



**Exploring the Social Construction of
Philosophical Assumptions: The
Methodological Journeys of Doctoral
Researchers in the Social Sciences**

Doctorate in Education

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Declaration

I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

Signed.....

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Abstract

Existing information regarding methodological journeys is predominantly restricted to autobiographical accounts, which may limit understanding, particularly in relation to the development, and significance, of methodological consciousness. This thesis explores the methodological journeys of doctoral social sciences researchers in the UK, in the early stages of their research career. It investigates how they speak of their perceptions of their individual journeys, and the potential relationships between their life histories and educational experiences and the epistemological, ontological and methodological assumptions they hold. The research design consisted of life history interviews with 9 researchers. In addition, 6 of the researchers were then involved in collective biography discussions. Information from these interviews was developed into a series of narrative accounts, which illustrate the complexity of the individual journeys. The analysis of the narrative information also included attempts to approach the information through both an interpretivist and post-structuralist lens, and privileged the value of embracing multiple perspectives.

The accounts of the researchers indicated that through their journeys, their philosophical assumptions may be understood as a socially constructed product of their life histories and academic experiences. The journeys were characterised as a series of social experiences which challenged and reinforced individual assumptions. The presentation of these journeys was seen as connected to social context and the nature of the assumptions held by the individual. Experiences of post graduate research training were presented as having the potential to unlock the methodological consciousness required to re-frame these experiences, improve understanding and resolve methodological conflict. This research presents an original contribution to knowledge through its approach to the exploration and illustration of methodological journeys. It has implications for post graduate programmes in the social

sciences and makes a case for the need for these to embrace methodological diversity and introduce paradigmatic understandings through teaching and supervision. In addition it asserts that individual researchers may benefit from directly engaging in aspects of reflexivity and contextualisation of their assumptions.

Part One – Background and Context

Chapter 1 Introduction & Context

1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of, and introduction to, the thesis as a whole. It introduces the research topic, research questions and the key concepts and issues which will be more fully developed throughout the thesis. It also outlines considerations in relation to methodology, and contextualises the study in relation to my own personal methodological journey.

This thesis explores the methodological journeys of a group of nine doctoral and post-doctoral social science researchers, all in the early stages of their research career. It investigates the social construction of the methodological assumptions held by these researchers, through exploration of understandings of the relationships between these and their individual journeys. In particular attention is given to the researcher's reflections (both individually and collectively) on their experiences of post graduate researcher training, and to their personal life histories, both in terms of their content and the ways in which these were shared. Throughout the thesis, consideration is given to concepts of methodological positions and how these relate to, and shape, the individual journeys. In addition, there is a focus on the pathways these journeys have taken, including understandings of factors which have influenced shifts in their methodological assumptions. Finally consideration is given to deconstructing the way these journeys are presented, to explore insights which may be gained from considering the way individual researchers speak of their perceptions of their individual journeys.

1.2 Rationale and Research Questions

This section presents a brief introduction to my research questions in the context of the rationale for this research. Further exploration of these questions is provided in chapters 2 and 3. The origin of my interest in this topic area is embedded in, and as such inseparable from, my own methodological and academic journey. With this in mind I have presented an overview of my personal perspectives on this journey, in section 1.7. To summarise: what began as engagement in a process of extending my own understanding of the philosophical concepts of ontology and epistemology, and their relationships with methodology, quickly developed into a fascination with the myriad of assumptions upon which academic research is unavoidably grounded. My early experience of the doctoral process itself enabled me to reflect on the significance and importance of these assumptions, and once I'd acknowledged this I effectively started to see research methodology as an integral part of the structures informing education and wider society. I considered that if we take research as central to our understanding of social reality, within the academy, but also in wider society for purposes such as policy development, then the assumptions upon which it has been developed have a very tangible impact on how it both represents and influences the social world.

Having reached a point where personal methodological assumptions were perceived as such a fundamental aspect of a cyclical relationship between research and the social world, questions relating to the construction of these assumptions started to become fundamental to my understandings of both. As my exploration of this progressed I acknowledged that this understanding had much consistency with the ideas behind the practice of reflexivity, and the perspective that research, and more specifically researchers, cannot be considered immune from the potential effects of the social phenomena which they themselves seek to uncover and explore. At the same time, it became apparent that where academics have previously

sought to explore ideas surrounding methodological assumptions, journeys and related influences this had almost exclusively involved adopting a form of self-critique or autobiography to explore this from a very personal perspective (e.g. Oakley 1999, Probert 2006). The intention was therefore to build on this understanding by aligning this as a topic with thinking relating to the potential of the idea of ‘bricolage’ (Kincheloe 2001) as a process of diversifying both perspectives and context to potentially explore different layers and elements of the methodological journeys and assumptions both of myself and others. In addition I also identified other key opportunities for research in this topic area. For example, despite existing literature reflecting debates regarding the impacts of different approaches to teaching methodology at post graduate level (see 2.3), there was little existing research which explored the connections between teaching approaches and methodological assumptions. Furthermore, whilst the concept of ‘methodological consciousness’ was accompanied by some theoretical understandings (e.g. Gadamer 1975 – see 2.3 for further information), there appeared to be a clear opportunity for research which considered, in detail, its relevance to methodological journeys and post graduate education.

In discussing my thoughts around this topic, my interactions with other doctoral students, both within my cohort and through my professional role, introduced some interesting anecdotal stories of ‘shifts’ in thinking, and journeys through personal philosophical dilemmas, which I found myself actively beginning to frame and contextualise. As my understanding evolved, and in the context of the literature review (presented in chapter 2) and my own methodological journey, two specific areas of significance in the process of ‘becoming’ and ‘being’ an academic researcher began to emerge. The first being the role and impact of post graduate research training as the process whereby the knowledge and understanding of the philosophical landscape may effectively be introduced or developed,

and the second the life histories which may precede and follow this understanding, potentially impacting the construction of assumptions before there may even be a consciousness of their existence. With this overview, the following research questions were developed:

- 1) How do doctoral researchers' individual life histories appear to influence their subsequent philosophical (ontological, epistemological and methodological) assumptions?
- 2) How do doctoral researchers' experiences of post graduate research training (and understanding of methodology) appear to influence their subsequent philosophical assumptions?
- 3) How do doctoral researchers speak of their perceptions of their personal methodological 'journeys'?

1.3 Relevance of the Study

As value for the use of reflexivity in qualitative research has increased in recent years (Hsuing 2008), so too has the need for individual researchers to give consideration to the wider personal and social context within which their research is generated. In relation to this Mauther & Doucet (2003) suggest that the question of 'doing' reflexivity is under addressed and present some initial 'possibilities' for undertaking reflexivity as a process. With this in mind, I would contend that in highlighting potential understandings of methodological journeys as part of this context, this study is currently of particular relevance for supporting and provoking thinking in this area. That is to say, that considering the 'historically effected' nature (Gadamer 1975) of the journeys and assumptions of others has the potential to support similar self-consideration. In addition, this kind of provocation may be considered very necessary in the context of an understanding of the conscious effort involved in engaging

with elements of philosophical understanding, particularly in relation to doubt (Berger & Luckmann 1966).

Accepting Bourdieu's premise that 'every word that can be uttered about scientific practice, can be turned back on the person who uttered it' (2004:4) reflexivity is seen as a potential means to enhancing many aspects of research, including elements of authenticity and transparency (Mauther & Doucet 2003, Etherington 2004). However, adopting the post-structuralist conceptualisation of the individual (in this case 'the researcher') as 'subject of thought' (Davies 2010:54), reflexive thought itself is considered here as context specific, and thus interlinked and related to aspects such as discourse, positioning, values. The relevance and value of this study is therefore seen in its potential to become a tool, as part of related discourse, to support researchers in interpreting their own methodological journeys, offering a starting point for contextualising personal methodological assumptions as part of reflexive positioning. In simple terms the study is therefore intended to provoke questions as much as it is to answer them, eliciting reflexive thought in the reader by providing other potential perspectives. Much as the idea of 'bricolage' (Kincheloe 2001) created a key understanding for this study as a whole, the aspiration is for this study to become part of the bricolage which shapes reflexivity in other studies.

In addition to reflexivity, I consider that this study may also have the potential to help inform post graduate research methodology teaching models. It has been argued that the doctorate has been 'reconceptualised' (Collinson 1998) with the emergence of an increasing volume of recognised doctoral training routes (Park 2005). In the social sciences this has had varying implications for when and how methodology may be introduced. For example, the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC 2015:5) most recently listed examples of five funded

PhD routes, spanning 3, 4 or 5 years, and embraced the fact that these create an option to ‘frontload’ or spread the teaching of research skills and concepts. A consequence of this may be that researchers are actively undertaking their research before accessing some content regarding methodology. Furthermore the emergence of professional doctorates, such as the Doctorate in Education (Ed.D), presents factors such as distance learning (Butcher & Simiensi 2004), time implications (Wellington & Sikes 2007) and a tendency towards more practice based research experience (Costley & Armsby 2007) which may impact on the priorities for teaching models. At the same time, in terms of practical guidelines The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC 2005:38) has shifted from advising that post graduate students in education should be taught about; ‘philosophical issues...and assumptions’ in research as well as learning about a ‘range of methodological approaches’ to more brief reference to ‘understanding of both the practice and philosophies of social science research’ (ESRC 2015: 8). This accompanies a perception that the ‘Quantitative Methods Initiative’ for Social Science (ESRC, HEFEC 2017) represents a shift to prioritising investing resource in teaching quantitative methods and skills (Gorard 2015) ahead of more diverse methodological understanding.

Etherington (2004:16) previously speculated, based on personal experiences of teaching at Masters’ level, that students may be attracted to specific courses and options because of the methodologies they embrace, but equally that students may be influenced by the methodologies employed and, overtly or otherwise, advocated by their teachers, however this appears to remain an assertion which has yet to be explored in any real depth. At the heart of this there remains a debate between those who see teaching about methodology using a ‘paradigmatic’ approach as ‘divisive’ and ‘counterproductive’ (Onwuegbuzie & Leech 2005: 267) and conversely those who see paradigmatic exploration as the ‘gold standard’ of

teaching (Lathers 2006:37). The intention here is therefore to recognise the significance of the diverse and changing context of doctoral study and contribute to existing debate, by exploring specific perceptions about the connections between individual experiences of post graduate research methodology training and subsequent methodological assumptions and journeys. Whilst it is accepted that this study will not provide straightforward generalisable answers to questions relating to how research methodology may best be taught, I consider that it may contribute to an enhanced understanding of the processes which may be involved in shaping methodological assumptions and developing philosophical understanding. In turn this information may support those teaching research methodology to evaluate aspects of their approaches in relation to some of the above debates and assertions, in the context of a research study. In addition it is hoped that it may also provoke others with interest in this area to explore some of the related concepts and processes from other perspectives

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1.4 Original Contribution to Knowledge and Practice

At present, empirical exploration of methodological journeys, the concept of methodological consciousness and the social context of methodological assumptions appears to be extremely limited. This is explored in more detail in chapter 2. This thesis is intended to make an original contribution to knowledge by developing new understanding of the nature and relevance of the individual methodological journeys of doctoral researchers in the social sciences. It is hoped that it will present a new and unique illustration of the potential relationships between these journeys, social experiences and individual philosophical assumptions. In addition, within this thesis I seek to extend on the theoretical concepts of methodological consciousness and identity, by addressing them in relation to empirical information. In doing so it is hoped that this may contribute to understanding of their relevance and significance to post graduate research training.

Within this thesis I do not intend to make any claims in relation to the generalisation of the findings, however I do hope to contribute to understandings and debates relating to the construction of the journeys and assumptions which may underpin research in the social sciences. Furthermore, in contributing understandings from a methodological model which privileges interpretivist and post-modernist understandings, and offers the potential for other perspectives, I also hope to offer a new and alternative perspective and focus to the typically auto ethnographic (e.g. Quayle 2007) and pragmatic (e.g. Coronel Llamas and Boza 2011) models which have previously been applied to related research. Therefore, in addition to originality in relation to the research topic, this thesis also presents an original contribution to knowledge through its methodological approach, and analytical frame.

In addition as detailed in 1.3, this information is seen as having the potential for contributing to the practice of reflexivity in related research and in informing thinking about the teaching of research methodology in the social sciences.

1.5 Theoretical Underpinnings: The Researcher as Philosopher

This section introduces key theoretical underpinnings of the understanding of the researcher as philosopher, which will be explored more fully in chapter 2. The decision to focus this study on doctoral researchers in the social sciences subject area was grounded in this understanding, particularly in relation to the potential for researchers in this area to confront questions and develop expertise in relation to understandings of social reality.

The process of conducting social research involves a necessity to make decisions about ‘how’ to approach a subject, topic or problem (Kothari 2004), with a credible research process

invariably understood as being one where the researcher is able to make a case for their position in relation to the many philosophical ‘why’ questions underpinning these decisions. Consider for example the place of the viva in challenging and questioning research decisions in the doctoral research process as a marker of the perceived importance of the researcher engaging in this level, and type, of thinking. Indeed, Maykut and Morehouse (2002:3) argue that at doctoral level it is essential for all researchers to consider their philosophic position prior to embarking on any study, in order to establish the consistency and ‘conceptual tools’, required for rigorous, valued ‘pieces of scholarship’. The central decision here generally being the selection of the research methods, although upon further consideration everything from the style of writing (Charmaz & Mitchell 1997) to the processing and analysis of information (Riessman 2003) may begin to present difficult decisions and form part of a quest for a sufficient level of philosophic consistency. Academic researchers who have reached, or are in the process of reaching, doctoral level are therefore expected to have developed a philosophic understanding and rationale for the way they approach their research. It is argued that these individual and collective understandings clearly shape practice and ‘knowledge’ (Nkwake 2012), and therefore this thesis contends that it is important to improve understanding and contextualisation of the journeys which contribute to these understandings themselves. In conceptualising methodology in the sense of a ‘journey’ here, methodology is therefore understood as the rationale, philosophy and conceptual understanding of ‘how’ research is approached (Kothari 2004).

Chapter two presents the philosophical ‘landscape’ and its connection with research paradigms in more detail, with reference in particular to Burrell and Morgan’s (1979) subject object continuum, which outlines a concept of the ontological and epistemological spectrum underpinning social research. In introducing the context of this complex area, it is necessary

to outline that this research concerns the way in which individual researchers' philosophical understanding of social reality (ontology) and knowledge (epistemology) connect with their life long journeys and experiences. Researchers in the social sciences are confronted with a number of very broad philosophical questions of reality and knowledge, in order to make a decision about where to situate their work methodologically. Questions such as whether social reality should be treated as an external feature or a product of individual consciousness (Cohen et 2000) and whether they can ever collect 'factual' knowledge about it. The implications for the specific research designs applied by researchers are then often understood as aligning with specific paradigms, which value and present types of quantitative or qualitative information in different ways. Interestingly, some authors have outlined historical shifts in the dominant paradigm within the social sciences (see for example Lincoln 2010) introducing related questions regarding this connection with social context.

In relation to contrasting paradigmatic models it should, however, be noted from the outset that whilst I have adopted these as a beneficial reference point for aiding understanding, I retain an awareness that there is undoubtedly a danger of significant simplification in reducing methodological positioning to two 'labels' (see Pring 2005). Furthermore beyond philosophical considerations I acknowledge that some researchers cite the practical benefits of mixed models (Onwugebugie and Leech 2005) or see design as a variable in relation to topic and other external factors (Barbour 2008). For clarification; in the context of this research I was, from the outset, predominantly concerned with viewing methodology as the personal philosophical assumptions which underpin and influence designs, rather than including other factors influencing individual specific designs (e.g. funding, influence). However, as the study progressed it became increasingly clear that in seeking to make philosophical assumptions explicit, considering these aspects within the context of the

construction of individual assumptions was unavoidable. I will further explore some of the key understandings and issues in relation to defining paradigms in chapter two. This study has therefore been built upon an assumption that individual academic researchers all have specific philosophical assumptions about the nature of the social world and the concept of 'knowledge' and seeks to explore how these are connected to their own social experience. The extent to which these philosophies may be considered to influence specific individual studies, and the level of consciousness and individual abilities/willingness to articulate these, were highly relevant to the study, and at times inseparable from the topic of focus, however in setting the context it is necessary to differentiate both of these from this topic itself. As Gerring (2001:1) asserts, regarding the distinction between design and methodology 'we can hardly claim to understand one without delving into the other'.

1.6 Methodology

From the embryonic stages of this study I was acutely aware that the presentation and consideration of my own methodological assumptions and journey would be fundamental to embarking on and presenting an effective exploration of the topic. I have sought to be clear throughout, that I fully acknowledge the impact of my own understandings of knowledge and social reality in shaping my understanding of the methodological journeys of the individuals involved in this study. Whilst this section presents a brief summary of my thinking, I have aimed to present a coherent and explicit ontological and epistemological rationale for my decisions and thinking throughout this thesis, and particularly in chapter 3. In relation to the very subject of my research, I also believe that it would be contradictory to suggest here that I adopted an absolutely fixed methodological 'framework' or position. As is detailed in the next section, this study became a key part of my own methodological journey, and spending

such a significant amount of time thinking about and discussing methodology clearly had impacts on my own assumptions.

It is however necessary here to summarise my own understanding of my methodological approach at this point in my journey; constrained by the necessity of selecting paradigmatic labels to define this. As I believe is evident throughout; this location is distinctly anti-positivist and is strongly influenced by post-modernist and post-structuralist thinking, but also sees great value in highlighting and deconstructing potential interpretations arising from theories of social constructionism. In asserting that aspects of ontology and epistemology are inescapably grounded in the researcher's own subjectivity (Bagnoli 2004), this view repeatedly presented me with doubt and uncertainty, creating the idea of the social sciences as ‘a postapocalyptic...science where certainty and stability have long departed...’ (Kincheloe 2001:681). I was increasingly attracted to Kincheloe’s idea of ‘bricolage’ as a methodology within which rigour originates from increasing interdisciplinary ‘perspectives’ and contextual understanding; rather than from a pragmatic model where rigour is achieved through the same perspective applying multiple methods (2001). For me this study therefore became about finding value in exploring my own, as one of many possible, perspectives which may constitute ‘knowledge’ (Roos 2003) in relation to this topic.

Both post structuralism and post modernism, in rejecting the understanding of one fixed meaning, are not able to be simply defined (Orston et al 2013) and are therefore explored at more length in chapter 2. However, at the risk of reducing understandings to a positivist interpretation which focuses only on contrasting features (Brooker 2014) for the purposes of introducing my methodology I saw my own approach as consistent with post modernism in its rejection of rationalist claims to truth (Foucault 1982) and ideas of metanarratives

(Lyotard 1984). I also strongly believed that the social situation of the research itself should be acknowledged (Kuhn 1970). Perhaps more specifically I also saw myself as taking a post-structuralist stance in embracing Derrida's (1983) ideas of deconstruction and seeking to see the narrative as consisting of more than just a collection of words. That is to say that as well as being grounded in an assumption that there are many possible understandings, I took that the context and the way a story is told is as important as the information it contains.

1.7 A Personal Methodological Journey

The process of undertaking this research, and of being involved in a doctoral study programme, has undoubtedly been central to my own methodological journey. Given both the methodological approach I have taken, and the nature of the topic of focus, I believe that it is integral to the authenticity of this thesis that a summary of how I personally reached the position above is presented as part of my introductions.

Through engaging with the narratives of the researchers involved in this project I was able to start to consider my journey, beyond the five year period through which I've undertaken this doctoral programme. From the outset this more recent element was far easier for me to engage with and understand, mapping my entry point to this programme as the origin of my methodological consciousness and then a fairly rapid engagement with some of the key philosophical ideas presented here. Through this stage it was apparent to me that lectures, readings and discussions with peers have moved my thinking from an external acceptance of research as a systematic process underpinned by pragmatist and positivist principles to understanding that there are other ways to conceptualise the social world and indeed an accepted opportunity for a doctoral student to consider this. In particular I recall engaging with readings in continental philosophy and finding fascination with questions of ontological

doubt, yet feeling a sense that whilst undoubtedly impacting on my assumptions this also seemed to be exposing and affirming something. Looking at my early writing in this doctoral process, even there I am initially explicit about my concern about my perceptions of the necessity of seeking to be ‘objective’ (Clark 2012). Perhaps what sparked my interest in this research topic however was an immediate question about why an introduction to these ideas prompted this reaction and initial conflict in my thinking, yet the same introduction resulted in varying levels of different conflicts and confirmations in my peers experiencing the same programme.

The process of unpicking the relevance of my own life history went right through to the final collective biography session, where I was able to share the following aspect of a reflection on memories as a key to my journey:

‘How can there be a beginning of time, but how can there not? How can there be an end of space, but how can there not? What does it mean to ‘exist’? These are questions that I can remember, in one form or another, contemplating in childhood and adolescence. Whilst now I’d define them as getting lost in ontological doubt, as relevant to research and to everything, at the time I think felt they were something different. Sometimes now I almost completely lose touch with the anxious child and teenager I was then, but enjoying asking these questions reminds me that actually once these were probably quite comforting. If I can’t even be sure of existence, then surely everything else I can find to worry about is trivial?’

In my reflection ontological doubt is, perhaps somewhat ironically, a comforting space and potentially part of the reason it feels relatively familiar to return to this space in the context of my research. When I elaborated on my tendency to see the world with a sense of

‘uncertainty’ my co-researchers contributed the interpretation that maybe this doubt comes from ‘a fear of getting things wrong’. At the time I challenged this perspective, on the basis that I thought that this uncertainty was an academic tendency connected to achieving philosophic consistency. However, upon reflection I realised that there were other examples of my adoption of this understanding outside of my research, for example advocating in my professional role for assessment approaches which avoid reducing children’s learning to tick boxes. I also thought about the complexity of earlier feelings of anxiety and about growing up in a big family where my parents welcomed children in care who had complex backgrounds and I reflected that each had contributed to a sense that there was no absolute right or wrong answer about people. Again, at each time I did not connect these thought processes with an anti-positivist view of the world, but I do now reflect that perhaps the doctoral programme allowed me to break through the ‘domain specific’ (Muis et al 2006) idea of research and align this with the way I already saw the world in other areas.

In addition to this, examining my journey in the same way I sought to explore the journeys of others here, the perspective of ‘getting things wrong’ retained prominence. One interpretation of this was that in terms of ‘preferred identity’ (Riessman 2000) this doctoral journey presented an understanding, acceptance and value for me which enhanced the legitimacy of looking at the social world in a new ‘alternative’ way. This perhaps did frame my earlier idea of objectivity as the ‘right’ way, before the doctoral process introduced some validity for other ways of seeing things, which eventually aligned with those earlier ideas that there may be no right answer or truth in relation to complex questions. These reflections were a significant part of my own learning in the process of undertaking this research.

It is also evident that the reasons for embarking on this study and the way the study progressed cannot be separated from my broader educational journey. I approached my doctoral study having progressed through an entirely work based graduate journey, which likely presented different experiences in terms of academic socialisation through an emphasis on part time and remote study (Deem and Brehony 2000). This included a professional degree in Early Years Education and an employment based route to Early Years Teacher Status. This experience of being engaged in academic study for a prolonged period spanning 10 years in total, but outside of a traditional full time academic community, and without a consistent cohort and community, increased my curiosity in the nature of methodological understanding, which, as soon as I was introduced to it, seemed so fundamental to the idea of knowledge production within the academy. Furthermore, the concepts explored in this thesis, and the very idea of empirically studying methodology, were of interest because of the complexity and challenge they created. Having experienced a sense of academic success throughout my journey, a very simple personal motivation for embarking on this doctorate was that it represented the biggest challenge available to me and an opportunity to significantly develop my understanding. In identifying something as new, unfamiliar and complex as methodological journeys, I felt that I was able to achieve this. Therefore, my interest in the topic was rooted in understanding my own sense of becoming an academic, my aspirations for embarking on the doctorate as a challenge and my own increasing methodological awareness and questions.

1.7 Synopsis of Chapters

This thesis is presented in two parts, chapters 1, 2 and 3 establish the context, background and design for the study, whilst chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 present the individual and collective accounts and discuss the findings and implications of these.

Chapter 2 introduces the context for my research, exploring a paradigmatic understanding of methodology by outlining understanding of key research paradigms, including positivism, interpretivism and post modernism. It examines existing works which understand methodology as a part of a journey, relevant ideas regarding doctoral identity and the debate between pragmatic and paradigmatic models of teaching research methodology. It is argued that these existing works present a clear opportunity for research which explores the connections between life histories, post graduate training and methodological understanding. This chapter concludes by outlining relevant sociological theory, including socialisation, identity formation and agency.

Chapter 3 presents the research process which was undertaken for this study. It outlines the rationale for the selection of life history inquiry and collective biography and explains how these formed part of my own coherent methodological approach. Research decisions are explained, including the process of selecting the researchers and carrying out the discussions and interviews. This chapter also outlines the process which was followed in order to develop the individual narrative accounts in a way which retained value for the whole stories, but accepted that these could only be presented through my own interpretations. A discussion regarding how this information was analysed is then presented, including the decision to use the interpretative and interruptive lens' which form chapters 5 and 6 respectively. This chapter also outlines the quality criteria applied to the study and explains the ethical issues considerations.

Chapter 4 presents the individual narrative accounts for the 9 researchers and summary accounts for the 2 collective biography sessions and outlines key considerations in the

process through which these were developed. It also presents the significance and utility of these accounts in their own right.

Chapter 5 presents an analysis of the narrative accounts, using an interpretative framework to explore ideas of change and influence in relation to the methodological journeys. It seeks to address two of the central research questions, firstly exploring potential relationships between the individual researcher's life histories and philosophical assumptions and secondly potential relationships between their experiences of post graduate education and their philosophical assumptions. It argues that the researchers' assumptions may be seen as a socially constructed product of their journeys, and cites the significance of post graduate training as the point where methodological consciousness may be introduced. This chapter explores the significance of this to post graduate research training, and of the methodological tensions and conflict which may arise from expectations within, and outside of, the academy.

Chapter 6 introduces further analysis of the narrative accounts, using an interruptive approach to address the remaining research question regarding the ways in which the individual researchers spoke of their perceptions of their methodological journeys. This chapter asserts that the methodological identities and methodological journeys presented by the researchers are framed by their experiences, assumptions and the social context in which they were shared. This is related back to the ideas of methodological consciousness and this chapter asserts its significance to the identity, narration, understanding and perceived agency of the individual doctoral researchers.

Chapter 7 presents the conclusions, findings and implications of the study. It summarises the view of methodological journeys as a process through which philosophical assumptions are socially constructed. The significance of methodological consciousness to this process is

asserted and its value in terms of aspects including identity, understanding and agency. On the basis of this, potential implications for the teaching and learning of methodology are considered, including an assertion of the value of teaching paradigmatic understandings and embracing methodological diversity at post graduate level. A case is also made for the benefits of researchers actively engaging with opportunities to contextualise their methodological understandings, and for research supervisors to encourage and support this.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is structured around three broad, but distinct areas of thinking which are integral to the contextualisation and understanding of the topic. The first section of the chapter focuses on the philosophical concepts and debates related to understandings of methodological assumptions and positions; this includes ideas of epistemology and ontology and their connections to paradigmatic understandings of methodology. The second section explores existing works within this topic area, including research relating to the teaching of methodology at post graduate level, and highlights the opportunity to build upon existing understandings and contribute to knowledge in this subject area. The final section is concerned with theories relating to the sociological processes through which methodology may be conceptualised as part of a journey, including ideas regarding the social construction of behaviour and thinking, such as identity formation and questions of human agency.

2.2 Methodological Debates: A Paradigmatic Spectrum

Theoretical Foundations

Understandings of personal methodological thinking as related to debates about the nature of ‘truth’, and underpinned by ontological and epistemological assumptions, are integral to this study. Methodology is understood here as a personal, philosophical set of assumptions regarding postulates relating to truth, reality and knowledge. Although a methodology may inform the research methods an individual applies, it is very clearly distinguished here from the use of specific practical methods (Clough & Nutbrown 2012) both conceptually and on the basis that there are a myriad of other factors which may influence these (e.g. funding, audience – see Gorard 2002). The term methodological ‘position’ or ‘paradigm’ is frequently used to conceptualise individual ‘positions’ in relation to the aforementioned sets of

assumptions. Many models (e.g. Lathers 2006) assign labels to specific ‘positions’ and this is something which will be explored further throughout this section. The concept of Ontology concerns assumptions about, and concepts and understandings of the nature of, ‘social reality’ (Cohen et al 2000), whilst Epistemology as the ‘theory of knowledge’ (Rosenberg 2015:11) concerns assumptions, concepts and understandings of what can be ‘known’ about social reality.

Frequently held as central to understandings of the existence of personal methodological positioning is an acknowledgement of connections between an individual’s epistemological and ontological understanding and assumptions, and their methodological position or approach to social research (Burrell and Morgan 1979, Hitchcock and Hughes 1995, Usher 1996, Cohen 2000, Lincoln et al 2011). That is to say that if we take an individual’s methodology as being their personal philosophy of the ‘science of research’ (Kothari 2011) then in part this will be linked to, or a product of, their understanding of social reality and knowledge. Whilst the nature of this connection may be theorised differently, for example Hitchcock and Hughes (1995:21) suggest that there is a process of ontological views ‘giving rise’ to epistemological and likewise on to methodological. Moring (2001:347) meanwhile talks of each set of views ‘constraining’ the next, for paradigmatic understandings these aspects of thinking are seen as inextricably linked.

As a basis for understanding, the potential contrast between the possible extremes of thinking in each of these areas is exemplified relatively efficiently by a conceptual model (below) developed by Burrell and Morgan (1979). Their linear subjective-objective continuum presents an ontological spectrum, ranging from ‘realism’ to ‘nominalism’, parallel to an epistemological spectrum ranging from ‘positivism’ to ‘anti-positivism.’ In simple terms, the

ontological extremes involve an individual viewing reality as either an external feature ‘imposing itself on... consciousness’ (Cohen et al 2000:8) or an internal product of consciousness itself. The related epistemological extremes involve holding the assumption either that hard ‘factual’ knowledge can be collected about this reality or that knowledge of social reality can only ever be a personal and subjective construct. In the context of social research, it is theorised that a researcher’s broad philosophical ‘world view’ influences where on the ontological spectrum they situate their interpretation of social reality, which in turn determines their assumptions about what can be ‘known’ about it and therefore the practical way in which they set about researching it (see Burrell and Morgan 1979, Hitchcock & Hughes 1995, Cohen 2000).

Figure 2.1 Subjective-Objective Continuum

Subjective		Objective
Nominalism	← Ontology →	Realism
Anti-positivism	← Epistemology →	Positivism
Voluntarism	← Human Nature →	Determinism

Burrell and Morgan (1979)

Similarly to the subjective-objective continuum, the connection to a paradigmatic understanding has also been illustrated in other ways. One example being Lather’s (2006) paradigmatic chart (included in appendix 3) which effectively defines a set of paradigms by outlining their related epistemological and ontological statements, metaphors and questions. For example her chart progresses from identifying positivism epistemologically as seeing ‘one truth’, through to interpretivism as understanding there to be ‘many truths’ and ‘deconstructivism’ as taking ‘truths’ as social constructions. Seemingly suggesting that

epistemological and ontological understandings, may just as easily be considered markers or identifiers of methodological positions as influencers. Lather's descriptors also extend to using metaphor and questions to support definitions of paradigms, for example stating that if positivism was a colour it would be 'blue... scientific/cool' as opposed to deconstructivism as 'black... uncertain' (2006).

Whilst epistemological and ontological assumptions appear to be consistently adopted defining factors in theories relating to the development of methodological positioning, there are other personal assumptions which have also been considered important. For example Burrell and Morgan's (1979) model also included a scale relating to interpretations of human nature, ranging from 'determinism' to 'voluntarism' and Lincoln et al (2011:111) developed a whole table of related methodological considerations including areas such as ethics and 'control'. These factors may perhaps be considered as relating more to practice and purpose, and possibly therefore arising from original philosophical positioning, but I also believe that they begin to illustrate the difficulty in trying to condense such complex considerations into a simple model. Indeed, the very nature of reducing a concept as broad as epistemology into a scale can be seen to require the adoption of a specific epistemological position itself. That is to say, there are inevitable 'positivist' elements to the reduction and labelling involved in moving from philosophic ideas to a philosophic 'position'.

Building on this understanding, the ideas of Pring (2005) are helpful to the foundations of this study, primarily because, in effect, they illustrate the potential link between the philosophical landscape outlined above, and some of the social constructionist theories which are detailed in the section 2.4. Pring argues that theoretical understanding of 'paradigms' and 'opposing positions' in relation to philosophical understanding have created a 'false dualism' through

excessive focus on contrasting positions (2005:229). This distinctly post-modernist understanding highlights the adoption of a specific epistemological position and a subsequent reduction of methodologies almost into narrow identities; which begin to play a part in socially constructing individual methodological positions. In essence, the narrowing into what Pring labels 'Paradigm A or B' is seen as creating a community of researchers where researchers are all assumed, and maybe even encouraged, to align with either one or the other. Pring asserts that this model, in assuming the presence of only 'one exclusive way of describing the world... obscures, or eliminates others' (2005:230). Interestingly Pring cites Guba & Lincoln's (1989) work as a key example of this 'false dualism', which is perhaps acknowledged in their acceptance, in later commentary, that 'confluence... differences and controversies' may be a more productive focus than 'contentions' in exploring paradigms which they acknowledge can become 'interwoven' (Lincoln et al 2011:97). In particular this contributes to the research question here regarding experiences of post graduate training, and how this conceptualises methodology. With this understanding, it is my intention to enter this research with a broader view of methodology, as a much wider, perhaps multi-dimensional, continuum. However, whilst embracing this approach on theoretical grounds, there appears to be little research which explores this connection in detail (see section 2.3) which therefore presented an opportunity for this study to add to thinking in this area.

Taking this perspective further, another potential complication with theorising methodological positions is the potential for an assumption here that academic researchers will have both a level of methodological consciousness and some clarity around their own assumptions. Whilst Pring's (2005) perspective may lead to the conclusion that there are methodological assumptions involved in identifying labels and positions themselves, there are also other perspectives, which assert the rejection of the idea of any fixed philosophical

position, or the adoption of the idea of multiple positions (which may otherwise be seen as conflicting). An interesting example of this are the varying presentations of ‘pragmatism’ either as a paradigm in its own right with ‘multiple positions’ (Feilzer 2010) or as a model which asserts that an individual may adopt a methodology which is independent from a philosophical idea of reality and knowledge (Greene et al 2001) focussed instead purely on the research ‘problem...and consequences’ (Feilzer 2010:7). Whether it is argued that pragmatism is a practical, rather than philosophical position, or whether indeed both perspectives may be true of specific researchers, the key consideration to this study is how a broad conceptual understanding of methodology as a philosophical concept relates to investigating the journeys of researchers with varying levels of awareness, a conscious rejection, or multiple understandings of methodological positions. Therefore again the approach here is intended to avoid narrowing this landscape on the basis that this could potentially exclude some approaches or understandings that don’t fit with a model or label.

Positivism & Interpretivism - The Pursuit of Truth

When conceptualising a paradigm, or methodological position, as a specific set of ontological and epistemological assumptions, there are two broad ‘dominant’ research paradigms (Yang 2014) which are often used as reference points. These are referred to as the ‘positivist’ paradigm and the ‘interpretivist’ paradigm. The positivist paradigm, which adopts principles from the natural sciences (Wahayuni 2012), is defined by an ontological view that an external objective social reality exists, and an epistemological view that we can obtain knowledge about human behaviour through scientific ‘observation and reason’ (Cohen et al 2000:7).

When a positivist approach is adopted, a researcher will commonly use quantitative methods including questionnaires or statistics in an attempt to establish generalisable data regarding social phenomena (Punch 2013). Conversely the interpretivist paradigm is often

characterised as a response to positivism, and thus frequently treated as interchangeable with terms such as ‘anti-positivism’ (Cohen et al 2000). The interpretivist perspective assumes that social reality, meaning and knowledge are all socially constructed and that multiple understandings of them may exist (Petty et al 2012). It accepts that research is subjective and that the researcher cannot be separated from the social reality which forms the subject of their research. When employing an interpretivist approach researchers will commonly use less structured, qualitative methods, for example interviews, observations or ethnographic studies (Taylor et al 2015). Both paradigms represent relatively broad schools of thought, and within each broad area there may be significant differences and philosophical debates regarding approach and quality criteria. Some understandings which may be described as interpretivist may adopt aspirations relating to positivist ideas surrounding replicability and validity for example, whilst for others these concepts will not be considered relevant (Seale 1999), conversely some positivist approaches will seek to make very explicit the limit of statistical correlation as evidence of causal relationships in the social world (Moffit 2005).

When exploring the historical context and understanding of the development of concepts of methodological understanding, relevant due to the way it connects social context with their construction, the broad positivist and interpretivist paradigms are generally presented (Guba & Lincoln 1994, Cohen et al 2000, Barbour 2008, Lincoln et al 2011). Lincoln et al (2011:98) highlight that in the social sciences these positions are ‘interwoven with’ and emerge from different disciplines, including psychology and sociology. From a historical perspective there are views regarding the nature of the ‘dominant’ paradigm, with positivism summarised as gaining dominance after arising from the natural sciences in the twentieth century in what Denzin & Lincoln (1994) term the ‘modernist phase’. At this point the application of quantitative methods was largely seen as preferable to an interpretivist paradigm which critics

characterised as ‘soft and unscientific’ (Snape & Spencer 2003:8). Similarly the late twentieth century is often characterised as the ‘interpretivist turn’ in summaries, with the construction of this shift attributed to factors including increasing amounts of literature contesting the legitimacy of applying experimental methods to the social world (Snape & Spencer 2003), but also the increasing availability of work by continental philosophers translated into the English language (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea 2015). There is an opportunity for this study to contribute to understanding here, particularly in relation to doctoral researchers’ post graduate research training and understanding of research. This is notable in the context of little empirical evidence relating to the theoretical link between perspectives arising in literature, as a consequence, cause or indicator of methodological thinking.

