of sociocultural contexts given access to quality education (Brown and Lauder, 2006). Rather than adopting an approach to educational inequalities that is critical of the overarching system, there is a tendency for neoliberal ideology to assert that young people from non-'disadvantaged' backgrounds no longer have an unfair advantage because education has become "dedicated to raising the standards of all" (Brown and Lauder, 2006: 28). In an attempt to raise standards, young people

[2] The General Certificate of Secondary Education is the main academic qualification undertaken to assess young people at the end of the secondary phase. GCSEs are generally required to pursue A-Levels or BTEC Extended Diplomas beyond the age of 16. This qualification is also used to measure the exam performance of schools in national league tables.

from 'disadvantaged' backgrounds are seen as a *problem to be fixed*. Thus, there is an inherent notion from policy makers in the UK that the education system itself is functioning well and the glitch in this otherwise benevolent system is young people who are labelled 'disadvantaged' (Raffo et al., 2007). This leads to an array of policy initiatives that aim to *fix the problem* by creating interventions aimed at addressing weak links but without offering any systemic change to the current education model. Improving the educational attainment of young people who are labelled 'disadvantaged' becomes the focus of initiatives.

The past three decades have witnessed a host of political agendas and initiatives that have aimed to address the problem of socio-economic educational 'disadvantage'. Post-Thatcher, Conservative Party leader John Major spoke of a 'classless society' where everyone respects achievement and promotion regardless of background and where each person's contribution is valued (Major, 1991). This ideology was driven in education as "a return to basics", where the "key subjects are studied properly" (Major, 1991: par. 42) and where parents are held responsible for their children's actions (Major, 1991: par. 40). Subsequently, in 1998, Education Secretary David Blunkett introduced literacy and numeracy hours where children would spend specified periods of time developing their reading, writing and maths abilities with the aim to improve standards across all schools and all pupils. With Tony Blair's mantra of 'Education, education, education!', Labour believed literacy and numeracy hours were key to the emancipation of young people and to attaining an income that supplied a decent standard of living. In 2004, the EMA (Education Maintenance Allowance) was introduced to encourage young people to stay in education. In 2010, under David Cameron's Conservative leadership, Education Secretary Michael Gove drove the notion of an "aspiration nation", steering education to focus on social mobility, blaming the idea of "lack of aspiration" as the explanation for the persisting gap in educational outcomes for young people from different socio-economic backgrounds (Gove, 2013: para. 14). Despite the many agendas and strategies proposed over the last 30 years however, the gap between those who are SED and their non-'disadvantaged' peers fails to be narrowed.

Arguably the most prominent initiative aimed to narrow the socio-economic attainment gap, however, was the allocation of the Pupil Premium (PP) fund which provides additional funding for young people referred to as 'disadvantaged', building upon the existing Free School Meals

(FSM) initiative[3] (Department for Education (DfE), 2018). The PP fund is designed to be used by schools to offer targeted interventions that raise the attainment of young people who are labelled 'disadvantaged', with schools being accountable for their efficacy. In looking to fix problems in a way that targets individuals rather than the system, the PP fund locates young people themselves as the issue and the attainment gap problem situated as something that is lacking in them and that may be compensated for by interventions (Reay, 2017a).

1.1.3. Compensatory education

Addressing the 'disadvantage' gap in education through compensatory terms is modelled on assumptions that socio-economic 'disadvantage' is often the result of the cultural deficits of people in the lowest tiers of society. Policy asserts the notion that they must strive to get out of their situation, rather than question a system that allows socio-economic deprivation to exist (Lawler, 2005). A compensatory education model has been an unwavering pattern of policy direction spanning at least the last four decades, despite critics claiming that it cannot compensate for wider social and economic inequalities (Bernstein, 1970; Reay, 2017b). However, recently policy has narrowed its focus much further down to pinpoint young people as the site of the intervention, with their familial and cultural backgrounds deemed the reason for their deficits, without any focus or understanding of the wider causes of socio-economic inequality. The New Labour government proposed that, at least through policy, issues around socio-economic 'disadvantage' and educational achievement were to be tackled at community and parental level with the rebranded 'Department of Children, Schools and Families' (DCSF) (Whitty and Anders, 2014), and similarly, Gove's aforementioned 2010 drive for an aspiration nation and greater social mobility suggested that a lack of innate aspiration was holding young people from 'disadvantaged' backgrounds back.

More recently, this can be evidenced by the recent OfSTED[4] focus on cultural capital which requires schools to provide "the essential knowledge that children need to be educated citizens" (OfSTED, 2019: 31). Schools are required to evidence and quantify how they are

[3] Children and young people are entitled to free school meals if they are from a low-income family and/or their parents are entitled to certain benefits. For eligible children, the government contributes £2.30 per day to schools to cover the expenses of their meals.

[4] OfSTED is the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills. The inspectorate reviews services providing education and skills for learners of all ages, including services that care for children and young people.

plugging gaps in young people's cultural capital, due to the belief that cultural capital is lacking in those who are labelled 'disadvantaged' (OfSTED, 2019). It is important to note that OfSTED use the term cultural capital here to imply there is only one type of cultural capital and that those who are 'disadvantaged' simply do not possess any at all or are lacking the right type, echoing the way schools have often valorised middle rather than working-class values (Bourdieu, 1977; Lawler, 2005). Here can be seen an example of a framework that accepts, rather than critiques, a system that undervalues some young people's backgrounds and cultures and positions them as in need of cultural compensation. A problematic outcome of such policy-making that targets its interventions at young people and their deficiencies (implying they are intrinsically lacking what it means to perform educationally) is that it locates young people themselves as the subject of policy to be *fixed*. Furthermore, there is very little, if any, evidence of young people having any involvement in the policymaking they are so deeply rooted within even in tokenistic terms and instead, labels such as 'disadvantaged' are applied to them without critique. These concerns, alongside the construct of cultural capital will be discussed further in the literature review of Chapter 2, where Bourdieu's concepts of social capital and habitus will also be explored.

1.2. Professional background and context

As a secondary phase English teacher of twelve years with both classroom and leadership experience across three inner-city schools, policy decisions designed to address the attainment gap have become increasingly problematic. This has led to me feeling somewhat distanced from a profession that is becoming less and less questioning of 'political' changes and agendas. A passion for inclusion prompted me to pursue a teaching career and has remained at the fore of my practice, choosing to work in comprehensive secondary schools with young people from a variety of social and ethnic backgrounds. Seeking to provide educational equality for a diverse range of learners led me to complete a Masters in Teaching and Learning as a newly-qualified teacher in 2009, conducting qualitative research studies with young people who speak English as an additional language and completing a dissertation with young people who are Travellers on their experiences of secondary school.

1.2.1. Policy into practice

However, tensions arose when I felt that my world views on education were being increasingly challenged by policy decisions that I was required to translate into practice at the direct interface with young people. Specifically, the implications surrounding the Pupil Premium (PP) fund initiative, whereby young people labelled as 'disadvantaged' are themselves the focus and yet so seemingly absent from the policy, became an area of interest. 'Disadvantaged' policy brought implications for my everyday practice as a teacher in that I was required to change my expectations and interactions with young people, which in turn I felt increasingly impacted upon their school experiences. I had rising concerns that 'disadvantaged' policy not only impacted upon how young people were perceived by policy makers (as problems to be fixed) but how teachers were also being expected to view them through these narrowed lines. 'Disadvantaged' policy that focused so much on additional academic interventions, raising exam performance and evidencing progress due to the rise in accountability meant that learning was becoming increasingly standardised, systematic and exam-focused, regardless of the abilities or additional education needs of young people.

1.2.2. Labelling young people as 'disadvantaged'

A major source of unease was the labelling of young people as 'disadvantaged' which became the preferred label with which to categorise those who were eligible for PP funding in policy from the coalition government in 2013 onwards. Originally, it appeared synonymously alongside the PP label but began to dominate and, in some cases, replace the PP label entirely in some policy and school documents. The label 'disadvantaged' was rapidly becoming the new buzzword, as *performance* had been in neoliberal perspectives on education, and its prevalence in education policy meant that it became entrenched in school practice and parlance (Adams, 2016).

It was problematic to me that school professionals were increasingly accepting of unannounced and unexplained terminology shifts in policy and were also expected to adopt these labels to refer to the young people in their care. Not only was the label being accepted into school lexicon but the connotations of the 'disadvantaged' label were not being critiqued. It became clear that the language used within 'disadvantaged' policy served to "actively

construct the world" to which it belonged and, in doing so, portray young people in an unfavourable light (Adams, 2016: 301).

'Disadvantaged' is currently used, in both policy and in practice, as a proper noun to imply that young people themselves are 'disadvantaged', as opposed to my understanding of them being unfairly hindered by wider social and economic circumstances. While I already felt tensions about the 'disadvantaged' label being used to ascribe deficit to young people in policy, further tensions arose when I was expected to refer to them as 'disadvantaged' in professional conversations. I already had reservations about referring to young people solely as 'students' or 'pupils' as these terms seemed to perpetuate the neoliberal ideals of performance and progress, whereas, to me, young people are more than exam performers and qualification gainers. Thus, to refer to them as 'disadvantaged' was unethical and against my philosophical worldview. This disparity between my own view and policy's view of young people made it clear that policy, schools and teachers' perspectives were discordant. I was concerned that label shifts in policy alluded to deeper political motives and in seeking out research on policy labels such as 'disadvantaged', it became evident that this issue was not being investigated. The way in which PP funding was being spent in my school and its exclusion of some cohorts of young people who were entitled to it further added to my concerns.

1.2.3. *Easy wins*

A particular initiative that was implemented in my school using PP funding that highlights the narrowing of education to solely academic performance involved interventions targeted at young people who were labelled 'disadvantaged' and had the potential to achieve a Grade C or what is now a Grade 4 "Standard Pass" at GCSE (OfQUAL, 2019). Schools are measured on how many young people achieve Grade 4 and above in English, Mathematics and three other GCSE qualifications or equivalent, with a particular focus on how many are 'disadvantaged'. Whereas young people can select the remaining three qualifications to suit their interests and abilities, it is mandatory to complete an English and a Mathematics qualification. Thus, the young people outlined above were taken out of subjects such as Physical Education or Personal, Social, Health and Economic education (PSHE) to complete an extra hour of English

and Mathematics intervention each week in order to strengthen their chances of securing a Grade 4 at GCSE.

Not only did this raise issues concerning students missing out on physical, social and emotional education and highlight the narrowing of education to place more emphasis on academic subjects but often also resulted in young people resenting being forced to complete more academic study which impacted negatively on their educational experience and relationships with teachers. Furthermore, the ethical implications of spending PP funding on young people who would count towards school performance figures but not on those who were 'disadvantaged' and might achieve a Grade 2 or 3 at GCSE in English and Mathematics were glaringly obvious. Money was being funnelled into interventions that excluded large numbers of young people who were labelled 'disadvantaged' that were eligible for funding but not deemed eligible for academic interventions. This was by no means unique to the school I was working in. Schools nationwide are compelled to improve their headline figures and so are drawn into acts of collusion whereby they *game* the education system through interventions that focus on young people who can be converted academically to count towards league table measures (Carr, 2019). As an example of this *gaming* the system, such young people are labelled informally as *easy wins* within the secondary school in which I work because these students can be converted to Grade 4s and count within the school's attainment measures and thus quantify the efficacy of how PP funding is used. This informal label, alongside the more official policy term 'disadvantaged', fuelled my motives to question the way policy was forcing schools and teachers to pigeon-hole young people and refer to them in such crude, academic ways due to the pressures of performance. The measures taken by schools to obsess over *easy win* students come as a consequence of the neoliberal drive and marketization in education as seen in the prominence of league tables (Mansell, 2007). Such narrowed interventions have become widespread practice now that schools are expected to show evidence of improved academic performance (Power, 2018).

As seen through the informal term *easy wins*, in my experience as a teacher, young people were being increasingly reduced to data and featuring as abstract notions within schools. Young people are often referred to in schools as cohorts rather than individuals

("disadvantaged", "EAL", "SEN", "LAC"[5] (DfE, 2018)), with groups pitted against each other to ascertain headline performance figures. Thus, young people are viewed in a manner that decontextualises them from their situations, experiences and anything positive associated with their lives.

1.2.4. Young people's lack of agency

Importantly, the prevalence of the 'disadvantaged' label in policy and school settings raised concerns that the young people being labelled had a complete lack of agency in their portrayal and representation within education. This echoed concerns in the literature that the lived experiences of young people were not called upon to identify sources of knowledge and learning that can serve as rich resources within the formal educational setting (Morrow, 2009; Bucknall, 2010; Robinson, 2014). Young people's homogenisation is something they have no control over and their passivity in how they are labelled and what is insinuated by those labels was troubling for me. Young people are rarely, if ever, consulted on their portrayal in policy despite being arguably more informed about school experiences than many adults who are involved in policy debates about education (Chamberlain et al., 2011). Furthermore, the drive for performance and attainment has also led schools to undervalue the voices of young people (Robinson, 2014). Despite their voices being missing from policy development and its enactment, professional conversations with young people that stemmed from the teaching of literature texts that require an understanding of socio-economic context suggested to me that they are highly aware of current socio-economic disparity and how certain groups of society are labelled and subsequently, portrayed as lesser. Years of classroom discussion with young people, alongside a pilot study in 2016 conducted during my EdD study which corroborated my professional understanding of their knowledge, awareness and willingness to share experiences around the labelling of social groups, confirmed the need to complete this educational doctorate.

1.3. An alternative to the 'disadvantaged' label

Given this thesis aims to critique terminology that labels young people, it is important to outline the reasoning behind how young people are referred to throughout it. The regular

[5] English as an Additional Language, Special Education Needs, Looked After Children.

discursive positioning of those who are labelled 'disadvantaged' as outside the notion of an idealised student is problematic and so, arriving at an appropriate term for young people is more than simply an issue of semantics (Youdell, 2006; Jones et al., 2020).

1.4.2. Framing the thesis through the lens of disadvancement

It is acknowledged that any label attributed to young people by an adult in power is open to critique and poses a threat to their identity and even labels that have apparently good intentions may intensify the *othering* of young people (Connelly, 2017). Therefore, it is pertinent to outline how young people in this study will be referred to. Because semantics and the power labels can hold are recognised as crucial constructs in the way young people are represented in 'disadvantaged' policy, the thesis proposes the use of an alternative term to refer to young people that are labelled 'disadvantaged'.

It is recognised that academics and practitioners often struggle with the appropriate terminology to use when referring to young people and run the risk of further excluded them by too often replicating the phraseology of government through terms such as 'disadvantaged' or 'marginalised'. The thesis proposes that there is a need for alternative terms to refer to young people who are labelled 'disadvantaged' in education policy that highlights the inequity young people face at the hands of governments' who allow socio-economic barriers to exist. Thus, the thesis offers an alternative term, *disadvancement*, as a construct that is arguably more representative of the true situation young people find themselves in. The term disadvancement is proposed as an alternative and more fitting term because it has clear distinctions to the term 'disadvantaged' due to the fact that it emphasises the injustices and setbacks young people face, rather than insinuating they personally exhibit innate 'disadvantages'. Not only will the term socio-economically disadvanced (SED) be used as an alternative label, but the notion of disadvancement as a construct will be utilised as a lens through which to explore young people's understanding of their oppression by society through the connotations and implications of the 'disadvantaged' label during the findings and discussion chapters.

When young people are referred to in relation to their socio-economic status but not as policy would have them seen as personally 'disadvantaged', the study will refer to them as young people who are socio-economically disadvanced. The verb disadvanced originates from the

French “desavancier” meaning to stop or cause to stop advancing (Collins English Dictionary, 2020) and is a more appropriate lexical choice for this thesis as it supports the notion that young people are *held back* by their socio-economic status as a consequence of social injustice. A main argument of this study is that the policy term ‘disadvantaged’ insinuates that young people’s socio-economic struggles are a self-made product of “having the wrong attitudes and doing the wrong things” (Reay, 2017a: 24). Government rhetoric almost always implies that young people who are socio-economically disadvanced (SED) are accountable for their own marginalisation (Heath et al., 2013). Despite social critics in the academy arguing that such attitudes have nothing to do with the “intrinsic qualities of people themselves and everything to do with the consequences of their circumstances” (Reay, 2017a: 197), education policy is seemingly quick to place onus on deficient families and this study posits that the label ‘disadvantaged’ perpetuates this because it implies a deficit: a lack of advantage. It is implicit that the ‘disadvantage’ is inherent in the young person.

While discussion of the label ‘disadvantaged’ is central to the study, its use here must be differentiated from its use in policy. This study is critical of the current policy use of ‘disadvantaged’ as a proper noun that implies the ‘disadvantage’ belongs to the young people themselves. When the study references young people who are referred to as ‘disadvantaged’ as a policy label, ‘disadvantaged’ will be written in inverted commas to acknowledge that this study rejects the notion that young people are themselves to blame for their ‘disadvantage’ (Reay, 2017a). This is not to say, however, that the term ‘disadvantaged’ is used as a solely negatively loaded term in education policy but rather it is ambiguous in its use and meaning. It is important to note that, while some academics use terms such as ‘socio-economically disadvantaged’, most tend to use it in the sense that society disadvantages them (Jerrim et al., 2018). The use of the term ‘disadvantaged’ as contested here refers only to its use in policy. As previously argued, in policy, the tone of ‘disadvantaged’ is one of personal deficit to be solved through compensatory education, rather than redesigning the system that is *disadvantaging* young people. Thus, throughout this thesis, the term socio-economically disadvanced (SED) is used to refer to young people who are held back by government socio-economic shortcomings in wider society regarding distribution of resources, opportunities, and benefits (Pirrie and Hockings, 2012). For the purposes of clarity, socio-economically disadvanced will be abbreviated to SED to aid fluidity and readability of the study henceforth.

1.4.1. Person first, consequence second

Debates around the most appropriate and empowering ways in which to label individuals have been ongoing across the past two decades, across a range of fields. Arriving at an appropriate term to refer to young people throughout this study was shaped by Rix's (2006) paper *Does it matter what we call them?* in which he argues that an appropriate term of address for a marginalised group (in his research, people with learning difficulties) must recognise them as people before anything else. Furthermore, organisations such as People First, with the slogan "we are people first, learning difficulties second", emphasise that there are consequences to labels that locate the difficulty as within the individual (People First, 1994). Similarly, there has also been a recent shift to centre young people within the care system in the labels used to define them. TACT Fostering and Adoption charity (2019) argue that the current label "looked after children" (LAC) should be changed to "children looked after" (CLA), in order to emphasise first and foremost that they are children and that their circumstances should not define them (TACT, 2019; Mannay et al., 2017).

Such calls for placing the person first and the consequence second emphasise the view that the 'disadvantage' is not part of the person but is a consequence of their socially constructed surroundings (Rix, 2006). Hence, as Rix (2006) sees learning difficulty as a consequence of social and economic barriers, so too does this study view young people's socio-economic 'disadvantage' as a consequence of social and economic barriers. Thus, this study claims that the current usage of the 'disadvantaged' label as used to precede young people in education policy ("disadvantaged children", "disadvantaged families" (DfE, 2019a)) helps to promote a deficit narrative and subsequent "blame and shame" culture (Knox, 2014: 1).

Also, due to the age of young people ranging from 11 to 16 years, the term *young people* was favoured over the term *children*, as this was felt to perhaps not accurately reflect those who spoke so eloquently in complex discussions about policy labelling and the stigma associated with it, as illustrated through young people's responses within the findings of Chapter 4. Furthermore, as the study intends to focus on the educational experiences of a case-specific group of young people who are labelled 'disadvantaged', from this point forward they will be referred to as *young people* when being referred to as the specific group, though it is not the

intention to generalise to all young people. Where the study refers to other groups of young people who sit outside this study, this distinction will be made clear.

1.4.3. Additional terminology

There is much literature that features young people who are labelled 'disadvantaged' and this group are often subsumed into studies using different terminology. Alongside the term 'disadvantaged' are a host of other terms that are used interchangeably, though do not always carry the same meaning or intentions. Terms such as working-class, lower class and deprived have been used in the literature to refer to young people who are at the centre of this study (Reay, 2001; 2005; 2017a; 2017b; Burgess and Thompson, 2019; Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF), 2019). Class in particular is a common term that is used in reference to young people who are labelled 'disadvantaged'. Although this study is not specifically about class as a concept, this is a term that is often used synonymously with terms such as 'disadvantage' in discussions around socio-economic status, labelling and grouping. Literature on class is both widely conceptualised and contested (Lawler, 2005; Archer et al., 2007; Reay et al., 2011; Reay, 2012; 2017a; 2017b) and it is not the intention of this study to explore this in detail here, nor to refer to the young people in this study in class terms per se. This study refers to a particular group of young people (as labelled as 'disadvantaged' in policy) and while many academics would place this group under the working-class label, it is argued that terms such as working class and lower class are too broad to use for the specific group of young people referred to here. However, class as both an important related concept and widely used label mean that the term both features in the literature review and in the wider narratives of the young people.

1.4. Aims of the study and research questions

The tensions described above prompted the conception of this professional doctorate as it became apparent that young people were not being consulted on the perception of their 'disadvantage' as asserted in policy. The focus of the project was therefore to add to the understanding of how the 'disadvantaged' label used within policy is perceived from the perspectives of young people themselves, who are simultaneously the subject of the policy but who are the missing voice within policy and policy enactment within schools.

1.3.1. Aims of the study

A great deal of effort has been concentrated on highlighting the devastating and wide-ranging impacts of socio-economic disadvancement on young people's educational experiences (Cassen and Kingdon, 2007; Gregg et al., 2010; Gorard, 2014). The attainment gap between young people who are labelled as 'disadvantaged' and their non-'disadvantaged' peers has been the source of significant attention in policy, schools, and in wider society (Cummings et al., 2012; OECD, 2016; Andrews et al., 2017; Department for Education (DfE), 2019a; OfSTED, 2019). However, little systematic attention has been paid to exploring the 'disadvantaged' label used to categorise such young people in policy and school initiatives. Specifically, what is missing is an understanding of the connotations and implications of the 'disadvantaged' label from the young people who are labelled as such. Exploring what being labelled 'disadvantaged' means to young people in a UK secondary school and finding out how they conceptualise and experience the 'disadvantaged' label in their daily lives is sought through this study. Largely, current knowledge about the 'disadvantaged' label is for the most part limited to adult perspectives of what it means to be 'disadvantaged', and adult reports of how young people experience it. The debate tends to be dominated by adults who are often far-removed from contemporary classroom experiences (Chamberlain et al., 2011).

The study's primary aim is therefore to understand the perceptions and experiences of young people who are themselves labelled 'disadvantaged' in terms of their understanding of the complex issues of labelling in policy and its implications in their lived realities. While research on young people who are socio-economically disadvanced exists (Connelly et al., 2014; Andrews et al., 2017; Reay, 2017a; 2017b; Ball, 2018; Crenna-Jennings, 2018; Jerrim et al., 2018; Ivinson and Thompson, 2020), their labelling as 'disadvantaged' in recent education policy has not been critiqued. Furthermore, such studies are often either centred on adults speaking on behalf of young people or evade frank discussions with young people to *protect them* from potentially sensitive exposure to their othering within policy (Morrow, 2009). Thus, this study seeks to address the absence of young people's experiences and perceptions from policy discussions due to adult assumptions of their inability to talk about sensitive and complex topics (Howe and Covell, 2005; Bucknall, 2010).

1.3.2. Research questions

Given the study's underpinning context, focus and aims, the main research question is:

> How do young people who are labelled in education policy as 'disadvantaged' feel about the 'disadvantaged' label?

In order to explore this central question, the study asks the following secondary research questions:

1. What are young people's perceptions of the 'disadvantaged' label?
2. What are the implications of being labelled 'disadvantaged' according to young people?
3. How do the perceptions of policy and young people differ with regards to the 'disadvantaged' label?

The research questions are considered from the perspective that labels might seem arbitrary and descriptive but are implicitly used to either assert or mask reality depending on who utilises the label and on whom it is placed (Rix, 2006). Further exploration of how labels must be acknowledged within context forms part of the literature review in Chapter 2. This study seeks to explore the implications of the label 'disadvantaged' from the perspective of young people who are themselves labelled 'disadvantaged'; the connotations and perceptions this term connotes for those who bear this label; and how they perceive their socio-economic disadvancement.

1.3.3. Conceptually framing the research

The study approaches the issue of educational inequality and 'disadvantage' from a perspective that is critical of quantitative research that dominates the education field that is directly related to delivering outcomes. This prevailing approach overshadows child-centred studies, as quantifiable data gathering at a macro level is seen as preferable and such studies are more likely to influence national strategy (Raffo et al., 2007). This thesis is cautious of studies which call for interventions that merely act as sticking plaster solutions, rather than propose an overhaul of a system that is designed to accept social injustice. Such an approach

offers little for a study such as this which attempts to unpick what is accepted rather than accept the status quo and would threaten to mask the reality of what it means to be labelled 'disadvantaged' (Gewirtz, 2000).

Rather, the study favours an approach to research that brings to the fore the voices of young people who are labelled 'disadvantaged'. The strength of such an approach is that it contests educational strategies that reproduce inequality (Collins, 2009). Instead, a socially critical approach seeks to address the endemic causes of an ineffectual system (Raffo et al., 2007). This study adopts an approach that refuses to accept that there is merely a defect in the existing education framework and instead questions existing power structures and seeks evidence that contributes to making significant changes to a flawed system (Humphrey, 2013). The study aims to offer school leaders and classroom practitioners an understanding of socio-economic disadvancement built upon young people's own perceptions and experiences. The research aims not to govern the reality of young people and provide a single truth from a position of power but to expose the realities of those who are labelled 'disadvantaged' as underpinned by an interpretative, socially critical paradigm (Cohen et al., 2017).

1.5. Summary and roadmap of subsequent chapters

The rationale for this study came from professional experiences of having to implement 'disadvantaged' policy into practice and also in professional interactions with young people who are directly affected by government guidance on how best to narrow the educational attainment gap. It became clear that although socially critical approaches to research are undervalued by governments who fail to engage with research that critiques policy labels, young people are very much aware of socio-economic labelling and stigmatisation but have no platform to voice their perceptions and experiences. Knowing that the young people I have worked with have strong views on a topic previously unexplored in depth with them, this study aims to fill some of the gaps in literature in providing a safe and ethically robust platform for them to voice their perspectives on the experiences of young people like themselves being labelled as 'disadvantaged'.

To achieve such aims, the study takes the form of a case study in an English secondary school. It focuses on a sample of young people from Years 7 and 11 (ages 11-12 and 15-16) who are labelled 'disadvantaged' in the school context and through semi-structured group and individual interviews using a range of participatory tools, their perceptions and experiences are explored.

1.5.1. Roadmap

This introduction has situated the study in the wider context around educational 'disadvantage' and outlined the professional perspectives and rationale for the focus of this professional doctorate in education. The remainder of the thesis comprises a further five chapters.

The following chapter, a literature review, is divided into three main sections. The first section examines educational 'disadvantage' at the macro level, specifically policy that is focused upon raising attainment and aimed directly at young people who are SED. It takes a view of policymaking and the research upon which it draws as being located within a functionalist paradigm. This perspective appears to consider the education system itself as being unproblematic, and instead attributes 'disadvantage' to young people themselves. This section also considers an alternative perspective to educational 'disadvantage' that is socially critical of a system that allows young people to be SED and it is at this socially critical level that this study positions itself. The next section focuses on educational 'disadvantage' at the meso level, where policy, schools and teachers, and young people are expected to engage. Here, the section focuses on the enactment of policy and its implications. The final section of this chapter looks at the micro level of how 'disadvantaged' policy impacts upon the young people it speaks about (rather than for). Chapter 3 is focused on methodology and research design where the philosophical underpinnings and approach of the study are detailed and the research process documented. Chapter 4 then moves on to present the voices of the young people, exploring their perceptions and experiences as revealed through their interview responses, having utilised the labels and literature uncovered in the previous chapter to explore their perceptions. This chapter is structured under two key themes that emerged from the analysis of young people's voices: views on labels and implications of labelling, with subsequent sub-themes discussed within each. Chapter 5 discusses what the young people's

voices can contribute to understandings of the use of the 'disadvantaged' label in policy and practice. It also revisits the frameworks of functionalist and socially critical perspectives in light of the perceptions of young people. Finally, Chapter 6 is a summary and conclusion chapter that, in drawing together the findings considering the research questions, explicitly highlights the contribution to knowledge of the study and makes recommendations for policy and practice. This chapter also highlights reflections on the research process, including limitations and further areas for research.

Chapter 2. 'Disadvantaged' educational theory and philosophy: a review of the literature

The purpose of this chapter is to situate the thesis in the wider context of existing literature by first highlighting a critique of problematic areas (and gaps) and then moving towards an underpinning conceptual framework. The chapter is divided into three main sections. Firstly, the chapter begins with a critique of the overarching philosophical differences in viewing the UK education system and the perspectives that dominate discourses in educational policy and research. This section examines educational 'disadvantage' at the macro level, specifically policy that is focused upon raising attainment and aimed directly at young people who are SED. The section establishes current UK education policymaking and the research upon which it draws as adopting a functionalist perspective. The chapter then reviews an alternative perspective to research on educational 'disadvantage' that is socially critical of a system that allows young people to be SED. This section focuses on how policy and research engage at the meso level, within schools and by teachers and leaders. Finally, the chapter focuses on the impacts of such policy and research at the micro level: how it impacts upon the young people who are labelled in policy and who are absent from discussions around how they are referred to and spoken for. It is at this micro, socially critical level that this study positions itself.

2.1. Functionalist framings of education

Education has often been viewed as essentially an optimistic endeavour through its aspirations for progress and upward mobility. For many, it connotes a means of achieving greater equality where young people can develop according to their individual needs and develop their potential (Musgrave, 2017; Robinson, 2017). However, sociological studies have shown how schooling patterns reflect, rather than challenge, socio-economic stratification and the idea of education as an intrinsically *good* has been contested (Morrison, 2006; Bessant and Watts, 2007; Brown, 2018).

The systematic sociology of education is largely attributed to the work of Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) who, alongside Max Weber (1864–1920), adopted a functionalist belief that society seeks social equilibrium and order. Often depicted through the allegory in which

society can be viewed as a human body, education acts as an important organ that, with other institutions, keep society operational (Parsons, 1961). Within a functionalist framework, it is thought that social order is assured when people accept the norms and values of their society, therefore an important aim of education is to socialise young people in these values which works towards their *betterment* (Reay, 2017a). Students learn these values because education replicates society in miniature; their behaviours at school are regulated until they gradually internalise and accept them (Davies, 2020).

A surge in functionalist approaches to education arose in post-war Britain, with sociologists such as Davis and Moore (1945) claiming that unequal outcomes for young people were functionally necessary to maintain a complex division of labour. This meritocratic view posits that schools must sort those who will occupy higher ranking jobs from those who will carry out lower paid work, resulting in any inequality in wealth as justified (Munro, 1998). Parsons (1961) believed that identifying some students as educational failures was necessary (Davies, 2020). Thus, the structural functionalist perspective contentiously maintained that this social order and continuum of inequality is what most people desired because there is a tacit sense that meritocracy is fair. In bringing such division into education, social inequalities were disguised because it appeared the divisions came from education itself, rather than simply reproducing them. Explicit reference to socio-economic differences, therefore, remained minimal as the belief in a meritocracy attempted to blur social boundaries and assert the idea that social mobility was in the hands of every individual (Parsons, 1961). Therefore, it was thought that differential attainment was part of a functioning society (Davis and Moore, 1945).

2.2. A functionalist approach to contemporary educational research

A functionalist approach is therefore one that seeks to overcome specific problems within the current social model by amending existing broad strategies and appears to dominate the current research field of educational disadvantage (Raffo et al., 2007). The desire to reach conclusive solutions to problems that maintain the equilibrium of the existing education structure is at the fore of functionalist research because the quest to find “what works” in education is so sought after (Wyse and Torgerson, 2017: 1). Many researchers find themselves blindly attempting to adapt the current system that has been normalised, rather than starting

from the perspective of questioning the system itself (Humphrey, 2013). In the case of research on young people who are labelled 'disadvantaged', a functionalist approach tends to focus on quantitative (and to a lesser extent, qualitative) studies that drive whole school improvement. This approach does not specifically or effectively address the socio-economic gap but instead accepts (explicitly or implicitly) the current system and so appeals to wider government education targets. As such, policy initiatives that aim to address the socio-economic attainment gap adopt this functionalist framing and research approach, claiming that there is a "glitch in an otherwise benevolent system" (Raffo et al., 2007: 5) and designing interventions to repair the minor flaw.

2.2.1. A functionalist approach to 'disadvantaged' policy

It is within these assumptions that education policy on 'disadvantage' is situated. Thus, there has been an increase in the need for functionalist studies to enable governments and agencies to draw upon research that supports rather than challenges their functionalist worldview. It can be argued that governments are heavily selective in the studies they draw upon to create policy and often fund research that perpetuates their functionalist worldview on education (Raffo et al., 2007; Humphrey, 2013). Researchers are increasingly drawn to project work that is linked to delivering generalisable outcomes due to pressures of demonstrating the impact of studies on policy and practice, alongside a rise in research commissioned by government and agencies. This can be seen in the recent rise in randomised controlled trials (RCTs) within education research (Torgerson and Torgerson, 2001; Connolly et al., 2018; Styles and Torgerson, 2018). Studies based on quantifiable data, gathered at a macro level (where possible), have become prevalent because they are more likely to result in researchers' work influencing national strategy (Feinstein et al., 2004). This means that, within policy making, there is an underrepresentation of evidence from independent, socially critical research that focuses on qualitative knowledge to make changes (Luthar and Zelazo, 2003; Raffo et al., 2007; Humphrey, 2013).

There exists a wealth of government-funded statistical data and quantitative information which points towards raising whole school quality of education in order to benefit young people labelled 'disadvantaged', echoing the aphorism "a rising tide lifts all boats" (Hines et al., 2001: 1). However, such strategy has been widely criticised for prioritising the

government's drive for more schools to be rated as 'Outstanding'[6] by OfSTED, the English school inspectorate, rather than focusing acutely on making the educational experiences of young people who are SED more inclusive (Gorard, 2016). Instead, some critics claim that individualised interventions for young people who are SED are far more effective in promoting educational equality (Hirsch, 2018). While, in theory, the PP fund is designed to be "carefully ringfenced" so it is "always spent on the target group of pupils" (OfSTED, 2012: 3), it is common for PP funding to be absorbed into wider school initiatives or spent on initiatives that focus solely on young people who show academic promise and so will improve attainment measures (Pyle and Ager, 2013).

A functionalist approach to research and policy regarding the educational experience of young people who are labelled 'disadvantaged' is evident in the government's 2016 *Closing the Gap* series of research studies. Led by the DfE, the series comprised 11 large-scale randomised controlled trials, where one set of young people is taught using a different method and another set is taught in the usual way, with their performance compared (DfE, 2016). Such studies champion school-level, academic interventions that act only as sticking plaster solutions, rather than proposing an overhaul of a system that is designed to accept social injustice (Andrews et al., 2017). A functionalist approach threatens to mask the reality of disadvantage or even recognise that a socio-economic divide exists by reducing it to the idea of equality of opportunity rather than social justice (Levitas, 1998; Gewirtz, 2000; Shields et al., 2017; Lynch, and Crean, 2018). It asserts the view that society should accept that poverty exists and accept that those people in the lowest tiers must strive to get out of their situation, rather than question why it exists (Lawler, 2005; Reay, 2017a). Schools then often serve to reproduce this notion rather than be a force for challenging its injustice.

While there are critics who reference young people who are labelled 'disadvantaged' in studies around the Pupil Premium, the label 'disadvantaged' itself has yet to be critiqued (See et al., 2012; Gorard, 2012; 2014; 2016; Gorard et al., 2019, Research Schools Network, 2020). A wealth of research exists within the field of educational socio-economic

[6] An Outstanding school will receive the highest grading (Grade 1) for most if not all inspection categories of quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development of pupils; and leadership and management. This means they provide the highest quality education and care for their children (OfSTED, 2019).

disadvancement, though much research (especially 'larger' funded work) tends to be published by Department for Education-funded projects if not published by the Department for Education directly, meaning government policy makers are rarely held to account (Education Policy Institute (EPI), 2020). Studies carried out by charities in the UK which aim to improve social mobility and address educational disadvantage, the Education Endowment Foundation's (EEF) *Closing the Attainment Gap* project and The Sutton Trust's *Disadvantaged Toolkit,* were funded by the DfE in 2011 to conduct research into educational underachievement in young people who are labelled 'disadvantaged' (Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), 2018; The Sutton Trust, 2019). This is problematic because there is an acceptance of the assumption that the system as it stands can be left untouched and what is needed are interventions to fix its defects, namely the underperformance of young people who are SED. To be funded, such studies are likely to concur with their funder's functionalist perspective and are thus likely to echo rather than challenge terminology such as 'disadvantaged' and recommend minor adaptations to existing strategies (Feinstein et al., 2004; Raffo et al., 2007). Therefore, it must be questioned why there exists so few independent research studies that hold governments to account regarding the widening gap between young people who are SED and their peers (JFR, 2019; EPI, 2020).

This thesis aims to challenge the dominant functionalist approach as favoured by policy makers regarding educational 'disadvantage'. It seeks to hold governments and policy makers to account for claiming that the existing system set up for young people who are SED is serviceable if additional academic interventions are implemented. It is situated from a perspective that seeks more radical and democratic approaches to educational relationships (Fielding and Moss, 2011; Hope, 2019; Cameron and Moss, 2020). Literature from this more socially critical perspective will be reviewed in detail later after a discussion on how, currently, education policy focused on disadvantage draws from a functionalist perspective.

2.3. 'Disadvantaged' policy initiatives

The chapter will now move on to examine how a functionalist perspective has operated in recent decades leading up to the current policy context. As this section intends to concentrate on current educational policy, it does not propose to cover all historical education policies that address educational 'disadvantage' from a functionalist perspective. Functionalist

assumptions are and have been deeply embedded within political systems with policy often looking to offer compensatory education strategies (Shain, 2016; Power, 2018). A preoccupation with *what works* rose to the fore under New Labour where a pragmatic approach articulated strategies designed to improve educational outcomes, oriented towards a simplistic output measure: more 'disadvantaged' pupils achieving a set standard (Adams, 2016). As such, policy prior to the current literature that will be reviewed in this section, under previous governments, could also be critiqued on these grounds. However, the section aims to focus the review of literature on the two most prominent current policies linked to addressing SED: Free School Meals (FSM) and the Pupil Premium (PP) fund. Where appropriate, policies that are referenced outside of current 'disadvantaged' policy will be situated within their historical context.

2.3.1. Free School Meals and the Pupil Premium fund

The most apparent shift in the acknowledgement of 'disadvantage' in schools came with the publication of the 1944 Education Act. Said to "almost replace all previous education legislation" (Oakland, 2006: 213), the Act guaranteed secondary education for all young people as state schools were made free to attend. Furthermore, the introduction of free school meals (FSM) and milk for young people who were SED became statutory for local authorities under Section 49. The introduction of FSM marked the beginning of a supposed route of young people with SED backgrounds accessing a more inclusive education (Davis, 1967). Consequently, the 1945 Labour government proposed the offer of FSM to young people of all socio-economic backgrounds but subsequently decided this to be unrealistic in terms of expenditure (Ross et al., 1974). Despite this, the FSM initiative has featured, in some form, in education policy across the decades and has more latterly in the context of measuring school performance become a proxy for 'disadvantage' in schools through the Pupil Premium fund (PP) (Gorard, 2012; 2014; 2016; Gorard et al. 2019).

Following Blair's New Labour, Gordon Brown's government promised to unlock the nation's potential, re-shaping the education landscape by creating a new Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF); raising the school-leaving age to 18; introducing a new exam regulator, OfQUAL; and driving for higher education to improve the nation's employability by increasing work with industry (Whitty and Anders, 2014). This intense pace of change was

fuelled by rising concerns that Blair's "education, education, and education" mantra may have appeared to have elevated general standards but did not necessarily improve the educational experiences of those who are SED (McKnight et al., 2007).

Alongside the Conservative-led coalition's immediate return to a traditional Department for Education on its election in 2010, marking a decisive break with the direction of policy under New Labour (Lupton and Obolenskaya, 2013), the Cameron-Clegg government made substantial developments to the funding awarded to schools to raise the attainment of students who were SED. Building upon the FSM funding previous governments had offered, the coalition government introduced the Pupil Premium (PP) fund in April 2011. Through the PP fund, schools currently receive £955 for every secondary age pupil who claims free school meals or who has claimed free school meals in the last 6 years (DfE, 2021: 2). This funding is designed to assist schools in "helping disadvantaged pupils by improving their progress and the exam results they achieve" (DfE, 2021: 1).

While New Labour's (1997) *Education Action Zones* and *Sure Start* initiatives moved somewhat to viewing education and schools holistically in recognising that the responsibility of tackling SED is a shared one that schools cannot hope to deal with in isolation, the PP fund moved the responsibility of narrowing the SED attainment gap back to schools with direct focus on improving the academic performance of young people who are SED (Ball et al., 2011; 2012; Gorard et al., 2019). PP funding is tied to individual young people meeting the eligibility criteria and provided to their schools. Thus, the policy differs from one based on funding for regions, as with the *Opportunity Areas* initiative (DfE, 2018) and differs from policy based on extra funding for schools that is not dependent on their intake (Gorard et al., 2019), such as the *Academies and free schools* programme (DfE, 2013). Instead, the PP is akin to the additional funding that mainstream schools already receive for individual young people with special educational needs or disability statements, funds that are designed to aid young people facing long-term challenges in accessing the curriculum (Gorard et al., 2019).

