



## MSc Ageing & Public Policy

### Cover sheet for written assignments

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**1<sup>st</sup> Class Honours: 70% +**

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## **Title**

Examining the challenges of supporting individual agency to the long-term homeless in later life

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I would like to thank both of my parents for supporting me throughout my masters.

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Finally, I would like to mention my dog Ali who has been kept up countless nights while I work on the dissertation instead of going to bed.

## **Abstract**

Supporting individual agency is considered an integral aspect of social reintegration for those who have experienced extreme forms of long-term social exclusion. This is because the concept is inherently linked to personhood. Due to this, the aim of this research was to examine some of the means in which agency both is and needs to be supported for those in high support homeless

services who had previously experienced intense forms of social exclusion over an extended period of time. This was done through the scrutinising of both theoretical and practical elements of consideration pertaining to agency. Taking on a multi-disciplinary approach to the theory, agency was analysed through the lens of psychology, sociology and philosophy. This was aided through the usage of a modified version of Romaioli and Contarello's (2019) theoretical framework before delving into practical instances of agency within these care settings. The research displayed singular examples where agency may be supported which can then be extrapolated into more abstract concepts as may be necessary. There were two key takeaways from the research. Firstly, while there is an encouragement for policymakers to create policies around the topic of agency, it should be noted that these should be broader in nature to allow for greater ease of homelessness-related services at the mezzo level to adjust their practices accordingly. That is to say, that rather than basing policies around specific instances, it is more practical for what this dissertation refers to as "thematic" policies to be implemented. Secondly, the dissertation suggests that, while it is important to dedicate resources towards supporting the "real" agency of an individual seeking support, it is also vital that these efforts do not inadvertently undermine self-perceived agency of those in homeless services. This may be achieved either through the implementation of additional policies or alternatively, acknowledging self-perceived agency could become a more significant area of focus in policies being drafted.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## *1.1: Introduction*

Individual agency refers to the autonomy possessed by a person to act in a manner without facing restrictions. This is a multifaceted issue which is therefore incapable of being defined with adequate consideration for all dimensions. The difficulty in explaining this term in a full manner stems from its roots in philosophy, sociology, psychology, law and numerous other fields. Furthermore, the concept contains multiple research questions within each larger field. Regardless of this, creating an environment which supports individual agency is integral to uphold the quality of life of an individual with respect to their dignity, self-perception, social perception, and general sense of personhood. Therefore, the dissertation will set out to examine some of the key challenges which exist when attempting to support the individual agency of a person (or actor) who has experienced long-term homelessness and is now in later life. Moreover, the demographic being considered will refer to those now in long-term, shared housing. The research for this dissertation was conducted in conjunction with a research internship via Galway Simon, dealing specifically with men in later life who have experienced extended periods of rough sleeping prior to entering these long-term services. Galway Simon is a local branch of the Simon Community, an NGO which works to “provide homeless, housing and treatment services to people facing the trauma and stress of homelessness” (*About Us*, no date). The dissertation will scrutinise three broad aspects of an individual’s agency pertaining to the philosophical, sociological, and psychological aspects which must be considered. These will be explored across four main body chapters which will be mentioned in the following paragraph. This dissertation will ideally act as a roadmap for policy

researchers to greater recognise the obstacles which exist in assuring agency is upheld while also informing researchers on some of the challenges which exist to support an individual's autonomy.

## ***1.2: Structure of the Dissertation***

As mentioned, the dissertation will be broken into six chapters. The first chapter will focus on providing an introduction to the dissertation as well as delivering a structural guide to it. Then, chapter 2 will develop the context around the inspiration of the dissertation; this will be done in four sections, first, providing clarity on Galway Simon (i.e., the NGO with which the research was conducted). Then, the chapter will provide a broad definition on the concepts of both “agency” and “personhood”. This will take into account the philosophical, psychological and sociological aspects of consideration. To conclude these respective sections, both will merge the core points of each of the three research fields into cohesive, singular definitions of both agency and personhood. Following on from this, a brief subchapter will be dedicated towards the methodology of the dissertation. Afterwards, chapter 3 will act as the literature review. This will begin by the inclusion of a theoretical framework by Romaioli and Contarello (2019), before extending upon it to include other concepts mentioned in Chapter 2. It is worth drawing attention to the similarities which exist between the theoretical framework and the context around agency and personhood. These similarities are an inevitability given that they are inherently linked. While often a theoretical framework is included as a subchapter of the introduction, this does not seem fitting for this dissertation. This is because there are three “academic languages” which will be used throughout the piece—that is, terms from psychology, sociology and philosophy—due to this, it is worth pre-emptively providing

context on the terms from each field in chapter 2 before including a theoretical framework which utilises those same terms. This will reduce the likelihood of the terminology acting as a barrier to comprehension with regards to understanding the dissertation. Afterwards, the subsequent subchapter of chapter 3 will further examine literature considered across the piece. Instead of contemplating the metaphysical properties of agency however, this section will provide a more grounded layout of the issues at hand. Doing so will allow for the dissertation to segue into chapter 4, the discussion. This chapter will merge the grounded aspects with the conceptual elements of the dissertation, allowing for an analysis to be conducted on the dissertation in its entirety. The chapter will be broken into two segments, where the first subchapter will link these theories to grounded instances—briefly touched on in subchapter 3.3—and the latter will recommend the possible direction which policymakers at the mezzo and macro levels should consider when creating future policy. Penultimately, a brief chapter on some of the limitations faced will be considered before finally, chapter 6 will function as a conclusion to the dissertation.

## **Chapter 2: Context around the Research**

### ***2.1: Introduction***

Chapter 2 will set out to discuss some of the key aspects to set the groundwork of the dissertation prior to its most central chapters. This will be done by firstly discussing the research internship position. This will entail giving clarification on the environment which influenced the research question. Afterwards, there will be a subchapter devoted towards agency. This will be broken into numerous sections given that the sociological, psychological, and philosophical branches of thought around agency must be considered. Personhood will be examined next in the subchapter; this concept is a philosophical



idea which, in short, may be summarised as a group which possess a moral community, regardless of species. In other words, personhood argues that to be considered “persons” requires morals including both rights and duties (Ikäheimo and Laitinen, 2007). Personhood is integral to agency and therefore, the theories around it will be expanded upon as the focus of subchapter 2.4. Finally, the methodology of the dissertation will be explained.

## ***2.2: Galway Simon***

Mentioned in chapter 1, Galway Simon is a local branch of the wider Simon Community. With its focus on homelessness, it is worth providing brief context on some of the aspects which will influence the questions asked later in the dissertation. Firstly, the research internship was conducted in a high support house offering long-term care to men both of retirement or alternatively nearing retirement age—with this being said, no clients were in employment. At least one member of care staff was always present in the house, and carers working here could be labelled under one of three categories, Housing Support Officers (HSOs), Housing Support Assistants (HSAs), and Volunteers. All three types of staff perform tasks including cleaning, cooking, and general ad hoc support of clients, however administrative tasks are primarily left to HSOs, with some more basic administrative duties being given to HSAs training to do social care work. Some HSOs have a more direct role in supporting specific clients—these staff are also called “key workers”. Each house is then led by a Team Lead, a Housing Support Officer with greater responsibilities. The Team Lead reports to the service manager who in turn, manages over multiple care houses.

In conducting the research, a “fly-on-the-wall” approach was taken. A clear line was drawn to make clear the fact that this

is a research-based position rather than a care-related position. This was done to clear up any confusion which may have existed in the minds of staff and clients alike about the duties to be performed. This forwardness also gave clients and staff an awareness over what they mention in advance. Of course, while no statements or viewpoints would be used without explicit consent, clarifying to the staff and clients over any questions that they had about the research provided them with a sense of comfort over what was being researched.

### ***2.3: How to Consider Agency***

Introduction. As mentioned in the introductory subchapter of chapter 1, agency may be viewed through the lens of many different fields; these do not necessarily reach consensus on what agency is, and thus, each branch discusses different issues (Hitlin and Long, 2009). Therefore, it is worth separating these definitions into their respective sections. This will allow for a more cohesive argument to follow in the later sections.