Whilst explorations of methodological understanding and social context generally focus on a fairly contemporary understanding, its epistemological origins reveal that the philosophical questions at the heart of methodological debate have actually been posed for centuries. At the risk of some over-simplification of a much broader philosophical landscape, historically at the centre of differences between understandings of ‘analytical’ and ‘continental’ approaches to philosophy lies a very similar debate. For analytical philosophers ‘scientific rigour’, reasoning and objectivity are held as key to understanding, meanwhile continental philosophers traditionally adopt a more hermeneutic approach, on the basis of the perceived inadequacy of science to answer the ‘big’ questions (Critchley 1997:348). Egginton & Sandbothe (2012:2) summarise this debate asserting that analytic philosophers ‘dismiss continental philosophers as... too literary’ lacking ‘rigour’ and ‘precision’ whilst continental philosophers ‘ridicule analytic philosophy for its pretensions to scientificity’ and ‘spurn’ it as ‘irrelevant’. Thus the epistemological debate was already central to key works presented as

far back as the 18th century by analytical empiricists including Hume and Berkeley and early Continental thinking arising from the works of Kant.

At the heart of both the philosophical and paradigmatic debate are essentially epistemological questions surrounding the very nature and definition of 'truth'. The positivist paradigm is effectively founded on a reliance on a correspondence theory of truth (May 1997:11). Bridges (1999) summarises that this theory of truth, represents the closest theory to what might be understood as a 'common sense' approach, the concept being that a statement is true if it 'corresponds with a 'fact' (1999:602). However, he continues to highlight the circularity created by the need for the corresponding fact to be defined as true itself, which returns us to the need for acceptance of the possibility of detachment from social structures and values in order to present reality as it really is. Ultimately this argument leads back to the concept of the 'infinite regress of reason' in that every 'truth' is resting on an assumption for which we will eventually have no facts to correspond with. This problem led Descartes to philosophise, from a rationalist epistemological position, that knowledge can actually only be sourced by 'working out to an external world' from 'indubitable truths' (Noonan 1999:7). Conversely an interpretivist perspective may see truth as the product of socially constructed and 'inter-subjective' meanings (Zimmer 2006). It could be argued however, that both paradigms operate within an academy where 'truth by verification' has at least some common currency, with seemingly some form of shared acceptance that work presented in any form should be open to the critique, challenge and development of other academics. This understanding of truth may be seen as significant to doctoral study as a process of academic socialisation and contributes to the research question regarding relationships between philosophical assumptions and experiences of post graduate training.

Deconstructivism, Post Modernism & Post Structuralism

Understandings of postmodernism, post-structuralism and in turn deconstructivism are relevant to this study, both due to their impact on my own methodological understanding and their potential relevance to the understandings of the researchers. However, the very nature of postmodern thinking means that it does not easily lend itself to one singular, fixed definition (Orston et al 2013), most notably because the rejection of this aspect is itself a fundamental principal of the approach (Cohen et al 2013). Postmodernism is generally understood as a reaction to ‘institutionalised modernism’ (Brooker 2014), which is perhaps best characterised, in sociological terms, as understanding social reality as part of a grand narrative containing certainty and absolute answers (Meachem & Buendia 1999) which may be uncovered through analysis. Broadly, it can be understood as rejecting rationalist claims, taking a distinctly anti-positivist position and seeing truths as ‘created, rather than discovered’ (Copan 2007). Post-modernism is sceptical of authority and metanarratives and doubts the existence of one fixed meaning (Crumley 2009). In this respect it is seen as arising from scepticism, as a ‘negative’ form of philosophy, which sets out to undermine other philosophies claiming to be in possession of ultimate truth’ (Sim 2013). This scepticism was perhaps most notably presented by Lyotard (1984), who criticised the metanarratives which existed in modernist understanding and theories, including Marxism. Due to its rejection of fixed, objective understandings, it is interesting to note the criticism of categorised, paradigmatic models of postmodernism, which may be seen as purely presenting a modernist interpretation of post modernism (Brooker 2014). One example of this is Hassan’s (1985) scheme of contrasting features of postmodernism, which contrasts aspects such as modernity’s value of narrative and semantics, with postmodernity’s anti-narrative and rhetoric. This has some relevance to the potential tensions in this study, between conceptual

models used as a reference point for understanding, and the overall methodological approach, the intention being to avoid these models defining the structure of the study itself.

Post-structuralism, perhaps even more so than postmodernism, also presents complications and challenges in terms of definitions. Whilst, postmodernism concerns a broader rejection of modernist understandings, post-structuralism can be seen as focussing more specifically on challenging the structural and systematic understandings of social reality, most notably systems of language and meaning. Because of this, many key post-modern thinkers, including Lyotard and Derrida, may seemingly interchangeably be defined as post-structuralist thinkers, depending on the specifics of the topic or argument under discussion. Post-structuralism has roots in the works of analytical philosophers including Heidegger, Husserl and Nietzsche (Williams 2005) and holds that both language, and the 'knowledge' it conveys have limitations (Belsey 2002) and that the process, context and history of knowledge production itself should be the focus of study (Strega 2005). It also asserts the 'local' and individual nature of the production, and ownership, of meaning (Hughes 2010). The works of Derrida are often held as central to post-structuralist thinking (Williams 2005) and he is frequently cited as the 'father' of deconstructivism (Conram 2004). Derrida held that language is a set of signs, which take meaning only from their contrast with other signs (Rorty 1995) and thus the role of deconstruction is to explore their production, beyond merely analysing their opposition to each other. Derrida (1991) adds that deconstruction is not a method or procedure, it is however often characterised as a paradigm, concerned with uncertainty, challenge and critique (Lather 2006). A key aspect of Derrida's understanding of deconstructivism is its focus on exploring the possibilities of taken-for-granted elements and assumptions upon which communications are based. This is seen as significant here, in the context of the potential for exploring varying levels of consciousness and understanding of

individual assumptions. Furthermore in terms of educational research Foucault also argued that pedagogical institutions hold ‘power’ and are a key part of the normalisation of assumptions in societies (Foucault 1982). This, in essence, links very closely to the central research question regarding the role of post graduate education in shaping methodological assumptions.

Post-structuralism receives some criticism for its complex, inaccessible and potentially vague nature (Williams 2005), although it could be argued that this is both necessary and inevitable, given the complexity of its focus and arguments. From a personal perspective, post-structuralist readings have led me to start with a (somewhat simplified) practical understanding of meaning, reduction and deconstructivism as relevant to the research process. This understanding takes that practically positivism may reduce a question or observation to several options (sometimes the detail of this may then be expanded by introducing sub choices or descriptive language) and thus the extent of what can be captured has significant limitations. In turn, or perhaps in response, interpretivism may instead adopt an open qualitative format, with any number of words available to capture the ‘reality’ of the situation. Post-structuralism however, would argue that language itself, in symbolic form, remains a limitation, a representation of reality, and that the deconstruction of this, the context and the many possible meanings is the only way to capture an authentic understanding (rather than representation). It is with this understanding, in terms of limitations and depth with which I have approached this study, and I note that this is a key factor for my own interpretations of the methodological understanding of the researchers (see Chapter 3).

2.2 Doctoral Journeys: The Development of a Personal Methodology

Methodology as a Journey

There is some existing literature which seeks to explore methodology as a journey, however it is immediately apparent that this almost exclusively approaches the topic from an auto-ethnographic or auto-biographical perspective. There is of course great value in these perspectives as authentic, informed accounts allowing the most ‘holistic and intimate’ analysis of the information (Chang 2008:2); a sample of which are explored below. It does however indicate the opportunity for this study in seeking to explore methodological journeys from an alternative perspective. Both the consideration of a collection of methodological journeys, and the potential for some co-construction of these journeys between researchers, have the potential to elicit considerations which have not previously been evident. In particular this has contributed to a research question which seeks to explore ‘how’ the individuals speak of their perceptions of their journeys.

Oakley (1999) presents, what appears to be, a relatively unusual account of a personal methodological journey, over a 10-15 year period of her career, resulting in a shift from a very interpretive feminist methodology to a more positivist stance and increased value for quantitative experimental models and randomised control trials. Despite its contrast with views on shifts in dominant thinking (Lincoln et al 2010); I am immediately drawn to question whether this is actually unusual as a direction of travel, or just unusual as an account, given that the application of a more biographical approach in order to analyse this journey may potentially be seen as redundant by a researcher who has ‘arrived’ at a more positivist perspective. Oakley cites her experiences in a health care unit, where the ‘dominant’ methodologies had a quantitative focus as pivotal to this; she outlines a realisation

of the potential of these methods as the best means to establish ‘an approximation to what is really going on’ (1999:252).

A contrasting journey from a positivist approach to a more interpretivist approach is presented in auto-biographic format by Bernauer (2012), who uses the concept of an ‘unfolding methodological identity’. Bernauer’s maps his journey as a series of eleven ‘twists’, highlighting dilemmas and changes in thinking through creating a dialogue between characters he names ‘self 1’ and ‘self 2’. These twists focus on both personal and professional life events, including conducting research, changing professional roles and getting married. Interestingly Bernauer presents the implications as a set of questions about the formation of methodological identity, most of which are very relevant to this study. These include questions about how graduates are taught about methodology and how early identity statements, such as ‘I’m not a math person’ may impact later identification with methodological approaches.

In many accounts of methodological journeys and choices, there appears to be a sense of conflict, confusion and challenge. For example; from the perspective of doctoral students, there sometimes appears to be an element of surprise at the methodological conflict encountered in embarking on the process of tackling the philosophical assumptions and implications which form part of developing ‘expertise’ in research. Probert (2006) writes of a journey from her initial ‘knee jerk reaction’ to methodology; as questions which get in the way of ‘doing’ doctoral research, to seeing it as an essential, messy and reflective process. She cites key readings and conversations as influencing her eventual decision not to ‘stay faithful’ to one position, in the interests of ‘rigour’. However, in relation to ‘socialisation’ her journey only seems to acknowledge the impact of the very immediate secondary process of

actually engaging in research. Conversely another doctoral student, Quaye (2007), starts his account of the challenges encountered in his methodological journey with information of aspects of identity engrained in very early experience. In outlining a journey to a much more interpretive narrative approach to his doctoral thesis, he sees culture and personal experience as being very relevant to his direction. Again I believe this presents questions for this study regarding how an individual methodological stance might impact the perceived relationships; for example does the value for personal narratives and an auto-ethnographic stance lead to Quaye (2007) seeing the detail in life history, contexts and cultures as more relevant than may be the case from Probert's (2006) stance? By posing questions about relationships between methodology and both broader life history and post graduate training, this study will also provide a more in-depth understanding about the potential direct and in-direct connections individual researchers make between their earlier experiences and later philosophical understanding.

From the perspective of a more experienced researcher, Dadds (2009:278) details the impact of one specific action research project into the 'lived experiences' of action researchers on her methodological journey, outlining its challenge to her 'attachment to 'objectivity' and 'detachment''. The focus of her realisation appears to relate predominantly to a change in her ontological assumptions and concepts of the connection between 'self' and reality. Another experienced researcher Lather (2007) writes at length of her personal methodological journey in her text entitled 'Getting Lost.' Describing her perceived value for an ontological location where the researcher has questioned the 'very ground of science' to the point where they question whether research based knowledge is 'even possible' (2007: vii). Lather's whole text regarding her journey is grounded in deconstructing her experiences, conflicts and challenges in researching the experiences of women with HIV/Aids (1997). Similarly

Riessman (2003), in her writings about narrative enquiry, refers to her research about divorce as pivotal to changes to her epistemological assumptions, suggesting she now looks back with ‘embarrassment’ at the gap between her former ‘fragmented’, coding based research practices and the social world (2003:331). The relevance of the potential impact of research practice itself on the direction of travel is highly relevant, methodologically and analytically, to this study, but these journeys also present me with potential questions about pivotal points in individual journeys and of whether researchers ever reach a point where they feel comfortable in a static methodological position. This was of particular relevance in informing the research question regarding the way in which the individual researchers speak of their journeys, and presents an opportunity for this study to contribute new insight into the way individual, and collective groups of, researchers present and construct their own journeys.

Methodology as a Taught Subject

In common with Pring’s (2005) assertions, commentary regarding the teaching of research methodology appears to broadly accept that the introduction of paradigmatic understandings of methodology, may have a role in the social construction of methodological ideas. However, different interpretations of the potential impacts of this appear to have resulted in two contrasting perspectives on the practice of teaching research methods; namely the ‘pragmatic’ approach and the ‘paradigmatic’ approach (Breuer et al 2007). Advocating the pragmatic perspective Onwugebugie and Leech (2005) present an argument for ‘taking the ‘Q’ (Qualitative/Quantitative) out of teaching research, instead suggesting the introduction of a mixed methodological framework to develop ‘pragmatist’ researchers and avoid division (2005:267). Similar perspectives are presented by others including Howard et al (2003) regarding the need to teach ‘evidence based practice’ and by Gilner et al (2011) in teaching ‘applied’ research. Conversely from a paradigmatic perspective; Lather (2006:37) details

‘paradigm talk’ as the ‘gold standard’ of teaching; advocating the direct teaching of the diversity of methodologies, to allow researchers to confront the real philosophical issues. In effect, the resulting question centres on whether it’s desirable, or even possible, for the practice and purpose of research to be separated from the philosophy of research. In relation to this, the pragmatic view does appear to be at risk of over simplifying the issue in hand, grounded in a premise that if the different assumptions underpinning paradigms are never introduced then conflicting methodological assumptions will never be held. This view would appear to limit the process of construction of personal methodological positions purely to the stage where a researcher is taught about methodology, which seems to be at odds with the literature above regarding methodological journeys, but remains highly relevant to my research questions. Indeed Mertens (2010) challenges this directly advocating for a mixed method approach, but rejecting the notion that pragmatism can ever be seen as a-paradigmatic. Instead presenting an argument that an awareness, and examination, of philosophical positions relating to mixed methods is essential, the alternative being that:

“If researchers do not acknowledge (or know) the philosophical assumptions that underlie their works, this does not mean that they have no philosophical assumptions. It merely means that they are operating with unexamined assumptions.” (2010: 9)

Furthermore, Pallas (2001) asserts that academic institutions have a responsibility for supporting doctoral students to be ready for the ‘epistemological diversity’ of a research community beyond the micro environment of their programme.

Guidance surrounding the teaching of research methods at undergraduate (Lawrence 2008) and post-graduate (ESRC 2015) level, appears to suggest that progression from an alignment

with a more pragmatic understanding to a more paradigmatic understanding is itself part of the process of a researcher developing to doctoral level. However, the European Social Resource Council only set a requirement for an ‘overview of the philosophy of research methods’ (ESRC 2015). In addition, the Arts and Humanities Research Council guidelines, which acknowledge ‘overlap’ with the social sciences, aims ‘not to be prescriptive’ regarding teaching at post graduate level (AHRC 2016), the QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education for Doctoral Degrees (QAA 2015) asserts only a requirement for students to ‘justify’ methodology and a review by Tinkler & Jackson (2010) of 20 institutions found that expectations of PhD students (more so than students at other levels) were ‘conceptualised and operationalised in diverse ways’. Therefore in the context of an apparent level of autonomy for institutions providing doctoral programmes, it is crucial to note that there appears to be limited research to contribute to the aforementioned debate, despite subsequent interpretations potentially being of very direct practical use for teaching models. This research therefore seeks to contribute to knowledge of this area and to consider potential implications for taught programmes, through introducing a broader exploration of researchers’ experiences of models of post graduate research training, in the context of their life histories.

In considering the origins of the alternative (and very specific) view of the acquisition, and potential for separation, of methodological ideas through direct teaching, a review conducted by Muis et al (2006) does provide some additional context. Muis et al looked at 19 empirical studies regarding the development of epistemological beliefs, concluding that these beliefs could be both ‘domain-general and domain-specific’, therefore suggesting that it is possible for an individual to hold general assumptions that they apply across multiple domains, e.g. psychology and mathematics, but also for an individual to hold assumptions that are specific

only to certain areas. This would imply that a researcher could develop (or be 'taught') assumptions which they hold specifically in relation to methodology, without these necessarily having to have a connection to those in other areas in their wider life. However importantly, this conclusion was reached through examining studies with a focus ranging from early years education to higher education, with none of the studies being specific to academic researchers. This leads back to questions regarding the relationship between the development (and consciousness) of these assumptions and researcher development as a process of specialising, or acquiring expertise, in research. In relation to some of the studies cited by Muis et al (2006) in their proposed process based models for the development of epistemological beliefs (e.g. Kuhn et al 2000) potentially omit consideration of a possible phase of development which includes 'specialisation' in epistemology itself. This development could include the necessity as a researcher in the social sciences to engage in deeper 'epistemic doubt', which has also been seen as a pivotal factor in the development of epistemological assumptions (Bendixen 2002).

A study by Coronel Llamas and Boza (2011) which did focus more specifically on doctoral level research adds some weight to a suggestion by Etherington (2004) that there may be potential connections between the methodologies embraced by teachers, and the methods employed by their students. Coronel Llamas and Boza conducted semi-structured interviews with 11 students and analysed the content of five doctoral programmes and 54 subsequent student research projects within their own university in Spain. They concluded that these doctoral students 'adopted and used methodological pluralism' (2011:87) in their research, when this formed part of their preceding coursework. The main focus of their study was evaluative, with their own position appearing to correlate with a pragmatic view, thus an effective programme appears to have been perceived as one which offered students the

technical input to become 'pragmatic' researchers. With this in mind, their findings make a connection between teaching of methodology and subsequent methods employed, but there is very little consideration of the role of students' resulting personal methodological assumptions. This raises some questions about whether it's possible to decipher here if the students were actually employing the methods in response to perceived expectations or those which they felt most confident with practically, or indeed those which best aligned with their personal methodological assumptions.

In addition to formal teaching, the process of doctoral supervision may also be considered as having the potential to impact on, and shape, an individual researcher's methodological ideas. One key element of the relationship between a supervisor and doctoral candidate is the level of ownership and autonomy a candidate has in relation to the methodology applied in their thesis. A study by Moxham et al (2013) suggested that expectations and understandings here may vary significantly. They collected questionnaire responses from 53 PhD Candidates with 47.2% of the candidates agreeing that methodology was a personal responsibility, whilst 41.5% saw it as a shared responsibility. Meanwhile 48.4% of supervisors saw it as a shared responsibility. Moxham et al (2013) suggest that ownership of topic and methodology may be a key aspect of students fully engaging in a doctoral programme, and thus presumably developing their methodological thinking. Indeed Easterby-Smith et al (2002:15) assert that a level of 'technical expertise' is a more important characteristic of a successful supervisor than in-depth knowledge of the specific topic and methods. Seibold et al (2007) argue that the role of the supervisor in developing methodology is an under researched area, detailing one example of a relationship and advocating the supervisors role as a 'mentor or coach' in the complex exchanges surrounding a student's methodological ideas. Furthermore Hall and Burns (2009:49) specifically suggest that the success students experience may be connected

to the 'extent to which they enact identities which are valued by their mentor'. However, typically the primary focus of research surrounding doctoral supervision appears to be its effectiveness in terms of completion/retention (Begin & Gerard 2013) and/or student interpretations of the experience (Holbrook et al 2014). There does therefore appear to be an opportunity to contribute to understanding of the potential impact of supervision on the direction of travel in terms of questions relating to post graduate training and methodological thinking.

Doctoral Identity: Developing Methodological Consciousness

Whilst the more obvious potential influences of, and relationships between, the direct processes of supervision and teaching are key to this study, the intention is also to consider the doctoral process as situated within a much broader individual context. This is a key point asserted by McAlpine (2012) who draws on narrative research over a 5 year period involving 80 doctoral students. She concludes that doctoral identity as a whole must be considered to include ideas of 'individual agency' and to incorporate 'student's pasts and imagined futures'. Whilst McAlpine considers identity in much broader terms, with little direct reference to methodological assumptions, she asserts that there is an opportunity to give 'greater attention to how the academic is embedded in personal intentions' (2012:45) in contrast to much of the existing research which focuses on 'doctoral experiences only' (2012:39). More specifically, she highlights aspects such as 'life changing events' 'relationships' and 'emotional support' as relevant to doctoral identity. Labaree (2003) presents another key consideration in relation to this understanding asserting that commonly educational researchers have a wealth of experience and have often 'already lived a life' before starting their doctoral journey. Indeed, whilst based on information in the United

States of America, he points out that the average age of a doctoral student in the social sciences is 34.

Sweitzer (2009) also utilises a broader understanding of doctoral identity, applying 'social network theory' to interviews with doctoral students and their 'self-identified' partners to consider the myriad of personal relationships which may influence individual students. She concludes that 'personal and professional lives merge' and that this can have an 'enormous impact' on identity (2009:30). Sweitzer suggests that more research is required across a 'variety of disciplines' to understand the relevance of personal relationships to doctoral identity. Whilst personal relationships are not a specific identified focus here, their significance to individual life histories is recognised, and as such this work highlights their potential relevance to methodological understandings as an aspect of individual doctoral identity.

A more specific intention for this study is to consider the significance of both the broader life courses of individual researchers, and their experience of post graduate research programmes. However a key, and seemingly under researched, aspect which brings these two elements together is consideration of the introduction of a heightened methodological awareness as part of this identity formation. If, as Mertens asserts, prior to developing this understanding a researcher is merely operating with 'unexamined assumptions' (2010: 9), then, assuming a programme does introduce these ideas, how do individuals connect these with previously unexamined experiences which precede this awareness? Furthermore there are also questions about how this newly acquired awareness may itself impact on an individual's assumptions. And if this awareness is not directly presented by a programme, then it may be asked what

role the inevitable methodological question presented by constructing a doctoral thesis (Drake and Heath 2011) or indeed subsequent research projects has in this process?

The term ‘methodological consciousness’ is very relevant here, and is relatively widely used, appearing to have some foundations in later interpretations of the work of continental philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (Gronin & Plant 2014). Gadamer’s work ‘Truth and Method’ insisted that the individual is unavoidably ‘historically effected’ and as such ‘the life of the mind consists precisely in recognising oneself in other being (1975:353)’. Yet whilst many advocates for a reflexive voice in research in the social sciences may share value for this philosophical concept (Walsh 2003), there appears to be little research about what it might mean to become ‘methodologically conscious’ as part of a researcher’s journey, and how this may relate to wider experience. If it is indeed aligned only with reflexivity, then there also appears to be potential for ‘methodological consciousness’ itself to be considered to occupy a methodological position. However, it has been argued that there remains a clear distinction between entering into a process of reflexivity and having consciousness of methodological assumptions (Sweetman 2003, Adkins 2004). Practically Nyström et al (2001) suggest that Gadamer’s consciousness argument focuses on a necessity to ‘understand ourselves and our place in history’, but as Lather (2006) indicates, introduction to the philosophical landscape of social science research should be seen as key to being able to engage with this effectively. The distinction between reflexivity and methodological consciousness does not appear to have been explored in any empirical studies and presents an opportunity for this study to further investigate the process and influences in creating individual awareness of, and ability to articulate, personal philosophical assumptions.

Existing literature suggests that it would be an over-simplification to assert that becoming methodologically conscious is an instantaneous event, indeed many suggest that the process of methodological becoming continues throughout their career (Lather 2006). However, the doctoral process is generally considered to introduce new methodological questions (Drake & Heath 2011) and it has been asserted that ‘methodological self-consciousness’ is a feature which is relatively unique to a thesis at this level across all subjects (Newbury 2011). Indeed, an analysis of 24 research papers in key educational journals, Koro-Ljungberg et al (2009), concluded that there may later be an unhelpful tendency for more experienced researchers to again consider epistemological assumptions as an ‘unconscious process’. Therefore, for this study, there is an opportunity to explore the relevance of this specific stage of post graduate research training to individual methodological journeys and assumptions.

If methodological consciousness is considered part of a wider individual doctoral identity, then it may be seen as relevant that there is also research which suggests that ‘recognition’ within an academic community (McAlpine et al 2008) is significant in shaping this identity. Particularly when in turn a comparative study of two universities, suggested research cultures can vary significantly even within a university and particularly for students taking different part and full time routes (Deem & Brohener 2000). Small scale research by Golde (2000) also found that academic integration, to which methodology may be considered relevant, was of greater significance than social integration to doctoral retention and success. The potential interplay between individual history and relationships and the nature of a post graduate training experience is obviously a vast area of research, however it is clear that it may offer some considerations for exploration of methodological journeys, consciousness and identity here. In addition, whilst the consideration of literature regarding individual methodological journeys, the teaching of methodology and doctoral identity all present useful understandings, it is apparent that there is an opportunity for research which looks more specifically at

methodology as an aspect of identity, in the context of life experiences, including education. It appears that this information could add value to existing thinking about the teaching and supervision of methodology, as well consideration for the relevance of reflexivity and role of methodological consciousness. It is therefore argued that there is a significant opportunity for this research to contribute to knowledge about the nature, significance and role of becoming methodologically conscious as part of a researcher's methodological journey.

2.3 Theoretical Framework: Socialisation

In order to explore the development of methodological assumptions and understandings as part of a wider journey, a key consideration here is the potential connections between ideas, behaviours and individual social experiences. This section focuses on theories relating to the key sociological processes of socialisation, identity formation and human agency, which are seen as essential in terms of developing a theoretical framework through which will be drawn on in part two to consider possible interpretations of the individual narratives.

Socialisation

Socialisation is the broad term used to conceptualise the lifelong process individuals go through in order to learn, and to adapt their behaviours, in accordance with the social group and structures around them. This may include the acquisition of skills, habits, values, ideologies and norms of a particular society, group or organisation (Marsh & Keating 2006, Singh 2015). Singh defines this as the mechanism through which 'social and cultural continuity are maintained' (2015:170).

In considering methodological understanding as a social construction, my foundations lie in an understanding of theories of socialisation originating from the seminal works of Berger

and Luckmann (1966). This perspective offers two key considerations for both the design and interpretations in this study; firstly its proposal of two distinct areas of socialisation, primary and secondary, are seen as related to the decision to explore individual life histories (including early primary socialisation) and post graduate education (distinctly secondary socialisation) as key elements within individual methodological journeys. Secondly its consideration of the relevance of expertise in shaping individual realities has implications for considering the potential role of post graduate training in shaping researchers 'expertise' and understanding in relation to social reality.

Berger and Luckmann's theories of 'socialisation' and the 'social construction of reality' assume a constant re-evaluation of individual understanding and expectations through interactions, for example with family, colleagues or mass media. A powerful stage of 'primary' socialisation is seen to occur through childhood, with 'secondary' socialisation continuing throughout an individual's life. Thus it is argued that whilst experiences throughout our lives shape our ideas, opinions and beliefs, this is underpinned by key experiences in our early childhood. Berger and Luckmann propose that challenging the taken-for-granted aspects of the reality of everyday life involves engaging in a 'deliberate, but by no means easy effort' (1966:4). However, at the same time they also discuss the role of expertise in shaping the individual view of reality, suggesting that with the correct knowledge and experience a task which may present a problem or challenge for one, may equally be part of the everyday routine reality for another. What is interesting here is that, in the case of methodological ideas, and the possibility of epistemological and ontological doubt, the individual has the opportunity, and perhaps necessity, to engage in the problem of challenging the taken for granted aspects of reality, but at the same time they may have also undertaken a process of acquiring expertise which shapes their knowledge and experience

around this problem. Whilst Berger and Luckmann use the practical example of the specific reality of the automobile engine to the mechanic, the aim here is to explore how gaining expertise in relation to methodology might similarly shape the way the individual approaches the problem of social reality. In relation to the role of expertise within socialisation, Berger and Luckmann's theories could be used to suggest that where a 'layperson' might adopt an unconscious acceptance of their assumptions in relation to social reality (1966:14), because a doctoral researcher may be required to develop specific related expertise and to effectively 'deconstruct' their assumptions, and communicate and argue them in their work; exploration here of this process in relation to researchers as a specific group of people should be seen as significant in its own right.

The relevance of post graduate research training, when seen as part of a process which has previously been referred to as 'academic socialisation', in shaping methodological ideas forms a key part of the research question. Academic socialisation, specifically, appears to have been frequently considered in relation to shaping academic discourse and language (Duff 2010) and behaviours and expectations (Austin 2002). Furthermore, the process of doctoral study as part of academic socialisation, has also received specific attention.

Weidman and Stein (2003) conducted a quantitative study of the 'socialization of doctoral students to academic norms'. Using questionnaire responses from 50 PhD students, they concluded that academic interactions during doctoral study were key to preparing individuals for academic and research careers. Gardner (2008) explored the process of doctoral socialisation, and its impact on retention and success rates. Based on information from 40 qualitative interviews, she found that doctoral study could be a difficult experience for those who didn't fit 'the mould', including women, students from ethnic minorities and part time students. Interestingly a key element of this related to 'fitting in' with

organisational/institutional culture, which poses some questions here regarding the significance of the methodological assumptions which may exist within the culture of an academic institution. However, whilst these studies explore socialisation within a period of post graduate study, and doctoral study in particular, much less work exists in relation to the relevance of this period in shaping assumptions and methodological approaches (see section 2.3). This study therefore seeks to contribute to an enhanced understanding of the potential relationships which may exist.

Brief reference to the sociological theories of Bourdieu is also relevant to my thinking here, particularly the key concept of the 'habitus'. Bourdieu's presentation of the 'habitus' as a sub-conscious 'acquired system of generative schemes objectively adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted' (2004a:174) could be seen as including the researcher's philosophical positioning. This is illustrated in his perspectives on research in the social sciences where he advocates reflexivity through the researcher maintaining 'one eye on their own habitus' to minimise bias. The key consideration taken from Bourdieu's work here, is that interpretations of the conscious understanding presented by individuals may only form part of the picture of this process of socialisation. This has informed an approach which has value for how the stories are told, as much as it does for what they actually present (see Chapter 3).

Human Nature & Agency

Questions surrounding human nature and human agency are integral to both concepts of socialisation and to individual methodological understandings. Therefore within this study, they are relevant to the exploration of the individual journeys, but also to considering methodological positions themselves. Burrell and Morgan (1979) list human nature after

epistemological and ontological assumptions as the next related and relevant methodological consideration in their continuum model. Their continuum of human nature moves from ‘determinism’ to ‘voluntarism’. They propose that an extreme deterministic stance, perhaps best characterised by behaviourist theories, such as that of B.F. Skinner, best correlates with a highly generalisable, objective, positivist methodology. Adopting this view of human nature leads to an assumption that the external environment and structures determine social behaviour and the researcher’s role is to gather facts about this relationship. In contrast to this, others argue that determinism, and behaviourism in particular, does not make sufficient distinctions between physical cause and effect relationships and causes which have impacts on the free choices people make (Flew 1991). To complicate matters further, it has also been argued that there are potentially connections between life courses and individual belief in free will itself (Stillman et al 2010), although the counter argument is of course consideration of the sociological factors which may have led an individual to hold this belief. At the other end of the spectrum Burrell and Morgan assert an alignment between voluntarism and a more interpretivist approach. In terms of methodological understanding the suggestion that a subjective understanding will connect an anti-positivist epistemological position with an anti-deterministic view of human nature, may however be seen as a greater over-simplification than suggestions of the direct connection between ontological and epistemological assumptions. An obvious example being that social constructionism adopts elements of an assumption that human nature is determined (Burr 2003:23), yet may equally be considered to share ‘philosophical roots’ with interpretivism (Andrews 2012:39). We could therefore argue that whilst concepts of human nature are clearly relevant to methodological understanding, they may not perhaps be employed to directly identify a particular paradigm in the same way as concepts of social reality and knowledge are used (e.g. Lather 2006).

This idea of a spectrum of understandings of human nature is however grounded in a longstanding philosophical and sociological question regarding the extent of human agency. Commenting on free will philosopher Heidegger suggested that each man is 'born as many men, but will die as one', but the question for sociologists is perhaps the extent and nature of the limitations on the many lives an individual may potentially follow. Bandura (2006) summarises agency as the extent to which an individual can 'influence intentionally one's functioning and life circumstances', as opposed to these being defined by social structures. In relation to the understandings of socialisation presented in the section above, for Bourdieu, there is a 'dialectical relationship' (Swartz 2012:8) with social structures, with individual agents constructing a micro social reality which in turn has already been 'determined by the position they occupy' within the macro environment of wider society (Bourdieu 1989:2). Meanwhile for Berger and Luckmann (1966) the immediate micro reality and an individual's behaviour and decisions are influenced and shaped by interactions with the social structures around them, most notably those which occur in very early life. Indeed in terms of influencing life circumstances, it has been suggested that what happens during early childhood may have the greatest leverage in terms of influencing social circumstances (Deutsch 1998). Similarly the conflict theories of Marx suggest that little agency exists within a society which is divided in relation to the ownership of the 'means of production' (Marx 1977). However, whilst embracing the relevance of the role of social structures in influencing behaviour, life courses, and in this case beliefs including philosophical and methodological understanding, this does not necessarily remove the potential for human agency.

A relatively simplistic, practical model of the relationship between agency and social structures potentially arises from the idea of 'rational actor theory', where limited individual

agency applies within the social framework and thus decisions and behaviour are based on individual assessment of experiences, resources, constraints, etc. (Breen & Goldthorpe 1997). However, but for the variations in individual perceptions and responses, this view may still be at risk of reducing understanding back down to a behaviourist understanding of calculative responses. Beyond this though, the stance adopted here is that of the concept of ‘intra action’ (Davies & Gannon 2012). This understanding, as with the above, acknowledges the impact of social interactions and collective context on individual agency, however the potential ‘entanglement of agencies’ (Davies & Gannon 2012) also acknowledges the complexity of individual decision making and the multiple possibilities that remain for individual courses. Thus, we can accept Heidegger’s philosophical ‘many men’ assertion, but also acknowledge the concept of socialisation as creating a framework within which individual agency is entangled. Furthermore, we can also begin to understand the potential for various layers of agency, where rather than social behaviour being determined, it is seen as co-constructed, on a micro, as well as macro, level within individual interactions. This understanding is highly relevant methodologically to this study and presents a need to ensure attention is given both to the wider life experiences of the researchers, but also the detail of individual experiences and the relevance of the context and interactions within the research process itself.

The other key question in relation to agency, is essentially the question of nature versus nurture. That is to say that if agency exists in interactions within social structures, then how much, if any, of behaviour, decisions and philosophical understanding is influenced by individual genetics. For example Bouchard & Loehlin (1997) argue that essentially genes ‘drive experience and shape personality’, citing the large scale Minnesota Study of Twins Raised Apart (Bouchard 2016), as evidence of the significance of genetics in behaviours, beliefs and life courses. It is accepted here that the scope of the study is to consider the

largely sociological factors relating to the individual methodological journeys, however this note is relevant in illustrating the complexity of the many lens through which they may be seen, but also in highlighting perceptions of the potential significance of aspects such as gender, personality traits (Karwowski et al 2013)) and learning styles (Schmeck 2013). Whilst we can speculate about conscious or subconscious understandings of the origin of these, potentially for some researchers these may be considered relevant understandings of their journeys in this context of who they are.

Identity Formation

The concept of identity has provided the catalyst for two notable debates, both of which are relevant here, and both of which have had significant bodies of literature devoted to them. The first of these is the longstanding philosophical question of the ontological nature of identity and the self. Contrasting viewpoints are perhaps best illustrated by the rationalist perspective arising from Descartes interpretation of the self as ‘a thing that thinks’ (2012) and the empiricist assertions which challenged this, characterised by Hume’s assertions regarding consciousness: ‘the identity we ascribe to man is only a fictitious one’ (2012). The second question is essentially the ‘scientific’ question of nature vs. nurture, which has long focussed on the extent to which internal psychological processes and social conditions influence the formation of identity (in whatever philosophical form it may take). For example noteworthy perspectives include Marx (1977) assertion that it is an individual’s ‘social being that determines their consciousness’, and Freud’s understanding that identity is an unstable product of the constant internal conflict between the id, ego and super ego (1961). If, for the purposes of a common understanding, we accept at least that the idea of identity encompasses, or is represented by, an individual’s ‘beliefs, values, goals and behaviours’ (Waterman 2015:197), then it is asserted that the development of personal methodological

understanding is part of the on-going process of the formation of identity. Therefore of particular relevance to this study is the broader concept of 'identity formation', but also the more specific ideas surrounding 'narrative identity' and 'methodological identity'. The former relating to understanding the construction of the way memories are told and how they may 'challenge' or 'provide continuity' for specific ideas of identity and self (Pals 2006:1081), and the latter relating to the idea of personal understanding of ontological and epistemological perspective (Bernauer 2012).

Erikson's (1950) theory of developmental stages, which is frequently noted as being a seminal theory of identity formation, presents a particularly useful psychosocial response to the question of identity formation (Marcia 1993). Erikson proposed identity formation as an on-going continuous interplay between both psychological and social 'being'. He outlined the development of the ego identity, as the continuous sense of 'self' and highlighted adolescence as the most important of 8 stages of identity formation. At this point, as part of the transition into adulthood, an individual is seen as facing the challenge of integrating childhood experiences into a stable adult identity. Those who are able to successfully overcome this 'identity crisis' are labelled as 'identity achieved'. Erikson (1982) hypothesised that the subsequent development of 'personal wisdom', to include insight, perspective and cognitive understanding about the social world was grounded in the earlier stages of identity development and particularly an individual's success with resolving identity crisis in adolescence. Beaumont (2009) later attempted to test empirically this hypothesised link between identity formation and 'personal wisdom'. Based on employing self-report questionnaires for 158 participants Beaumont suggested that there was a correlation between indicators of identity style and selected indicators of wisdom, namely self-actualization and self-transcendence. Another useful perspective on these aspects is Bahktin's

conceptualisation of elements of identity including beliefs and world views as part of a process of ‘ideological becoming’, again theorising an interplay between social context and individual agency (Ball and Freedman 2004). Whilst asserting the influence of social groups and systems, Bahktin also acknowledged the potential for the individual to influence the social world. These potential connections between the process and nature of identity formation, and an individual’s methodological identity, as an aspect of individual ‘wisdom’, ‘ideology’; and understanding of the social world are seen as relevant to interpreting the individual reflections presented by the researchers involved in this study.

In addition to the psychological development and changing social context aligning with stages of life, other factors have been raised as considerations, with psychosocial processes remaining central. For example Waterman (1993) asserted that the process of identity formation also varied by gender, citing female identity formation as ‘more complex’ because of a higher level of engagement in ‘active reflection’ and identity ‘decision making’. In addition Cotes & Levine (2014) also made links to historical context, suggesting that the process of identity formation has become more complex as the society we live in has become more complex. This aligning to an extent with Goffman’s (1959) concept of the individual as a ‘social actor’, adapting their behaviour to the, in this case increasingly complex, social context they are in.