2.3.2. A critique of the Pupil Premium fund

The focus of making funding linked to individual young people who are SED is problematic. Firstly, the PP fund can be seen as a strategy that, in placing young people's performance at

the heart of policy, seeks to plug the gaps in deficit backgrounds of those who are SED (Reay, 2013; 2017a; 2017b; Evans and Tilley, 2017; Boakye, 2020). This deficit narrative insinuates it is the responsibility of young people to rid themselves out of SED (Reay, 2017a; Darnon et al., 2018; Croizet et al., 2019). Secondly, funding linked to individual young people who qualify for the PP according to the narrow parameters of a very low income and receipt of certain benefits potentially disguises those who may move in and out of socio-economic disadvancement. Furthermore, accountability for tackling educational inequality resulting from SED, a deeply entrenched societal issue, is then placed upon schools who are required to prove the efficacy of initiatives funded by the PP through the performance measures of individual young people (Ball et al., 2011; 2012). Thus, the PP fund can be seen as designed to bypass the responsibility of tackling SED from the government (Lauchlan and Boyle, 2007; Shain, 2016; Darnon et al., 2018; Croizet et al., 2019).

The PP fund can be criticised for being based around the functionalist notion that young people who are SED have something missing and need something extra to compensate for their deficiency (Shain, 2016; Reay, 2017a). This view centres young people who are SED at the heart of interventions and are seen as innately flawed, rather than governments acknowledging that the whole social structure is flawed (Raffo et al., 2007). The notion of education policy driving a deficit narrative is discussed further in section 2.5. when the chapter moves on to discuss the connotations and implications of the recent surge of using the 'disadvantaged' label to refer to young people who are eligible for PP funding. Further critique of the PP initiative comes from the belief that it is not wholly representative of young people who are SED as the "threshold nature of eligibility" is disguising those who may be close to the threshold for FSM but just miss out for their whole school experience or those whose families strive to mask their SED due to shame and stigma attached with such a label and so opt out of receiving FSM for their children (Gorard, 2016), as explored in section 2.9.6. of this chapter. Labelled the "hidden poor" (Noden and West, 2009: 4), these young people are still likely to be suffering the impacts of SED. Although the DfE have partly addressed this by introducing 'Ever 6 FSM[7]', young people who had qualified for PP funding during their primary education are later disregarded (Treadaway, 2014). The PP fund appears to benefit

[7] Ever 6 FSM means that PP funding continues for the subsequent 6 years, even if the child is no longer entitled to receive FSM.

policy makers as young people fit neatly into an initiative that can be quantitatively monitored. It reduces young people to crude economic measures as they conform to a simplistic definition of belonging to a family living below the poverty line (Kounali et al., 2008; Gorard, 2014). Such an approach fails to recognise young people who may not fit neatly into the bracket of policy maker's formula and are thus at risk of being failed by the education system, such as those with family incomes that fall just above the PP benchmark who are not necessarily exempt from barriers to accessing education. Educational policy has been criticised for using FSM and thus, PP funding as a "convenient administrative proxy" that merely acts as an indicator of potential 'disadvantage' (Gorard, 2016: 2). Eligibility for the PP fund is based on family income which means that young people's access to support is based on statistics that make generalisations about their diverse needs. This raises questions about the suitability of a clear-cut label such as 'disadvantaged' which homogenises young people who are SED.

Another contentious point regarding the PP fund is the pressure from governments for schools and teachers to quantify the efficacy of 'disadvantaged' policy strategies and the spending of PP funding. Responsibility is placed on schools and teachers to enact PP policy in order to tackle the 'disadvantaged' attainment gap by proving how PP spending has made a quantifiable impact as measured by headline figures and league table positions (Ball et al., 2011; 2012). This drive for performativity results in schools and teachers devising strategies that often focus on academically able young people who are labelled 'disadvantaged' who, given enough academic interventions, will count towards schools' performance measures (Ball, 2003; Hirsch, 2007; Adams, 2016).

Recent critics of the PP fund's shift in responsibility to schools and teachers believe that schools alone cannot and should not be expected to address the attainment gap between young people who are SED and their peers (Sharp et al., 2016; Burn et al., 2016; Gorard et al., 2019). Independent research conducted on educational 'disadvantage' challenges the notion of providing schools with more funding to raise the attainment of those labelled as 'disadvantaged' (Roland, 2015; Andrews et al., 2017; O'Connell, 2017; Copeland, 2019). The JFR's *Education and Poverty Programme* (2007) research conducted prior to the PP fund that investigated the social gap in educational experiences advised that a focus on interventions solely at school-level risk creating a "scattergun approach" that would not address underlying

causes of unequal educational chances (Hirsch, 2007: 7). Further research in 2010 concluded that a young person's educational experience is shaped by a complex array of factors, including "their individual characteristics, the wider family environment, the area where they live and the schools they attend" (Rasbash et al., 2010: 1). The study concurred with similar critiques that supporting young people who are SED means more than an approach that solely targets academic improvement rather than improving their wider educational experience is not appropriate (Copeland, 2019). However, such research did not influence policy and so, despite the wider research contradicting its approach to educational 'disadvantage', the PP fund was launched in 2011.

Two years after the PP fund was launched, the shift to placing the onus on schools and teachers through the initiative was directly critiqued in 2013 by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR). The publication *A long division: Closing the attainment gap in England's secondary schools* similarly concluded that there is fault in policy makers relying on the assumption that school improvement will be enough to reduce the socio-economic attainment gap (Clifton and Cook, 2012; Sharp et al., 2015; Burn et al., 2016; Gorard et al., 2019). The underlying logic of PP policy - that educational inequality can be solved by school improvement strategies - was again claimed to be insufficient. Instead, the study proposed that the way to narrow educational inequality is to also consider factors outside the classroom that may be manifestations of SED, rather than focus solely on academic interventions targeted specifically at those who are *failing* academically (Clifton and Cook, 2012). This lack of involvement of schools, teachers, young people or families in policy making also results in performativity-related initiatives that do not allow teachers to recognise individuals' specific barriers to learning caused by their SED (Evans et al., 2017).

Furthermore, the education charity The Sutton Trust reviewed the impact of the PP fund on teachers from 2015 to 2019. In their study that involved over 1600 teachers across the UK entitled *Pupil premium money will have limited impact on poorer pupils* (2019), one in four secondary school leaders reported that their PP funding was being absorbed into core attainment groups and so not being used on interventions that might improve the educational experiences of all young people who are SED but rather on improving whole school performance. The study also revealed that teachers felt an increased responsibility with the introduction of the PP fund to quantify their impact on closing the socio-economic attainment

gap, resulting in them engaging in academic interventions that they did not feel were for the benefit of all young people who were SED (The Sutton Trust, 2019). Expecting teachers and school leaders to "set aside personal beliefs and commitments and live an existence of calculation" under performativity is critiqued in detail in section 2.7. where the different considerations of policy enactment are discussed (Ball, 2003: 215).

2.4. Functionalist language and discourse

The chapter will now move on to talk about the language and discourse used in policies and initiatives that come from a functionalist perspective. Functionalist policies tend to adopt language that rejects collective social experience and instead favour language that implies an individualisation of deficit (Loveday, 2015; Reay, 2017a). For example, in the UK, a commonly used though largely contested term to refer to socio-economic divisions has been the concept of social class. Successive governments have sought to shift the focus away from class with terms such as working-class, poverty and class divide being absent from government publications and replaced by a discourse framed around notions of 'equality'. References to class were originally omitted from the meritocratic vision of 1980s politics to stop society thinking in terms of class: "It groups people as bundles and sets them against one another" (Thatcher in Jones, 2012: 47). Thatcher, the then Prime Minister, intended to eradicate the notion that people could improve their lives by collective action, rather than through individual self-improvement, or by "pulling yourself up by your bootstraps" (Thatcher in Jones, 2012: 47).

Following this, the New Labour government from 1997 adopted a similar rhetoric that helped to promote "excellence for all" through the marginalisation of socio-economic class divide (Reay, 2017a; Dunford and Chitty, 2020). A dogmatic belief in the declining importance of class identity was a driving force of 1990s politics and a major factor in asserting New Labour's "programme of re-socialisation" was the attempt to "universalise the values, attitudes and behaviour of a certain fraction of middle-class parents" (Gewirtz, 2001: 136). To promote the *more traditional* family, New Labour policy sought to bypass class discourse by replacing it with all-encompassing phrases such as "excellence for all" and "social inclusion" (DfES, 1999). With the introduction of policies to raise achievement and standards more generally, for example *The National Literacy Strategy* and literacy and numeracy hours, there appeared an

acceptance of the fact that there will be natural social inequalities (Gewirtz, 2001; Dunford and Chitty, 2020). New Labour tended not to use such explicit terms as class as this acknowledgement of a polarised group did not encourage the vision of a socially inclusive education system in which there is "excellence for the many and not just the few" (Blunkett, 1997). The New Labour government was therefore criticised for integrating the issue of social class inequality into the general rubric of raising standards with its insinuated deficit narrative (Dunford and Chitty, 2020).

Thus, through New Labour's language of equality, euphemisms were arguably used to refer to those who were SED with no real acknowledgement that social inequalities existed to convey the narrative of individual deficit as opposed to a collective experience of SED because of class structures. Terms such as "families in challenging circumstances" or "socially excluded families" (DfES, 1997) mask the reality of those who are SED and fail to recognise that these are not experienced sporadically by individuals because of their challenging circumstances but that real class divides exist (Gewirtz, 2000; Reay, 2017a). As such, the core issue was reduced to one of *equality of opportunity*, whereby the primary objective of the government seemed to be social cohesion rather than social justice with policies failing to address wider structural inequalities (Levitas, 1998; Munro, 1998; Whitty and Anders, 2014; Dunford and Chitty, 2020).

In much the same way, recent governments rarely express issues of inequality in collective or structural terms but it is instead connoted through moral euphemism (Skeggs, 2005). Governments use terms such as "Pupil Premium" and "disadvantaged" (DfE, 2019a) as nouns to downplay the idea of class having shared experience at its heart rather than individualised behaviours in order to internalise inequality as something it is an individual's responsibility to get themselves out of (Reay, 2016). Such euphemistic terms originate from a functionalist perspective that posits, with minor interventions and enough desire, anyone can thrive in the current social structure (Raffo et al., 2007). The term 'disadvantaged' implies *other* to those who have worked hard enough and sought personal betterment. This rejection of class or other collective terminology is convenient for governments as the deviation from acknowledging this as social injustice encourages society to blame individuals themselves for struggling socially and economically (Evans and Tilley, 2017; Reay, 2017a). A functionalist

perspective that favours language of equality fails to acknowledge that class divide exists (Savage et al., 2010; 2013; Shields et al., 2017; Lynch and Crean, 2018).

2.5. A shift to 'disadvantaged'

While terminology is likely to change in the ever-shifting landscape of education, the introduction of the term 'disadvantaged' in 2013 is highly contentious. The DfE began to use 'disadvantaged' both synonymously and more prominently than the PP initiative itself in policy, which then filtered down into the language and measures in schools as language at the meso level echoed the policy discourse of a drive for improved performance and attainment (DfE, 2017; 2018; 2019a; 2019b). OfSTED also began to echo the language of policy discourse, using phrases such as "disadvantaged children" (OfSTED, 2019: 7). Likewise, government sponsored research bodies such as the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), an independent charity who received a founding grant of £125 million from the Conservative DfE in 2011, also began to favour economically-bound labels for young people, echoing the terminology of their sponsor: "disadvantaged pupils" and "disadvantaged children" (EEF, 2018). The prevalence of the 'disadvantaged' label is significant twofold: firstly, the young person rather than the initiative is being labelled and secondly, 'disadvantaged' holds negative connotations in comparison with Pupil Premium and further cements the notion of a deficit narrative (Lauchlan and Boyle, 2007; Reay, 2013; 2017a; Evans and Tilley, 2017; Boakye, 2020).

Prior to the shift to 'disadvantaged', it was the initiative that was labelled and featured heavily in policy, rather than the young people themselves. The initial launch of the Pupil Premium fund in 2011 was deemed a monumental addition to FSM by the Coalition government and, as such, was given an official title that used language that implied excellence, quality and priority with the word 'Premium' to emphasise the unprecedented focus and support being given to young people who were SED (DfE, 2012). However, potentially due to the desire to use language of equality that confers individual deficit on young people who are SED, the term 'disadvantaged' began to be used synonymously alongside Pupil Premium in policy discourse with them being crudely referred to as "the disadvantaged" (DfE, 2018). More and more, the young people the initiative aimed to support became the focus with the initiative implicitly rebranded by the frequent use of the 'disadvantaged' label to shift the focus of the problem

on to young people. Instead of the spotlight being on the policy initiative that would claim to be able to eradicate the attainment gap between young people who are SED and their peers, the focus became the young people and the 'disadvantages' they were bringing to education that required fixing (Gorard et al., 2019). This deficit narrative shifts the responsibility for addressing the attainment gap on to young people whom are made out to be lacking in order to assert the belief that the fault lies with them (Reay, 2017a).

Labelling young people as 'disadvantaged' results in a focus on an innate deficit model, and a failure to explore contextual factors that may have influenced a young person's struggles in education such as wider social inequalities (Reay, 2006; 2017a). Such labelling is often based on individual impairment, instead of on social or structural context (Reay, 2013; 2017a; Evans and Tilley, 2017; Boakye, 2020). In a deficit model, interventions focus on tackling problems located within young people themselves to transform them from 'disadvantaged' to akin with their non-'disadvantaged' peers (Reay, 2017a). Thus, the 'disadvantaged' label explains away the problem and asserts the view that there is nothing that could have been done to prevent the young person's 'disadvantages' from occurring (Lauchlan and Boyle, 2007). Alongside the informal re-branding of existing initiatives through language adaptations, it is claimed that multiple innovations, frequent policy switches and untested success claims described as policy hysteria allow governments to deflect the focus of educational failings on to schools or young people themselves (Pirrie and Hockings, 2012; Whitty and Anders, 2014). Thus, the implicit shift from Pupil Premium to 'disadvantaged' appears to act as a political rhetorical device, allowing the state to mask the reality of broader social problems (Riddell, 2007).

The chapter has now reviewed how the 'disadvantaged' label is born out of a functionalist framing at the macro level of policy making. It will now move on to discuss approaches to research that sit at the meso level in that they work predominantly at school-level to produce more qualitative studies that challenge the functionalist ideal that the education system and its provision for young people who are SED is sufficient. It is acknowledged that studies exist which challenge the current educational model that are also positioned at the macro level alongside studies that inform policy (EPI, 2021; JFR, 2019) and studies that sit at the meso level that are functionalist (EEF, 2018; The Sutton Trust, 2019). However, as social inequalities are so deeply entrenched within society, and research that is critical of government structures

is rarely drawn upon to influence policy decisions, most independent, interpretative studies tend to sit at the meso level.

2.6. Socially critical framings of education

The chapter will now move into an alternative vision of viewing education: a socially critical perspective that acknowledges the broader implications at the macro level but that centres on the meso and micro level: what happens in schools and how this then impacts on the children and young people.

As outlined above, the current dominant approach to research on educational disadvantage at the macro level that has emerged from the literature is one that seeks to overcome specific problems within the existing system (Raffo et al., 2007). This functionalist perspective to education research and policy making is where governments position themselves to replicate social structures and where they draw influence from to make policy (Reay, 2017a; Darnon et al., 2018; Croizet et al., 2019). This perspective filters down into the meso level, where leaders, teachers and other education workers are expected to enact policy handed down to them in education settings.

2.6.1. Challenging functionalist perspectives

While Post-World War II revisions of education addressed the need for a technologically-able work force and offered to undermine socio-economic distinctions and promote social mobility through a belief in meritocracy (Parsons, 1948), research continued to show a link between social position and achievement. This suggested that education could only provide social mobility for the few (Davies, 2020). The Political Arithmetic tradition (Hogben, 1938) was one of politically critical quantitative research that focused on social inequalities caused by social stratification (Heath, 2000). This research contested the functionalist approach of Durkheim's *social unity* and Davis and Moore's *division of labour* as overlooking major concerns with the way educational settings were designed with the purpose of reproducing social inequality (Sargent, 1994; Heath, 2000; Darnon et al., 2018; Croizet et al., 2019).

Those writing from a Marxist perspective argue that a meritocratic view legitimises the system of social inequality (Sennet and Cobb, 1993). Directly refuting the notions of Durkheim and

Parsons who assert that a functionalist approach to education helps people come to terms with their social position, those who take a socially critical approach claim that education should not replicate “hierarchical class relationships in wider society” (Reay, 2017a: 11). A socially critical perspective challenges the acceptance of a system that reproduces inequality, resulting in a workforce that accepts their role in society and therefore does not challenge the ruling class (Darnon et al., 2018; Croizet et al., 2019).

2.6.2. A socially critical approach in contemporary educational research

Socially critical research studies similarly adopt an alternative perspective in that they offer a critique of existing power structures and enable a more democratic development, bringing to the fore the relationship between education and lived experience (Raffo et al., 2007; Fielding and Moss, 2011). Socially critical perspectives seek more socially just approaches to running classrooms and schools (Hirsch, 2007; Cameron and Moss, 2020). It contests the functionalist approach within education by pursuing an overhaul of frameworks that promote social injustice, seeking more democratic approaches to designing and enacting educational systems (Raffo et al., 2007). The majority of socially critical research often values studies that involve collaboration with students, teachers, families and the community in order to make changes to a flawed system (Luthar and Zelazo, 2003). However, as this approach to research does not accept that there is merely a defect in the existing education framework and instead questions existing power structures, it infrequently drives policy (Humphrey, 2013).

Socially critical academics are concerned that the current education system primes young people to subscribe to become socially mobile and part of the middle-class professionals of the future (Orr, 2003; Savage et al., 2013; Shildrick, 2018). This approach blames the enforcing of middle-class cultural experiences at school that most likely contradict the experiences young people labelled as 'disadvantaged' have outside of school structures (Meighan and Harber, 2007). Thus, there is huge injustice in a system where young people who are SED are not adequately prepared to cope at school and receive the fewest qualifications and hence occupy the least desirable jobs and remain SED (Munro, 1998). In summary, a socially critical perspective argues that not only does the authority of education policy remain vested in the middle classes but the education system itself validates middle-class cultural capital (Ball, 2003; Reay, 2006; Savage et al., 2013; Shildrick, 2018).

For young people labelled 'disadvantaged', absorbing a school's middle-class values is accepting their inferior position in society just as much as if they were resolved to fail (Davies, 2020: 3). With the 'disadvantaged' label comes funding for schools to shape young people to become models of middle-class normative expectations (Manstead, 2018). The belief that hard work equates to social mobility is framed within the functionalist paradigm and is problematic in that social mobility plucks the lucky few out of 'disadvantaged' communities with little thought given to those who are left behind (Darnon et al., 2018) and can also be seen as “a cultural resource for the middle classes to asset strip” (Reay, 2005: 141).

Despite this, young people are led to believe that education provides a means of achieving social betterment. This occurs because the whole education system is ingrained with ideology provided by the middle classes, allowing governments to justify and replicate social inequality (Darnon et al., 2018; Croizet et al., 2019). By converting young people in the lower classes into middle-class adults, policy aims to eradicate any sense of solidarity and pride within the lower classes so that it appears that there is no social divide within society (Reay, 2017a). It is refuted by socially critical researchers that those in the lower tiers of society are merely *excluded* from a societal model that, with the meritocratic view of *where there is a will, there is a way*, will enable everyone to become clones of the middle-class elite (Sennet and Cobb, 1993; Gewirtz, 2000; Darnon et al., 2018). Furthermore, a socially critical perspective is not only critical of meritocratic framings of education because of the fallacy outlined above but that it is a concept based on injustice as it still allows for inequality on the basis of genetics, both mentally and physically and is entrenched in an ableist ideology (Jost et al., 2003; D’Souza, 2016).

2.6.3. Socially critical language and discourse

Whereas the language adopted in functionalist discourse was found to be euphemistic and enabled governments to assert deficit narratives of those who are SED, socially critical perspectives call for a re-claiming of language that rejects political rhetoric and acknowledges the SED of many people in twenty-first century Britain (Reay, 2017a). Labels that connote equal opportunity as favoured by those who take a functionalist approach as explored in section 2.4. are avoided by those who approach research on SED from a socially critical perspective as they assert a decline in the significance of class itself (Lawler, 2005). Rather,

language is adopted that seeks to "reclaim social class as a central concern within education, not in the traditional sense as a dimension of educational stratification but as a powerful and vital aspect of both learner and wider social identities" (Reay, 2010: 288). Critics of functionalist language favour explicit reference to class through terms such as "working-class", "middle class", "living in poverty" and "social inequality" (Gewirtz et al., 1995; Reay and Ball, 1997; Gewirtz, 2002; Reay, 2013; 2017a; 2017b) which challenge the meritocratic, functionalist perspective and are socially critical of the existing social model as a whole and its entrenched inequalities (Luthar and Zelazo, 2003; Raffo et al., 2007).

Rather than using labels to suggest that inequality is to be explained by the deficiencies of the poor themselves, more socially critical academics maintain the legitimacy of using such frank terms as "working-class" and "poverty" (Bennett, 2012). By using such explicit terms, academics lay bare that functionalist policy does not seek social justice to *overcome* inequality but rather seeks social cohesion in *spite of* inequality (Hatcher, 2006). While critics have challenged the government's focus on aspiration rather than class inequalities, they have also raised concerns that as the aforementioned "rhetoric of equality and freedom" intensifies, so too does the documentation of "ever-deepening inequality and domination" (Burawoy, 2005: 7). Academics who opt for a socially critical perspective to research believe that young people are 'disadvantaged' *by* the system, rather than bringing their 'disadvantage' *to* the system and so deem it important to use "language of class" (Gewirtz, 2000: 311) to highlight the ways in which social groups suffer at the hands of government failure to address social inequality (Shain, 2016; Reay, 2017; Darnon et al., 2018; Croizet et al., 2019).

2.6.4. Situating the thesis in a socially critical approach

This study starts from the perspective that labelling a cohort of young people as 'disadvantaged' allows governments to mask the social reality that the existence of socio-economic disadvancement and poverty in twenty-first century Britain is a direct bureaucratic failing (Reay, 2017a). Through the 'disadvantaged' label, governments are able to shift the problem of social inequality on to those who are experiencing socio-economic hardship due to the implication that such people are deficient in what it means to be socio-economically stable. Government rhetoric rarely features acknowledgement of poverty and lack of resources, and instead centres on those who are SED making poor life choices and therefore

being portrayed as inherently lacking (Skeggs, 2004; Lawler, 2005; Jensen, 2014; Tyler, 2020). Thus, rather than acknowledging the currently widening socio-economic divide, labels such as 'disadvantaged' polarise those experiencing SED as there is an insinuation that the poverty, lack of culture or financial deficit is inherent in the young person, or at least handed down from a parent who has “the audacity to be poor” and is willingly ruining their child’s life chances (Reay, 2017a: 198).

It is problematic that purely functionalist research dictates how funding is allocated and what strategies are to be implemented in schools to aid young people who are SED in their educational experience. This approach commits to the potential mislabelling of a diverse group of young people as 'disadvantaged', the connotations of which are largely under-examined. A study that critiques terminology shifts in policy is important because continuing to accept labels as arbitrary terms and failing to challenge them as vehicles for potential political ideology will incur costs at the expense of young people and their educational inclusion. Therefore, this thesis proposes a contribution to knowledge in order to better understand the implications of policy labels on the perceptions of young people who are SED. It seeks to explore the extent to which the use of the label 'disadvantaged' claims to promote equity but may in fact further marginalise young people in education and wider society.

2.7. Policy into practice

The chapter has outlined the initiatives that have come from policy as influenced by a functionalist perspective and has explored an alternative socially critical approach to SED research. It will now move on explore how such policy filters down to the meso level and is enacted in schools and by teachers and leaders.

As previously established, educational policy on 'disadvantaged' young people is situated within a functionalist perspective and is presented by governments as an unproblematic attempt to problem-solve, through nationally driven insertions into practice (Maguire et al., 2015). Braun et al., (2011) claim that understanding policy as a direct response to a problem is a deeply flawed perspective. Instead, it is argued that policy must be viewed as a process that must be interpreted as it is enacted, rather than simply implemented (Ball, 2008; Braun et al., 2011). Ball et al. (2012) argue that viewing policy as something to be enacted is a richer

concept that encapsulates the complex ways in which policies are read in relation to contextual factors. Recognising that policy enactments are multifaceted assists in understanding the relationship between making policy and policy enactment in contexts such as schools (Colebatch, 2015).

Rather than schools straightforwardly adopting policies, they must produce their own interpretation and translation of policy as they put them in place (Coburn, 2005, Adams, 2016). Braun et al. (2011) categorise the factors that must be considered when enacting policy into four strands: situated contexts, professional contexts, external contexts and material contexts. They claim that material contexts such as staffing, budget, buildings, technology and infrastructure, must be factored into policy enactment. However, as this study focuses on 'disadvantaged' policy which comes with the PP fund and the material contexts do not play as prominent a part in enactment in schools, this context will not be explored in detail in this chapter, though it is acknowledged that how schools decide to spend PP funding does, to some extent, depend on their material context.

2.7.1. Situated contexts

Situated contexts are those such as locale, school histories, intakes and settings which are often “dematerialised in the way that schools are represented and interpretations of policy explained” (Braun et al., 2011: 580). According to Gee (2012), schools should reflect on and critique the wider discourse of their society in order to enact change. However, policy has a habit of homogenising schools with similar cohorts or geography; however, the “nuances of local context cumulatively make a considerable difference to school processes and student achievement” (Thrupp and Lupton, 2006: 309). This is particularly apparent with schools deemed as 'disadvantaged' as they are serving many young people who are labelled as ‘disadvantaged’, where policy fails to consider student, school and area context and assumes schools in the poorer areas of England share many commonalities. When enacting policy in 'disadvantaged' schools, Maguire et al. (2020) call for policy enactment that avoids generic measures and are specifically adapted to suit 'disadvantaged' contexts. Currently, there tends to be far more focus on schools’ leadership and pedagogy than on situational contexts (Thrupp and Lupton, 2006).

2.7.2. Professional contexts

Professional contexts include school ethos and values, teacher commitments and experiences, and policy management, and the friction that can occur between contentious leadership and a drive for results versus teachers' pursuit for well-rounded education for all (Braun et al., 2011). As such, policy enactment involves "negotiation, contestation or struggle between different groups who may lie outside the formal machinery of official policy-making" (Ozga, 2000: 2). The notion that policy can be objectified is at odds with the lived experiences of those working in policy-rich contexts (Adams, 2016).

Policy enactment involves shaping policy to compliment aspects of the school's culture or ethos. Schools must consider the situated necessities of their contexts in order to transport the concepts of policy ideas into contextualised realities (Braun et al., 2010). These institutionally determined factors are crucial to policy enactment, even though the majority of policymaking and research neglects such restrictions and enablers (Ball et al., 2011; 2012). Since policies do not often offer an instruction manual but instead create circumstances in which the range of options available in their enactment are narrowed or changed, putting policies into practice is a complex and constrained process (Ball, 2003; Braun et al., 2011).

Another crucial factor in the enactment of policy is the ways in which policy involves teachers. Teachers find themselves in the compromising position of both policy subject and policy actor (Ball et al., 2011; 2012). On the one hand, teachers can be described as policy subjects as they are producers and consumers of policy, alongside school leaders. On the other hand, teachers are policy actors in that they are often on the front line of delivering policy initiatives and strategies and must succeed in 'performing' policy (Braun et al., 2011). The two potentially conflicting roles of subject and actor can heavily influence the enactment of policy. 'Disadvantaged' policy for example is deep-rooted in the standards agenda (the drive to raise the level of 'disadvantaged' student performance through the spending of the PP fund is discussed further in section 2.7.3.) and thus produces passive policy subjects because teachers' practice, autonomy and world view is dictated by the requirements of performance and delivery (Ball et al., 2011; 2012). With such policies, it is actively required that teacher judgement and ethical concerns are set aside because their role as policy actor is dictated (MacBeath, 2008). For teachers, creativity is narrowly defined as the strategies designed to

boost student performance are largely generic across the majority of schools (Braun et al., 2011). Teachers as subjects have strong morals, opinions on pedagogy and ethics and reflexive judgement and some policy enactment strips teachers of this agency (Maguire et al., 2015). Policy enactment in this sense does not locate the reader as "a site of the production of meaning but only as the receiver of a fixed, pre-determined, reading" (Braun et al., 2011: 581). School policies and practices in this way are merely products whereby teachers, and therefore students, are consumers of the policy text (Buckles, 2010).

In schools, different policy actors have contrasting personal and professional values that can be influenced by their positionality. Senior leadership and middle leadership must be "compliant with dominant forms of policy imperatives and have to be able to demonstrate how this is being implemented" (Maguire et al., 2015: 497), as discussed in section 2.7.3. However, policy actors such as classroom teachers and other educational professionals such as teaching assistants often have more pressing policy concerns such as how the enactment feeds into educational equality for young people (Maguire et al., 2015). They view new policy ideas through the lens of their values, knowledge and practices that aim to improve the educational experiences of young people outside of exam result and league table pressures. Thus, the professional pressures from leadership cause concern regarding the interests and purposes which drive policy, those of the schools as opposed to those of the students (Coburn, 2005; Ball et al., 2011; 2012).

For example, when it comes to enacting 'disadvantaged' policy, there may often exist conflict between teachers' worldviews on education and the drive for attainment from school leaders who in turn are driven by policy directives of raising attainment. Due to pressures from policy makers to quantify the efficacy of 'disadvantaged' policy strategies and the spending of PP funding, it is mostly enacted through strategies that focus on young people who are academically able *and* SED who, given enough academic interventions, will count towards schools' headline figures (Ball et al., 2011; 2012). Many schools focus 'disadvantaged' strategies funded by the PP grant on what schools informally and tacitly refer to as *easy wins*, a term for students who have the potential to achieve a Grade 4 or Grade 5 at GCSE. In doing so, these targeted young people are key for many teachers to demonstrate improvements in overall levels of performance and thus *performativity* (Ball, 2003). This results in interventions for young people who are labelled 'disadvantaged' but not perceived to be *academically able*

being overlooked and further excluded (Hirsch, 2007). As well as within-school exclusions from accessing certain interventions or opportunities, this also often takes the form of "informal illegal exclusion" (Children's Legal Centre, 2021) or "off-rolling", where schools temporarily remove pupils from the school roll when the removal is primarily in the best interests of the school, rather than the best interests of the pupil (Owen, 2019). Many instances are driven by the pressures of league table positions, with many disadvantaged pupils disproportionately removed from the school roll so as not to count within the school's examination figures (McGill, 2019). The glaring social justice, inclusion and ethical issues raised here are glossed over as asides to the main business of policy (Ball et al., 2011; 2012). In this way, policy enactment is unequivocal and teachers and leaders are set distinct parameters for the enactment of policy (Wright, 2001; Buckles, 2010). Such policies operate by informed prescription and are enacted over and against informed professional judgement. The additional label of *easy wins* as attributed to cohorts of students based on academic merit, although never formally documented, further marginalises the remaining young people who are labelled 'disadvantaged' and do not 'qualify' for academic interventions. This segregation and labelling is hugely problematic; however, it is not within the remits of this thesis to include a critique that would give it justice.

2.7.3. External contexts

Government policy is centred on the belief that simplistic outcomes are key in revealing how to achieve efficiency through statistical methods for determining performance (Adams, 2016). As previously referenced, external contexts that affect the enactment of policy involve the pressures from wider policy contexts such as OfSTED ratings and league table rankings. In the context of a neoliberal perspective on education, government interventions adopt "the mantras of efficiency, performance and standards" (Adams, 2016: 291) and therefore, the rationale for policy is often extrinsic outcomes rather than intrinsic legitimation of student engagement and development (Braun et al., 2011). League table positions and attainment measures form an ever-present backdrop to policy accounts in schools and this is problematic as a performativity discourse is prioritised over a humanist discourse (Jeffrey, 2002). In many cases, policy is enacted with quantifiable evidence of progress at the fore, and not necessarily what is most suited to improving educational experiences for young people.

To what degree policy can be enacted is also dependent on whether the policy is instructed, recommended or suggested (Cerna, 2013). Policies that are recommended or suggested are often subject to non-implementation and are incorporated into school policies for reasons of accountability, rather than to instigate pedagogic change (Ball et al., 2001). For example, whilst 'disadvantaged' policy is mandated: “Schools must publish details of how they spend the pupil premium and the effect this has had on the attainment of the pupils who attract the funding” (DfE, 2015: 16), school leaders are able to enact 'disadvantaged' policy by devising interventions and strategies of their own. School leaders must “decide how to spend pupil premium money, as the Government considers them to be best placed to understand the educational needs of their eligible pupils” (DfE, 2015: 16). The mandatory proof regarding how the funding is spent and quantifiable outcomes of 'disadvantaged' policy results in leaders’ hands being tied in their enactment. Policy enactment is driven by performance and thus, the focus is on improving academic attainment for 'disadvantaged' students, rather than the aforementioned situated necessities which are relegated in the enactment process (Braun et al., 2011). Here, educational performance is defined in terms of “simple output measures judged against government objectives”, rather than in terms of social justice (Adams, 2016: 291-92).

2.7.4. Young people’s lack of agency

Despite the considerations of situated contexts, professional contexts and external contexts as factors that must be considered when enacting policy, it is apparent that what is missing in education policy delivered at a meso level is how it impacts upon young people. Not only are they absent from the macro policy process, featuring only as subjects as discussed in the next section but young people are also largely unconsidered in the meso enactment phase, as the drive for quantifying policy efficacy is prioritised. This results in leaders and teachers feeling pressured to make decisions on behalf of young people and also choosing who is focused upon and who is side-lined (Hirsch, 2007; Buckles, 2010). Policy that comes from outside and that seeks performance-related outcomes prioritises these competitive interests over and against those of students (Ball et al., 2011; 2012). It has been argued that there is an absence of young people in the policy process and so too are they underrepresented in policy enactment.

Socially critical approaches seek to change educational policies and frameworks so that they address social inequality faced by young people often through their inclusion as participants in research rather than simply as research subjects (Chamberlain et al., 2011; Mannay, 2017). However, it appears there is a tendency to avoid explicit talk with young people about socio-economic policy labels used to categorise and stigmatise them. It must be acknowledged that qualitative research has the ability to cause subtle forms of psychological harm as it encourages young people to discuss sensitive and personal issues (Simons, 2009; Duncombe and Jessop, 2012; Barnikis, 2015; Barnikis et al., 2019). Because of this, studies that focus on the policy labels used to categorise young people could potentially expose them to the class labels, generalisations and stigmatisations policy placed upon them and so such studies are limited.

The avoidance of talking with young people about the labels that policy uses to denote their socio-economic disadvancement comes from the developmental tradition of understanding what constitutes a young person. Essentially, it is believed that young people are en route to becoming adults and this is what makes them of interest within a research setting (Uprichard, 2008; Qvortrup, 2009). However, this perspective positions young people as less competent than adults and compromises the balance of rights and power between the two (Santrock, 2011). Known as the *becoming* child, they are perceived as adults in the making, deficient of the competencies they will develop when reach adulthood (Uprichard, 2008; Qvortrup, 2009). The positioning of young people as incompetent and dependent justifies the control adults have over their lives, though this is often framed positively in that young people require the protection of adults (Reynaert et al., 2009).

Alternatively, sociological traditions challenge the dominant developmental traditions and question the assumptions made in developmental concepts (Gallacher and Gallacher, 2008). Those with socially critical perspectives understand the notion of young people to be social constructs (Jenks, 2004; Nieuwenhuys, 2010). As a result, their present knowledge, perspectives, lives and cultures, not simply their journey to adulthood, are considered competent in participating in research as they are recognised as social actors who are actively constructing childhood (Uprichard, 2008; Qvortrup, 2009). A sociological approach ascribes agency to young people, seeing them as either assuming or rejecting the roles allowed to them by adults (Gallacher and Gallacher, 2008; Nieuwenhuys, 2010). Within this tradition, the

notion of young people being incompetent is refuted, as is the belief that they must be protected by adults.

2.8. Young people's awareness of social division

The third and final section of this chapter now moves on to understanding educational 'disadvantage' at the micro level and will focus on young people's understanding and awareness of their own and others' social positions.

Studies have shown that socio-economic division appears to be a recognisable concept to young people and that they are very aware of their social position and the limitations it places on them (Sutton et al., 2007; Papapolydorou, 2014). What is not known, however, is whether young people have an awareness of the labels used in policy and schools to denote those who are SED. By disallowing young people to know of and discuss their perceptions of their labelling as in the developmental tradition, albeit with a view to protect them from unethical exposure to their social judgement, could be seen as further marginalising them (Brons, 2015). An increasingly common view within the socially critical education research paradigm is that new knowledge is best discovered through drawing not only on 'expert' observations (adults) but also on young people's own perceptions, even regarding sensitive areas of research such as how the labels, generalisations and stigmatisations of policy are lived and experienced by young people themselves (Hirsch, 2007; Simons, 2009; Barnikis, 2015; Barnikis et al., 2019). The debate on whether young people should be consulted on sensitive issues such as what it means to be labelled 'disadvantaged' is discussed below.

2.8.1. Sensitive research with young people

Often based on assumptions rather than from first-hand experience, it is argued that young people are not capable of understanding the complexity of the situations they are in (Leeson, 2010). These reservations are frequently based on researcher's own anxiety that young people would become too distressed for them to manage (Morris, 2003; Simons, 2009; Barnikis, 2015; Barnikis et al., 2019). Such reservations are to be anticipated as researchers worry that their own conduct could be deemed unethical for potentially psychologically harming young people and thus, would not be granted institutional ethical approval. While institutional ethics is an important part of the research process, it can also pose as the

greatest barrier that most academics face as it dictates their research performativity (Solvason, 2019). However, after this formal approval, it is often the case that ethics becomes "more personal, where codes of conduct, permission letters and tick boxes cannot help. You are simply left with your own conscience" (Solvason, 2019: 1). Ethics as a concept is more than simply gaining approval from an institution. Rather than focusing solely on the intention to avoid doing harm to those we conduct research with, it is instead useful to consider the intention to research with people (Simons, 2009; Barnikis et al., 2019).

Researchers shy away from engaging with young people on complex, personal or sensitive topics as such studies are perceived as too difficult to navigate and tend to be categorised as specialist work to be conducted by therapists or psychologists (Leeson, 2010; Alderson and Morrow, 2020). The prevalence of this attitude has resulted in many researchers or practitioners avoiding such research with young people, consequently silencing voices that need to be heard (Leeson, 2010). Instead, understanding is sought from the significant adults who surround them. Studies that ask adults about young people's lives are often justified as the only ethical way to establish how it feels to be a young person (Alderson and Morrow, 2020).

However, the concept of young people as vulnerable can be countered by regarding them as competent narrators of their world with the ability to articulate their perceptions and experiences (Christensen and James, 2008; Alderson and Morrow, 2020). The assumption that young people are incapable of talking about their own lives has been increasingly challenged with the argument that only by giving them an unrestricted voice can young people's views be properly sought and represented (Clark and Moss, 2001; Duncombe and Jessop, 2012). Young people can be described as the experts in their own lives, rather than adults being viewed as more qualified representatives, because they themselves have a unique and lived experience (Einasrdottir, 2007; Mukherji and Albon, 2010). It is thought that to deny young people their voice may exacerbate their lack of agency, which is both unethical and dangerous (Hendrick, 2003; John, 2003; Williamson et al., 2005; Duncombe and Jessop, 2012). In stressing the importance of engaging with young people in discussions where their circumstances and past experiences are sensitive, those who conduct research with young people advocate building a relationship that is based around trust and where active listening enables the young person's voice to be heard (Leeson, 2010). Increasingly, researchers are

including more direct young person engagement within studies that are investigating sensitive topics, arguing that failing to collaborate with young people prevents those who are most in need of telling their story from doing so and resulting in little opportunity for a young person to begin to process the injustices they are experiencing (Adderley et al., 2014; Cooper et al., 2015). Research that has revealed that "children, just like adults, hold their own views and perspectives, have the right to be heard, and are able to speak for themselves *if the right methods are used*" and the study's careful methodological considerations are explained in depth in Chapter 3 (Einarsdottir, 2007: 199).

2.8.2. A product of scarcity or personally lacking?

Within the frameworks of functionalist and socially critical perspectives, there are two conflicting ideas about how and why young people are SED. A functionalist perspective views young people as personally deficient in what it means to be socially acceptable, whereas a socially critical perspective argues that they have been deprived of something, therefore their alleged 'disadvantage' is done to them by society (Lawler, 2005). Some believe young people who are labelled 'disadvantaged' are innately lacking in what it means to be successful, whereas others believe they are products of their scarcity of resources (Ferera et al., 2020; Goldsmith et al., 2020). Scarcity, in a sociological sense, can be defined as having access to less of a resource than others in society (Tauer, 2007; Mullainathan and Shafir, 2013). In similar terms to scarcity in economics, people place greater value on objects that are scarce, and less value on those that are plentiful (Ferera et al., 2020; Goldsmith et al., 2020).

Economic scarcity is prominent in the lives of many young people who are labelled 'disadvantaged' and it is believed that scarcity captures the mind, regardless of what the absent resource is (Mullainathan and Shafir, 2013). Scarcity remodels the thought process when an individual is consumed by an undue focus on the necessity at hand, therefore it is likely that the survival mode of worrying about finance may filter down into the thought processes of secondary school young people (Zhao and Tomm, 2018). Socio-economic scarcity for 'disadvantaged' families means they are not just short of money but are also "short on bandwidth" (Mullainathan and Shafir, 2013: 257), which is the finite amount of space they have available to think about other issues perceived as outside survival mode. This concentration on where their family's next sum of money is coming from can play a significant

factor in the education engagement of young people who are labelled 'disadvantaged'. If a child is primed to think about socio-economic scarcity, their ability to perform other tasks is likely to be measurably reduced (Zhao and Tomm, 2018).