Agency in sociology. According to Emirbayer and Mische (1998), agency may be considered in three ways which they label as “the Chordal Triad of Agency”. In their article, these may be summarised as: “the iterational [sic] element”, “the projective element” and “the practical-evaluative element”. Although all three have been used in sociology, most research is dedicated to the first form. However, according to the article, all are used to some extent. Broadly<sup>1</sup>, these may be summarised as follows: iterational agency refers to the repetition of an action, with the intent of sustaining one’s identity over time. The projective element refers to the ability of actors to imagine

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<sup>1</sup> Given the complexity of the three definitions, the dissertation provided simplified versions of Emirbayer and Mische’s work. Although this will allow for improved ease of read, some of their sentiment may have been lost in the process. Therefore, it is recommended that for a deeper understanding of the topic that their writing on the Chordal Triad of Agency is itself read.

possible outcomes of an event based on their emotions of hope, fear, and desires for the future. Finally, the practical-evaluative element of agency pertains to the logical and opinion-based judgements by an actor to deal with pending issues with some uncertainty. The three forms of agency provide a substantial level of depth to understand agency from a sociological perspective. Before moving past agency with respect to sociology, the following paragraph will examine the concept of mastery.

Mastery considers the perceived control of an actor over their own chances in life (Hitlin and Long, 2009). That is to say that this refers to a person's self-perceived capabilities to influence the environment around them. The concept is relevant to the dissertation given that mastery examines scaling. In an example which the authors provide on this concept, they discuss the idea that a child's sense of mastery may be good—for their age—despite a lack of financial independence over their own life. Moreover, an ability of mastery is that it may fluctuate as a result of self-perceptions. In their work, the authors reference a potential lack of mastery caused via retirement, whereby a lack of social obligation contributes to diminished self-perceived agency. These two factors are of significant importance and will be discussed in greater detail throughout the later chapters of the dissertation.

To conclude this section of the dissertation discussing sociological agency, the topics of importance were the Chordal Triad of Agency and Mastery. The former is of relevance given that it discusses three distinct aspects of consideration for agency in sociology, whereas the latter refers to mastery as it relates to

the scaling of agency and self-perceived lack of agency due to age<sup>2</sup>. These will both be relevant in later chapters.

Agency in psychology. Psychologist Albert Bandura argued that there are four core aspects of human agency (2006). These are: intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness. The first refers to the planning to achieve an intended goal. For larger intentions, this also requires collective action from those with a shared goal<sup>3</sup>. Forethought may be described as a step towards achieving intentionality. This represents anticipation of possible issues which may arrive when attempting to reach the future. That is, that forethought pertains to visualisation of the “path forwards”. Next was self-reactiveness, which may be considered being a “go-getter”. According to Bandura, an actor with agency does not wait for the future they perceived to come to them; instead, they are an active participant in shaping the environment around them. Last mentioned was self-reflectiveness, a term which considers the ability of an actor to reflect on their personal efficacy. This is to say that they consider the achievability of the goals they set, be they likely, or unlikely, and will attempt to adjust their expectations accordingly.

Agency in philosophy. Unlike the sociological and psychological definitions of agency, the philosophical definition which will be employed contains less elements. Instead, it focuses on a causal view on agency which considers "action

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<sup>2</sup> This is similarly addressed in an article by Romaili and Contarello (2019). In their paper, they consider disponibility to assess agency based on the decision to act rather than the inability to be independent. That is to say, that any act which shows some autonomy displays agency, rather than the “western approach” which argues full independence must be a pre-requisite. A view which they claim is inadequate to assess people in later life who no longer face the same need to "think of oneself as strong or to fear being weak".

<sup>3</sup> Further discussed in an article by (Romaioli and Contarello, 2019).

awareness<sup>4</sup> by appealing to actions that are represented as causing an outcome" (Tramacere, 2022). In simpler terms, this means that an actor is aware of their influence of the world around them. This awareness is a specific aspect of action selection, and both will be expanded upon in the following paragraph. Afterwards, their importance will be discussed in the concluding section of the subchapter.

To reiterate the contents of the previous paragraph, action awareness is an aspect of action selection (Wenke, Waszak and Haggard, 2009). Action selection discusses the choice which an actor may make based either on internal thought or, as a response to the environment around them (Prescott, Bryson and Seth, 2007; Wenke, Waszak and Haggard, 2009). On the other hand, action awareness only examines an actor's knowledge of what influence they possess over the world around them (Sarrazin, Cleeremans and Haggard, 2008). It is the conscious realisation of an actor's own impact caused by their actions. Providing a distinction between these two definitions is vital given that, although action awareness is part of action selection, to consider these must have them separated from each other.

Conclusion. To conclude this subchapter, agency may be viewed with respect to philosophy, sociology and psychology. All three focus on differing aspects of the topic; despite this, some overlap between the three fields has been shown. Sociology discussed the iterational element (repetition of an action to maintain sense of identity), the projective element (imagining future outcomes based on hopes, fears, etc.), the practical-evaluative element (how decisions are made by an actor

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<sup>4</sup> Although only "action awareness" was mentioned here, it is important to also consider "action selection". In brief, action selection makes up the entire construct, whereas action awareness refers to a specific aspect of action selection. Both action selection and action awareness will be discussed in greater depth later in the piece, however, due to their similar names, it is worth highlighting that while these are similar, they are not synonymous.

under uncertainty), and mastery (an actor's self-perceived control over the environment around them). Then, psychology considered intentionality (planning to intend), forethought (visualising how to plan to intend), self-reactiveness (playing an active role in shaping their own environment), and self-reflectiveness (recognising the likelihood of goals set). Finally, examining philosophy, agency was considered with respect to action awareness (awareness of influence on the world around themselves) and action selection (options presented). As may be seen when considering these points, mastery and action awareness represent the extent to which an individual perceives their influence on the world around themselves. Moreover, the practical-evaluative element, action selection (separated from action awareness) and self-reactiveness emphasise the active role played in shaping one's own surroundings. These links between the respective fields allow for a shortened, interdisciplinary definition of agency of seven components. These are:

- The Iterational Element
- The Projective Element
- Mastery
- Intentionality
- Forethought
- Self-reflectiveness
- Action Selection

Now that a definitive provision of features to describe the meaning of agency has been drafted for the dissertation, the topic will be readdressed in later chapters of the piece.

## ***2.4: Defining Personhood***

Introduction to personhood. Mentioned in subchapter 2.1, the concept of personhood is separated from the human species. Instead, it considers a "person" to be an individual which

possesses the capacity to act in a manner which upholds a moral code. The concept is important to consider given its relationship with agency. This is because a link exists between personhood and autonomy. The link exists when the “person” and the “human” are separated—where the “person” is a normative construct and “human” is the individual—and being a person thus relies on the ability to enjoy one’s agency (Wallace, 2000). Therefore, the following paragraphs will discuss what it means to be a person under the interpretations of Daniel Dennett and Bill Buron.

Defining Personhood. In Daniel Dennett’s chapter “Conditions of Personhood” (1976), he argues that the concept possesses multiple “themes”. These are: rationality of an actor, consciousness of an actor, capability of an actor to communicate verbally with others<sup>5</sup>, possession of the trait of self-consciousness, how others perceive the actor (i.e., is the actor viewed as a person<sup>6,7</sup>) and finally, how the actor perceives others (i.e., does the actor recognise others as people). It is important to recognise that these are philosophical and therefore, differences exist among philosophers. Moreover, some of the language seems unfit for adequate scrutiny without first defining the terminology here. Due to these philosophical differences, it is important to recognise that variations on the definition of personhood exist; this will be done in the following paragraph.

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<sup>5</sup> One of the weaknesses of Dennett’s article was a decision to necessitate “verbal” capabilities of an actor to attain personhood. This oversight has been addressed in literature analyses of his article (Fredric C. Young, 1979).