The post-modernist perspective on identity, perhaps most notably presented by Foucault, goes beyond the analysis of the social construction of the behaviour of an individual, and in common with the empiricist challenge asserts that the individual in fact has no tangible internal identity (Gutting 2005). Instead identity, or the self, is seen as an on-going and relative process. In rejecting the notion of the construction of ‘an’ identity, the assertion is instead made that the identity ‘exists’ only in human performance and discourse, rather than

these aspects themselves being a product of identity. Arising from this understanding is the concept of narrative identity, a time and context dependent ‘internal, dynamic life story that an individual constructs to make sense of his or her life’ (Bauer et al 2006). Whilst the idea of narrative identity denies that identity exists as a ‘self-contained entity’ it asserts that identity is actively ‘constructed’, by the individual, in the context of their social being (De Mul 2015). The idea of narrative identity may therefore accept both that aspects of the self are constructed through psychosocial processes, as per Erikson’s theories, but that at the same time this identity takes shape only in the narration of the individual. Indeed it could be argued that there are some connections between Erikson’s assertions, regarding an individual’s response to inevitable identity ‘crisis’, and research about narrative identity which asserts that the sense making ‘exploratory narrative processes’ of identity as a narrative construct may influence mediation between ‘coping openness in young adulthood’ and ‘maturity’ in later life (Pals 2006). From this perspective, the individual consciousness of the narrative becomes the space for reflection on ‘emotionally significant’ experiences.

In terms of theoretical perspective, the scientific psychosocial perspectives on identity formation presented in this section, such as those of Erikson, may be seen to present contrasting interpretations to the philosophical post-modernist ideas, such as those of Foucault. In some ways this may be compared to some of the contrasts present in the paradigmatic spectrum presented in 2.2. In adopting the idea of bricolage (Kincheloe 2001) and considering the emergence of the research questions below, this contrast is seen here to present opportunities, rather than conflict, in terms of exploring identity in relation to methodologically journeys. In relation to the substantive aspects of the research questions, the psychosocial and social constructivist understandings are seen as compatible and useful to understanding and analysing the fuller context and the journey which may have contributed

to these narratives as identity and social performance. That is to say that they offer possibilities in terms of exploring the questions regarding connections between social experiences and methodological identity and in supporting interpretivist analysis of the journeys. This relates in particular to the analysis presented in chapter 5. Extending from this, there is also value for the understanding that behaviour, identity and understanding is relative to, and part of, the space, time and context within which it 'exists' and is presented in individual narrative. The post-modernist perspectives therefore present an opportunity for alternative understandings, particularly in relation to analysing how the journeys were presented, which relates in particular to chapter 6. This diverse consideration is compatible with the idea presented in the methodological foundations of this thesis (1.6) that rigour may originate from careful consideration of interdisciplinary 'perspectives' such as this; as opposed to a pragmatic understanding where rigour is achieved through one perspective but multiple methods (Kincheloe 2001).

2.5 Conclusions and Emerging Research Questions

This chapter has explored the key concepts, issues and debates in relation to the research topic and has introduced the theoretical framework which underpins this study. In addition, it has highlighted that the existing literature relating to theoretical and substantive understanding of methodological understanding, as an aspect of researcher identity, introduces a clear opportunity for this study to contribute new knowledge to this topic area. In particular, it has demonstrated that research regarding the concept of methodological journeys currently appears to be limited to auto-biographical and auto-ethnographic accounts, and therefore there is an opportunity for this thesis to develop on this understanding and offer new perspectives, both theoretically and methodologically. Research in this area is warranted given the highlighted questions and debate regarding introducing key methodological issues

to doctoral researchers during their learning journey, to ensure a sufficient level of understanding and methodological awareness. On the basis of the literature review undertaken for this thesis, three central research questions were therefore identified, as introduced in chapter one.

- 1) *How do doctoral researchers' individual life histories appear to influence their subsequent philosophical (ontological, epistemological and methodological) assumptions?*

This chapter has identified an opportunity for developing new knowledge and understanding in relation to the relationships between doctoral researchers' life histories and philosophical assumptions. Whilst identifying theoretical connections between aspects of social context, experience and philosophical assumptions, it has been highlighted here that there is a relatively narrow base of empirical work upon which considerations can be made about the relationships between social experiences and researcher assumptions. Whilst it is acknowledged that there are existing studies which frame methodology as a 'journey', it has been identified that these appear to be almost exclusively auto-ethnographic in nature (e.g. Probert 2006, Oakley 1999). It is therefore argued that the co-construction and analysis of a collection of journeys has the potential to introduce new understandings about, and perspectives on, methodological journeys. Furthermore, the aforementioned existing accounts have highlighted varying understandings of the significance of earlier life experience, and presented questions regarding the significance of the assumptions themselves in shaping this presentation (which also links to question three below). When considered alongside the theoretical understandings of socialisation presented in this chapter (e.g. Berger & Luckmann 1966), it is taken that contextualising this concept within a wider life

history, and thus also considering how these assumptions relate to experiences which precede methodological awareness, has the potential to offer key new insights in this area.

- 2) *How do doctoral researchers' experiences of post graduate research training (and understanding of methodology) appear to influence their subsequent philosophical assumptions?*

The connections between post graduate training programmes and doctoral researchers' philosophical assumptions have been highlighted here as an area of academic interest, as demonstrated by debate regarding the significance and benefits of paradigmatic understandings and teaching in directly shaping methodological understandings (see Pring 2000, Lather 2006, Onwuegbuzie & Leech 2005). However, this chapter has also highlighted that this debate is informed by limited empirical research about a) methodological journeys (as mentioned above) and b) connections between post graduate programmes and methodological understanding and assumptions. In addition, this chapter has outlined that this debate, and limited research, also exists in the context of guidelines which present a certain level of autonomy for academic institutions delivering relevant programmes (e.g. AHRC 2016). With this in mind it is argued that information about the significance and relevance of these programmes could be of significant utility to those designing and delivering them. Whilst it is acknowledged that some research exists which considers this from a pragmatic perspective (Coronel Llamas & Boza 2011), it is argued that this focuses on the practical application of methods, rather than philosophical and methodological understanding. As a result of this, understanding is limited to a relatively narrow perspective and does not address this research question. In addition, this chapter has highlighted an opportunity to develop new

considerations of the relevance of methodology as part of existing understandings of doctoral and academic socialisation during post graduate training (e.g. Weidman & Stein 2003).

3) *How do doctoral researchers speak of their perceptions of their personal methodological 'journeys'?*

This chapter has introduced the concept of methodological consciousness (Gadamer 1975) and expanded on its potential relevance to doctoral researchers' ability to understand and identify their philosophical assumptions. In the context of this, it is significant that again there is limited empirical work, in addition to varying understandings (e.g. Sweetman 2003), to illustrate this and inform understandings. By seeking to explore both the substantive content of the methodological journeys of doctoral researchers (as highlighted by question one and two) and the presentation of these journeys it is hoped that this study will provide new material to illustrate this concept. In addition, as highlighted by the existing accounts about methodological journeys, a question exists regarding the impact of the assumptions themselves on the way that the journey is presented (e.g. Probert 2006, as opposed to Quayle 2007) and therefore this question seeks to offer perspectives in relation to this.

Chapter 3 – Research Design

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the approach I followed in undertaking this study. It begins by introducing the two practical methods, life history inquiry and collective biography, and continues to explore the research process I employed and the key considerations involved in this. The nature of the study, and the topic in question, meant that achieving a consistent and coherent epistemological and ontological framework was a key consideration for me throughout the study, and this is something which I have sought to reflect in this chapter and throughout. The methodological foundations which underpin this study are presented in chapter 1, alongside a summary of my own methodological journey, which is intended to offer further contextualisation to this. My research design aligned with aspects of a post-modernist and post-structuralist approach, which meant a key consideration when selecting my research methods was an intention to obtain in-depth contextual understanding and provide value for the possibility of many different perspectives (Roos 2003).

The aim of this study was to explore the methodological journeys of a group of nine doctoral and post- doctoral researchers in the early stages of their research career. The focus for this involved three central research questions, which emanated from the literature reviewed in chapter two (as summarised in 2.5):

- 1) How do doctoral researchers' individual life histories appear to influence their subsequent philosophical (ontological, epistemological and methodological) assumptions?

- 2) How do doctoral researchers' experiences of post graduate research training (and understanding of methodology) appear to influence their subsequent philosophical assumptions?
- 3) How do doctoral researchers speak of their perceptions of their personal methodological 'journeys'?

With reference to these questions, and to my methodological approach, I decided to undertake two forms of narrative inquiry, beginning with initial life history interviews before progressing to collective biography sessions. The combination of these two methods was seen as key to providing opportunities to consider potential interpretations of the relationships between experiences, socialisation and methodological assumptions. In addition, the collective biography was intended to value the interpretations of the researchers themselves in the analysis, and to add context to consideration of the significance of the way the researchers spoke of their journeys.

3.2 Life History Inquiry

Overview

Life history inquiry is a narrative research approach which 'explicitly acknowledge(s) the historical influence that a person's biography has on their current experiences and perceptions' (Floyd 2012:224). It is grounded in the premise that the complexity of relationships between the individual and the social world make it beneficial to explore social phenomena within as much detail and context as possible. Goodson & Sikes (2001:18) describe life stories themselves as detailing a social construction through 'changing patterns of time and space in testimony and action'. As a form of research life history is understood to have existed as a recognised approach since at least the early 1900's (Goodson 2001), with

examples of its use spanning across multiple disciplines during the 20th century including education, sociology and psychology. Whilst the approach to co-constructing life histories has unsurprisingly been linked to the specific context, particularly the researcher's area of expertise and focus (Cole & Knowles 2001), there is some consistency in the basic understanding of its application in social research. The primary source of information for life history inquiry is generally understood to be a single, or multiple, life history interviews (Cohen et al 2000, Bryman 2012), but other relevant information including documentation, photographs and other historical records may also be included (Bryman 2012).

Although the narrative is essentially an 'old topic' in both research and wider culture (Jovchelovitch & Bauer 2000), much of the recent renewed emphasis on its value appears to stem from critique relating to the perceived inability of more structured methods to address the complexity of questions regarding social phenomenon (Hollway & Jefferson 2000). However, whilst life history interviewing tends to be understood as a form of 'unstructured' interview (Bryman 2012: 489) there are undoubtedly some variations in understandings about exactly how unstructured. One rationale often cited for the use of narrative interviewing is the sense that being invited to tell your story presents an opportunity for an individual to engage in a relatively natural, authentic and perhaps even empowering process (Riessman 2003) as opposed to a potentially more fragmented and researcher led structured interview. In addition to this, theories regarding the existence of a narrative schema (Cortazzi 2014) support the idea that key aspects such as detailed information about time and place, motives and feelings will naturally occur within a narrative, without the researcher needing to impose a structure to try to invite this. The nature of life history interviewing means that it can be a 'messy' and 'unsettled' process (Shacklock & Thorp 2005:156) and therefore attempts are sometimes made to embrace elements of the concept of the approach, but introduce aspects of structure

in an attempt to align it with specific research aims, or methodological perspectives. For example a researcher may use a set of pre-designed questions (e.g. Haglund 2004) or a calendar/timeline (e.g. Lin et al 1997) to guide discussion.

Whilst the specific process employed will be explored further in section 3.3, several things were key here to the specific understanding of life history inquiry. The first being that certain questions can be implicit in the basic social exchange which takes place in inviting someone to tell their story, as Goodson & Sikes (2001:1) highlight, the process of life history research itself presents questions such as ‘Who are you?’ ‘Why are you?’ ‘Why has your life taken this course?’ without these needing to be directly asked. Alongside this I adopted the perspective that when life history inquiry minimises structure it presents the opportunity for insight into otherwise hidden aspects, such as the choices the individual makes in the order they present information or which decisions they feel it is necessary for them to provide a rationale for. On this basis some approaches insist only on immanent questions, avoiding directly asking a co-researcher why they’ve made certain choices (Jovelitch & Bauer 2000). Finally I acknowledged that the most frequently cited criticisms of life history inquiry often relate to concerns about it being overly subjective and not generalisable (Cohen 2000, Bryman 2008), but argue that these are rooted in a specific methodological perspective and understanding of ‘research’. Indeed, in contrast to this, rather than being concerned with issues such as the ‘validity’ and ‘bias’ in the information individuals gave (Cohen 2000), my own methodological perspective led me to an understanding that rejected the key purpose of life history inquiry as being a means to accessing any form of objective account of an individual’s journey. I understood there to be value in the way it ‘privileges subjectivity and ‘positionality’ (Riessman 2003:2) and creates the potential to uncover the way individuals reflect on their perceptions of their history.

‘Historical reconstruction may not be the primary concern in a life story, what is, is how people see themselves at this point in their lives, and want others to see them’
(Atkinson 1998:24)

In understanding the purpose of the method in this way and acknowledging the absence of an attainable valid, objective account, the aspiration was to obtain rich and in-depth perspectives and explorations of these reflections. As a result I subsequently saw a key limitation of life history inquiry as being the potentially narrow scope of interpretation and perspectives between only the researcher and co-researcher. This contributed in part to the introduction of the Collective Biography method to the study, although it was only feasible to use this approach to explore very specific elements of individual narratives.

Rationale

My selection of life history inquiry was grounded in the specific understanding presented above, and in the decision to seek to directly explore life history as part of my research questions. In considering both my own understanding of methodological journeys and perspectives, and the related understandings which became apparent through my literature review, I concluded that both the complexity and the potential for the existence of a lack of an initial conscious awareness of some aspects of this made it a necessity to use an approach which maximised the presence of both depth and context. Whilst my own methodological perspective was undoubtedly integral to this, in practical terms I did not believe that a more structured or direct format, such as interviewing people specifically about the construction of their methodological perspectives, would elicit the most productive information. In a similar way to Berger and Luckman’s (1966) assertion that it is not easy for an individual to suddenly engage in thoughts regarding ontological doubt in a day to day situation, I

considered methodological perspectives, and particularly ideas of their origins to be, at least in part, best accessed through the development of a contextual thread of thought. In this scenario, I returned to the poststructuralist idea of the individual as ‘subject-of-thought’ (Davies 2010:54), with the life history inquiry presenting the necessary focus to provide the context for this depth of thought. In some ways this was considered as having some similarities to the extended process of consideration of such issues, which an academic researcher would engage with when producing academic work. Indeed, at an early stage, brief consideration was given to the potential of including some form of exploration of such work; however I considered that working with life histories presented the potential for a much more contextual co-construction of information. In comparison a piece of academic work as a product was considered to be open to influences well beyond methodological perspectives, including desired audience, funders, etc. (Gorard 2002). On this basis, I decided that if an individual’s social behaviour was considered as including aspects of the ‘social actor’ (Goffman 1959), then my research questions were more concerned with exploring the identity presented by an individual in co-constructing their life story in the context of methodology, than the identity presented by the same individual within a piece of work in the context of their perceived audience. In terms of the research question relating to how the individuals then spoke of their journeys, focussing on providing the space to elicit these life stories also seemed to present a sufficient level of autonomy to allow for an authentic analysis of the way they had chosen to frame and share this, rather than this being a response to a specific structure.

In addition to providing the desired depth, context and potential for relevant threads of thought, I also believed life history inquiry to be an appropriate method for this study, because of its explicit acknowledgement of the relevance of an individual’s history as a

whole in the process of socialisation. This was particularly relevant to the research questions regarding relationships between methodological journeys, life history and post graduate training. Following my literature review I was conscious of understandings of the potential significance of post graduate research training in influencing methodological perspectives (e.g. Coronel Llamas and Boza 2011), but also felt that focussing solely on these influences could lead to over-simplification. My intention, which is reflected in the use of the terminology 'life histories' in my research questions, was to ensure that even aspects of very early primary socialisation, which are often considered as highly relevant to all aspects of perceptions and social behaviour (Berger & Luckman 1966) were able to remain within the scope of the study. In this social constructivist frame the development of ontological and epistemological perspectives was understood to be a complex process, potentially entangled with experiences throughout life, rather than something which is purely part of research training. The use of life history inquiry was therefore seen as presenting the potential for a wider range of influences, through the course of an individual's life to be considered relevant, including those elements of their personal and professional lives, as well as their academic journeys. In the context of the research questions, this meant the method was well suited because it avoided narrowing or compartmentalising aspects of, and connections between, broader life history and post graduate training experiences. Conversely, whether or not explicitly stated, I believed that many other approaches which may have been considered as suitable had the potential to set unintended parameters in relation to this, because unlike life history there is often more of a tendency for questions to be situated within the present (Haglund 2004). For example, had I attempted to co-construct case studies relating to methodological journeys, I felt that understandings of this may have constrained the focus predominantly to professional and educational experience. Indeed I quickly discovered that the evolution of most of the potential methods to include a wider scope would ultimately end

up having elements of life history inquiry to them anyway. Returning to the case study example, if we interpret ‘the case’ as being more relevant to determining the focus of investigation, than the specific method of investigation (Hartley 2004), then a case study of an individual, which allows for acknowledgment of aspects of their life including early socialisation could effectively be considered as best achieved through a form of life history inquiry.

3.3 Collective Biography

Overview

Collective biography is a narrative research method involving group construction and analysis, both in written form and through discussion, of journeys and memories. Its origins lie in an approach introduced by German socialist Frigga Haug as part of a study which explored female socialisation (Haug et al 1987) and it is a method which is frequently associated with feminist research approaches (Small 2000). Haug originally used the term ‘memory work’ for the approach, and whilst this term is still preferred by many (e.g. Onyx & Small 2001), it is apparent that the adoption of the name ‘collective biography’ is generally associated specifically with the method’s situation and use within the poststructuralist paradigm (Small 2000), a key example of this being the work of Davies and Gannon (2006). Whilst my approach has drawn on many of the strengths of Haug’s original ideas of memory work, my rationale for selecting this method (which will be explored further below) had, what I considered to be, distinctly poststructuralist elements. For this reason I believe it is most accurately termed here as collective biography and that this best reflects its consistency with the work of other researchers who have used this term (e.g. Kamler 1996, Gannon 2001). Indeed, given that there is currently a relatively small amount of literature relating to the approach (Small 2000), particularly in comparison to other methods, I hope that selecting

terminology which situates the work alongside other examples could be useful to others in the future.

As a method of inquiry collective biography is described as being: ‘collective’, highly ‘subjective’ and ‘deconstructive’ (Crawford et al 1990). The basic principle behind the method is that memories are seen as central to the social construction of self and are to be ‘studied in their own right... not judged against the real/true past event’ (Small 2000:2). The objective is therefore not to obtain and analyse an accurate, objective account of a specific event itself (because there is ontological doubt that one ‘true’ version of this can ever exist), but to deconstruct the individual’s present reflection on the event, within the context of the collective group, and the subsequent thought process and perspective to which this group itself contributes. The rationale behind this is that the specific memory, and the unique shared connection with it within the present moment, is seen as being potentially the most relevant and significant obtainable insight into the social construction of self and identity.

““Meaning does not lie *in* the experience. Rather experiences *become* meaningful as a result of being grasped reflectively” (Arnold 1979:22).

Davies and Gannon (2012) refer to the poststructuralist concept of ‘intra-action’ (as opposed to interaction) as being relevant to the process involved in the generation and development of this reflection. They describe this as an ‘entanglement of agencies’, provoking movement away from an understanding of the relevance of the ‘will’ of the individual, to the ‘conditions of possibility’ (Davies 2010:55) which any ‘intra-action’ creates for provoking thought. With this interpretation the process of collective biography not only promotes a conscious awareness of the role of the immediate ‘intra-action’ which may be occurring in the present,

within the group, but of the role of the ‘entanglement’ of reflections on previous experience in shaping this thought, and indeed the potential of collective biography itself to become part of future entanglements of agencies.

In practice many variations in approaches to both memory work and collective biography exist, which is perhaps no surprise given that Haug et al (1987:91) originally emphasised the ‘heterogeneous’ nature of the method, to reflect its opposition to the homogeneous views of social reality. However, three basic phases are often drawn from Haug’s work when summarising the method (Crawford et al 1992, Small 2000). These are:

- 1) Each co-researcher writes and shares a description of an event or episode – usually to reflect what they consider to be a ‘trigger’ in relation to the subject.
- 2) The group collectively discuss the stories, theorising and exploring meaning, metaphors and generalisations.
- 3) The records of both the written stories and the collective discussion are analysed by one of the co-researchers.

In common with life history inquiry there have been criticisms regarding the ‘subjectivity’ and lack of ‘generalisability’ of memory work (within which collective biography is situated). Radstone (2008:33) suggests that the ‘institutionalisation’ of memory work as part of a new discipline of ‘memory studies’ threatens to ‘transform speculation into fact’.

Seemingly conversely Haug et al (1987:43) had originally argued that as individual experience ‘becomes possible’ within ‘the domain of collective production’ it is indeed ‘subject to universalisation’. However, I would argue that both Radstone’s concerns and Haug’s claims may be considered equally valid, and perhaps compatible; with the key factor

here being the situation and understanding of memory work within the academy and beyond. In the case of collective biography this perhaps makes the lack of literature and understanding (Small 2000) its biggest limitation and dictates a requirement for it to be employed in a context where it is clear that the accuracy and generalisability of the memory itself is neither claimed, nor considered relevant (Koutroulis 1993). Rather the objective is to embark on an exploration of the process of construction of these memories (Crawford et al 1992); and individual reflections on experience, which in turn have the potential to give worthwhile insight into the 'collective production' to which Haug (1987) refers. The implication of this is a necessity for the researcher to embark on the 'complex haul' involved in the process of research and analysis (Davies & Gannon 2006:9), and seemingly communication about this, in an attempt to achieve consistency with the philosophical underpinnings of the approach and avoid misunderstandings about the rationale for its use.

Rationale

The decision to select collective biography as part of my research design began with the adoption of Kincheloe's idea of methodological 'bricolage' (2001). Within this approach rigour is seen as originating from increasing interdisciplinary 'perspectives' and contextual understanding; as opposed to a pragmatic model where it may be seen as a product of applying multiple methods, but from the same perspective. Whilst this concept could have been applied to a number of specific research methods, when this was aligned with my research focus collective biography seemed to fit well for several reasons. The first of these was that a key element of collective biography is the active analysis and theorising which occurs as part of the group itself. Whilst I tried to avoid making assumptions about the nature and level of specific expertise and interest each researcher may bring in relation to the subject, I concluded that it was reasonable to assume that a collective of academics within the

social sciences would all have a general level of understanding about areas including socialisation and methodology and that this would introduce the potential to present some very worthwhile, relevant and productive perspectives and contextual understandings. I saw access to multiple analytical perspectives as a key mechanism for working towards a broad and in depth perspective of the nature of the development of methodological ideas. Indeed from the outset I was concerned that there was potential for the presence of contradictions and limitations in viewing methodological perspectives as a 'lens' through which we see and understand the world, and then limiting the interpretation of the perspectives of others by analysing their journeys solely through my own personal 'lens'. The selection of collective biographies as part of my research approach introduced the opportunity for the topic to be explored in an original way, by analysing the development of methodological ideas through multiple different methodological perspectives. Therefore collective biography appeared to offer an opportunity, building on the life history interviews, for a highly in-depth collective exploration of processes, presenting consistency with my research topic, research questions and my methodological stance, including the concept of bricolage. The idea was to begin a process of eliciting perspectives relating to methodological journeys, and then to enhance this with collective biography by giving increased time, space and expertise to some of the specific 'triggers/memories' which arose, effectively blurring the line between the more traditional research and analysis phases, by facilitating some co-researcher involvement in the analysis. The use of collective biography had previously been advocated by others specifically for work involving groups of academics (Gannon & Davies 2006) and was particularly suited to my intention to provide different perspectives in response to the research question regarding how individual researchers spoke of their journeys.

In reviewing other studies which have explored elements of methodological journeys, or the construction of epistemological ideas, I noted that there were two key types of common research approaches. The first of these was an auto-ethnographical or auto-biographical approach (e.g. Dadds 2009), the second an evaluation of consistency between the specific content of the teaching of methodology and the research produced by the students (e.g. Coronel Llamas and Boza 2011). A key reason for discounting both of these approaches was clearly the aspiration to approach the topic in an original way, but the process of considering my study in relation to these was also very useful in arriving at the decision to employ collective biography. The basis for this was that they confronted me with questions regarding what exactly I was setting out to explore. Ultimately I concluded that the latter approach seemed highly inconsistent with my epistemological approach, because I deemed it inappropriate to accept the espoused content of a programme as an effective way of exploring its relevance to the construction of methodological positions and, likewise, to accept the specific research design, as part of a 'product', to be directly representative of a philosophical assumptions. Instead my decision was to embrace elements of the depth and perspective of an auto-ethnographic approach, but in the first instance to embark on exploring both 'self' and 'others' through a life history approach and then, following some of the rationale described in the previous paragraph to build even further on this initial perspective by introducing a collective approach. As part of this approach the involvement of others could then evolve into a co-researcher capacity and begin to move the process away from a more traditional focus from a uni-directional perspective.

3.4 Research Process

This section outlines and explains the process which was employed for selecting researchers and undertaking the interviews. A simple overview of this, and the stages of analysis (which are explored further in 3.7), is provided in figure 3.1 below.

Figure 3.1 Research Process Flow Chart



Identifying the Researchers

Questions about exactly how many interviews are ‘enough’ to generate the most useful information are frequently cited in articles (Guest et al 2006); with some understandings of this tending to use the guiding principle of the concept of ‘saturation’ (Mason 2010).

However, the largely post-structuralist foundations which informed my approach here, effectively led me to determine that, beyond the purely practical considerations of attaining any statistical volume of interviews, lies the philosophical question of the basic possibility of the existence of such a point in this context. My own methodological assumption was that not only was there potential for an almost infinite number of perspectives and journeys to exist, these would also be linked to, and informed by, the specific context within which they had been communicated, which again could not be reduced to a potential volume. Therefore my starting point was to see the 'how many' question as presenting the necessity for a researcher decision which involved consideration of a number of 'epistemological, methodological and practical issues' (Edwards & Bakers 2012) in order to determine how best to maximise the insight the study could potentially give.

In identifying the researchers for this study it was evident early on that there was a need to establish a balance between some of my key methodological ideas and the related practical considerations. From a philosophical viewpoint, my reference to the value in obtaining multiple interdisciplinary perspectives, particularly through the co-analysis aspect of collective biography, meant that it could be argued that the more individuals involved in the study, the more valuable the insight it could potentially create. That is to say that the more perspectives gathered, particularly through the co-analysis, the broader the understandings which may potentially have been considered. Practically of course, the accompanying value for establishing 'depth' (Hollway & Jefferson 1997) meant that time, accessibility and scale also needed to be considered in relation to this (Cohen et al 2000), therefore it was clear that a balance needed to be achieved between achieving a sufficient level of understanding through the volume of different perspectives, and a sufficient level of depth through the attention given to each individual journey.

With the above in mind I decided to focus on the methodological journeys of a minimum of eight and maximum of ten doctoral and post-doctoral social sciences researchers. I felt this would ensure that there was potential for a level of diversity of methodological perspectives across the group of individuals. It also meant that there would be a sufficient number of people for two collective biography groups to take place, allowing learning from the first session to inform the approach to the second. I decided that three to five individuals would be an appropriate number both practically, in terms of facilitating discussions which everyone could contribute to, and for consistency with the objective to obtain some level of diversity. Practically, it was also decided that this number of life history interviews and two collective biography sessions would create a vast amount of information to consider, it would remain within the limitations, both in terms of time and space, of what could be productively utilised within this study. Unsurprisingly some of the researchers could not attend the collective biography session and therefore in both cases the group went ahead with three researchers, plus myself. This small group size appeared to contribute to individuals feeling comfortable, but still retained a useful group dynamic with opportunities for interpretive dialogue.

In order to identify the researchers for the study I constructed an email with details about the research, inviting expressions of interest and sent this out through a number of professional and academic networks, including through doctoral colleges. The majority of these contacts were connected in some capacity to four main academic institutions in the South of England. The criterion for inclusion was that an individual needed to be a doctoral, or post-doctoral, researcher in the social sciences, but that they could be at any stage in their research career, with any research interests/areas. I hoped that keeping this very broad would not only improve my chances of finding a sufficient number of individuals, but also the potential of

working with a group of people with a diverse range of journeys, roles and experiences. In addition, the selection and use of a number of different networks for distributing the email was also intended to support the recruitment of a diverse, rather than representative sample. I felt this was important, because for some of the potentially key areas arising from both the review existing literature (e.g. research experiences) and my research questions (e.g. post graduate training) I felt there would be less value and breadth of perspective in working with a group of people at the same stage in their career, or who had all undertaken similar programmes at the same institution.

There were nine researchers who expressed an interest in taking part in the study, met the basic requirements and subsequently attended a life history interview. I received two additional initial expressions of interests from researchers who were unable to, or decided not to take part. There was therefore no requirement to make selections from those who expressed interest, I simply stopped sending out information about the study once a sufficient number of researchers were involved. This process occurred in two stages, linked to each collective biography group, approximately six months apart. All of the researchers I identified were in a relatively early stage of their career, with eight of the nine being current doctoral students. In most cases it was expressed that they decided to be involved in the research, because of a perception that it would help them to consider their methodological assumptions alongside their doctoral research. Figure 3.2 (below) details the gender, stage of study, doctoral programme and discipline of each of the identified researchers.

Figure 3.2 Information about the Researchers

Name	Gender	Stage of Study	Programme	Discipline
Jane	F	Paused in Part 1	EdD Narrative Pathway	Education
Heather	F	First Paper	PhD by publication	Social Science and Law
Sarah	F	Post-Doctoral	University funded PhD	Health and Social Science
Sian	F	Year 1	PhD 1+3	Social Work
Peter	M	Year 2	PhD 1+3	Social Work
Imogen	F	First Paper	PhD ('Three Paper')	Economics
Jemma	F	Year 2	PhD +3 full time scholarship	Education
Debbie	F	Year 3	PhD 1+3	Education
Dawn	F	Year 3	PhD 2+3	Education

Interviews

A key consideration in relation to the interview process was the order of the two methods. Having initially planned to undertake the collective biography sessions prior to the life history interviews, I ultimately decided to reverse this ordering. The rationale for the idea of beginning with the collective session had been that this discussion, and the exposure to perspectives of others, might have the potential to 'unlock' thinking which could lead to enhanced depth following in the life history interviews. However, I eventually concluded that this approach, perhaps informed by my own methodological foundations, assumed the pre-existence of a certain level of methodological consciousness. Instead I progressed to an understanding that accepted that it was necessary to be open to the possibility that there may actually be links between the nature of this consciousness and the methodological journeys and assumptions themselves. For example, if we see engagement with 'epistemic doubt' as

part of philosophical ‘specialisation’ (Bendixen 2002:191) or the employment of reflexivity as a ‘methodological lens’ (Day 2012:61) as part of a specific methodological approach, then certain elements of journeys, including training and research experiences may be seen to have the potential to impact on how conscious we are of our assumptions and decisions. The alternative understanding was that instead the depth and exploration involved in the life history interview could have the potential for heightening awareness of both methodological thinking, and its potential connection with experience, which would be necessary for individuals to make judgements about what a key relevant memory might mean. On a practical level the basic understanding was that it was likely to be easier for individuals to begin their threads of thinking with consideration of their own experience in a one-to-one interview, and progress to consideration of potential specific connections between elements of this and their methodological thinking, in a group context, than it would have been the other way around.

During both the life history interviews and the collective biography sessions an example of paradigmatic mapping, adapted from Lather (2006) was made available as a reference point (see appendix 3). It was felt that the detail and metaphors that this particular format provided made it a valuable tool to help those involved to communicate ideas in relation to methodological positions, assumptions and journeys and that it may offer some common ground in terms of definitions. This was particularly key in the context of questions about the extent to which each researcher may have a conscious understanding of methodology, and their assumptions. Whilst Lather’s (2007) included only postivism, interpretivism, critical theory and deconstructivism in the original version, I referred to an article by Feilzer (2010) to adapt the chart and introduce reference to ‘pragmatism’ as potential additional paradigm. The intention in doing so was not to necessarily to agree with the argument that pragmatism

should be considered as a paradigm in philosophical terms, but to accept that this may be an understanding which some of the researchers could relate to and therefore could potentially be useful in eliciting and understanding their perspectives. In addition to this, I was also concerned that not recognising this could impact on the way some of the researchers engaged with the interview if they wanted to assert this, but felt that pragmatism was not accepted here as a methodological position.

3.5 Interview Format and Approach

Life History Interviews

When making decisions about the format and approach to the life history interviews I was very keen to avoid introducing more structure than was absolutely necessary, so as to elicit as authentic an account as possible (Riessman 2003). I wanted those involved to be able to be able to make decisions about what was relevant and to determine the direction and order of their own stories. I did however remain concerned that again there was potential for this to be driven by an assumption that all of the researchers would enter the process with a certain level of consciousness of their own methodological journey and I was aware that this assumption could either make it difficult for them to engage with the process, or alternatively impact on the relevancy of the information they shared. Ultimately I decided not to employ a set list of pre-determined questions, but to use three key sources of information to develop a framework which would act as a reference point during the interviews and set the parameters and approach to the interview. These sources were: the research questions themselves, which supported the identification of the key stages of interest; key themes arising from the literature review, which introduced some context for understanding in relation to methodological awareness. and information about the ‘elicitation technique’ (Jovchelevitch &

Bauer 2000), which influenced the interview approach and phases. A basic schedule which outlines how these were presented to the researchers is included as appendix 3.

The research questions introduced five main life stages, which were of particular interest: early childhood, school and education, non-academic professional experience, post-graduate research training and research experience. Clearly not all of these were relevant to all of the researchers, and additionally I believed that they remained broad enough to leave capacity for each individual to decide how these applied to their own life history, but would support the flow of the interviews. The specific topics which had arisen from the literature themes, and were intended to act as an aid for understanding and relevancy were: the concept of methodology as a journey, the realisation of personal methodological assumptions, the understanding of these assumptions, turning points/shifts in thinking and the connections between experience and assumptions. The use of the life history interviews was based on an understanding that an individual's methodological journey is entangled within their very personal life history and experience and that, regardless of the level of individual consciousness of this element, value and insight would be lost in any attempt to compartmentalise or isolate this from this context. Eliciting a life story was understood to be 'more than just a recital of events', it was about individuals 'organising experience' (Rosenwald & Ochberg 1992:8) and constructing identity, of which the key journeys and assumptions were seen as integral elements.

The approach to the narrative interviews conducted during the study was influenced by the basic phases of the 'elicitation technique' (Shutze 1977). My understanding of the technique was obtained via the translated interpretation presented by Jovchelovitch & Bauer (2000) and

I had previously worked with this approach during earlier post graduate research study. The elicitation technique consists of 6 basic phases:

1. Preparation – knowledge of subject
2. Initiation – presentation of topic
3. Main Narration
4. Questioning Phase – immanent questions only
5. Concluding Talk
6. Memory Protocol of Concluding Talk

The questioning phase did not include ‘why’ questions or direct questions about opinions and attitudes, instead questions used the words presented by informants and were framed in ways such as ‘tell me more about’ or ‘what happened before/after’ (Jovchelovitch & Bauer 2000).

The identification of the stages and topics of interested was considered to be part of the preparation and initiation phases.

Perspectives on the ideal length of life history interviews vary considerably, usually depending on their nature and purpose (Atkinson 2007). Based on the pilot interview and previous experience, I decided to allocate up to one and half hours for each life history interview. I felt that allocating this amount of time would allow an adequate level of detail without placing unrealistic expectations on those involved or creating more information than there would be scope to work with. I was conscious that the scale and scope of the study, the number of researchers and the methodological foundations introduced a necessity for me to approach the interviews with the aspiration of eliciting the maximum amount of relevant information within a sensible time period and without over-directing the flow. I believed that the identification and use of the stages, topics and approach would aid me in doing this. The interviews were all conducted in a location which was chosen by the co-researcher, which

was generally a place of study or work. This approach was selected for two reasons; firstly, to ensure that those taking part were in a familiar or comfortable environment and therefore felt more at ease in telling their story (Herzog 2005) and secondly because it was hoped that the if the researchers selected spaces which they had personal connections to then this would support their narrative to occur within a specific personal context, in line with sociological thinking relating to the potential impact of this on individuals' behaviour as social 'actors' (Goffman 1959, Herzog 2005). Some of the researchers however, requested for the interview to take place away from a familiar environment in order to allow them to detach this from their practical thinking. Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed later, however notes were taken throughout to support the questioning phase.

Following the initial pilot of the interview technique, I was able to reflect that the selected approach seemed to elicit useful and very relevant information. In particular it appeared that adopting a relatively unstructured approach led to the co-researcher making some quite insightful connections through the thread of her narrative. For example, on more than one occasion interjections such as 'I hadn't connected those things before' were made during the personal narrative and the natural flow of this narrative was uninterrupted by me for 20-30 minutes at times. The only adjustment I decided to make after this interview, was to be more conscious of introducing a clearer initiation point, as whilst I was being conscious not to dictate where the narrative should start, this created some initial indecision from the co-researcher (which we discussed at the end of the interview). Alongside an intention to avoid structuring the starting point, I noted early on that whilst in the first interview the researcher worked through her account in chronological order, in subsequent interviews other researchers were more comfortable starting by talking about their current work. Therefore I began with more directed, but very flexible opening prompts, effectively offering a choice

between starting by talking about earlier memories or current work. Interestingly I found that this did seem to lead to a more comfortable initiation of the narrative, but also that it didn't appear to overly direct the researchers who in most cases very swiftly progressed to a period of life which they appeared to deem most relevant and important in this context.