Young people labelled as 'disadvantaged' are also described through narratives of lack but not necessarily in only material resources (Lawler, 2005; Goldsmith et al., 2020). The notion of lack is the belief that young people's deficit is inherent. Lack, as opposed to scarcity, is the notion that young people who are labelled 'disadvantaged' are deficient in qualities that others possess, such as moral standing and respect. Thus, scarcity refers to access to material factors as opposed to being culturally and socially lacking. However, a narrative of lack and deficit is more convenient than a narrative of scarcity for governments who intend to distance themselves from the problem of socio-economic scarcity and place an onus on those they label 'disadvantaged' to work their way out of their *self-made* situations (Reay, 2013). The political rhetoric surrounding families who are labelled 'disadvantaged' switches thinking of poverty as a lack of material resources to a lack of the right forms of behaviour and so there is little responsibility for the state to increase levels of economic and social capital for them so long as they develop adequate cultural capital (Reay, 2013; Lawler and Payne, 2017).

This rhetoric can be seen through education policy, where the perceived deficits of young people who are labelled 'disadvantaged' are described as having a lack of "expectation and dedication" (Blunkett, 1997) and "a lack of interest or support" (Miliband, 2003). More recently, then Education Secretary Damian Hinds calling for schools to "raise aspirations among all working-class communities" (Hinds, 2018) and OfSTED Chief Inspector Amanda Spielman's speech to the Festival of Education in June 2019 asserted that working-class communities lack "aspiration and drive" (Spielman, 2019). Within schools and education policy, a scarcity of self-belief caused by wider social inequalities is often translated as a lack of interest or aspiration, as though young people who are SED are actively mindless and disengaged. However, this is another instance of attributing the cause of poverty to the inherent traits of the poor (Harper, 2003).

2.8.3. Symbolic violence

The ways in which the 'disadvantaged' label instils a lack of self-belief is evidence of the symbolic violence enacted on young people. Symbolic violence is when individuals internalise society's views or the discourses of the dominant so that they are perceived as acceptable (Bourdieu, 2000; Emirbayer and Johnson, 2008). They absorb the structures of their social settings into their habitus, even if they are 'disadvantaged' by it (Lumsden and Morgan, 2017). This notion of lack associated with young people labelled as 'disadvantaged' that dominates policy infiltrates policy enactment in schools and then permeates young people's own perceptions of self (Emirbayer and Johnson, 2008; Lumsden and Morgan, 2017). As aforementioned, in the current functionalist framework of self-responsibility, this symbolic violence often forces individuals to blame themselves for their own suffering whilst the role society plays in this suffering remains hidden (Bourdieu, 2000). Consequently, those in receipt of support are denied the help they need because they fall victim to a logic which claims that their unfortunate situation is their own fault (Bourdieu, 2000; Lumsden and Morgan, 2017). Thus, there is a gap in the literature of socially critical perspectives that seek radical transformations of the social conditions of the production of habitus that is "actively complicit in its own domination" (Emirbayer and Johnson, 2008: 47). Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) argue that symbolic violence limits young people challenging the acceptance of commonplaces such as believing those who are labelled 'disadvantaged' lack aspiration and motivation and Fairclough (2000) stresses the need to address the perpetuation of these hidden injustices through challenging the belief that they are inevitable.

The chapter will now move on to review the damaging effects of labelling on young people considering the above section reveals how the 'disadvantaged' label can imply a sense of lacking in *desirable* characteristics.

2.9. Theoretical framings of social construction

The thesis acknowledges that concepts are socially constructed and contested, which is crucially important within the socially critical approach taken within this qualitative study. As such, it is important to consider some key concepts that will be drawn upon to examine the perceptions of young people regarding their social positioning and portrayal.

The work of Pierre Bourdieu in particular lends itself to examining the inequity of education and can also be used in order to frame the way people are valued in society. Specifically, Bourdieu's work on capital and habitus will be explored in order for these concepts to be used as a lens through which to interpret young people's perceptions in subsequent chapters. Bourdieu examines capital, habitus and field as a trio which refer to resources, ways of being and space that sit alongside each other to frame his exploration of power relations within society. These concepts align with this study's approach of examining capital resources (social, economic and cultural) and the ways of being young people are expected to display within the field of education.

2.9.1. Capital

A key concept within Bourdieu's understanding of society and people's actions and interactions within it is 'capital', which he extends beyond the notion of material resources to capital that may be economic, cultural or social (Bourdieu, 1986). Economic capital is non-metaphorical and is immediately and directly convertible into money. It may be institutionalised in the forms of property rights. Cultural capital is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalised in the forms of educational qualifications. Social capital is made up of obligations ('connections'), which are convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalised in the forms of a title of nobility (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu claims that these forms of capital are equally important as material assets as they can be accumulated and transferred from one arena to another (Navarro, 2006). Bourdieu saw the concept of capital as a helpful metaphor to shed light on the recurrent process of the remaking of social order as the possession or not, of different forms of capital could be a significant factor in the ways that people experience and gain access to opportunities in society.

2.9.2. Social and cultural capital

Social capital can be described as "the sum of resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 119). Alternatively, cultural capital can be described as possessing legitimate knowledge of one kind or another (Jenkins, 1992). In his 1986 paper, *The forms of*

capital, Bourdieu suggests that cultural capital can exist in three forms: the *embodied* state as in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; the *objectified* state, in the form of cultural goods which are the realisation of theories or critiques of these theories; and in the *institutionalized* state, a form of objectification which must be set apart because it confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee (Bourdieu, 1986). In Bourdieu's (1984) work *Distinction*, he discusses capital in depth and illustrated this through his studies on French society. He proposes that "social order is progressively inscribed in people's minds' through 'cultural products' including systems of education, language, judgements, values, methods of classification and activities of everyday life" (Bourdieu, 1984: 471). These all lead to an unconscious acceptance of social differences and hierarchies, to a sense of one's place in society. Cultural capital and the means by which it is created or transferred from other forms of capital plays a central role in societal power relations, as this "provides the means for a non-economic form of domination and hierarchy, as classes distinguish themselves through taste" (Gaventa, 2003: 6). The shift from material to cultural and social forms of capital is to a large extent what hides the causes of inequality.

2.9.3. Habitus

A second important concept introduced by Bourdieu is that of habitus. Bourdieu sees power as culturally and symbolically created, continually revalidated through an interaction of agency and structure. The main way this occurs is through what Bourdieu terms 'habitus' which are the socialised norms that guide behaviour and thinking. Habitus is the way society shapes people's dispositions to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guides their existence (Wacquant, 2005; Navarro, 2006). Habitus is created through a social process, as opposed to an individual one, that results in patterns that are transferrable from one context to another and are also adaptable to specific contexts and over time (Navarro, 2006). It is neither a result of free will, nor established by structures, but created by the relationship between the two over time. As Bourdieu states, habitus is the "dispositions that are both shaped by past events and structures, and that shape current practices and structures and also, importantly, that condition our very perceptions of these" (Bourdieu, 1984: 170). In this

sense, habitus is created and reproduced unconsciously without any deliberate concentration.

2.9.4. Field

Bourdieu's theory on social reproduction also features the idea of 'fields', which are the various social and institutional arenas in which people express and reproduce their dispositions, and where they "compete for the distribution of different kinds of capital" (Gaventa, 2003: 6). A field denotes a network, structure or set of relationships which may be intellectual, religious, educational, or cultural (Navarro, 2006). People often experience power differently depending on which field they are in at a given moment, thus making context and environment key influences on habitus. Bourdieu accounts for the tensions that arise when people are challenged by different contexts. His theory can be used to explain how people can resist power and domination in one field and express complicity in another (Moncrieffe, 2006). Fields help explain the differential power people experience as they are socialised to behave differently in public, private and intimate arenas of power (VeneKlasen and Miller, 2002).

Bourdieu also uses the term 'misrecognition', a cultural phenomenon that symbolises a set of active social processes that place taken-for-granted assumptions into the realm of social life and, importantly, they are born in the midst of culture (Bourdieu, 1986). All forms of power require legitimacy and "culture is the battleground where this conformity is disputed and eventually materialises amongst agents, thus creating social differences and unequal structures" (Navarro, 2006: 19).

2.9.5. Social reproduction in education

Bourdieu argues that 'taste' and what is deemed respectable in a society is largely determined by those with high levels of capital as illustrated in his focus on the education system. He posits that children enter the school system with different amounts of capital as they do not start and continue within the system with the same resources and advantages. Therefore, the system largely reproduces advantage because those with the good fortune of being born into families with money and the right cultural capital, progress further than those who are not.

They do not have an inherent ability and advance on merit, but start out with, and are supported by those possessing the right mix of economic and cultural capital (Gaventa, 2003).

Exploring Bourdieu's concepts assists in understanding the aforementioned appropriation by government of cultural capital within the current English school inspection framework, which was introduced in the introductory chapter, used as a means to suggest that young people who are labelled 'disadvantaged' are in deficit. When making a judgement about the quality of education, inspectors will consider the extent to which schools are equipping pupils with the knowledge and cultural capital they need to succeed in life, described by OfSTED as *"*the essential knowledge that pupils need to be educated citizens, introducing them to the best that has been thought and said and helping to engender an appreciation of human creativity and achievement*"* (OfSTED, 2019: 43). Deemed a "crude, reductionist model of learning, both authoritarian and elitist" (Reay, 2017: 34), it does not recognise the point Bourdieu was making: that the key elements of cultural capital are intertwined with privileged lifestyles rather than discrete qualities that those who are 'disadvantaged' can be taught (Reay, 2017; Mansell, 2019). As aforementioned, the education system has historically worked to strengthen inequality and Bourdieu agrees that it continues to support the production and maintenance of elites, requiring more than lessons in acquiring cultural capital offer equity to all.

2.9.6. Labeling theory and stigma

The way in which some people's lives, knowledge and ways of being are valued and others devalued are normalised in society is through the concepts of labeling theory and stigma. In a similar way to Bourdieu's work, Becker's (1963) labeling theory and Goffman's (1963) concept of stigma are also an important socially critical lenses through which to understand the perceptions of young people regarding their social disadvancement through the 'disadvantaged' label.

According to labeling theory (Becker, 1963), while social labels form part of the cultural framework that people use to categorise society, labels such as 'disadvantaged' are unique in that they are stigmatising labels. Known as *deviant labels*, they are associated with stigma because mainstream culture has attributed negative stereotypes to them (Link and Phelan,

2001; 2014). When young people are labelled 'disadvantaged' in the way it is used in policy terms and are defined as socio-economically *deviant* in that they differ from what is considered normal or acceptable, they often face new problems based on the reactions of self and others to the negative images that are tethered to the label (Becker, 1963; Lemert, 1967). Negative stereotypes of those who are SED are manifested in political rhetoric, the mass media, and everyday language as witnessed in the language that is commonly adopted to refer to young people who are SED in schools (Becker, 1963; Goffman, 1963; Scheff, 1974). Those labelled as 'disadvantaged' tend to be marginalised as *other* in that they possess undesirable traits or characteristics (Goffman, 1963; Link and Phelan, 2001; 2014).

Becker (1963) argues that the status implied by the attributed label may become a dominant status for the person, where the negative connotations attached to the label can supersede other attributes a person may have and begin to dominate their identity. In Becker's (1963) studies, it was found that to be labelled by society carries an accompanying set of characteristics specific to all those who bear the same label. Thus, society presumes that the labelled person is unable or unwilling to change their inherent traits (Becker, 1963). Furthermore, once individuals have been typified, the stigma attached to labelling promotes contempt for people with a label (Wright et al., 2011). Stigma is attached to the labels society attributes to individuals, with society dictating what norms and values are deemed acceptable attributes and behaviours for its members (Lawler, 2005). Moreover, societies have mechanisms of social control to ensure that most members conform to these norms. Those who do not conform are stigmatised and devalued by society (Tyler, 2020). Goffman argues that stigma is an attribute that reduces the individual from "a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one" (Goffman 1963: 3). This notion suggests that there is an inherent characteristic that is contrary to a social norm, where norm is defined as "a shared belief that a person ought to behave in a certain way at a certain time" (Stafford and Scott, 1986: 80).

Stigma is produced by how people are made to feel, what other people would think of them or how they perceive themselves (Chase and Walker, 2013; Garthwaite, 2016). In relation to the 'disadvantaged' label, whilst funding such as the PP fund is seen as *free*, there are hidden costs of poverty such as disrespect, embarrassment and shame (Purdam et al., 2015; Geiger, 2015; Pemberton et al., 2016). Therefore, the discredit projected onto those labelled as 'disadvantaged' in order to shape their identities serves to eradicate the concept of

respectability from those who are SED (Skeggs, 2004; Lawler, 2005). Some posit that labels such as 'disadvantaged' are merely "objective class divisions", whereas others challenge their impartiality and argue that they are produced and maintained as "judgements of culture" that are produced and maintained by the middle classes (Skeggs, 2004: 118). As previously discussed, the deficit narrative conferred on young people who are labelled 'disadvantaged' is said to amplify the notion that lacking in financial resources equates to a lack of humanity itself (Lawler, 2005; Purdam et al., 2015; Geiger, 2015; Pemberton et al., 2016). Policy labels such as 'disadvantaged' arguably serve to convey a whole existence that is thought to be repulsive through young people's appearance, behaviour and taste and paint disgusting subjects of people who are suffering from economic hardship (Bourdieu, 1986; Lawler, 2005; Jensen, 2014; Tyler, 2020).

With stigma and shame comes *othering*, which can be understood as a process of differentiation where distinction is drawn between *us* and *them* and through which social distance is maintained (Garthwaite, 2016). Such negative value judgements construct those who are SED as "a source of moral contamination, a threat, an undeserving economic burden, an object of pity or even as an exotic species" (Lister, 2004: 10). The notion of *othering* has become increasingly researched in recent years and asserts that stigma is part of political rhetoric that perpetuates socio-economic divide (Chase and Walker, 2013; Garthwaite, 2014; Patrick, 2014; 2016; Pemberton et al., 2016; Shildrick et al., 2012; 2013; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013). Research on stigma also considers how those who are *othered* strive to avoid potentially discrediting encounters by disassociating with labels society and policy places on them (Chase and Walker, 2013; Garthwaite, 2016). This notion will be returned to in section 2.10. when the chapter explores how young people who are labelled 'disadvantaged' reject and disassociate themselves from the label.

What is also important to acknowledge regarding stigma is the social and cultural backdrop against which stigma occurs and that for stigmatisation to occur, power must be asserted (Link and Phelan, 2001; Tyler, 2020). Primarily, this concerns who disqualifies whom from social acceptance and the nature of the interactions between those who are stigmatised and those who are not. The labelling of 'disadvantaged' by those in more powerful positions (policy makers, school leaders, journalists) appears to "impose an identity" upon young people (O'Byrne, 2011: 153). The power exercised through the notion of stigma is often a

discreet and highly sophisticated form of violence which enables the implicit “exploitation, control or exclusion of others” (Link and Phelan, 2014: 24).

Rather than stigma being weakly understood through a functionalist perspective as being a social problem that can be solved through education or by changing individual attitudes, the ways in which stigma is “deliberately designed into systems of social provision” must be considered from a socially critical angle (Tyler, 2020: 26). Since 2010, governments and the media have engaged in an intensive drive of welfare stigma production, portraying narratives of the undeserving poor to justify austerity (Jensen and Tyler, 2015; Tyler and Slater, 2018). It is argued that stigmatisation is “intimately linked with neoliberal governance” (Paton, 2018: 923) which attempts to manipulate society’s behaviour through engineered stigma strategies that instil humiliation and shame (the shame surrounding the 'disadvantaged' label is discussed in section 2.9.8. of this chapter). Stigma is a convenient strategy for governments which allows cuts to social provision that are “enacted and legitimated through strategies of (state-sanctioned) stigma production” (Tyler and Slater, 2018: 727). Far from being an unfortunate by-product of social structuring, as a functionalist perspective would acknowledge, stigma is actively deployed in ways that intensify existing social inequalities (Link and Phelan, 2014; Tyler and Slater, 2018). Although stigma is often experienced personally through stigmatising looks, comments or remarks, it remains “enmeshed with wider capitalist structures of expropriation, domination, discipline and social control” (Tyler, 2020: 26).

2.9.7. The labelling of young people in education

For some, labels are a necessary function in the quest to improve educational outcomes for those who are SED as they provide helpful explanations for outsiders and provide common terms that allow the general public to engage in educational discourse (Sheffield and Morgan, 2017). However, seemingly arbitrary labels are often used to either assert or mask reality depending on who utilises the label and on whom it is placed. Therefore, the labels we use cannot be disassociated from the context in which we use them and experience them, and the expectations we bring with us when we do so (Wright et al., 2011; Mannay et al., 2017). All labels are a social construct and thus, hold multiple, and often masked, connotations (Rix, 2006).

Those in favour of attributing labels to young people refer to the process as diagnostic, with a label generally leading to treatment and opening doors for resources, as the acquisition of a label be a passport to special treatment, opening gates to support not otherwise gained (Gillman et al., 2000; Sheffield and Morgan, 2017). There are concerns, however, that labels are applied without consideration for the nature of intervention, as discussed previously with the homogenous grants given to schools through the PP initiative. Furthermore, labels can have long lasting negative effects and can be very difficult to break free from, even if the young person achieves educational *success* that overrides the parameters of the label (Cefai and Cooper, 2010; O'Connor et al., 2011). It is thought that labels are not only psychologically harmful when attached to a young person at one point in time and later removed but that they often determine a young person's future outcomes, leading to further social disadvantage and exclusion from mainstream society (Lauchlan and Boyle, 2007; Cefai and Cooper, 2010; O'Connor et al., 2011). Despite claiming a desire to improve the lives of young people, labelling them encourages society to make assumptions and can promote a sense of *othering*, whereby young people identified as marginalised from the mainstream fall victim to subservience (Johnson et al., 2012). Labelling young people, albeit with the intention of directing funding at them, runs the risk of further marginalising a group that, ironically, policy claims to support by using such discriminatory language (Steele, 2010; Reardon, 2011).

2.9.8. Labelling young people as 'disadvantaged'

A wealth of research exists that has concluded that young people who are labelled 'disadvantaged' are less likely to engage with mainstream education (Harwell and LeBeau, 2010; Mannay et al., 2017), though what is under researched is how the 'disadvantaged' label itself impacts upon young people. 'Disadvantaged' is the label currently used in government policy as a label for young people who are eligible for PP funding. The implications of such a word that begins with the prefix 'dis' warrants query as to whether it is an appropriate term for any child to be labelled with. The prefix *dis* is suggestive of segregation, exclusion, cancellation and aversion (Collins English Dictionary, 2020), and the word 'disadvantaged' has been defined as "to be without sufficient power or other means of influence" (Treadaway, 2014: 18). Whilst claiming to empower young people, policy makers could be seen as perpetuating the marginalisation of those who are SED through the 'disadvantaged' label (Bennett et al., 2020). It has been recognised that it is necessary to distinguish between

acknowledging young people's differences and highlighting their limitations (Higgins and Tymms, 2014), with the need to address the attitudes and experiences that lie behind "social differences rather than social handicaps" (Hirsch, 2007: 3). As such, labels such as 'disadvantaged' are inappropriate as they imply young people have innate weaknesses and are viewed as obstacles to educational success in themselves (OECD, 2012).

2.9.9. Shame and blame

Terminology frequently appearing in coverage of the lives of those who are SED in the media conforms to what Jones (2012) calls "demonising terms". Prevalent labels such as *benefit scum* and *chav* have exacerbated the public's diminishing sympathy towards the poor and lack of concern about inequalities (Tyler, 2008; Tyler and Bennett, 2010). While sensationalist newspapers and online blogs have adopted terms such as *chav* or *scum* to ridicule a marginalised group that no longer challenge the status quo, politicians and policy makers appear just as pernicious in their process of labelling (Tyler, 2008; Tyler and Bennett, 2010; Jones, 2012; Bennett, 2012). In opting for loaded terms that further ostracise such as 'disadvantaged', the systemic problem of SED fails to be addressed (Taylor-Gooby, 2013).

Subsequently, through society's depiction of those labelled as 'disadvantaged', an identity of apathy and self-destruction is conferred upon young people as the shame levelled at families who are SED is directly felt by young people and potentially internalised (Lawler, 2005). This results in the 'disadvantaged' label, with all of its accompanying deficit connotations previously discussed, becoming shorthand for *their fault* (Boakye, 2020). Governments are able to confer blame upon those labelled as 'disadvantaged' for daring to be poor (Reay, 2017a) and thus, deflect the responsibilities of society in addressing social inequalities (Heath et al., 2013; Reay, 2017a; Evans and Tilley, 2017). Shildrick (2018) uses the term "poverty propaganda" to refer to the way society is preconditioned to view those labelled as 'disadvantaged' as accountable for their socio-economic status. While policy language does not necessarily match the level of demonisation of that employed in media discourse, it is certainly loaded to marginalise the lowest tiers of society, painting them in such a light that elicits blame for their misfortune. For example, "disadvantaged" and "free school meals" are frequently used to precede the word "children" in recent government publication (DfE, 2016, 2018, 2019a, 2021) and appear to insinuate that the poverty, lack of culture or financial deficit

is inherent in the child, or at least handed down to the child from a parent who is willingly hindering their child's life chances (Reay, 2017a).

Rather than acknowledging that there exists an unequal and socially differentiated society and that this is government failing, it is far more convenient to lay the blame on individuals' apathy (Reay, 2017a; Evans and Tilley, 2017). This ideology traces back through Thatcher's Conservativism with those who are SED being viewed as idle, deceitful, inferior and bloody-minded (Jones, 2012); to Charles Murray's (1990) notion of the 'underclass' as rife with illegitimacy, crime and unemployment; and even further back to Dickens' protagonist Ebenezer Scrooge who cannot "afford to make idle people merry" (Dickens, 1843: 8). All of which act as a stark reminder of how those who are SED have been and still are used as scapegoats for state shortcomings and are expected to transform their own lives despite having resources to make that possible withheld from them (Reay, 2017a).

In citing the deficit qualities of individuals, the government conveniently sidestep queries about the wider economy. The emphasis in the raft of recent policy has been on "fixing the child rather than on addressing more fundamental issues relating to social justice such as systemic issues relating to fairness and equality" (Pirrie and Hockings, 2012: 10). Their rhetoric rarely features notions of poverty and the lack of resources but are almost always centred around those labelled as 'disadvantaged' as "having the wrong attitudes and doing the wrong things" (Reay, 2017a: 24). Hence, loaded terms such as 'disadvantaged' are employed within education policy to mark out young people as "educational losers" to justify and replicate social inequality (Reay, 2017a: 12). Opportunely, this solicitous compassion for those labelled as 'disadvantaged' allows the state to again offer compensatory education that has failed to sufficiently address the needs of those who are SED as it cannot compensate for wider social and economic inequalities (Shain, 2016; Reay, 2017a).

2.10. Disassociation with the 'disadvantaged' label

After discussing the negative connotations and implications the 'disadvantaged' label carries, the chapter will now focus on how, subsequently, young people may seek to distance and disassociate themselves from the 'disadvantaged' label.

There is a wealth of literature surrounding young people feeling ashamed to talk about living in poverty (Adelman et al., 2003; Harris et al., 2009; Kintrea et al., 2011; Ridge, 2011). In education policy, 'disadvantaged' is used as a euphemism for poverty-stricken, poor or anyone not doing as well as their peers and therefore, it is a label that young people are likely to distance themselves from (Boakye, 2020). This is linked to the idea of disassociating with what represents socially as "the greatest threat" (Bourdieu, 1986: 479) due to the belief that there is something perilous in being seen as belonging to the lowest tier of society. This leads to a "spatialization of class" (Lawler, 2005: 433), whereby sub-classes are created in order to allow for disassociation with the lowest tier of social hierarchy. Young people are likely to have a strong desire to disassociate themselves with the 'disadvantaged' label as it links them to the poverty of the most 'disadvantaged' in society (Shildrick, 2018). Within the lower tiers of society, individuals are keen to define boundaries between what defines *us* in relation to domains occupied by *them*, as it helps "prevent *our* way from being subsumed into *their* way" (Miller, 1997: 50) and thus, maintains distance from what is perceived as the lowest SED group.

2.10.1. Striving to be *normal*

The theme of young people wanting to feel the same as others or, more specifically, to just be a *normal* young person is evident in much literature (Reay, 1998; Savage et al., 2001; Lawler, 2005; Papapolydorou, 2014; Hanley, 2017; Rogers, 2017; Jones et al., 2020). Conclusions of these studies, conducted with young people who were SED and young people who were looked after, suggested that young people seek to identify with those who they perceive as the *average* social group that is the largest and live the most *normal* lives (Lawler, 2005). Hanley (2017) views society as a pyramid with those at the very bottom and those at the very top being minorities and most people feeling more at ease in the mass in the middle. When applying this structure to young people who are SED, it appears that they are likely to view themselves as something akin to *ordinary* rather than akin to 'disadvantaged' (Savage et al., 2001). Often, they seek *otherness* from classes or subclasses deemed lower than themselves but also seek *otherness* to middle class existence (Savage et al., 2001; Papapolydorou, 2014; Reay, 2017a).

When considering what individuals perceive as *normal*, it is useful to consider claims that class terms are commonly used by individuals when self-identifying and categorising in terms of social position because they have at their heart a collective identity formation (Heath et al., 2013; Evans and Mellon, 2016). Despite the Office for National Statistics (ONS) declaring that the working class in technical terms has been shrinking to a fraction of its former size (Evans and Mellon, 2016), the annual British Social Attitudes Survey (BSAS) survey revealed that the majority of those who took part identified as working-class when asked to express a socio-economic identity (Heath et al., 2013). These results came as a surprise to many who have argued that in modern societies, class identity has become of little importance and that class position now bears little influence on how people see themselves and others (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Savage et al., 2010; Evans and Mellon, 2016; Manstead, 2018). According to this perspective, traditional notions of social class do not correlate with ordinary people's experience of social life because the notion of class identity has been lost for working-class people (Savage et al., 2010). However, academics who take a more socially critical approach assert that the working-class label is still relevant as we need to revive class analysis, not bury it as this would play into the hands of those who hold the wealth and power and also which stories and versions of the social world are listened to and why (Reay, 2006; 2017a).

Although many politicians from a functionalist, meritocratic perspective argue that the working-class label is now obsolete, the survey shows that individuals continue to identify as working-class even when they occupy higher income scales, with nearly half of people in managerial and professional occupations identifying as working-class (Evans and Mellon, 2016). In recent decades, governments have declared an ambition to liberate Britain from old class identities, suggesting that what counts is not where you come from but where you are going (Cameron in Hope, 2013). However, according to the National Centre for Social Research's 33rd annual British Social Attitudes report on class identity, working-class identity appears to be alive and well (Evans and Mellon, 2016). However, it is worth reiterating that this study argues that terms such as working-class are too broad to use for the specific group of young people referred to in this study. However, working-class appears to be a term that a large proportion of society uses to describe themselves in socio-economic terms and so, in establishing what is *normal* in relation to SED, it is worth acknowledging that for many this term is a self-identifiable alternative to labels such as 'disadvantaged'. Where individuals are

likely to disassociate with policy labels such as 'disadvantaged', it is interesting that they self-identify with labels such as working-class.

Despite literature which suggests that young people can make independent choices and write their own biographies (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002), familial experiences are significant in the reproduction of class inequalities, with socio-economic differences in the way children are socialised (Darnon et al., 2018; Croizet et al., 2019). Habitus is unconsciously developed from childhood through family experiences and influences young people towards certain ways of behaving by placing importance on past experience through the unconscious socialisation of different social groups (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Dumais, 2002; Reay, 2005). The term *horizons for action* is used by Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) to refer to this "arena within which actions can be taken and decisions made" (p34). Based on Bourdieu's (1984) *Habitus and Social Capital,* because schemata filter information, "*horizons for action* both limit and enable our view of the world and the choices we can make within it" (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997: 35). Therefore, what is *normal* to young people is arrived at instinctively by individuals within social and cultural networks of influence (Ball et al., 2001; Reay, 2001; Evans, 2016). Young people's understanding of *normal* is bound by their *horizons for action* which are "the limits of what they can see*"* (Hodkinson, 2008: 5).

2.11. Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the literature threefold: at the macro level, focusing on the overarching philosophical differences in viewing education and the perspectives that drive educational policy and research; at the meso level, where 'disadvantaged' policy is situated and enacted within school contexts; and at the micro level, where 'disadvantaged' policy impacts upon the young people it labels and how they are absent from discussions around how they are referred to and spoken for.

It appears that there is a need for socially critical paradigms that strive to "understand and interpret the world in terms of its actors" (Cohen et al, 2017: 27), rather than over-simplified educational research in the positivist tradition that, according to Habermas (1972), is unable to answer many important and interesting questions about life as it is not grounded in real-life experience in a particular context. Despite the fact that the functionalist paradigm

appears to dominate the field of educational research and as observed as a national framework its merits are acknowledged, there is a void waiting to be filled by a smaller scale, interpretivist research regarding young people labelled as 'disadvantaged'. Considering the dearth of 'disadvantaged' research that recognises the child as more than a statistic and the need for ethical data that explores multiple truths rather than solely the policy makers one truth, this thesis posits that a social constructivist stance would provide a both a more authentic and more ethical stance towards conducting research with young people who are SED.

Current education policy is essentially driven by government ideology with the promise of finding a solution to a problem and thus legitimising government decisions (Humphrey, 2013). Therefore, this research aims not to "govern the reality which is being observed" (Nesfield-Cookson, 1987: 9) or to provide a single 'truth' about 'disadvantaged' pupils but to expose the perceptions and experiences of young people of what it means to be labelled 'disadvantaged', as underpinned by an interpretative paradigm (Cohen et al, 2017).

As established above, there is a gap in literature on research that focuses upon young people who are labelled 'disadvantaged' in that their voices on policy terms, labelling and the stigma asserted by those who create such labels are rarely heard. This dearth of research exists twofold. Firstly, a functionalist approach to research is predominant and informs education policy which favour quantifiable studies that advise how to bridge the educational attainment gap from 'disadvantaged' and their peers. In such research models, there is rarely a platform for young people's perceptions and experiences of being labelled 'disadvantaged'. This may be because such an approach seeks to maintain an existing social framework, regardless of whether it is adept in addressing social inequalities (Raffo et al., 2007). As such, there is no value to young people's voices as they could threaten to challenge policy as they experience it first-hand. Secondly, although there exists literature on socio-economic educational experience involving young people from a socially critical perspective (these studies are far fewer in number than the functionalist approach noted above), it is often assumed that explicit discussion around socio-economic labelling with young people is inappropriate and ethically unviable in ways that avoid harm (Morrow, 2009). In the ethical minefield of research involving young people, it is often thought best to shield and protect them from awareness

of how policy and society is categorising and stigmatising them and so the gap in literature exists.

This literature review chapter prepares for chapter three which will detail how socially critical assumptions informed the study's design and how the study operationalised potentially sensitive work of this kind with young people who are SED.

Chapter 3. Methodology and research design

The purpose of this study was to explore how the policy label 'disadvantaged' is experienced by young people who are SED and labelled 'disadvantaged'. The research focused on the perceptions of young people and aimed to contribute knowledge that is rich in their voices and experiences. To remind of the study's core aims, the study's main research question was 'How do young people who are labelled in education policy as 'disadvantaged' feel about the 'disadvantaged' label?'. To explore this central question, the study asked the following secondary research questions:

- What are young people's perceptions of the 'disadvantaged' label?
- What are the implications of being labelled 'disadvantaged' according to young people?
- How do the perceptions of policy and young people differ with regards to the 'disadvantaged' label?

The purpose of this chapter is to reflexively outline and document the methodology and methods used to address the above aims and research questions. The chapter begins by outlining the study's philosophical underpinnings and theoretical framework. It then moves on to outline how these philosophies shaped the study's methodological design, alongside how data collection methods were chosen. The chapter then moves on to the practicalities of the research including all aspects of data collection, data analysis and ethical considerations.

3.1. Philosophical underpinnings and theoretical framework

In order to pursue the question 'How do young people who are labelled in education policy as 'disadvantaged' feel about the 'disadvantaged' label?', an epistemological and ontological framework was carefully considered. Establishing my epistemological stance involved reflecting upon what I deem knowledge to be and how it is acquired which, alongside considering my ontological views on the assumptions I possess around the nature of social reality, allowed me to design a research study that encapsulated my socially critical worldview of education and socio-economic disadvancement.

As the previous two chapters have illustrated, my underpinning view is that policy is dominated by some forms of knowledge and rejects others. There is a power imbalance in terms of what constitutes *worthy* knowledge; whose worldviews are taken into consideration; and what knowledge is drawn upon to influence policy. This study aimed to counter the dominant functionalist view that side-lines young people's worldviews, reducing them to recipients and subjects of policy rather than important stakeholders (Such and Walker, 2005).

While this study did not adhere to a set theoretical framework led by a particular worldview, it aligned with a socially critical approach and therefore drew upon some perspectives of critical theory (Rush, 2004). The study argues that current 'disadvantaged' policy is flawed and fails to give agency to young people's experiences and worldviews, despite them being the subjects of such legislation. As such, it sought to highlight problems with underlying assumptions and current policy structures; identify opportunities for change and provide both clear context for criticism (Bohman, 2010). The prevalence of the 'disadvantaged' label within policy and its lack of critique prompted a need to question the assumptions made through such labels and challenge the existing educational model as set by policy makers' functionalist perspective (Bryman, 2012). The view that the world consists of contextually abstracted, measurable phenomena central in functionalist policy making and research, as outlined in Chapter 2, was rejected in favour of an approach that aimed to understand the nature of reality of young people (Bandura, 2017).

The study therefore aligned with interpretative frameworks that are situated in an epistemology of understanding and an ontology of a lived world of human experience as opposed to a positivist certainty of knowing, explaining and measuring (Schwandt, 2006). It set out to allow young people's voices to be heard by asking challenging questions and so also drew upon a social constructivist perspective, one where individuals construct knowledge through cognitive processes with a social rather than individual focus (Young and Colin, 2004). It was noted in Chapter 2 that there is space for research that is conducted *with* young people with the view to making them feel more involved in their own futures, rather than the more prevalent approach of research *on* young people (Hirsch, 2007). Patton (2014) claims that research *on* young people without considering the meanings they attribute to their actions or environment is to treat them like objects, whereas a constructivist worldview promotes Weber's (1968) concept of *verstehen* – the empathic understanding of human behaviour. This

means that in order to understand other's existences, researchers must empathise with their collaborators of knowledge, placing their feelings, actions and reactions at the fore in the quest for a deeper understanding of human groups (Outhwaite, 1975). This empathy, Weber (1968) argues, offers a subjective understanding of the action of individuals and, due to the limited amount of qualitative research conducted *with*, rather than *on* young people who are SED, the concept of *verstehen* formed part of the study's conceptual approach.

As the dominant positivist stance often claims to understand human experiences with solutions centred at the fore (Raffo et al., 2007), educational professionals, academics and wider society are persuaded into revering notions of problem-solving and hypothesising, rather than valuing understandings of experience from a person-centred, holistic perspective (Holloway and Wheeler, 2002: 19). This study was approached from a social constructivist angle because it discarded the belief that the objective *view from nowhere* is viable in research centred on young people (Nagel, 1989). One of the key concepts of social constructivism is the desire to understand and explore and thus, the single world view favoured by policy makers is limiting in the richness of data and depth of understanding it provides (Wildemuth, 1993). It would be unjust to reduce young people who are SED to statistics and disregard a subjective approach that can shed light on an area of research that is less commonly represented: the voice of the young person.

3.2. Methodological approach

The study approached the issue of educational inequality and 'disadvantaged' policy from a perspective that is critical of research that seeks quantifiable results (Hirsch, 2007). Quantitative approaches overshadow studies that seek to place young people and their voices at the centre of research, due to quantifiable outcomes being more likely to influence national strategy (Feinstein et al., 2004). This thesis aimed to produce knowledge that assists in overhauling the current education model which accepts rather than challenges social injustice (Raffo et al., 2007; Collins, 2009). From a qualitative approach, this study sought to critique what is accepted rather than concede to the existing ways in which young people who are labelled 'disadvantaged' are represented (Humphrey, 2013).

The study adopted a qualitative approach to research that gave agency to the voices of young people who are labelled 'disadvantaged' as it gave importance to the relationship between education and lived experience (Raffo et al., 2007). The study set out to generate rich knowledge that bridges that gap between 'disadvantaged' policy creation and policy enactment by school leaders and classroom practitioners by offering an understanding of what it means to be labelled 'disadvantaged' from young people's own perceptions and experiences. The research did not seek to govern the reality of young people and provide a single truth from a position of power but instead aimed to illustrate the realities of those who are labelled 'disadvantaged' as underpinned by an interpretative and qualitative perspective (Cohen et al., 2017).

3.2.1. A case study design

An interpretivist case study approach does not aim for validity but instead searches for multiple perspectives and contextual explorations of the chosen case. It is this quality of theoretical reasoning that upholds the legitimacy of case study, referred to as analytic or theoretical generalisation (Mitchell, 1983; Yin, 2014). It is not how quantifiable or comparable the data is, as is the crux of the majority of current research on young people who are 'disadvantaged', but how well the researcher generates knowledge out of the findings (Bryman, 2012). Considering the research of a professional doctorate aims to explore the practice within one's profession, a case study approach was apt as it offered a small-scale focus on a particular setting and provided a rich, illustrative analysis of occurrences within a chosen location (Merriam, 1988). Bryman (2012) describes case study in educational research as an intensive study by qualitative means of a single case. This case study therefore provided an in-depth understanding of a specific context at the school at which I am employed (Stake, 2005). Such a case study, as well as offering potential positive outcomes for the case study site itself, offered important insights and richness currently missing to a lot of schools (Creswell, 2013).

A case study approach is not only well-suited to research undertaken during professional doctoral study but also lends itself to a socially critical, constructivist worldview. An interpretative position acknowledges the researcher's direct participation in the research and that their involvement constitutes the focus of inquiry and so too does case study research

(Stewart, 2014). Case studies capture a snapshot of people within their lived experiences by presenting the situation through the eyes of the participants, rather than simply producing abstract theories (Chamberlain et al., 2011). Such illustrations are constructed by embracing the subjectivity of the researcher, allowing for participants to contribute to knowledge by building a trusting relationship with the researcher. Adopting a case study approach therefore offered the opportunity to gather rich, in-depth insights into young people's lived experiences within this particular context (Hamilton, 2012). Rather than viewing the presence of the researcher as impairing findings, case studies acknowledge the researcher's participation in the research (Stewart, 2014). Here, my role as researcher was about attempting to provide an illustration of real people in real situations (Chamberlain et al., 2011).

According to Yin (2014), case studies are either exploratory, explanatory or descriptive. Exploratory case studies offer the chance to collect data prior to defining a hypothesis so long as the methodology is outlined prior to data collection. Alternatively, explanatory case studies focus on an existing idea and endeavour to match its outcomes in another case. Descriptive case studies take a theoretical standpoint and construct a hypothesis with which to critique findings. An interpretivist perspective values an exploratory approach to research and does not aim to prove a hypothesis, nor reach a single truth, therefore an exploratory case study appeared to suit the context of this study. Yin (2014) describes exploratory case study design as allowing the researcher to capture the circumstances of a situation that is natural and commonplace. As this study aimed to explore and understand the case (the way young people themselves understand the label of 'disadvantaged' in a single school) rather than prove or measure, it is this type of case study that rose to the fore. An exploratory case study allowed for a comprehensive understanding of a specific context with valuable outcomes for the case school (Stake, 2005; Stewart, 2014; Yin, 2014).

3.2.2. Generalisability

Case study design has been criticised for the lack of consistency in process as qualitative methods such as observations or interviews allow for adaptations to complement the context of the case, therefore disputing the design's validity and generalisability (Sullivan, 2011). However, advocates of case study design argue that a lack of generalisability within case study design is justified because they are so context-specific (Stake, 2005; Bryman, 2012). It is not

an intention of the study to generalise outcomes as representative of all young people who are labelled 'disadvantaged', nor representative of all schools as those involved are not even the complete cohort of young people who are SED in the school and the school itself is one unique context (Bryman, 2012). However, the study can still provide important learning points for other schools with similar socio-cultural contexts.

Another criticism of case study design is the inability to follow a set of clear principles to allow for systematic review. However, it is argued that such validity and reliability cannot be applied in the same way to qualitative work to determine whether the research is "worth investigation" (Hammersley, 2007: 287). Instead, principles such as giving agency to those who are marginalised; bringing about practical or theoretical changes to education; or challenging injustice and oppression are adequate in reviewing the reliability of qualitative methodologies (Johnson and Rasulova, 2016). As such, the study rejected assumptions from a more quantitative approach that cannot simulate the realities of social systems and instead sought to understand how policy labelling is perceived through the eyes of young people (Alderson and Morrow, 2020).

3.3. Methods

The chapter will now move on to introduce the methods that were chosen in light of the study aligning with an interpretivist perspective to research and will explain why the method of interviews was an appropriate choice for this study. This section will introduce and justify the choice of semi-structured interviews and participatory tools used within these interviews, though these will be revisited in the research design section 3.5. when the chapter reviews and reflects upon the methods used.