<sup>6</sup> As highlighted in Dennett’s chapter, treatment as a person is not to be mistaken with the “golden rule” of treating people with kindness. Instead, hostility may be perceived as a characteristic to explain personhood as well.

<sup>7</sup> This argument has been defended by Fredric Young (1979). This was done by distinguishing between being a person “de re” as opposed to being a person “de dictu [sic]”. Stating this, Young makes the point that in a de dictu sense, the comment makes sense (i.e., if a person is not viewed as a person, they are not viewed to possess personhood”). This is unlike a de re interpretation of personhood which would identify the actor as a person. In other words, the de dictu interpretation which he applies may be subject to changes where a more absolute de re definition would not allow this flexibility to change who is a person.

To do this, Bill Buron's feature article called "Levels of Personhood: A Model for Dementia Care" will be scrutinised. Although this will be the only other article considered to define personhood, it is imperative to clarify that many other definitions may support or contrast the definitions presented in the dissertation. This occurs as the meaning of personhood varies over time, across both age and condition of the person being considered (Buron, 2008).

To define personhood, Buron makes the case that three aspects, or levels exist, namely: biological (level 1), individual (level 2), and sociologic (level 3) personhood (2008). The first refers to an entitlement to personhood regardless of any other capabilities of an actor<sup>8</sup>. This is based on the actor's biological status as a human. Next, individual personhood considered multiple aspects including personality, traits, communication and self-consciousness. These are important to consider, however, Buron makes it clear that in later stages of dementia, where the ability of an actor to (for example) communicate may decline, the trait required for personhood reverts to the first level. Lastly, sociologic personhood pertains to the "social relationships, culture, responsibility, 'moral agency,' and membership in professional and social groups often enable society to bestow the status of personhood upon others". Again, Buron clarifies that if incapable of upholding these standards, a person with dementia retains their personhood due to its definition reverting back to the previous level.

Concluding personhood. The previous two paragraphs highlighted that many differing stances exist amongst philosophers to explain the concept of personhood. To merge

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<sup>8</sup> As Buron's article was written about the base qualities to be a beneficiary of personhood, it is important to recognise that the article is seeking a minimum attributes approach. One which moves away from more advanced skills and instead draws attention towards the bare necessities to achieve personhood.



Dennett's and Buron's content, the core ideas discussed throughout their respective works, it may be seen that Dennett's concepts are subsections of Buron's:

- Biologic
- Individual
  - Rationality
  - Communication
  - Self-consciousness
  - Consciousness
- Sociologic
  - How others treat the actor
  - How the actor treats others

As addressed above, Dennett's six themes may all fall into one of the three levels listed by Buron. Here, the sociologic level acts as a "de re" interpretation of personhood to the biologic "de dictu" sense. As a result, a clear convergence amongst these papers inadvertently exists. Due to this fact, Buron's argument seems appropriate that, when an actor fails to fit a later definition of personhood, they will retain their personhood via the retreatment of its definition to the previous level—that is, if the sociologic level is not met, a person will retain their personhood what with its reversion to the level before it.

## ***2.5: Methodology of the Dissertation***

The research conducted for the dissertation was influenced by two main aspects. Firstly, the theoretical framework of subchapter 3.1 as well as the conceptual aspects addressed in subchapters 2.3 and 2.4 were determined via research. This review of the relevant literature was found by searching terms including "sense of agency in later life" and "theoretical framework for agency" via Google Scholar. Conversely, subchapter 3.3, which focuses on the grounded

issues faced by the clients in these services was instead based on what was seen and discussed within the high support care house where the research-based placement took place. While this will also be backed up through literature of relevance, the reasons as to why these topics were brought to light were a result of the research internship's onsite issues seen. This joint-strategy was used to form the dissertation's content as their combination allowed for a more conducive set of solutions to be discussed than to otherwise exclusively consider the metaphysical literature around the topic. Moreover, this decision should see less biased analysis during chapter 4 in that no issue should be too niche for policy while still providing value to academic literature around supporting agency in later life.

## ***2.6: Conclusion***

In conclusion, the chapter was broken into four main sections. These respectively discussed: Galway Simon, a definition of agency, a definition of personhood and methodology. The first was important to explain where the research was conducted and why certain aspects will be key focuses of the dissertation (for instance the usage of Buron's article on personhood focused on personhood in relation to dementia care). Then, agency itself was defined. Given that the thesis of the dissertation will centre around agency, the subchapter is crucial to highlight the core aspects of agency which must be considered with respect to psychology, philosophy and sociology. Furthermore, this provided a brief reference to the concept of self-perceived agency, an idea which will be of prominence later in the dissertation. Finally, personhood was defined. Two articles made up the focus of this subchapter, with the first providing greater depth on the aspects of note to attain personhood, whereas the latter mentioned the floating definition of personhood and its ability to regress to an

earlier level if certain conditions are not met. These articles therefore discussed different content while simultaneously providing a refined definition of the concept by its concluding section. Personhood was worth scrutinising given its link to agency and therefore, all aspects were necessary to advance the dissertation forward into the following chapters. Afterwards, the methodology which caused the direction of the dissertation was provided, displaying that the theoretical aspects of the dissertation were based on both a review of current literature and the practical issues were focused around aspects seen and discussed within the research internship while still being connected to academic literature.

## **Chapter 3: Literature Review**

### ***3.1: Introduction***

Chapter 3 is broken into two main subchapters; after the introduction, the first is a theoretical framework and the second will be a review of the practical literature. Both are pivotal to tie together the dissertation. Where the former will allow for the dissertation to refine and merge the practical and abstract aspects of consideration, the latter will instead be used to define in more grounded terms, some of the issues faced by men in these settings. Again, this will be considered across later chapters, merging some of the previously discussed metaphysical theories with grounded facts through the lens allowed for by the aforementioned theoretical framework. Therefore, this chapter is integral to the dissertation in its entirety.

### ***3.2: Theoretical Framework***

Defining a theoretical framework. A theoretical framework is a core aspect of research, and its value is seen in

research of a qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods nature (Lederman and Lederman, 2015). These form an integral part of academic writing as they emphasise the reasoning behind why certain aspects of a topic are researched. This attempts to ensure that the research remains focused. Therefore, the addition of a theoretical framework is crucial to the dissertation, this will be done in two parts, the first will consider a completed theoretical framework on agency in later life by Romaioli and Contarello, and the latter will identify other key aspects which must be considered. By the concluding section of this subchapter the piece will then merge these frameworks into a singular, cohesive framework, attempting to encompass the core aspects of agency.

A preformed framework for agency. To consider agency, it is worth using the framework created by Romaioli and Contarello. While many chapters of the dissertation will separately consider psychological, sociological and philosophical aspects when creating a definition, this article already considers all three when formulating its framework. Dealing with the agency of those in later life, the article is an apt starting point to create this dissertation's framework. The concepts examined in their article were:

“Mental states of wellbeing and serenity; willingness to exercise positive thinking; solid engagement with the present; sense of moderation (sobriety) which consists less in personal contentment than in desiring ‘what is right’; openness to existence; capacity to accept oneself, and finally, a particular attention towards interpersonal relations” (Romaioli and Contarello, 2019)<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Crossover between these themes in the framework and the definition of agency in chapter 2 exist. This, as referenced in the article by Romaioli and Contarello is unsurprising (2019); this occurs as a result of the intrinsic relationship between agency and a framework created around agency.

The concepts are integral to agency discussed in the dissertation given the article's connotations with later life. The only aspects not previously touched upon via chapter 2 are sense of moderation, mental states of wellbeing and serenity, and openness to existence. Sense of moderation is an aspect of interest given that it further narrows research throughout the following chapters focused on self-reactiveness or mastery. Rather than addressing the broader theory, which emphasises the awareness of control over surroundings, this pigeonholes the concept towards control with respect to desire. Given the nature of the research placement, this is important to consider. This is because those in later life who require support in social reintegration need policies in place to promote their agency rather than restricting it<sup>10</sup>.