Collective Biography Sessions

Two collective biography sessions were organised, with learning from the facilitation of the first session able to inform the second session. As in the example above, the main learning point from the first session was the necessity for a clear and comfortable initiation point, in this case a group introduction and discussion about research projects. As previously noted in the introduction of the method, Haug et al's (1987) original presentation of this approach asserted that, because of its underlying principles, there are few fixed 'rules' regarding how it should be employed. However, when designing my approach I was keen for it to embrace two main principles which accompanied my understanding of collective biography. The first of those was value for the process of engaging in written recording of memories, which Davies & Gannon (2006, 2012) frequently place at the centre of the concept of collective biography. It was felt that in this context the process of writing potentially shared some of the specific merit attributed to engaging in both autobiographic and auto-ethnographic writing processes (Collins & Gallinat 2013) most notably that this was seen as a different process to verbalising memory and may therefore offer an additional perspective and insight. Small (2007:3) also argues that we 'remember more through writing'. The second principle was the need for the presence of a form of co-analysis which I saw as being central to the rationale for my decision to use it for this study and to the study creating new and worthwhile insights into the topic. The perceived value in this was in the way that it creates multi-directional perspective, Stephenson (2007:4) asserts that this process:

“...challenges the rational, unitary, fixed subject is that a co-researcher is not automatically credited with the ultimate powers of interpretation over her own experience”

In practical terms my design for the collective biography session effectively saw it as a process which began at the end of the individual life history interviews. At this point, having begun the process of exploring memories as part of a much broader narrative and after introducing (through the topics) the potential connections between this and individual methodological perspectives, each co-researcher was encouraged to begin to identify a specific memory which they perceived to be relevant to their methodological journey. This meant that between the original interview and the collective biography session each individual had a period where they could begin to consider and reflect on this, rather than being expected to immediately recall something at the start of the session. The average length of this period was 6 weeks.

The collective biography sessions took place at a community venue in Bristol, England, a time period of 2 hours was allocated for these. Similarly to the life history interviews this was based on an aspiration to balance the methodological value for exploring the memories at depth by dedicating longer time periods to the approach (with some examples known to dedicate multiple days, e.g. Davies & Gannon 2012), with the practical considerations relating to the expectations placed on the researchers and the scope and scale of the study. The sessions began with the opportunity for everyone in the group to give a brief introduction of themselves, this was followed by the presentation of an overview of what the purpose of the group was, the process the session would follow and reference to some key ethical issues (see ethics section), for example in relation to confidentiality and each person's right to leave

the room if they were particularly uncomfortable with any element of the discussion. This information was also presented to each person through discussion and via the research information prior to their involvement in the process as a whole. After a period of related discussion, the group were then asked to spend some time individually recording a specific memory (1-2 pages of text) which they felt was relevant to their methodological journey and the five topics identified in the life history interview were re-introduced to aid decisions about relevancy: methodology as a journey, realisation of methodological assumptions, understanding of assumptions, shifts in thinking and connections between experiences and assumptions. Several of Haug et al's (1987) guidelines for writing were introduced, including that co-researchers could, if they felt comfortable doing so, write in the third person and should seek to include as much detail as possible (whether or not they personally feel that something may be insignificant/trivial). The assertion Haug made was that writing in the third person may facilitate for the creation of personal distance and reduce the inclination for justification of behaviours and decisions. However, in most cases the researchers indicated that they felt more comfortable writing in the first person.

Having recorded these memories in written format, each co-researcher was invited in turn to share their memory with the group by reading their recordings. After each memory was introduced, the co-analysis took the form of a discussion which was supported by a set of four key prompts/question areas: 'Communication and Language, Influences, Change/Direction and Methodological Position'. These prompts were introduced prior to discussion and then acted as a reference point as and when they were required, rather than any form of systematic progression through the areas for each memory (see Appendix 3). For example, to support discussion we were able to visit questions such as 'what are the key sites of influence?' or 'how is this memory communicated?' In line with Crawford et al's

(1992:49) outline of the analysis phase there was also a focus on: similarities and differences; metaphors, generalisations and ‘taken for granted’ understandings; and any key information which was not present (but might have been expected to be present). At the end of the session each co-researcher was invited to reflect on the discussion, particularly how this may have affected their own thinking and had the option of re-writing or amending their writing. This could either be to clarify or add any key details, or to extend on anything which, in the context of the group, they felt was relevant. The sessions were all audio recorded and all written records and notes were also kept for analysis. The final phase of collective biography is effectively understood to be the analysis and theorising of the information (Small 2007), my approach to this is summarised in the analysis section of this chapter.

During each collective biography session, in order to embrace the principle of the ‘collective’ as a set of co-researchers, I also shared a personal story of my own, an approach which appears common to those employing this particular method (e.g. Davies & Gannon 2012, Gannon et al 2016). I agreed that this was a vital part of advocating a genuine process of co-analysis, and that whilst practically I was still effectively leading this process, philosophically it minimised the potential for a researcher-researched relationship. I was also conscious that, unavoidably, my own methodological journey was an integral part of this work and therefore this process had genuine value in exploring my own journey in relation to the research questions (see section 1.7).

3.6 Quality Criteria

In relation to qualitative research, Steinke (2004:184) suggests that there are three basic ‘quality criteria’ positions, the first two advocating the adoption of either ‘quantitative’ or ‘independent’ criteria, and the third being the ‘postmodern rejection’ of these criteria. Clearly

within my methodological foundations there would have been a misalignment between my own ontological and epistemological assumptions and any notion of the possibility of making claims in relation to traditional quantitative criteria such as ‘validity’, ‘reliability’ or ‘generalisability’. In addition to this, because the adoption of independent criteria is predominantly concerned with ‘testing’ the accuracy of individual accounts and memories, I also deemed these to be incompatible here. My intended focus was specifically the reflections and memories themselves, not the degree of accuracy with which they may represent any event, incident, etc. Therefore, in relation to Steinke’s positions, my approach would evidently be most consistent with the rejection of these. However, whilst Steinke’s use of the term ‘rejection’ could be misinterpreted as implying that quality criteria, in any form, would be considered irrelevant, instead it may be better understood here as a rejection, and reframing, of what may be typically meant by this term. The rejection of both the achievability and usefulness of applying hard external tests to evaluate the validity and reliability of information about something as complex as social reality resulted in a shift towards understanding quality criteria as best applied through reflexivity, employed as a form of self-evaluative narrative. This is reflected in the substance of the questions behind these criteria moving from a point where I may have asked ‘how reliable is my research?’ to a process of reflexive questioning about how ‘authentic’ and ‘transparent’ (Etherington 2004) the process, and the subsequent written ‘product’ became. For example the consideration of questions such as why might I be interpreting this information in this way? (Mauthner & Doucet 2003). The other area of quality assessment for the study was the on-going consideration of how I was able to meet the aspiration to achieve depth through diversifying the ‘conditions of possibility’ (Davies & Gannon 2012:17) for thought, by maximising, and being conscious of both context and perspectives. I felt that making this transparent in my writing was a key element of ensuring philosophic consistency, by acknowledging throughout

that the thought, interaction and interpretations, both my own and those of others, were entangled with the social context in which they existed.

In practice using reflexivity as a form of 'self-critique' (Koch and Harrington 1998) meant that I followed a process which focussed on using relevant context, including elements of my own social context and methodological journey to communicate, challenge and question my interpretations of the information. That is to say that if an understanding of specific information was presented, then contextualisation, and some theorising of the potential origin and positioning of this understanding was also necessary to enhance the transparency of that understanding. To assess whether my thinking achieved this, I was able to review the introduction of any new theory, idea or interpretation and question whether it was presented in isolation from these aspects. This approach was relevant through both the co-analysis and final analysis stages, meaning the researchers were also encouraged to consider why certain theories and interpretations were put forward. I was also careful to ensure that it was communicated throughout that these were interpretations, and not any form of claim to knowledge. In addition some reflexive commentary is included in the discussions in chapter 5 and 6 to illustrate this.

3.7 Analysis

Analysis – Interruption and Interpretation

When analysing the life history narratives and information collected during the collective biography sessions, I approached this from a 'narrative', rather than 'paradigmatic stance' (Polkinghorne 1995:5). That is to say, that my aspiration was not to reduce or code the narratives to search for commonality, but to deconstruct the individual, and collaborative, reflections to explore concepts including plot, positioning and the 'narrative as performance'

(Riessman 2003) as well as influence. Czarniawska (2004:88) refers to the deconstruction of narrative as often being marked by a shift from a focus on ‘interpretation’ to ‘interruption’ or from questioning *what* is said, to *how* it is said. Given the nature of my research questions, in this case I felt it beneficial to approach the analysis with both of these questions in mind, a stance which Czarniawska refers to as ‘interruptive interpretation’ (2004:89). I considered that the research question: ‘How do doctoral and postdoctoral researchers speak of their perceptions of their personal methodological ‘journeys’?’ was clearly well aligned with an interruptive approach. I felt it presented the possibility of exploring the insights which could be gained from the manner in which the researchers constructed the ‘reality’ of their journeys. Conversely the remaining research questions initially appeared to necessitate an interpretative approach through their focus on the nature of the influence of elements of biography on methodological assumptions. However, I also saw the word assumption itself as best considered through an interruptive focus. In particular I felt that if there was an acceptance of the possibility that there were likely to be varying levels of consciousness regarding methodological assumptions and thought, then there may be as much to learn in ‘interrupting’ and deconstructing the ‘taken for granted’ aspects of an understanding (Davies & Gannon 2006) as in interpreting the understanding that was explicitly stated or reinforced. As a whole this process was therefore much broader than solely being an attempt to identify which specific factors might be considered as influences within relationships between biography and methodology, rather it was an attempt to deconstruct the nature of the reflections on these relationships in the context of these narratives as a construct ‘sat at the intersection of history, biography, and society’ (Liamputtong and Ezzy 2005: 132).

As a process the analysis began with a realisation that the volume of information collected meant that decisions needed to be made about what should be included, and in what form.

Initially I felt a sense of discomfort at the potential reduction in the authenticity and ownership of the individual's stories, which could accompany their reduction and representation. However, I progressed to a point where I understood that this, like any other aspect of the research and analysis, could only ever be a product of my own connections, interpretations and interruptions anyway. I accepted and was careful to communicate that my own specific reading and the selection and application of my own methodological lens was just one potential reading and one way of identifying what emerged as 'important' (Roos 2003). I therefore decided that, within this process as research, making decisions to detail accounts in a way that valued my identification of 'talk that sings' (Bird 2004) or elevating the importance of specific aspects such as metaphor was no different in terms of its influence than making decisions about what research methods to use. As a result I came to see writing these stories as a process of re-telling and creating a specific understanding of them (Richardson 1993), with the onus shifting from any attempt to create a form of objective understanding through an over reliance on verbatim quotes as a form of 'evidence', to a focus on deconstructing my own connection with them and using reflexivity in order to create a very subjective and authentic insight.

Practically I structured the analysis, and subsequently presented the discussion chapters, around the research questions, divided using the 'interpretive and interruptive' understandings presented above. This was further aided by the creation of an analytic frame which was employed during both my own analysis and the collective biography session. This frame presented a starting point for five key consistent elements of analysis. The primarily interruptive aspects were identified as presenting a focus on 'positioning', 'plot' and 'use of communication/language'. Meanwhile the more interpretative aspects were identified as focussing on specific sites of 'influence' and ideas of 'change/direction'. This frame was

considered beneficial in creating some consistency in the co-analysis and in ensuring the focus and link with the core questions throughout the study; however I also felt that it was broad enough to ensure the focus of the study was not narrowed or over compartmentalised and that multiple and even conflicting, readings of each journey could be included. For example, 'positioning' was understood as encompassing methodological, contextual and social elements, and the use of language presented deconstructive questions such as: 'How is the story told?' 'What is and isn't included?' 'What assumptions or contradictions exist?' It was also accepted that this was not a process of systematically working through this frame for each journey, but of utilising this to make decisions about the relevant insights which could be drawn, thus seeing deconstruction as a 'poststructuralist epistemology, not a formula with steps and procedures' (Boje 2001:19).

I initially transcribed the interviews and then organised them using Gee's (1986) idea units to further explore the construction of the narratives. I also re-listened to each narrative multiple times as I felt this was integral to exploring 'how' they were told. Whilst I didn't choose to 'code' the transcripts thematically, I did make decisions about the key threads of the narrative and then highlight these as being relevant to different stages of the journey in relation to the research questions. For example, I highlighted key threads of narrative which appeared to capture experiences of post graduate education. I also used the questions to create notes relating to interpretations, questions and reflections as they arose. Figure 3.3 (below) shows an example of this, and a full example of a re-formatted transcript is included as appendix 4. This highlighted for example, the areas of the transcript which were considered to relate to early childhood and the notes for questions and considerations emerging against these. I then choose to begin by reframing the stories, outlining my understanding and reading of them in the context of the research questions, as detailed in the accounts in chapter 4. I saw this

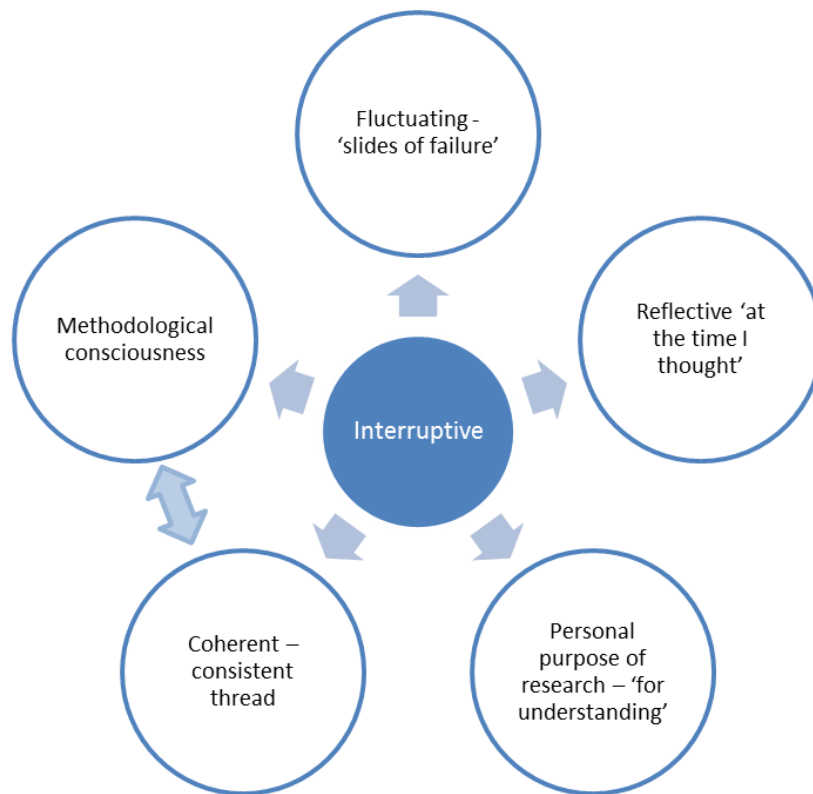
writing as a process of engaging with the stories in a space which Richardson and St Pierre assert is not accessible when you fragment the same information with analytic systems (2008: 484). In the context of the research questions I was therefore initially reducing the transcripts down to what appeared to be the key elements of the narrative, before re-writing these as individual accounts. From here I effectively saw the final analysis and discussion chapters as illustrating, challenging and deconstructing these understandings, drawing on the analytic frame, in order to answer the research questions. At this point some I revisited and recorded the interruptive notes which had contributed to these understandings and figure 3.4 (below) shows an example of these notes. I followed the same process for creating and considering the collective biography accounts, however in this case as well as the accounts themselves, I also sought to illustrate my interpretations of the collective analysis, dialogue and understanding and drew on the written memories provided by the researchers.

A key aspect of the methodological approach to this study (1.6) was the idea of bricolage (Kincheloe 2001), and the aspiration to value and consider different perspectives and interpretations. Consideration of the literature presented in chapter 2 was therefore central to the analysis of the journeys, introducing perspectives through a theoretical framework and interpretations arising from related empirical work. The literature in this section was used as part of the iterative process of revisiting the transcripts and subsequent narrative accounts to consider and develop my own interpretations and develop understanding. In particular this was an important part of the interpretations presented in chapter 5. Miles et al (2013:277) present the significance of the literature in 'generating meaning', as part of a spectrum of qualitative analysis 'tactics' ranging from the more 'concrete' to the 'abstract and conceptual'. Of particular relevance here was consideration of ideas of 'contrasts', 'comparisons', 'metaphors' and 'theoretical coherence' to generate meaning from the

journeys (Miles et al 2013). In keeping with the methodological foundations these were considered as possibilities for understanding (Roos 2003) and therefore framing and understanding these as potential conceptual understandings, rather than ‘concrete’ conclusions was a key part of the analysis. It was my intention throughout to reflect this approach and communicate my analysis in a way which reflected its authenticity as my individual understanding of the information, in the context of the research questions and literature. An important aspect of this was the use of reflexivity (as highlighted 3.6 – Quality Criteria) to contextualise and give transparency (Mauther & Doucet 2003, Etherington 2004) to these understandings, both as part of the process of analysis, and in the reporting of this, which is explored further below.

Figure 3.3 Example of Initial Transcript Notes

Transcript	Notes
And some of them were doing courses on research, philosophy of science	
I thought well that's really something that I haven't looked into at all	Awareness/Consciousness
And started to do a bit of reading on my own	Self-led -> <i>influence</i>
But it's not really part of my formal training	Post graduate
Um, yeah	
I think it's not at the stage where it really comes through in my own research	Stage – potential for <i>change</i>
Maybe it will at some point	
But um	
I think it's not at the stage where it really comes through in my own research	Increased understanding
Maybe it will at some point	
But my research is still very quantitative	
And basically just assumes that that's what I do	Ownership – assumptions - <i>positioning</i>
Post Graduate Training	
Methodological Reflections	

Figure 3.4 Example of Notes for Interruptive Analysis**Reporting**

The discussion and findings for this study have been presented in three main chapters. Chapter 4 presents my interpretation of the narrative accounts and collective biography memories for the researchers. Chapter 5 and 6 present the discussions, which are framed by the interpretative and interruptive aspects presented above, and their alignment with the research questions. This means that the research questions regarding relationships between assumptions and life histories and post graduate education experience are primarily addressed in Chapter 5 and the question regarding the way the researchers; spoke of their perceptions is primarily addressed in Chapter 6.

In considering the aims of this study, its potential audience and my methodological approach, this section presented an important consideration. I had initially felt that within my methodological framework I was inclined to avoid the discussion relying too heavily on

verbatim quotes drawn from the transcript. The origin of this perspective was an understanding that there were potential risks and inconsistencies in presenting the information in this way (Poland 1995). In particular I was concerned that this could be interpreted as an attempt at providing fragmented elements of the information as a form of objective ‘evidence’ for my interpretations, at the expense of broader contextual information and reflexive commentary. However, I also accepted the significance of the voice of the researchers in illustrating the interpretative elements of the discussion to the reader, and indeed reflecting some of this context. This thinking is reflected in the debate between the methodological understanding of participant quotes as ‘scientifically’ necessary for validation, or as valuable for illumination and provocation (Sandelowski 1994). Ultimately I decided that particularly in Chapter 5 specific quotations from the accounts would be included, however I feel it is important to note that these are provided for illustrative, rather than validation purposes. In contrast, I considered that the nature of my approach to Chapter 6 aligned more so with a post-structuralist stance for privileging considerations and context beyond language and therefore in order to avoid narrowing this focus I opted to use less quotations here. Both chapters begin with a summary of the key understandings I obtained, and proceed to explore the individual threads of understanding under the areas I understood to be of significance.

All of the accounts of the nine researchers’ journeys are presented in chapter 4, a decision which was based on my perceptions of their value in illustrating a relatively diverse range of methodological journeys. This was something which I highlighted in chapter 2 as being limited in current literature. In chapter 5 and 6 reference is then made to significant aspects of new understanding, utilising carefully selected references to pertinent aspects of selected journeys to illustrate interpretations. I decided that this was consistent with a narrative,

idiographic approach to my analysis (Polkinghorne 1995) with significance identified through individualised interpretation, rather than through reference to all of the researchers to highlight commonality or communicate notions of representation. Furthermore, in some cases there were areas of importance which were not relevant to, or referenced in, some of the journeys, for example experiences of living in different international communities. However, for other broader key areas, such as experience of post graduate research training, I perceived there to be significant value in illustrating the diversity of experiences across the nine researchers.

Relevance

The abstract nature of seeking to empirically study methodological understanding meant that there were inevitable decisions and interpretations regarding the relevance and significance of specific elements of the researchers' journeys, and assumptions they shared. As highlighted in chapter 1, this included more practical considerations of aspects such as purpose and audience, however it also extended to more abstract concepts such as their ethical and theoretical assumptions and ideas. That is to say, that whilst the focus of the analysis was on interpreting, and interrupting, the methodological journeys of the researchers, at times these could be considered inseparable from their theoretical assumptions and ideas. The complexity of interpreting the relevance of this is highlighted by the example presented in 2.3, which cites that methodologically theories of social construction may be considered as consistent with both deterministic (Burr 2003) and interpretivist (Andrew 2012) methodological assumptions. Just as it is evident that elements of post-modernist and social constructivist theoretical understandings are relevant to the methodology presented in this thesis, it is accepted that the theoretical understandings of the researchers were integral to their journeys and life histories. However, it is also acknowledged that the complexity of these links means

that these judgements are highly subjective, and that reflexive and contextual consideration is required to understand the source of interpretations. For example, elements of critical theoretical positions in the researchers journeys were grounded in complex histories influenced by aspects such as gender and culture, and likewise so were my own interpretations. It is hoped that the presentation of the journeys in chapter 4 will allow the reader to consider other potential understandings of the significance of these aspects.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

The in-depth and personal nature of the information being collected, along with the fact that some of this information was shared in a group environment, meant that confidentiality was considered to be one of the key ethical considerations for the study.

Information which was collected throughout the research was held in strict confidence and stored securely in a locked filing cabinet or on a password protected computer. No identifying information was retained, or included in the final thesis, neither will it be used for any subsequent publications. It was acknowledged that as well as key elements such as names and academic institutions, consideration was also needed to ensure I avoided the inclusion of other potential identifiers such as specific reference to an individual's previous research projects.

In order to participate in the collective biography session, all participants were required to agree to treat any information which was shared with them by other participants as confidential. They were informed of this prior to the session and it was reiterated at both the start and end of the session.

The necessity for multiple life history interviews to be completed, and part analysed, prior to collective biography groups being conducted prevented completion of a full pilot. Instead I

was able to pilot one life history interview and to progress this to a stage of individual, rather than group, memory work. Following this I then carried out both methods with one group at a time, allowing a gap within which I could process any learning from the first group and use this to inform work with the second.

The methodological foundations of the study meant that participant validation of interview transcripts was seen as having the potential to create some inconsistency, and therefore this was not used. The research methods were selected on the basis that thought, and expression of thought, are considered to be context dependant. The process of participants validating transcripts would therefore introduce a secondary context within which the participant would actually be reflecting on a representation of their original perspectives, with any requested changes actually creating new, and less relevant pieces of information, rather than ‘invalidating’ the original.

Prior to commencing the research clear information about the project, and potential ethical considerations, was provided to each individual. The research information sheet and consent form (appendix one and two respectively) included information which was recognised to be necessary to secure full informed consent (BERA 2011), including details of involvement and purpose, right to withdraw and risks and benefits. This information also highlighted some potential for sensitive topics to arise during group discussion and explained that individuals were very welcome to take a break from the discussion if they felt uncomfortable.

It was also acknowledged that ethical, and as such moral, considerations cannot always be codified and reduced to guidance and procedure (Bauman 1993:54). This is particularly true in relation to exploring the intimate and personal elements of an individual’s life history (Eakin 2004), as Richardson (1990) notes ‘narrativising... like all other intentional behaviour, is a site of moral responsibility’. The idea of operating with an ‘ethic of care’ for

those involved in a research study, carries its own philosophical landscape, however I acknowledged throughout that the concepts of ‘care and respect’ for the stories of others was integral to this study (Eakin 2004). This informed decisions such as the use of first person in communicating interpretation of the stories of others (Sikes 2010:14), retaining some clarity that ‘interpretations’ are exactly that; and not an independent reflection of the ‘life as lived’ (Bruner 1993). I also embraced Barbour’s (2008:80) note regarding the need to avoid a ‘take the data and run’ approach and recognised the commitment which others gave to the research, by ensuring individuals were aware of my genuine personal gratitude and the potential value created by their contribution to the process.

3.9 Limitations

Having outlined the methodology, design and approach of this study, it is necessary, and indeed methodologically important, to consider the limitations that these present. In doing so it is hoped that this will enhance the transparency of this process for the reader and provide additional context to the interpretations and findings. Greenhalgh et al (2005) detail the subjectivity of narrative research as both one of its main strengths, and one of its main limitations and assert that the researcher’s awareness of this is an important aspect of good quality narrative research.

As detailed in 3.5 this study adopted a relatively unstructured approach to life history interviewing, grounded in a perceived value for allowing the researchers to make decisions about how their stories were told (Riessman 2003). In relation to this, it is acknowledged that this introduced limitations in relation to the focus of the interviews, for example it is possible that researchers may have neglected to provide key contextual information, because this was not directly requested. Bauer and Jovchelovitch (2000:65) highlight that a central limitation

of an unstructured approach is the need for the researcher to be treated as someone who has no knowledge or interest in the topic so that the full account is given, whilst every informant will unavoidably make assumptions about what is known and that this is 'taken for granted'. The interview schedule (appendix 3) was intended to support the researchers with identifying relevant and significant information to their accounts.

The researchers identified for this study, as detailed in 3.4, were a small specific and non-exhaustive sample. This enabled an in-depth exploration of a collection of methodological journeys of doctoral researchers in the social sciences, however it is acknowledged that this presents limitations in terms of the scope of the study and therefore implications. The decision was made to focus specifically on doctoral researchers within the social sciences, based on the development of research questions regarding the way in which concepts of methodology and social reality are introduced and exposed in this subject area. As detailed in the table in 3.4 the researchers were engaged in a small sample of varying disciplines and doctoral programmes, however the study is only able to address their specific accounts of a limited range of experiences. For example, it is not able to address any considerations in relation to doctoral study and journeys outside of the social sciences, or across the full range of social science disciplines or routes highlighted in 1.3. As Riessman (2008:60) highlights narrative sampling should be 'purposeful' to 'interpret meaning' rather than to generalise, but equally the specifics of this purpose should acknowledge potential challenges in identifying individuals, such as the time commitment required from individuals to engage in in-depth interviews presents challenges in identifying (Bryman 2008).

3.10 Summary

This chapter has presented an overview of the methodological perspective, research approach and specific methods applied for this study. It has outlined the rationale for employing life history inquiry and collective biography to investigate the methodological journeys of the nine researchers. It has also detailed considerations in relation to attempts to achieve methodological consistency throughout the research process and this thesis. This has included the methodological consideration of aspects including reporting, quality criteria and selecting researchers. As part of this, it has identified the perceived value of adopting aspects of interpretivist and post structuralist considerations, and the relevance of reflexive considerations and seeking to value different perspectives. Finally it has presented key ethical considerations in relation to the study.

The following chapter progresses to part two of this thesis and introduces the methodological journeys of nine researchers through the narrative accounts, and collective biography accounts. The thesis then proceeds, in chapter 5, to discuss interpretations of these.

Part Two – Findings and Analysis

Chapter 4 – Narrative Accounts

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I present my accounts of the methodological journeys of the 9 individual researchers, alongside the accounts from the 2 collective biography sessions. Jane, Sarah and Sian took part in the first collective biography (group 1) and Peter, Jemma and Dawn took part in the second (group 2). Heather, Imogen and Debbie were invited to be involved in this second stage, but did not attend. I did however decide to include their accounts on the basis that I felt these provided useful insight into their journeys, even without the additional perspectives which were generated through the collective biography for the other researchers. The accounts are presented in the order that the researchers were interviewed, culminating in the collective account for the group, and form the basis of the discussion presented in chapters 5 and 6.

These accounts were developed through a careful process of transcribing, re-listening and reducing the full interviews into the current understandings in the context of the research questions. This involved initially identifying the key themes, ideas, threads and points of focus and establishing the different key stages of the journeys in relation to the research questions, before re-writing them in their current format. An example transcript which reflects this is included as appendix 4 and full information regarding the analysis process is included in section 3.3. I took developing these accounts and using writing to analyse and re-tell the stories, as a way of understanding them (Richardson 1994). To do this there was a necessity to make decisions about what information, examples and quotations to include and I recognise that these are therefore limited to my interpretations about what was most significant in the context of the research questions (Peshkin 2010) and the approach detailed

in 3.3. When creating the accounts, I followed an iterative process of moving between the research questions, the analytical prompts I had identified and the transcripts and audio recordings. This allowed me to make decisions about which examples and information were informing my understandings. I initially experimented with reducing the stories down to a basic account purely re-told from my interpretations, without the words of the researchers, and then developed this thread adding their words and seeking to emphasise how key elements of the story were told. Approaching the accounts in this way allowed me to explore different understandings through interpretation, without seeking quotations as evidence and adopting the ‘transparent account problem’ (Hollway & Jefferson 2000:3) which assumes all accounts are limited to the words they present. For both my own understanding, and to support the reader I then developed an initial summary account related to methodological understanding, which forms the first paragraph of each account. In presenting the journeys which follow as a chronological story, I embraced the idea that narrative is about focussing on change and connections more than ‘causality’ (Connelly and Clandinin 1990:7). This also reflected the schematic and storied nature of understanding narratives (Cortazzi 2014:64) and my attempts to find ‘order and meaning’ within them (Sandelowski 1991:161).

4.2 Group 1

Jane

Jane currently describes herself as an idealist, expressing rejection of positivism and pragmatism and indicates that for her, research is about explanations and not certainties. She feels her life, which has included some unhappy and uncomfortable periods, has reinforced this view. Jane holds a very conscious, and at times complex, understanding of her own methodological perspective and its connections with her life history. She talks about methodology from a very personal perspective. Her focus is largely directed at the role of

research in supporting her own understanding, rather than in influencing others or social impact, etc. Jane has selected post graduate training opportunities which appear consistent with her methodological understanding, but has fluctuated between what she refers to as big 'successes and failures'. Jane recently paused her doctoral journey, which was a narrative Ed.D pathway.

Of her childhood, Jane recalls *'not a happy childhood, meddled with mental health illness of my parent and alcoholism, so a bit messy'*. She moved schools frequently *'by the time I'd got to kindergarten, I'd already been in another reception class and two nursery schools'* experiencing *'dreadful separation anxiety'* and speaks of a sense of abandonment, recalling her early schooling as a very negative period of her life. Throughout primary and secondary education Jane had high aspirations and experienced disappointment and conflict as her achievements struggled to match these. *'I remember telling them I wanted to be a doctor... by the time I was about 8 or 9 I was thinking I'd be lucky if I would even survive.'* Jane reflects *'I think that kind of uncertainty and fear... drove for me, a sense making mission'*. She indicates that she initially saw the idea of science offering *'indisputable answers'* as *'a little armour'* and *'a way of healing a frightened place in the world'*, but also as a *'massive kickback at my dad... who was a vicar'*.

A significant motivation at school for Jane was the desire to prove wrong those who doubted her and this was a key reason for proceeding to *'struggle through'* her O Levels. Jane then progressed and took A Levels in the natural sciences before fulfilling her aspiration to secure a place on a degree in Human Biology. At this point, Jane defines herself as a *'raging positivist'*, convinced that everything was answerable and could be understood through a scientific perspective. She subsequently felt some conflict with this during a spell as an au pair in Italy prior to her degree, where she recalls experiences including the death of a child

in the village. *'I remember writing home to my parents at that time, that there was more life than just existing.'*

Her experience of the degree was not as she expected and she soon became disillusioned with it, initially changing to a degree in philosophy, psychology and sociology, but then after struggling to succeed with this, she dropped out and moved back to her home town. At the same time Jane also began to take an interest in alternative ways of seeing the world, which included a growing passion for the arts. She recalls *'I can't remember a trigger point for that, except that I wanted pottery and I wanted pictures, and I wanted people to talk about aesthetics'* she continues to suggest that even the *'hard and unpleasant'* aesthetics of the university campus impacted on her increasingly interpretivist world view.

Back in her home town Jane completed a humanities degree at the polytechnic college, which began an interest and passion for truth and fairy tales, which was a focus for a successful dissertation. Jane then started working in a family business, a children's day nursery, having a period of success both professionally and in her continued studies. She was continuously enrolled on a range of courses, particularly related to childcare, management and teaching and also spent a period as a college lecturer. She reflects on her career journey as having periods of success, with continual interruptions, describing them as *'allegedly out of her control'*.

Jane enrolled on a Masters course which she was interested in because of an understanding that it sat at *'the extreme end of interpretivism'* and remembers being *'in love'* with a piece of work by her lecturer analysing business through fairytale. She experienced great success with her dissertation which used poetry as research, and describes the quality of the course as being life changing with *'fantastic teaching, subject matters and ways of looking at things'*. She then proceeded to a narrative Ed.D pathway seeing herself as now being at *the 'wooly*

end of the arts’ as research, *‘bitten by deconstruction’* and searching for other ways of knowing, seeing the academy as doing little more than reproducing itself. Initially this experience was very successful, but disillusionment followed and she recalls *‘I suddenly decided I didn’t know what the hell they’re talking about’*. This also coincided with a transition from initially completing an *‘amazing piece of work’*, to having a lecturer who she *‘didn’t understand what he wanted, he didn’t like my style.’* Jane highlights success and failure as a theme of her educational journey saying *‘one the problems with having these big successes connected with big failures is the terror that someone’s going to take that success away’*. She eventually concluded that she shouldn’t continue at that point. Subsequently she then returned to another Masters level course, concluding that she needed more methodological understanding of narrative, describing her own understanding as the *‘pane of glass’* on which the *‘mist of narrative’* is made visible.

Heather

Heather describes the world as knowable, but infinitely unquantifiable. She embraces a participatory methodology and asserts that everyone’s truth is entirely framed by their own experience. However, she also sees methodological perspectives as constantly evolving and has a sense of frustration in expectations that academics should *‘stick with’* the perspective of whatever papers they’ve written in the past. Heather is a PhD student who is intending to focus on *‘characterisation of good and bad parenting’* and how *‘women can form social movements to effect regulation’*.

Heather outlines a *‘class based transitional childhood’*, explaining her parents were wealthy, committed to education and *‘success was important’*. However her childhood experiences of education shift from initially enjoying early primary school, recalling *‘I liked school, mostly because I liked being right’* to completely disengaging with the whole education system

during her teenage years. She cites the initial turning point as experiences of being bullied '*I went back to school with a different viewpoint... education just wasn't on my radar*' and recalls missing significant amounts of her education. Heather also recalls difficult periods during this time where her brother was very ill and her parents separated. She eventually had some home education and sat 3 GCSE's at home.

Heather completed A Levels through an adult learning route and recalls being disappointed with the psychology A Level, because '*there were no answers, it's just all theories.*'

Throughout her initial experiences of further and higher education, Heather recalls numerous examples of the system not being inclusive for her as a young mother living independently, including not being treated as financially independent and issues with leaving promptly to collect her child from nursery: '*they had no understanding... and at that time I really struggled with it.*'

Initially finding university difficult to access Heather began volunteering as an Evaluation Officer for a charity working with single parents, despite success with this eventually, with a sense that she didn't want to '*start working there and never leave*', she decided to go back to university and completed an arts based education degree, having initially switched from sociology. '*I don't know that I was necessarily interested in the practical art of teaching, but the grounding principles... the action of teaching*'. After completing her degree she spent 7 years delivering teaching programmes with the organisation that had supported her own home education.

Heather's Master degree was in Research Methods, but again her experience was fraught with challenge in her personal life, she eventually completed the degree over 5 years, but recalls '*I don't really think I absorbed anything.*' She remembers having to focus most of her energy on ensuring her family had some security and stability, undertaking multiple part time roles,

which included work on a parenting programme and with a domestic violence charity. *'I felt really stuck... I decided no, I am finishing this Masters even if it kills me'*. Heather cites her dissertation supervisor's introduction of the idea of questions about ontological perspective as a catalyst for provoking her engagement with literature around participatory world views.

Her early research topics included the educational aspirations of young mothers, she explains: *'what really captured me in that was contextualising my own life experiences in that context.'*

She reflects on using conversational interviewing techniques throughout her research experience, terming it an *'approach I come back to'*. Heather contrasts her professional experiences to being in an academic space, citing access to the time, space and knowledge to look at things in other ways. She outlines in detail one particular experience in a piece of research about domestic abuse where her professional knowledge and academic role allowed her to *'contextualise knowing'* about a young woman's story, but at the same time gave her no professional *'recourse to re-visit'* it.

The understanding she has gained in her current academic role, as part of a project working with co-productive methodology has led her to be less critical of non-participatory research, because of the risk of closing off other ways of knowing. She also recalls *'it quickly became apparent that there were some really problematic assumptions within co-productive methodologies'* including time, governance and power dynamics.

She describes wanting to undertake a PhD because she is *'methodologically interested in research and its role in the construction of knowledge.'*

Sarah

Sarah describes herself as a *'huge pragmatist'* and talks of experiencing frustration at times with heavy philosophical discussions about methodology, which for her often complicate things that seem quite *'obvious'*. For Sarah research is a practical exercise and her key considerations in relation to method primarily concern impact and engagement, rather than concepts of truth or knowledge. She suggests that she feels *'completely comfortable'* working with qualitative methods, but also speaks of a sense of the necessity of quantitative information in informing practice. Sarah is a post-doctoral researcher, her PhD focussed on genetics and appearance and she is currently involved in a project which focusses on isolation and loneliness of older people.

During Sarah's childhood her parents separated, she recalls both of her parents being involved in academic study and also taking a strong interest in political activism, recalling *'We have these fantastic photos of me kind of with placards at age 3 wandering around London.'* Her primary school experience was positive, but she generally reflects on her own attitudes to school as being about surviving and *'scraping by'*, summarising: *'I wasn't that bothered'*. With hindsight, she frequently refers to reflecting on this now as being *'awful'*.

Sarah's choice to engage in further and higher education was born out of a realisation that without it she may get stuck in a job which didn't meet her own expectations. Her degree in communication studies with education was her first challenging educational experience, she reflects *'It was the first time I couldn't get away with just bobbing along...I loved it, it was absolutely amazing'*. This was followed by a series of jobs in the media, one of which led her to conclude that her work *'had no merit... it was just all a bit pointless'*. From here Sarah spent several years working with a charity which supported young people, she chose to leave this role after to care for her 2nd child who was very ill when he was born. A theme of her

early career is the notion that things just happened to her, she summarised *'there's so much I've just fallen into'*.