3.3.1. Semi-structured interviews

As previously acknowledged in the literature review, research on young people who are SED is often dominated by government-funded research that claims to provide conclusive evidence relating to those labelled as 'disadvantaged' (Raffo et al., 2007). Often taking the form of positivist research that claims to offer objectivity and predictability, this approach threatens to exploit young people who are SED by offering conclusions that may not reflect their experiences due to a lack of active participation in the research process (Chamberlain et

al., 2011). Thus, a more participatory approach to research, in which qualitative data is sought, aimed to expose the lived experiences of young people who are labelled 'disadvantaged' (Mannay et al., 2017). Thus, the methods adopted in this study aim to understand experiences more collaboratively with young people (Cooper et al., 2015).

As such, questionnaires, surveys and highly structured interviews were rejected in favour of semi-structured interviews which offered young people "the opportunity to define the world in unique ways" (Merriam, 1988: 73), whilst maintaining some procedural structure (Hammersley, 2007). This exploratory interview approach sought the opportunity for a discourse which moved beyond surface talk to a rich discussion of experience, employing loosely defined questions grounded on the epistemological assumption that there are multiple realities (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994). Rather than trying to design all human variations out of the interview process, the variations that came from face-to-face interaction helped to generate more natural participant responses (Wengraf, 2001; Knight, 2002; Rubin and Rubin, 2005).

To determine how the 'disadvantaged' label translates into real life experiences from the perceptions of young people, semi-structured interviewing offered the opportunity for a rich dialogue between interviewer and interviewees. The interviews were recorded with the consent of young people and transcribed orthographically post-interview which allowed for complete researcher engagement during discussions (Wengraf, 2001; Rubin and Rubin, 2005). Young people were given the chance to validate transcriptions post-interview to clarify meaning or certify views. The orthographic transcription formed a record of what young people said with repetitions, hesitations and pauses for thought transcribed and syntax and grammar not corrected. It was also highly important that the interviews were conducted in the most sensitive and ethical way possible as young people were being asked, albeit indirectly, about their labelling as 'disadvantaged'. Semi-structured interviews were deemed most appropriate because they allowed for young people to steer discussion in ways they felt comfortable with and provided myself as researcher room to navigate ethically the field of educational 'disadvantage' by not being limited and bound by a strict set of questions that must be covered (Merriam, 1988).

3.3.2. Participative approaches

Rather than the interviews resemble a traditional question and answer format, it was important to make them participatory. Firstly, it was crucial to allow young people to lead discussion and to offer their perspectives with as little influence and guidance from myself. Secondly, the interviews needed to be informal and as far from a traditionally structured *question and answer* session as possible, like those that might occur in a classroom setting. Thus, participatory tools were used within interviews and any formal answering of questions in written form was rejected for informal, oral accounts. The potential complexities of the dual roles of interviewees/interviewer and students/teacher are discussed in section 3.5.2.

While this study does not claim to be wholly participative in that it does not use wholly participatory methods, it does seek to adopt more participative ways of researching. It is important to note that there is a continuum of participation within participatory research being very much led by young people, who generate the focus and methods of research studies (Clark, 2004; Groundwater-Smith et al., 2015; Cuevas-Parra and Tisdall, 2019). This study does not adopt this approach as the thesis was born and shaped out of my professional observations and experiences. However, what was intended was to make the interviews as participatory as possible for the young people involved, within the confines of a school setting alongside the ethical implications of discussing the policy label 'disadvantaged' with those who are themselves SED and labelled as 'disadvantaged' in that school context. This was achieved by employing participatory tools and strategies within the interview (details will be discussed in section 3.4.).

Participative methodologies aim to establish rapport with young people in order to assert the view that no one perspective can claim authority or authenticity and ultimately create the space for young people to feel empowered so that they can define, express and analyse their reality (Chambers, 2012; Swantz, 2015). Advocates of participative methodologies argue that for too long outsider researchers have asserted their own ideas about how minority groups should be supported (Chambers, 2012) and that social researchers should seek to do research *with* people not *on* people (Simons, 2009; Barnikis, 2015; Barnikis et al., 2019). For example, the study sought to enable young people to engage actively in decisions which affect their

lives, meaning that they were not just listened to but also heard so that their voices may then shape outcomes.

3.3.3. Validity and reliability

Because this study takes a critical approach in that it challenges dominant functionalist research that fails to acknowledge the role of young people's voice and agency in relation to the 'disadvantaged' label, it is important to be clear about the validity and reliability of the research methodology. The research did not seek to reach objective conclusions but focused instead on the individual experiences and realities of the young people who were interviewed (Holloway and Wheeler, 2002; Humphrey, 2013; Robinson, 2014; Mannay, 2017). Because of this, however, I was aware of how my role as professional and researcher needed to be constantly reviewed and so this chapter will also highlight the reflexivity employed throughout, aiming to take account of itself through ways of seeing which act back on and reflect existing views (Alvesson et al., 2008). However, researchers can never be detached, objective observers and so, the iterative process of consciously acknowledging the "shifting positions on the insider–outsider continuum" (Hellawell, 2007) and knowing that this can shape research outcomes, is at the fore of this chapter.

The chapter will return to reflexivity as I detail how my role as professional and researcher affected the research in a more applied sense in section 3.5.

3.4. Research design

The chapter will now move into the more practical, operational aspects of data collection, and in the latter half, will include the reflective elements of carrying out the study in practice.

3.4.1. Context of the case school and young people involved

The site for this study was a mixed comprehensive secondary school in a Northern-English city. At the time of the study, enrolment was over 1400 students, with an expected increasing roll over the following 3 years. The case school was largely representative of non-selective comprehensive schools within the local authority. The school had a higher than national average proportion of young people labelled as 'disadvantaged' and thus, in receipt of Pupil Premium (PP) funding and was rated Outstanding by OfSTED in 2015. The city in which the

school is situated could be described as geographically isolated as it is surrounded by rural and mostly more affluent areas.

While the young people invited to partake in the study were labelled 'disadvantaged' by government measures, they were equally labelled as members of a particular group within the case school, namely a Focus group that offered English and Maths intervention to young people who were labelled 'disadvantaged' but that also had a chance at achieving a Grade 4 "Standard Pass" at GCSE (OfQUAL, 2019). As discussed in the literature review of Chapter 2, schools are measured on the attainment gap between young people labelled as 'disadvantaged' and their non-labelled peers, therefore they were grouped as such because they were already working at a GCSE Grade 3 in English and Maths and were close to achieving the Government benchmark of a Grade 4. The selection process of young people is discussed in detail in section 3.4.6.

3.4.2. Conducting the interviews

In total, data collection comprised two group interviews and 10 individual interviews with students in English school year 11 (comprising 15-16-year-olds) and school year 7 (comprising 11-12-year-olds). Interviews were spread across separate days so as not to rush young people or to have to prematurely end interviews to begin a subsequent one directly afterwards. This also gave time for reflections between the group and individual interviews, which proved beneficial in eliciting richer responses from young people as they appeared to have had time to reflect on the discussions in the group interviews before their views were sought individually. The average duration of the interviews was 48.02 minutes (ranging from 36.04 to 65.02 minutes). Appendix A offers an overview of all the interviews, including their individual duration, year group of young person and pseudonyms.

Initially, both group interviews were conducted using a range of participative tools to stimulate and guide discussion. Firstly, I began the group interviews by laying out flashcards of labels used to describe young people in terms of socio-economic terms which contained the following: socially included, socially excluded, poverty, poor, deprived, rich, affluent, Pupil Premium, disadvantaged, advantaged, middle-class, and working-class (Appendix B). To encourage the young people to think about the connotations and implications of these terms

and to prompt discussion, I asked them to complete ranking exercises with a series of briefs. The young people were asked individually to rank the labels in order of ones they had heard being used most to being heard least or never; in order of ones they would be most likely to use and least likely to use; and in order of which ones they thought were most appropriate and least appropriate for adults in education to use to refer to young people.

After each ranking, young people were asked to talk through their ranking and began to pick up or point to terms they wanted to talk about, which led to discussions around the connotations of terms, who might use them and where the young people had heard them in use. I then asked them to select any terms that they thought were used in education to describe young people and also asked them for any terms they would use that were not included. Again, they were able to sort the flashcards and explain where they had heard the terms used in education and what they thought they meant, alongside what they thought they implied. I enabled young people to talk freely without much prompting and instead let the group dictate the direction of discussion of the terms. Had they not voluntarily voiced opinions on the 'disadvantaged' label (this was a term brought up numerous times in both group interviews by young people and so was discussed thoroughly), I would have prompted them to share their opinions on the term as it was such a central part of the study.

When young people had concluded their discussions on the perceptions of the labels they had been given, culminating with an extended discussion on the 'disadvantaged' label, I introduced them to an excerpt of 'disadvantaged' policy taken from the Department for Education's 2015 paper *Supporting the attainment of disadvantaged pupils* (Appendix C)[8], which featured the terms "disadvantaged", "poverty", "poor" and "Pupil Premium" (DfE, 2015: 5-6). I read this to the young people in each group interview whilst they had copies of their own. I then asked them if they had any opinions on what we had read, which led to discussions around how they thought young people were talked about in the excerpt and discussion was drawn to how the 'disadvantaged' label was used to refer to a group of young people by governments and schools.

[8] This policy paper excerpt was chosen as it was relatively illustrative but also of appropriate length, terminology and content for the session.

Once the discussion of the policy excerpt had concluded, I presented the young people with a wide range of images of different types of housing (Appendix D), as the link between 'disadvantage' and "the street [they] grew up on" (DfE, 2015: 6) was referenced in the excerpt and a previous pilot study in 2016 exposed that reference to housing types and areas were common across young people's talk about socio-economic circumstances of themselves and others. They were asked to describe the kinds of young people and families that might live in these houses and which images they might associate with the term 'disadvantaged'. Again, discussion was led by the young people's views on the images. If discussion veered too far from discussing the 'disadvantaged' label in relation to the images of housing, I asked questions such as 'So, you mentioned you thought a 'disadvantaged' family might live in this type of housing. Can you tell me why you think that?' (see Appendix D for example questions). This activity concluded the group interviews.

In the individual interviews, young people were asked to talk in more detail about the labels, ranking activities and housing images discussed in the group interviews, with all resources being available to refer to. Individual interviews were initially guided by my group interview notes, which logged the labels or images individual young people had expressed strong views about. Between group and individual interviews, I created guided questions for each individual interview, based on the notes I had made in the group interviews and from listening to the interview recording and reading the transcripts. In the individual interviews, I sought clarification and detail from comments young people had made in the group interviews, and this was achieved through asking clarifying questions such as "In the group interview, you mentioned that the 'disadvantaged' label is for the 'lowest in society. Could you give me an example of what you meant by 'the lowest in society'?". On answering these questions, young people offered more personal and detailed responses, building upon their initial comments in the group settings.

3.4.3. Recording interviews

The study followed Fontana and Frey's (2005) advice on capturing interview data in that interviews were recorded so as not to disrupt the natural flow of the conversation. Access to recording devices was obtained through the case school's IT department and the recording process worked seamlessly as I had prior experience of using the recording equipment during

the recording of GCSE speaking and listening assessments, as had the Y11 young people in the study. The recording device and process was discreet but transparent so as not to hamper the open and trusted bond between participant and researcher (Simons, 2009). None of the young people commented upon the recording element during interviews.

Whilst obtaining and setting up recording equipment was time efficient, what did take considerable time was the typing up of transcripts, with an average of seven hours plus time for reviewing and amendments required to transcribe one hour of recording (akin to estimated transcription times in qualitative research) (Wengraf, 2001; Cassell and Symon, 2004). Though time-consuming, the transcription process was highly beneficial in revisiting the responses offered by young people. The obligation to repeatedly listen to the dialogue provoked multiple interpretations of the data. For example, paying particular attention to intonation, emphasis and deliberate pauses (non-verbal points were noted on transcripts with silences transcribed as ellipses and intonation and emphasis of words transcribed as italicised text). Sufficient time was factored into the research process as it was understood that transcription is not merely an administrative task but the very first and important step in analysing data (Fontana and Frey, 2005).

Whilst semi-structured interviews are likely to be exploratory, they still need to be somewhat planned (Knight, 2002). Group interviews were structured around the three participatory activities (see Appendices B, C and D). Individual interviews were structured around particular comments each young person had made in the group interviews, which were logged as *aide memoires* to ensure that opportunities to revisit important points raised in the group setting could be explored in more detail in each individual interview (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004). This was helpful at the data analysis stage when coding and categorising were used and also allowed for flexibility when responding to the emerging world views of young people alongside new ideas on the topic (Rubin and Rubin, 2005).

An interview of this kind can be simplified as a “conversation with a purpose” (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994: 79) yet it is this purpose that requires researchers to implement additional skills than they would when participating in a natural conversation. Kvale (2007) advocates a set of essential skills to ensure a fruitful interview process: active listening to ensure the interviewer is hearing; reacting to and constructing interpretations; focusing to keep the

interview on topic; and clarifying and checking for accuracy where material is incomplete or is ambiguous. It is essential that the full attention of the interviewer is assigned to the process and becomes a collaborator with young people to "get the story straight" (Wilson and Hutchinson, 1991: 270) and so Kvale's (2007) aids were utilised throughout the interview process.

In order to facilitate Kvale's (2007) skills, traditional, in-depth notetaking was rejected in capturing interview data as it threatened to disrupt the natural flow of the conversation (Fontana and Frey, 2005) and therefore only brief notes were taken during the interview where necessary. Kvale (2007) advises that interviewers set aside at least ten minutes of reflection after interviews to contemplate what has been learned and to note down any significant non-verbal features that accompanied young people's responses. Therefore, interviews were limited to one per day to leave time for reflection and collation of more detailed notes in order to clarify and summarise meaning on brief annotations gathered during the interview (Lofland et al., 2006).

3.4.4. Interview approaches

Semi-structured interviewing was a method that was trialled in a short study conducted in 2016 whilst completing the preparatory stages of the professional doctorate course. The study acted as a pilot for this thesis as it focused on establishing the most appropriate and ethically sound methods of selecting, recruiting and interviewing young people. The study's aim was to explore how young people who were labelled as 'disadvantaged' engaged with literacy. Trialling semi-structured interviews was invaluable in experiencing the pitfalls and successful elements of this data collection method alongside the literature and theory behind it and informed many decisions made in the methodological design stage of this thesis. The 2016 study will be referred to in this section as a pilot study as the methodological decisions it informed are reviewed.

Opening interviews with a question that sought a narrative from young people was shaped by their success in producing rich data when trialled in the 2016 pilot study. In looking for natural responses, the individual interview process adhered to Mishler's (1991) narrative approach which outlines that since responses in everyday conversations often display the features of

narratives, narratives must be one of the "natural cognitive and linguistic forms through which individuals express meaning" (Mishler, 1999: 12). Thus, I began each individual interview of this study with a request for a narrative (for example, "Can you tell me a little more about your thoughts on the labels and images we discussed last time?"). I was then able to remain mostly silent for at least two minutes of each individual interview, making only a few words of encouragement and engagement as I remained a listener to young people's experiences (Kvale, 2007). Only after they had concluded their initial narrative did I pose questions for clarification. The confidence to remain a silent yet attentive interviewer proved essential in furthering the interviews and elicited deeper narrative responses that remained centred on the young people's voices without me influencing their responses. Though long silences were alien to the conversations had between myself and the young people outside of the research context, this method was repeated throughout all individual interviews in this study and the absence of my voice provided essential contemplation and reflection time for the young people.

Though this approach enabled young people to relay extended narratives, prolonged silences could have caused anxiety as they could have been made to feel uncomfortable in dominating the interview space (Eder and Fingerson, 2002). There are a limited number of times in the lives of young people when they are asked to reflect on their own experiences and thus, being asked to talk at length about themselves was potentially foreign ground. Self-conscious behaviour could have resulted in young people wanting to end discussion due to not wanting to explore insights into their world brought about by the interview as they may have felt alien talking for an extended period about themselves and their lives (Kvale, 2007). However, by utilising Eder and Fingerson's (2002) proposal of ensuring young people were aware of the researcher's desire to hear personal views, they were open in sharing their experiences.

After following Kvale's (2007) initial advice when seeking spontaneous, rich descriptions and opting to begin with a narrative question that invited young people to open up and have free reign on telling their experience, narratives were then followed by probing questions to elicit comprehensive narratives. In checking for accuracy by sensitively pressing points as taken from Wengraf's (2001) advice on eliciting extensive replies, coherent narrative responses were obtained. In observing *red light* moments such as unusual terms or strong intonations, opportunities arose to ask for elaboration or clarification (Wengraf, 2001). For example, when

multiple young people used the term *normal*, I was able to ask them what they meant by *normal* to obtain well-rounded responses (Kvale, 2007). While the warnings of faking friendships and using rapport to pose as a Trojan horse were observed (Duncombe and Jessop, 2012), intrusively probing narratives to obtain honest and well-rounded responses was not necessary in the interviews. Though some clarifying questions were necessary, the semi-structured interviews were conducted so that the power imbalance that is ever-present in an interview situation (and especially between teacher and student as discussed in section 3.5.3.) was minimised sufficiently to allow the young people to seemingly feel able to speak openly and freely (Eder and Fingerson, 2002; Flick, 2007; Duncombe and Jessop, 2012).

On the other hand, semi-structured interviewing allowed for irrelevant or repetitive responses to be diverted. If young people deviated from the discussion around socio-economic disadvancement, the organic nature of the interview meant that conversation could be guided back on topic. This eradicated the problem that researchers who conduct highly structured and standardised research face in that they can merely watch the enquiry heading on to the rocks without the opportunity to steer the research back on to more pertinent ground (Knight, 2002). Though some critics claim that improvisation is a sin and flexibility a curse (Knight, 2002), face-to-face, lightly structured interviews offered spontaneity to explore avenues of experience that young people themselves mentioned and would not have necessarily been explored had I been bound to work through a set of pre-prepared questions. With the chance to change the direction of the inquiry to accommodate new insights, data generated was rich as the experiences revealed were impossible to pre-empt and thus positioned young people at the fore of data construction, alongside the myself as researcher (Kvale, 2001).

3.4.5. Clarity of questions

It is advised that the researcher is familiar with the language and culture of those they are interviewing as the chief focus is to understand the meaning of human experiences from the interviewees' perspectives (Zhang and Wildermuth, 2009). Because the interviews were governed by the social conventions of young people who are SED, an understanding of their language; how their language can be structured; and its meanings in the specific context of the research setting was essential as it is language that essentially allows a young person to

structure the way their world is experienced (Andrews, 2012; Creswell, 2013). During the construction of the semi-structured interviews, I was particularly mindful of lexical and organisational choice. Long and complex questions, posed in quick succession before response time was offered were rejected, a further reflection of the 2016 pilot study (Kvale, 2007). In this study, age-appropriate questions were used; appropriate time was given for young people to gather their thoughts before speaking; and language used (included that in the policy excerpt) was unambiguous and direct, to stimulate interview responses that captured their meaning.

3.4.6. Selection of young people

As the study aimed to explore young people's perceptions of their own and others' labelling, the study focused primarily on capturing strong stories from a very specific group. In seeking such personal narratives, the selection of young people had to be very sensitively handled and as such, decisions regarding how many participants were invited and which participants were chosen became a reflection of the study's purpose (Sutton and Austin, 2015). As such, students were recruited from teaching groups explicitly called Focus groups that already existed in the school. Focus groups were an alternative name for tutor groups in the case school, where students see the same member of staff for a 25-minute period each day to cover a range of weekly activities including Personal, Social, Health and Economic education (PSHE), reviews of attendance, literacy and numeracy activities and an assembly. The young people selected for this study were part of Focus groups specifically for those eligible for PP funding and perceived to be at the borderline of achieving a benchmark pass (GCSE Grade 4), thus receiving additional English and Maths intervention within their Focus group (across each of the five year groups Y7 to Y11), there were two Focus groups that were designed as such). Two groups, one from Y7 and one from Y11, each containing 10 young people were invited to participate in the study. This provided a sample that was sufficient to gather rich and illustrative data but remained practical so group and individual interviews were not hampered by time restraints (Newington and Metcalfe, 2014).

The ability to use existing groups of young people who were labelled 'disadvantaged' enabled the study to ascertain the perceptions of those who are SED without exposing them as being labelled 'disadvantaged' to themselves or others. Within the case school, there were Focus

groups for each year group and the study worked with one Focus group for the youngest and eldest year groups, Year 7 (11-12 years) and Year 11 (15-16 years), to provide an opportunity to analyse young people's perceptions of the 'disadvantaged' label at different ages. There were two group interviews with six young people in Y7 and eight young people in Y11 out of a possible 10 young people who attended each, with young people participating in discussion with their age-related peers to maximise openness of discussion. Those who did not give consent to participate in the study continued with their Focus group lesson as usual. Individual interviews were completed with young people's consent after the group interviews, resulting in 5 young people from Y7 and 5 young people from Y11 agreeing to an individual interview.

The decision to focus on two year groups at the very beginning (Y7) and very end (Y11) of the secondary phase was appropriate for the study as it was not a research aim to categorically compare different age groups. The study intended to capture the views of young people at the start and end of their secondary phase experience and therefore while age and variation were carefully considered, it was not necessary to select a Focus group from each of the five year groups in the school. It was also considered that, apart from creating a larger sample of young people, involving other year groups would not necessarily have offered anything new but alternatively may have compromised the depth and richness of narrative which was partly enabled because a substantial amount of uninterrupted time was able to be devoted to each young person. Furthermore, in the study's design stages, it was planned that up to 20 young people would be involved, and therefore had everyone consented to participate, the sample would have been 20 young people in group interviews (10 in each) and 20 individual interviews. The study respected the right to decline participation from the six young people who did not consent to participate in the study at all, and from the four who declined consent to be individually interviewed. It was not thought appropriate to widen the sample selection when some young people did not consent to participate, as this was thought to be reactive, rather than proactive. The sample size chosen meant that over an hour at a time could be dedicated to each young person to allow time to put them at ease, build confidence and elicit detailed and rich narratives. This was built into the study's rationale with the aim to offer a novel approach to research in the field by asking young people who have been labelled 'disadvantaged' about their perceptions of the label, in contrast to the plethora of more functionalist, adult-led studies with large data sets that drive policy. The ethical

considerations when inviting young people who are SED to a study on the 'disadvantaged' label is discussed in section 3.6. when the chapter moves on to discussing the ethical implications of the study.

The nature of this sub-group may have impacted upon the responses gained and so this group could be said to misrepresent the broad spectrum of young people who are labelled 'disadvantaged'. If there had existed Focus groups in the school that contained groups of young people who were labelled 'disadvantaged' but rather than being classed as *easy wins*, were disengaged with their learning or were aiming for academic targets below the government benchmark of a Grade 4, the study would have included such groups within the sample to broaden the representation of those who are labelled 'disadvantaged'.

3.5. Reflecting on methods

It is first useful to explore reflection and reflexivity as concepts to frame the process of reflection that was undertaken continually throughout the research process.

Reflection can be described as learning and developing through examining what we think happened during the research process and how we think others perceived the event and us. This process opens up our research to scrutiny by ourselves and others (Bolton and Delderfield, 2018). Reflecting on one's research practice is essential in making changes to subsequent interactions with participants and being aware of how the research process could shape outcomes and interpretations. Reflexivity can be described as the conscious exposure of the role of the beliefs and values held by researchers in the selection of research methodology. It is the deliberate self-scrutiny of the researcher's attitudes, thought processes, values, assumptions, prejudices and habitual actions in relation to the research process (Shacklock and Smyth, 1998). Reflexivity is finding strategies to question these beliefs in order to strive to understand our complex roles in relation to others (Bolton and Delderfield, 2018).

Particularly due to the subjective nature of the research and the fact that I am conducting research in a school I am familiar with and with young people to whom I am familiar, I must be aware of the "limits of my knowledge, of how my behaviours plays into organisational practices and why such practices might marginalise groups or exclude individuals" (Bolton and Delderfield, 2018: 14). In being reflexive, it is also key that I recognise that I am active in

shaping my surroundings, and am proactive rather than simply reactive to research circumstances and relationships, so as to continually review and revise ethical ways of being and relating (Cunliffe, 2009).

The following sub-sections will consider the research process as framed by the concepts of reflection and reflexivity.

3.5.1. Referring to young people

The term participants to refer to the young people who were invited to partake in the study was initially chosen as it captured the sentiment of participative methodology. The study's methodological design aimed to create the conditions to enable young people to feel empowered so that they could narrate their own realities (Chambers, 2012; Swantz, 2015). However, in hindsight, the term participants began to feel too impersonal and faceless when repeatedly used in early drafts of this thesis. Thus, the term participants was replaced with young people so as to continuously remind the reader that the voices captured talking about labelling and its connotations are those who bear such labels, a group whose perceptions are largely overlooked. Furthermore, when attributing individual young people to their responses when quoted in the findings chapter, labelling them as participant followed by letters alphabetically (*Participant A*, *Participant B*, for example) was also incongruous with the founding principles of the study in line with my earlier critique of labels, in that it further demoted and dehumanised a group that it intended to bring to the fore (Steele, 2010; Reardon, 2011).

On realising the inappropriateness of labelling young people as *Participant A*, *Participant B* and so on, I invited those who were interviewed to choose a pseudonym for themselves. I advised that pseudonyms should not be common names of peers in their year group to maximise anonymity. It was suggested they perhaps chose a famous person they admired but young people were ultimately given autonomy over their aliases with the intention that they felt some sense of ownership over their responses.

3.5.2. The insider–outsider continuum

As previously acknowledged, in completing an EdD, I found myself constantly within an "insider–outsider continuum" (Hellawell, 2007: 1). Because I occupied both the roles of

researcher and professional, it is important to acknowledge how this could have had an influence on the research process and outcomes. Lewis (1973) argues that the perspectives of both outsider and insider reveal certain realities and each perspective has its advantages and disadvantages and that, ideally, the researcher should be both inside and outside the perceptions of participants at all times. Hammersley (1993) describes this as possessing both empathy and alienation, which are both useful qualities for a researcher.

As an insider, there are many advantages such as the relative lack of culture shock or disorientation; the possibility of enhanced rapport and communication; the ability to gauge the honesty and accuracy of responses; and the likelihood that respondents will reveal more intimate details of their lives to someone considered empathetic are juxtaposed with the problems that proponents of insider research nevertheless acknowledge (Hockey, 1993). It is also important to recognise that my insider status of professional conducting research at my place of employment could be seen as causing power differentials between myself and the young people I interviewed and causing bias in that I was potentially invested in my place of employment.

However, it could also be argued that being an insider researcher is far more than simply looking into one's own work organisation (Hellawell, 2007). Rather, Merton (1972) defines the insider as an individual who possesses an intimate knowledge of the community and its members, with the community existing as a much wider concept than just the organisation itself. Therefore, it could be argued that had I conducted the research in a different school, with young people who were not familiar with me as a teacher or leader, I would still be an insider as I possess intimate knowledge of schools, young people and education without necessarily being a member of that particular school. To be an outsider researcher, Hellawell (2007) claims, you must consider the opposite of being an insider, so to possess no knowledge of the topic, community or research area. Here, it is contested whether researchers are ever fully outsiders in their research.

With this in mind, the chapter will now discuss the practicalities of the dual role of researcher and professional within the research.

3.5.3. Dual roles: researcher and professional

In partaking in the research, young people were required to set aside existing perceptions of myself as classroom teacher and leader (Simons, 2009). It was important to acknowledge that my dual role brought tensions to the study and that the balance between professional distance and personal friendship had to be carefully managed when interviewing students with whom I had a relationship built on authority (Kvale, 2007). Thus, young people were made explicitly aware of the differences between the role of researcher compared to their existing perceptions of the role of myself as professional. However, whilst I did strive to separate the roles of researcher and professional to maintain non-hierarchical relationships, I was bound by my professional duty of care towards young people. The nature of a single case study with data interpreted from a constructivist angle means that I was active in seeking an open response from young people. Despite this being advantageous in exploring experiences within a specific context, it was also plagued with ethical implications. If a young person had revealed sensitive information, I would have been obliged to pass the information on to the school's Child Protection Officer. Because of this, the study could not offer complete confidentiality in the sense that young people had to be told that any safeguarding concerns would be disclosed. Sharing such implications may have jeopardised the quality of data collected as young people may have withheld information for fear of confidentiality infringement. Despite this, young people's welfare was a priority, though thankfully this did not occur in the interview process.

Not only is researcher bias a crucial factor to consider when conducting interpretative research but where the researcher is, in some ways, an insider brings further challenges. Since the case school was also my place of employment, what obligations I owed to young people, sponsors, fellow professionals, or others alongside interests in upholding the school's reputation were considered (Cohen et al.,2017). Furthermore, the outcomes of the study could have challenged existing or forthcoming decisions that were made regarding the experiences of young people who are SED in the school. This awareness, alongside gaining the consent of the Head teacher of the case school and fully explaining the research process to them minimised my professional bias interfering with the research.

Whilst access to research contexts can be difficult, gaining access for this study to the institution and young people did not prove problematic due to my insider status as an employee of the case school which alleviated pressures of negotiation for those outside of organisations (Knight, 2002; Zhang and Wildermuth, 2009). However, I had to be explicit at what points data was being collected and recorded to be used in the study and be careful not to exploit young people's openness or vulnerability by utilising information revealed under the impression that it was not for publication in non-research-based conversations (Kvale, 2007). My dual role of researcher and professional could also be seen as having some benefits. As rapport is important in obtaining rich qualitative data, there was no desire to completely divorce pre-existing relationships with young people from the study (Kvale, 2007). In fact, existing professional skills were utilised during interviews to elicit rich responses, as discussed in detail in section 3.5.4. below.

3.5.3. Power relations

While a researcher cannot control nor predict what information young people will reveal at what time, possessing an awareness of such factors and placing high priority on the primacy of relationships strengthens the researcher's claim of an ethical approach to research (Christians, 2011). Therefore, the importance of supportive, cooperative and collaborative relationships where I ensured there was space for young people to have control over what was discussed in interviews was at the forefront of the data collection process. This required constant consideration of relational ethics so that trust accrued over time acted as a medium through which ethical implications could be resolved through mutual understanding (Etherington, 2007). The study intended to construct research *with* young people and so I rejected the idea that, as researcher, I must avoid doing harm *to* them by viewing them as the weaker, more vulnerable party in the process. Rather, I endeavoured to treat the young people as on equal terms with myself, striving to establish discussion that was independent of hierarchical or powerful interests (Simons, 2009). For example, remaining a keen listener rather than interrupting their narratives, as outlined in section 3.4.4., aimed to make them feel their voices were valued and respected.

Forming rapport and gaining trust is essential to the success of semi-structured interviews as the open sharing of young people's experiences can only occur when trustful relationships

are established (Kvale, 2007). However, a relationship built on trust already existed between the young people and myself as, outside of the research process, the relationship is between student and teacher/leader (Raider-Roth, 2005). As previously discussed, this existing rapport was of benefit when interacting with young people and eliciting rich responses. However, whilst trust played a significant part in obtaining such responses, the power I held as adult, researcher and professional was wholly acknowledged. It would have been naïve to regard the interviews as open dialogues between egalitarian partners because even unintentional exertion of power may have resulted in young people expressing what they believe I wanted to hear (Kvale, 2007). While the semi-structured interviews were carefully designed to allow young people to voice their experiences and understanding of their world, I had to reiterate at the beginning of both group interviews and every individual interview that the study sought their opinion only and that there was no correct answer to the questions I posed (Eder and Fingerson, 2002). Despite the careful design of interviews, it can never fully be known if the relationship between myself and young people did inhibit in any way.

I was also mindful that it was not a commonplace for a teacher to seek to understand a young person's views on a topic outside the curriculum, for over an hour at a time (Kvale, 2007). While it was acknowledged that power imbalance is ever-present and must be used as a lens through which to critique any assumption made about a young person's response, I minimised power inequality by choosing Focus groups that contained young people that I did not teach (Simons, 2009). The case school's number of young people labelled as 'disadvantaged' was above the national average (OfSTED, 2019), therefore there were Focus groups that contained young people that I did not teach which were targeted for the study.

3.5.4. Utilising prior experience

According to Rubin and Rubin (2005), existing traits derived from researchers' disciplines may prove beneficial in the semi-structured interview process. Thus, skills such as inference and deduction that are deemed critical in conducting successful interviews where researchers are required to "think about what might be unspoken, suggested by the words but not explicit in them" (Knight, 2002: 61) overlap with my professional role. In teaching young people literacy skills, understanding and appreciating how things might look from others' perspectives is a core value within the classroom and young people are encouraged to express themselves in

perceptive and original manners. Thus, I regularly seek out shades of meaning and subtle connotations of language choice to infer how a child has perceived a concept. For example, analysing how language is used for effect to imply characteristics about a protagonist in a fiction text or exploring semantic fields within a poem to better understand the poet's intentions. This skill came in useful in alleviating the problem some researchers face in finding themselves limited in the questions they can ask and in the sense they can make of what they hear (Knight, 2002).

An important role of the interviewer is to clarify whether the inference they have made from young people's ambiguities reflect genuine experiences of their life situation (Kvale, 2007). However, Duncombe and Jessop (2012) warn of researchers using inference for self-gain when faced with pressure to deliver results. Researchers could manipulate dialogue and make illegitimate conclusions from young people's responses in order to profit their research study, without any concern for broader ethical issues Therefore, I was conscious of clarifying assumptions made during interviews through clarifying questions as illustrated in section 3.4.2. of this chapter to ensure their experiences had been appropriately represented and that the monopoly of interpretation which a researcher holds had not been exploited (Kvale, 2007).

On the contrary, not only are inference and deduction crucial skills to possess as an educator but are skills young people must acquire in order to critically analyse and appreciate literary effect. Therefore, both myself and the young people were aware that not all knowledge is explicit and that views can be expressed through subtle suggestions in the unspoken as will be seen in Chapter 4 when one young person began to unpick the connotations of the prefix 'dis' at the beginning of 'disadvantaged'. Whilst the ability to infer meaning based on their experiences by reading between the lines was an aid, it was not underestimated how much adults assume they are attuned to young people's insinuations, nor how aware they are in the implicit agenda the researcher possesses (Simons, 2009). Ignoring this could have jeopardised the quest in obtaining information without the young people necessarily knowing what I, as researcher, sought (Kvale, 2007). It was therefore essential to refrain from leading questions and loaded vocabulary and utilise open-ended questions to allow young people to describe their own experiences (Creswell, 2013).

In considering Wengraf's (2001) advice on incorporating field-specific knowledge of face-to-face interaction, interviews were approached with the experience of posing and answering questions which are skills embedded within my professional practice. An aspect of questioning that could be transferred from professional role to research role was the improvisation of questions. As informed by Kvale (2007), there is no one correct follow-up question and semi-structured interviews require a flexible on-the-spot follow-up of young people's responses. It is this spontaneity that is crucial in becoming an effective classroom practitioner and my existing ability to raise different types of questions at appropriate difficulty levels; to give sufficient time for young people to respond to questions; and to deal with ambiguous responses was of great benefit in interviews (Creemers and Kyriakides, 2006).

Wengraf (2001) reminds researchers to consider all existing professional knowledge about face-to-face interaction, the setting and the types of people involved. My professional role as educator requires an understanding of the rich variation in young people's experience (Patton, 2014); involves regular face-to-face interaction with them (Knight, 2002); and recognises that traits of empathy, sensitivity, humour and sincerity are important tools for successfully educating young people (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). Drawing upon these existing traits in the interviews was enabled due to my insider status of working with young people and proved highly beneficial in the semi-structured interview process in eliciting rich narratives.

3.6. Ethical considerations

Considering the universal nature of the use of the 'disadvantaged' label in UK schools which also spreads into wider society and the media, the study wanted to be candid with young people and their parents and carers that the research was about understanding their perceptions of this label. The study was also highly aware of the ethical implications of conducting a study with young people who are SED about their labelling as 'disadvantaged' in education policy. The existing Focus group structure therefore became of interest because these were groups that, due to the 'disadvantaged' label, had driven the case school to offer interventions that intended to improve their attainment. Thus, young people were aware that they had been invited because of an interest in the Focus group, with all other group members

also being invited. In this way, the invitation process was conducted with both honesty and ethical consideration. The study ensured that young people were invited to the study both knowing exactly what the study entailed but also ensured that the 'disadvantaged' label was not applied directly to them as the reason for them to participate. As discussion around socio-economic status and socio-economic labels from education policy discussed in both group and individual interviews was deemed sensitive, all references to socio-economic status and labelling were discussed in the third person and never attributed to individual young people. Also, all young people were reminded throughout not to refer to other individuals and groups from within the school directly.

It is not always clear how ethical values should be applied in given situations as some of the most obstinate ethical issues are products of conflicts among ethics and the necessity of trading off one against the other, as Simons (2009) argues that the balancing of such values in tangible situations is the ultimate ethical act. Within this study, it was pertinent for the young people not to feel a sense of otherness or hostility in the fact that they are labelled as 'disadvantaged' (Simons, 2009). Thus, although the proposed study aimed to explore the terminology used to identify such groups ("low income families", "disadvantaged children", "the disadvantaged" (DfE, 2012, 2015, 2018; OfSTED, 2012; 2019; EEF, 2018), such loaded lexicon was carefully phrased in questions posed to young people and a careful balance between detailed over-information and leaving out aspects of the design that may influence them was adhered to (Kvale, 2007).

While it was easier not to draw unnecessary attention to the fact that the young people who were invited to participate in the study were themselves labelled 'disadvantaged' by policy makers and practitioners during the recruitment stage, this became more difficult within the interviews, especially in the interest of being transparent and not wilfully deceiving the young people who had volunteered to participate. Because young people were labelled 'disadvantaged' according to household income, receipt of benefits and eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM), exploring their experience of carrying this label without revealing the nature of the group of young people targeted was difficult but it felt necessary. Unlike groups that are obviously diverse and where young people are clearly aware of these differences such as gender or age, their own or others' household income and social upbringing may not have been apparent to them. Aside from not paying for their lunchtime meal, it was

considered possible that the young people may not have been aware of any difference to their education compared to those not labelled as 'disadvantaged'.

The decision to interview young people in this study about their perceptions of the 'disadvantaged' label was prompted by their awareness of their social status and how groups of young people were labelled within schools in the 2016 pilot study (Sutton et al., 2007; Papapolydorou, 2014). Therefore, as it has been suggested that secondary age young people are aware of these ideas, it is argued that it is in fact unethical if discussion around policy labels and socio-economic disadvancement is withheld from them, as this would underplay their agency in a topic that involves them so significantly as explored in the literature review (Hendrick, 2003; John, 2003; Morris, 2003; Christensen and James, 2008; Leeson, 2010). It is therefore argued that it is crucial to explore the labelling of those who are SED with young people themselves, given the way they are segregated in policy and in school settings such as in the Focus groups that featured in the case study school.

While the study's design aimed to minimise the exposure of sensitive information being revealed to them, some young people did raise questions in individual interviews whether young people are told that they are labelled 'disadvantaged'. Because I was so aware of ensuring that information on young people such as policy labels like 'disadvantaged' remain confidential within my professional role to as not to *other* them from their peers, I had prepared for the very possible eventuality of young people asking if they themselves were labelled 'disadvantaged' during the research process. The study thought carefully about balancing candidness and ethics and confirming that young people were 'disadvantaged', should they have asked was not thought to be ethically sound. In anticipating them asking if they were labelled 'disadvantaged', I planned to return the focus of the question back to the young person, for example: *'What makes you think you might be labelled 'disadvantaged'?*. This way, the young person could talk about why they might think they are labelled but as professional and researcher, I was not obligated to confirm this.

In actuality, only in the third person did two young people ask if young people could be told if they were labelled in individual interviews, though none asked directly whether they were labelled 'disadvantaged' themselves. However, comments from all young people interviewed showed they were likely aware of the bracket they had been placed into by policy makers

prior to asking the question about whether a young person can be told that they are labelled. For example, some slipped into first person narratives when talking about those labelled as 'disadvantaged' and also spoke passionately about the misrepresentation and demonisation of those labelled as 'disadvantaged' in the media, in a way that made them seem personally involved (these findings are discussed alongside young people's voices in Chapter 4). It was perhaps due to the sense of shame and dissociation from the 'disadvantaged' label as discussed in detail in Chapter 2 that meant they did not seek to identify personally with the 'disadvantaged' label, whether they were aware they had been labelled or not.

3.6.1. Confidentiality and anonymity

The names of the case school and young people were omitted from the study to avoid potential identification through the whole research process. Young people are referred to using pseudonyms and ages only in the thesis and all other obvious identifiable features have been removed. However, the guarantee of complete confidentiality could not be offered during interviews regarding safeguarding concerns. If a safeguarding concern had arisen, the statutory obligations to safeguard the children from within the school would have been implemented.

Decisions around informed consent and anonymity were informed by the selection process for the 2016 pilot study. What proved to be a significant issue in the pilot was the focus that the young people placed upon the research purpose being an opportunity to get out of lessons, rather than a chance to voice their opinions. When the study was explained verbally, the young people interrupted the explanation to ask if they would miss any lessons. When this was confirmed, all young people rapidly agreed to being interviewed before parental consent had reached home. It appeared that they had missed the point of the interview and saw the opportunity as novel, making it evident during the pilot that they did not fully understand the significance of informed consent.

The misunderstanding of the crux of the interview was further confirmed when young people returned to their classroom and aimed to glamorise the situation by announcing that they had been exclusively selected to be recorded for an interview and that they would miss a lesson. With the children waiving their right to anonymity before parents had been informed,

the pilot highlighted flaws in the order in which consent was obtained. Despite the pilot study attempting to give further agency to young people in giving them ownership of the consent forms, the ethical dilemma this posed was rectified in the parental contact for this study. Rather than sending letters home with the young people themselves, letters were posted to parents' addresses, accompanied by a phone call to parents to ensure that ethical approval was gained, followed by the consent of the child.