Before attempting to consider other aspects to add to the theoretical framework, it is worth drawing attention to figure 1 in the appendix; the table displays the similarities which may be seen across agency, the framework by Romaioli and Contarello (2019), and personhood. In this, the concept "titles" were highlighted accordingly to draw attention to the similar aspects across each respective section. Doing this is of relevance prior to adding to the theoretical framework as it highlights the similarities across each concept. Doing so will effectively prohibit the "re-use" of a concept already mentioned in the pre-formed theoretical framework. As mentioned multiple times throughout the dissertation, many concepts outlined are similar in nature. While this is to be expected, it may be argued that not taking this step risks "re-stepping" into a previously addressed aspect of the framework given the vagueness which may inadvertently exist in the principles set forth within it—it is worth adding that this "vagueness" in a theoretical framework is

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<sup>10</sup> The other two not previously discussed are, while integral aspects, more easily recognisable as aspects of importance. Therefore, they will not be simplified in a similar manner.

intentional, this is done to provide flexibility to the means in which a principle is considered rather than being a flaw of the principle.

Altering the original framework. Along with these aforementioned principles, it is vital to consider the iterational element when creating the theoretical framework. It could be argued that this juxtaposes the framework principle that an actor has the capacity to accept oneself. However, it may also be argued to support the concept as it requires action where none would otherwise exist—that is, “disponibility”. The idea will be explored in greater detail in later sections of the dissertation. Before moving on, it is worth drawing attention to the fact that while the iterational element would suggest the physical act of repetition, it is important to consider all acts of repetition as “markers”. These markers may be considered small in scale, but work towards the goal of maintaining an actor’s identity. Therefore, while crossover between the iterational element and capacity to accept oneself exists, these will be considered as separate ideas going forward in the dissertation.

As well as the iterational element, it is worth considering the individual level of personhood, or more specifically, the section of it which deals with self-reflectiveness. Awareness over the likelihood of goals set, while again, similar to mastery and capacity to accept oneself, is uniquely different. Where one—self reflectiveness—deals with an actor’s recognition of the likelihood of their goals set, the other—mastery—considers agency to be a vessel for the actor’s self-perceived control. Therefore, in a “de re” sense, these may be considered the same, however, in a “de dictu” sense, differences may exist between the two. This distinction makes it increasingly worth being separated for analysis of grounded concepts throughout the dissertation.

Finally, the principle in the pre-formed framework, “openness to existence” will be removed from consideration. Given the gravity of the principle, to provide an analysis on it would require a disproportionate amount of deliberation in the dissertation. The concept is of utmost importance, however, to be compartmentalised would take away from the depth which the principle would require.

Concluding the theoretical framework. While only two concepts were added to the original framework, to make clear each “pillar” which the discussion (i.e., chapter 4) will adhere to, each will be shown as a bullet point for increased clarity to the reader. Therefore, the new framework will consist of:

- Mental states of wellbeing and serenity
- Willingness to exercise positive thinking
- Sense of moderation
  - i.e., control over desires, not control over contentment
- Capacity to accept oneself
  - Encompasses mastery, disponibility and, in that, the sense of scale which agency possesses
- Interpersonal Relations
- The Iterational Element
  - i.e., repetition to maintain identity
- Self-reflectiveness
  - i.e., recognising influence over the world around oneself

### ***3.3: Literature Review of Grounded Research***

Introduction to grounded research. To make a distinction between the earlier concepts discussed and the literature throughout this subchapter, the term “grounded” is necessary. While the previously mentioned topics were examples of

metaphysical, or conceptual issues, this subchapter will focus on actual issues. This is necessary to connect theory to the problems faced by those in long term care settings in the subsequent chapters.

Mentioned in chapter 2, the research was conducted alongside a research internship in a long term, high support care house for men nearing or past retirement age. Given that this is high support, Galway Simon adopts a system of individualised care which differs depending on each client. Therefore, financial literacy will be addressed. The importance of this differs from client to client, however, with the recent attempts by Allied Irish Bank to reduce the number of ATMs in use, the need to engage with online banking is of greater importance (McGlynn, McConnell and Hosford, 2022). Afterwards, “markers” will be mentioned, these were briefly addressed in subchapter 3.2 and will be scrutinised in greater detail in this subchapter. Next, there will be a section on the ownership and utilisation of items such as house keys; supporting this is crucial to agency with respect to scale—that is, mastery. Decision-making where action may not be possible is also worth examining. This could be categorised as disponibility and the example which will be considered will be dinner rotas. As well as these, key workers are an important piece of consideration given the possibility of parasocial relationships and their—that is, a parasocial relationship, not the key worker themselves—harmful connection to a goal of supporting agency. Lastly, memory will be discussed, this is a recurring theme throughout the subchapter, being an issue for privacy with respect to financial literacy, ownership of items such as a key, and “markers”. These will then culminate in this final section of the subchapter with the issue of memory being further developed to consider visual boards, post-it-notes, name tags, and calendars. Before moving onto the following paragraph, it is worth re-iterating that the intent of this



subchapter of the literature review is not to tie these issues into the framework. Instead, this will be done later in the dissertation. Rather, subchapter 3.3 will provide examples of issues faced by some<sup>11</sup> of those clients in these settings. These mergences of grounded issues and theory will then be considered in the following chapter.

Financial literacy. With a growing shift away from traditional banking, there is a growing need to engage with technology. This is best exemplified through recent attempts by traditional banks to remove Automated Teller Machines favouring digital (i.e., phone and computer) banking in its place. This issue will increase in prevalence going forward given the constant need of banks to increase profits as well as their need to lower costs to compete with “challenger banks” (also known as “neobanks”) (Godsil, 2023). Given this issue, many clients with minimal experience using technology are at the risk of losing their access to their bank balances. Furthermore, with many clients being at risk of memory loss, there is an inherent risk that they may lose their credit/debit cards by forgetting their password information while it is inserted in an Automated Teller Machine. While the risk may not be faced by all clients in such services, with a growing chance of losing access to ATMs due to their removal, a greater number of details will be necessary to access digital banking<sup>12</sup>.

Markers. Markers are an integral aspect to maintain identity. Given the nature of these, it may be mistaken for a symptom of dementia, however, any form of impediment on memory or agency may lead to the creation of markers by a client. Markers may be considered an act of repetition to (as

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<sup>11</sup> The word “some” was used because, as mentioned earlier in the paragraph, this is individualised care, not all face the same issues and hence, how each client is supported may see slight differences.

<sup>12</sup> That is, recollection of both the account holder’s registration number and their Personal Access Code.

mentioned) maintain sense of identity. These markers may be ascribed to two categories, verbal markers and activity-based (or physical) markers. Given that both forms of marker are distinctly different from each other, this section will be broken into smaller paragraphs to not obfuscate the details of each type.

The first refers to verbal habits, be this the repetition of a joke, story, fact or sentiment, these are the most easily replicable by the average client given the decreased activity necessary to achieve them. Verbal identity may involve the repetition of facts about a place, family status, or other defining characteristics which the client believes makes them who they are. These verbal markers may also be sentiments. A sentiment may be the questioning of ethics, religion, law, opinions on groups of people or activities<sup>13</sup>, etc., and at its core may maintain the sense of identity which a client may feel is reduced due to their decreased sense of agency (Cohen-Mansfield, 1986).

Physical, or activity-based markers are activities which may be used to achieve a sense of agency (Cohen-Mansfield, 1986). These may include shopping, checking a bank or phone balance, etc. While these are examples of everyday activities, if a client feels that they possess a reduced sense of agency, they may wish to increase the frequency with which they do these tasks. This physical repetition may assure the client that their identity remains intact and therefore, while seemingly small, with respect to the scaling of agency, these habits are crucial for social care workers to both respect the sanctity of, and moreover, support clients in.

Ownership. Somewhat similar to the previous paragraph, ownership and usage of items such as a key may be of increased importance to a client with or who feels as though they have a

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<sup>13</sup> These may be positive or negative. For example, support or prejudice against a group of people or cause.

reduced level of agency. This may be considered a risk, for instance, if the key is lost a security risk is created. However, if a client possesses a key, their eagerness to open a door for a member may be an eagerness to exert this form of independence. Therefore, respecting that agency is scaled back, some research indicates that there is a value to providing clients the opportunity to do such tasks rather than the staff doing so unprompted (Moilanen *et al.*, 2021). While this may not be done due to malice, this accident may be upsetting to a client facing restricted autonomy.