Sarah re-entered academic education undertaking a post-graduate diploma in Psychology and reflects *'really I should've done psychology in the first place'*. Following this she successfully applied to undertake a PhD, an opportunity which had a loose theme, but a good degree of autonomy. Sarah spent a year *'sitting in'* on Masters modules in ethics and research methods and describes the function of this as *'working out what the question was'*. She suggested that her subsequent dialogue with her supervisors, who were collaborating between two universities, had an *'applied focus'* and *'there wasn't an awful lot of talk about big philosophical issues'*. Her study involved taking a mixed methods approach to questions relating to young people's experiences of a genetic condition affecting appearance. *'It had to be something to do with genetics and appearance... because it was the centre for appearance research it had to be something with an applied focus.'* Having initially intended to take a more qualitative approach she reflects, *'in the end I'm really pleased I used quantitative methods... (they) are the ones that are reported... they jump out at you more within my thesis.'* However she also experienced a sense of frustration with a later role which was very focussed on 'measures' in relation to body image. Sarah appears to hold a strong belief that it is important to include people in research about them, which has led to her current role as a research associate for a co-produced project about loneliness involving a group of older people and a community group:

I've always had this feeling that we kind of don't really listen to people, we say we want to, but if they say what we don't want to hear we ignore it and we're kind of good at doing that. In research, in life generally, it's that whole confirmation bias.

Sian

Sian is very comfortable with applying a positivist, systematic approach to her research. She qualifies that whilst her ontological perspective is that reality is not as simple as this may imply, she believes that a robust positivist approach can provide useful information. Sian is currently undertaking her PhD, which will focus on analysing characteristics related to information held by social services about child neglect cases. Prior to her PhD Sian had undertaken no formal social science or research training.

Sian's professional and educational background and even her childhood interests all relate very strongly to a methodical, organised approach to the world. She recalls: *'one of the toys I remember having... was a type writer... at one point all I wanted to be was a secretary, organising things'*. Sian describes herself as first generation British Chinese and explains how academic success was very important to her family, but how she also saw education as *'a way of being able to have the kind of independence I wanted later on in life'* which she saw as arising from her *'identity struggle between two cultures.'*

At school her strongest subjects were the physical sciences and she eventually chose to take a degree in geology, purely on the basis that she thought she would enjoy it. Her early professional career involved process re-design and operations management in the banking sector. Notably she recalls a realisation she had in this role, explaining *'it didn't matter about your systems... without the people, they'll all fail'*. After having a period of success, and working on a national scale, Sian eventually decided that this area wasn't for her and made a decision to instead volunteer and work with young people, recalling the satisfaction of knowing when she'd *'made a difference to a young persons life'*. Her progression from working directly with young people to her current field came as a result of feeling *'limited by the scope'* of the impact she could and she reflects that this led to a desire to want to work on

the same scale as she had in her business role, but for this work to have the similar value to her volunteering. Sian perceives that her move into research in social services allows her to apply her business skill set, potentially to wide scale benefit for children and families.

Sian isn't *'wholly convinced'* that her doctoral training has impacted on her methodological perspective yet. She has taken modules which focus on qualitative and quantitative *'skills'* and feels the purpose of this training is to help test how *'robust'* what she *'now understands as her theoretical framework'* is. She reflects that she is beginning to see that this needs to include understanding different *'realities'* and *'ways of knowing.'* Sian's PhD is effectively a development of some work she previously undertook for a local authority, and she recalls wondering why all local authorities and agencies didn't have this knowledge. In terms of her position Sian outlines *'I don't think there is one kind of label that you choose... I think the practical side of me is 'does it really matter?'*

Collective Biography – Group 1 Sarah, Jane and Sian

Jane: "Their knowledge production isn't regarded with the same value as knowledge production that's produced within a certain discourse"

Sarah: "That's a problem actually sometimes with research,, that we're almost taught to disconnect actually"

As a collective, a key part of our dialogue was a shared value for methodological diversity, which included some frustration about what is and isn't understood as research in society, through media and the academy. This included some assertions about advocating for, and protecting certain perspectives and ways of looking at the world. For example Sarah detailed frustration at a research group not accepting aspects of an arts based approach as *'research'*,

to which Jane responded *'honestly, I really feel you need to tell them that it is... there are researchers doing that.'* This led to some questions about the value given to different knowledge production in society, what doctoral status means and how this might have impacted on our own journeys. A theme of each of our memories was the experience of challenge or misalignment with expectations, with the idea being that these were part of our socially constructed ideas about society, reality and knowledge. In relation to this Jane summarised: *'The most generative learning, is learning we're in the wrong space'*.

Sarah (Collective Account)

Early on in her PhD, Sarah attended a talk about the *'imposter syndrome'* which she says prompted a realisation about a conflict between her own identity and *'how I felt about myself as an 'academic'*. At that point she felt that *'a lot of academic structures seemed bizarre and a bit pointless/antiquated'* which acted as a motivator for a journey into her current role in a *'co-produced'* community research project. Today however, she is beginning to re-frame some of these structures, seeing their pragmatic and protective value to her as a researcher trying to *'make a difference'*. However, she believes that people *'still take their epistemological positions too seriously'*. She sees her role in researching with the community as ensuring the community can *access* research and influence the direction, but that the process is still *'somehow rigorous'*.

As a group we reflected on the tension between structures and language which may be seen as necessary methodologically, and those which potentially exclude some groups, and also some knowledge production. Sarah's current role was seen as an interesting illustration of these tensions, this was captured by an example where she was supporting some community members to understand how it was possible for artistic performance to be considered relevant to research, whilst at the same time detailing to others why a process needed to be followed

when collecting quantitative information. Language was described by Jane as potentially *'the most beautiful paint pallet'*, but at the same time by Sarah as a possible tool for elitism.

Jane (Collective Account)

At nineteen years old Jane *'jumped'* from an understanding of a world which was potentially knowable, to the pursuit of *'irregularities, exceptions and the unpredictable.'* Her journey is symbolised as a shift from the *'bare red brick walls'* of her university to a *'handmade pottery bowl'* she bought on her homeward journey after leaving her science degree. Recently, almost 40 years later, she parted with this bowl, its *'loss'* seen as symbolic *'of further shift into the uncontained'*, a journey from an *'argumentative belief in the trajectory dazzling light'* and the pursuit of *'perfect knowledge'*, to trying to make meaning *'lost in the darkness'*.

In dialogue Jane talked of her mistrust in the agendas behind attempts to fit the human condition into one defined structure, but that undertaking a process of making meaning was inescapable. She was asked by Sian *'where does that mistrust come from?'* and initially detailed a *'very disturbed childhood I think'* before expanding that she understood it as a *'very personal response'* which does *'permeate learning environments'*. We talked of the inconsistencies, and Jane's mistrust, in researcher's attempts to separate themselves from the social context which they are seeking to *'explain'* and questioned the value in the assumption that trying to *'disconnect'* was an important part of being rigorous.

Sian (Collective Account)

At 12 or 13 years old Sian was shocked when her English teacher was so honest in telling her *'she hated teaching'*. *'I couldn't understand why you'd give your life up for something you didn't believe in'*. When she commenced her own working life and she questioned her own passion about a role she held in the banking sector, she decided to leave. Her Manager told

her that she was *'very brave'* taking such a risk in leaving such a *'secure and well paid position'*. Of both occasions she recalls *'I used to struggle to understand why they had such different viewpoints'* She empathises with different perspectives more now and sees value in being with those who have different perspectives, but only where *'different viewpoints are encouraged'*. She describes a world with one perspective as *'grey'* and *'like a prison'* and the need for her role and methodology to have value and be *'fulfilling'* rather than *'tick boxes'* created by *'societal expectations'*. Sian recalls that the difference in her examples feels so interesting to her, but she is still not entirely sure why.

Sian was asked whether she saw her career decisions as being about purpose, and making a difference and she emphasised beliefs, value and having passion as being important. Her story was also compared to an earlier comment from Sarah about why she decided to leave a role in the media. We discussed the perspective of this kind of economic risk as potentially socially irresponsible and questioned whether this arises from the dominant discourse treating wellbeing solely as a direct result of economic prosperity. Jane commented: *"There's a manipulation there isn't there, about becoming responsible social economically producing"* Sarah suggested *'the idea of what's risk is really complicated'*. This also led to questions about the economic value, and often the job security, of roles in academia and how knowledge production fits into, and is influenced by, the market. Sian elaborated that she saw: *'it's very much about your economic contribution'* and acknowledged the response of *'we can't quantify wellbeing... (or) satisfaction'*.

4.3 Group 2

Peter

Peter speaks of a methodological perspective which appears to centre on pragmatic questions of what best fits and provides '*evidence*'. He suggests he holds value for a mixed methods approach thinking that '*it's not one or the other... one can complement the other*' and that a divide is '*maybe just the natural order of things*'. He talks of experiencing a tension between ideas of how best to capture learning, and how to '*evidence it*' to influence '*local and national government*'. Peter also aligns his thinking, about research and about his own journey, with clear social constructionist ideas, framing his understanding of his journey to undertaking his PhD as a '*crystallisation of my whole life actually*'. Peter is a PhD student who is focussing on the isolation of older people.

Peter describes his early childhood as '*a bit unusual*'. His mother was from Zimbabwe and his father from England and he spent his early life moving between a number of countries. He says he recalls only '*a sense of being somewhere exotic*'. He then started school in England before his family emigrated back to Zimbabwe after it became independent. He later returned to England in his late teens. He reflects on his early life in terms of forming ideas about two very different cultures, and struggling with identity and his place in the world. He summarises seeing Zimbabwe as '*naïve*', but '*relaxed*' in contrast to England as '*rigid*', but '*sophisticated*'. He also talks of being '*Zimbabwean, and different*' in England, and '*English, and different*' in Zimbabwe. He remembers '*missing*' England when he moved to Zimbabwe and then feeling '*quite intimidated*' and missing his life in Zimbabwe when he returned.

Peter completed his A Levels in England, but '*didn't do so well*'. At this time he remembers enjoying music and making some friends, but struggling to fit in. He initially started a social sciences programme at a polytechnic university with the intention to do a degree in

economics, but decided he *'didn't like it'*, yet *'really loved'* psychology so instead did his major in Psychology. After graduating he recalls a continued sense of *'not belonging'* and not knowing what to do, and he eventually got a job in a music store. He recalls *'I realised this is not the life I want and it was then I got the idea of teaching.'* Peter then completed a PGCE in Further Education, although says he still felt a little bit like a *'fraud'*.

After spending 2 years teaching in further education, Peter spent a *'tough'* year teaching in a challenging school in America. On his return he starting teaching psychology in further education, but before long *'jumped from being a lecturer to being a manager'* in a *'problem department'*. Peter recalls that he *'turned it around'* and his success and *'enthusiasm'* meant that he kept being given more difficult departments, until he was doing the equivalent of 2 and a half full time roles. At the same time he had 2 young children and was attempting to a Master Degree in Psychology. He recalls *'something just had to give'* and first he didn't do the dissertation and then *'things just took a turn for the worse'* at work and he says *'actually I was very, very unhappy'*. Peter became ill, suffered from panic attacks and *'just couldn't go back'* to work.

When Peter decided to look at options for what to do next, he was given an opportunity to carry out an evaluation of a bushcraft course. He recalls using his experience to set an *'educational framework of looking for learning outcomes'*, but then realising *'gosh it's not about the learning of bushcraft is it?'* He recalls: *'It was way more than I envisaged... I struggled to capture it all, but I did my best'*. He followed this with a period as a Cognitive Behavioural Therapist, where he recalls realising that most of the time *'the social environment'* was the problem. He remembers *'one moment'* where he reflected that he'd had *'all these experiences'* and *'training'* and had now realised that because the value in community projects is so *'hard to capture'* funding it is difficult, yet it needed addressing because some of these projects could be so *'powerful'*.

Peter initially took a pragmatic stance when considering his Masters degree suggesting he took ‘quant and qual’, because he felt he’d need the skills to use mixed methods. He recalls a performance workshop which ‘*opened up the debate*’ in terms of philosophy for him and says for his research it started to present philosophy in terms of understanding assumptions and achieving ‘*credibility*’ in his research. He suggests the programme allowed plenty of ‘*freedom*’ to apply different approaches, but that he started to feel the wider ‘*power struggle*’.

Peter’s is intending for his PhD to focus on isolation of older people, and he cites the other key reflection on this as being his memories of the contrast between his grandparents in Zimbabwe whose house would ‘*be literally packed full of people*’ as opposed to his English grandparents who were ‘*isolated.*’ Peter talks of the need for an ‘*evidence base*’ for community projects and for ‘*talking the language*’ of decision makers and to ‘*champion projects.*’

Imogen

Imogen is an economist whose PhD involves working on large scale secondary data sets, applying technical quantitative methods. She feels confident that her skills and interests align with working in what she calls an ‘*absolutist*’ way, but speaks with a sense of concern at the perceived irrelevance of other ways of seeing the world by colleagues within her field. She summarises that ‘*ideas about the way society works are not going to be overturned by a statistical study*’ but feels there’s value in ‘*underpinning these things with data*’.

Imogen recalls being ‘*academically minded*’ as a child growing up Germany, but says she was ‘*the first person in my family to be interested in maths and quantitative things and statistics*’. She speaks of her confusion at finding a childhood workbook where she had written that she was not good at maths, because this didn’t align with her memories of this time. She recalls re-interpreting this from a *feminist point of view wondering if that was*

because I thought it was more acceptable to be good at reading than maths. As a child she always found *books easier to engage with than people*, because she felt people were *complicated*. Imogen remembers that during a difficult time in her childhood, following the death of a grandparent and her parents separating, she read the novel ‘Sophie’s World’ and the *whole idea of questioning everything and being surprised that there is a world* affected her. Later on, at 16 years old, she remembers a year spent in Uruguay again challenging her thinking and revealing how *‘differently you can see things... subtle things about family and relationships.’*

Imogen studied Mathematics and Economics as her undergraduate degree and talks of feeling she’d reached her *limit* with Maths and that *then it was OK to let it go*, subsequently studying economics for her master degree. She suggests that methodology in terms of research philosophy didn’t feature at all in this with a course on causal identification being the *‘closest to the philosophical side’*. She refers to *‘stumbling into’* her doctoral project after following an interest in taking an internship with an institute, because it was very *‘policy orientated’*. As part of this she was presented with the question of how she could use the data which was available. Her PhD is about *women’s labour market outcomes*, including decisions about wages and commuting.

Imogen talks of an aspiration to be a *‘bridge’*, seemingly to encourage more awareness of both methodological and sociological questions within economics. She is increasingly aware of other methodological approaches from conversations with her fellow students, but feels that she is not encouraged to explore these. She recounts telling her supervisor about her readings on philosophy of science: *‘it was sort of like a reaction like I’d said well I’m taking some tennis lessons!’* Imogen appears to refer to methodological assumptions as belonging to her approach, rather than choosing to take any personal ownership of these. *I feel like it’s really assumed that we use data, we use statistics.* She concludes that it would be *naïve to*

suggest you're not influenced by the things you're surrounded by. At times Imogen speaks with some frustration at the perceived irrelevance of methodological assumptions in her field.

Jemma

Jemma sees her methodological understandings as grounded in her educational experiences of the natural sciences in her undergraduate Degree and the social sciences in her two Master Degrees. Practically she has firmly aligned herself with a mixed methods approach and says she's at a point in her journey where her objective is to *'acquire skill, practical skills and competences in using mixed methods'*. However, Jemma has chosen to reject the notion that this approach should be underpinned by only pragmatist principles, suggesting these are *'kind of shallow in the sense that it kind of says the method should define everything.'* Instead she sees her research as being underpinned by interpretivism and phenomenology and dismisses pragmatism because for her, *'a philosophical framework has to be philosophical in every sense of the world'*. Jemma is a PhD student undertaking a study on the 'unintended consequences' of exam failure.

As a child Jemma grew up in Nigeria and considers that her family was *'average'* and *'comfortable'*. She recalls *'I entered school early because I was intelligent'* and she then subsequently moved ahead twice meaning she was 3 years ahead of her age group. By secondary school she suggests this had *'put a lot of responsibility, that maybe I wasn't prepared for'* and that this created a period where she questioned the *'point of school'*.

Jemma recalls two key moments where she remembers finding answers to this question, the first was the start of her aspiration to be a doctor and the second a successful result on a Maths test. After this she says she *'began to consciously read, study mathematics'* and repeatedly got good grades.

A key personal theme, which Jemma has now taken as the focus for her PhD research, is that of the consequences of exam failure. Having grown accustomed to academic success during her schooling, unexpectedly Jemma didn't achieve the necessary grade in Physics to pursue a route in medicine and remembers *'it shook me it shook me and shook me badly... (it) changed the way I saw myself at the time'*. She recalls that she felt *'constrained'*, *'experienced lots of consequences'* and couldn't understand why her peers had *'gone ahead'* of her. This appears to be an experience which she is still reflecting on and questioning now. Jemma instead took an undergraduate degree in natural sciences, but upon doing an internship after she'd graduated she realised *'I really did not enjoy working in the laboratory, I was more interested in people.'*

Jemma's post graduate training in the social sciences began with a Master Degree in Nigeria in Educational Measurement and Assessment, which she describes as *'purely quantitative'*. Following this she got a scholarship to complete another Master Degree in London, in Curriculum Pedagogy and Assessment, which she said contrasted this being *'purely qualitative'* and introducing a range of methods, but recalls that she *'wasn't conscious of that fact'* prior to starting the programme. Of this experience she says she *'struggled'* with the transition, but was then *'really intrigued, I was like wow there is an approach that will really allow you to focus on people.'* She also cites her second Master degrees as presenting the expectation to *'define your philosophy'*, an aspect which she didn't see as aligning with pragmatism, as well as providing the opportunity to work with people which she was so keen to find.

Jemma explains that her value for a methodology which accepts the existence of *'multiple realities'* also comes from experiencing the contrast between the social construction of realities in different cultures. She recalls the example that for her in Nigeria it was normal for

teaching to be transmissive and there was *'right knowledge and wrong knowledge'* and in the UK it was difficult for her because this was much less absolute.

Prior to returning to the UK to start her PhD Jemma had some professional experience working on research projects in Nigeria which allowed exploration of her *'new found love for qualitative method'*. Jemma has recently finalised her full proposal for her doctoral thesis. Originally she had set out to explore failure in terms of *'causal explanation'*, but says that her experience on the doctoral programme led her to question *'to what end'*? Jemma hopes that her research about the unintended consequences of failure will help to highlight the young people who *'fall through the cracks'* who the *'system does not kind of acknowledge'*.

Debbie

Debbie explains feeling a sense of *'relief'* upon recently discovering post structuralism as part of her PhD studies, reflecting that she feels it aligns with the questions she had about the world around her throughout her life. She recalls that *'for a time I was very much attracted to kind of critical theory'*, but decided this can be about *'goodies and baddies'* whereas post structuralism *'chimes with the way I see life as being complex and moving'*. However, Debbie also feels that negativity towards other paradigms should be *'challenged'* and that post structuralism is *'about challenging a hierarchy, so it shouldn't place itself at the top'*. Debbie is a PhD student seeking to *'deconstruct'* journeys, and concepts of success and failure in relation to her childhood school.

Debbie describes her parents as being from a *'poor background'* and refers to herself as meeting *'widening participation indicators'*. As a child she remembers feeling like she didn't *'fit in entirely'*, in particular she recalls stories about struggling with social expectations relating to gender which seemed to be based on an *'illogical binary'* of *'boys strong, girls*

weak. For example having no power to challenge the notion that girls couldn't play football, because their *'bones are too brittle'*, yet could play hockey with sticks that would *'crack over your shin'*. From a young age she says she was termed a *'tom boy'* and at the age of 7 she remembers being told she was wearing a *'boy's cowboy outfit'* and thinking *'it's my cowboy outfit and I'm a girl'*.

The focus of Debbie's PhD is to explore the *'educational journeys'* of a small group of people, including herself, who went to the same secondary school which was *'labelled the worst school in Britain'*. Of her own early experiences at the school she reflects it was *'frightening at first, quite a violent place'*, but that somehow she *'managed to be... sufficiently confident'* and it was *'OK'*. She believes that because of the difficulties at the school, *'any good behaviour was inflated'* and therefore whilst she reflects that she was *'quite lazy actually'* and achieved *'not fantastic exams'*, her report was *'glowing'*. Debbie is interested in deconstructing notions of *'disadvantage, privilege, good school/bad school'* and lists the indicators which would apply to herself and others in the group, for example *'parents had no qualifications'*.

On leaving school Debbie secured a place at Oxford University with the support of a tutor at Oxford who *'had a sense of social justice'* and *'wanted people like me from my background'*. She remembers the experience as a *'massive cultural shock'*, but *'survived'* and studied theology achieving a 2:2. Again she reflects with her current understanding on this in terms of notions of *'the brightest and the best, as if you're all starting from the same place'*. She progressed to a Master degree in social work, where she recalls finding the ideas interesting, but the programme *'quite positivist'*. She reflects now that she feels her dissertation was a deconstruction of *'the categorisation of offenders'*, but that she didn't see it that way at the time and is embarrassed at how *'theory free'* it was. Debbie suggested she never felt *'fired up'* about the academic side at this point, which has changed more recently.

Debbie worked for just 1 year as a social worker before deciding it wasn't for her, which she remembers as being quite *'traumatic'* having spent so long qualifying. *She recalls: 'it was basically about doing assessments and trying to manage a very small budget'*. Debbie also had spent some short spells working as an assistant to a professor at a university, and a personal assistant to a *'disabled activist'*, she describes these as *'enjoyable'* and *'very powerful'* respectively. Much of her remaining professional experience was in heading a *'(sort of) research team'* in parliament providing evidence for political parties, which she remembers as being *'very positivist'* and *'not a space for really in depth critique'*. In her early 40's she took voluntary redundancy and decided to apply to do a PhD, she says she decided *'I'm ready for education, for theory, for thinking really critically'*.

To prepare for returning to study Debbie says she prepared *'by watching loads of youtube videos'* of lectures from universities all over the world. On starting the Masters element of the programme at university she remembers being asked where she saw herself and recalls *'I think they had like postmodern and I got a feeling I might be up that end'*. Through the course of the programme she cites readings, particularly Derrida, Foucault and Lather as influencing her and an experience of a *'post structurally driven'* conference where she recalls:

'It wasn't even like I necessarily clicked with individual people, but for the first time I felt I think I'm kind of amongst my own people'

Debbie talks of her experience throughout her PhD studies as initiating a realisation of her philosophical assumptions through introducing key post-structuralist thinkers, recalling she always thought *'as if your methodology hasn't got something to do with your views, your values'*. She also reflects that she became very *'self-motivated'* and *'couldn't believe'* how well she was doing, in terms of being conscious of her methodology she suggests *'it was definitely the structured element of this course.'*

Having reached her current methodological perspective, she suggests her current challenge is to create a structured piece of work for her PhD, because *'I can't just do a dance for my viva!'*

Dawn

Dawn came to the social sciences from a background in technology and describes a very current process of growing methodological consciousness and questions, as she embarks on her Doctoral study. She indicates that she came from a *'hard science'* background, thinking that *'there must be a formula for people'*, but through her post graduate education started to find ways to understand learning *'not just from a physiological perspective'*. Dawn talks passionately about the injustice of the way *'big systems'* exploit people and outlines research, and education, as offering her the potential to *'do something for the people.'* Dawn is a PhD student, conducting action research relating to intergenerational activity and technology.

Dawn grew up in Mexico, her parents had moved to the city to work as teachers, but she also remembers spending time in more rural surroundings with relatives. In particular Dawn's great grandparents are an important part of her early memories and she remembers them as very active, independent and capable in their later years, *one of them was aged 94 or something and they used to wake up at 5 in the morning go to the mill and ground the corn and make tortillas.* They told her stories about the Mexican revolution, which she felt was a much better way to learn than reading *'impersonal'* facts from a book. Dawn connects this part of her personal history with her doctoral research about intergenerational learning, summarising that societies now treat older people as *'another chair in the room'*.

Dawn originally aspired to be a teacher, but her mother told her she could do *'much better than that'*, which she reflects now related to the conditions and rights of teachers in Mexico. Instead she opted to study technology because she was, and still is, *'convinced that*

mathematics are behind everything'. After deciding she wanted to study something related to *'hard science'* she recalls that at the time she felt technology was *'easy and it paid'*. With hindsight this is something she says she *'feels bad about'* now. She recalls her work experience in this area, including a role working on software for banking, as *'traumatic'*, because she believes she was contributing to an *'awful system'* which exploited the poor and elderly. She reflects that she asked herself *'why am I doing this?'* and made a decision to save enough money to *'invest in my education'* to help people.

Dawn came to the UK to study a Master Degree in Education and Technology to *'bridge the gap'* between her skills and *'how I could be using that in education'*. She describes this transition as *'tough'* moving from *'black and white... zero one'* to considering philosophy and theory, but was open minded. Dawn says it was *'not the lessons that we go and sit through'* that had an impact on her, but instead recalls two realisations she had during her Master Degree. The first was the interactions with her peers *'there were 25 of us, from 16 different countries, it was beautiful'*, which she says helped her understand the social construction of global societies. The second was a realisation about *'philosophical being'*, where she recalls thinking that disagreeing about philosophy and religion is like arguing about *'an imaginary friend.'* This learning helped contextualise thoughts and discussions she had prior to studying and led to a realisation that *'the way in which I perceive things is going to shape my questions.'* She suggests that it wasn't until her Master degree that she realised that her existing assumptions *'fitted into a school of thought'*.

Dawn found the ethical discussions about her current research useful in shaping her methodology and initially wanted it to be participatory action research, but for practical reasons is adopting a more traditional action research approach. She describes her work as *'interventions'* and appears much clearer about what she wants to achieve than how she will research this, suggesting her project is about *'learning to be together with someone else'*.

Dawn challenges the role of the media, corporations and institutions in exploiting societies. She talks with frustration that researchers are trained to *'reproduce existing structures of power and politics'* and says that this makes her feel that her methodology is constrained to fit a structure, concluding: *in the end what is the purpose for research, if it is not to make the world a better place?*

Collective Biography – Group 2 Peter, Jemma and Dawn

"I think there is a tendency, a global tendency, to frame quantitative methods as the only way we can get to know anything really." – Dawn

"It reminds me of like, when you're growing up and your parents saying to you we really want you to marry this quantitative they're respectable, they have a good job, good prospects and then you fall in love with this hippy qualitative, musician, doesn't have a job..." - Peter

The dialogue in the second collective biography session focussed on the values attributed to quantitative and qualitative methods. The perceived value in society for quantitative methods was contrasted by individual experience which was seen to demonstrate the value for qualitative methods. There were also questions about the achievability of in-depth interpretivist research, due to both the practicalities of time and funding and the relationships and ownership required to uncover the *'hidden'* depths. Peter, Jemma and Dawn all talked with a sense of the necessity of compromise in relation to this. For example Peter suggested his alignment with using mixed methods was about *'the best you can do'*.

Jemma (Collective Account)

Jemma shared a memory about the moment when she was on a bus and decided that she would study education once she completed her chemistry degree. She reflected *'I remember that when people asked me why'* that she would answer that she wanted a profession that was

about *'people'* not *'abstract concepts'*. She says that her attraction to education is *'implicit in my attraction to methodologies that prioritise close interaction with people.'* She added that she *'wanted to believe'* that the *'seed'* was *'sowed'* during a student placement, which she hated, at a paint company.

Jemma's memory prompted questions about her strong identification with mixed methods as opposed to her passion for close interaction. I asked her if she felt mixed methods was about her practical skills, or philosophical views and she outlined that she *'fell in love'* with qualitative methods. When explaining the need for quantitative methods she explained *'it's practical for what I want to do'* and *'it's a big deal back home'*. Peter picked up on this later point and offered the metaphor of someone's parents saying *'we really want you to marry this quantitative they're respectable, they have a good job, good prospects and then you fall in love with this hippy qualitative, musician, doesn't have a job...'*

Dawn (Collective Account)

Dawn recounted a memory from her own research, where a focus group responded to her question with *'are we doing what you want?'* She remembers that she told them *'there are no right or wrong answers'* and reflects that *'I wanted them to be involved and do research with me.'* She suggested that she realised people can be *'puzzled'* that research is not *'a questionnaire or going to university to answer 1000 questions'*. Dawn recorded and underlined that she felt research was about *'actual participation'* and that it should not be about *'exploiting people to get data'*.

Dawn was asked if she could tell us any more about why she *'wanted them to be involved and participate'* but said there wasn't *'more of a reason or something to back that up'*. Dawn expressed frustration that using a participatory methodology doesn't feel *'possible'*, because of time, relationships and that she thought universities should be aware that the *'structure is*

not in place for people to do their best'. Peter suggested her story showed that it was interesting to consider *'the regulatory system'* which is research is part of and *'how that might dictate our perceptions'*.

Peter (Collective Account)

Peter shared a memory about his relationship with his father-in-law in his later life before he passed away. He explained that they *'got closer in the last couple of years of his life after his daughter and I separated'*. Peter reflected that he'd known him for *'a good 12 years before that'*, but that he realised more and more *'how much he had to offer, his insight and perspective'*, but also his *'pain, humanity and vulnerability'*. In Peter's memory he contrasted his perception of the view of others who saw his father-in-law as *'difficult'* or *'eccentric'*, with the person he learnt about once he established a close and trusting relationship.

Peter shared that initially he knew the memory was relevant to methodology, but was trying to identify why. He added that when he listened to the other accounts this became much clearer to him. He reflected that he was trying to think about why he was always *'quantitative'* and how did he *'come to this qualitative'* (which was a change which perhaps hadn't appeared so clear in his life history account). He was asked if this experience leaves him conscious in his research that everyone *'carries things'* and replied *'very much so.'*

Dawn added that it raised the question of how we avoid stereotypes in research.

4.4 Summary and Conclusions

The accounts presented above were carefully developed in the context of the research questions. The decision to include the journeys of all of the researchers who were involved in the study was based on their value in providing an illustration of a relatively diverse set of journeys, constructed and presented in the context of varying philosophical assumptions. It is

hoped that, as highlighted in chapter 2, these accounts will begin to offer additional insights into the way individual and collective methodological journeys may be both constructed, and presented. These two considerations will be explored in more depth throughout chapters 5 and 6.

Even in isolation from the deeper exploration which follows, the presentation of these journeys has significance in creating the potential for provocation and understanding in relation to reflexivity. As highlighted in section 1.3, this is important in the context of increasing value for reflexivity within research in the social sciences (Hsuing 2008), particularly when coupled with the limited literature regarding methodological journeys (see chapter 2). Beginning to illustrate potential perceptions of connections between social experience and the individual researcher as ‘historically effected’ (Gadamer 1975) here has the potential to provide a useful tool for other doctoral, and post-doctoral researchers, who are exploring the practice of reflexivity. In this respect, considering the reader as ‘subject of thought’ (Davies 2010:54), these accounts provide examples of the social situation of the researcher and allow the reader to make comparisons to their own experiences and understandings. In addition they present questions about areas and stages of experience which may not previously have been considered. As indicated in 1.3, the significance of this is heightened by the fact that elements of philosophical consideration, particularly questions in relation to doubt, require specific conscious consideration (Berger & Luckmann 1966). The detail of these journeys represents the key focus of chapter 5, where I will proceed to explore considerations of methodology as a social construction.

Chapter 5 - Interpretations of the Methodological Journeys

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will consider interpretations of the methodological journeys of the researchers, presented in chapter 4, by exploring the potential relationships between their life histories and experience of post graduate training and their individual philosophical assumptions. This chapter will adopt an interpretative stance, focussing on ideas of influence and change, as highlighted in section 3.3. In doing so it will address two of the central research questions:

- 1) What relationships appear to exist between researchers' individual life histories and their subsequent philosophical (ontological, epistemological and methodological) assumptions?
- 2) What relationships appear to exist between researchers' experiences of post graduate research training (and understanding of methodology) and their subsequent philosophical assumptions?

Focussing on the accounts presented in chapter 4, I will argue that each of the researcher's individual philosophical assumptions may be seen as a socially constructed product of their lifelong personal and academic journeys. These journeys are characterised here as a series of experiences, questions and realisations, across a number of key life stages, which challenge and/or reinforce individual ontological and epistemological perspectives. Central to the narration of these journeys and individual capacity to look at these reflexively is the idea of 'methodological consciousness', with the process of sharing methodological journeys often creating new understandings of potential links between early experiences and later understandings. Using this point as a foundation, I will assert that post graduate training can have a key role in 'unlocking' opportunities for individuals to reflect on their own perspectives and their own social context, by introducing methodological consciousness.

Finally, with reference to the collective accounts in particular I will pose questions about whether methodological expectations and assumptions, introduced by the academy and in wider society, may create tensions between personally held philosophical views and the practical act of carrying out research. In presenting these arguments I will contend that this information is significant in contributing to insights into methodological journeys and understandings of approaches to supervision, and the teaching of methodology, as presented in chapter 2 and generates significant new knowledge about methodological journeys. In addition, as highlighted in section 1.2, this is presented as being relevant to those seeking to engage in reflexivity, and to consider the relevance of their own journeys to their philosophical assumptions.

Interpretations in relation to key areas of consideration are illustrated with carefully selected elements of the researchers' journeys and verbatim quotes. This approach was consistent with a narrative, idiographic approach to my analysis (Polkinghorne 1995) with significance identified through individualised interpretation which was not premised on highlighting commonality or communicating notions of representation in relation to the group as a 'sample'. This information is also presented as one of many possible readings and understandings of these accounts (Roos 2003). As highlighted in the information relating to quality criteria in 3.3, I have also included some key elements of reflexive commentary in relation to some interpretations in order to enhance the transparency and context of my own specific understanding of the information. I sought to apply this form of 'self-critique' (Koch & Harrington 1998) throughout, and subsequently to illustrate this process by making some of the key considerations explicit within the discussion.

The Social Construction of Methodology

As presented in chapter 2, to engage with a methodological perspective, an individual needs to be confronted with philosophical questions of truth, reality and knowledge. Their understandings in relation to these questions may be viewed as their personal, philosophical ‘science of research’ (Kothari 2004). Whilst an individual may subscribe to certain collectively agreed postulates, these will unavoidably have foundations in specific belief systems. As such we may either view these perspectives, and their underpinning belief systems, as part of a tangible individual and/or collective ‘identity’ (Waterman 2015), or part of the process of individual narration, performance and sense-making (Bauer et al 2006). The summaries of the life history accounts presented in chapter 4 and the subsequent shared collective biographies, outline my own personal interpretation of their presentation of their beliefs, and the journeys which had contributed to these. In interpreting all of the information which these researchers shared I was conscious that in addition to the role of my own perspectives in the construction of these narratives, both their decision to engage with the study, and their own methodological understanding would frame the perceptions of the role of the social world in constructing their ideas.

By its very nature conducting research with, and about, academic researchers within the social sciences, has the potential to introduce ‘expert’ interpretations and analysis itself. The role of expertise in individual concepts of social reality is argued by Berger and Luckmann (1966) as part of the process of social construction, and formed part of the rationale for employing co-analysis within collective biography here. A key starting point for understanding these methodological assumptions as connected to the construction of the individual journeys is therefore the exploration of the explicit connections made by the individuals, and the collective, between their memories and reflections of lived experiences and subsequent philosophical understandings. In many examples it was clear that the

researchers were also making new connections, marked by responses such as Jane indicating after a period of monologue ‘Do you know, I’ve never seen it that way before’. Whilst it is acknowledged that these interpretations themselves are a product of the individual methodological perspective, these reflections are seen here as central to the meaning within the narration. That is to say that:

““Meaning does not lie *in* the experience. Rather experiences *become* meaningful as a result of being grasped reflectively” (Arnold 1979:22).

In addition, these connections are significant, because they offer an illustration of reflexive understanding from a relatively broad range of perspectives, as opposed to reflexivity as part of a specific methodological model (Walsh 2003).

Across the life history accounts beliefs about the relevance of specific personal experiences in shaping methodological ideas varied. In addition to many examples where very clear explicit links were made with specific experiences, there were also examples in every case of a memory being recalled, before a question to the effect of ‘is this the sort of thing you’re interested in hearing?’ In most examples I interpreted this as a marker of either information which the co-researcher perceived to be contextualising, rather than of relevance to their direction of travel, or as a process of checking the expectations of their narrative as a particular social performance here (Goffman 1959). Through exploring several key aspects of life stages and experience, interpretations are also presented below for some of these less direct references to experience, and aspects of the way the accounts were presented are explored more fully in Chapter 6.

5.2 Life Histories

Early Childhood

In three of the journeys, perhaps most notably Heather's, reference to early childhood was framed as a brief contextualising narration but for others, including some which are explored here, this stage was a key point of reference throughout their journey.

Of the individual life history accounts, Jane's presented some of the most explicit links between reflections on specific experiences, and her ontological and epistemological perspectives. In outlining a series of challenges, beginning in very early childhood, she presented a narrative with a clear thread which outlined her methodological understanding as a response to her lived experiences. In particular her early positivist understandings were explicitly framed as arising from a need to make sense of the world. She connected difficult early childhood experiences which included her parent's mental health illness and frequent school moves with feelings of '*uncertainty*' and '*conflict*'. In response to this a positivist epistemological position was initially seen as having the potential to offer some form of emotional protection:

"There were indisputable facts and there were answers, and there was certainty. An armour, a little armour." (Jane)

Her own interpretations of this phase of her journey align with social constructionist ideas regarding the heightened significance of primary socialisation (Berger and Luckmann 1966), which is marked by frequent references (in both her life history interview and collective biography memory) to significant links between later understandings and early childhood experiences. Notably, in terms of the aforementioned impact of 'expertise' (Berger and Luckmann 1966) on interpretation, in co-constructing this journey, both myself and Jane did

so with a specific significance for early childhood, both holding post graduate qualifications in this area. Furthermore, similarly to Quaye (2007) Jane was also re-framing this early experience with a later value for narrative methodologies which, as with this study, acknowledge the significance of this broader experience.