Thus, for this study, young people that were given consent to participate by parents and carers were spoken to in their Focus groups about the study's aims and data collection methods, which were explained both verbally to ensure understanding and in the form of a letter they could take away. Reply slips were attached to the letter to obtain written informed consent from all young people. It was stressed that they could opt out at any stage of the research, even if they had returned the reply slip consent. Therefore, both verbal and written consent was obtained and verbal consent was re-sought before each interview as well as in advance of the interviews. Young people were able to withdraw from the study up until the final write up, as data could be omitted from findings and not included in the thesis. A date was provided by which they could opt out, and could be conveyed in writing, in person or through their parents and carers making contact. Initial consent from parents and carers included the option to request a copy in additional languages, as are all letters received by parents of children at the case school. The letter designed for young people was read to them to ensure any literacy or other barriers to understanding were overcome and was written in a language appropriate for young people. No young people withdrew from participation after their parents gave consent, though one young person withdrew from participation after the group interview and so was not individually interviewed.

3.6.2. Vulnerabilities of young people

Because the study invited young people to talk about potentially sensitive topics, I was aware that potentially emotional responses could ethically transcend the bounds of the interviews (Kvale, 2007). Furthermore, any desire I had to help, empower or change the young person based on what they revealed in the interviews would raise further ethical implications (Wengraf, 2001). In inviting them to describe their perceptions and experiences, young people themselves can often associate a research interview with emancipatory and self-

expressive encounters experienced with relatives, friends or partners (Kvale, 2007). Instigating such strong emotional reactions would question my motives as both researcher and as an adult *in loco parentis* as a semi-structured interview may force spontaneous revelation that would require the notification of the institution's Child Protection Officer if the young person was deemed at risk (Kvale, 2007). To mitigate these possibilities, I reminded young people at the beginning of each interview that ethical protection was offered through the academic institution's committee; that if they revealed anything I was concerned about then I would be obligated to pass the information on; and also reminded them of their right to stop the interview or withdraw at any point. I also consciously avoided steering interviews into the realms of a therapeutic situation by only ever referring to the 'disadvantaged' label and other policy terms to label young people who are SED in hypothetical scenarios (Fontana and Frey, 2005; Duncombe and Jessop, 2012). In practice, possibly due to their disassociation with the 'disadvantaged' label as seen in their responses in Chapter 4, emotional, personal anecdotes were not offered, with some young people occasionally slipping into first person narratives but then reverting back to speaking of the 'disadvantaged' label or reference to SED through third person, hypothetical scenarios.

On the other hand, young people may have been unlikely to offer honest and unguarded opinions due to their prior experience or perception of an interview. Interviews at the case school are often linked to negative investigations such as poor attendance or a behavioural incident. Alternatively, other interviews young people may have had experience of would be classed as high-stake interactions such as college or work experience interviews where giving honest responses may be jeopardised by pressures of upholding school values and seeking to protect their reputation. As highlighted by Wengraf (2001), it must be acknowledged that participants' prior experience of interviews where attendance may have been non-negotiable or they may have faced punitive and disciplinary encounters with higher-ups may have affected their responses. To minimise young people censoring their responses, interviews were conducted in classrooms and seminar rooms, rather than staff offices to minimise the similarities between any previous school interview, as recommended by Simons (2009). It was also explained how the aims of the interviews were to understand a situation rather than prove or disprove a theory or reach a particular conclusion.

3.7. Data Collection and Analysis

After recording and transcribing the interviews, the young people's responses were subjected to a systematic analysis which allowed fluidity from the raw data to the identification of the overarching themes to the emergence of sub themes.

3.7.1. Initial impressions

Data analysis began after each interview was conducted, with an immediate summary of each conversation completed, as recommended by Gibson and Brown (2009) and Drake and Heath (2011). These initial impressions captured a macro review of each interview immediately after it occurred. As well as noting the date, location and duration of the interview, personal reflections were logged such as the atmosphere of the interview, the rapport created between young people/person and myself plus any other particularly noteworthy moments. This approach was consistent with (Lofland et al., 2006) who claim that data emerges through consideration and reflection and involves the interaction of many elements. Essentially, this initial method of data analysis was followed because it accepted the inherently rich nature of social interaction (Christians, 2011). Processing these initial impressions of data gave insights into how aware and informed the young people were, with many contributing strong views on the use of labelling to denote SED and around the deficit narrative promoted by the government to portray those labelled as 'disadvantaged' as at fault.

3.7.2. Inductive coding

The next step in the analysis process was to review transcribed interviews in greater depth. A detailed analysis of transcript data was necessary to capture the richness of the young people's narratives on their perceptions of the 'disadvantaged' label (Robinson, 2014). Inductive or 'ground up' coding was adopted as an approach where codes were derived from the data and themes identified during the initial impressions stage as outlined above. Preconceived notions of codes were rejected and instead young people's narratives emerged from the raw data itself. This approach suited the exploratory nature of the research. The data analysis process was influenced by Gibson and Brown's (2009) empirical data analysis whereby analytical codes were generated by gaining an understanding of data through iterative readings, logging commonalities, contradictions and points of interest. By identifying

codes within the data, significant or recurrent themes in the analysis were brought to the fore, hence why this approach is also named alternatively as thematic analysis coding (Braun and Clark, 2006). The aim was to retain adequate liberty in coding and to uphold the organic narrative voices of young people. Therefore, computer assisted qualitative data analysis software packages, such as NVIVO, were rejected as qualitative data analysis is deemed a highly intuitive venture and therefore unlikely to achieve satisfactory computerisation (Garcia-Horta and Guerra-Ramos, 2008).

A *Google Sheets* spreadsheet was used as a way of recording codes and quotations from young people. Sub-codes emerged as the overarching themes logged during the initial impressions branched out and became more specific and nuanced. This approach allowed the initial impressions themes to grow and breathe, with codes developing empirically from the data (Gibson and Brown, 2009). New codes were encouraged to emerge through the logging of repetitions, emphasis, agreements and contrasts across the transcripts. As latent and explicit codes (Braun and Clark, 2006) emerged and shaped the grouping of young people's comments, they were logged on the coding spreadsheet, which began to grow and change as additional data was added. Rather than the emerging themes becoming cumbersome, clarity was achieved through the creation, deletion, splitting and merging of codes. Also, returning to individual sections of the interview data (to clarify what was said, or how it was spoken) improved the validity of analysis as it ensured theoretical saturation point was reached because no new themes were emerging (Given, 2016). The ongoing, iterative process of data analysis which comprised three edits, conducted over three months, is illustrated at a macro level in the various screenshots in Appendix E. Figure 1.2. below offers a micro example of how the analysis progressed from raw data to wider themes emerging to specific codes developing, in order to illustrate how data was transformed into a narrative:

Raw data taken from transcripts	Themes that emerged from initial impressions	Codes that developed from thematic analysis	Explicit codes that formed the final narrative of the findings
Erm, so I said poor obviously and erm… poverty is similar 'cause it only refers to the situation people have to live in. I just think if you're going to call them 'disadvantaged' so they can get support in school, you need to use something that's not making them out to be like undeserving, if you know what I mean? So poverty makes it seem like it's about the situation they're in.	poor and poverty referenced labels should reflect context negative connotations of 'disadvantaged'	poor and poverty more acceptable labels than 'disadvantaged' setbacks are contextual, rather than innate	alternative ways to refer to young people connotations of labels in policy and popular discourse
Saying someone is poor creates sympathy and sort of disbelief that kids are living in this way. There's being poor and then there's being lazy and disengaged and I think if kids are being labelled in that [policy document] then it should make them out to be trying hard but not having enough money to do well.	poor referenced poor vs lazy	awareness that labels have implicit meaning awareness of deficit narrative that some labels suggest	a deficit narrative and blame
Poverty means you don't have the basic needs. It's like it's not your fault if you're poverty so I think it's okay to call them that. Maybe it will even help to call them that so then schools can help them.	poverty referenced fault/blame		

Figure 1.2. Micro example of data analysis process

3.8. Conclusion

This chapter has offered a rationale for the selected approach of an interpretative case study, providing an analysis of the research design, research process and has offered more detail about the case school and the young people who participated in study. The chapter has given an in-depth examination and reflection of the data collection process alongside the systematic stages of analysis, from managing the raw data produced by the group and individual interviews to the identification of the overarching themes and sub-themes. This chapter leads naturally onto the presentation of young people's voices and the findings that emerged from them.

Chapter 4. Young people's voices: the findings

The thesis set out to answer the question 'What are the perceptions and experiences of young people in an English secondary school who are labelled 'disadvantaged'?' and so this chapter presents the findings of young people's perceptions and experiences thematically. The chapter will be split into two sections focusing on the primary themes that emerged from the data. Within each of the main themes, a series of sub themes will be explored. The first key theme is views on labels, including the following sub themes: connotations of labels in policy and popular discourse; alternative ways to refer to young people; and disassociation with 'disadvantaged'. The second theme is implications of labelling including the following sub themes: motives of the 'disadvantaged' label; a deficit narrative and blame; and stigma and shame.

As was outlined in section 3.4.2. of the methodology chapter, young people participated in group interviews initially, followed by individual interviews. In this chapter, a range of direct quotations are referenced from both group and individual interviews and it is noted in the text where the quotations are taken from, alongside the young people's year group. The pseudonyms for each young person will also be noted with each quotation.

Before the chapter introduces the voices of the young people, it is beneficial to reiterate that this study draws distinctions between the government concept of 'disadvantage' as used in education policy and the concept of disadvancement as posited as an alternative concept original to this study. As outlined in the introductory chapter, the distinction between these two terms is that 'disadvantaged' places the drawbacks within the young person as inherent deficits, whereas disadvanced highlights the inequity young people face through no fault of their own. Subsequently, the concept of disadvancement will be used as a lens through which to explore young people's voices throughout this chapter.

4.1. Views on labels

This section discusses three sub-themes that emerged when young people offered views on labelling: connotations of labels in policy and popular discourse; alternative ways to refer to young people; and disassociation with 'disadvantaged'. This section will explore young people's views on the connotations and propriety of policy labels with discussion focused on

the ‘disadvantaged’ label alongside other labels used in popular discourse that they expressed an opinion on.

4.1.1. Labels in policy and popular discourse

Young people were adept in offering perceptive and detailed view on the connotations and implications of several labels used in education policy to categorise those who are SED. As demonstrated in Chapter 3, group interviews began with young people sorting flashcards containing labels from policy and popular discourse in different rank orders to stimulate discussion around terminology used to label young people. These were: socially included, socially excluded, poverty, poor, deprived, rich, affluent, Pupil Premium, disadvantaged, advantaged, middle-class, and working-class. Young people then offered their opinions on terms within their rankings in an open, collaborative discussion.

When they were asked to rank the terms in order of which ones they thought were most appropriate and least appropriate for adults in education to use to refer to young people, the following excerpt from the Y11 (age 15-16) group interview best reveals how the majority of them believed that the labels used in education policy carried negative connotations and were misrepresentative of young people who are SED:

> Drake: I don’t think they’re all words that are thrown about by 16-year-old kids, more adults, adults would use them. Like disadvantaged, socially excluded, they’re not what we would say.
>
> Anne-Marie: Yeah, I agree. Young people would use something less… offensive! Like disadvantaged is harsh!
>
> Stuart: Yeah, I don’t think most young people would even understand some of these and they are [being labelled by] them.
>
> Rita: Young people should be able to decide what they’re classed as, because what if you don't feel disadvantaged and you’re being called that. It’s not fair.
>
> Anne-Marie: Yeah. It’s like assuming they are something when they might not be.
>
> Demi: I think what Drake said about them being labels adults use is right, like, how do adults know what kids are like all over the country. It’s just like a massive generalisation.
>
> Virgil: It’s so it’s easy for them to write about. Just think of one word that sums it up. Like, disadvantaged is what they think most young people like that are.

As highlighted in the above excerpt about the terms adults in policy and education use to describe young people, the discussion suggested that they were aware of the lack of agency that exists in the process of adults selecting labels to define young people. Also, their comments appear to convey the idea that the 'disadvantaged' label is "offensive" (Anne-Marie) and misrepresentative of young people who are SED. There was an awareness from Anne-Marie and Demi that "assumption[s]" and "generalisation[s]" are made by adults in policy and that the labels chosen for those who are SED are to simplify things for policy makers, rather than to best represent young people. Furthermore, Virgil's comment that the 'disadvantaged' label is "easy for them to write about" hints at the understanding that the label acts as a convenient category marker for policy makers (Gorard, 2016), resulting in young people being pigeonholed and spoken for, as corroborated by a comment later in the same group discussion by Dave that the 'disadvantaged' label is the government's attempt at *"making you fit into a box".*

4.1.2. Less ambiguous terms

Another activity in the group interviews involved reading an excerpt of 'disadvantaged' policy taken from the Department for Education's 2015 paper *Supporting the attainment of disadvantaged pupils* (Appendix C), which featured the terms "disadvantaged", "poverty", "poor" and "Pupil Premium" (DfE, 2015: 5-6). Young people were then asked for their opinions about how they perceived the terms disadvantaged, poverty, poor and Pupil Premium had been used by adults in the policy excerpt. This discussion of the connotations of labels was also revisited in individual interviews, where young people were able to refer back to the labels and could offer more personal and descriptive responses, building upon their initial thoughts in the group setting.

When young people were asked for their opinions of the labels used in the policy extract in each group interview, a sub theme emerged across both group interviews and was also evident when the policy terms were revisited in individual interviews. A large part of each discussion around the policy excerpt was steered by the young people in each group interview to focus on the terms poor and poverty. The following excerpt is from the Y7 (ages 11-12) group interview:

Camila: Poverty is just saying what some people are. Like you can't help being poverty[9], so the label just says what someone is.

Mo: Yeah, I think it's a more simple label than say disadvantaged.

Alexandra: Why would you say it was more simple?

Ed: Is it because it's easy to understand? Like being poverty or poor, it's just easy to imagine they would be living like.

Mo: Yeah, poverty is sort of… clear. Like you'd know if you were in poverty and so calling them that is fair I think.

Rita: So, poverty is honest, yeah, and better than a disadvantaged because it makes you feel sorry for them in a good way.

Roddy: Poverty is sort of the best out of them [pointing to the policy labels in the excerpt] because it tells you that they need help from the government.

The group discussion here suggests that young people in the Y7 Focus group feel the term poverty refers more frankly to the young person's SED and so is preferable to 'disadvantaged'. The young people above seem to feel that poverty as a label is more transparent and is thus more representative of the context of those it refers to. There was a commonality across the above discussion in that they considered the term poverty to be *"simple", "clear", "fair"* (Mo) and *"honest"* (Rita) because it explicitly describes young people's SED and *"just says what someone is"* (Camila). Ed's comment that poverty is a label that is *"easy to understand",* as is the term *"poor"*, perhaps hints that other labels are unclear and misleading as the Y11 cohort also highlight in more detail in their discussion about the term poor below. This is also seen when Rita implies that the term 'disadvantaged' fails to create sympathy for those who are SED, possibly suggesting 'disadvantaged' serves to create a negative portrayal of young people.

The following excerpt is taken from the Y11 (age 16) group interview:

Drake: Well, the word poor doesn't shy away from what the problem is. Like if you're labelled as poor, that's not because you're a bad person or whatever. It's just the situation your family's in.

[9] Rather than using poverty as an abstract noun to refer to a state of being, poverty is used here as an adjective which is a common way the word is used within the case school, perhaps an example of young people adapting language in order to sound different from adults (Drummond, 2016).

Mabel: Yeah, I get that. It's like it is what it is. Poor just states the obvious so it's not trying to be offensive like disadvantaged, more just like present the facts and at least acknowledge that people are poor. Poor to me is different to disadvantaged.

Stuart: I think poor and disadvantaged are just as bad because what do they even mean, like what is poor? What is disadvantaged? Every kid will be different. But yeah, at least poor is not trying to infer that they don't want to do well at school like disadvantaged does. It's more that that is the way things are, they are poor!

Anne-Marie: That's harsh! But true I guess. You can't argue with poor, you know, poor is poor. Everyone knows what that means. But like what does Pupil Premium even mean? That makes them sound like they're better than others when they're the opposite, they're obviously struggling.

There was a strong sense that the majority of Y11 young people here felt that the term poor as used in the policy excerpt was a more apt, though not necessarily appropriate term, because it did not suggest or imply things that may be misrepresentative of young people. Across the discussion above, it appeared that they deemed poor to be a more explicit and unambiguous way in which to describe young people that meant the label was not loaded with connotations that might paint the young person in a negative light. The concept of disadvancement can be drawn upon here to illustrate how the young people appear to be identifying a process of being *held back* in their narratives. Drake and Mabel both express the opinion that the term poor focuses more on the socio-economic *"situation"* (Drake) rather than something innately wrong with the young person, an *"offensive"* (Mabel) implication linked to the 'disadvantaged' label that is explored more fully in section 4.2. of this chapter. While Stuart could recognise that the term poor was relative to others being insiders or outsiders of the category people place themselves (Waterhouse, 2002) and so not completely unambiguous, he also agreed with Drake and Mabel that poor is a more honest representation of the contexts of young people who are SED. Stuart draws upon the notion that the 'disadvantaged' label implies a lack of interest in education that is inherent in the young person, whereas poor is far more frank in meaning in a similar way to Drake's comment that poor does not make young people out to be bad people (implying that 'disadvantaged' does). Anne-Marie also thinks poor is not an ideal label but that it is preferable to labels such as Pupil Premium as it speaks truth and is not ambiguous in meaning. She claims that Pupil Premium portrays young people as falsely advantaged, presumably because of the

connotations of the word premium, rather than plainly stating their SED. Here, the young people seem to be gravitating towards the idea that a label is offensive if it implies something negative about the person, whereas labels that imply social inequality such as poor or poverty describe more candidly the lives of those who are SED, again echoing the idea that the concept of disadvancement is happening to them, not because of them.

A theme that emerged across all young people's voices above regarding their perceptions of the connotations of the labels used in the policy excerpt was that they could distinguish between labels that were less rhetorical compared to those they thought were more ambiguous and loaded. In discussions with both the Y7 and the Y11 Focus groups, in group and individual interviews, young people were confident in talking about which terms they felt were more appropriately used by policy makers because they felt they more accurately described young people and their SED and those they would not use because they imbued false characteristics on those being labelled. The two excerpts from group discussions above suggest that they approach the analysis of SED policy labels from a socially critical perspective. They appear to recognise that some labels such as 'disadvantaged' (as discussed in detail in section 4.1.5.) are used as euphemisms to enable policy makers to portray those who are SED as personally deficit and lacking (Lawler and Payne, 2017). Instead, young people argue that language that rejects this political rhetoric and that acknowledges the disadvancement of young people is more legitimate (Reay, 2017a). Young people's acknowledgement of socially critical language that places explicit references to SED ahead of personal deficit continued into the individual interviews, where they were asked to clarify points they made in the group interviews. The following responses serve to further illustrate how young people felt about the terms poor and poverty as used in the policy excerpt.

Below, Mo (Y7) was asked to elaborate in his individual interview on a comment he made in the group discussion, namely that he felt poverty was a *"fair label"* and when asked what he meant by that, he said:

> Well, being poverty just labels the young person more… simply. Like it says it as it is instead of thinking of a confusing label. I reckon poverty is not used in a nasty way, I think it's just a label isn't it? People are called poverty because that's what they are.

Mo appears to understand poverty to be an unquestionable and unambiguous label given in the policy document and that the label acts *"simply"* as an identifier that does not necessarily

carry any connotations or implications but is *"just a label".* Similarly, Drake (Y11) adds to the idea of some labels being less loaded than others. When asked to clarify in his individual interview whether there were any other terms used in the policy document that he felt did not *"shy away from what the problem is"* (as he said in the group interview) he said:

> Erm, so I said poor obviously and erm… poverty is similar 'cause it only refers to the situation people have to live in. I just think if you're going to call them 'disadvantaged' so they can get support in school, you need to use something that's not making them out to be like undeserving, if you know what I mean? So poverty makes it seem like it's about the situation they're in.

In a similar vein to Mo above, here Drake links the terms poor and poverty due to their ability to describe the *"situation"* as the setback rather than implying something inherent to the young person. Drake implies that other terms used in the policy document portray young people as the cause of their disadvancement, as though they are undeserving of help, whereas he views the term poverty as a label that warrants support because of SED that is out of their control.

Furthermore, Mabel (Y11) was asked to clarify what she meant by saying *"poor is different to disadvantaged"* in her individual interview. She said:

> Saying someone is poor creates sympathy and sort of disbelief that kids are living in this way. There's being poor and then there's being lazy and disengaged and I think if kids are being labelled in that [policy document] then it should make them out to be trying hard but not having enough money to do well.

Mabel builds on Drake's response by explaining that labelling young people as poor does not portray individuals as to blame for failing in education but rather that it draws attention to the ways in which young people are living, which she implies is shocking. Much like Drake, Mabel seems to feel that the poor label is not linked to young people being *"lazy and disengaged"* from education but that they are underachieving because of financial scarcity.

When asked to expand on her comment from the group interview that *"you can't help being poverty"*, in her individual interview Camila (Y7) said:

> Poverty means you don't have the basic needs. It's like it's not your fault if you're poverty so I think it's okay to call them that. Maybe it will even help to call them that so then schools can help them.

Here, Camila understands that poverty is the scarcity of basic necessities and also draws upon the notions of fault and blame like Rita. She implies terms like poverty do not confer blame on young people who are disadvanced but rather illustrate plainly the help they need. The theme of blame is discussed later in section 4.2.2. of this chapter when young people's perceptions of the implications and motives of the 'disadvantaged' label are explored, though it worth noting here that Camila is implying that euphemising how young people are described can potentially mean schools support is misdirected and that misleading labels can result in them failing to receive the support they need.

Roddy (Y7) also spoke about the term poor in his individual interview when discussing which labels he thought best described young people in the policy document when he said *"Poor is a label that can happen to anyone. Some people are made poor by what happens to them".* Much like Camila, Roddy appears to use the term "poor" here in the sense that the label explicitly reveals that young people's SED is a product of social injustice that *"happens" to* them rather than existing within them, again drawing upon the concept of disadvancement – the act of being held back. His comment that you can be *"made poor"* based on social circumstances and unforeseen occurrences suggests that he understands how some labels can create misrepresentative narratives whereas other labels such as poverty are franker and more explicit.

As seen within these examples from individual interviews, young people were able to confirm and clarify their opinions that some terms from the policy document held less ambiguity than others and that these terms that they perceived to be more truthful about those who are SED should be used. A large proportion of young people across both Focus groups and both group and individual interviews believed that the terms poor and poverty unequivocally denoted a young person's disadvancement and therefore were labels that aimed to highlight young people's situations and struggles instead of attributing the 'disadvantage' to the young person themselves. The Y11 young people could also articulate that these labels spoke about young people in ways that did not imply negative narratives linked to young people themselves. Except for Stuart in the Y11 group interview, most young people appeared to accept the terms poor and poverty were finite labels, described as *"the way things are"* (Mabel) without any pretence, as was accused of labels such as 'disadvantaged' and Pupil Premium discussed in section 4.1.5. Thus, they appear to echo language adopted by more socially critical

approaches to SED research and also the construct of disadvancement offered by this study that do not shy away from direct and explicit reference to how groups in society are living *because of* social inequality (Reay, 2017a).

4.1.3. More positive alternatives

Alongside the discussions explored above where young people explained their opinions on the terms that they had ranked in order of ones they would be most likely to use, they were also asked to think of any alternative terms that they felt were more representative of young people in group interviews. Some young people in the excerpt below indicate how a reworking of labels could alleviate some of the negative assumptions current labels hold and may be an effective tool in overcoming social assumptions and biases (Rix, 2006). The following excerpt is taken from the Y11 (age 16) group interview:

> Demi: So, what about children who are poor?
>
> Virgil: Yeah, I think something like children who are poor or poverty.
>
> Drake: What about children living in poverty? 'Cause then that's more about how they are living, not that they are poverty.
>
> Alexandra: So do you mean that it describes their circumstances rather than the young people themselves?
>
> Drake: Yeah, like it makes it about their situations. You can't help being poor so the label needs to show that it's not their choice.
>
> Anne-Marie: Yeah, like disadvantaged children makes them sound sort of bad, like they're choosing not to do well.
>
> Stuart: What about children who have to live disadvantaged then? That's not as bad is it?
>
> Alexandra: Why not?
>
> Stuart: 'Cause it says they have to live a certain way not out of choice but out of the way their life has gone.

In the comments from the Y11 group interview above, young people's alternative suggestions can be further viewed through the lens of disadvancement as they hint that labels should be clear that the 'disadvantage', poverty or poorness they are experiencing is happening *to* those who are SED, as also interpreted from their earlier comments on poor and poverty in the

previous section. For example, Demi and Virgil begin the discussion with suggestions of labels that both use the phrase *"children who are..."*, suggesting that, whether consciously or not, placing the young person or child first and the socio-economic barrier second is important when deciding on preferable labels for young people who are SED. As the conversation develops, this idea of making clear that the young person is separate to their SED is built upon by Drake and Stuart's choices of *"children living in poverty"* and *"children who have to live disadvantaged"*. Their proposed labels further strengthen the concept of disadvancement in that the young people feel that labels should reflect the way in which children are separate to their socio-economic circumstances. Furthermore, Anne-Marie then insinuates that the label *"disadvantaged children"* where they are described as innately 'disadvantaged' implies that children are opting to be 'disadvantaged' which she feels is a misrepresentative narrative.

These discussions from the young people also echo discussions from the wider literature. There have been numerous recommendations to rework labels that fail to recognise any labels as being people before anything else as discussed in the literature review (e.g., People First's slogan "We are people first, learning difficulties second." (1994); Rix's preferred "people with learning difficulties" (2006); and TACT's "children looked after" (2019)). In much the same way, the labels suggested by young people in the above discussion seek to bring to the fore those who are being labelled and to make clear the distinction between them as individuals and their SED.

After the initial discussions about alternative and preferable labels in group interviews, young people began to implicitly refer to those who are SED in the phrases they had coined in individual interviews, as illustrated in the following examples:

> …young people who have to live poverty (Roddy, Y7)
>
> …young people who need support (Rita, Y7)
>
> …families that are really, really struggling (Mandy, Y7)
>
> …children who have poor backgrounds (Mo, Y7)
>
> …children who are working-class (Camila, Y7)
>
> …kids who have to live in poverty (Dawn, Y11)
>
> …those who are working-class (Anne-Marie, Y11)

…young people who are working-class (Dave, Y11)

…children who come from a working-class family (Drake, Y11)

In individual interviews, young people again sought to centre the young person at the heart of the label, this time unprompted by interview questions and without the influence of peers as in the group discussions. It is powerful that they adopted a similar framing of labels so as to be recognised as young people and children first and foremost and viewing their 'disadvantages' as products of social inequalities (Rix, 2006). Across multiple individual interviews (some of which were drawn upon for the above examples), many young people used the working-class label, as well as the labels poor and poverty, as their preferred way of referring to those who are labelled 'disadvantaged' and this is explored in detail in the following section.

A sense that young people sought to distance young people as individuals from the social situation they were experiencing as proposed by the concept of disadvancement can be illustrated strongly by the way Mabel (Y11) commented that *"They should be seen as young people who are classed as disadvantaged, not that they actually are disadvantaged"* in her individual interview. Mabel's opinion on how young people should be labelled in education policy is particularly interesting because it is very similar to the decision I made to use the phrase *young people who are labelled '*disadvantaged' throughout this study, despite not sharing my rationale with those who took part in the study. As outlined in Chapter 1, the use of the 'disadvantaged' label in policy is used to precede young people in education policy ("disadvantaged children", "disadvantaged families" (DfE, 2018)) and arguably serves to promote a culture of blaming the problem of poor academic attainment on the young person themselves rather than as a result of their social circumstances (Knox, 2014). Therefore, it was my intention by preceding 'disadvantaged' with young people and by using the preferred term disadvanced to make clear that the study views young people's socio-economic 'disadvantage' as a consequence of social and economic barriers (Rix, 2006). It appears that in using the phrase *"classed as disadvantaged"*, Mabel also insinuates that the 'disadvantaged' label is being used as a judgement on young people and so is careful to clarify how SED is happening *to* young people, rather than it happening *because of* something innate within them.

4.1.4. The working-class label

As illustrated in Camila, Anne-Marie, Dave, Drake's suggestions of more representative labels, the term working-class was chosen from the list of labels as one that young people would use as a preferable option to 'disadvantaged', with many others also using the term both in group discussions and independently as explored below. Above, the terms poor and poverty had been discussed as more preferable to 'disadvantaged' and Pupil Premium due to their candidness and ability to focus on the social limitations a young person was experiencing rather than on their implicit personal flaws. Similarly, the term working-class was chosen independently as an apparently legitimate and in many cases positive label to identify young people with, with 11 out of the 14 young people using it without prompting across group and individual interviews.

Whilst young people's comments on the working-class label were diverse and expressed in loosely defined ways, a commonality across all references to the label was the way in which it was chosen as a positive and preferable option to many of the policy terms such as 'disadvantaged'. Responses throughout highlighted the ways in which young people self-selected the working-class label as a point of discussion, as unprompted by myself as interviewer. Firstly, the following excerpt from the Y11 group interview illustrates this where the discussion around labels they considered to be more appropriate to use for young people was continued:

> Virgil: Oh yeah, like working-class is a label that people would use for themselves because it makes them seem like they're trying to improve their lives.
>
> Mabel: It's almost something to be proud of and kind of show, like a badge of honour. Like to say you're working-class is like you've worked for something. Something you've earned rather than someone giving you it.
>
> Anne-Marie: Yeah, like if people get given it easy, it's not really… like you didn't work hard, you didn't have the motivation to get that sort of thing. No one can buy that. That's working-class.
>
> Dave: So for me, working-class is the sweet spot in the middle between rich and poor.
>
> Stuart: Yeah, it's like you're not in poverty but you don't have it too easy neither. Working-class is like you can provide for yourself. Like Mabel said, get a sense of achievement.

Demi: If you're identifying as above that then you can't really relate to people as much, I don't think.

Virgil, Mabel and Anne-Marie imply that the working-class label connotes pride, self-worth and an element of ardour in one's self-improvement. Mabel's phrase *"a badge of honour"* encapsulates her feelings about the working-class label being a positive label to identify with because it connotes having earned success. There is a sense that young people feel there is pleasure in being resolute and *"earn[ing]"* status, rather than being *"give[n]"* it. Dave's comment implies that working class is the most desirable group because it is *"in the middle",* which often suggests *average* and therefore the most common, majority group. Stuart builds on Dave and Mabel's earlier comment by suggesting that being working-class equates to neither struggling to survive, nor living with an abundance of wealth and how there is a sense of achievement in contributing to your own success. Demi draws upon the idea that working-class people are more relatable and balanced individuals compared with those who identify as higher in social status. It is also worth recognising that in the above discussion there is a sense that young people's notions of the working class may be understood in the literal sense of those people who *work* and therefore that there is pride in that.

The notion that the working-class label connotes the majority and thus, more desirable social group can be linked to literature on young people seeking to be *normal* (Reay, 1998; Savage et al., 2001; Lawler, 2005; Papapolydorou, 2014; Hanley, 2017; Jones et al., 2020). Young people appear to identify with the working-class label because it is what they perceive as the *average* social group that is the largest and live the most *normal* lives (Lawler, 2005). Dave and Stuart in particular echo the notion that society is a pyramid with those at the very bottom and those at the very top being minorities and most people feeling more at ease in the mass in the middle (Hanley, 2017). It appears that the young people here choose the working-class label as they see it as something akin to *ordinary* rather than akin to 'disadvantaged' (Savage et al., 2001). It is apparent that young people in the group interview view the working-class label as both *other* from those deemed potentially lower than themselves but also as *other* to more middle-class existences (Reay, 1998; Savage et al., 2001; Papapolydorou, 2014).

The sentiment of the group interview above regarding the term working-class was also echoed in individual interviews across both year groups, as this quote from Anne-Marie (Y11) illustrates:

> Yeah, working-class is something to be proud of. I just think it's a label that is more positive than 'disadvantaged' because, well, even if children are struggling, saying they're working-class means that they want to do well and are not just giving up.

Here, Anne-Marie builds upon her earlier group comment that working-class implies a lifestyle that cannot be bought but rather earned by echoing Mabel's comment about the working-class label connoting a sense of pride. Anne-Marie also discusses the merits of the working-class label in that it is positive in its portrayal of young people who are hardworking, rather than lacking in drive and commitment as she suggests is connoted by the 'disadvantaged' label. The word *"proud"* is used again by Mandy (Y7) in her individual interview when talking about how she views her family as working-class:

> I think what my dad says, that we're working-class and proud, is right. I think he means that working hard means you feel proud when you can afford nice stuff because you deserve it.

Mandy echoes Anne-Marie's sentiment above that working-class suggests an existence that has been deserved and worked hard for, in a similar understanding to Mabel's comment that working-class suggests *"something you've earned"*, as stated in the group interview above. This commonality in language across group and individual interviews, and across both Focus groups shows that young people have a shared understanding of the working-class label, perhaps suggesting it is a term that has been previously discussed, as indicated by Mandy's comment above that implies it is a term that her family use to self-identify. However, whilst there is sophistication in many responses, again there could be a literal sense to the term working-class implying *working* and hence why young people view it as a more appropriate term, as aforementioned. Some young people appear to link the term working-class specifically to being *in work* which also implies that seeing their families in employment is part of their understanding of what a *normal* looks like. This could reflect the notion of the vulnerability of 'the precariat', an emerging class of people facing lives of insecurity, moving in and out of jobs that give little meaning to their lives due to the recent gig economy and

zero hour contracts (Standing, 2011). This notion appears to carry a sense of insecurity and uncertainty which young people seek to distance themselves from.

Furthermore, a sense of pride in the working-class label was also seen in Dave's (Y11) comment from his individual interview when he talked about why he thought the term working-class was preferable to 'disadvantaged':

> You're kind of a clan, aren't you? That's why groups are powerful, having the security of that group. I think working-class is just another one of them. It's another clan to be part of, another group to have to defend you. You've got that in common.

Dave uses the word *"clan"* to imply how the working-class label gives those who identify with it a sense of belonging and community. He implies that the working-class label brings power, solidarity and protection, almost seeing other people who identify with the label as allies. Young people in the earlier group discussion on policy labels felt that the 'disadvantaged' label was disempowering because it portrayed young people as innately lacking in the qualities society deems necessary to thrive. Here, Dave implies that alternatively the working-class label serves to empower those who identify with the label because it forms the majority group, echoing his earlier comment about working-class being the *"sweet spot in the middle"*.

The following comments were also made in individual interviews and serve to further illustrate how the majority of young people were drawn to the working-class label as a more representative label:

> Like, I'd class myself as working-class because I'm just… normal I guess. (Dawn, Y11)

> I think that working-class would be a fairer label than calling them disadvantaged. I'd say working-class is more positive than disadvantaged because there's hardly any people that aren't working-class. (Drake, Y11)

> Disadvantaged seems like lower than working-class, seems like 'oh you are struggling a lot more than everyone else', and the majority of the population is working-class aren't they? (Mabel, Y11)

> I would say I was working-class because that's what my family are. We are not rich and we're not poor, we're just working hard to have a good life. (Roddy, Y7)

> I would choose working-class out of them [points to the flashcards] 'cause it says you're not posh but not poverty either. (Rita, Y7)

> Working-class is a good label because it means working hard to do well. (Mo, Y7)

As illustrated by the additional examples above, there was a real sense that young people appeared to endorse the working-class label and, while not everyone self-identified with the label and instead continued to speak about young people in general, there was a sense that they felt that the term working-class label was a positive label to use. This is despite much literature suggesting that reference to class in Britain has become less easily understood (Savage et al., 2001). It is thought by some that class labels may be too primitive in today's complex society and that individuals are not necessarily bound by class terms (Heath et al., 2013; Savage et al., 2013). Much literature refers to a "once respectable working class which held progressive principles" (Lawler, 2005: 434) but one that no longer carries any worth (Skeggs, 2004). However, what was seen across this study was the prevalence of the working-class label used by young people to refer to a group that possesses a strong identity and a sense of pride (Reay, 2017a). It could be that young people misinterpret the term working-class as a positive label they seek to identify with because they do not realise that it is also a contested concept more widely, though this potential lack of awareness does not negate the ways they view the working-class label. Again, it appears that young people perceive the working-class label in the very literal sense of *working*, as indicated by Mabel's comment from the group interview above: *"you've worked for something"* and Mo's comment from his individual interview: *"it means working hard to do well*". This could be illustrative of the family circumstances of the particular group of young people involved in this study where it is implied that perhaps parents are in employment, though this can only be speculated as there is no specific evidence of knowing this. Dawn's comment "*I'm just… normal"* also suggests how she perceives her own social position within society as the majority, average group which draws upon the notion of *horizons for action* (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997; Ball et al., 2001; Hodkinson, 2008), a concept that is explored in more detail in section 4.1.6. when many young people appear to distance themselves from the 'disadvantaged' label and self-identify as what they perceive as *normal*.

Young people's perceptions of the working-class label, seen across group and individual interviews and both age groups, contradict the notion of society's conflation of working class to underclass to drive out the concept of respectability from the working classes (Skeggs, 2004; Lawler, 2005). Within their worlds, the term working-class still appears to have meaning though it is thought to have been "pushed outside the political system" (Reay, 2017a: 14).

Rather, young people can clearly recognise the working class as a rich and diverse class that still very much exists. Reay (2017a) calls for a re-claiming of the working-class label since it has been written out because society seeks to conveniently overlook the ever-widening class divide, and young people in this study appear to similarly reject the assertion that class terms are outdated.

4.1.5. Negatively loaded labels

When commenting on labels they would not use to describe those who are SED, the young people appeared to see the 'disadvantaged' label as problematic because it was not fixed and definite in meaning as they perceived terms such as poor and poverty to be but instead held more implicit and damaging connotations. In the following comments taken from across both group and individual interviews of Y7 and Y11, young people were able to communicate how a label may appear harmless or even helpful at first glance but then began to unpick the nuances of language to reveal connotations coded within the labels.

In the group interview, Anne-Marie and Mabel (Y11) were asked to clarify comments they had made at the beginning of the interview about how labels can seem harmless but can have implicit meanings:

> Anne-Marie: Well at first, disadvantaged just seems like it's a harmless label but it's not as black and white as you just fit into one label. Two young people who are labelled are not going to be the same and have the same struggles are they?
>
> Mabel: Yeah, I agree, it's not that simple. Different labels can mean different things. It depends on who is being labelled and who is saying the label to them. If you called yourself disadvantaged, which you probably wouldn't, it would be different to being labelled that like officially in school.
>
> Anne Marie: Yeah, so some labels make people sound worse than they actually are. Like making people out to be something they're not so when the government or whoever helps them, then they can say 'look at how we've helped these failing people'!

Anne-Marie and Mabel comments suggest an understanding that labels are far from arbitrary and that young people cannot be simply split into *"black and white"* groups. It is also implied that labels can carry implicit meaning depending on who uses the label. The above responses show an awareness of how labels can be used to either assert or mask reality depending on who utilises the label and on whom it is placed (Rix, 2006). There is an awareness from both

Anne-Marie and Mabel that labels cannot be disassociated from the context in which they are used and experienced (Wright et al., 2011; Mannay et al., 2017). Rather, that all labels are a social construct and thus, hold multiple, and often masked, connotations (Rix, 2006). The young people here appear to acknowledge that the labelling of young people by those in more powerful positions intends to "impose an identity" upon them (O'Byrne, 2011: 153).

Drake (Y11) makes similar points in his individual interview to Anne-Marie and Mabel above in responding to being asked for an example of *"the lowest in society"*, a term he used to describe those labelled as 'disadvantaged' in the group interview:

> So it's like... an insult now. It's like someone who doesn't care what people think and is a bit like gross and has no social behaviour. So disadvantaged means like the lowest of the low if that makes sense?

Drake understands the ambiguity in the meaning and use of the 'disadvantaged' label and feels that the 'disadvantaged' label is used implicitly as *"an insult"* to imply anti-social behaviours that are *"gross"*. Below, Mabel (Y11) similarly adds to Drake's idea of the label connoting poor social behaviour in this comment from her individual interview:

> It's a horrible word to use. Disadvantaged is labelling them as like subhuman. Like the beginning of the word is dis, like disappointment or disgust, like those words begin with dis because it means 'not' doesn't it?

By linking its implied meaning to being *"subhuman"*, Mabel is able to deconstruct the label by isolating its prefix *"dis"* and linking this to words that begin in the same way and that are also associated with a deficit narrative that implies those who are 'disadvantaged' are inherently lacking in what it means to be human. Both Drake and Mabel show an awareness of how the 'disadvantaged' label can produce and maintain "judgements of culture" (Skeggs, 2004: 118). For example, Drake's comments that depicts a 'disadvantaged' person as someone who "*doesn't care what people think and is a bit like gross and has no social behaviour"* and also Mabel's comment that the term connotes *"disappointment"* and *"disgust"*.

In his individual interview, Dave (Y11) also thought similarly to Mabel and her idea of the 'disadvantaged' label *othering* those who are labelled and marginalising them to the *"extreme[s]"* of society:

> I don't think it's a fair word ['disadvantaged'] cause it's a bit extreme. It's like saying, erm… it's like an exaggerated version of what someone is. Like making them out to be unable to function as a human without all this help.