Decision-making. Another method to provide clients with a sense of control exists if clients cannot cook for themselves. Dinner rotas may be made upon consultation with clients. However, if these are not followed through with, this may be upsetting to a client. Again, this may not be done due to negative intentions. However, given that a client, incapable of making their own food contributed to the original meal decision, for this to be altered may lead to a client feeling a further lack of exertion. Looking again at the concept of disponibility, if a client cannot cook, to maintain agency, their input (i.e., their decision) acts as their agency. If this is neglected, it may be more harmful to the client than it may be considered to an individual with greater agency. Therefore, to go against the original dinner rota may be considered a potential detriment to a goal of supporting the agency of a client<sup>14</sup> (Smebye, Kirkevold and Engedal, 2012).

Parasocial relationships. A parasocial relationship is a one-sided relationship. This may occur where one participant

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<sup>14</sup> Other examples of decision-making may also be considered, however due to the need to keep a consistent narrative throughout the paragraph, only decision-making for a dinner rota is presented here. Shopping, ability to travel with a member of staff (e.g., in a car) and other instances which require group rotas may be substituted into this example.

views the other as a friend where a friendship does not exist<sup>15</sup>. This is a risk in high support care work where a member of staff spends substantial periods of time with a client. A client may be under the impression despite being reminded otherwise that the relationship these two individuals have is a staff-client relationship. However, if reminding a client of this is not adequate, a potential risk exists. For example, if a member of staff leaves, the client may feel that their agency is restricted given that they are no longer “allowed” to remain in communication with the social care worker. Moreover, where a key worker<sup>16</sup> is the cause of a client’s parasocial relationship, the client may feel hesitant to do their daily tasks without the assistance of this specific individual. Key workers are an integral member of the staff, they act as the main source of information for their client’s needs; nevertheless, if this leads to the key worker spending a disproportionately higher amount of time with the client for day-to-day activities, the client may form a closer connection to the key worker than a regular member of staff. While the forced ending of a parasocial relationship is not, in a “de re” sense a restriction on the agency of a client, in a “de dictu” sense, it may be perceived as such by the client. Therefore, to support a client’s agency, reducing the likelihood of a parasocial relationship emerging would decrease a client’s possible feeling of restriction if the key worker is unable to work with the client, re-locates or leaves the service.

Memory. Mentioned throughout the subchapter, memory is important to consider if attempting to support the agency of a client. This is an issue which presented itself with respect to

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<sup>15</sup> While many papers exist on the topic of parasocial relationships, most currently focus on parasocial relationships with online influencers and actors. Despite this, some papers exist which display that a parasocial connection may form in instances where an individual A holds a position of authority over individual B (Liao *et al.*, 2021). As a result, it can be assumed that such relationships may also form where a client forms a relationship with support staff.

<sup>16</sup> The primary Housing Support Officer for a specific client.

ownership, markers and financial literacy. Moreover, memory may act as a barrier to agency if a client is incapable of leaving their house without being accompanied. Due to these issues, it is important that, to support the agency of a client, steps are taken to allow for their agency to exist. Memory is an interesting area of consideration given that it is a less avoidable area of decline for many clients. Where supporting agency is possible through numerous methods with respect to other, aforementioned topics, if a client is of the belief that their memory is declining, there are not clear pathways to support their agency. With literature drawing attention to a potential cycle created whereby a client feels they have lost some of their agency due to their worsened attention—caused by a deteriorating memory—they may be less inclined to take an active role in controlling their life around them (Hennawy *et al.*, 2019). This lack of attention paid by the client to their surroundings may lead to further cognitive decline as they find at a later stage that their memory failed them again—however, this new event may be the result of a lack of attention to detail rather than further cognitive decline—thus leading them to pay less attention going forward. This is displayed graphically in figure 2 of the appendix. Due to this, the succeeding two paragraphs will display some of the potential routes which may be considered to support the client’s memory. It is important to note that these will not necessarily improve their memory itself, however the decreased reliance it will give them on asking members of staff of their schedules will decrease the feeling of no control which a client may feel at their worsening memory. The first paragraph will discuss the inclusion of visual boards, post-it-notes and calendars, these are all items which may discretely direct a client’s attention towards them without drawing attention towards their potential memory loss. The second paragraph will examine the usage of name tags, a more controversial item to consider as will be discussed in greater detail below.

To combat the impact of a worsening memory, one solution which some literature around the topic suggests is to provide clients with visual boards and filled in calendars (El-Wahsh *et al.*, 2021). If a client can only be made aware of their weekly schedule by asking a member of staff, they may face a heightened awareness that they cannot act without accompaniment. Therefore, to counteract this, such items allow for a client to check their weekly schedule in their bedroom without the need of assistance from staff. Again, this is an especially important area to support given that it allows for the client to not feel as reliant, therefore increasing their self-perceived level of agency.

The other, more controversial aspect to decrease a client's awareness of memory loss. Is to have members of staff wear name tags (Hendriks, Truyen and Duval, 2013). This would be an effective method to support a client who may longer feel confident in remembering a member of staff's name. Rather than asking or avoiding their name in conversation, they may use the name tag as a method to remember their name. This may provide the client with greater confidence in conversation with a member of staff while also being subtle enough that a client with a worsening memory does not necessarily realise they remembered the staff member's name only by having read the name tag. Having said this, doing so in a high support care house may be viewed as antithetical to its purpose. It may be argued that the purpose of this house is to act as a home for clients, with this being the case, the usage of name tags may be considered too institutional for clients (Fleming, Kydd and Stewart, 2017). Whether this be implemented would require the decision be made by clients within the specific service regardless of the benefits it would provide.

Concluding the grounded literature review. In conclusion, the literature review focused on the grounded issues

which many clients within these services may face. This stepped away from the metaphysical aspects of issues with many of the sections of the subchapter instead focusing on examples which may be extrapolated from their examples and considered with respect to other issues—for example, corroborating in the meal plan rota may see its importance extracted to refer more broadly to the decision-making of a client facing restricted agency. The first section focused on financial literacy; given the heightened risk of memory loss of clients in later life along with the growing likelihood of ATM removals, it is a pivotal issue that clients are supported in adapting to the digital age banking. Afterwards, markers were discussed. These are acts of repetition which are intended to maintain a sense of identity. While actions may be similar to dementia, the intent of the iterational element should when possible be supported. Despite this, acts such as verbal markers may be negative, therefore, it is an aspect which staff should be prepared to deal with. After this, ownership was mentioned, this is a direct instance of agency which risks being lost—a problem which may be of proportionately greater strain to a client facing less autonomy. Decision-making followed this, examining the concept through the lens of disponibility allowed for an unusual scrutinization of agency. This instead focused on agency where none would otherwise exist rather than agency being restricted with no solution available. After this, parasocial relationships were examined, these are a threat to the self-perceived agency of a client who may consider their connection to a (or multiple) member of staff to be more than a staff-client relationship. This is of greater concern where a key worker spends disproportionately greater amounts of time with a client than a regular member of staff otherwise would. Due to this, it may be advisable that, while key workers remain within these services, they avoid their client for day-to-day tasks wherever possible, instead opting for other members of staff to support the client on day-to-day affairs. Doing so would reduce the

opportunity for a parasocial relationship to form. Finally, memory was considered. Memory was discussed at length with respect to financial literacy and markers. However, this is because it is a focal point when considering agency. Some solutions offered in this section suggested items such as visual boards, post-it-notes and name tags be used. While these may seem reductive as surface level solutions to support the agency of these clients, it is important to pay heed to their underlying value. These may not necessarily reduce the rate of cognitive decline which a client may face, however, their benefit lies in their own self-perceived view of their memory. Throughout the subchapter, only some aspects focused on legitimate issues of agency, others instead opted to consider issues which a client may feel are a restriction on their agency. To support agency, both must be considered. Therefore, both types of issue will be scrutinised in greater detail in the following chapter. To clarify the way in which these issues are examined—that is, whether the dissertation considers each respective issue to be either an issue of real agency or self-perceived agency—figure 3 displays the means in which each topic has been considered to be.