With Jane's later methodological stance in mind, it was also of interest to consider the perceived relevance of early childhood for those with more positivist understandings. Whilst Jane talks of her views arising from challenges in childhood, both Sian and Imogen recalled their predominantly positivist understanding as, to some extent, more of a confirmation of earlier childhood interests and strengths. In Sian's case, in the context of her methodological understanding now she recalled herself as growing up wanting order and organisation:

“One of the toys I remember having that I really enjoyed the most was a type writer. I think at one point in my life all I wanted to be was a secretary, and like organising things.”(Sian)

In Imogen's account her present day reflections confirmed her childhood passion for maths, even where this view was directly challenged by a childhood workbook she had discovered. Potentially where their examples deviate though, is that Sian contextualised this as consistent within an understanding of family expectation and value for specific academic abilities, whereas Imogen presented herself as pursuing an interest which was different to those around her. The significance of this appears to be reflected in a current position where Sian retains a sense of certainty about her approach, whilst Imogen is experiencing some frustration at what she perceives to be a lack of acknowledgement and debate regarding philosophical assumptions. The sociological contrast here being that Sian's approach fits the values, ideologies and norms (Singh 2015), which she presents for both primary and secondary socialisation (Berger & Luckmann 1966), meanwhile Imogen reflects broader understandings

of those around her in early socialisation and some frustration with later, more narrow understandings. I did however consider that there was an inclination, based on my own assumptions, to see Imogen's frustrations as methodological conflict, when indeed her views and her involvement in the study, may equally be framed purely as methodological interest. It is unfortunate that she was unable to engage in the collective biography process where this may have been extended.

Of the remaining accounts, whilst Sarah didn't appear to offer a direct connection between her early childhood experiences and her methodological understanding, I considered that her strong early memories of her parents as activists appeared very relevant to the way she presented her approach to research.

“Most of it (childhood) was spent at strikes and on picket lines... We have these fantastic photos of me kind of with placards at age 3 wandering around London.”(Sarah)

For Sarah her understanding focussed firmly on aspects of research such as control, ethics and purpose, which have been directly linked to methodology elsewhere (Lather 2006, Guba & Lincoln 2011), but these aspects were interpreted as the focal point of a practical, rather than paradigmatic understanding (Feilzer 2010) of her pragmatic approach. Whereas Jane, and indeed Debbie too, present research as a means to understanding personal challenge, potentially arising from conflict in childhood, a potential reading of Sarah's account was that presenting research as being about action, impact and inclusion could be seen as mirroring this aspect of her earlier experience. I understood this as having some consistency with Bakhtin's idea of 'ideological becoming' (1981), both in terms of experience shaping this later realisation or belief about purpose, and in terms of seeing research as a tool for the individual to influence the social world. There are further examples in the context of her

reflections on her education, which also appeared to have some consistency with this (these are explored below).

The connections explored in this section suggest that early childhood experiences may be considered as highly significant to the development of later methodological assumptions and ideas. This is consistent with ideas of socialisation (Berger & Luckmann 1966), particularly in the way that this frames the importance of early ‘primary’ social experiences. It also has significance in introducing examples, which have the potential to broaden the questions and considerations for researchers seeking to understand and articulate their own assumptions. This is an aspect which could be of particular use to doctoral students seeking to consider the nature of their ‘philosophic position’ (Maykut & Morehouse 2002:3).

Experiences of Education

Experience of school was a central theme of Debbie and Jemma’s accounts. In both cases as well as potentially contributing to their philosophical assumptions, aspects of negative school experiences had directly influenced the topic of their PhD research. For Jemma, who perceived herself to have a strong academic background in the natural sciences, the ‘failure’ of her final exams appears pivotal to a long term interest in assessment and particularly a realisation of the impacts and limitations of such absolutist ways of determining ability. In terms of identity, Jemma apparently continues to struggle to see this narrow measure as a valid representation of her own abilities.

“Those who I felt I was more intelligent than went on to higher education and I wanted to and I couldn’t really understand why I had to be at home. It wasn’t as if I had any academic problem over the years” (Jemma)

In Debbie's case a similar misalignment appears to exist with broader categorisation around gender, privilege and ability, which she is directly seeking to deconstruct through her own research. For both Jemma and Debbie there appears to be a very personal question about the failings of positivist assumptions and categorisation in accurately reflecting the way they understand aspects of their own 'reality'. In response it appears Debbie is seeking to provide an illustration of other ways of looking at this. Meanwhile having initially been suggested in her life history account, the co-analysis in the collective biography reinforced that whilst Jemma was employing a mixed methods approach to her PhD thesis, her acknowledgement of positivist assumptions was on primarily practical rather than philosophical grounds. Jemma particularly related to Peter's metaphor during the collective biography, apparently intended to summarise the tension of the perceived necessity of quantitative approaches versus her attraction qualitative methods:

"It reminds me of when you're growing up and your parents saying to you, look we really want you to marry this quantitative. They're respectable, they have a good job, good prospects ... and then you think OK and you fall in love with this hippy qualitative musician, who doesn't have a job." (Peter)

In both Jemma and Debbie's case, in terms of identity formation (Erikson 1982, Marcia 1993) their psychological perceptions of self, and their social being as reflected by positivist and absolute definitions appears to create conflict which marks a shift in the nature of these assumptions.

I also identified other potentially complex relationships between reflections on educational experiences and later methodological understandings. In Heather's account challenges with engagement and inclusion are apparent throughout her educational journey, with educational and social structures perceived as not accommodating her personal circumstances. This

appears to be reflected in a later acknowledgement of epistemological ideas of individualised ‘truth’ as both fluid and linked to structures and context. In fact Heather asserts that for her research is partly about contextualising ideas of knowledge and experience. She also directly rejects ideas of individuals as research subjects, and I connected this value of participatory approaches with her own sense of being excluded by social structures. Heather’s later response to earlier challenge again connects to the idea of ideological becoming (Bahktin 1981), positioning her as seeking to influence and respond to the perceived adversity created by social structures. She suggested her response to perspectives of a ‘*dysfunctional*’ educational system was to see that ‘*it’s about re-imagining how could this be different*’. This also provided an illustration of the complexity of the entanglement of agencies (Davies & Gannon 2012) with the social capital of her academic grounding and background seen as playing a part in co-constructing her capacity to challenge this.

For both Sarah and Heather the idea of ideological becoming appears relevant, because their methodological stance appears to arise not just from philosophical thought processes, but from clear beliefs about their sense of social purpose (this distinction is explored further in section 6.3). My understanding of the origins of this differ significantly for them individually though. Sarah reflects on social purpose with a sense of disappointment and responsibility on perceptions of her own ‘*awful*’ lack of effort in education, as if her earlier ‘self’ failed to meet this ideology. Meanwhile Heather does so with a sense of responsibility arising from the frustration at the failings of the educational system itself. Both of these methodologies however are grounded in a clear belief for prioritising elements such as ethics, inclusion and social justice. I was particularly conscious in the interpretations of Heather and Sarah’s ideological stance, of their contrast with my own in terms of ideas of purpose. This is perhaps characterised by Lather’s (2006) framing of the difference between methodologies which seek to ‘critique’ and ‘interpret’ as opposed to those which seek to ‘change the world’.

On a simpler level Bernauer (2012) suggested that self-perception of educational aspects such as whether someone considers themselves a 'math person' might be relevant to later methodological tendencies and this was something which was directly reference in four of the accounts. Imogen, Jemma and Dawn highlighted this as a personal characteristic, whilst Sarah reflected that she definitely didn't relate to it. However, in all cases an initial alignment between a sense of ability in mathematics at school and applying positivist methods, was then later challenged on other methodological grounds. For example in Sarah's case she later acknowledged the perceived importance of using quantitative methods and highlighted her sense of achievement at addressing this:

“Actually it forced me in to doing more stats and kind of at the end a real sense of accomplishment, you know.” (Sarah)

The above understandings position educational experiences as integral to the methodological journeys of the researchers and as frequently connected to ideas of challenge, understanding and change which may influence and shape assumptions. They also suggest that the broader, emotionally significant aspects of experience are perceived as more integral than the acquisition of specific skills. This is noteworthy both in provoking those teaching research methods to question the idea that these methods may later be taught as skills in isolation from philosophy (Onwuegbuzie & Leech 2005) and also in presenting questions for doctoral researchers about the relevance of their own education.

Cultural Understandings

The potential for connections between ontological assumptions and experiences of different cultural understandings and realities featured in a number of the accounts. In particular this appeared to be of most relevance in the cases of four individuals, Peter, Jemma, Imogen and

Dawn, who had experience of living in different countries, where they understood there to be significant cultural differences.

For Jemma, the contrast she saw between cultural understandings in her home country of Nigeria and her experiences of the UK created both an ontological realisation and a methodological tension. From one perspective her shift to an acceptance of more nominalist ontological understandings was marked by a realisation of the existence of ‘multiple realities’:

“There are a lot of realities here in the UK context that doesn’t make sense back home. So I really cannot situate myself in a paradigm that doesn’t accommodate multiple realities” (Jemma)

From another perspective her earlier experience introduced some tension and she indicated that it was important for her to continue to value some positivist epistemological assumptions, because *‘it’s a big deal back home.’* Again this tension became more evident in the collective biography session and this was an aspect which others in the group picked up on, identifying a distinction between more interpretivist philosophical assumptions alongside the application of more practical quantitative methods. Considering that Jemma’s experience of the UK has been framed almost entirely by her continuous engagement in post graduate training, and that she has research training in Nigeria, there appears to be the potential for a myriad of influencing factors within this tension. These could include the significance of recognition and value within very different academic communities (McAlpine 2008) and of identification with a personal understanding of culture (Quaye 2007) and identity (Waterman 1993). In addition this research process required Jemma to actively construct a narrative identity (De Mul 2015). In the context of this, it is noteworthy that the relevance of culture

was most apparent in her input in the collective biography session, where this was framed by her interactions with Peter who shared some commonalities in terms of understanding this.

In Peter's account he actively highlighted what he saw as some significant contrasts between his experiences of culture in Zimbabwe and in England, and these appeared to form part of his ontological understanding of the way realities are socially constructed. For example, he characterised Zimbabwe as *'naïve'* and *'relaxed'* and England as *'sophisticated'* and *'rigid'*. This information formed part of a particularly coherent narrative account, culminating in seeing his PhD as a *'crystallisation'* of a journey where his recollections of culture featured prominently. Of particular significance were Peter's perceptions of the way others identified him in relation to culture:

"So I was very English and different in Zimbabwe, but then came to England and I was very Zimbabwean and different." (Peter)

As noted, Peter's increasing adoption of what appears to be a more pragmatic approach, and his resistance to aligning with any one set of assumptions, had some commonality with Jemma's thinking. However, as I considered this further (particularly in the context of his two separate accounts), for him it appeared to have a more philosophic grounding. Essentially in rejecting a reduction to one set of assumptions Peter seemed to echo Pring's (2005:230) argument about the idea of methodological 'false dualism'. In the context of his shifting identity this could be seen to share some consistencies with a more post-modernist reflection on both his cultural and methodological identity as fluid and dynamic (Bauer et al 2006). In addition, and in the context of this, his reflections on research as having the potential to move communities on a spectrum from individualised to more collective cultural identities (characterised by his PhD research topic of loneliness) also aligned with this. This is of note in terms of thoughts about the connections between the nature of these ideas and concepts of

individual sense of self and agency (Kashima et al 1995). In simple terms whilst Jemma seemed to have been influenced to shift to interpretivist assumptions, but retain pragmatic value for positivism, increasingly I saw Peter's history as contributing to the idea of pragmatism as acknowledging the existence of philosophic grounding (Feilzer 2010:7), but consciously rejecting that this should be static and defined (Pring 2005).

The idea of exposure to other cultures as introducing the potential to see multiple constructed realities was also acknowledged by Imogen, who had grown up in Germany and spent a year studying in Uruguay, and by Dawn. In Dawn's case her exchanges with her diverse group of peers (which are explored further under post graduate training) contributed to an understanding of identity as contextual and constructed. Having introduced very positivist early epistemological assumptions, for both Dawn and Imogen these cultural experiences were cited as being part of the creation of at least some philosophical doubt and methodological interest for them. Dawn summarised that this led to a realisation that:

"It's not just because that person was born there and I was born here. It was the context, it was bigger... It was not geographic, more than that it's the social construction. At least to me that's the way I understood... The way in which our society, globalised or not, works or doesn't work actually." (Dawn)

This exploration highlights that where researchers had significant experience of multiple different cultures, this was perceived as integral to their understandings, and to their ontological assumptions in particular. The value of this illustration of 'different realities', created primarily through interaction, has two potential implications for the teaching of research methods. Firstly it presents these examples of experience and dialogue about experience, most notably those Dawn accessed informally, as a potential tool for developing understanding through research methods programmes. In this respect, if ontological doubt

requires conscious effort (Berger & Luckmann 1966), illustrating the differences which challenge the ‘taken-for-granted’ aspects of the social reality may provoke this consideration. Secondly it encourages reflection on the potential diversity of expectations and experiences of doctoral students entering teaching programmes. This may include avoiding conflict through consideration, in teaching and supervision, of situations where students arriving from international communities may be accustomed to specific expectations and ideas about what is meant by ‘research’ (as in Jemma’s example). In addition this also has some consistencies with Pallas’ (2001) ideas regarding the need to ‘prepare’ doctoral students for an epistemologically diverse research community.

Personal Life & Relationships

In a similar way to reflections on early childhood, there was a contrast between the presentation of specific personal experiences as contextualising information and as directly influencing their philosophical assumptions. Where perceived connections were presented, there was also a distinction between those seemingly rooted in epistemological understanding and those rooted in research purpose. I perceived the most significant and illustrative of these to be Peter and Dawn’s respectively and therefore these are explored in more detail in this section.

“He was often thought of as difficult and eccentric... as I got to know him better I could see his humanity, his pain and his understanding that were hidden.” (Peter)

Peter’s reflections on his relationship with his father-in-law seemed significant not only in terms of content, but also in the way this was presented. Despite being cited as having a fairly profound impact on his epistemological assumptions, Peter did not refer to this example at all in his life history and when he introduced it within the collective biography group he explained that he had felt that it was relevant, but had only begun to grasp ‘how’ within the

context of the discussion. Therefore effectively Peter's reflection was consciously presented as a product of the 'intra-action' (Davies and Gannon 2012) within this group. This had some comparatives with the way my ideas of my own journey developed in connection with this process as a whole (see section 1.7). During group discussion Peter's memory of having his perceptions challenged as his relationship with his father-in-law developed over a long period of time, was directly referenced by him as being part of the answer to how he '*got to this qualitative*'. Again this was significant, because whilst his life history account had framed his methodological journey, it had perhaps not highlighted the presence of such a marked shift. Indeed, in constructing his identity within this initial narrative (De Mul 2015), and as explored in the previous section, Peter had not appeared to align himself with any one fixed set of assumptions at any point. Interestingly, in terms of influence, my immediate understanding was to interpret his reference to this in a similar way to the examples of challenges to methodology presented by experiences within research itself (e.g. Riessman 2003, Dadds 2009). This raised some questions about the significance of being methodologically conscious (as explored in section 5.3) and framed this as not necessarily just being a practical part of 'doing' research, but an example of the way personal and professional considerations may 'merge' (Sweitzer 2009:30). This also challenges the idea of doctoral researchers holding 'domain specific' (Muis et al 2006) epistemological assumptions, because whilst Riessman (2003) cites an epistemological challenge occurring within the research, Peter's example presents epistemological consideration within a separate (but related) domain of his life and thinking.

In addition to this Peter joined Dawn and Heather in presenting particularly clear connections between wider life history, and relationships, and research topic and purpose. Dawn and Peter, who are both seeking to undertake research for the benefit of older people, recounted positive memories in their life history accounts of their grandparents as active, engaged and

connected. Dawn, who appears to be in a process of re-considering methodology, having come from a *'hard science'* background choose to include a memory in her life history account of learning from her grandparents.

“Well because they lived through the Mexican revolution... of course you can read the books... (which say) killed 9000 people, it's a bit impersonal. Talking to them was like living through their stories.”(Dawn)

This particular memory appeared to capture and illustrate a key thread of Dawn's history, connecting her fear and frustration of the older person as *'another chair in the room'*, with her passion for her research topic of inter-generational learning, her enthusiasm for action research and her sense of challenge to her previous epistemological idea of there being a *'formula for people'*. Dawn refers to her research as *'interventions'* and shares some consistencies with the questions at the centre of critical theory, e.g. 'what can we do?' (Lather 2006). The importance of this memory could therefore be re-framed both in terms of epistemology (i.e. how do we best reflect the 'knowledge' about what happened), but also in terms of purpose (i.e. knowledge exchange as social connections). There is clearly a necessity for some relatively complex methodological considerations within this, but this example detailed how these may be unavoidably 'embedded' in personal considerations (McAlpine 2012).

As highlighted within educational experiences, Heather's journey also situated ideas of research purpose and ideological assumptions within personal experience. In addition, as with Dawn, this was entangled with considerations about its epistemological relevance. With Heather reflecting on a particular research experience about the educational aspirations of young mothers and suggesting:

“What really captured me in that was contextualising my own life experiences in that context.” (Heather)

For Heather there appears to be an almost cyclical relationship between the questions arising from personal experience, her research interest and her value/acknowledgement of personal perspective. This is perhaps shared with others including Jane, Debbie and indeed potentially myself. However, whilst it provides an illustration of Bourdieu’s assertion of a connection between the researcher’s ‘habitus’ and ‘scientific practice’ (2004), for all of these researchers this is clearly an assertion which aligns with their methodological assumptions anyway. This in turn highlights questions about aspects of experience which have contributed to this direct acknowledgment, which is something which is explored further within forthcoming sections about post graduate education.

Exploring the connections between wider life experiences and the philosophical assumptions of the researchers further reinforces the idea of the interconnected nature of personal lives and doctoral work (Sweitzer 2009). This is something which could have use to doctoral students in contextualising understanding, and considering the way this may re-frame personal relationships (as in Peter’s example). In addition it may be a useful note for supervisors in acknowledging that methodological tensions and realisations may potentially have origins outside of the substantive focus of doctoral research itself.

Professional & Research Experience

The researchers involved in this study had varying research and professional backgrounds, for example Jemma and Sarah had professional and post graduate research experience, whilst for Dawn this was her first experience of research in the social sciences. Similarly, Jane and Debbie had significant professional experience, whilst Imogen was at the start of her professional career.

Sarah and Jemma both present their first professional research experience as being notable in terms of working with a specific, pre-determined methodology. Sarah refers to a project which investigated body image by using 'measures' as 'hideous', elaborating:

“Whenever I’m filling in a form I find it quite frustrating, so I always think other people must, but I know that’s probably not true.”(Sarah)

Although she'd previously cited her use of statistical measures in her own PhD as a noteworthy achievement for her personally, her disillusionment with entirely positivist assumptions appeared to make sense, whether on pragmatic or philosophical grounds. For example, this could be seen to contrast her values for listening to and including people. However, I perceived her decision to doubt her initial methodological argument (i.e. that people's frustration with forms might impact on the information) to be reflective of a dismissal of the relevance of debates about philosophical assumptions (as per Onwuegbuzie & Leech 2005). Having retained an 'applied focus' throughout her academic journey and socialisation (Duff 2010), and having already expressed frustration at philosophical discussion, Sarah presented the relevance of her negative research experience as primarily about it being 'hideous' in terms of not being of personal enjoyment or satisfaction. I was however conscious of the significance of the contrast with my own strongly paradigmatic understanding, when I was interpreting the pragmatic frame which underpinned Sarah's explanations.

Jemma also presented her first research experience, which involved working with children and young people, but this time as reinforcing a '*new found love*' for qualitative methods. Whilst there is potential for over simplification to behaviourist or rational actor theory ideas (Goldthorpe & Breen 1997), framing methodological decisions as motivated by comfort/skills, satisfaction and enjoyment (as opposed to rational actor theory based only on

economic resources (Scott 2000)), in these cases the sense of personal satisfaction/dissatisfaction for a methodology does appear to be of relevance. This is a consideration process echoed in Bernauer's (2012) personal methodological account. These decisions are however presented within the context of a much more complex process of socialisation, as aspects of an increasingly complex concept of identity (Cotes & Levine 2014) and elements of an individually constructed identity, which includes the necessity both to make sense (Bauer at al 2006) and to present a performed reflection of 'self' (Riessman 2003).

Illustrating this complexity, in presenting information about a number of professional roles, a theme of Debbie's professional history was a sense of frustration about a misalignment with ideas, approaches and systems. This is perhaps most powerfully reflected by her decision to leave her position as a social worker after just one year, not least because in the context of the behaviourist decision making process mentioned above, Debbie had invested significant personal time and resources into achieving this professional identity:

"It was basically about doing assessments and trying to manage a very small budget and I just didn't want to be in that position. It was quite traumatic because I'd been working towards this for years and years." (Debbie)

Debbie who now adopts a very clear sense of her philosophical assumptions as 'post-structuralist' retrospectively frames this experience in terms of ideas of power, institutions and positivist/absolutist ideas. Indeed she reflectively refers to her social work training as 'quite positivist' and 'never questioning' methodologically. In terms of agency and socialisation I saw Debbie's journey as being extremely complex. She reflected herself that sociological theory did not make sense of her journey, for example ideas of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1989) would frame her as having quite restricted life opportunities,

because of her background. However, equally through accessing specific personal life opportunities, for example being offered a place at Oxford University, Debbie could be seen to have accessed unique opportunities to acquire specific cultural capital. Ultimately, in terms of methodology, Debbie's professional journey (including, but not limited to her social work experience) captures a process which fits with the idea of 'identity crisis' (Erikson 1982), with Debbie disillusioned with a perception of her professional role in a system which she saw as recreating or failing to challenge disadvantage. Her entry into post graduate education, which is explored in the next section, is then seen as finally providing her with a legitimate means to challenge and reframe this. In identity terms, this development of 'personal wisdom and self-actualisation' reflects the '*relief*' she explains in becoming 'identity achieved' (Erikson 1982, Beaumont 2009).

Peter also referenced a professional experience as providing a more direct challenge to his methodological ideas, sharing similarities with realisations highlighted by Riessman (2003) and Dadds (2009). Unlike Debbie however, Peter reflects upon his experience of carrying out an evaluation of a bushcraft education programme as providing a more direct and productive challenge to the nature and limitations of epistemological expectations and assumptions. He reflects:

"I realised gosh it's not about the learning of bushcraft is it? It was way more than I envisaged... I struggled to capture it all, but I did my best'." (Peter)

This may have some relevance to an understanding of the potential for the level of methodological understanding to allow learning to take place in response to an experience, rather than provoke conflict as in Debbie's experience. However, it is clear that there are substantial differences between the level of autonomy and personal investment involved in their contrasting experiences, which is also highly relevant to nature of their reflections.

Across the journeys, references to professional and research experience presented it as often being characterised in terms of alignment with methodological assumptions, whether this experience occurred before there was a conscious understanding of this (e.g. Debbie's social work example) or after (e.g. Jemma's qualitative research project example). If misalignment or limited understanding (as in Debbie's example) has the potential to cause conflict then this does suggest that teaching models which embrace understandings of methodological diversity and develop awareness of epistemological diversity (Pallas 2001) could have value in preparing researchers to make decisions about opportunities for later professional involvement in research projects. It also begins to frame the potential 'agentic' value of methodological understanding, which is explored further in chapter 6.

Methodology as a Social Construct

As introduced in chapter 2, whilst existing auto-ethnographic and auto-biographical literature regarding methodological journeys (e.g. Bernauer 2012, Quaye 2007, Probert 2006) proposed connections between social experience and individual philosophical assumptions, there was an opportunity for this study to investigate a more diverse range of journeys and perspectives. The information presented in this section has introduced the potential for varied and complex connections between social experience and individual methodological assumptions and ideas across a number of life stages, from early childhood to professional experience in later life. This has been explored in connection with key sociological ideas of socialisation (Berger & Luckmann 1966) and identity formation (Erikson 1982) to highlight the significance of social experience in the development and construction of methodological assumptions. Perhaps the most obvious and direct consequence of asserting a link between social experience and philosophical assumptions is the necessity for academic researchers across the social sciences to acknowledge and consider these aspects in order to ensure that any claims to 'knowledge' are based on transparent research processes. The information presented above provides

additional understanding which expands on the journeys presented in chapter 4 and introduces further illustration of the idea of methodological journeys. This has the potential to be of practical use for doctoral researchers who do seek to contextualise their own experiences and assumptions. Mauthner & Doucet (2003) highlight and seek to act upon a perceived lack of information about ‘doing’ reflexivity and it is hoped that building upon this, the information here will help provoke and frame considerations about the nature of experiences which are relevant to considering research as personally and ‘historically effected’ (Gadamer 1975).

Alongside this, in this section I have begun to introduce some potential considerations in relation to the teaching of methodology at post graduate level. These considerations have begun to indicate that teaching models which embrace the idea of methodological diversity may have the potential to be more inclusive and support individual researchers to avoid methodological conflict and make informed research and professional decisions. In relation to this, a key area of exploration in this understanding was the role and significance of post graduate research training in shaping and re-framing these earlier experiences and assumptions and this chapter will now proceed to explore this area in more detail. In particular it will focus on the concept of ‘methodological consciousness’ (Gadamer 1975) as part of the social construction of the specific ‘expertise’ (Berger & Luckmann 1966) of these individuals as doctoral researchers.

5.3 Post Graduate Research Training – The Introduction of Methodological Consciousness

“If researchers do not acknowledge (or know) the philosophical assumptions that underlie their works, this does not mean that they have no philosophical assumptions. It merely means that they are operating with unexamined assumptions.” (Mertens 2010: 9)

The doctoral process introduces new methodological questions (Drake & Heath 2011) for a researcher, and in doing so has the potential to present a necessity for conscious consideration of the substantial philosophical questions which are integral to this study. In chapter 2 this awareness of philosophical assumptions is framed as part of the concept of ‘methodological consciousness’ (Gadamer 1975), with the literature review identifying a research opportunity to both illustrate the relevance of this concept and explore its connections with the researcher’s experience of post graduate training. In this section, I will continue to explore the narrative accounts presented in chapter 4, focussing on the researchers reflections on their post graduate training experiences both in the context of their relevance to the process of socialisation (alongside the elements of life history presented above) and to ideas of methodological consciousness. The unavoidably interlinked nature of these concepts and experiences, means that some aspects of these experiences have already been introduced above, not least because the consideration of every element of these life histories was being ‘grasped reflectively’ (Arnold 1979:22) in the context of subsequent engagement in post graduate training.

In exploring the potential role of post graduate training in ‘unlocking’ methodological consciousness and considerations, I will also contribute to the debates, research and understandings presented in 2.2, particularly in relation to the teaching of research methodology as part of a paradigmatic (Lather 2006) or pragmatic (Onwugebugie and Leech 2005) model.

This section presents three key aspects of post graduate training, which were perceived to be of relevance to the researchers philosophical assumptions: experiences of taught programmes, experiences of supervision and wider impacts of engagement in post graduate programmes.

Experiences of Taught Programmes

Perspectives on the relationships between taught research methodology programmes and philosophical assumptions varied, a contrast highlighted by Dawn's assertion that *'it's not the lessons we go and sit through'* as opposed to Jane's reflections of her Masters teaching as *'life changing'*. Broadly the researchers' recollections reflected experiences of entirely pragmatic (Sarah) and positivist (Imogen) programmes in some cases, as opposed to models which clearly included paradigmatic and philosophic considerations in others (e.g. Peter, Jane, Debbie). In terms of the idea of methodological consciousness, to an extent, and perhaps unavoidably as a product of this study, all of the researchers engaged with some conscious framing of their assumptions, but this also varied significantly and often appeared to connect with their methodological approach. For example whilst Sian and Imogen acknowledged an emerging methodological consciousness, alongside broadly positivist research assumptions, for Debbie, whose assumptions were situated in doubt, uncertainty and ideas of multiple truths it was a central thread to her whole narrative (this an aspect which is explored further in section 6.3). This echoes the difficulty in distinguishing between methodological consciousness in terms of value for reflexive voice (Walsh 2003) and in terms of broader philosophical understanding and awareness (Sweetman 2003, Adkins 2004). Debbie and Peter in particular framed experiences within taught programmes as influencing their assumptions, and increasing their methodological consciousness. For Peter the specific inclusion of a performance workshop was particularly significant, in terms of seeing this consciousness as part of an awareness of methodological diversity:

"there was some scope within in the 'qual' to look at very different ways of data... so something that stuck in my mind, we did a performance drama workshop... there were

lots of things that came out of discussion.... it was good in opening up that debate for me.”(Peter)

For Debbie, whilst she summarised the doctoral process as quite powerful in terms of new methodological understanding creating a sense of ‘relief’ for her, she cited a number of considerations related to the taught programme. These included being introduced to ‘post-structuralist thinkers’ and taking part in an exercise which initially introduced the idea of a paradigmatic spectrum.

“I think they started by saying stand in this line according to where you are. I was like I don’t know where I am, but I’ve got a feeling, I think they had like post-modern and I got a feeling I might be up that end.”(Debbie)

In terms of debates about models of teaching, Debbie perceived that her assumptions were grounded in questions which she had held, and experienced frustrations with, throughout her life. Therefore the process of increasing consciousness of these has consistencies with Lather’s (2006) assertion of the necessity of paradigmatic models in facilitating for researchers to confront and understand philosophical issues. As mentioned in relation to her wider life experiences, Debbie’s presentation of this thread connected with the idea of an alignment in terms of identity (Erikson 1982).

“But just for years I thought I don’t know what to do, it felt a bit hopeless actually... I found it very difficult. But I’ve had a certain amount of enthusiasm, because it does feel I’m more aligned with what I’m doing, with the kind of person I am and how I see the world.”(Debbie)

Whilst the origin of Debbie’s assumptions therefore appears to precede her doctoral experiences, in providing consciousness, academic recognition (McAlpine 2008) and

increased paradigmatic understanding (Lather 2006) the experience of the taught programme has left her better placed to achieve consistency within her doctoral research (Maykut & Morehouse 2002). In contrast she summarises her Master degree as ‘quite positivist’ and reflects that she didn’t fully understand her approach to her dissertation at the time. This also provided an example where a change in methodological consciousness was made evident by the way an individual re-framed an experience which pre-dated their current awareness. In her case she spoke of her previous academic work as an attempt at deconstruction, but says at that point she didn’t know this and that she now felt a *‘bit embarrassed at how theory free I was’*. There were additional examples of this re-framing, including Jemma who talked about her earlier work and suggested, in the context of her later post graduate experience that now she realised research decisions were all part of her ‘framework’. In addition often it appeared that the construction of the narrative itself, in the context of this heightened awareness presented new connections. In the earlier example of Jane talking about positivism as a form of protection she continued to reflect *‘I hadn’t thought of it like that until now’*. In relation to this I was aware that this research process itself, in the context of all of these complex individual experiences, had the potential to both contribute to, and expose, this consciousness. This also raised questions about the level of awareness and interest which was likely to exist in order for the researchers to seek to engage in the study first place.

In examples where programmes were not seen to introduce paradigmatic considerations, in some cases this was then introduced or directly pursued elsewhere. In relation to teaching models, for Imogen the lack of attention to or acknowledgement of philosophical considerations was a source of some frustration and she perceived her emerging methodological consciousness as purely the product of following personal interest. Similarly in Sian’s account, with little previous experience in the social sciences she indicated that her programme had so far been research ‘skills’ based, but that she had started to see the

relevance of different '*viewpoints*' and '*realities*' (Sian indicated that she hoped to cover this in a future taught module). Therefore, despite experiences of more pragmatic focussed teaching (as per Onwugebugie and Leech 2005), confronting these questions has still been necessary for them either as part of a common expectation at doctoral level (ESRC 2005), or to contextualise their own thinking. The only exception to this appeared to be Sarah, who engaged in a more unusual route to her PhD, 'sitting in' only on modules which were seen as relevant to her research and retaining a purely pragmatic '*applied*' focus. However even in Sarah's case, her collective biography account revealed a later re-framing of the relevance of these considerations, even though she still asserts that people '*take their epistemological positions too seriously*'. The seemingly unavoidable emergence of these questions, regardless of the content of taught programme accessed, has consistencies with Probert's (2006) reflections on her own methodological journey, which she maps as moving from questions that get in the way of 'doing' research to arriving at seeing this as part of an essential process. Five of the researchers highlighted their rationale for choosing a specific taught programme. In particular Jane was most clear about making a decision to enrol on a programme because she understood it to have a specific methodological or paradigmatic alignment. This is consistent with Etherington's (2004) suggestion that often this may involve an active choice in terms of seeking philosophical consistency. However, equally Jemma presents an example of what's framed almost as an accidental transition, when having completed a 'quantitative' based master degree, she then secured a place on a second master degree without any awareness of its interpretivist focus. At the heart of this appears to be a question about whether an individual possesses the methodological awareness and understanding to make this decision. Jane's capacity to make this choice appears to be rooted in an existing consciousness, which in relation to her whole narrative account, and consistent with Lather's idea of methodological becoming (2006), has no single obvious point of origin. For Jemma

however, this consideration didn't appear to form part of her decision and her transition was mapped an initial 'struggle', followed by a growing methodological interest and she now frames the development of her current methodological approach as arising from the expectations of this taught programme:

"It comes from my previous masters experience, where you are expected to define your philosophy" (Jemma)

Interestingly, whilst Jemma reflects on this transition very positively, despite actively choosing a narrative doctoral programme Jane still cites concerns about her own methodological understanding when talking of her decision to stop this programme:

"I suddenly decided I didn't know what the hell they're talking about" (Jane)

In considering these experiences in relation to the paradigmatic/pragmatic debate it therefore appears that a pragmatic 'avoidance' of philosophical debate in taught programmes, as proposed by Onwugebugie & Leech (2005) has the potential to cause internal conflict both in relation to philosophy (as in Debbie's example) and academic development (as in Imogen's example). Furthermore, whilst it may potentially delay questions regarding philosophical assumptions, because these are a necessary part of the doctoral process (ESRC 2005, Maykut & Morehouse 2002, Probert 2006) ultimately individual researchers will need to confront paradigmatic ideas at some point anyway. This may be integral to the whole process (as in Debbie's example), it may potentially even lead to further conflict and doubt (as in Jane's example), but even in the more unusual case of an apparently entirely pragmatic doctoral frame (as in Sarah's example) these questions are still likely to be exposed at some point in the research journey. In embarking on a taught programme which embraces methodological diversity and paradigmatic understanding, as advocated by Lather (2006), it appears that researchers are better placed to re-frame, expose and understand their assumptions (as

highlighted by Debbie, Peter and Jemma's journeys in particular). With this in mind, the apparent implication for the design of related taught programmes is that introducing and embracing methodological diversity does appear to have the potential to better prepare doctoral researchers in relation to the philosophic questions which the process presents. However, in addition to this there also appears to be some necessity for this to reduce conflict and tensions (as have emerged in Imogen's example) and develop identity (as in Debbie's example). These points are explored further in the remainder of this chapter, and in chapter 6. Furthermore, the researcher's experiences have significance in terms of how methodological diversity may be introduced and suggest that practical, interactive exercises may be perceived as particularly useful for improving understanding. This is illustrated by Debbie and Peter's experience, but perhaps also be the significance Dawn gave to peer-to-peer dialogue (explored under cultural understandings. In relation to these considerations I did also note a key reflexive consideration in terms of seeing this from a perspective which has been influenced by the significance of my own experience of a paradigmatic taught doctoral programme, as reflected in the topic of this thesis.

The final consideration in relation to taught programmes, was the extent of the direct connections between specific assumptions embraced in taught programmes and adopted by researchers. Whilst a study by Coronel Llamas and Boza's (2011) identified that a group of doctoral students appeared more likely to adopt 'methodological pluralism' in their work when this was part of their course, the journeys explored here suggest that the link between taught programmes and philosophical assumptions (as opposed to applied methods) is far more complex. It was evident that being taught about specific methods did appear to be a site of influence and inspiration, as illustrated by Jane's reflections on a module about qualitative methods:

“I was like wow there is an approach that will really allow you to focus on people.”

(Jemma)

However, the emergence of methodological consciousness appeared to allow the researchers to continue to consider this within the context of their own assumptions and understanding. For example in Imogen’s case methodological interest and questions, including epistemological doubt, continue to exist even within the context of the practical application of methods which align with a very pragmatic positivist economics programme. Again this has significance in relation to an emerging view of purely pragmatic teaching models as being grounded in overly simplistic ideas of methodological understanding.

Experiences of Supervision

Across the nine journeys references to methodological influences and relevance of supervision as part of the post graduate research training process appeared less frequent and less substantial than references to taught programmes. Moxham et al (2013) suggested that ownership of methodology is an important consideration in the supervisor and student relationship, and the key example of this presenting challenge and conflict was Imogen’s concern at her supervisor’s dismissal of the relevance of philosophy to her study when she began to investigate this:

“It was sort of like a reaction like I’d said well I’m taking some tennis

lessons!”(Imogen)

In terms of supervisor relationship, this positions the supervisor predominantly in terms of ‘technical expertise’ (Easterby-Smith et al 2002) as opposed to influencing philosophical ideas. This is echoed by Sarah’s experience where she suggests *‘there wasn’t an awful lot of*

talk about big philosophical issues'. Although, unlike Imogen, this more 'applied focus' was something Sarah embraced.

Conversely Heather highlighted her Master degree supervisor as introducing questions about ontology, and provoking her interest in literature about participatory world views, suggesting this relationship had significance in the emergence of her methodological consciousness.

Debbie also recalled her supervisor supporting her quest for philosophical consistency by urging her to be careful not to 'make straw men' of other paradigms (and thus placing post structuralism at the *'top'* of the *'hierarchy'* it challenges). In addition, during the collective biography session, Dawn referred to her perceptions of the responsibility of supervisors in ensuring students were supported and prepared in relation to methodology. This expectation, and these type of exchanges are consistent with Seibold et al's (2007) assertion of the role of the supervisor as methodological 'mentor'. This approach appears to have the potential to share some of the benefits highlighted for paradigmatic teaching models, however in the context of the nine accounts this often appeared to be something which was perceived as having the potential to compliment taught programmes rather than being the primary site of influence. One consideration in relation to this, is that in many cases the taught programme preceded the supervision relationship and may therefore position it as extending and contextualising existing knowledge (as in Debbie's account), rather than introducing it as new knowledge (as in Heather's account). This may also suggest significance in terms of how supervision is allocated, particularly in relation to the level of methodological consciousness and interest of a student. Interestingly the journeys did not introduce any sense of the potential for methodological conflict within supervision relationships.