Here, Dave implies that the 'disadvantaged' label exaggerates those people who the label means to identify, those who are "*struggling"* (Drake). He implies how it paints those who are SED as unable to function as contributing members of society, suggesting an awareness of how the 'disadvantaged' label implies that that a lack of financial resources equates to a lack of humanity itself (Lawler, 2005; Purdam et al., 2015; Geiger, 2015; Pemberton et al., 2016). As captured within the above responses, there was an awareness from Drake, Mabel and Dave of how the 'disadvantaged' label presents those who are labelled as disgusting in their behaviour and taste and how the policy label codes a whole way of life that is thought to be repellent (Skeggs, 2004; Lawler, 2005; Jensen, 2014; Tyler, 2020). These young people's comments highlight their understanding that the 'disadvantaged' label connotes extreme versions of and exaggerates and demonises members of society. As touched upon here in the above comments, the notion of deficit narratives and those who are SED being conveyed as a *problem to be fixed* in society will be focused upon in section 4.2.2. when the chapter moves on to discuss how young people's voices appeared to show a suspicion about the motives of governments using the 'disadvantaged' label to portray those who are SED as inherently lacking through deficit narratives.

Strong views on the connotations of the 'disadvantaged' label were also seen in the Y7 Focus group's individual interviews. Below, Mandy (Y7) describes someone who is labelled disadvantaged:

> To describe someone as disadvantaged would be someone who isn't exactly like everyone else - they're not the average person. More like families that are really, really struggling. That's probably not true though.

Much like the Y11 Focus group comments above, Mandy believes the implied perception of those the 'disadvantaged' label to be less than the average human being. She can also understand that this may not necessarily be an accurate portrayal of those who are labelled but that the negative portrayal of someone who is *"really, really struggling"* is certainly what is suggested by the 'disadvantaged' label.

In the group interview, Ed also shared his view on the 'disadvantaged' label by saying "*I guess you'd assume that people who are labelled disadvantaged don't have a very good home life, which I know isn't the case."* Here, Ed talks of the negative assumptions made about those labelled as 'disadvantaged' and is close in sentiment to Mandy who above talks about the implicit, though not necessarily accurate, extreme struggles of those labelled. Furthermore, Camila and Rita (Y7) also build on Ed's idea in their individual interviews that the 'disadvantaged' label connotes an inaccurate negative portrayal of those who are SED:

> You probably think disadvantaged are all lazy and naughty. But they might be hard working, it's just what the word sounds like. (Camila)
>
> Disadvantaged is like 'you're bad now'. No one would want to be called that. (Rita)

Here, both Camila and Rita also appear to acknowledge that the implicit narrative attached to the 'disadvantaged' label is unfounded but that the label is used to imply innate negative human qualities to the individuals who are labelled, echoing Mabel and Dave's earlier comments about the 'disadvantaged' label implying inadequate human characteristics.

As seen in their discussion of the terms poor and poverty, young people again appear to take a more socially critical perspective when discussing appropriate and inappropriate labels. In the above responses that critique 'disadvantaged' for portraying young people through skewed narratives, the young people here appear to oppose language that implies that those who are SED are innately 'disadvantaged' and are to be blamed themselves for struggling socially and economically (Reay, 2017a; Evans and Tilley, 2017). They are wary of labels that appear to carry implicit connotations that present young people themselves as deficient and promote meritocratic notions that, with enough help, they can improve themselves and their lives (Reay, 2006; 2017a). Young people instead favour labels of disadvancement that are not euphemistic but more accurately describe those who are forced to experience wider structural inequalities (Levitas, 1998). Whereas policy uses labels that seek to downplay the idea of SED having shared experience, the young people here use terms like working-class and living in poverty to acknowledge the collective experience of living in a flawed social system (Raffo et al., 2007).

It is important to note that though young people never acknowledged directly that policy was talking about them specifically in being labelled 'disadvantaged', it appeared that, by

passionately attacking the 'disadvantaged' label and the stigma that surrounded it, they may have been aware that they were labelled 'disadvantaged'. Particularly in the Y11's responses to the connotations of the 'disadvantaged' label as seen in the following section, it appeared that the platform they had been given to discuss the 'disadvantaged' label was taken as an opportunity to have agency in rejecting their labelling.

4.1.6. Disassociation with the 'disadvantaged' label

This section explores how the young people view themselves in and amongst their 'disadvantaged' peers. The findings above suggest that they feel that the identities of young people are belied due to the use of misrepresentative labelling and thus, they seek disassociation with a label chosen by adults. Young people appear to reject the limitations placed upon those who are labelled 'disadvantaged' and consider how young people would refer to themselves to more accurately narrate their stories of experiencing disadvancement. It is worth reiterating that all the young people in this study are classed as 'disadvantaged' in the policy sense and thus in the context of the case school, though this did not necessarily mean that they were aware of their own labelling in this way. However, as mentioned in section 4.1.5., young people gave some indications that they were aware the 'disadvantaged' label might apply to them in some sense and so appeared keen to convey their disregard for a label that misrepresented them, though this was never explicitly acknowledged.

The young people seemingly place themselves and their families within society by explaining their understanding of the 'disadvantaged' label as relative to others, though no student claimed 'disadvantaged' as a label they identified with. As noted in section 4.1.6. when Dawn identified with the term working-class as it positioned her as "*just… normal"* and Dave described the working class as *"a clan",* there was a sense that some young people sought to belong to the majority group in society as this equated to what was most *normal*. The following responses from individual interviews add to Dawn and Dave's earlier comments and suggest that young people seek what is commonplace and that they do not associate the 'disadvantaged' label with this.

Roddy (Y7) was asked how he perceived his own social positions in society in relation to the labels from policy and popular discourse used in the group discussions and he

commented: "*Like I come from a normal family… [when asked to explain what he meant by normal]... I mean one that like doesn't have to get help to get food and clothes and stuff.*" Roddy places himself as *"normal"* in that he belongs to a family that he perceives does not need extreme support to access material necessities, despite being eligible for FSM himself. Roddy may not be aware of his eligibility for FSM as the case school has a cashless system where student dinner cards are topped up online which avoids highlighting who pays for school dinners and who receives FSM. Also, there is strong evidence to suggest that many families who are entitled to FSM choose not to take up the offer to avoid stigma (Sahota et al., 2014).

In a similar way, in her individual interview Mandy (Y7) places those labelled as 'disadvantaged' as *other* to the majority group she places herself within when she says: *"You've got the average people, like I would say someone like me, then disadvantaged would be really, really struggling with anything.*" Again, Mandy self-identifies as *"average",* much like Roddy identified as *"normal"* above and similarly pushes those labelled as 'disadvantaged' to the margins of society as emphasised through the phrase *"really, really struggling".* The terms *"normal"* and *"average"* were used by several other young people in individual interviews in very similar ways to Roddy and Mandy: *"most people are normal and then there's disadvantaged"* (Dawn, Y11); *"what's normal to someone might not be normal to me"* (Drake, Y11); *"average people who have enough money"* (Rita, Y7). It appeared to be a definite way young people could express their opinions on how they perceived the 'disadvantaged' label to convey narratives of individual lack and deficit and enabled them to disassociate with a label they did not feel spoke for their experiences.

While it cannot be known what conscious and subconscious processes young people used here and the data does not allow the study to make conclusions about young people's disassociation with the 'disadvantaged' label, what can be acknowledged is that all the young people distanced themselves from the label. Young people's disassociation echoes Bourdieu's idea of distancing oneself from what represents socially as "the greatest threat" (Bourdieu, 1986: 479) as there is something shameful in being seen as belonging to the lowest tier of society. It may well be that some felt that they had consciously distanced themselves enough to avoid identification with the 'disadvantaged' label; no young person owned the label and spoke positively about being labelled as such, potentially confirming that some of them

possessed a strong desire to disassociate themselves from the perceived poverty of the most 'disadvantaged' (Shildrick, 2018). While the young people may have distanced themselves from the 'disadvantaged' label on a subconscious level, their awareness of the shame implied in the lower tiers of society as discussed later in section 4.2.3. illustrates why the distancing (both consciously as well as subconsciously) may have occurred. Furthermore, because the processes of conscious and subconscious distancing from the 'disadvantaged' label are likely to be complex and warrant dedicated investigation, this does not fall within the remit of this study and is instead posed as a potential area for future study in Chapter 6 of the thesis.

When asked how they perceived their own social positions in society in relation to the labels from policy and popular discourse, the young people referenced above perceived those who were labelled as 'disadvantaged' as lesser than their own social position. This is despite the fact that all young people in the study were indeed labelled as 'disadvantaged' in the school and policy context, which adds further weight to their views that the 'disadvantaged' label is a demonising and misrepresentative term. Whether actively distancing themselves from the 'disadvantaged' label because they knew they bore this label and disagreed with its portrayal of them, or whether their distancing was on a more subconscious level, young people placed themselves above those requiring *"help to get food and clothes"* (Roddy, 12) and those who are *"really, really struggling"* (Mandy, 12), suggesting that they see themselves as something "akin to ordinary" (Savage et al., 2001).

This links to how young people arrive at what is *normal* within their *horizons for action* which refers to the arena within which decisions are made, as referenced in Chapter 2 (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997; Ball et al., 2001; Hodkinson, 2008). *Horizons for action* both limit and enable young people's views of the world and so what they perceive as being 'disadvantaged' lies outside their horizons, whereas working-class appears very much to be a term the young people feel is acceptable. Thus, identifying with the working-class label appears to fit with their existing schematic views of themselves, and their families (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997), as seen in Mandy's comment: "*I think what my dad says, that we're working-class and proud, is right"* and Roddy's comment: *"I would say I was working-class because that's what my family are".* Young people perceive *normal* socio-economic status as based on family scripts and experiences (Ball et al., 2001) which comprise economic, social and cultural resources experienced within the home. Therefore, rather than young people who are SED

feeling that 'disadvantaged' is *normal*, familial habitus could be shaped by parents and siblings working hard to hide their socio-economic barriers from them. What is *normal* for them does not equate with the term 'disadvantaged', even though their family is in receipt of benefits and so they are eligible for PP funding. Therefore, young people's *horizons for action* may well be shaped by the belief that their family is not struggling and therefore see those who are labelled as 'disadvantaged' as being apart from *normal* because of the dominance of socially structured pathways (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997: 29). In this sense, for young people to see themselves as 'disadvantaged' would require them to step outside of their cultural script (Acker, 2011).

4.1.7. Distancing through pronouns

As illustrated in the above responses, many young people established a very definite distance between themselves and who they perceived as 'disadvantaged'. The following excerpt from the Y7 group interview captures how they also sought to distance themselves from the 'disadvantaged' label by talking about those who are labelled as *other* from themselves:

> Ed: Well, we are all doing fine but those young people might be living in really bad conditions.
>
> Mo: Yeah, like our lives are not that hard but they are finding it really hard to do okay.
>
> Rita: They would find it hard to maybe have enough food and not be able to pay their bills.
>
> Camila: I think them young people find it hard to concentrate at school because of what you just said Rita.
>
> Rita: We don't have to worry about that do we? We just come to school and can focus on lessons.
>
> Roddy: But, yeah, them who are poverty are really tired too and can't focus on school like us.

As Ed begins the discussion, he makes assumptions about the rest of the group being *"fine"* in terms of SED, using the inclusive *"we"* to imply those in the group all belonged to the same social group. He refers to young people who are labelled as 'disadvantaged' as *"those young people"* suggesting that he is keen to separate himself and the rest of the group with the connotations implicit in the lives of those labelled as 'disadvantaged'. Others support Ed's

view that they are distinctly *other* to those labelled as 'disadvantaged' with Mo comparing *"our lives"* with *"they"* to establish two different lifestyles. Rita similarly uses *"they"* as compared with the phrase *"we don't have to worry"* and Camila and Roddy use the phrases *"them young people"* and *"them who are poverty"* to signify that they are not including themselves within those labelled 'disadvantaged'. Roddy also uses the inclusive pronoun *"us"* to highlight how, much like Ed, he sees the group being interviewed as different to those young people who are labelled 'disadvantaged'. The above responses again reveal how young people seek to identify with those who they perceive as the *average* social group and that live the most *normal* lives (Lawler, 2005), as discussed previously in section 4.1.6. of this chapter. Young people sought to set boundaries between *us* and *them* and expressed this through frameworks of status evaluation such as the need for those who are SED to access financial support to feed their families (Southerton, 2002).

When asked to describe the life of someone who is labelled 'disadvantaged', such distancing using pronouns was seen in most young people's individual interviews. The following responses exemplify the use of the inclusive pronouns to refer to their own social group and the impersonal pronouns to refer to those labelled as "disadvantaged" to establish clear segregation. In her comment *"Like there's us and then those people who are really struggling",* Dawn (Y11) uses the demonstrative *"those people"* to achieve distance between herself and those who are labelled 'disadvantaged'. She does not use "me" to pit herself against those she perceives as being labelled 'disadvantaged' but rather *"us"*, suggesting that she is part of a social group that is not *"really struggling"*. Dave and Drake (Y11) use pronouns in very similar ways to Dawn in their individual interviews when asked to describe what they understand a 'disadvantaged' young person to mean:

> They're... not like us who come to school and don't have to worry. (Dave)
>
> Like they might have to go to food banks and well, us, we have food at home. (Drake)

Much like Dawn, Dave and Drake use the demonstrative pronoun *"they"* and the inclusive pronoun *"us"* to illustrate the boundaries they perceive between themselves and those labelled as 'disadvantaged', though they are young people who the government have labelled as such. As it was not the study's desire to make young people aware of their labelling as 'disadvantaged', it is unclear whether Dawn, Dave and Drake were aware of their

'disadvantaged' label as none spoke directly about it. However, Dave and Drake's earlier comments about the 'disadvantaged' label appeared so disparaging that policy makers use this term to inaccurately label young people that it could be that they do have some awareness that they are labelled as 'disadvantaged'. Dave claimed "*I don't think [disadvantaged is] a fair word*" due to the *"extreme"* and *"exaggerated"* way it presents young people as "*unable to function as a human without all this help*" and this is further illustrated by Drake's comments that feature in the following section that the 'disadvantaged' label paints an inaccurate picture of *"a problem group"* and that the label is *"an insult"* that unfairly portrays young people as *"the lowest of the low".* Although Drake attempts to remove himself from the 'disadvantaged' group, his awareness of food banks and families' need to use them reveals that his use of language to establish boundaries between himself and those labelled as 'disadvantaged' may be purposeful. Drake may be attempting to mask his reality of being 'disadvantaged' and potentially having experience of seeking financial assistance within his family.

4.1.8. Slipping into autobiographical narratives

As much as the previous section suggested that young people sought to distance themselves from the 'disadvantaged' label and implicit lifestyle, there is evidence to suggest that Anne-Marie and Drake (Y11) below were aware of their being labelled 'disadvantaged', though made a conscious effort to disassociate themselves from this. This can be seen in their occasional slipping into anecdotal talk about themselves and their families, and their subsequent attempts to correct this personal identification:

> It's like when we go shopping and we… like not me but say a family that is struggling with money and they can't buy all the kids Air Max 95s [trainers] so it's like, who got new ones longest ago. (Anne-Marie)

> Us at Christmas, we have to... I mean some people, they have to save up for months before, like if you've got younger brothers and sisters. (Drake)

Although young people were reminded throughout the interview process not to refer to other individuals and groups from within the school directly, they were not warned against speaking about personal experience. However, the young people here self-corrected their use of pronouns when they became aware they were talking about situations or experiences they had been in, often getting caught up or carried away in telling an autobiographical account.

Often, it was a shift to referring to *"them"* and *"they"* after beginning their talk with personal and detailed reference to what appeared to be real life events, for example, the detail of the *"Air Max 95"* trainers and the logic of "*who got new ones longest ago".* The narratives told appear at times to be too specific, detailed and convincing to be hypothetical scenarios, with the voices of parents or siblings appearing to emerge through the young people's descriptive narration. This can be heard through Drake's further comment about Christmas presents: "we *have to save up because all of you have to have the same amount or it's not fair".*

Young people's dissociation with the 'disadvantaged' label was a tacit process of negotiating what defines *us* in relation to the defined categories occupied by *them* (Southerton, 2002). This is further evidence to suggest that young people become more aware of the idea that being labelled 'disadvantaged' carries an element of shame as they progress through their teenage years, which would account for the differences in the use of language to distance themselves from the 'disadvantaged' label between the young people age 11-12 and those age 16. As young people progress through adolescence, they appear to show signs of learning the lexicon of socio-economic distancing as prompted by the popular discourse of the stigmatisation of those perceived as belonging to the lowest tiers of society (Geiger, 2015). It appears that the need to distance themselves from what they perceive as the lowest class is creeping into young people's vocabulary (Lawler, 2005).

4.1.9. Distancing from perceived higher tiers of society

While there was a distinct pattern of disassociation with socio-economic labels referring to those least well off in society, there was also a less obvious but still notable distancing from the other end of the class spectrum. The following comment from Stuart from the group interview with the Y11 young people discussing playing county level rugby against players from public schools illustrates this distancing:

> They [public-school rugby players] seem effortless in what they do compared to us, like they just belong in those kind of schools. Like they'd proper stand out here in a working-class school but they're celebrated where they go.

Stuart describes young people from public schools as *"effortless"*, implying they have a sense of ease, as corroborated by his description of them *"just belong[ing]"* which suggests they have an inherent right to attend public school. In the opening part of his response, Stuart

speaks of his public-school sports rivals as celebrated and there is a sense of him feeling they are otherworldly and untouchable, as though their school setting and the lifestyle that accompanies it are in a different league than his, where he has to work hard to keep up with them. However, Stuart's glorified portrayal of public-school students ends when he describes them outside of their world. In a comprehensive school, Stuart implies they would *"stand out"* and no longer display desirable qualities in his reality. There is a sense of derision in that Stuart feels that young people who attend public schools would struggle in the *real world* and implies that they are only seen as *"effortless"* when protected by their public-school bubble.

Similarly, Drake (Y11) builds upon Stuart's response by linking public school education and the lifestyle of students who attend such schools as *"effortless"*:

> Like we, the working class, whatever, can have a fairly decent life but they, they don't have to ever struggle or make hard choices. It's too easy for them.

Whereas Stuart began with a more glorified, albeit, derisive portrayal of young people who attend public school, Drake is more disparaging of this effortlessness and likens it to idleness which is, ironically, a trait often attributed in popular discourse to those perceived as choosing to live in poverty (Reay, 2017a; Evans and Tilley, 2017). By saying that young people from public schools never have to *"struggle"*, Drake implies that this is a negative trait. One reading of this comment is that it implies that without ever facing and overcoming adversity and making *"hard choices"*, young people will have no resilience. Drake saying it is *"too easy"* for those who attend public schools implies, in a similar way to Stuart, that a lifestyle of convenience is accepted within the public-school bubble but that it is frowned upon within other social groups as there is a sense of pride in working hard and earning a *"fairly decent life"*.

A further two young people referenced the above discussion from the group interview in their individual interviews, echoing Stuart and Drake's sentiments on young people from public schools being an undesirable 'other':

> Yeah, so [Drake] was talking about those people that go to private school and I think they have no idea about how some families live and struggle. It's like they're living on another planet and don't care about anyone in any other position. (Anne-Marie)

> North School[10] kids are like, well not all of them but like most of them just have everything they want. Like we'd like have to save to buy expensive stuff but they just get it when they want it. (Mabel)

Both Anne-Marie and Mabel (Y11) reiterated their peers' views on young people that attend public school as being oblivious to the hardships and hard work of other social groups as they are so far removed from what those in this study perceive as the *real world*. Rather, they live *"on another planet"* and bear undesirable traits such as a lack of empathy and being indulged, as illustrated by phrases such as *"[they] don't care"* and *"get everything they want [...] when they want it".*

It has been previously discussed in section 2.10.1. of the literature review that young people seek *otherness* from classes or subclasses deemed lower than themselves (Southerton, 2002); however, here, four young people appear to seek similar disassociation from the upper middle classes. Often seen as part of the elite and therefore the peak of the social pyramid (Hanley, 2017), those who attend public schools are portrayed in the quotations from Stuart and Drake to *"stand out"* and reveals that those who come into regular contact with young people who attend public schools through sporting events seek disassociation not only with those they perceive as the very bottom of society but also those at the very top, linking back to the notion of identifying with the term *normal* as discussed earlier in section 4.1.6. (Savage et al., 2001). The above comment from Drake that young people from public schools "*don't have to ever struggle or make hard choices"* suggests a lack of respectability for their lifestyles due to the perception of them having to possess little endurance or diligence (Skeggs, 2004). By expressing ideas that those who are part of what society views as the middle classes *"can't really relate to people as much"* (Demi) and how young people from a neighbouring independent school seem undeserving of their achievement because they are *"giv[en] it"* (Mabel), the Y11 young people here perceive classes above them to be undesirable and somewhat distasteful. While it is argued that the working classes are often seen as disgusting subjects and are lacking in socially acceptable moral behaviours, what is less noted is the disgust that is also felt by the lower classes for the middle-class elite (Lawler, 2005). It is often accepted, especially in social policy, that people inherently desire to *better themselves*, becoming socially superior to the class they were born into (Reay, 2017a). However, the

[10] North School is a pseudonym so as not to reveal the name of the public school benign referenced.

above comments from Mabel, Anne-Marie, Stuart and Drake regarding the neighbouring public school and their young people's inability to exist in a world outside their own help to illustrate how meritocratic notions are promoted by policy makers rather than existing as an inherent desire in the young people in this study (Sennet and Cobb, 1993).

4.2. Implications of labelling

The previous section explored the initial theme of young people's opinion on labels in policy and popular culture used to describe those who are SED and the connotations they hold. The section also explored how young people sought to disassociate with the 'disadvantaged' label but perceived other labels to be more appropriate labels. It became clear when young people expressed opinions on how they perceived the portrayal of young people through the 'disadvantaged' label that they had an awareness of how it served to exclude those who are SED from society through stigmatisation. The following sections move on to explore how they linked their opinions on labels used for young people who are SED to their perceived implications of labelling, exploring the following sub themes: motives of the 'disadvantaged' label; a deficit narrative and blame; and stigma and shame.

4.2.1. Motives of the 'disadvantaged' label

A dominant theme within discussions with young people was the suspicion of potential motives behind labelling and the subsequent effects: what is gained, what is lost and by whom. The young people, most prominently from the Y11 Focus group though not exclusively, appeared to feel that the negative portrayal of 'disadvantaged' families was a motivation for using the label rather than simply an unfortunate by-product of policy. When asked how and why they thought the term 'disadvantaged' was used in the policy excerpt, young people articulated their understanding of the perceived purpose governments had in using the label, as seen in the Y11 group interview excerpt below:

> Dawn: It's like why would you want to make children out in that way when you're supposed to be offering all this money to help them?
>
> Drake: So disadvantaged is supposed to be like a problem group, like 'oh, we can see you're struggling, let's step in and help you to get out of your situation'.
>
> Alexandra: What do you mean by a "problem group"?

Drake: Well, like they're a problem and the government are the good guys who sweep in and turn them around. But I don't think it's like disadvantaged are bad and the government are good. People can't help being poverty… actually isn't it the government's fault that they're poverty?

Stuart: Yeah, I think you look at stuff like homelessness and think how can our country still have this? Like we're pretty rich right as a country, so we shouldn't really have stuff like homelessness or poverty but we do. No one chooses to be like that so I agree, it's their [the government's] fault.

Mabel: So, the government uses words like the homeless or disadvantaged kids to make it seem like it's not their fault but actually like Anne-Marie said a minute ago that they want to be like that.

Anne-Marie: Yeah, I meant that disadvantaged presents them as bad people who choose to be like that. But that's what the government want you to think so they can be the heroes to save them like Drake just said!

Dave: So it's actually their failure as leaders but they turn it around and make it seem like it's kids who are failing themselves. That's well harsh!

By articulating that those labelled as 'disadvantaged' are *"supposed to be a problem group"* (Drake) and presented as *"bad people"* (Anne-Marie), the young people here illustrate how they understand how the 'disadvantaged' label holds what they see as masked connotations in seeking to portray a negative image of those who are SED as a problematic group in society (Rix, 2006). The discussion reveals how they recognise that the 'disadvantaged' label draws attention to the implied deficits of young people themselves rather than the social circumstances that is the root cause of their SED. As seen in Stuart and Mabel's use of the word *"fault"*, the young people appear to understand that negative portrayal of those who are SED is an attempt to shift focus from governments' wider responsibilities (Lauchlan and Boyle, 2007). Dave refers to the government *"failure"* in response to addressing social inequalities and their subsequent desire to seek to present those who are SED as *"failing themselves"*. This illustrates that the young people see the motives of the 'disadvantaged' label as allowing governments to assert deficit narratives that insinuate it is the responsibility of young people to rid themselves of their SED (Reay, 2006; 2017). Drawing upon earlier discussion about hidden meanings and connotations of labels, Anne-Marie comments that the deficit narrative is *"what the government want you to think"*, though this is a false and deeply damaging image to paint of young people. The young people here seem to be implying that the narratives conveyed through the 'disadvantaged' label have been engineered rather

than simply being “unfortunate outcomes of illiberal social interactions” (Tyler, 2020: 26). They appear to understand how images of deficit and dependency on the state are “invoked by architects of welfare reform to manufacture ignorance of alternative ways of addressing poverty and social injustice” (Slater, 2012: 948).

An understanding of the motives behind the use of the policy label ‘disadvantaged’ was common across individual interviews. Young people were sure to make clear that society’s views of those labelled as ‘disadvantaged’ were not representative and that the negative portrayal was merely a construct to allow governments to fulfil their motives, as expressed by Dave and Anne-Marie (Y11) below:

> It's like they’re [government] keeping them [those labelled ‘disadvantaged’] down. I think it’s like… a balance, like, it works for them to have so many people at the bottom because then they can say they’re helping people. It’s all about looking good for the government in a selfish way. (Dave)

> I guess the government have an agenda because disadvantaged is a negative term, no one wants to be labelled disadvantaged, so the government labelling that influences people who would possibly be teetering on the edge to do a bit more to not have to wear this label. Maybe, it’s like a preventative thing so the government don’t have to help loads of people. Like slipping into being labelled and having someone give you handouts. (Anne-Marie)

Dave believes that it works in the government’s favour to oppress young people and families through the ‘disadvantaged’ label because they can then be seen as making a difference in the lives of those that are in fact socially excluded by a functionalist social model (Raffo et al., 2007). Anne-Marie claims the government’s unsavoury depiction of those labelled ‘disadvantaged’ enables them to confer blame and deflect responsibility away from societal inequalities (Lawler, 2005). She talks of the stigma of people not wanting to be labelled ‘disadvantaged’ and that she perceives this as a conscious motive by the government.

4.2.2. A deficit narrative and blame

A total of seven out of the ten young people interviewed individually spoke about an element of fault or blame surrounding the label ‘disadvantaged’ in either group, individual or both interviews, whereby those labelled as such and also wider society were made to feel that the reason for poor socio-economic standing was the fault of the individual, as further illustrated in the following responses in addition to the responses above:

> That label [points to disadvantaged] makes it seem like it's their fault. (Camila)
>
> That shouldn't be happening, having to be relying on the benefits and working and being blamed for being lazy. (Roddy)
>
> I don't think it's right that children are called disadvantaged because they're getting all the blame for something that's not their fault. (Mo)

Here, Camila, Roddy and Mo (Y7) are arguing that the 'disadvantaged' label is used to blame those who are labelled for their disadvantage, though they do not explicitly name who they think drives and desires this blaming, as seen in the earlier Y11 group interview and in Y11 individual responses below. This would suggest that the younger cohort, whilst still able to comment on connotations of labels around social divisions, were not as exposed to the agendas and motivations of labelling in the same way Y11 young people were. The Y7 young people made more age-appropriate comments regarding the implications linked to the 'disadvantaged' label. The potential motives behind governments using the 'disadvantaged' label was picked up upon by some of the Y11 Focus group after their group discussion referenced above. The sentiment of young people is best captured in the Y11 responses from individual interviews below:

> It's like society… blaming them for it. As if 'Oh it's your fault.' Instead of like, you know helping them, they're like throwing them aside, like you're not important and they're only focusing on people who are doing well. Like 'Oh, you know, you deal with it, it's your fault. (Dave)
>
> It's passing the blame for the country's problems to the poor, like they're ruining the country. But then they give them money, like benefits and free meals at school and then it looks like the disadvantaged are like the bad guys. Direct attention to the poor people. (Dawn)
>
> There's poverty in the country, so the government starts targeting minorities and blaming them for problems. (Anne Marie)
>
> It's kinda like if you're disadvantaged well you're a child so you can get some help but once you are like 18, they just forget about you. It's like you're an inconvenience cog in their little machine of society...It's a bit like tick them off, we've helped them now, you know job done. It's on them now to sort themselves out. (Drake)

Exemplified in the comments above is the way in which young people linked this blame and implied fault to government motivations. Their views were in line with more socially critical perspectives which argue that current portrayals of those who are SED lead to social injustice being glossed over as featured in current functionalist frameworks. A functionalist

perspective views SED as a minor hitch within an otherwise sound social model that with minor tweaks can be resolved as discussed in Chapter 2 (Raffo et al., 2007; Humphrey, 2013; Andrews et al., 2017). There is an understanding from young people that this perspective allows governments to avoid acknowledging and dealing with wider social inequalities, a major outcome of the study and one which is discussed in detail in Chapter 5. Many young people demonstrated how they perceived society to be preconditioned to view those labelled as 'disadvantaged' as accountable for their socio-economic status, drawing upon the idea of poverty propaganda which perpetuates poverty and disadvantage (Shildrick, 2018). Their comments show that they have an understanding of how those who are SED are seemingly held accountable for their own marginalisation by society attributing blame on individuals' apparent apathy as Drake says "*It's on them now to sort themselves out".*

As aforementioned, many young people felt the 'disadvantaged' label conveyed a deficit narrative of those who are SED being portrayed as a problem to be fixed in society. The term lack was used multiple times (10 uses by eight young people) to describe their perceptions of those being labelled 'disadvantaged'. Young people's sentiments are best captured in the following responses from discussions around the images of different types of housing (Appendix D), when they were asked to describe the kinds of young people and families that might live in certain types of housing and which images might they associate with the term 'disadvantaged'. Below, Anne-Marie and Mabel (Y11) talk about what assumptions society makes about young people who lived in the housing depicted on the images:

> It's a generalisation but you think that disadvantaged will have a lack of manners or respect for other people. (Anne-Marie)
>
> I don't think that but that's sort of what you're supposed to see them as. Money or not, that lack of moral and emotional support counts. Like, not playing their part in society kind of. (Mabel)

Anne-Marie's comment shows an awareness that the 'disadvantaged' label implies lacking in often the most basic of skills that are fundamental to human functioning and communication. Mabel also notes that a lack of financial means can play a role but focuses her response on highlighting how lack can also imply negative family support, suggesting families are not contributing to society. Below, Stuart echoes Mabel's thoughts that a lack of

money is one factor; however, the deficits that stem from this are also prominent such as a lack of headspace to consider broadening your interests in the Y11 group interview:

> If you're disadvantaged, there might be a lack of interest in doing stuff. Not knowing about stuff going on, a lack of interest because you've got more important things to think about like what you need to spend. Not in every case obviously.

Those labelled as 'disadvantaged' were frequently described by young people in the study through narratives of innate deficit (Lawler, 2005). Here, several young people described those who are labelled 'disadvantaged' as being perceived to be lacking not only in material resources but also innately lacking in moral standing, cultural capital and taste as previously discussed when they explored the connotations of labels in group interviews (Bourdieu, 1986; Hudson, 1994; Lawler, 2005). The young people above critiqued the political rhetoric surrounding families who are labelled as 'disadvantaged' that switch thinking of poverty as a lack of material resources to a lack of the right forms of behaviour (Lawler and Payne, 2017). Education policy and school professionals often focus on the scarcity of ambition and the devaluing of education as abstracted from the social context, believing it is the young people themselves that are lacking in drive (Lauchlan and Boyle, 2007). Their responses here echo earlier comments that the government is "attributing the cause of poverty to the inherent traits of the poor" (Smith and Stone, 1989: 101).

Anne-Marie, Mabel and Stuart above were also conscious to couch their comments in disclaimers to distinguish their beliefs with the view that they believed governments were attempting to convey - that young people who are labelled have the audacity to be 'disadvantaged' (Reay, 2017a). Anne-Marie stated: "*It's a generalisation but...*"; Mabel began: "*I don't think that but...*"; and Stuart ended his comment with: "*Not in every case obviously.*" The young people here expressed their concern with generalisations that assume those who are labelled 'disadvantaged' are lacking in what it means to be a decent member of society and were critical of society encouraging deficit narratives through labels such as 'disadvantaged' (Lauchlan and Boyle, 2007). These disclaimers echo the comments referenced earlier by Mandy and Ed (Y7) in section 4.1.6. that the 'disadvantaged' label conveys a sense that "*they're not the average person"* but that this is *"probably not true though"* (Mandy) and that *"you'd assume that people who are labelled disadvantaged don't have a very good home life, which I know isn't the case"* (Ed).

The understanding that the 'disadvantaged' label paints an inaccurate picture of young people is also epitomised in Mabel's (Y11) response from her individual interview:

> How can you say that if you've got money, you are a better parent? It doesn't work like that. You can still support your kid, exactly the same love and support if you are less well off. Maybe people with less money do it more, just because they can't support them in the money aspect as much. Who says what makes a good parent or a happy family?

Mabel suggests that families who are labelled as 'disadvantaged' might provide a higher quality of upbringing in terms of *"love and support"* in lieu of having financial means. Mabel implies this caregiving outweighs that provided by families who are not labelled 'disadvantaged' and also challenges the assumption that a *"good parent"* or *"happy family"* has *"got money"*.

4.2.3. A lack of self-belief

The following response from Roddy (Y7) reveals how he recognised that a lack of self-belief was absent from the lives of young people who are labelled 'disadvantaged'. When he was asked to explain how being labelled 'disadvantaged' might affect a young person growing up in his individual interview, he said: "*they're going to grow up thinking like, in the world, they're not important."* Roddy's very blunt statement about young people thinking they are *"not important"* highlights how the connotations of the 'disadvantaged' label may affect young people's sense of self-worth and importance. Rather, he believes that the damage done in their educational experience (self-worth in this case) follows them through life and is also referenced by Anne-Marie (Y11) in her individual interview:

> I think some people are supposed to be excluded from things in society like going to university or earning a certain amount. Like their drive is not as high as someone who is advantaged. It's confidence, if they've not got that confidence to go for things, then they won't excel in, like, you know, the outside world. Schools are small but you have to put yourself out there after school and you're not gonna get anywhere and that's when you need confidence.

Anne-Marie builds upon Roddy's comment in her individual interview regarding the way the 'disadvantaged' label can disable positive self-image in young people and that this follows them from school into *"the outside world"*. Not only this but Anne-Marie could link the 'disadvantaged' label's ability to make people feel under confident to society's purposeful

exclusion of certain types of people. This societal exclusion was also a shared view of Drake, Dawn and Rita (Y11) when asked how the 'disadvantaged' label might affect young people in their individual interviews:

> You're made to feel not worth as much as someone else. (Drake)
>
> I think it's common for them [young people labelled disadvantage] to stay in that life. It's quite hard for them to believe they can get out of that coz you can't really think about a different life. (Dawn)
>
> So the Government is saying it's about money but I think a shortage of money can be one factor but that can also affect a range of other things. It's not just money. I think that can affect other parts of their life that are not obvious. There's a barrier, like, self... like self-belief maybe? Yeah, like confidence, a lot of poor people don't have that confidence to be like, 'I know what I'm doing' or 'I'm doing well'. (Rita)

Here, young people refer to self-belief and self-worth as barriers to accessing opportunities others who are not labelled 'disadvantaged' can access. Furthermore, Dawn comments on how a lack of self-belief can affect the ability to focus on future prospects. As she suggests, poor socio-economic standing is thought to be stable across lifespan (del Rio et al., 2011) and cause an inability to imagine longer-term consequences, as current pressing need limits future perspective and also lowers the resistance to self-destructive temptation (Mullainathan and Shafir, 2013). This links to the notion of horizons for action, as aforementioned in section 4.1.6. where factors such as family, location and social experiences dictate both what young people perceive as achievable and what they view as lying outside their horizons (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997; Ball et al., 2001; Hodkinson, 2008). Even from the age of 11, young people who are labelled as 'disadvantaged' appear to feel a sense of worthlessness and perceive themselves as *"not important"* (Roddy, Y7). This echoes the work of Reay and Wiliam (1999) whereby primary age children talked of being *"a nothing"* (p346) if they did not perform well in assessments and this construction of themselves as failures.

This also echoes the idea that young people are aware of the "(not-so) hidden agenda[s]" (Reay and Wiliam, 1999: 346) that education policies have, as best captured in Drake and Anne-Marie's (Y11) comments about being *"made to feel"* (Drake) inferior to others and how young people who are labelled 'disadvantaged' are *"supposed to be excluded"* (Anne-Marie) from higher education and salaries. A lack of self-belief leads to behaviours displayed by young people that are perceived by policy makers and educators to be a lack of aspiration.

Lacking in aspiration implies personal lack (not being bothered enough, having low expectations) and thus suits policy makers in that there is someone to blame for the attainment gap between young people who are labelled 'disadvantaged' and their peers, whereas a lack of self-belief is a product of the 'disadvantaged' label. The ways in which the 'disadvantaged' label instils a lack of self-belief in young people is evidence of them falling victim to symbolic violence, in which they absorb the idea of deficit and their disadvantages being their fault as discussed within the literature (Bourdieu, 2000; Emirbayer and Johnson, 2008). The young people referenced here appeared perceptive in their understanding that feelings of low esteem and ambition are not necessarily innate but are part of the agenda of the wider establishment, above and beyond their school experience.

4.2.4. Stigma and shame

The majority of young people could talk about how the 'disadvantaged' label served to paint negative and misrepresentative images of those who were labelled and some could link to how these views are perpetuated in wider society through narratives of stigma and shame. The young people below comment on how they perceived society's construction of those who are SED intended to describe them in an unsavoury light, linking to earlier literature on those labelled as 'disadvantaged' as repulsive (Bourdieu, 1986; Miller, 1997; Lawler, 2005). When asked how they thought those labelled 'disadvantaged' were perceived in society, the following quotations exemplify young people's understanding that such young people and families are portrayed as immoral and anti-social but that this portrayal was a social construct, not reality. Below, young people were asked how they thought those labelled 'disadvantaged' might be viewed in wider society in their individual interviews:

> So, like benefit scum or whatever. Like in my head I'm like, I can't say that! Like you don't want to seem like you're judging them but we do in society don't we. (Anne-Marie, Y11)

> Anti-social behaviour, swearing, stealing. Chavvy. That's what we're preconditioned to think about them and that's not what it is at all. (Drake, Y11)

> I think you assume that if someone's disadvantaged then that means that 'Oh, their parents don't work at all, you know, they just sit on their bums all day' but actually you might have two working parents so that's not really the case but you still get blamed for being a waster. It's like, I don't know, we are made to think bad of them. (Camila, Y7)

> We should train ourself not to think things like people from poor backgrounds are criminals or they're all in it for themselves. (Roddy, Y7)

While 'disadvantaged' is the policy label used to refer to young people, these comments suggest that those labelled as 'disadvantaged' are further demonised in wider society by terms such as *"chavvy"* (Drake), *"benefit scum"* (Anne-Marie), *"waster"* (Camila) or *"criminals"* (Roddy). It is important that the young people above are clear to state that these are the common perceptions that society has constructed and that they are not in agreement with the image they portray of those who are labelled 'disadvantaged'. Rather, they *"are made to"* (Camila) view them in a negative light and that people should strive to reject these assumptions or as Roddy says *"train oursel[ves]"* to think differently. The young people here can recognise that, in popular discourse, the 'disadvantaged' label carries even more stigma than in education policy, stating that there is an element of *"judging them"* as society is *"preconditioned"* (Drake) to attribute their 'disadvantages' to innate human qualities that are lacking. The notion of young people removing themselves from the popular discourse of viewing young people as personally deficient has been previously discussed in the comments in section 4.1.5. and also aforementioned in section 4.2.2.

Some young people (Y11) could recognise the role the media played in driving the wider deficit narrative in order to place shame and stigma on those labelled as 'disadvantaged' when asked if they thought the connotations of the 'disadvantaged' label were experienced anywhere else other than in education policy in their individual interviews:

> I think maybe there always needs to be a group that's blamed in the media. Like people that are disadvantaged are labelled benefit scum or whatever people call them in the papers. (Dawn)

> It's like the government but The Sun also like circulates stories about people on benefits and just staying at home. Who owns The Sun? Well, some upper class person probably. Those kind of people are looking down their noses at those poorer than them and that works for them. So then everyone else will make fun of them. (Drake)

> The media plays a big part doesn't it. All the villains like on Benefits Street. It's age-long preconceptions though isn't it? They've always been presented as stealing or living in violent places which can't all be true. It must make people ashamed of where they live and what people think of them. (Mabel)

> They're like made to seem really bad on TV, like I said before, a totally exaggerated version of what people are actually like. They must edit out all the normal bits and just

> keep in all the shocking bits to make them seem like awful people. It's an unfair presentation of them but they don't know until it's aired. (Dave)

Dawn, Drake, Mabel and Dave, in four separate individual interviews, could articulate the power the media possessed in stigmatising those who are SED. Dawn and Drake refer to the press as using labels such as *"benefit scum"* which shows their awareness of how tabloid newspapers demonise and shame those who are SED. Mabel echoes Dave's reference to society being *"preconditioned"* to assume deficit narratives above, as she talks about the *"preconceptions"* that are deeply embedded within society as perpetuated by the media. Furthermore, Mabel's reference to the "*villains like on Benefits Street"* and Dave's understanding of the engineered image presented of people who are SED who are *"exaggerated"* as *"really bad"* and *"awful"* through media producers' careful editing shows how the young people here understand how the media is complicit in *"blam[ing]"* (Dawn) those who are labelled 'disadvantaged' for their situations.