## **Chapter 4: Discussion**

### ***Subchapter 4.1: Merging theory with practice***

Introduction. Mentioned on multiple occasions throughout the dissertation, the intention of subchapters 2.3 and 2.4 was to provide context on both agency and personhood respectively as concepts. These would then contribute to the theoretical framework created (from a mix of a pre-formed framework along with other aspects worth considering) in subchapter 3.2. Afterwards, the theoretical concepts were removed from the limelight in favour of a literature review focusing on grounded issues. While this would make references to theory around agency, not all were examples of agency as it



exists in the real world; some of the topics highlighted cases whereby a client's self-perceived level of agency is not supported. Therefore, this chapter, having categorised agency into these two figurative boxes via figure 3, will now delve into a deeper analysis in which the concepts are merged with their grounded equivalences. This will draw greater attention to issues and their prevalence if a goal of supporting agency is to be strived for by the Irish government or by non-governmental organisations operating within Ireland. These two concepts will use the terms "real agency" and "self-perceived agency" to quickly define between the two versions of agency hereafter. Within these sections of the subchapter, each issue will then be considered with respect to the framework aspects which they relate to.

Real agency. Reusing figure 3 of the appendix, the grounded issues which the dissertation is considering to be instances of "real agency" are: financial literacy, ownership, decision-making on rota-based contributions and memory. Therefore, each of these will be scrutinised throughout the following paragraphs.

Aiding clients with regards to financial literacy is an integral aspect to support their agency. This is a multifaceted topic which may be considered with respect to three aspects of the dissertation's theoretical framework. The ways in which financial literacy must be considered are around "willingness to exercise positive thinking" and "sense of moderation". Both are logical derivations from the framework. Where the former is crucial to financial literacy given the outlook which an individual may possess on their future (especially given the potential financial status of the individual within these homeless services), the latter is important to recognise patterns of expenditure. Without access to an ATM, a client, unprompted to check their

finances online may be less likely to scrutinise their purchasing habits. Thus, to support a client's agency in this regard would improve their quality of life with regards to stress of financial hardship<sup>17</sup>.

Ownership is of primary significance if agency is to be supported. To fail to support ownership especially for those clients with more limited levels of agency indubitably restricts a client further than they otherwise would need to be. Where this disponibility may be supported, if it is not, the client is therefore stripped of their ability to at a later stage, make a decision<sup>18</sup>. Therefore, ownership may be considered with respect to the theoretical framework to "accept oneself", given this scaled back sense of agency. However, ownership may also be considered as it relates to self-reflectiveness. A consequence of supporting a client with the autonomy to act if they choose to, is the recognition that they can control such an aspect of themselves if they so choose—in other words, both capacity to accept oneself and self-reflectiveness relate to this concept.

Decision-making, segueing on from the previous paragraph is vital for a client with restricted agency. Be this the decision to open a door with a key (i.e., the outcome of the example of ownership in the previous paragraph), or the contribution to contribute to a rota. Regardless of the context, decision-making may be considered to be an integral aspect of agency as it relates to multiple different facets of the framework. These correlations with the framework are: "interpersonal relations", "self-reflectiveness", "mental states of wellbeing and serenity", "willingness to exercise positive thinking" and

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<sup>17</sup> In other words, if a client is aware of their finances, they would be likely to feel more comfortable spending within their means.

<sup>18</sup> To clarify, while ownership is linked to the decision which eventually arises from it (e.g., opening a door with a key may only be done if a client is in possession of a key), these are, for the sake of clarity within the research, isolated, but complementary issues which both must be addressed.

“capacity to accept oneself”. The first of these is self-explanatory. To engage with other clients and/or staff in a cooperative manner is an instance of interpersonal relations. While developing interpersonal relations in a less transactional manner (e.g., group activities such as the co-operation of local Men’s Sheds and homeless services) is a better interpersonal relationship, if agency is substantially restricted, engaging with even these more basic interpersonal relations is a positive step towards supporting agency. The next principle mentioned (i.e., self-reflectiveness) similarly is of importance for decision-making. Where a client does not over assume the control that they possess over the environment around them. Afterwards, “wellbeing and serenity” was mentioned, this is linked to decision-making given the scaling sense of agency, whereby a client would be better off to utilise the restricted agency they have than to not at all use their agency. Thus, to support the wellbeing and serenity of a client necessitates that the individual is allowed to make some decisions where possible. Moreover, this closely links to both the capacity to accept oneself and willingness to exercise positive thinking where for the former, disponibility is present with these decisions, and for the latter, there is a recognition that for similar, future endeavours, the client can once again act out their agency through these decisions.

Memory, as mentioned in figure 3, cannot be separated from being both real agency and self-perceived. Therefore, only the real facet of the framework which relates to agency will be mentioned within this section of the subchapter. That facet is interpersonal relations. Mentioned in subchapter 3.3, a client who may be unaware of their daily affairs due to a decline in their memory may be forced to ask members of staff of their own schedule. This may lead to a growing insecurity that the client, incapable of looking after themselves, is dependent. This issue

would go on to taint their interpersonal relations with staff; therefore, to support their agency, it is important that to stop this issue from arising, the client has access to visual boards or calendars to display their schedule to them rather than feeling reliant on members of staff. Doing so would reduce the feeling of no agency by weening off their need to ask others for information about themselves.

Self-perceived agency. Again, considering figure 3 of the appendix, the aspects which the dissertation has considered to be aspects of self-perceived agency are: markers, parasocial relationships and memory. Therefore, each of these will be considered throughout this section of the subchapter.

The first and final framework element listed may be considered instances found in a “marker”. This is because a client may exude their agency via repetition of tasks. Where the iterational element describes acting out one’s independence for the purpose of maintaining identity (and thus, agency), the latter represents the inverse—knowing when to stop. If a client facing restricted agency is to be supported where possible, it is crucial that steps are taken to support clients in their ability to act autonomously while not overallocating the extent to which that they may repeat tasks for their agency. In simpler terms, while supporting agency is important, and hence, it is necessary for a client with heavily restricted agency to be supported where possible, if this requires an excessive strain on the NGO (i.e., tasks are too repetitive and time-consuming to get to multiple times a day while also supporting other clients), concessions should be appropriate to still maintain a goal of supporting agency. This is because, through sense of moderation, a client is being supported to stop over exuding their agency. Applying this sentiment may be considered antithetical to a goal of supporting agency, however, it may be of value if attempting to socially

reintegrate clients with restricted agency back into more customary living practices. This is because the repetition of moderation may play an inadvertent role in reintegration, thus supporting agency in the long run.

As well as considering markers with respect to the principles of the iterational element and sense of moderation, the concept must also be considered as it pertains to self-reflectiveness and wellbeing and serenity. These principles go hand-in-hand within this instance; if a client recognises the extent that they can be disponible, their agency is inherently supported. Moreover, this recognition leads to improved wellbeing and serenity given that the client possesses an awareness of their own agency. While this does not ensure that the individual is content in their level of agency, supporting the client to recognise the autonomy they currently may exude is a vital step towards promoting further levels of agency.

Parasocial relationships, as described previously, may form as a result of staff dealing with clients. This is a risk to a client's agency as it relates to interpersonal relations and the wellbeing and serenity of the client. Regarding the former, if a client, unaware of their connection to a member of staff faces "loss" of a friendship via the change in position or employment of the member of staff, they may feel that, when no longer able to speak to the member of staff, their allowance to make friends is hampered. Thus, a parasocial relationship may itself act as an issue when co-attempting to support the social reintegration of clients who have faced long term social exclusion. Therefore, this is a self-perceived issue of agency where, while no agency was taken away (i.e., a staff-client relationship rather than a friendship was made clear) from the client, their agency may feel threatened through a false interpretation of such an interpersonal relationship. In the long run, this may also lead to a decreased

level of wellbeing and serenity as it pertains to the client's belief that they may become friends with others going forward.