Wider Impacts of Engagement in Post Graduate Programmes

The formation of doctoral identity and the experiences of engagement in post graduate training are not limited purely to practical experience of teaching, research and supervision (Sweitzer 2009, McAlpine 2012). This was evident in a number of the methodological journeys.

The most significant wider impact of post graduate experience appeared to be in Dawn's journey. Dawn highlighted her experience as a 'tough' transition of moving from a world view which considered things as 'black and white... zero, one', however she strongly asserted that it was her relationships with her peers (previously explored under cultural understandings) and a personal philosophical realisation which informed this. This appeared significant given the absence of previous experience or training in this area, however I was also mindful that this was presented within the context of her personal challenge to the purpose and responsibilities of the academy (of which her taught programme is clearly a part).

In addition Debbie highlighted attending a 'post structurally driven' conference as part of her studies as reinforcing her philosophical assumptions. She reflected on the experience:

"It wasn't even like I necessarily clicked with individual people, but for the first time I felt I think I'm kind of amongst my own people" (Debbie)

In terms of socialisation, and previous references to her sense of identity (Erikson 1982), this experience is significant in the way she frames it as the first time she saw that her values and beliefs aligned with the social group around her (Marsh & Keating 2006).

Like supervision these less formal experiences appear to have the potential to enhance the doctoral experience, and again suggest that paradigmatic understandings may arise elsewhere,

even where a pragmatic teaching model directly omits these. There may be implications here for the way post graduate research training values and encourages more informal and interactive learning experiences which relate to methodological understanding.

5.4 Methodological Tensions & Expectations

This chapter has situated post graduate research training and the doctoral process as having the potential, and necessity, to develop methodological consciousness and inform philosophical assumptions. As highlighted in 5.1, in terms of socialisation this may be seen as part of the ‘expertise’ of a doctoral researcher (Berger & Luckmann 1966). In creating an awareness of personal assumptions, and allowing an individual to engage in aspects such as ‘epistemic doubt’ (Bendixen 2002), this process may also begin to expose the assumptions of other individuals, collectives and societies (something which this study makes a very direct effort to explore). In doing so, there is the potential for important individual, or dominant collective, assumptions to conflict with personal assumptions, creating tension with the process of socialisation in terms of consistency between norms, values and beliefs (Singh 2015).

In this section I will explore the nature of the researcher’s experience of some of these tensions, initially through reference to the collective biography accounts. It is significant to note that this emerged as a key theme of both of the collective biography discussions, as a product of intra-action (Gannon 2012) and methodological ‘bricolage’ (Kincheloe 2001) of the collective. Of importance within this was its presence in challenging and exposing the perceptions of ‘taken for granted’ assumptions in society, not least because within the co-analysis this developed, seemingly organically, upon the initial rationale to expose the taken for granted understandings of the individuals themselves within the collective (Davies & Gannon 2006).

The Academy & Wider Society

During the first collective biography group, the epistemological concept of ‘knowledge production’, and its connection with the academy and wider society was central to the thread of dialogue. It was noteworthy that the interactions between Sarah and Jane were integral to this understanding, not least because in their life history accounts they contrasted as appearing to be amongst the least and most methodologically conscious respectively. Sarah’s example, highlighted within the co-analysis of her memory account, presented a powerful practical illustration of a tension created by a research group discrediting an arts based methodology. In the apparent absence of methodological consciousness within the group she had mentioned, dominant discourse, including the media, was cited as influential and Jane expressed frustration at society not seeing certain knowledge production with *‘the same value’*. In addition Sarah reflected on the academy teaching researchers to *‘disconnect’*, although I noted that this was also presented within the context of her experience of a predominantly pragmatic post graduate programme. Sian connected this to a concept of perceived *‘academic elitism’*, but in turn we continued to question how academic research was represented as largely statistical in media.

In terms of the researcher’s experiences and reactions to these perceived tensions, in the first collective biography group this was largely seen as creating tension, but therefore introducing the necessity to advocate for methodological diversity. This was however contrasted in the second collective biography group, where similar tensions were cited, largely in relation to a quantitative vs. qualitative debate (rather than extending to ideas of the site of knowledge production), but with the response (primarily from Peter and Jemma) being that this was about compromise. This was highlighted by Peter’s previously referenced metaphor relating methods to marriage, and his subsequent suggestion that it’s about *‘the best you can do’*. It was also present in Jemma’s justification for adopting interpretivist assumptions, but using

quantitative methods, because *'it's practical for what I want to do'* and *'a big deal back home.'* This perhaps illustrates how views about dominant paradigms within the academy and wider society (e.g. Denzin & Lincoln 1994) may sometimes connect to knowledge production, presentation and promotion (as argued by Pring 2005) regardless of individual philosophical assumptions. Likewise, as with the first group, and Jane in particular, it emphasises the potential frustration of perceived pressures to adopt philosophical assumptions which conflict with internal ideas. Interestingly I felt this was best illustrated by Dawn within her original life history account where she expressed frustration at the media and academy seeking only to *'reproduce existing structures of power and politics'*. This tension introduces the importance of value for methodological diversity within the academy, and individual programmes, in terms of reducing individual frustration. It also positions methodological understanding as key to empowering individual researchers to make decisions and advocate for different ways of knowing. The implications of this are explored further in relation to agency in chapter 6.

Influence & Success

In the context of perceptions of dominant expectations and values, the researcher's aspirations and experiences of influence and success were very relevant. There appeared to be some examples of reactive influences on philosophical assumptions due to dominant expectations, for example the perceived necessity, and subsequent recognition of Sarah's inclusion of quantitative information in her PhD thesis. Equally, Jane cited her biggest academic successes as being those which, consistent with her current thinking, adopted anti-positivist and nominalist assumptions. The key difference here across many of the researchers appeared to be the identification and alignment with a research community which embraced individual assumptions, and thus shared the norms, values and beliefs (Singh 2015). This was

apparent for example in Debbie's 'relief' at discovering a post-structuralist community. In addition a basic behavioural/rational actor theory (Breen & Goldthorpe 1997) understanding could position experiencing success with a certain approach as reinforcing a practical decision to continue to adopt this successful approach.

Examining the journeys with this perspective in relation to influence, inclusion and success in response to perceived expectations, where misalignment occurred I positioned them as broadly responding by either a) seeking to compromise philosophical assumptions in practice, for example in the cases of Peter and Jemma mentioned in the previous section, b) seeking a community or programme where personal philosophical assumptions align with the dominant view, for example in the case of Jane and Debbie or c) experiencing conflict or frustration at the absence of recognition of elements of personally held assumptions, for example in Dawn's frustration at perceptions of the academy's forced 'reproduction' or Imogen's frustration at the absence of discussion and debate. In offering this perspective I do not intend to imply that these were static or absolute definitions, indeed for some these aspects clearly overlapped or shifted through their journey, however this does provide some insight into the relevance of perceived expectations post-methodological consciousness. Given that research about doctoral students often focuses on retention (Begin & Gerard 2013), the proposal of a connection between this conflict and paradigmatic avoidance and/or rejection (in society and/or programmes) poses an interesting question about its impact on doctoral success. This is particularly seen as relevant given that Jane's account connects methodology with her decision to disengage with her doctoral programme. The implication again being that embracing methodological diversity within a post graduate teaching programme may reduce the potential for conflict.

The challenge with this view however (particularly in relation to categorisation 'b'), is that whilst an individual researcher might be able to influence and select a micro reality, this in

turn is situated within the dominant expectations and assumptions of the macro reality of wider society (Bourdieu 1989). Therefore, where there is an aspiration to have influence on practice and wider society, as highlighted by Peter's reference to needing to create an *'evidence base'* for decision makers and by the discussions in the second collective account, there are inevitable tensions relating to funders, influence (Gorard 2002) and concepts of truth. It therefore appears fundamental to indicate that these tensions have a significant role in the construction and communication of philosophical assumptions, and this is explored further in relation to ideas of agency in section 6.3.

Progressing from the understandings presented throughout this chapter, the next chapter will proceed to explore the way the individual researchers constructed their individual narratives and spoke of their perspectives of their methodological journeys.

5.5 Conclusions and Summary

This chapter has presented an understanding of the nine methodological journeys as illustrating a process through which individual philosophical assumptions have been socially constructed. It has explored interpretations of the researcher's perceptions of specific experiences which were significant to their understanding, through numerous periods and areas of their life from early childhood through to their post graduate education and professional experience. In doing so it has exposed the complexity of the construction of these assumptions and the significance of methodological consciousness in allowing the researchers to re-frame and understand these. Proceeding from this, it has explored the ways in which post graduate research programmes may expose and influence these assumptions, particularly in relation to the concept of methodological consciousness. Furthermore, it has highlighted the potential for methodological conflict within the academy and wider society, and the value of methodological consciousness and understanding in preventing and responding to this.

Building on the presentation of the journeys themselves in chapter 4, this chapter is seen as being of particular use in further developing illustrations of methodological journeys for those embarking on doctoral research. In the context of the limited current literature regarding methodological journeys, as highlighted in chapter 2, this has the potential to play a significant role in developing ideas about ‘doing’ reflexivity (Mauthner & Doucet 2003) by providing provocation and examples upon which researchers may begin to frame their own understanding.

In addition, this chapter has highlighted the significance of post graduate research training programmes in developing methodological consciousness and understanding. The journeys of the researchers suggest that embracing methodological diversity through paradigmatic teaching models (Lather 2006) may reduce the potential for frustration, better prepare researchers for making research and professional decisions and develop a sense of identity. Finally, it has highlighted that practical, interactive experiences which highlight methodological questions and value different understandings may be particularly beneficial to some students. Some of these aspects will now be explored in more detail in chapter 6, particularly in relation to the way in which the journeys were presented.

Chapter 6 – Interruptions of the Methodological Journeys

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I progress from the interpretations presented in chapter 5, to exploring the narrative journeys presented in chapter 4 through an ‘interruptive’ lens (Czarniawska 2004). Throughout the chapter I approach the journeys from an increasingly post-structuralist viewpoint, with an intention to provide additional attention to their context and presentation. At the centre of this discussion is an aspiration to address the final research question in further detail:

- 3) How do doctoral and postdoctoral researchers speak of their perceptions of their personal methodological ‘journeys’?

As highlighted in 2.2 this question is seen as particularly significant in the context of the limited volume and diversity of literature about methodological journeys. It is also of relevance to the emerging ideas in chapter 5 regarding the relevance of methodological consciousness and reflexivity to the researcher’s ability to understand and articulate their journeys.

As highlighted in section 3.3 in order to explore this question, I analysed the accounts in terms of key ideas around plot, positioning, narrative performance and identity, seeking to expand on deconstructive questions such as ‘how is the story told?’ In doing so, this aspect of my approach ‘privileges subjectivity’ and ‘positionality’ (Riessman 2003:2) and, in contrast to chapter 5, places significantly less relevance on verbatim quotes as illustrating fragments of the journeys as a whole (Sandelowski 1994). I saw that utilising this perspective, alongside an interpretive approach, avoided reducing analysis only to assumptions of transparent

accounts (Hollway & Jefferson 2000:3). This was also consistent with my methodological intention, as stated in section 1.6, to see deconstruction as treating these accounts as more than a collection of words (Derrida 1983). In addition I have sought to build on understandings of the collective biography sessions as valuing other perspectives of the information (Kincheloe 2001).

Focussing on the presentation of the individual accounts, in this chapter I will argue that the researchers' conceptualisation of their methodological identity, 'position' and journey was inseparable from the nature and social construction of their philosophical assumptions. In doing so I will contend that just as these philosophical assumptions may be considered as a product of their social experiences, in turn their narratives create a form of 'methodological identity' which is framed both by assumptions and experiences, and by the social context within which they have been shared. Extending from this, I will expand on these journeys in terms of the idea of narrative as performance (Riessman 2003) exploring ideas of plot, and agency, through understanding the researchers as 'social actors' (Goffman 1959). I will assert the significance of these aspects in the way individual perceptions and journeys are presented in relation to the concepts of methodological consciousness (as highlighted in chapter 5) and methodological identity (as highlighted in 6.2). In doing so, I will use these foundations to further reinforce the assertion that individual capacity for methodological consciousness and reflexivity has significance in the researchers' individual understanding, presentation, connections and reflection upon their methodological journeys. With reference to literature presented in chapter 2, and in response to the identified research opportunity, I will therefore seek to further illustrate the concept of methodological consciousness and position it as a key element of doctoral identity.

6.2 Narrative and Methodological Identity

The concept of narrative identity asserts that identity ‘exists’ and is constructed through the process of narration (De Mul 2015), this is outlined by Bauer et al (2006) as an ‘internal, dynamic life story that an individual constructs to make sense of his or her life’. Considering the context in which these individual journeys have been co-constructed, and the questions which they seek to address, the narrative accounts as a whole may therefore be viewed as an attempt to frame and make sense of complex ontological and epistemological ideas.

The narrative accounts presented in chapter 4 introduce my interpretations of the ways in which each of the researchers made sense of their ideas, and their perceptions of the paths they had followed to reach these. In the context of these, my intention here is to deconstruct how I came to see these narratives in this way and particularly how they presented the researchers’ conscious ‘methodological identities’. In part this concept of methodological identity underpins the initial summary paragraph for each of the accounts in chapter 4. This arose from my own perceived necessity to make sense of the individual stories by seeking to identify some form of ‘arrival’ point upon which I could interpret the construction of the journey behind this.

As indicated in chapter 5, the processes of socialisation and identity are seen as interconnected, and involve the alignment with, and acquisition of skills, habits, values, ideologies and norms of a particular society, group or organisation (Marsh & Keating 2006, Singh 2015). If narrative identity is then seen as the site where an individual can actively ‘challenge’ or ‘provide continuity’ for specific ideas of identity (Pals 2006:1081), then ‘positioning’ becomes a key aspect of methodological identity, particularly within a diverse (Lather 2006) and perhaps divided (Onwuegbuzie & Leech 2005) methodological research

community. In turn methodological identity may be seen as consisting of the methodological values, ideologies and assumptions of the individual researcher.

Presentation of Positioning and Assumptions

In 2.2 I presented Pring's (2005) argument that paradigmatic 'positions' contribute to the creation of a 'false dualism', and upon this foundation I argued that in part the concept of a position itself unavoidably involves adopting an epistemological position. In seeking to understand the researchers' journeys, my starting point was to establish the extent to which each researcher associated with a paradigmatic label and/or specific ideas and assumptions. In addition I was interested in 'interrupting' how they identified with this, and considering indicators of contradiction and doubt. As identified in 3.3, during the interviews Lather's (2006) paradigmatic chart was made available for reference, particularly in the context of questions about potential levels of methodological consciousness and understanding. For some of the researchers I was aware that this itself presented potential 'labels' to support communication (e.g. Debbie & Sarah), however equally others made no reference to it at all (e.g. Peter), or used it as evidence that a 'position' oversimplified their perspective (e.g. Jane).

For some of the researchers there was clear alignment between the way they conceptualised their assumptions and their decisions about the adoption of a position or group as part of a methodological identity. Of all the researchers, the most absolute identification with a methodological label came from Sarah, indeed she was the only researcher to refer to herself using a paradigmatic label: *'I'm a huge pragmatist'* (although as highlighted in chapter 2 there are debates about the nature of pragmatism as a paradigm, see Feilzer 2010). This was consistent with the assumptions she presented and her ideological view of research solely in

terms of action. Subsequently in the first collective biography group, whilst she embraced the idea of methodological diversity, she retained an assertion that people take epistemological positions *'too seriously'*, even in dialogue where this was a significant contrast to the views of Jane, and indeed myself. Indeed as part of this exchange Jane offered a counter perspective, which entirely re-framed Sarah's research group example in terms of methodological value. Sarah's adoption of pragmatism as a personal position aligns with her conception of her PhD as a process of 'academic socialisation' (Austin 2002) and 'academic recognition' (McAlpine et al 2008) advocating for a focus on practical decisions rather than philosophical issues.

Whilst consistency and methodological identity for Sarah was grounded in practice, for Heather and Jane their position, or absence of, was presented with consideration of its connection to, and consistency with, philosophical assumptions. Heather and Jane talked about 'using' methodologies, predominantly participatory and deconstructivist respectively, but both actively distanced their own identities and assumptions from methodological labels. Indeed, in both cases they challenged aspects of the simplicity of the paradigmatic chart (Lather 2006) indicating their sense of personal alignment and misalignment with information connected to varying positions. For both Heather and Jane the assumptions they presented rejected positions and contrasts as definitions (as per Derrida 1983), and therefore they appeared to actively seek to avoid presenting a fixed methodological identity, which is consistent with some post-modernist understandings (Gutting 2005). From a personal perspective this perhaps echoed some of my own experience of concerns with engaging with the necessity of presenting aspects of my own, and others, positions here.

In the context of this, perhaps the most significant connection between philosophical assumptions and methodological identity was Debbie's account. Debbie expressed a very

conscious rejection of classification, an aspect which was seen as fundamental to her PhD research, yet in doing so I also felt she more clearly positioned and classified herself in relation to post-structuralism. This included physical references to this part of the paradigmatic chart, as well as her reference to her realisation, in relation to previous consideration of a paradigmatic spectrum that *'I might be up that end'*. In addition she referred to her experience of a post-structuralist conference as being *'kind of amongst my own people'*. I understood Debbie to be clearly presenting the concept of post-structuralism as fundamental to her methodological identity which is perhaps situated in the way she frames this almost as a discovery. The adoption of this methodological identity, as socialisation in the sense of belonging in relation to a group (Singh 2015), appears to reflect a reaction which is consistent with the assertions in chapter 5 regarding Debbie's identity 'crisis'. This is illustrated by her earlier reflections about not *'fitting in'*. In some ways it perhaps also has consistencies with Jane's reflections on her initial alignment with positivism in response to a perceived *'sense making mission'*. In both cases it highlights the potential of the presence of methodological consciousness, and subsequent ideas of identity, in extending and re-framing understanding of 'self', and personal experience.

To an extent I characterised Dawn, Sian and Imogen as having similarities in the way that their accounts communicated their sense of methodological identity. They all presented relatively clear ideas about the methodologies they were using, which in Sian and Imogen's case in particular were founded on very positivist assumptions, yet they didn't necessarily directly associate these with their own personal ideas and assumptions. As a result they broadly presented themselves as using positivist methods, but remaining open minded and methodologically interested. This perhaps reflected their more recent transition from backgrounds in mathematical or scientific areas to the social sciences, the fact they are all in

a very early stage of their career and that they appear to have emerging ideas and methodological consciousness. Again I saw an element of this as being related to an important process of academic socialisation (Austin 2002) and doctoral socialisation (Gardner 2008), in the context of the doctoral experience presenting new questions for them (Drake and Heath 2011). It was perhaps most notable for Sian and Imogen where I saw a misalignment between a sense of confidence in applying a very absolutist methodology, alongside an assertion of personal ontological and epistemological doubt. This was reflected in Sian questioning ‘*why doesn’t everybody know this?*’ in relation to the practical relevance of her research, but later contrasting:

“I’m really very comfortable in a quantitative positivist thing, but I don’t really believe that the ontology and epistemology of it is (pause)... I don’t think that is reality” (Sian)

This returned me to assertions about the difference between practical application of methods and personal assumptions, as highlighted in 2.3 in relation to research about the connection between taught programmes and methods adopted (Coronel Llamas & Boza 2011). The understanding being that teaching a method or approach completely independently of methodological understanding may lead to students replicating design, but not embracing or understanding the assumptions it is based upon. Sian and Imogen’s examples also further highlight the relevance of considering methodological understanding and identity as relevant to all researchers, rather than valued as an aspect of specific methodological approaches (e.g. through the practice of reflexivity). I also noted that its significance was again grounded in its contrast with my own quest for philosophical and methodological consistency.

The relevance of identification with methodological positions or understandings may have further implications for post graduate experiences. In addition to enhancing understanding, there are clearly potential benefits, in terms of a sense of identity for some students (such as Debbie), of the inclusive nature of programmes which embrace different identities through methodological diversity and enhance student's methodological consciousness.

Identity & Social Context

If narrative identity is seen as actively constructed in the act of telling (De Mul 2015), then this cannot be separated from the idea of the narrator as social actor (Goffman 1969) and in this case myself, and the collective biography group as the audience and co-constructors. Indeed this understanding was fundamental to the methodological decision to use collective biography on the basis of its value in expanding perspectives (Kincheloe 2001) and creating intra action (Gannon & Davies 2012). The construction of ideas of methodological identity was therefore situated within this, and through the interruptive analysis I was able to understand it as part of this context.

A useful way of exploring the relevance of context was the comparison of my interpretations of the life history inquiry narration and the collective biography narration. As already cited in chapter 5 for Peter and Jemma, key new understandings arose from their input into the collective biography session. In Jemma's case in the life history interview she presented herself as having philosophical interest and consciousness, but primarily a focus on mixed methods in relation to her strong skills base. For Jemma I perceived that the presentation of her skills, qualifications and understanding was important in the context of frequent references to her exam 'failure'. From this perspective I interpreted Jemma's understanding of 'fitting in' with the concept of a doctoral student (Gardner 2008) as being primarily about

presenting herself as skilled. This appeared particularly relevant in relation to the unavoidable reference to her exam experience within her whole journey, almost as a form of mitigation against the potential for this information to conflict with her preferred identity (Riessman 2000). My sense of this as a strong theme of her identity in the life history inquiry, did not carry over to the collective biography group however. In a different context, and with the exam experience not being central to the dialogue, Jemma's identity was constructed through an ideological value for research as being *'about people'* and she re-framed positivism and quantitative skills as a practical necessity, finding some consistency in dialogue with Peter. In doing so, she actively positioned herself in a more interpretivist paradigmatic position and endorsed the metaphor of qualitative 'love' Peter reflected back to her from his perspective.

This change could be understood as a product of being part of a different external micro reality creating new perceptions of expectations and values (Berger & Luckmann 1966), thus seeing narrative as a process of conveying a 'preferred' identity (Riessman 2000).

Alternatively, it may simply be that by seeking to explore a specific memory through collective biography, the question Jemma was trying to make sense of (Bauer et al 2000) shifted and therefore so did the information which she felt was of relevance.

The difference in social context between the life history interview and collective biography group also re-framed elements of my understanding of Peter's methodological journey.

Despite presenting a very coherent journey (an aspect which is explored in the next section), Peter's life history account was, much like Sarah's, largely framed in pragmatic consideration and personal direction, with reference to aspects such as purpose and influence. In contrast his collective biography memory exposed the idea of a methodological shift, in response to a question he himself presented of *'how did I get to this qualitative?'* As with Jemma, the collective biography discussion was the first time I was aware of Peter clearly situating his

assumptions, understanding and identity in terms of philosophical aspects. The fact that this was situated in a group dialogue about methodology, in terms of influencing interactions and perspectives (Kincheloe 2001) appears relevant. In relation to this Peter directly stated that the methodological relevance for the memory became apparent only within the context of listening to Jemma and Dawn's perspectives. In addition the coherent and schematic nature (Johnson & Mandler 1980) of Peter's initial narration led me to considerations about whether the significance of these elements was lost in his wider objective to tell his story, as opposed to the more direct and methodological nature of the question he sought to answer in the collective biography session.

When considering Sian and Imogen's decisions to distinguish the methodological identity they presented through their narratives, with the methodological framework they were employing in their research, I was also very conscious of the context of this narration. Having both cited emerging methodological questions as a reason for engaging with this research, and having then been presented with a more unfamiliar research approach, an absolutist response may have been perceived as at odds with their intention to engage as part of their doctoral socialisation (Gardner 2008). That is to say that their 'preferred identity' (Riessman 2000) in this context was to be presented as methodological interested and aware. Whilst Imogen was unable to participate in the collective biography session, of all the researchers, Sian sought the most clarification and reassurance about the nature of what she should share during the session. Both this, and the subsequent memory she shared, appeared to demonstrate less certainty, consciousness and reflection on her methodological identity, again contributing to the understanding presented in chapter 2 of an emerging consciousness. This was reflected in the perspectives of the collective group, which Sian acknowledged even

where they introduced a contradiction between positivist assumptions and her memory, perceived by others as an illustration that social aspects like wellbeing can't be 'quantified'. Understanding the connection between social context and concepts of methodological identity further enhances the value of this study in providing the provocation for reflexive and contextual thought in relation to methodology. In this respect, engaging with perceptions of the methodological journeys of others (as in the collective biography session) has the potential to extend thinking and highlight relevance for the individual. That is to say that this research both exposes elements of the relevance of the micro reality (Berger & Luckmann 1966) it presented, but also has potential value in contributing to the 'conditions of possibility' (Davies 2010:55) for others, particularly doctoral students. Furthermore, there is potential for post graduate research training, including more informal aspects such as peer dialogue (as mentioned in chapter 5), to provoke and facilitate experiences which extend this thinking. Expanding from this, these understandings in relation to identity also form part of the interpretations of the journeys as a whole and the next section will proceed to explore the nature of these in more detail.

6.3 Methodological Journeys as Performance

Riessman (2000) asserts that whilst the process of analysing narrative as performance is about questioning the presentation of 'preferred identities', this relates to situating them socially, rather than doubting their authenticity. Indeed, as introduced in 3.2, a key focus of this study was to examine memories and stories in 'their own right', rather than against the 'real past event' (Small 2000:2). Using this approach to re-visit the narratives in relation to the way the individual researchers spoke of their perceptions, and in the context of the concepts of methodological identities (presented above) and methodological consciousness

(presented in chapter 5,) presented new information about, and understandings of, methodological journeys.

Methodological Consciousness in Plot and Narration

By re-framing the journeys beyond ‘what’ was said, to ‘how’ it was said, I was able to further develop and illustrate ideas about methodological consciousness. In 5.3 I identified that all of the researchers displayed some elements, but varying levels and types, of methodological consciousness in terms of an awareness or explanation of methodological understanding. Extending on this, by exploring elements of the plot and thread of the individual narratives I was able to understand the stories in terms of the extent to which the narration itself was situated within this consciousness. That is to say, that the researchers’ individual philosophical assumptions were consciously exposed as integral to the story itself, rather than presented as a separate topic or subject in their own right. As indicated previously, this understanding contributes to the conceptualisation of methodological consciousness as both an aspect of reflexivity (Walsh 2003) and a necessary practical aspect of academic research (Sweetman 2003). With this in mind, this was also closely connected with both the nature of the individual researcher’s assumptions and their presentation of a methodological identity.

The clearest example of a narrative ‘plot’ which was underpinned by a continuous thread of methodological consciousness came from Jane’s life history account. Jane presented a coherent narrative following a chronological, schematic (Cortazzi 2014:64) format, almost entirely through a single monologue. In this context, whilst Jane identified some new connections, the seemingly ‘rehearsed’ (internally or externally) nature of the story as a whole meant that I interpreted it as the product of existing conscious reflections. Indeed, I identified that it was narrated through a consciously reflective voice, i.e. ‘now I see it as...’

Furthermore, it was characterised as a series of experiences, with subsequent responses and reactions, framed in the context of impact on philosophical assumptions. For example after talking about her Master degree she re-connected this to the methodological thread explaining:

“The whole thing was just life changing I think, I realised that sense making was still really important to me.” (Jane)

This structure was reminiscent of the literature regarding personal methodological journeys, with a key element of plot being shifts and changes to assumptions (e.g. Probert 2006, Quayle 2007, Bernauer 2012). Despite this structure, as mentioned in the previous section, the journey was presented in the context of a methodological identity (6.2) which rejected certainty and absolute explanations, and therefore this methodological consciousness was also evident in the interpretivist nature of the reflections. Jane’s narration may be conceptualised as being methodologically conscious in Gadamer’s most philosophical sense as recognition of self as ‘historically effected’ (1975:353).

Whilst Jane’s narration best provided an illustration of a strong presence of methodological consciousness in the construction of a methodological journey, I understood Sarah’s account as best illustrating an apparent disconnect between these aspects. Whilst, like Jane, Sarah’s narration had a largely coherent, schematic and chronological format (Cortazzi 2014:64), this was largely narrated in its contextual sense, with little explicit reference to her own philosophical ideas and assumptions. However, in the context of her ‘preferred’ identity (Riessman 2000) in relation to pragmatism, and her explicit reference to frustration at philosophical discussion, this could also be seen as consistent with her presentation of

methodological identity. The question of whether this is framed, for her, in terms of pragmatism as paradigm or practice (Feilzer 2010) may then be seen at the centre of whether the practical and contextual plot she presents is a form of conscious rejection and disconnect with ideas of philosophical assumptions, or an unconscious avoidance of these issues (a consideration highlighted in section 5.2). As mentioned in the previous section, Sarah's account had some similarities with Peter's life history narration. Again Peter presented a clear plot, and he did at times demonstrate elements of methodological consciousness in some of his reflections, however the predominant focus of his journey didn't appear to be methodological. Indeed, at times Peter could equally have been responding to the question 'what was the journey that led you to do a PhD?' With his main period of narration forming contextualisation and a lead-in to the following statement:

"It's almost as if the PhD came to me, but it was very much as a crystallisation of my whole life actually. So it was a very powerful moment at that time when it suddenly became gosh, this is what I'm supposed to do. That sounds like, I call it an epiphany sometimes." (Peter)

For Peter his preferred narrative identity (Riessman 2000) appeared to involve making sense of this journey (Bauer et al 2006) in a broader sense, and the life history interview provided a relevant opportunity to share this. As mentioned in the previous section, in the context of the collective biography his methodological identity then evolved further through the group dialogue.

The final story 'type' in terms of plot, seemed to relate to those researchers who have previously been identified as having an 'emerging' methodological consciousness. For these

researchers, again most notably Imogen and Sian, the life history was a slightly more ‘messy’ process (Shacklock & Thorp 2005:156). In these cases the overall plot was less clear, the periods of narration shorter and the life history consisted of a collection of separate reflections in response to the interview topics. For Sian and Imogen, methodological consciousness existed in terms of awareness and understanding, but the nature of the methodologies they were applying meant that at present it seemed to be disconnected from their research process. As a result the process of engaging in this study seemed to almost initiate new emerging reflections on the nature of their identities as potentially being ‘historically effected’ (Gadamer 1975:353). For example, for Imogen methodological awareness and taking part in this research was characterised as part of a process of considering her journey:

“I have an openness, it would be naïve to suggest that you’re not affected by the things you’re surrounded by.” (Imogen)

Through focussing on the plot in terms of ‘how’ the stories were presented, I therefore identified connections between the nature, extent, and indeed stage, of consciousness and identity, and the way the researchers presented and understood their journeys. This understanding could be summarised as seeing the researchers as illustrating a spectrum of methodological consciousness, influenced by their life histories and post graduate training experience. This spectrum may be seen as progressing from rejection (as per elements of Sarah’s narration), through emergent, aware and methodologically interested (as per Sian and Imogen) to personal capacity for complex, potentially non-domain specific (Muis et al 2006) reflections on ‘historically effected’ concepts of self (as per Jane and Debbie). As argued in 5.2, this consciousness is seen as a key aspect of ‘expertise’ (Berger & Luckmann 1966)

potentially arising from doctoral socialisation (Gardner 2008) and particularly paradigmatic taught post graduate programmes.

Engaging in elements of reflexivity and exposing personal assumptions is dependent on a level of methodological consciousness and in chapter 5 it was highlighted that this has implications for the content of relevant post graduate programmes. The presentation of the journeys themselves, in suggesting varying extents of methodological consciousness has implications for researchers who are at different points in their journey in terms of this understanding. In particular there are examples here, most notably Imogen and Sian, of doctoral researchers who have engaged in this study as part of an effort to actively embark on a process to improve their methodological understanding, despite this not necessarily being advocated by others working within their paradigm (as illustrated by Imogen's supervision example). The understandings this has exposed suggest that actively seeking to understand the nature of personal philosophical assumptions may be a productive exercise for doctoral researchers themselves, and something which could be advocated by doctoral supervisors. Elements of this may be achieved by engaging in processes of articulating methodological journeys, but also through engagement with related literature and reports such as this research itself.

Methodological Agency

The sociological concept of agency is presented in 2.4 as the extent to which an individual can 'influence intentionally one's functioning and life circumstances' (Bandura 2006).

Although this is closely related to the understandings of methodology as a social construction, as presented in chapter 5, I made the decision to expand on this as part of the

interruptive analysis. This was based on an understanding of perceptions of agency as being understood in aspects of the ways in which narratives are presented (Bamberg 2011).

Exploring how the researchers' spoke of their perceptions of their journeys in relation to ideas of agency offered additional insight on two considerations raised in chapter 5. The first of these was the varying extent to which the researchers perceived their response to the social experiences (5.2) to be a conscious decision or internal reaction, which also connects to the relevance of their methodological consciousness (both as perceived at the time and now). The second, which is explored in the next section, was the extent to which the researchers' perceived the methodological tensions (5.4) to impact on their ownership of their methodological identity and approach.

The social experiences in chapter 5 are presented in terms of their relevance to different life stages, and in exploring the presentation of these it was apparent that agency in relation to methodological 'functioning' was interconnected with perceived capacity for methodological consciousness and understanding at that point. Indeed, methodological understanding was often later characterised as a tool for understanding internal reactions to earlier experience and this knowledge could be understood as a form of 'capital' in this respect (as per Bourdieu 1989). For example, Debbie's capacity now to re-frame her school experiences position her as having little agency, either practically or in terms of understanding, at the time. Indeed she characterises her own background in terms of a distinct void of social capital. She directly used phrases to describe early experience including '*you have no power*' and '*it didn't seem right*'. In seeking to re-visit this however, her methodological consciousness changes her position and it is this which is later framed as introducing the capacity to re-interpret and resolve the conflict in her reflections:

“But it’s always making sense to me. In terms of how that way of looking at things understands power” (Debbie)

This sense of understanding and awareness was also present in the difference between the ways in which Jane presented her earlier, almost automatic shift to positivism in terms of a need for understanding, as opposed to her later more conscious deconstructive reflections. It was also evident in Heather’s shift from earlier disillusionment with the education system, to subsequently seeing her role in ‘re-imagining’ this through her research. Indeed, alongside her master degree, where she cited supervision as introducing methodological questions, Heather identified the agency in her own progression as a contrast to those around her with no sense of capacity to influence functioning or circumstances in relation to institutions:

“They just sit and whinge like this all the time, and that’s what I meant by being institutionalised.” (Heather)

In these accounts, within the ‘entanglement of agencies’ (Davies & Gannon 2012) the emergence of methodological consciousness may contribute to the social capital (Bourdieu 1989) to challenge structures and ideas. From this perspective connections may be made with the reaffirming nature of a belief in aspects of freewill (Stillman et al 2010), as well as the emergence of a sense of ‘ideological becoming’ (Bahktin 1981). However, Sarah’s sense of ideological purpose in the apparent absence of methodological consciousness, which I earlier connected to her socialisation through her parents ‘activism’, illustrates the complexity of this entanglement and the diversity of potential influences. Indeed education and academic socialisation (Gardner 2008) in their broader sense are frequently seen as contributing to

social capital, and therefore questions regarding the role of methodological consciousness and identity as part of wider doctoral socialisation are complex.

Agency, Paradigm and Purpose

The complexity referenced in the previous section is further illustrated by exploring the examples of the methodological tensions, highlighted in 5.4. As I indicated within that section, this broadly categorised the two collective biography groups as group one, where there was a theme of challenging systems and tensions (methodological agency), and group two, where there was a theme of compromising methodology. In terms of agency, I related this to a debate regarding the critical paradigm where in relation to influence Oakley (1999) asserts a necessary alignment with positivism as the dominant political paradigm, and Korth (2002) contrasts with the importance of methodological diversity in exposing the 'taken for granted' in disadvantage (2002). In relation to this debate I would assert that this sense of compromise in group two does not necessarily reframe the role of methodological consciousness in terms of knowledge capital, agency and understanding, but rather its connection with, and situation within, broader concepts of research paradigms, research purpose and the role of research itself within broader social construction.

In terms of methodology in the second collective group, Peter, Jemma and Dawn's dialogue elicited methodological consciousness, but created a sense of reduced methodological agency. However, as per the debate regarding the critical paradigm, this agency may effectively be seen as 'entangled' in the paradigmatic choices between methodological autonomy (as advocated particularly by Jane in group one) and agency as action, challenge and influence (as advocated particularly by Peter and Jemma in group two). Relating this back to contrasting paradigmatic models, as illustrated by Lather (2006), we return to the

complexity of defining assumptions through paradigm. At the centre of this complexity is the potential for conflict between the methodological question of how we may best understand the social world (a question Lather connects to interpretivism) and how we may best influence decisions and changes in the social world (a question Lather connects to critical theory). For Peter and Jemma, their concept of how to reflect and understand the social world may appear to be better situated within interpretivism, but they present a conscious choice to prioritise influence, purpose, action and ideology in relation to method. However, elements of this agency and the ability to make this compromise may be seen to exist as a product of the presence of methodological consciousness, and the capacity of a doctoral researcher to make sense of this choice. This is illustrated by Peter's reflections on the collective dialogue about the necessity and impact of positivist methodologies, and therefore his assertion in the value of mixed methods:

"So it's like the world is geared towards quick fix big numbers... But its understanding, that our knowledge is limited because of that." (Peter)

On this basis, as argued in Chapter 5, developing the presence, awareness and consciousness of methodology, as contextualised by the paradigmatic understandings advocated by Lather (2006) may be seen as fundamental to 'doctoral socialisation' (Gardner 2008) regardless of the specific research approach employed. Furthermore, and as previously indicated, distinguishing between the practical research methods employed (as highlighted in the study by Coronel Llamas & Boza 2011) and personal philosophical assumptions as one aspect informing this is key. In the context of this, whether individual researchers' perceive themselves to engage in an agentic way in relation to either methodology or purpose, may be influenced by academic introduction of methodological consciousness and academic

recognition (McAlpine 2008) of methodological diversity. With this awareness, doctoral researchers are then better placed in terms of having the 'conceptual tools' (Maykut and Morehouse 2002:3) to make methodological and practical decisions about their research. In addition, if we consider doctoral socialisation as unavoidably linked with personal and social lives (Sweitzer 2009), then just as the personal may impact on the academic, through developing methodological assumptions, identity and creating a sense of agency, the academic experience appears to have the potential to be of benefit to the personal and social context of the individual. With this in mind direct efforts, through supervision and teaching, to enhance these aspects may have connections with the wider responsibility of institutions to support student's personal and academic development.