The young people here seem to be aware of the power of the stigma of being seen as 'disadvantaged' that is translated from policy into popular discourse can be seen in programmes such as *Benefits Street,* which has been described as a show which "seemingly take pleasure in depicting people as lazy, criminal, violent, undisciplined and shameless, playing into the media and government rhetoric around people living on a low income" (Garthwaite, 2016: 7). Shows such as *Benefits Street*, as referenced by Mabel, are known to portray "imagined connections between welfare recipients and moral laxity, greed, and even criminality" (Jensen 2014: 1). Mabel and Dave's references to *poverty porn* television shows and Dawn's reference to the tabloid media show an understanding of "underclass media mythologizing" (Jensen, 2014: 2.7). However, young people are also aware that such *myths* are not without consequences and are "a key site of stigma production" (Garthwaite, 2016: 11), translated into the everyday experiences of people who are SED as seen in Mabel's comment: "*It must make people ashamed of where they live and what people think of them".* Furthermore, Dave's comment that *"It's an unfair presentation of them but they don't know until it's aired"* highlights his understanding of the lack of agency people who are SED have in how they are perceived in society.

4.3. Summary of findings

In this chapter, the data was presented using the themes and sub themes from the analysis of interviews with young people who have been labelled as 'disadvantaged' by policy makers. The first theme that was discussed was opinions on labels, including the following sub themes: connotations of labels in policy and popular discourse; alternative ways to refer to young people; and disassociation with 'disadvantaged'. The second theme was implications of labelling including the following sub themes: motives of the 'disadvantaged' label; a deficit narrative and blame; and stigma and shame.

The young people labelled 'disadvantaged' who participated in this study seem to show an awareness of society's categorisation and stigmatisation of class. They expressed strong views on the motives of governments, policy makers and the wider society in promoting such labelling. Many voiced the idea that those who attribute labels such as 'disadvantaged' are concerned with shaming young people and families to point the finger at those who find themselves in poor socio-economic situations and shift blame from the establishment. Furthermore, they expressed strong views on the negative effects of labelling and believed imposing labels on young people was potentially damaging. These findings are particularly interesting because while the young people were knowledgeable and held strong views on the labelling of themselves and their peers, they lack agency to voice these opinions in wider forums. They seem quite sure that the labelling happening to them is wrong; however, they are unlikely to have previously been offered a platform to speak about how they feel about it. The findings presented in this chapter will now be discussed with reference to the conceptual approaches to research used to frame the study in the following chapter.

Chapter 5. Young people's voices as underpinned by a socially critical worldview: a discussion

The previous findings chapter captured the young people's voices, using the literature reviewed in the second chapter to help interpret their perceptions and experiences. This chapter draws together the overarching ideas that emerged from young people's voices and considers them in the context of functionalist and socially critical frameworks set out in Chapters 1 and 2 and in relation to the central research questions. The chapter aims to discuss the core findings to establish the heart of the thesis' contributions. It focuses on two key outcomes from young people's voices: their rejection of the 'disadvantaged' label and preference for less euphemistic terms and their views that the motives behind the use of the 'disadvantaged' label is to shame those who are labelled and blame them for their SED. The chapter then discusses how these key outcomes indicate a need for young people's agency in research.

5.1. Revisiting the study's aim and approach

The study set out to explore young people's perceptions of the 'disadvantaged' label arising from my professional concerns that it was it was inappropriate and potentially damaging. This was based on a concern that, firstly, the label itself is somewhat negative and potentially threatens to misrepresent and *other* young people; and secondly, my concern that some of the policy rhetoric (and the assumptions being made about young people and how this may influence teachers) may be deeply damaging for those who are SED. Because so little independent research exists that questions rather than conforms to the government's use of the term 'disadvantaged' and what is implicit in its use for those who are SED, this thesis set out to offer an exploration of the 'disadvantaged' label from the perspective of young people who are labelled as such in policy and education settings.

5.1.1. An alternative socially critical study

The study sought to offer a novel take on research with young people who are labelled 'disadvantaged'. In summary, the current research landscape comprises: a majority functionalist approach to the educational experience of young people (experience is used in

the singular here because dominant research seeks to homogenise those who are labelled as 'disadvantaged' into one uniform group); and a minority socially critical approach, rarely valued outside of academia (Luthar and Zelazo, 2003; Hirsch, 2007; Raffo et al., 2007; Humphrey, 2013; Reay, 2013, 2017a). Research is still also very often either centred on the adult speaking on behalf of young people or evading frank discussions with them in order to *protect them* from potentially sensitive exposure to avoid harm (Leeson, 2010). This study offers a socially critical approach that centres young people in the discussion that is directly influencing their current experiences and argues that, with careful and considered ethical measures, they can indeed be consulted on policy development and policy implications focused on addressing educational inequalities and terminology used to discuss young people who are SED.

5.1.2. Young people's socially critical voices

The following discussion will outline how young people appeared to be critical of policy frameworks (functionalist) that seek to overcome specific problems within the current social structure by amending or extending existing broad strategies (Raffo et al., 2007). A functionalist model with regards to educational 'disadvantage' seeks to fix elements of the educational framework that are not working (in the contemporary policy landscape, namely the young people who bring the 'disadvantage') but fails to engage with approaches that seek to change the overarching system that allows for SED to exist. This results in young people, who are labelled as 'disadvantaged' and who are perceived to be underachieving, being force-fed strategies that offer academic interventions to raise attainment for schools without any critique of the wider education system as inherently broken (Andrews et al., 2017). The young people's responses in Chapter 4 strengthen the argument for more socially critical approaches to understanding the educational experiences of those labelled as 'disadvantaged' that give a platform to the voices of those with that particular lived experience in an attempt to overhaul the current ineffective system by seeking more radical changes and democratic approaches to education (Hirsch, 2007).

5.2. Core findings

Young people's socially critical perceptions and experiences of the 'disadvantaged' label can be encapsulated in two key research outcomes.

As seen when young people's comments were viewed through the lens of disadvancement in the previous chapter, they have clearly understood how the language used in policy works against young people and fails to acknowledge the socio-economic barriers that are placed before them. In this sense, young people are able to offer a structural analysis of labels used to misrepresent them. The young people in this study concur with socially critical academics and with the notion of disadvancement that there is a call to reinvigorate language of SED.

Firstly, young people spoke strongly about their disapproval of current policy labels used to refer to those who are SED, particularly the 'disadvantaged' label. They commented on how young people are not only misrepresented through the labels chosen by policy makers but spoke of the harm it does to those labelled. Although young people were not alerted to their labelling in the study, nor asked to comment directly on themselves as young people labelled 'disadvantaged', they appeared to speak in ways that distanced themselves from the 'disadvantaged' label. Young people also offered alternative terms that they felt were more appropriate in referring to those who are SED by adopting a socially critical approach to considering who should label young people and how they should be labelled as illustrated in section 5.3. below. Secondly, young people expressed strong views on the motives of governments and policy makers in promoting the 'disadvantaged' label to create a sense of shame and stigma for those who are SED. They offered the view that the motivations behind this were to allow the blame to be directed at those who find themselves SED and shift blame from the establishment, as illustrated in section 5.4. below. Young people appeared to take a socially critical perspective in showing an awareness that the implications and connotations of the 'disadvantaged' label are not accidental but rather act as a distraction from governments having to directly tackle the problem of SED.

The two core research outcomes outlined above can be epitomised by young people's responses and these will head the following discussions on what they have taught us about how best to address the educational experiences of young people whilst enduring the 'disadvantaged' label.

5.3. *"Young people should be able to decide what they're classed as."* (Rita, 16)

A key discovery emerging from the young people's voices were concerns over their misrepresentation by being attributed with the 'disadvantaged' label. The findings suggest that young people's identities are belied due to the use of negatively loaded labels. They commented on the limitations placed upon them by the policy term 'disadvantaged' label and considered how young people would refer to themselves in order to more accurately reflect and narrate their stories of socio-economic disadvantage, prompting proposals of consulting young people in how those with agency categorise and classify them. Though young people's understanding of the motives of governments using language that promotes deficit narratives through the 'disadvantaged' label is touched upon within this section as the discussion is based around the labels, this will be discussed in further detail in the following section 5.4.

5.3.1. 'Disadvantaged' as functionalist rhetoric

Young people appeared to disapprove of the current functionalist approach to education research and policy where adults make decisions for young people (Reynaert et al., 2009; Santrock, 2011). Instead, they favoured an inclusive approach that involves young people in discussions around what and how they are labelled (Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008; Nieuwenhuys, 2010) as seen in the above quotation from Rita (*"Young people should be able to decide what they're classed as."*) and in Anne-Marie's comment on the policy term 'disadvantaged' that: "*Young people would use something less… offensive!"*. When offered a platform to voice their opinions of their representation in policy in the form of this study, there was a strong sense that young people felt that the 'disadvantaged' label was a convenient category marker for policy makers who are inconsiderate or ignorant of the implications the label carries (Gorard, 2014). They appeared to feel that the 'disadvantaged' label made sweeping generalisations about the lives and experiences of young people, as seen in Anne-Marie's comment: *"It's not as black and white as you just fit into one label"* and Dave's comment that the 'disadvantaged' label is the government's attempt at *"making you fit into a box"*.

Rather than viewing policy makers as protecting young people in making decisions for their best interests (Reynaert et al., 2009; Santrock, 2011), the young people seemed to view the

process of their labelling and subsequent interventions as silencing and further marginalising, implying that the challenges faced by those who are SED are exacerbated by the 'disadvantaged' label. They were able to express that they felt young people were not only marginalised by the 'disadvantaged' label because of the negative connotations it holds but also because the label is used to refer to a diverse range of young people that it unfairly reduces to a homogenous group that is conveniently grouped as the problem to be fixed in a functionalist perspective (Raffo et al., 2007).

As discussed in the review of literature in Chapter 2, a functionalist approach seeks to address a defect in an existing framework. When asked how and why they thought the term 'disadvantaged' was used in the policy excerpt (Appendix C), young people could establish that the 'disadvantaged' label grouped young people together so that they became the defect to be fixed as seen in Drake's comment when asked : "*Disadvantaged is supposed to be like a problem group, like 'oh, we [the government] can see you're struggling, let's step in and help you to get out of your situation'"* and Dave's comment: "*It's like making them out to be unable to function as a human without all this help".* Though they never acknowledged directly that policy was talking about them specifically, it appeared that young people knew they were labelled 'disadvantaged' and sought to distance themselves from its stigma. Particularly in the responses from Y11 young people, it appeared that the platform they had been given to discuss the 'disadvantaged' label was taken as an opportunity to have agency in rejecting their labelling and subsequent stigmatisation.

The young people's comments also suggest that a functionalist model accepts the 'disadvantaged' label as a legitimate term imposed on young people and therefore accepts that the gap between the educational experience of 'disadvantaged' young people and their peers is inherent and exists naturally within society, rather than a gap that is caused by social inequality that exists in wider society *because of* government shortcomings (Reay, 2017a). They jointly contested that the labelling and categorisation of young people as 'disadvantaged' presents them as a flawed group and therefore any strategy proposed to *fix* this group accepts that the current education model will suffice with minor adaptations (Russell, 2013). Thus, the socially critical voices of young people add weight to the call for alternative approaches to research and policy making that seek to overhaul the ineffectual system that allows for young people to be SED (Raffo et al., 2007).

5.3.2. Alternative, socially critical labels

After discussions around existing policy labels where all young people expressed distaste towards the 'disadvantaged' label, they were asked if there were any labels that would be more appropriate to use, both from the terms provided on flashcards for the ranking exercise in group interviews (Appendix B) and any terms they could think of themselves. Young people indicated how a re-working of labels could alleviate some of the negative assumptions current labels hold and challenged the ways that the 'disadvantaged' label dictated the social worth of young people who are SED as seen in Rita's comment: "*what if you don't feel 'disadvantaged' and you're being called that. It's not fair"*. They adopted a socially critical approach in arriving at alternative labels for young people who are SED in that they used terminology that appeared to centre the young person being labelled, rather than the implied inherent deficit linked to their SED as was critiqued with the 'disadvantaged' label. For example, some of the terms suggested were: *"young people who are working-class"* (Dave); *children who come from a working-class family"* (Drake); *"young people who have to live in poverty"* (Roddy); "*young people who need support"* (Rita); *"families that are really, really struggling" (Mandy);* and *"people who are classed as disadvantaged, not that they actually are disadvantaged"* (Mabel). Young people's choice of semantics when suggesting alternative labels that were more representative of those who are SED is reminiscent of more socially critical research that seeks to rework labels that fail to recognise the labelled as people before anything else as discussed in the literature review (People First, 1994; Rix, 2006; TACT, 2019).

Furthermore, in using such terms that do not shy away from the social factors that make a young person SED, young people's alternative labels echoed critics of functionalist policy language who instead favour language that highlights the social injustice people face at the hands of governments: "working-class", "living in poverty", "social injustice" (Reay and Ball, 1997; Gewirtz, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002; Reay, 2001; 2005; 2006; 2016; 2017a; 2017b). By using such explicit terms, social critical academics lay bare that functionalist policy seeks to mask social justice behind labels that blur wider societal flaws (Hatcher, 2006). In using similar terms such as *"working-class"*, *"have to live poverty"* and *"struggling"*, rather than terms that connote a defect inherent with the young person or family, young people's suggestions implied that they did not feel these frank terms should be written out of society by government's attempts to mask social inequalities (Reay, 2016).

In appropriating labels, young people appeared to reject the term 'disadvantaged' because it was based on assumptions by adults in policy. Instead, they suggested that terms such as “working-class” better represented feelings of collective experience of young people who are SED and rejected the 'disadvantaged' label as it promotes individual deficit and internalises inequality as something inherent, and thus confers responsibility for equality to the individual (Littler, 2017). In suggesting these alternative labels, young people channelled ideas of collective identity through experiencing social inequalities rather than being deemed as personally lacking by the 'disadvantaged' label. It appears young people are aware that the 'disadvantaged' label rejects notions of collective experience as strengthening and giving agency and is instead used by the government to apply individual betterment (Littler, 2017). Their socially critical worldviews are critical of the current functionalist discourse that favours labels like ‘disadvantaged’ that confers narratives of lack and deficit on to young people who are SED (Reay, 2017a).

It is argued that governments are able to blur social divisions through euphemistic language that fails to acknowledge the ways in which social groups suffer at the hands of unaddressed social inequality (Reay, 2017a). Thus, a society that views experience as collective rather than individual does not suit government agendas in masking social inequalities. The young people in this study take a more socially critical view that SED is a collective experience as seen through the ways they used semantics to re-shape socio-economic policy labels to indicate individuals are not inherently responsible for their SED. They critiqued terms such as Pupil Premium and 'disadvantaged' because they implied these terms downplayed the idea of class having shared experience at its heart rather than individualised behaviours to internalise inequality as something it is individual’s responsibility to get out of themselves (Reay, 2017a). Instead, the use of terms that explicitly refer to how SED is a product of society’s inequalities as illustrated through young people’s responses in this study strengthens the need for young people to be active in policy discussion and research that informs education strategies.

5.4. *“Disadvantaged is labelling them as like subhuman.”* (Mabel, 16)

As discussed above, the collective responses of young people in this study appeared to challenge the euphemistic way in which policy makers position the 'disadvantaged' label. In this section, it is discussed how many of the young people spoke of society’s shaming of

'disadvantaged' families and the subsequent blame of poor socio-economic standing being placed on the individual through labels such as ‘disadvantaged’ as they distort the reality of persistent social inequalities (Manstead, 2018).

Current functionalist research and policy presents improved academic attainment through examination performance as a panacea to bridging the attainment gap between young people labelled as 'disadvantaged' and their non-labelled peers. However, the young people in this study seemed to challenge the idea that those who are SED should be made to *perform better* to rid themselves of their ‘disadvantage’ in society. Within the literature review, it was established that current functionalist policy frameworks seek to promote social mobility through notions of meritocracy, aiming to encourage individuals to better themselves so as to mask any social divide (Hatcher, 2006; Reay, 2016; 2017a). Socially critical approaches refute the idea that with minor restructuring, society will enable everyone to become part of the middle-class elite (Hoskins and Barker, 2020) and within this study, young people hinted that those who are SED should not have to consider leaving where they belong to be perceived as valuable as seen in discussions around the working-class label in section 4.1.4. of Chapter 4.

A socially critical approach argues that a narrative that omits an understanding of wider social inequality equates to erasing the existence of families who do not desire, nor feel it is just, to have to change their identities to solve their SED progression (Hoskins and Barker, 2020). This belittles families and depicts them as innately 'disadvantaged', rather than as products of social inequalities (Reay, 2017a). This is affirmed by young people’s understanding of the connotations and subsequent implications of disparaging labels such as 'disadvantaged', as seen in Mabel’s response: “*Like the beginning of the word is dis, like disappointment or disgust, like those words begin with dis because it means ‘not’ doesn't it?”*. Young people appeared to understand how the ‘disadvantaged’ label was implicit in painting disgusting subjects of people who are SED as outlined by Lawler’s (2005) research in the review of literature. In this context, the ‘disadvantaged’ label connotes extreme versions of and exaggerates and demonises members of society, as illustrated in Dave’s comment: *“it’s like an exaggerated version of what someone is. Like making them out to be unable to function”* (see section 4.1.5. of Chapter 4 for further references to how young people made the link between the ‘disadvantaged’ label and the negative portrayal of those who are labelled).

Lawler (2005) draws upon Bourdieu (1986) to posit how those who are SED are presented as disgusting and students appear aware of how the 'disadvantaged' label conveys a repellent persona (Skeggs, 2002, 2004; Lawler, 2005; Jensen, 2014; Tyler, 2020).

The voices of young people indicate a sense that, in using terms such as 'disadvantaged' with deficit and individualised connotations, governments shift focus from social inequalities and wrongly place the onus on people who are thought to be 'disadvantaged' because they are refusing to engage with social mobility and the notion of bettering oneself (Reay, 2017a). The young people from the Y11 Focus group especially appeared to recognise that the demonisation of 'disadvantaged' families comes from policy's attempts to preserve a socially unjust system in order to shift focus from governments' wider responsibilities, as in Anne-Marie's comment: *"government starts targeting minorities and blaming them for problems"* (see section 4.2.2 of Chapter 4 for more of this discussion). Young people appear to see through a socially critical perspective that the glut of functionalist research is designed to reaffirm governments core motives, rather than to challenge and change what has not and is not working for those labelled as 'disadvantaged' (Raffo et al., 2007; Russell, 2013).

It is significant to remind here that there was no suggestion of government motive in labelling young people as 'disadvantaged' from myself, nor in any of the interview stimulus material. Young people themselves guided the study in this direction and it is clear from the quotations referenced in Chapter 4 that illustrate their understanding of why it might be of political interest to use disparaging labels to categorise those who are SED, that many young people in this study sense that people who are SED are manipulated within society by those in power. In previous studies, researchers have tended to shy away from discussions around social inequalities in society that directly relate to the lived experiences of young people for fear of exposing them to sensitive information such as their labelling as 'disadvantaged' (Duncombe and Jessop, 2012). However, by allowing young people a forum in which to speak openly, this study has enabled the eloquent and sophisticated accounts of their knowledge and experiences of how they are spoken about in policy that have been previously silenced to emerge. The young people in this study appear to believe there are motives behind the 'disadvantaged' label and can form enlightened opinions on the role 'disadvantaged' policy plays in perpetuating social inequalities.

As illustrated in the previous section through the exploration of young people's choice of terms of address to describe those whom the government label 'disadvantaged', many preceded the reference to lower socio-economic status with the child or young person themselves to combat the intended implications of a loaded term such as 'disadvantaged'. Young people hinted that labels used to describe young people should acknowledge that their SED does not exist intrinsically but is born out of wider social inequalities (Reay, 2017a). This indicates an awareness of the implications such labels have within society and an acknowledgement that young people are being 'disadvantaged' by the government's failure to address the socio-economic disparity in society. The young people within this study appeared to display a desire to free those labelled in policy from the limitations and stigmatisations tethered to the 'disadvantaged' label. The views among the older young people also suggest an understanding that the 'disadvantaged' label distorts the reality that socio-economic disadvantage is caused *by* the system not *brought to* the system because of life choices or innate behaviours, as implied by the government to justify and replicate social inequality (Abrahams, 2016).

While policy terms were presented and young people's opinions were sought on their implications and possible alternatives, the placing of the young person before the disadvantage showed an understanding of the power of semantics as illustrated in young people's responses. This acts as further evidence for a call for socially critical studies that unpick the nuances of policy labels and also give time and agency to young people who, as indicated in this small scale study, are highly informed and opinionated on a topic they have been often shielded from. Their perceptions and experiences of how young people are 'disadvantaged' by society are invaluable sources of information when school professionals consider how policy is to be implemented at school level.

5.5. Young people's agency in research

The findings of this study are particularly interesting because, while young people are knowledgeable and have strong views on the labelling of themselves and their peers, they often lack the opportunity to exercise agency and voice these opinions in wider forums (Morrow, 2009; Bucknall, 2010; Robinson, 2014). They are quite sure that the labelling happening to them (or young people like them) is wrong; however have rarely, if ever, been

offered a platform to speak about how they feel about it. Through the quality of young people's responses and their willingness to talk about such complex terminologies and ideologies, the study has illustrated the efficacy of a young person-centred study on policy labelling and its ability to hold its weight in a research arena dominated by functionalist research. Secondly, through the content of young people's responses it has also been highlighted how those labelled as 'disadvantaged' in this study feel about the functionalist methodologies through which decisions are made for them by adults in power.

What can be concluded from this discussion is that young people have a voice and are highly aware of the limitations the 'disadvantaged' label places on those who are SED, whether or not they see themselves as within this category (Sutton et al., 2007). The eloquence of young people's responses warrants the design of more constructivist research models that incorporate the voices of young people, on whom policy labelling and strategising directly impacts, rather than policy being solely driven by functionalist and largely positivist frameworks. Rather than supposedly *protecting* young people, adults must listen to the perceptions of those who are living the experiences of wearing the 'disadvantaged' label. If adults fail to listen to young people's voices with regards to how socio-economic labels are shaping their educational experience, functionalist and largely quantitative research approaches will do young people a great disservice in making decisions on their behalf that do not tell their stories, nor do they effectively address their needs (Einarsdottir, 2007; Christensen and James, 2008).

5.6. Conclusion

This chapter brought together the key findings of the study and examined their significance alongside the conceptual approaches to research used to frame the study. Firstly, young people's rejection of the 'disadvantaged' label and preference for more representative terms was discussed, followed by a discussion on their views that the motives behind the use of the 'disadvantaged' label is to shame those who are labelled and blame them for their SED. The chapter then discussed how the findings have illustrated further involvement of young people in research that directly impacts upon them. The following chapter will discuss how the key findings answer the central research questions; examine the study's strengths and limitations;

consider areas for further research, in particular the call for young person-centred research as discussed above in section 5.5.; and highlight the overarching implications of the study.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

By returning specifically to the research questions, this final chapter will recapitulate the key findings and will focus on the key contribution to knowledge of the thesis. The chapter will also examine the study's strengths and limitations, considering areas for further research and highlighting the implications of findings and recommendations for educational practice and policy development.

To reiterate the study's rationale, the research argues that the current policy approach to educational 'disadvantage' is flawed twofold in that it does not enable young people's voices to be heard but also that, in labelling them as 'disadvantaged', it is actively detrimental to the development and wellbeing of young people and their educational experiences. This study was born out of a gap in literature that challenged the acceptance of labels such as 'disadvantaged' to categorise young people. There was a notable dearth of socially critical studies that questioned the assumptions of labels used within the current education model for young people who are SED. Instead, the literature was dominated by studies that favoured a functionalist approach to research on educational 'disadvantage' and thus, it was these studies that were drawn upon heavily to inform policy.

This study aimed to bridge the gap in literature by engaging with young people and offering them a forum in which to voice their perceptions and experiences of the 'disadvantaged' label, within the context of a deep political rhetoric around categorising and stigmatising young children and their families through their labelling. The focus of the project was to add to the understanding of how the 'disadvantaged' label used within policy is perceived from the perspectives of young people themselves, who are simultaneously the subject of the policy but who are the missing voice within policy and policy enactment within schools.

6.1. Returning to the research questions

This thesis set out to explore the following research questions:

1. What are young people's perceptions of the 'disadvantaged' label?

2. What are the implications of being labelled 'disadvantaged' according to young people?

3. How do the perceptions of policy makers and young people differ with regards to the 'disadvantaged' label?

The chapter now turns to each of these questions individually to examine how the research in this thesis addresses each of these directly.

6.1.1. To what extent are young people aware of the 'disadvantaged' label?

The literature on young people's awareness of the labels used to categorise them in policy appears a somewhat undiscovered territory, as many studies reframe discussion to avoid direct exposure of young people to the policy terms used for them (Leeson, 2010). However, through the methodological approach employed in this thesis, interviewing two cohorts (Y7 and Y11 students) in both group and individual interviews, it was observed that *protecting* young people from their portrayal in policy fails to give credence to their clear understanding of how the 'disadvantaged' label is used to portray young people both within school and in wider society. This is highlighted through the young people's vehement defence of those who are SED and the misrepresentative nature of the 'disadvantaged' label.

The assumption that young people are not only too inexperienced to contribute to discussion around the 'disadvantaged' label but that any discussion around socio-economic labels should be avoided as it cannot be executed ethically is refuted by the depth and breadth of young people's awareness within the ethically sound remits of this study. Although it must be acknowledged that the already-existing Focus groups containing young people who were labelled 'disadvantaged' did in part enable this research, ethical studies involving young people who are SED can be done with opportunities to ask them about their views on socio-economic policy labels being sought out and carefully considered. Despite policy not being designed to be read by young people, albeit with good intentions for the most part, those in this study show great awareness and understanding of the damaging implications of labelling them. As was demonstrated in Chapter 4, findings suggest that they sought to challenge policy's misrepresentation of young people through the 'disadvantaged' label by engaging in forms of dissociative behaviours that distance themselves from a label that has been ascribed to them without consultation. The study has exposed the young people's critique of policy that speaks for them and attributes damaging labels to them. They view the education system

and wider society's addressing and treatment of young people and families who are labelled 'disadvantaged' through a socially critical lens which highlights that they are not passive in awareness of policy labels as previously thought but are able to engage in thoughtful analysis that could be claimed to surpass many adults' perceptions. They are challenging the leading functionalist worldview and view the labelling of young people as 'disadvantaged' as a far more complex and loaded issue than policy makers care to acknowledge.

Whilst the two Focus groups (Y7 and Y11 students) expressed varying degrees of awareness, as was appropriate for their differences in age and educational experiences, what was clear was their awareness of the labels used to classify themselves and their peers. Some of these labels were preferred over the 'disadvantaged' label (for example '*working-class'*) and some of which they criticised the government, media and wider society for using synonymously with 'disadvantaged' (for example '*benefit scum*' as discussed in Chapter 4), claiming they had very different connotations and thus, very different implications, as discussed when the second research question is reconsidered below. Young people's perceptions of the implications of the 'disadvantaged' label, alongside other terms that were discussed when instigated by the young people in interviews, will be elaborated upon below when considering the second research question but it is important to highlight that alongside their awareness of the 'disadvantaged' label sat an astute awareness of stigma, shame and blame that were inextricably tethered to the 'disadvantaged' label.

6.1.2. What are the implications of young people being labelled 'disadvantaged'?

As was discussed in Chapter 4, young people expressed strong views on the motives of governments and policy makers in promoting such labelling. They collectively voiced the opinion that those who attribute the 'disadvantaged' label and its sister terms (that are used interchangeably) are concerned with shaming young people in order to point the finger at those who find themselves in poor socio-economic situations and shift blame from the establishment. To summarise, the young people in this study recognise that the 'disadvantaged' label creates an issue of "misrepresentation and othering that both feeds into and is fed by social inequalities" (Reay, 2006: 295).

Research findings suggest that young people perceive those who attribute the 'disadvantaged' label as seeking to reduce those who are SED to the margins of society and to promote disgust at their mere existence (Skeggs 2004, 2005; Lawler, 2005; Jensen, 2014; Tyler, 2020). Findings highlighted that the young people are very aware of the connotations labels can hold and how they can be used to serve government motives. Their understanding of government motives is centred on the shaming of families who are labelled 'disadvantaged' through negatively loaded labels in order to convince society that they are to blame for their own misfortune.

This study has also offered insight into when an awareness of the implications socio-economic labels carry really starts to emerge in young people's consciousness. As two age groups were involved in the study (11-12-year-olds and 15-16-year-olds), the types of language and nuances of understanding illustrated by each group show a progression of understanding regarding socio-economic stigma and labelling. Both groups can be described as sophisticated in their world views, as previously masked in other socio-economic studies by the ethical *shielding* of young people. For example, at age 11-12 young people display an emerging view on the stigmatisation and damaging effects of labelling which still exceeds what might be deemed age-appropriate awareness of socio-economic status, whereas at age 15-16, their reflections on socio-economic status are more mature as if they are able to see past the political rhetoric of the 'disadvantaged' label and recognise the government's agenda in seeking to present groups of young people as 'disadvantaged'. This suggests that an awareness of stigma appears to develop between the ages of 11 and 16. Young people's comments revealed that at age 15-16, they alluded to being involved in socio-economic discussions in the home and had an awareness of how their portrayal as 'disadvantaged' secondary age students fed into the negative portrayal of their older selves in the media and wider society.

6.1.3. How do the perceptions of policy and young people differ with regards to the 'disadvantaged' label?

The research reveals the unanimous view young people had in challenging negatively loaded labels and replacing them with terms they felt highlighted the socio-economic barriers that existed *for* them, rather than *because of* them, echoing the thesis' concept of

disadvancement. The study illustrates how policy makers, on the other hand, use negatively loaded labels such as 'disadvantaged' to give the impression that, with enough desire and hard work, those labelled can become more middle class (Littler, 2017). This is in spite of knowing that this is unfeasible for most due to the often rigid nature of systemic inequalities; however, such policy rhetoric helps to give the impression that opportunities are provided for those who are SED and that ridding themselves of 'disadvantage' is attainable. Thus, such strategy that comes from favouring language of 'disadvantage' allows governments to blame people for their own deficits as they choose not to take up opportunities in society (Littler, 2017).

The study confirms the claim that there exists a dichotomy between the language of social injustice used by socially critical academics and the language of 'disadvantage' as used by policy makers and governments. The young people in this study believe that there is a call to reinvigorate language of disadvancement, not bury it in the current social context of growing inequalities (Skeggs, 2004; Sayer, 2005; Reay, 2006). Hence, they were drawn to the term working-class in both group and individual interview settings to refer to the social group they felt they belonged to and to better represent themselves as opposed to 'disadvantaged', despite policy routinely presenting the education system as classless (Reay, 2006).

A preference for language of equality (for example, equality of treatment or equality of opportunity) as in the 'disadvantaged' label is born out of policy makers' desire to maintain the existing social structure that is replicated within the education sector through a functionalist approach to research and policy decisions (Raffo et al., 2007). A functionalist perspective to research is prevalent because such an approach posits that the social model which is structurally sound overall and with only minor tweaks can promote social equality and to acknowledge language of class would be to acknowledge the concept of disadvancement and acknowledge that inequity is placed upon young people (Abrahams, 2016). However, the young people in this study display an awareness of how the 'disadvantaged' label aims to prompt those who are SED to distance themselves from such a label, echoing the socially critical concept of disadvancement that the government's drive for encouraging social mobility and middle-class aspirations acts as a mere sticking plaster to promoting social justice (Littler, 2017). The young people in this study challenge the current functionalist approach to social inequity as the shame, stigmatisation and subsequent

blaming of families for being socio-economically deficient is seemingly transparent to them. They appear to understand that within education and wider society, those perceived to be in the lower strata of society are constructed as an "unknowing uncritical tasteless mass" and the term 'disadvantaged' is used to perpetuate this portrayal (Reay, 2001: 335).

In summary, young people in this study engage in exposing the *othering* of those they feel belong to the working class within 'disadvantaged' policy and its implications within school settings.

6.2. Contributions

This thesis makes an original contribution to the literature in the field of educational 'disadvantage' by offering the construct of disadvancement as a lens through which and a label by which current secondary education policy can be critiqued. Through the concept of disadvancement, the study has revealed how current policy labels such as 'disadvantaged' reproduce existing social inequalities. The overarching contribution of disadvancement as a construct can be refined into three key contributions to be discussed below: ethically enabling the space for young people's voices; young people's understanding of policy labelling; and young people's socially critical perspectives.

6.2.1. Ethically enabling the space for young people's voices on the 'disadvantaged' label

Firstly, this thesis has shown that research that questions young people directly on their understanding and awareness of socio-economic policy labelling and its implications, when done ethically, is highly valuable. Whereas many studies reframe discussion to avoid direct exposure of young people to the 'disadvantaged' label (Leeson, 2010), this study has successfully planned and executed an ethically sound study that enables access to young people's voices. Where many researchers forfeit research that explicitly discuss policy labels with young people given the ethical implications, this study was able to achieve its outcomes through a careful methodological design that looked for opportunities to enable this. By carefully selecting a specific cohort to participate in the study, this resulted in a purposive sample that highlighted young people's rich narratives. Concentrating on two existing Focus groups within the case school, none of the young people who participated raised concerns about why they had been selected for the study. As aforementioned, whilst the structure of

the school afforded these opportunities, it is also important that others seek out such research opportunities and find ways of ethically conducting studies with young people in the future.

Rather than adhering to the notion that conducting such research should be avoided because it protects young people against the stigma of socio-economic policy labels, this study has shown that they can be both ethically protected and asked about their opinions on policy labels. Furthermore, the study argues that involving young people in discussion about how they are portrayed in policy *is* protecting them, by offering them a chance to voice their thoughts on how policy labels transpire to real life experiences, rather than excluding them from debate. The study has given access to the voices of young people who are not commonly represented in discussions around SED and policy labelling. Their absence is likely because functionalist approaches to research that propose large scale, quantifiable data is the best way to understand what needs to be fixed and what interventions need to be put in place to fix existing elements of the education system would not benefit from young people's critique (Raffo et al., 2007; Russell, 2013). Young people spoke articulately, with clarity and, perhaps most interestingly, with authority about the concept of disadvancement and how current policy labelling and the stigmatisation tethered to it detracts from the inequity placed upon young people by society. Thus, a large contribution of this study is that it has enabled access to hearing young people's voices on an issue where they are normally just the objects of policy (Such and Walker, 2005). What is clear is that young people are rarely given a platform to voice their perceptions and more opportunities must be created to enable them to be heard.

6.2.2. Young people's understanding of policy labelling

Secondly, through the enlightening voices explored in this study, the study contributes to knowledge by highlighting how young people can and should be involved in policy development. Whilst this study cannot address wider socio-economic disadvancement in society, it has contributed somewhat to bridging the gap of young people being absent in policy discussions. Importantly, it has revealed the damage that can happen if young people are spoken for. The study has contributed to the literature through the revealing of young people's keen awareness of the inappropriate, misrepresentative and damaging nature of labelling cohorts of young people in education policy and the implications this has on their

educational experience. It has highlighted the ways in which young people are highly aware of the stigmatisation those labelled as 'disadvantaged' in society beyond school experience. The young people here recognise that semantics plays an important part in instigating change regarding the way young people who are disadvanced by the system are misrepresented in education policy and wider society.

It has been assumed in some existing research that young people are insufficiently competent to understand the complexity of the situations they are in (Leeson 2010). However, this study has challenged the assumptions made about young people's ability to comprehend and add to discussion on such complex issues as 'disadvantaged' labelling. Also, young people's voices have offered knowledge on how schools could better enact policy and refer to those who are SED. The study has demonstrated the powerful ways in which young people can speak openly and reflectively about issues that they are often *protected* from, even though it is vital their voices be heard. This study offers insight into the awareness of young people regarding their marginalisation in society. Adult researchers often critique the government's veiled attempts in tackling social inequalities on behalf of the young people who are mistreated. However, to hear from them first-hand that they are aware of their stigmatisation as those who are SED cements the idea that an approach to research that accepts socio-economic deficit as just existing naturally, rather than the product of wider social inequalities is further failing young people.

6.2.3. Young people's socially critical perspectives

The study has also illustrated how young people think in more socially critical ways than many adults would believe them capable of. As outlined within the review of literature, there is a dominant stance in education research that inequality is accepted, whereas the young people in this study are more questioning of existing structures and frameworks that influence their educational experiences. This is especially apparent as young people reach the end of their secondary education, though this perspective is clearly evolving in the younger cohort's voices too. Amidst a functionalist climate that allows misrepresentative policy labelling, a shame and blame culture and a meritocratic view that aims to replace those facing SED, there exists a group of young people who are articulate, knowledgeable and wise beyond their years in expressing their experiences of 'disadvantaged' education policy from a socially critical

perspective. In suggesting alternative labels to ‘disadvantaged’ such as working-class, young people channelled ideas of collective identity through experiencing social inequalities rather than being deemed as personally lacking by the 'disadvantaged' label. They reject being homogenised as a group who are portrayed as sharing personal deficit, rather than their perceptions of disadvancement being experiencing collectively.

While the study has contributed to existing knowledge on young people’s perspectives on the ‘disadvantaged’ label, there remains a gap as this study has only explored the voices of a particular and localised cohort of young people. In the next section, recommendations for further study will be outlined, with the study arguing that more voices need to be heard that are wholly representative of those who are labelled ‘disadvantaged’.

6.3. Recommendations

Whilst it is necessary to consider the possible ways to move forward in overhauling the existing functionalist system that is thought to be ineffectual in creating a socially inclusive system for young people who are SED, it is first useful to consider the wider context to locate this thesis and its findings. As aforementioned, the entire English education system is operating from within a functionalist framework and as such, serves the interest of the middle classes (Ball, 2003; Reay, 2006). As such, rather than being the liberating force it could or even should be, it is rooted in structures and practices which maintain the status quo (Raffo et al., 2007; Russell, 2013). This study raises important questions in relation to this: where do children labelled as ‘disadvantaged’ fit within the system? In whose interests are they labelled ‘disadvantaged’?

To dissolve the deeply embedded structures of educational inequality, particularly with regards to young people who are labelled ‘disadvantaged’, the entire functionalist approach to research, policy and strategy must be revised. Whilst the study argues that a socially critical approach must be accepted as valid knowledge through which to inform policy and its enactment, there remain ways within the existing structure that can improve the educational experiences of young people who are SED. As such, the remaining section will offer specific recommendations of ways to respond to the issues raised in this thesis within the current system to make education policy for those labelled ‘disadvantaged’ more equitable. This is

important for those policy makers unlikely to change the existing system and for educators who are tasked with improving the academic performance of young people who are SED.

As applied as lens through which to critique the inequity faced by young people who are labelled 'disadvantaged' throughout this study, above all it is recommended that the construct of disadvancement can be utilised by academics and practitioners as a means to fully articulate the underpinnings of their analysis and also as an alternative term to describe young people so as to avoid replicating the phraseology of government which is described as misrepresentative and damaging by the young people in this study. Within this overarching recommendation, there are a number of specific practical recommendations that detailed below.

6.3.1. Involving young people in policy development and research

The second recommendation from this study is that young people's voices must feature in research looking at the impacts of policy on young people such as the 'disadvantaged' label, drawing understanding not only from *experts*' observations but also on "children's own perceptions" (Hirsch, 2007:2). This study claims to go some way towards bridging the gap in literature by offering a rich and concentrated data set that is predominantly young people's perceptions and experiences of the 'disadvantaged' label and the stigmatisation and connotations associated with it. The study has confirmed that young people within the case school can speak eloquently about the 'disadvantaged' label and have nuanced views that negate previous calls to shield them from a topic which they are already highly aware of. This study has avoided unethically drawing attention to young people's own labelling as 'disadvantaged' and, through careful questioning around the notion of labelling and societal stigmatisation, this study recommends that adults have a duty to offer such a marginalised group a platform to voice their perspectives. Failing to do so threatens to perpetuate the marginalisation of young people who are labelled 'disadvantaged'. The study has demonstrated that research on a potentially sensitive topic such as the 'disadvantaged' label can directly feature young people's voices and while this study is unique in that is asks them specifically about policy terms used to label them, it adds to the body of research that also invites young people to offer their perspectives on topics that they are usually only subjects of (Curtis et al., 2004; Fattore et al., 2008; Wickström and Lindholm, 2020).

Also, young people within this study are highly aware of the *othering* that is being done to those labelled as 'disadvantaged' at the hands of policy makers in education. Therefore, this study posits that researchers are doing young people a disservice by not involving them more cooperatively in studies that directly affect their educational experience. Arguably, the young people interviewed appear to be at an important point of their development in awareness of social, economic and educational inequalities and are seemingly more reflective in many ways than adults. The study strengthens the need for socially critical studies that are built around young people's opinions that are in their infancy as opposed to adults' views that might be claimed as having been assimilated to societal norms (Leeson, 2010). It is proposed that adults talk *with* young people rather than *about* them with regards to their socio-economic status and educational experiences. As Hirsch (2007) claims: "Work with disadvantaged young people is most effective where it makes them feel more involved. This factor is at the heart of the social divide in educational outcomes but has not been central in solutions so far" (p1).