The other issue brought forward by the dissertation as a consequence of self-perceived agency is memory. While in the previous section of the chapter, the consequence was considered with regards to its hampering of interpersonal relations, it is an issue to self-perceived agency as it relates to the long-term implications of an awareness of decline in memory. Now, aware of this deteriorating cognitive function a client may be less inclined to pay attention to their environment, thus worsening their memory. This, in effect, may create a cycle of sense of memory loss, which leads to inattention, which in turn leads to a sense of memory loss, thus restarting the cycle. This is therefore a constant harm to a client's wellbeing if nothing is done to counteract their declining memory.

#### ***Subchapter 4.2: Recommendations for future Policy***

At the macro level. The macro level of a system refers to the government or community-wide portion of a society (Macionis and Plummer, 2012). These could effectively be considered the nationalised institutions. For instance, if considering the authority which is responsible for healthcare in Ireland, the macro level would be considered to be the Health Service Executive. The purpose of this paragraph was to introduce the concept prior to developing points on the issue. Pertaining to the dissertation, the macro level policies being suggested will refer to the government policies as well as the policies which the Simon Community (i.e., the national NGO rather than the local NGOs such as Galway Simon) may be advised to consider.

Firstly, with regards to financial literacy, it is important to assure that the agency of a client is supported. To do this

requires that at the macro level, policymakers take steps to provide a client the opportunity to develop their skills with digital banking. While many NGOs may not have the time to spend teaching clients on how to adapt to new age banking, government-backed courses would allow for the clients of such services to learn how to engage with digital banking facilities. Additionally, such a course would provide alternative benefits to clients in that they may become more computer literate in general. On occasion, government-subsidised courses may be criticised given that they provide minimal additional pay to a non-working course taker. However, a course such as this would provide an intrinsic benefit to the individual, thereby increasing the likelihood of uptake for the course. Alternatively, this may be considered by national level NGOs, but, unless similar NGOs such as the Peter McVerry Trust and the Simon Community made a joint effort to teach these classes, any singular NGO may not possess the resources to start such a process.

Decision-making is another issue which may be considered at the macro level. Policies on this would revolve around support services such as the HSE Home Support Service ('HSE Home Support Service for Older People: Information Booklet and Application Form', no date). While amenities such as these do an adequate job of assessing the needs of those in long-term high support care houses, further easing those restrictions would be of benefit to care staff in the NGOs. This is because easing up greater amounts of time for care staff working in these services (e.g., HSOs and HSAs) would allow for a greater amount of time for staff to work with clients. Alleviating this pressure would thus create a more suitable environment to support the agency of clients where decision-making is an integral aspect of exuding agency. For example, if a client requires less support from NGO care staff due to the partial alleviation of work by Home Support Services, NGO staff are

thus presented with a greater amount of time to follow through with rotas. Thus, this partial alleviation allows NGO care staff to more consistently proceed with pre-made rotas. Doing so would benefit the ability to accept oneself and self-reflectiveness of an individual, feeling that while prohibited from full agency, partial disponibility may still exist. Moreover, this would aid in interpersonal relations between clients and staff with regards to trust that the client's decisions are followed through with by staff. With a goal of social reintegration, this further influences the ability of clients to reintegrate. Where a staff-client relationship may be a substantial element of a client's social relations, this "betrayal" of trust may be a further problem to hamper a client's social reintegration; thus, keeping this trust is crucial to support the client's agency.

To reconsider the Home Support Service discussed in the previous paragraph, these are also of relevance with respect to activity-based markers. For iterational activities which require travel (whether it requires staff participation to walk or travel in a vehicle to a location) there is a necessity that staff are available to support the client in their travel. Easing the workload of staff members via the increased availability of HSE Home Support Services would increase the frequency at which staff are available to support clients in exuding their agency via travel relating to the iterational element (i.e., activity-based markers). Thus, increasing funds allocated by the government in this way would further support the client in the redevelopment of their agency.

At the mezzo level. Before considering the mezzo (also referred to as the "meso") level, it is worth clarifying its meaning. A mezzo system in a society is the local level of a society (Caldwell and Mays, 2012). For instance, if again considering healthcare in Ireland, local hospitals would be considered to be



operating at the mezzo level. In regard to the dissertation, the mezzo level policies being considered will be of value to non-governmental organisations such as Galway Simon.

Trauma informed care is an integral aspect when considering all policies within the subchapter at both the macro and (primarily the) mezzo level of society. This is a highly individualised system of care intended to support clients where they are at rather than expecting a higher, equal standard of all clients which may be comparable to the means in which an emergency accommodation operates ('Chapter 1: Trauma-Informed Care: A Sociocultural Perspective', 2014). Given that this is individualised, it is important to mention that this is the form of care which must be used if the following policies are to be considered. To reiterate, this is the case since not all clients would find the policies applicable to them.

The ownership of items such as a key is important for clients especially with restricted agency who may need to be accompanied when leaving their accommodation. Therefore, allocating some resources towards the provision of keys for all exterior doors allows a client a heightened sense of agency which they would otherwise not be capable of possessing. Imposing a policy around ownership would rely on the provision of keys and assurance that staff are aware of this policy, given that, as mentioned earlier in the dissertation, it is easy for members of staff to accidentally not follow. Thus, these issues of ownership should be considered for policies to support agency.

Addressing memory in policy requires more minor concepts which are proportionately of greater importance to support agency. Allocating resources for items such as memory boards would allow for greater self-confidence in clients facing a decline in cognitive functioning. Thus, increasing the real and self-perceived agency of a client. With respect to name tags,

given this more “institutional” nature than the other items, greater concessions would be necessary to make for policy; whether this is an instance of decision-making among clients if these should be allowed, or alternatively worn by staff on a per-room basis, these would not be able to be as broadly applied as other forms of products intended to help with a client’s memory (such as the aforementioned visual/memory boards, calendars and post-it-notes).

Parasocial relationships, as already mentioned are easy to attempt to combat; this is done by reducing the time which any specific member of staff deals with a client where possible, instead substituting another staff member in to work with the client. Despite this, doing so will not prohibit the formation of a parasocial relationship, instead, this only decreases the likelihood of them forming. However, for policies by local level homeless charities to take this step would be a positive move towards supporting a client’s self-perceived agency in that they are less likely to feel as hurt by a staff member’s lack of or decreased presence within the care house. Therefore, to take this step along with the continued training of staff members to make boundaries clear to clients would decrease the risk of a client forming a parasocial relationship with care staff.

## **Chapter 5: Limitations**

### ***Subchapter 5.1: Why might there be limitations?***

There are five major limitations of the research conducted for the dissertation, these are: terminology; time constraints; confidentiality; lack of training, and a lack of materials combining the three academic fields in the area. These will be briefly mentioned in the following subchapter to give greater amounts of context on each limitation which was faced.

## ***Subchapter 5.2: Major limitations of the research***

Terminology. Terminology acted as a substantial barrier to entry to understand much of the literature. While the dissertation considered the idea of agency through a merged lens of philosophy, sociology and psychology, my primary discipline of study is economics. This slowed the pace of reading through literature to understand much of the field specific terminologies necessary for the dissertation.

Time constraints. The research was conducted over a period of just under three months. While the research took place between the 6<sup>th</sup> of May and the 31<sup>st</sup> of July, the research placement via Galway Simon took place from the 6<sup>th</sup> of May up until the 14<sup>th</sup> of July. Given this constraint, it is possible that details were missed which would have otherwise been noticed had there been a longer period to conduct research associated with the dissertation. Moreover, given the time constraints, the opportunity did not present itself to speak to clients in female-only or mixed housing. This means that, while policies can be recommended for all clients of a similar service in this age bracket, alternate views could not be expressed which would in turn, potentially influence the direction which aspects of the dissertation took.

Confidentiality. To assure anonymity of all clients, interviews were not conducted on either staff or clients. This is because these would risk exposing sensitive information about the clients availing of these services. Instead, a grounded literature review was conducted alongside more conceptual issues, which would have been influenced by, but not as prevalently showcasing the challenges of supporting agency which qualitative research (i.e., interviews) would have displayed.

Training. Training is an important aspect of working in these high support houses. Given that this internship was intended for research rather than being based on practical work experience, training was not involved in the process. Due to this, the days in which placement would be conducted were intended to be the least hectic days of the house's week. While this allowed for a greater amount of time to question members of staff about aspects of their duties, this may be considered a limitation of the research internship. This is because, while necessary due to a lack of training, it increased the likelihood of a more sheltered experience in dealing with the clients.

Lack of research considering all three academic fields. While a substantial level of literature exists on all three respective academic fields, the quantity of literature which merged psychology, sociology and philosophy is less significant. Due to this, many aspects such as subchapter 2.3 were forced to merge concepts from each discipline rather than interdisciplinary (of all three fields) definitions of agency being readily available. This was not a necessarily prevalent limitation given that it allowed for a deeper understanding of the fields at hand, however, this did slow down the research process.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

To summarise the preceding chapters, the dissertation examined the challenges of supporting the agency of clients in long-term care who had previously experienced extreme forms of long-term social exclusion. The areas which agency was scrutinised through were with respect to the fields of sociology, psychology and philosophy. This was done in several chapters. Chapter 1 introduced the dissertation; divided into two subchapters, the first was a basic introduction and the second provided a structure for the dissertation. Afterwards, chapter 2 gave context on many of the factors which would be of

significance throughout the dissertation. Therefore, the subchapters included gave some background about the research internship which accompanied the research via Galway Simon. Then, agency was considered with respect to its philosophical, sociological and psychological components. After, a definition of personhood was picked given that this concept is intertwined with the concept of agency. Lastly, the methodology which guided the dissertation was provided. Moving onto chapter 3, this acted as the literature review. Separated into two parts (after the introduction), the first main subchapter created—through the consideration of a pre-formed framework with other aspects—a theoretical framework which would provide the principles which issues of agency going forward must fall in line with. This was comprised of seven aspects: Mental states of wellbeing and serenity, willingness to exercise positive thinking, sense of moderation, capacity to accept oneself, interpersonal relations, the iterational element and self-reflectiveness. While crossover between some of these existed, all could arguably be separated into uniquely distinguishing tenets for which the dissertation would go on to sort through issues where agency may not be supported adequately at present. The next subchapter gave instances of specific issues which a client may face, this was grounded when compared to the theory which had preceded this subchapter. While each issue was minor, the overarching themes which each may be considered part of (i.e., ownership, financial literacy, memory, decision-making, markers and parasocial relationships) were extrapolated from the specific examples and further problems within these themes could therefore be substituted into their place. Next, the theory would finally be merged with grounded issues in subchapter 4.1, this then allowed for the subsequent subchapter to discuss policy implications at both the macro and mezzo levels within Ireland. Before the conclusion, a final chapter was provided which gave context on

some of those limitations which may have been faced throughout the writing and researching of this dissertation.

In conclusion, the dissertation provided six broad examples of problems which may be faced by clients with limited agency within long-term, high support housing. This would then evaluate the reasoning as to why each issue may be a potential obstacle to a goal of supporting agency of clients. To achieve this, the dissertation began by distinguishing between whether each issue is an example of real and/or self-perceived agency. Segregating these into two categories allows for future research in this field to more aptly analyse the specific examples of issues. That is to say, that any marker would quickly be recognised as being of importance to self-perceived agency and therefore, any grounded example of a problem within this field may efficiently be deconstructed. In other words, these categorisations allow greater precision when merging theory to practice. The dissertation considered each problem within the confines of specific examples given that there are a wide range of similar, yet different aspects within care work which may arise. Therefore, the broader themes are of greater importance to consider agency than instead adopting an approach of mass consideration of specific instances. Care work within such a setting requires adaption by staff members. Thus, to impactfully act, examples of concern are in some regards, more suited to broader strokes for policies, with more focused direction being attributable to the micro and mezzo levels found within individualised care. Hence, the policy recommendations provided in subchapter 4.2 listed examples of thematic policies which may be recommended given their less restrictive nature. This approach would be of greater benefit to NGOs with a goal of supporting the agency of clients within their long-term high support housing who face restricted agency. However, as made clear, such policies are intended for those with heavily restricted

agency. Given the nature of individualised care, these should not be mistaken for sweeping policies which would target actors within a different cohort to the group<sup>19</sup> listed. This method of thematic policy may hence be of more significant value for such a customisable form of social care work.

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<sup>19</sup> That is, those who have experienced long-term extreme forms of social exclusion now in high support housing with restricted agency and roughly 55 and upwards in age.

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## Appendix

Figure 1: Table displaying similarities between the concepts of agency, Romaioli and Contarello’s theoretical framework and personhood.

Personhood (P)		Theoretical Framework (TF)		Agency (A)	
Concept (P)	Context (P)	Concept (TF)	Context (TF)	Concept (A)	Context (A)
Biologic		Mental states of wellbeing and serenity		The iterational element	Repetition
Individual	Rationality, communication, self-consciousness & consciousness	Willingness to exercise positive thinking		The projective element	Imagining outcomes influenced by emotions
Sociologic	How others treat the actor and how the actor treats others	Sense of moderation	Regarding control over desires as distinct from contentment	Mastery/self-reactiveness	Self-percieved ability to control whereby agency is on a scale
		Openness to existence		Intentionality	Planning to intend
		Capacity to accept oneself		Forethought	Visualising how to plan to intend
		Interpersonal relations		Self-reflectivenss	Recognising the likelihood of goals set
				Action Selection	Choice which an actor makes based on either internal thought or the environment around them

Figure 2: Image displaying the cycle potentially created following a sense of cognitive decline. Within this figure, the term “cognitive” decline is not used. This is because this sense of poorly performing memory may be a real instance of cognitive decline or alternatively a result of inattention. Regardless, if this cycle begins, it is vital that steps are taken to ensure clients feel a sense of control.

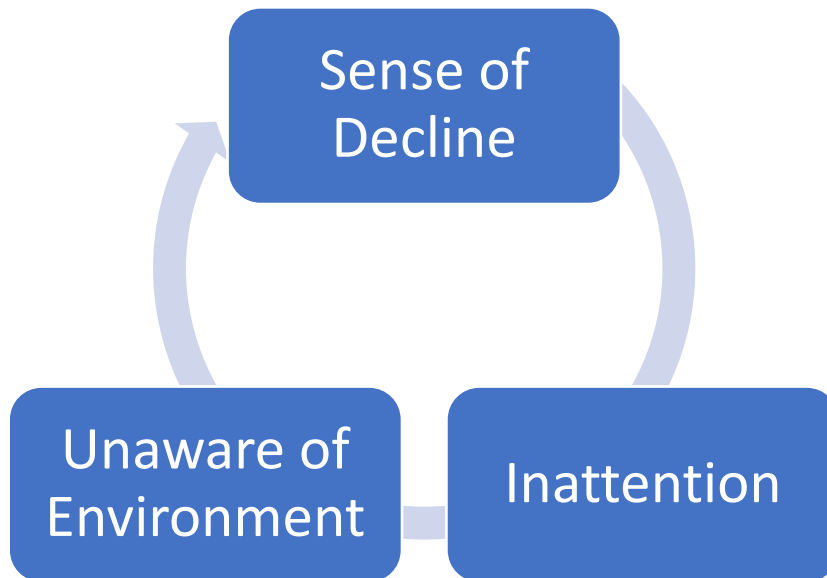


Figure 3: Table displaying the grounded issues of subchapter 3.2, contrasting the topics based on whether they are examples of “real agency” or “self-perceived agency”. (N.B. Memory may be considered with respect to both real and self-perceived agency)

Real Agency	Self-perceived Agency
Financial Literacy	Markers
Ownership	Parasocial Relationships
Decision-making	
Memory	