6.3.2. Schools can learn from young people's voices

A third recommendation is that schools must engage with young people in discussions around their representation and labelling within school. It has been acknowledged that policy silences young people but so too do schools when implementing strategies for those labelled 'disadvantaged' as they become increasingly impeded by producing quantifiable results (Wenham, 2017). Schools that pride themselves on centring young people through student voice surveys or student leadership teams are equally as guilty in omitting young people from discussions around the 'disadvantaged' label when in fact they are, as evidenced in this study, knowledgeable, insightful and articulate about this topic when given a platform. Young people who are labelled 'disadvantaged' by policy makers are unique in that they can offer lived experiences of how the policy works in reality, irrespective of quantifiable evidence such as academic attainment that schools use to ascertain the efficacy of policy enactment. Young people's criticisms that have emerged from this study regarding their misrepresentation and suppressed voices could be welcomed at school level, from student leadership teams discussing what 'disadvantages' young people in their school might face and how best to address them, to what terminology teachers and leaders use to most accurately represent the young people in their care who have been labelled 'disadvantaged' in policy.

Also, personal experiences of policy labels are often shied away from in schools, despite social inequality and labelling being intrinsically linked to arts-based subjects such as history, geography and English literature (Webb, 2019). This would enable young people to take back ownership of their representation within schools and regain the identity that is lost through the 'disadvantaged' label. The study has provided valuable lessons in what language is and is not representing and affirming young people's self-perceptions and in turn, this could inform schools on how to reaffirm positive perceptions and challenge damaging stigmatisations linked to the 'disadvantaged' label.

6.3.3. Policy enactment in schools

This study also offers practical implications that may inform how schools implement national 'disadvantaged' strategy. Young people's responses confirm that it is not necessarily academic interventions that will narrow the attainment gap between young people labelled 'disadvantaged' and their peers but more so the way in which those labelled' disadvantaged' are perceived by others and how they perceive themselves. Schools must understand some of the ways in which socio-economic disadvancement is lived in classrooms (Reay, 2006) as there is a danger of implementing 'disadvantaged' policy without considering the disparity between those who create policy and those whom the policy speaks for. Those who create policy are "prisoners of a reassuring entourage of white, middle-class technocrats" (Bourdieu, 2000: 627) who often know almost nothing about the lived experienced of the young people they are writing education strategies for.

Thus, on a practical level the outcomes of this study offer schools an opportunity to tailor broad policy papers that focus on quantifiable wider school improvements to close the socio-economic attainment gap. Qualitative case studies such as this can undoubtedly offer young person-centred perspectives to the policies schools are required to implement in order for them to be enacted in ways that best cater for and represent the young people in their care. If a functionalist approach threatens to, in the eyes of the young people in this study, misrepresent and homogenise children labelled 'disadvantaged', school-level studies would provide an opportunity for young people to feel a sense of ownership over their school experience. It is problematic that education policy continues to lead with broad quantifiable initiatives that standardise young people under such vague an umbrella label as

‘disadvantaged’ that have consistently proven ineffectual in practice (the socio-economic attainment gap is widening at secondary level (Education Policy Institute (EPI), 2021)). Thus, there is a call for schools to adopt a case study research approach that informs how government initiatives can be most effectively implemented to suit the needs of young people. National policy that is undeniably designed with political rhetoric at its core can be adapted in practice to centre the voices of those it will affect.

6.3.4. An increase in socially critical research

Another recommendation is that more socially critical studies around the ‘disadvantaged’ label are warranted that do not accept that current policy is representative of and addressing the needs of the young people it labels. If the young people in this study are highly aware of the stigmatisation of those labelled as ‘disadvantaged’ within policy and that this will continue in wider society post-education, it is paramount that schools not only implement and adapt policy strategy in ways that will best represent young people but also build opportunities for discussions that challenge society’s socio-economic hierarchy into the curriculum. This would also aid teachers and leaders to see past the data-driven profession teaching is increasingly becoming and change the way teachers are expected to view young people and their school experience. Teachers are often asked to look at two cohorts of children, ‘disadvantaged’ and their non-’disadvantaged’ peers, to establish if there exists an attainment gap between the two. Young people are too often reduced to the ‘disadvantaged’ label attributed to them by policy makers. Within dominant functionalist research, the socio-economic attainment gap is accepted within schools and wider society, thus this study recommends that more socially critical research is conducted that challenges this assumption.

This study proposes that tackling the socio-economic attainment gap must start by the rejection of blanket policy initiatives that are ineffectual. Further interventions that tackle academic attainment are ineffectual in aiding young people who are labelled ‘disadvantaged’ but are more so for the benefit of league tables and exam results (Adams, 2016). As illustrated by the eloquent responses in this study, it is not the intellect of the young people that is the problem but rather, it is their SED and subsequent self-perceptions and sense of belonging that need to be addressed (Hirsch, 2007). Rebranded broad school improvement policies that focus on raising general attainment of all students to close the ‘disadvantaged’ attainment

gap (the idea of a rising tide lifts all boats) are continually proven ineffectual and only serve to benefit the government initiative to raise all schools to Outstanding OfSTED status (Clifton and Cook, 2012).

6.3.5. Celebrating more than middle class values

This study also recommends that schools nurture and celebrate the experiences of young people who are SED, to change the way that current policy and government measures require schools to valorise middle class values rather than the diversity of working-class identity (Ball, 2003). Though class was not a focus of the study, as so many young people self-identified with the term working-class, class is acknowledged here as a diverse group that includes those labelled as 'disadvantaged'.

Young people's awareness of how the 'disadvantaged' label as used in policy aims to devalue working-class identities bolsters the study's proposal for school initiatives that promote and celebrate the experiences of young people who identify as working-class. Through better understanding young people's narratives of social class identification, it is proposed that schools learn how to value working-class cultural capital alongside the prescribed curriculum, as summative examinations continue to require students to have knowledge of middle-class identities and experiences (Manstead, 2018). Young people who are labelled 'disadvantaged' though identify as working-class must feel worth and value if they are to succeed in education and the young people in this study have confirmed that an education model that assumes no value in the current social experiences of those who are labelled 'disadvantaged' is damaging to their educational experience rather than boosting their life chances (Hirsch, 2007). This study supports the claims young people made on policy makers perpetuating the problem of socio-economic 'disadvantage' through the shame, stigmatisation and subsequent blaming of 'disadvantaged' families and calls for opportunities for schools to challenge the government and media portrayal of those other than the middle-class elite.

The study acknowledges that it offers very specific understandings of the views of a finite cohort. However, it does suggest that other young people of similar ages may be equally as aware of the implications of the 'disadvantaged' label. Further studies are needed to ascertain

the breadth of this awareness, across different ages, different schools and different areas of the country and this is discussed in detail in section 6.5.

6.4. Personal and professional growth

As this is a professional doctorate, it is beneficial to reflect upon the research journey in order to ascertain how the study's conclusions have influenced my personal and professional role and how this shapes my future work.

I was driven to undertake this professional doctorate due to 'disadvantaged' policy recommending sole focus on additional academic interventions in order to raise exam performance, resulting in learning becoming increasingly standardised, systematic and exam-focused, regardless of the abilities or additional education needs of young people who are disadvanced by society. Furthermore, 'disadvantaged' policy and the prevalence of 'disadvantaged' as a label for those who are socio-economically disadvanced presented young people as problems to be fixed within education. I felt that educators were expected to view young people through narrowed lines that insinuated their 'disadvantage' was innate, as outlined in Chapter 1. I increasingly felt that the 'disadvantaged' label had become a buzzword in education that was being accepted without critique and that the label portrayed young people in an unfavourable light in a personal sense, rather than as being unfairly hindered by wider social and economic circumstances. Also, I had rising concerns that young people labelled as 'disadvantaged' were glaringly absent from the policy that directly impacted upon their educational experience. This complete lack of agency due to the fact that young people were not called upon as sources of knowledge regarding their own portrayal and representation within education prompted this study.

In a personal and professional capacity, the study has strengthened my observations of young people's astute awareness of current socio-economic disparity as witnessed through the teaching of literature texts that draw upon social and cultural contexts. More importantly, however, the study enabled the young people involved to express their awareness of how certain groups of society are labelled and subsequently, portrayed as lesser. As a result, I intend to build upon this knowledge during classroom discussion, linking the contexts of taught literature texts with young people's perceptions of current social context and how they situate themselves within society or are indeed situated by others. Furthermore, this

outcome of the study will prompt discussions with whole school leadership regarding opportunities to discuss the local socio-cultural contexts of the case school and the young people whom attend and the creation of opportunities to discuss, debate and celebrate the variety of contexts young people come from rather than the aforementioned dominant focus on middle class cultural values as championed by the government.

Additionally, the study has prompted the opportunity for professional discussions with young people that focus on their lived experience where knowledge is created cooperatively rather than dictated by adults. The study impels me to create further spaces for young people to feel empowered in talking about their perceptions of self within society where young people take charge of research and drive its process, taking an influential part in decisions that affect their lives. Namely, I intend to propose the reinvigoration and prominence of the student leadership team within the case school, a group of young people who are currently consulted on topics dictated by leaders within the school in order to gain a student perspective on new initiatives or proposed school changes, though making young people the ones to decide what, how and why they discuss topics they feel pertinent.

Reflecting upon the research process and outcomes, I am also consigned to urge the case school, in the first instance, to consider alternative terms to 'disadvantaged' to refer to young people who are socio-economically disadvanced. Specifically, by beginning with the terms young people within this study suggested and channelling their socially-critical perspectives to the 'disadvantaged' label, this would provide opportunities for both young people and adult educators to further critique the 'disadvantaged' label and arrive at a more appropriate and representative term endorsed by the young people it refers to.

Suggestions on how I intend to progress in a research capacity, in addition to my current role as school teacher and leader, are outlined in the future research section of 6.6.

6.5. Limitations

Despite the rich data generated by the research, there are limitations to this study. The first of these relate to the cohort of young people chosen to participate in the study. Young people were selected from pre-existing Focus groups, which are much like traditional tutor groups but also focus on academic attainment. Every young person within the case school belongs to

a Focus group with other students in their year group. However, there are some Focus groups that group together young people who are labelled 'disadvantaged'.

The study stresses that other researchers should not disregard studies that speak to young people about the 'disadvantaged' label as, through careful methodological considerations, it is not only possible but yields rich knowledge and understanding. Within such ethical parameters, it is crucial to minimise the singling out and identification of young people labelled 'disadvantaged' when selecting and recruiting a sample. Within this study, therefore, all members of two Focus groups (one from Y7 and one from Y11) that were made up of young people labelled 'disadvantaged' were invited to take part in the study. As they were already grouped together, this appeared the most ethical way of approaching young people and the most likely way of increasing the rate of participation (all young people were introduced to the study within their Focus groups so could discuss their decision to participate). The Focus groups already available in the case school made this possible, though this poses a limitation for similar studies that cannot minimise the ethical implications of targeting young people who are labelled 'disadvantaged' and, in doing so, revealing their labelling to them.

The reasoning behind the young people being grouped in the same Focus group was, as aforementioned, because they were all students who were in the 'disadvantaged' school cohort but secondly because they were also labelled informally by school leaders as *easy wins* - students who, with added intervention, could achieve what the government deem a standard pass (Grade 4) at GCSE. As previously explained within Chapter 3, this meant that the young people selected were deemed *academically able* by the school, whilst also being labelled 'disadvantaged'. Whilst the grouping and labelling, targeting and excluding of young people who are labelled 'disadvantaged' into Focus groups is commonplace in most schools given the nature of PP funding and how the efficacy of spending must be evidenced and is thus hugely problematic, it is not an aim of this study to explore this issue as such ethical implications call for a study in its own right.

Targeting these two Focus groups proved beneficial twofold: it provided an ethical selection process and yielded lengthy and eloquent responses from articulate young people. However, a limitation of the selection process was that the two Focus groups may not have fairly and accurately represented the diverse cohort of young people labelled as 'disadvantaged', both

within the case school and within other schools. While the young people in this study have perhaps surpassed adult expectations in terms of knowledge and understanding of the labelling of those who are SED and its implications, they are from a very particular subset of a wider cohort of both young people labelled as 'disadvantaged' and more widely, those who are SED. While the Focus groups were not chosen for this reason as previously discussed in section 3.4.6. of Chapter 3, their contexts must be noted as a limitation. The nature of this sub-group of young people may have impacted upon the articulate and nuanced responses gained and so this group could be said to misrepresent the broad spectrum of young people who are labelled 'disadvantaged' and might offer insight into why so many disassociated themselves with the 'disadvantaged' label, using *"us"* and *"them"* pronouns, as discussed in Chapter 4.

The sample size of this study should also be considered a limiting factor. A total of 20 young people were initially invited to participate, with 14 young people consenting to participate in the initial group interviews and 10 young people consenting to participate in the individual interviews. As previously explained in section 6.2.1., the sample size allowed for ethical recruitment and data collection processes which enabled those involved to voice their opinions on the 'disadvantaged' label in a safe space. There was one Focus group in each of the other school years (Y8, Y9 and Y10) that contained young people who were labelled 'disadvantaged' and who received English and maths intervention as they were classed as *easy wins* by the school. Whilst the growing awareness of the implications and motives behind the 'disadvantaged' label became apparent between Y7 (age 11-12) and Y11 (age 15-16), it would also have been interesting to explore young people's awareness of the 'disadvantaged' label and its implications across the ages of 11 through to 16 to potentially observe the progression of understanding and awareness. For this reason, the research could have been broadened to include Y8, Y9 and Y10 (ages 12 to 15). However, as it was not an intention of the study to specifically compare the responses of young people at each stage of their secondary education, nor was it an intention to select a sample size that would threaten the ethical boundaries of the study by becoming too unwieldy and too difficult to dedicate time and *verstehen* (Weber, 1968) to each young person, the Focus groups from Y7 and Y11 were selected.

The limitations discussed so far are of a practical nature and it is also important to consider the theoretical and analytical limitations of the thesis. The interpretations and conclusions drawn from this study are of course of a subjective nature due to the qualitative approach to the research. What further subjectifies the research outcomes are my status and professional role. I had somewhat unrestricted access to communicating with the young people as interviews were conducted in my workplace. Whilst it was made clear to young people when data was being collected to be used directly in the study, interpretations may have been influenced by other interactions with them outside the interviews. Although my professional status may have impacted upon the interpretations taken from the study, this status also proved invaluable in having future contact with the young people post-interview. For example, clarity could be obtained post-interview regarding comments that may have appeared vague on transcription and young people could be contacted after data collection to choose pseudonyms that best represented their experiences and perceptions.

6.6. Future Research

The issue around the labelling of young people as 'disadvantaged' in education policy is one that warrants future research to understand the depth of its implications.

6.6.1. Participatory research

This study was successful in creating active participation in the research process for the young people involved as it aimed to expose the voices of those who are labelled 'disadvantaged' (Mannay, 2017; Barnikis, 2015; Barnikis et al., 2019). In doing so, this study has opened the opportunity for research that focuses on lived experience where knowledge is created, negotiated, sustained and modified with young people (Schwandt, 2006). Participative methodology aims to create the space for young people to feel empowered so that they can share their reality which was why elements of participatory methods were adopted in the data collection stages of this study (Chambers, 2012; Swantz, 2015). Young people's depth of understanding of the 'disadvantaged' label and its implications in this study illustrates that future research that follows a participatory methodology that is very much led by young people who would generate the focus and methods of research is warranted (Clark, 2004; Groundwater-Smith et al., 2015; Cuevas-Parra and Tisdall, 2019). While this study was born

out of my professional observations and experiences, future research could be conceived from the observations and experiences of young people themselves which would enable them to play an even more active and influential part in decisions that affect their lives (Barnikis et al., 2019). While the study employed some participatory tools in order to give some ownership of discussion to young people, future research that employs participatory methodologies would enable them to design and lead on research that focuses on issues that are pertinent to them without relying on adult guidance.

6.6.2. A broader sample

As discussed above, the somewhat similar profiles of the young people who took part in the study could be broadened to include a more diverse sample of those labelled 'disadvantaged'. A study sample that included young people who are disengaged with education, for example non-attenders or poor attenders; those who are not perceived by schools to be *academically able* and struggle to access the ever increasing demands of summative examinations; those who are also young carers or who are also looked after could give schools findings and recommendations pertinent to their case schools and thus, fine-tuned to best help the young people in their care to thrive.

Future research could also focus on the whole secondary cohort (ages 11-16), and potentially include Y12 and Y13 (ages 16-18) in case schools that offer post-16 provision. Furthermore, studies on SED involving the primary phase would offer alternative perspectives. This would offer insight into the awareness of young people across a wider age range, leading up to their transition from compulsory education to their independent life choices. Such studies may reveal when the development of world views occurs in adolescence, as this study suggests young people become more socially and politically aware between the ages of 11 and 16. Furthermore, this study was not able to fully ascertain whether young people were consciously distancing or unconsciously distancing themselves from the 'disadvantaged' label, therefore future studies might explore this area in more detail.

6.7. Concluding Words

In conclusion, this study has covered new ground in exploring how young people themselves labelled as 'disadvantaged' perceive and experience the policy label 'disadvantaged'. Their

awareness of the negative connotations that the 'disadvantaged' label holds and their subsequent disassociation with it, as well as the way they see shaming and blaming of young people and families through the 'disadvantaged' label, is evident through their contributions to discussion. This study challenges the functionalist view that socially critical models that centre rich and diverse qualitative approaches are undesirable as they challenge existing power structures (Raffo et al., 2007; Russell, 2013). A functionalist perspective that is currently the preferable approach allows governments to maintain control of existing political frameworks is threatened by socially critical perspectives to research that are driven by opinions and experiences. The socially critical approach taken by this study endeavours to offer an overhaul of the current system, arguably much needed if the education system is to move away from merely tweaking ineffectual 'disadvantaged' policy as has been published over the previous decade (DfE, 2012; 2015; 2016, 2018, 2019a; 2021). The outcomes of this study challenge a functionalist approach that fails to include and/or accept the observations of young people, who speak clearly of the social injustice in society faced by those who are labelled 'disadvantaged' and how this manifests itself within education policy.

The young people in this study call to rectify their misrepresentation through this study, and as adults with agency, it is education professionals' duty to offer a platform to allow them space to voice their lived experiences. Thus, this study challenges a solely functionalist approach that dictates education policy regarding young people who are labelled 'disadvantaged' and rejects the quest for purely quantifiable data that does not acknowledge human experience. The study also challenges the belittling and silencing of young people by adults who make sweeping decisions for a diverse cohort that are far more knowledgeable than given credit for. Without this area being addressed, unchallenged assumptions within education policy will continue to reproduce the very social injustices it claims to be tackling.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Details of group and individual interviews

Interviews in date order	Duration	School Year	Gender	Pseudonyms
Group 1	59.04	11	Mixed	Anne-Marie, Virgil, Dave, Dawn, Drake, Mabel, Stuart, Demi
Group 2	46.17	7	Mixed	Rita, Roddy, Mo, Mandy, Camila, Ed
1	58.46	11	Female	Anne-Marie
2	65.02	11	Female	Mabel
3	52.35	11	Male	Dave
4	47.34	11	Female	Dawn
5	43.79	11	Male	Drake
6	41.27	7	Female	Rita
7	51.32	7	Male	Roddy
8	36.04	7	Male	Mo
9	37.34	7	Female	Mandy
10	38.14	7	Female	Camila

Appendix B: Ranking exercise flashcards with labels to describe social and economic circumstances and example questions asked to begin discussions in group interviews

socially included	**poverty**	**poor**
deprived	**rich**	**affluent**
Pupil Premium	**disadvantaged**	**socially excluded**
advantaged	**working class**	**middle class**

- Can you rank the flashcards in order of ones you have heard being used most to being used least or never?
- Now, can you rank the flashcards in order of ones you would be most likely to use to least likely to use?
- And can you rank the flashcards in order of ones you think are most appropriate to least appropriate for adults in education to use to refer to young people?
- So, you have placed [flashcard] as number one in your ranking. Can you explain why you chose this flashcard?
- You have chosen something different, so can you tell us why you chose this one?
- The bottom of your ranking has [flashcards A and B]. Can you explain why you put them there?
- Which of the terms here have you heard being used in school?
- Can you think of any terms that you have heard of that do not feature here?

Appendix C: excerpt of 'disadvantaged' policy taken from the Department for Education's 2015 paper *Supporting the attainment of disadvantaged pupils* and example questions in group interviews

Why is it so important to ensure disadvantaged pupils achieve their full potential?

The educational performance of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds (commonly defined in terms of family socio-economic status) is much lower than their peers, and England has a relatively large achievement gap among countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

There has been good progress in the absolute attainment of poorer children in the last few years, with twice as many pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) achieving five good GCSEs including English and mathematics in 2013 than in 2005. But the achievement of other pupils has also improved and so the attainment gap has only narrowed slightly. In 2014, only 36.5 per cent of disadvantaged pupils achieved 5 A*-C including English and maths GCSEs, compared with 64.0 per cent of all other pupils.

Recognising the need to improve the performance of disadvantaged pupils, the Government introduced the pupil premium in 2011. This allocates specific funding to schools for each pupil from a disadvantaged background[1].

Disadvantage has a big influence on pupils' life chances. As the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission's 2014 'State of the Nation' report highlights, pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds are: twice as likely to be not in education, employment or training (NEET) and at higher risk of ending up in poverty as adults.

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[1] Including pupils eligible for FSM within the past six years and pupils looked after by the local authority. For more details of eligibility, please see https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2010-to-2015-government-policy-education-of-disadvantaged-children/

Pupils of all abilities are affected. A report published by the Sutton Trust estimates that around 7,000 pupils each year who were in the top ten per cent at age 11 fail to achieve in the top 25 per cent at GCSE: boys and pupils eligible for the pupil premium are most likely to be in this 'missing talent' group.

> *Put simply, a child's socio-economic background – things they can't choose like the street they grew up on and how much their parents earn – have too much of an impact on how well they do at school and the choices they have later in life.*
>
> Teach First website

But it doesn't have to be like this. Schools can help break the link between disadvantage and performance by supporting disadvantaged pupils to achieve their full potential.

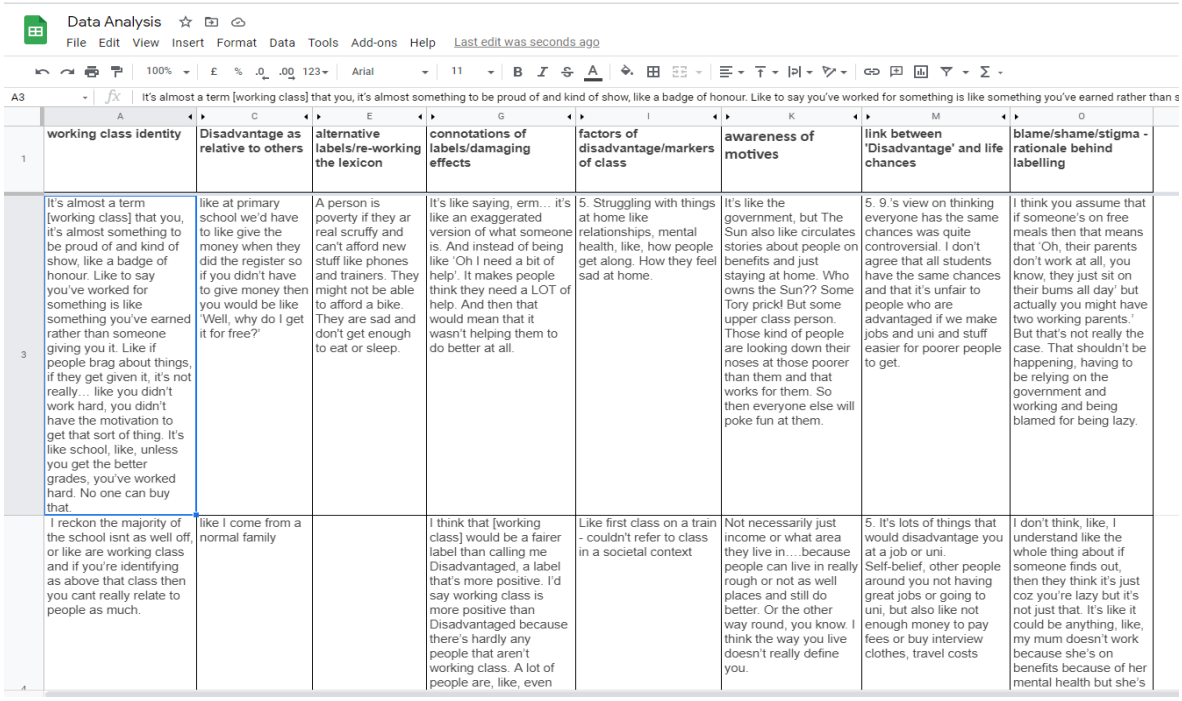
- This extract that talks about young people in education includes some of the terms from the flashcard activity. What do you think about the way young people are referred to in this extract?
- What are your opinions on what we have just read?
- How do you think the 'disadvantaged' label is used to refer to young people by governments and schools?
- Why might the government be interested in the education of 'disadvantaged' young people?
- What factors you think the government's definition of a 'disadvantaged' young person might take into account?
- Do you think we have 'disadvantaged' children at this school?

Appendix D: Images of housing similar to that of the case school's catchment area and example questions asked to begin discussions in group interviews

- Here are some examples of places where young people might live. Who do you think might live in these places?
- Can you tell me about the lifestyles of the young people who live in these places?
- What might their morning routine be?
- What might their family or friends be like?
- What might they do when they get home from school?
- Would you associate any of the flashcards we just looked at with these images of where people might live?
- Would you associate the term 'disadvantaged' with any of these types of housing?
- Can you tell me why you think that?

Appendix E: Screenshots of Google Sheets illustrating iterations of analysis of data into codes

First iteration of themes emerging:



Data Analysis

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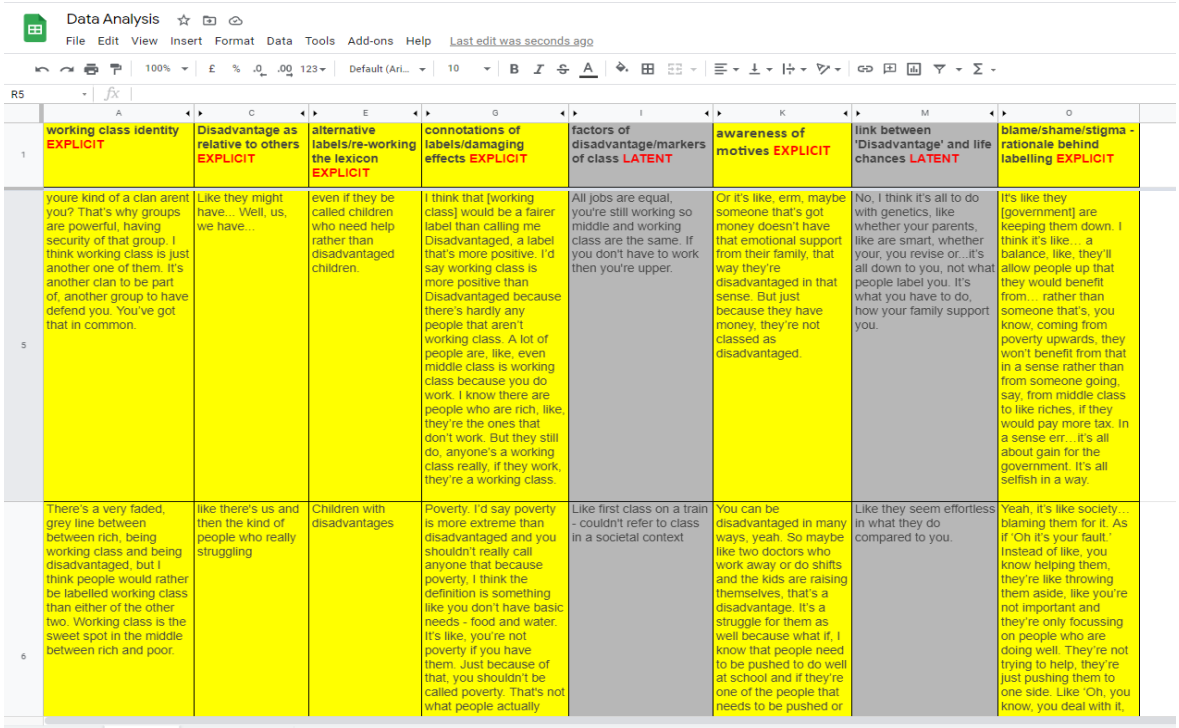
A3 | It's almost a term [working class] that you, it's almost something to be proud of and kind of show, like a badge of honour. Like to say you've worked for something is like something you've earned rather than s

	working class identity	Disadvantage as relative to others	alternative labels/re-working the lexicon	connotations of labels/damaging effects	factors of disadvantage/markers of class	awareness of motives	link between 'Disadvantage' and life chances	blame/shame/stigma - rationale behind labelling
3	It's almost a term [working class] that you, it's almost something to be proud of and kind of show, like a badge of honour. Like to say you've worked for something is like something you've earned rather than someone giving you it. Like if people brag about things, if they get given it, it's not really… like you didn't work hard, you didn't have the motivation to get that sort of thing. It's like school, like, unless you get the better grades, you've worked hard. No one can buy that.	like at primary school we'd have to like give the money when they did the register so if you didn't have to give money then you would be like 'Well, why do I get it for free?'	A person is poverty if they ar real scruffy and can't afford new stuff like phones and trainers. They might not be able to afford a bike. They are sad and don't get enough to eat or sleep.	It's like saying, erm… it's like an exaggerated version of what someone is. And instead of being like 'Oh I need a bit of help'. It makes people think they need a LOT of help. And then that would mean that it wasn't helping them to do better at all.	5. Struggling with things at home like relationships, mental health, like, how people get along. How they feel sad at home.	It's like the government, but The Sun also like circulates stories about people on benefits and just staying at home. Who owns the Sun?? Some Tory prick! But some upper class person. Those kind of people are looking down their noses at those poorer than them and that works for them. So then everyone else will poke fun at them.	5. 9.'s view on thinking everyone has the same chances was quite controversial. I don't agree that all students have the same chances and that it's unfair to people who are advantaged if we make jobs and uni and stuff easier for poorer people to get.	I think you assume that if someone's on free meals then that means that 'Oh, their parents don't work at all, you know, they just sit on their bums all day' but actually you might have two working parents.' But that's not really the case. That shouldn't be happening, having to be relying on the government and working and being blamed for being lazy.
4	I reckon the majority of the school isnt as well off, or like are working class and if you're identifying as above that class then you cant really relate to people as much.	like I come from a normal family		I think that [working class] would be a fairer label than calling me Disadvantaged, a label that's more positive. I'd say working class is more positive than Disadvantaged because there's hardly any people that aren't working class. A lot of people are, like, even	Like first class on a train - couldn't refer to class in a societal context	Not necessarily just income or what area they live in….because people can live in really rough or not as well places and still do better. Or the other way round, you know. I think the way you live doesn't really define you.	5. It's lots of things that would disadvantage you at a job or uni. Self-belief, other people around you not having great jobs or going to uni, but also like not enough money to pay fees or buy interview clothes, travel costs	I don't think, like, I understand like the whole thing about if someone finds out, then they think it's just coz you're lazy but it's not just that. It's like it could be anything, like, my mum doesn't work because she's on benefits because of her mental health but she's

Second iteration after latent and explicit codes emerged:



Data Analysis

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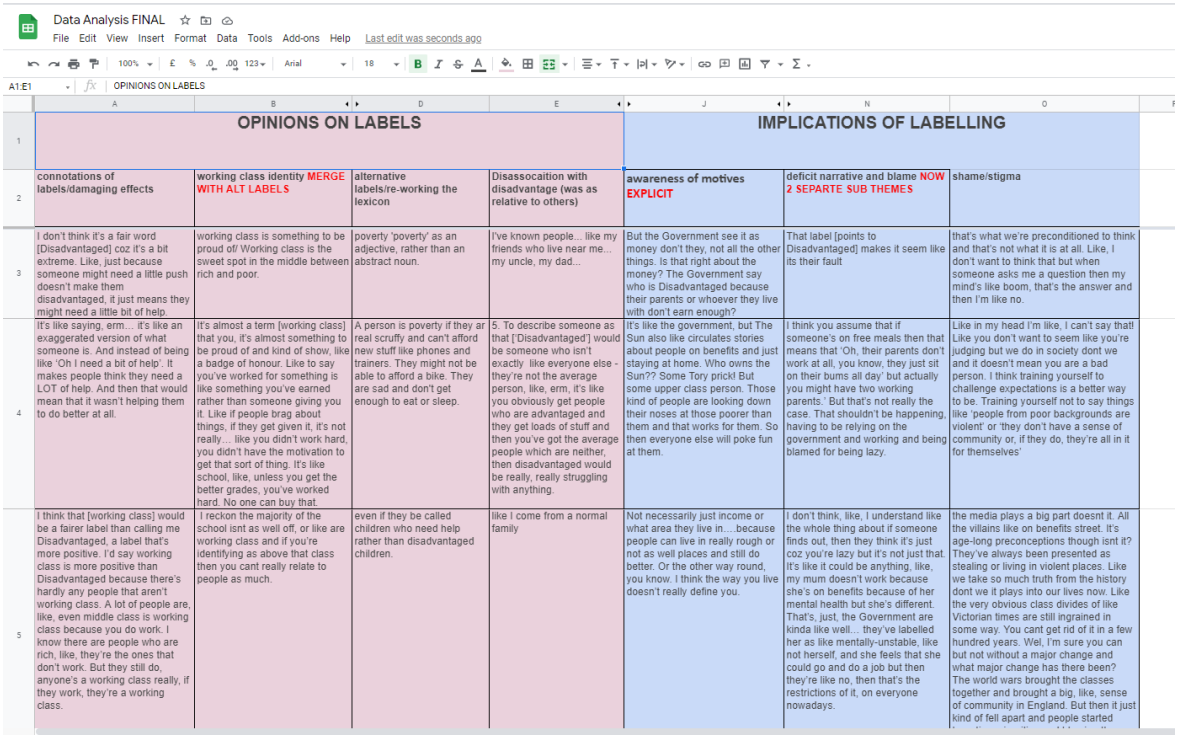
R5

	working class identity EXPLICIT	Disadvantage as relative to others EXPLICIT	alternative labels/re-working the lexicon EXPLICIT	connotations of labels/damaging effects EXPLICIT	factors of disadvantage/markers of class LATENT	awareness of motives EXPLICIT	link between 'Disadvantage' and life chances LATENT	blame/shame/stigma - rationale behind labelling EXPLICIT
5	youre kind of a clan arent you? That's why groups are powerful, having security of that group. I think working class is just another one of them. It's another clan to be part of, another group to have defend you. You've got that in common.	Like they might have… Well, us, we have…	even if they be called children who need help rather than disadvantaged children.	I think that [working class] would be a fairer label than calling me Disadvantaged, a label that's more positive. I'd say working class is more positive than Disadvantaged because there's hardly any people that aren't working class. A lot of people are, like, even middle class is working class because you do work. I know there are people who are rich, like, they're the ones that don't work. But they still do, anyone's a working class really, if they work, they're a working class.	All jobs are equal, you're still working so middle and working class are the same. If you don't have to work then you're upper.	Or it's like, erm, maybe someone that's got money doesn't have that emotional support from their family, that way they're disadvantaged in that sense. But just because they have money, they're not classed as disadvantaged.	No, I think it's all to do with genetics, like whether your parents, like are smart, whether your, you revise or…it's all down to you, not what people label you. It's what you have to do, how your family support you.	It's like they [government] are keeping them down. I think it's like… a balance, like, they'll allow people up that they would benefit from… rather than someone that's, you know, coming from poverty upwards, they won't benefit from that in a sense rather than from someone going, say, from middle class to like riches, if they would pay more tax. In a sense err…it's all about gain for the government. It's all selfish in a way.
6	There's a very faded, grey line between between rich, being working class and being disadvantaged, but I think people would rather be labelled working class than either of the other two. Working class is the sweet spot in the middle between rich and poor.	like there's us and then the kind of people who really struggling	Children with disadvantages	Poverty. I'd say poverty is more extreme than disadvantaged and you shouldn't really call anyone that because poverty, I think the definition is something like you don't have basic needs - food and water. It's like, you're not poverty if you have them. Just because of that, you shouldn't be called poverty. That's not what people actually	Like first class on a train - couldn't refer to class in a societal context	You can be disadvantaged in many ways, yeah. So maybe like two doctors who work away or do shifts and the kids are raising themselves, that's a disadvantage. It's a struggle for them as well because what if, I know that people need to be pushed to do well at school and if they're one of the people that needs to be pushed or	Like they seem effortless in what they do compared to you.	Yeah, it's like society… blaming them for it. As if 'Oh it's your fault.' Instead of like, you know helping them, they're like throwing them aside, like you're not important and they're only focussing on people who are doing well. They're not trying to help, they're just pushing them to one side. Like 'Oh, you know, you deal with it,

Final iteration after deletion, splitting and merging of codes:



Data Analysis FINAL

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A1:E1 | OPINIONS ON LABELS

OPINIONS ON LABELS				IMPLICATIONS OF LABELLING		
connotations of labels/damaging effects	working class identity MERGE WITH ALT LABELS	alternative labels/re-working the lexicon	Disassocaition with disadvantage (was as relative to others)	awareness of motives EXPLICIT	deficit narrative and blame NOW 2 SEPARTE SUB THEMES	shame/stigma
I don't think it's a fair word [Disadvantaged] coz it's a bit extreme. Like, just because someone might need a little push doesn't make them disadvantaged, it just means they might need a little bit of help.	working class is something to be proud of/ Working class is the sweet spot in the middle between rich and poor.	poverty 'poverty' as an adjective, rather than an abstract noun.	I've known people... like my friends who live near me... my uncle, my dad...	But the Government see it as money don't they, not all the other things. Is that right about the money? The Government say who is Disadvantaged because their parents or whoever they live with don't earn enough?	That label [points to Disadvantaged] makes it seem like its their fault	that's what we're preconditioned to think and that's not what it is at all. Like, I don't want to think that but when someone asks me a question then my mind's like boom, that's the answer and then I'm like no.
It's like saying, erm... it's like an exaggerated version of what someone is. And instead of being like 'Oh I need a bit of help'. It makes people think they need a LOT of help. And then that would mean that it wasn't helping them to do better at all.	It's almost a term [working class] that you, it's almost something to be proud of and kind of show, like a badge of honour. Like to say you've worked for something is like something you've earned rather than someone giving you it. Like if people brag about things, if they get given it, it's not really... like you didn't work hard, you didn't have the motivation to get that sort of thing. It's like school, like, unless you get the better grades, you've worked hard. No one can buy that.	A person is poverty if they ar real scruffy and can't afford new stuff like phones and trainers. They might not be able to afford a bike. They are sad and don't get enough to eat or sleep.	5. To describe someone as that ['Disadvantaged'] would be someone who isn't exactly like everyone else - they're not the average person, like, erm, it's like you obviously get people who are advantaged and they get loads of stuff and then you've got the average people which are neither, then disadvantaged would be really, really struggling with anything.	It's like the government, but The Sun also like circulates stories about people on benefits and just staying at home. Who owns the Sun?? Some Tory prick! But some upper class person. Those kind of people are looking down their noses at those poorer than them and that works for them. So then everyone else will poke fun at them.	I think you assume that if someone's on free meals then that means that 'Oh, their parents don't work at all, you know, they just sit on their bums all day' but actually you might have two working parents.' But that's not really the case. That shouldn't be happening, having to be relying on the government and working and being blamed for being lazy.	Like in my head I'm like, I can't say that! Like you don't want to seem like you're judging but we do in society dont we and it doesn't mean you are a bad person. I think training yourself to challenge expectations is a better way to be. Training yourself not to say things like 'people from poor backgrounds are violent' or 'they don't have a sense of community or, if they do, they're all in it for themselves'
I think that [working class] would be a fairer label than calling me Disadvantaged, a label that's more positive. I'd say working class is more positive than Disadvantaged because there's hardly any people that aren't working class. A lot of people are, like, even middle class is working class because you do work. I know there are people who are rich, like, they're the ones that don't work. But they still do, anyone's a working class really, if they work, they're a working class.	I reckon the majority of the school isnt as well off, or like are working class and if you're identifying as above that class then you cant really relate to people as much.	even if they be called children who need help rather than disadvantaged children.	like I come from a normal family	Not necessarily just income or what area they live in....because people can live in really rough or not as well places and still do better. Or the other way round, you know. I think the way you live doesn't really define you.	I don't think, like, I understand like the whole thing about if someone finds out, then they think it's just coz you're lazy but it's not just that. It's like it could be anything, like, my mum doesn't work because she's on benefits because of her mental health but she's different. That's, just, the Government are kinda like well... they've labelled her as like mentally-unstable, like not herself, and she feels that she could go and do a job but then they're like no, then that's the restrictions of it, on everyone nowadays.	the media plays a big part doesnt it. All the villains like on benefits street. It's age-long preconceptions though isnt it? They've always been presented as stealing or living in violent places. Like we take so much truth from the history dont we it plays into our lives now. Like the very obvious class divides of like Victorian times are still ingrained in some way. You cant get rid of it in a few hundred years. Wel, I'm sure you can but not without a major change and what major change has there been? The world wars brought the classes together and brought a big, like, sense of community in England. But then it just kind of fell apart and people started

Appendix F: Ethical approval

From: FACE Ethics
Sent: 12 December 2018 21:59
To: ALEXANDRA JONES <A.Jones@2015.hull.ac.uk>; alexrjones22@gmail.com
Cc: Lisa M Jones <L.M.Jones@hull.ac.uk>
Subject: Ethics Approved

Dear Alexandra,

Project title:	What are the perceptions of children from socio-economically disadvantaged (SED) backgrounds with regard to the construction of 'Disadvantaged' within educational policy?
Ref No.:	1819PGR05
Date:	12/12/2018

I am pleased to inform you that the FACE Ethics Committee has given ethical approval for the above research project.

You are now authorised to carry out the research as outlined in your application.

Best wishes,
Beth

Beth Luker-Barrow
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