6.4 Summary and Conclusions

This chapter has explored the ways in which the nine researchers presented and spoke of their perceptions of their methodological journey. It has indicated that the presentation of the journeys was connected to the nature of their individual assumptions, which in turn shaped the way the researchers constructed their methodological identity through the narratives. Throughout the chapter, the concept of methodological consciousness has been positioned as central to both this identity, and to the individual's awareness and capacity for reflexive understanding. Using this as a foundation, it has also been asserted that the value of methodological consciousness extends beyond understanding, and that within these journeys it had relevance to the researcher's sense of identity and perceptions of personal agency. In this sense this consciousness is therefore presented as a form of personal and social capital, with potential for resolving challenge, reframing experience and empowering change. Furthermore, of particular relevance to this was the perceived presence of this consciousness

in making decisions in relation to the tension between methodological agency and ideas of action, influence and change.

On the basis of this understanding, this chapter has presented two potential implications for practice. The first of these is in highlighting and illustrating the potential value of methodological understanding for doctoral students. In doing so, it is asserted that there may be benefits in students engaging, with related literature and seeking to reflect upon, and articulate, their own assumptions, journeys and understandings. This is also something which may be encouraged by supervisors. The second is that through building upon the academic value of methodological consciousness (as argued in chapter 5) and indicating a social and personal value, its introduction becomes relevant to doctoral socialisation in a broader sense. In this respect, asserting agentic value and increased potential to reframe experience, positions this understanding as having relevance to the wider responsibilities of academic institutions in supporting the personal and professional development of doctoral students. It is therefore argued that the introduction of methodological understanding should be considered as a fundamental aspect of doctoral programmes. Furthermore, it is also asserted that if methodological understanding is considered in terms of identity, then embracing methodological diversity has the potential to enhance the inclusive nature of a programme.

Chapter 7 - Conclusions, Findings and Implications

7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and reflects upon the key findings from this study which have been introduced in the previous chapters. It is presented in two sections and begins by outlining the key findings in relation to the three central research questions and highlighting their contribution to knowledge. In this first section I explain the relationships identified between the researchers' philosophical assumptions, their life histories and their experiences of post graduate research training and outline the ways the researchers presented their methodological journeys. In the second section I continue to consider the implications and potential considerations for practice arising from these, including opportunities for further research. In doing so, in this chapter I also address some of the key debates and questions arising from the literature review, as summarised by the research opportunity highlighted in section 2.4

Within this chapter I argue that the individual researchers' philosophical assumptions may be understood as a socially constructed product of their lifelong personal and academic journeys. I assert that the concept of 'methodological consciousness' was fundamental to the researchers ability to understand, reflect and present both their assumptions and their journeys, and that a key point of origin for this consciousness is experience of post graduate research training. Furthermore, this introduction of methodological consciousness is framed as having value both in terms of understanding, but also in terms of individual sense of agency and identity. With this in mind implications for post graduate research programmes, supervision and researchers (in particular doctoral students) focus on a value for the development of methodological consciousness and understanding.

In highlighting implications for practice, the assertion within this chapter is not that the findings of this study are universally generalisable in a representational sense. It is accepted that an assertion of this nature would neither be epistemologically consistent with the methodological approach here, nor accepted as consistent with the practical research design (Cohen et al 2000). Key limitations are highlighted in section 3.9, which includes reference to the studies small, non-exhaustive sample and focus only the social sciences. However, implications are based on the premise that qualitative findings of this nature have substantial utility (Sandelowski 1997), in relation to both theoretical and inferential understanding (Lewis & Ritchie 2003). The findings of this study therefore highlight aspects of idiographic knowledge which may be relevant in particular to consideration of the on-going development of researchers with elements of shared experience. Indeed Donmoyer (2000) asserts that methodologically we may need to reframe the concept of generalisability in terms of informing practice in relation to complex individualised fields such as education. Ultimately the position here is consistent with the idea that ‘research can only function as a heuristic; it can suggest possibilities, but never dictate action’ (Donmoyer 2000:51).

7.2 Key Findings and Contribution to Knowledge

In the context of limited existing understanding regarding methodological journeys and the social situation of related philosophical assumptions (as highlighted in chapter 2), this study aimed to make an original contribution to knowledge and practice by answering three central research questions. Key findings in relation to each of these are explored below and these are then situated as adding to existing knowledge and understanding

How do doctoral researchers’ individual life histories appear to influence their subsequent philosophical (ontological, epistemological and methodological) assumptions?

The findings of this study indicate that relationships between the researchers' broader life histories and their subsequent philosophical assumptions were varied and complex. Exploration of the journeys highlighted that social experiences throughout the researchers' lives, had a role in shaping their philosophical assumptions. Personal life history was therefore highlighted as inextricably linked with the nature of philosophical assumptions. Through the related processes of socialisation and identity formation, specific key experiences were seen to challenge and/or reinforce the researchers' understandings of knowledge, reality and indeed the purpose of research. The researchers' current methodological consciousness was seen as key to re-framing these experiences, and in resolving and uncovering personal and philosophical conflict within their life history.

The study highlighted early childhood experiences as having significant relevance to later philosophical assumptions as part of a process of 'primary socialisation' (Berger & Luckmann 1966). Through both this, and experiences of education, ideas of challenge, insecurity and conflict, most notably in Jane, Debbie and Jemma's experiences, are highlighted as having potential for significant impact on personal assumptions. The study also found that in all four cases where researchers spoke of experience of different cultures (Peter, Dawn, Imogen and Jemma), this was cited in particular as a key challenge to realist ontological assumptions. In addition these different cultural perspectives introduced the potential for methodological conflict (most notably in Jemma's transition). Across wider life experiences and education, it also highlighted the impact of social experience coupled with later methodological consciousness in forming assumptions upon which to understand or challenge specific social constructs related to personal experience. Notable examples of this included Debbie's doctoral research to reframe her school experience and Dawn and Peter's

doctoral research about the lives of older people. Finally, the study suggests that professional experience may be both significant in developing assumptions, but equally have the potential to cause conflict with existing assumptions. In this respect the presence of existing methodological consciousness is seen as beneficial both in terms of capacity to acknowledge new learning in relation to these assumptions and to avoid and manage conflicting understandings.

How do doctoral researchers' experiences of post graduate research training (and understanding of methodology) appear to influence their subsequent philosophical assumptions?

The findings of this study indicate that the methodological impact of post graduate research training is not limited to experiences of taught programmes, but extends to wider experiences of supervision and to involvement in an academic community. Indeed in one case (Dawn) it was asserted that wider academic experiences were perceived as significantly more important. The study highlights that the researchers perceived active methodological questions and exercises through their post graduate experience as being particularly significant to increasing their methodological consciousness. Key experiences ranged from workshops and practical exercises (Debbie and Peter) to supervisor questioning (Heather) and peer dialogue (Dawn). In addition it suggests that where elements of post graduate experience are focussed solely on practical methods, at the exclusion of methodological understanding, this has the potential to cause tensions and frustrations. Conversely it is apparent that post graduate programmes which embrace methodological diversity and enhance methodological consciousness have the potential to be more inclusive, and to better prepare researchers for methodological challenges and tensions. The most illustrative example of this being Debbie's

ability to resolve on-going conflict in relation to her methodological identity. Post graduate research training is therefore positioned as more notable in introducing methodological consciousness and questions in the context of much broader life history, than in being the primary influence on the nature of philosophical assumptions which may then emerge through this experience.

How do doctoral researchers speak of their perceptions of their personal methodological 'journeys'?

The findings of this study position the presentation of the personal methodological journeys as interlinked both with the nature of individual philosophical assumptions, and their social construction. Through telling their stories each of the researchers presented their own 'methodological identity' and their capacity for doing so was framed by their level of methodological consciousness. In addition to this, their preferred methodological identity appeared to be related to the social context within which their narration occurred. This was particularly noteworthy in comparison between the life history narrative accounts and the collective biography accounts (with Jemma and Peter's accounts best illustrating). Finally, the way the researcher's spoke of challenge and methodological tension also related to their methodological consciousness and understanding, and the study found that these aspects had the potential to increase their perceptions of agency in relation to both the methodology and purpose of their research. In this respect the researchers' journeys provided an interesting illustration of the spectrum of methodological consciousness from pragmatic avoidance (e.g. Sarah) through emergent and methodologically interested (e.g. Imogen and Sian) to acknowledgment of the 'historically effected' nature of self (e.g. Debbie and Jane).

Relevance and Original Contribution to Knowledge

Through addressing the above research questions, this study makes an original contribution to knowledge by illustrating, interpreting and exploring the methodological journeys of a group of doctoral and postdoctoral researchers in the social sciences. In addition, in addressing this topic it contributes methodological and analytical originality, particularly through the application of collective biography and use of an interruptive analytical frame. This information may have significant relevance both for researchers themselves, perhaps most notably doctoral students and researchers seeking to apply similar methods, and for those involved in planning and delivering post graduate research training programmes. By understanding and exploring the stories of others researchers, supervisors or programme leaders may gain insight into the relevance of the professional (Jalongo et al 1995) and personal context (Lawlor & Mattingly 2000) of themselves and others. This is particularly significant in the context of existing literature which is largely limited to auto ethnographic and auto biographic explorations of methodological journeys (e.g. Oakley 1999, Probert 2006, Quaye 2007). The direct implications of some of these findings are explored in the next section.

In chapter 1, I highlighted the relevance of the study's potential contributions to the practice of reflexivity. The need for more information about 'doing' reflexivity, as opposed to information about its value (Hsuing 2008), was highlighted by the work of Mauthner & Doucet (2003). I would assert that amongst the most significant contributions made by this study is its reflexive situation and illustration of a group of researchers' philosophical assumptions as linked to social experience and 'historically effected' (Gadamer 1975). This information has the potential to be of great utility to others seeking to engage in reflexive

considerations. Furthermore, this research enhances existing individual explorations (e.g. Probert 2006, Quaye 2007) through both exploring the perceptions and journeys of a methodologically diverse group of researchers and also through making attempts to introduce these perceptions into the co-analysis of aspects of this. In this respect, this study contributes to the understanding that whilst reflexivity may be grounded in methodological assumptions itself, the process of considering related questions, whether or not this is made explicit by a researcher, may be relevant across the paradigmatic spectrum (perhaps best highlighted by the engagement of Sian and Imogen in this study). The implications of this for the researcher are explored below. Perhaps in terms of summarising this as a contribution, rather than reflexivity, it is best conceptualised here in more methodologically neutral terms as providing practical examples for enhancing awareness and understanding of methodological assumptions.

Finally, whilst the idea of methodological consciousness has a conceptual and theoretical starting point (Gadamer 1975), this research highlights significant new information about its relevance to the doctoral researcher both academically and in terms of understanding and reframing personal life histories. In doing so, it presents this consciousness as inseparable from the practical aspects of research at this level and suggests that previous ideas of skills based, pragmatic teaching programmes (Onwuegbuzie & Leech 2005) are based on an oversimplified, fragmented and domain specific concept of individual methodological understanding, which may increase, rather than decrease the potential for internal conflict.

7.3 Implications for Practice

As indicated above, illustrating and exploring the journeys of the nine researchers provides information which may contribute to the understanding of others. This potential for increased

understanding, alongside the substantive findings and the contribution the research makes to debates regarding the content of taught research programmes at post graduate, has the potential to inform the decisions and practice of both those involved in designing and delivering related programmes (including supervisors) and to researchers themselves (perhaps most notably doctoral students in the social sciences). Therefore in this section I outline and explore the implications for each of these groups, before highlighting potential opportunities for further related research.

Post Graduate Research Training - Approaches to Teaching

As highlighted in chapter 2, guidance for, and requirements of, institutions responsible for post graduate research programmes in the social sciences may be perceived to present a certain degree of autonomy in relation to decisions between paradigmatic or pragmatic teaching approaches (ESRC 2015, QAA 2015), however there is an increasing sense of a 'shift' towards prioritising more prescriptive skills based models (Gorard 2015). This was echoed in this study, where although six of the researchers appeared to have accessed some paradigmatic content, Imogen and Sarah had accessed programmes with no direct teaching regarding methodological understanding and Sian had commenced her research without having yet accessed any relevant teaching. In the context of this, it is noteworthy that whilst there are debates about the best approach for students and the research community (Pallas 2001, Howard et al 2003, Onwuegbuzie & Leech 2005, Lather 2006), there is lack of empirical research in relation to these views (see chapter 2).

The argument presented by Onwuegbuzie & Leech (2005) is that teaching about the divide between paradigmatic understandings is 'counterproductive and divisive'. However, the findings of this study suggest that methodological conflict is not limited to the introduction of

methodological debate within post graduate education. For example, with increased consciousness Debbie was able to cite unresolved methodological conflict throughout her earlier education. Conversely, it has highlighted that instead it is opportunities for improving methodological understanding which may indeed be limited to this period in some cases. For example for Sian and Dawn their doctoral programme was their first and only research training in the social sciences, and as such their only formal opportunity to engage with this content. In addition, the study suggests that where methodological conflict occurs, increased methodological consciousness through post graduate research training experiences may be key to exposing and seeking to resolve this, both in terms of internal understandings or personal challenges (as reflected by Debbie, Jane, Heather and Jemma) and external influence and expectations (as reflected in the collective biography discussions). In Imogen's examples, the lack of reference to methodology itself was also a site of frustration. Furthermore, the journeys of the researchers echo Pallas (2001) view that there is a need for doctoral students to be ready for the 'epistemological diversity' of the wider research community. This is illustrated by Debbie and Sarah's experience of methodological conflict in professional experience, and Jemma's initial '*struggle*' with her transition to her Masters. The role of taught programmes in this preparation could include exposure to seminars and lectures led by academics with varying perspectives or engagement in exercises involving responding to methodological challenge and debate.

On the basis of this understanding, it is asserted that this study reinforces the theoretical recommendation made by Lather (2006) that teaching approaches which embrace methodological diversity may be beneficial in better preparing doctoral researchers. In particular it has highlighted the potential for post graduate teaching programmes to improve understanding of assumptions and their social context, to help resolve methodological and

identity conflict, to support later decision making about professional opportunities and for engaging with the wider research community (Pallas 2001). This is highly relevant to the design of programmes, both in terms of the content of taught modules, but also the schedule and programme which a student may access. The doctoral process may be a lengthy and demanding process (Eliot et al 2016), and there are multiple routes a student may follow with varying amounts of assessment and teaching prior to the thesis (ESRC 2015). It is apparent from the journeys explored in this study that there may be benefits in the direct introduction of methodological consciousness occurring prior to a student commencing their research for their doctoral thesis. In addition to better placing students to achieve philosophic consistency (Maykut & Morehouse 2002), this process may reduce the frustration experienced by researchers such as Imogen who are already developing their research prior to identifying related questions. Effectively, as previously explored, it is seen to offer students the capacity to make decisions about their academic pathway earlier on in their doctoral journey, as seen in Jane's decision to stop and revisit aspects of methodological understanding.

In this regard, the findings of this study challenge the lack of emphasis apparently placed on methodological understanding, and exposing methodological consciousness, in guidance for doctoral study (e.g. ESRC 2015). A key implication is that guidance could both increase the significance given to content relating to philosophical assumptions and considerations, and ideally recommend that content which has the potential to 'unlock' methodological consciousness and expose methodological questions should be front loaded. This would appear to ensure that doctoral students are able to consider the philosophical assumptions which may underpin a specific methodology, prior to beginning their research, improving understanding and reducing the risk of later tensions and contradictions. In relation to this guidance, it would seem that the brief acknowledgement of the relevance of teaching about a

‘range of methodological approaches’ and ‘philosophical issues...and assumptions’ (ESRC 2015:8) should be further emphasised and contextualised in relation to its role in preparing students for doctoral study and ‘readiness’ for contributing to the academic research community (Pallas 2001). A benefit of increased emphasis on this content in national guidance, is the potential for increased consistency across the diverse range of doctoral programmes and routes. Furthermore, in the context of a perceived current priority for investment in quantitative research in the social sciences (Gorard 2015), regardless of considerations of its methodological importance, this may be seen as relevant, and beneficial to, the journeys of researchers applying these methods. As demonstrated by the relevance of methodological understanding to researchers applying quantitative research designs such as Sian and Imogen.

Ideally it appears that the introduction of content to explore methodological understanding would occur through taught modules at master degree level. With this in mind the researchers’ reflections of experiences which were significant to their learning also provide some additional information for how this may occur. Where the researchers cited post graduate training experiences as key to their methodological consciousness, in three cases (Debbie, Peter and Dawn) their reflections related to more interactive, illustrative learning experiences, such as workshops and peer dialogue. In relation to this it is noted that the teaching of complex philosophical concepts may need to address the significance of various individualised learning styles and approaches, much like content in other educational contexts (Kolb & Kolb 2005). This may be particularly relevant in terms of differentiating this in response to the presence of varying assumptions, as is reflected in the different conceptualisations of methodological positioning. For example as highlighted in 6.2 Sarah’s pragmatic conceptualisation of a paradigmatic position was very different to Heather and

Jane's. As consciousness of aspects such as philosophical doubt requires deliberate conscious effort (Berger & Luckmann 1966), these examples, along with the information about cultural understandings illustrating ontological considerations, suggest that these researchers identified experiential and active, rather than passive, learning experiences as being most notable in unlocking understanding.

Extending from this, the final consideration for taught programmes is the apparent inclusive nature of programmes which embrace methodological diversity. It was apparent that the researchers entered their doctoral journey with varying levels of pre-existing consciousness upon which to base their decisions. Indeed in the most extreme case Jemma initially experienced struggle due to entering a programme with no awareness of the approach embraced by the master degree she had enrolled on. If post graduate training is positioned as exposing consciousness of assumptions, then this may also expose conflict or confusion if it contrasts the assumptions it exposes (as highlighted by aspects of Debbie & Jane's journeys). This is consistent with the basic premise put forward by Onwuegbuzie & Leech (2005), but I argue that an alternative interpretation of this is to recommend methodological diversity in response to emerging assumptions, rather than to avoid philosophical debate altogether. The journeys illustrate that at times the idea of methodological identity extends well beyond the academic arena of an individual's life, and therefore methodological inclusivity can link to aspects of wellbeing, agency, empowerment and identity in similar ways to other aspects of individual identity. If this results in a lack of a sense of academic belonging and integration then it may also have implications for retention and success for doctoral students (Golde 2000). In addition, achieving inclusivity through embracing methodological diversity is illustrated by the considerations raised about understanding of what research is in different cultures. This suggests the design of post graduate research programmes needs to reflect the

diversity of understandings and ‘realities’ experienced by all students, including those arriving from a wide range of international contexts.

In summary, this study makes recommendations for consideration of paradigmatic approaches to teaching research methods at post graduate level. It indicates that there may be benefits in these including active, experiential learning experiences, and that through embracing methodological diversity as an aspect of researcher identity programmes may be more inclusive for students.

Approaches to Supervision

In the context of taught programmes which expose and embrace methodological consciousness, this study conceptualised the perceived role of the supervision as including aspects of the idea of ‘methodological mentor’ (Seibold et al 2007). This is reflected in Dawn’s expectations and Imogen’s frustrations. This role may include asking questions which extend understanding, as in Heather’s experience, or contextualising existing methodological consciousness as in Debbie’s experience. It may also include encouraging some of the aspects listed as implications for researchers and students in the next section. In making a case for the value of methodological understanding and awareness, and suggesting that this understanding is emergent, rather than instantaneous, this study indicates that the some doctoral researchers may benefit from supervisors seeking to directly support their methodological journey as part of their doctoral socialisation. This may be perceived as particularly important in situations where preceding teaching programmes have not addressed this. In these cases the role of the supervisor may include steps to encourage this understanding before a student embarks on their doctoral research, to avoid later conflict or

confusion. Examples may include signposting students to appropriate literature, conferences, seminars or encouraging exercises which elicit reflexive thought.

In addition to this, it may be useful for supervisors to note the potential, as an aspect of new understandings, for tensions, realisations and reframing of experience beyond the focus of the doctoral research itself. This is consistent with the assertion that these research and personal lives 'merge' (Sweitzer 2009). Again, much as with teaching approaches, in the context of the findings of this study, I would assert that encouraging doctoral students to identify, acknowledge and reflect on these is preferable to considering them irrelevant to the research. In this respect, however informal or practically framed, the concept of reflexive thought as part of the process of undertaking research may be embraced.

Finally, the understandings this study has presented in relation to the individualised nature of methodological journeys and understanding suggest there should also be a note here regarding the consideration of the allocation of supervision. In considering aspects such as methodological awareness and understanding in research proposals and dialogue with students, institutions may seek to identify the aspects of supervision which may be most beneficial to a student and use this information to help inform allocations. These allocations should acknowledge the complexity and diversity of backgrounds and understandings of individual doctoral students. In particular this may be achieved through using assessment processes to identify understandings, questions and methodological conflict and considering the supervision support a student may require.

Researchers and Doctoral Students

As indicated earlier in this chapter, a potential contribution of this study is the way it illustrates an understanding of philosophical assumptions as connected to social context for researchers, particularly doctoral students. The obvious implication for this audience is therefore the recommendation for engagement with related literature, questions and articulation of journeys and understandings to explore this. The group of nine researchers involved in this study, provided an example of students and researchers directly seeking to better understand their assumptions by embarking on the process of telling their stories. This introduced new ideas of connections for them, particularly in dialogue with other researchers through the collective biography session. There were also other examples of direct effort to improve understanding, such as Debbie's experience of attending related conferences. Social context, different perspectives and the idea of engagement with opportunities for 'intra action' (Gannon & Davies 2012) were all identified as impacting on and extending individual understanding. With this in mind it is recommended that individuals consider making a direct and conscious effort to further their methodological understanding. Indeed, this may include consideration of the process of documenting or sharing an individual methodological journey, much like the researchers in this study.

In addition, whilst it is acknowledged that this consideration is inseparable from methodology, in concluding that philosophical assumptions are socially constructed this research supports the value of reflexivity in research. In doing so it provides an illustration for researchers, including doctoral students, and promotes the idea that these may be used to expose the connection between the individual, their assumptions and their research as a product. This may be achieved through explicit deconstruction of interpretations, as attempted in this thesis

through elements of reflexive commentary. Additionally, reflexivity should equally be considered to be a relevant part of the research process as a whole, with the researcher considering questions such as ‘what may have contributed to my personal interpretations of this information?’ as they embark on their study. Indeed, some of the examples in the previous paragraph, such as consideration of personal methodological journeys, may contribute to elements of reflexive thought and increased consciousness of methodological assumptions. Ultimately this then has the potential to make research practice and reporting more socially situated, and thus more transparent, which I would assert is vital given the role of research in informing policy and practice.

Further Research Opportunities

Progressing from the new understandings and interpretations presented by this study, and in the context of the implications presented above, there are four main opportunities here for further research in this area. The first would be to conduct an evaluative case study to explore the influences of a methodologically diverse, paradigmatic, taught post graduate programme. This could be of particular utility alongside the existing evaluative studies of more pragmatic taught programmes, which seek to explore connections between teaching and practical skills (e.g. Coronel Llamas and Boza 2011) in helping to further illustrate the detail of how post graduate teaching models may expose methodological consciousness. The second is to extend the considerations and approaches here to researchers who have reached a later stage of their methodological journey, both to explore further the impacts of ‘doing’ research on philosophical assumptions and to consider how earlier experiences may continue to be re-framed in the context of this. Thirdly, having advocated for the value of methodological diversity, there is clearly an opportunity for further research to explore this research topic from other methodological perspectives. This may include research which considers a larger

sample of researchers. Finally, this study presents the interconnected nature of ideas of methodology, purpose, understanding and research. Therefore, extending from this there may be opportunities to further explore the social construction of individual ideas of the purpose and role of research, placing further emphasis on the ideological understandings underpinning this.

Final Reflection

In chapter 1 I highlighted the relevance of this study, and the doctoral programme as a whole, to my own methodological journey. My sustained engagement with this study over a period of three years has been a significant personal learning journey for me, greatly enhancing my knowledge and understanding of methodology and my own research skills. Increasingly I have been aware of the significance of this to both my academic and professional work. Perhaps most notable was the experience of engaging with a diverse group of researchers, through both the life history inquiry and collective biography sessions, and enhancing my own understanding of the varying perspectives through which they saw the social world. Earlier in this chapter I referenced Pallas (2001) assertion of the importance of doctoral students being prepared for the diverse methodological communities which exists within academia. I believe the process of embarking on this study has provided a very positive form of preparation for understanding, communicating and developing within this community and that it is appropriate to conclude by acknowledging this.

7.4 Conclusions

This study has sought to explore the methodological journeys of nine doctoral researchers, giving consideration to how these were presented and the relationships between the researchers' philosophical assumptions, life histories and experience of post graduate research training. The findings offer an insight into the complex, socially constructed nature of methodology and its connections with socialisation and concepts of identity. In addition they position post graduate research training as having a key role in unlocking methodological consciousness to improve researcher understanding, resolve methodological conflict and promote individual agency. In presenting this information and illustration, this study may be of significant use for researchers themselves, and for those involved in delivering doctoral research programmes. Whilst, unavoidably, this study has adopted a specific methodological perspective itself, it has sought to value and consider the perspectives of the researchers and to present reflexive considerations from across the paradigmatic spectrum. It is argued that the key implications of the knowledge presented here, include the recommendations for programmes to embrace methodological diversity and introduce paradigmatic understandings through teaching and supervision. In addition it is asserted that individual researchers may benefit from directly engaging in aspects of reflexivity and contextualisation of their assumptions.

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Appendix 1 Research Information



Researcher:

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Supervisor:

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INFORMATION SHEET

Introduction

Thank you for considering taking part in this research study. The following information is intended to ensure you understand why this research is being carried out, what it involves and what will happen to any information you provide.

My Role

I am a Doctoral Student at the University of Reading and also work for a community organisation in Bristol. This research is being carried out as part of my Doctoral thesis.

Research Objectives

The aim of this project is to explore how the personal, professional and academic journeys of individual researchers in the social sciences may relate to the construction of their methodological perspectives/assumptions. In particular the objective is to analyse how these researchers communicate about their journeys and what relevance their postgraduate research training and events in their life history have in the development of their methodological understandings. This is summarised by the following research questions:

- 1) How do doctoral researchers speak of their perceptions of their personal methodological 'journeys'?
- 2) What relationships appear to exist between doctoral researchers' individual life histories and their subsequent philosophical (ontological, epistemological and methodological) assumptions?
- 3) What relationships appear to exist between doctoral researchers' experiences of post graduate research training (and understanding of methodology) and their subsequent philosophical assumptions?

Why have you been invited to take part?

As a doctoral, or post-doctoral, researcher in the social sciences, your experiences and perceptions are valuable in helping to inform and develop a better understanding in relation to the questions above. Following your response to an initial email invitation you have been selected to take part because you were one of the ten respondents based in closest geographical proximity to Bristol, on this basis it is hoped it will be as convenient as possible for you to take part in an interview and collective biography session.

Involvement

If you decide to take part, then you will be invited to take part in two interlinked stages of the research. The first stage will consist of a detailed life history interview, which may take up to 1 hour and can take place at your place of work, or appropriate venue of your choosing. With your permission this interview will be recorded, using an electronic voice recorder. The interview will take a narrative format and will take approximately 1 to 1.5 hours, with the focus on exploring your own story/journey in the context of the research questions. It will not take a structured format, however a list of key topics and areas to be explored is attached.

The second stage of the research will consist of involvement in a 'collective biography' session. Collective biography involves a group of people coming together to share and discuss their stories, it is sometimes known as group memory work. In this session you will be invited to focus on a specific memory relating to your personal methodological journey, which has arisen from your life history interview. At the start of the session you will be invited to record this event in written format before sharing it with others in the group. There will be a stage of group analysis, with all members of the group taking a role in analysing and discussing the reflections presented by others. The group will consist of 4-5 doctoral and post-doctoral social sciences researchers, with introductions made at the beginning of the session. It will involve a time commitment of around 2 hours and will be located at venue in Bristol.

Research Audience

The results of the study may be presented at national and international conferences, and in written reports and articles.

If you would like to read a copy of a summary report once it is complete, or to view your specific interview/session transcripts, then please contact me via timothy.clark@reading.pgr.ac.uk It is hoped that the full report will be complete by Spring 2017.

Confidentiality

Any data collected will be held in strict confidence and no real names will be used in this study or in any subsequent publications. The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you or your institution (if applicable) to the study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Participants will be assigned a pseudonym, which will be used in all records. Research records will be stored securely in a locked filing cabinet and on a password-protected computer and only the researcher and research supervisor will have access to the records. The data will be destroyed securely once the findings of the study are written up and will be kept for a period no longer than five years.

In order to participate in the collective biography session, all participants will be required to agree to treat any information which is shared with them by other participants as confidential.

Benefits and Risks

It is hoped that there is potential for those involved in the study to engage in useful discussions and reflections about their own methodological ideas. It is also anticipated that the findings of this study may be useful for those teaching post graduate modules about methodology and also for some researchers and supervisors, particularly those engaging with reflexivity in their research.

Whilst no significant risks have been identified in the risk assessment for this research, due to the in-depth and personal nature of the study you should be aware that there is potential for sensitive or emotive topics (related to your own memories or those of other participants) to be discussed. During the group discussion you should not share any specific memories unless you feel comfortable to do so, and if any topic of conversation makes you feel uncomfortable then you will be free to take a break from the discussion at any point.

Right to Withdraw

You are under no obligation to take part in this research study, and can opt to withdraw, for any reason, at any point by contacting timothy.clark@reading.pgr.ac.uk

Contact

Should you wish to discuss any of the above information further, then please contact me via My supervisor for this study is Elizabeth McCrum, University of Reading, who can be contacted via

Ethical Review

'This project has been reviewed following the procedures of the University Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct'.

Insurance

"The University has the appropriate insurances in place. Full details are available on request".

Thank you

Thank you for considering taking part in this research. If after reading the above information you would like to be involved in the study, then please sign the attached consent form, which may be returned at the interview appointment.

Signed: 

Date:

Appendix 2 Consent Form

**Consent Form**

Project Title: An Exploration of the Methodological Journeys and Assumptions of Academic Researchers in the Social Sciences: What impact do life histories and post graduate training experiences have on individual researchers' methodological assumptions?

I have read and had explained to me by Tim Clark the Information Sheet relating to this project.

I have had explained to me the purposes of the project and what will be required of me, and any questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to the arrangements described in the Information Sheet in so far as they relate to my participation.

I understand that I will be interviewed and involved in a group session and that these will be recorded and transcribed.

I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw from the project any time, without giving a reason and without repercussions.

I have received a copy of this Consent Form and of the accompanying Information Sheet.

Please tick as appropriate:

I consent to being interviewed: yes _____ no _____

I consent to this interview being audio recorded: yes _____ no _____

Name:

Signed:

Appendix 3 Interview Schedules

1. Life History Interviews

The life history interviews were intended to be relatively unstructured, with co-researchers having autonomy to determine the direction and order of their story. The table below highlights the intended interview phases, adopted from the 'elicitation technique' (Jovchelovitch & Bauer 2000:60), the key stages of interest to the research questions and a summary of the topics which were introduced. These prompts were employed as a reference point to support understanding of focus and aid the 'flow' of the interview, rather than as a checklist to work through. The listed topics and stages are considered to be most relevant at the initiation and questioning phases.

A process of immanent questioning was employed, re-using phrases introduced by the participant and focussing on increasing depth rather than asking 'why' e.g. 'can you tell me more about...?' or 'could you explain that any further?'

Overview

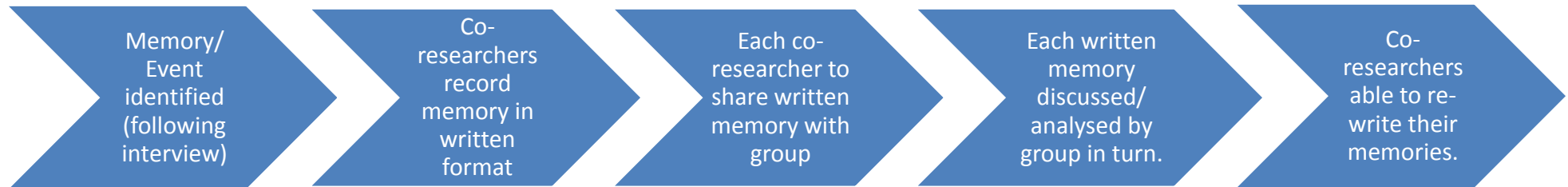
Phases of Interview*	Key Stages of Interest	Topics
Knowledge of Subject	Early Life History/Childhood	Methodology as a journey
Initiation - Presentation of Topic	Experiences of school & education	Realisation of personal methodological assumptions
Main Narration	Non-academic professional experience	Understanding of personal methodological assumptions
Questioning Phase	Experience of postgraduate research training	Turning points/shifts in thinking
Concluding Talk	Experience of conducting research	Connections between experiences and assumptions

*Taken from Jovchelovitch & Bauer interpretation of the 'elicitation technique' (2000:60)

2. Collective Biography Sessions

The information below details the basic process which was employed for the collective biography sessions and the prompts which were used in order to support the co-analysis phase of this work.

Process



Co-Analysis – Prompts (example of related question)

Communication/Language	Influence(s)	Change/Direction	Position
How is the memory communicated?	What are the key influences?	How has it impacted on the individual's methodological journey?	What is the understanding of the related methodological position(s)?

Methodological paradigm map (based on Lather 2007) will be available during both life history interviews and collective biography sessions to allow identification/reference of specific understandings of individuals understanding of the idea of a methodological 'position'.

Paradigmatic Chart

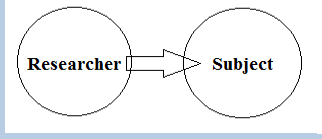
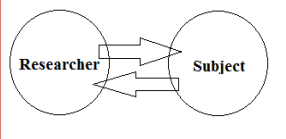
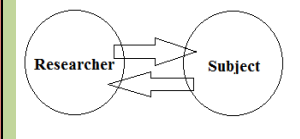
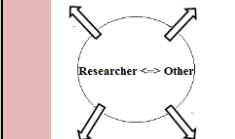

Paradigm	Positivist	Pragmatist *	Interpretivist	Critical Theory	Deconstructivist
Relationship					
Ontology	Reality is objective and “found”	Reality is layered and ‘experiential’	Reality is subjective and constructed	Reality is subjective and constructed on the basis of issues and power	Reality is ultimately unknowable; attempts to understand subvert themselves
Epistemology	Truth is one	Truth is relative	Truth is many	Truth is many, and constitutes a system of socio-political power	“Truths” are socially constructed systems of signs which contain the seeds of their own contradictions
Questions	What is true? What can we know?	What is useful? What is the best fit?	What is heuristic? What can we understand?	What is just? What can we do?	Is there a truth? What constitutes truth?
Methods	Quantitative	Mixed	Qualitative	Qualitative methods with quantitative and mixed methods	Qualitative
Purpose	Knowing the world	Informing the world	Understanding the world	Changing the world	Critiquing the world
Communication	Transmission		Transaction	Decision making	Challenging the nature of communication
If this paradigm were a colour....	Blue – cool, scientific, objective	Brown – practical, stable	Green – natural, symbolic of growth	Red – Dynamic, action-oriented	Black – absence/denial of colour
If this paradigm were a game...	Tetris – exacting, quantitative		Clue – exchanges informing decisions	Monopoly – a world constituted by economic struggles	Candyland – unconcerned by reality played by children or the extremely sophisticated

Chart adapted from Lather (2006)

*Informed by Feilzer (2010)

Appendix 4 Example Transcript in Progress

Transcript 1	Jane	Note
	Um, not a happy childhood (pause)	
	Um... meddled with mental health illness of my parent and alcoholism, so, bit messy	Later reframed
	But even by the time I got to kindergarten	
	Which is what Reception?	
	I'd already been in another Reception class and two different nursery schools	
	So, I'd been in F-- Nursery School, B-- Nursery School	
	I then went to W-- Primary	
	And through all of that time I got labelled as a, a school refuser	
	So I went to R-- School, which um	
	At the age of five was like going into a prison, I think I would describe it	
	And again there the traumas were all around separation	
	Dreadful separation issues	
	Constantly wanting to be ill and not go	
	But also I think quite a cocky little thing	
	And my parent's notes would always say 'Name says she had a stomach ache'	
	So there was always this sense of being slightly abandoned and not stood up for and not believed in	Attachment
	When I went for an interview there	
	I remember telling them that I wanted to be a doctor	
	Um and by the time I was probably about 8 or 9 I was thinking I'd be lucky if I would even survive, let alone be a doctor	Ambition Aspirations
		Misalignment – expectations to reality
	Was um, I was not able to spell	
	I remember being hit over the head with a book, because I couldn't spell in front of the class	
	So, lot of humiliation	
	she read two of them out and I was like 'Oh my god... I've done it' you know I've actually got somewhere.	
	And she said to the class I've read one out because it's so good and one out because it's so bad	
	And asked the class to identify which was which	
	Again that sort of adds to the whole feeling of	
	Obviously it was mine because it was so bad.	
	A slide of (pause) failure, I think	Description – slide of failure
	You know from starting at school	
	Which I didn't want to go to anywhere	
	And having these high ambitions for myself	

Which I think I had	
To slowly turning into this, thing	
So by the time I'm sixteen, my parents decided that I ought to go to an educational psychologist	
And, the educational psychologist, um	
Name, which you can probably wipe out,	
But the name's branded into my brain	
Decided that I wasn't even intelligent enough to be actually capable of getting, um, any O Levels	
So, that was quite a sort of damning seal on the whole thing	
We had a very argumentative family, that you know, that discussed everything.	
And I was very gendered within that family	
As needing to be the quiet girl, the	
You know, it didn't matter if I wasn't quite so... successful	
So Name (ed psych) kind of pushed a button in me, and egged on by my parents I wrote a stinking letter to Name telling him that I felt his assessment was wrong	
And then proceeded to struggle through my O Levels, which I got	Expectation - determination
And I did chemistry, biology and geography A Levels	
All with the goal of going to S--- University to do a human biology degree	
That was my absolute goal.	
Um, and I turned into a raging positivist, I think	POSITION
(laugh)Absolutely convinced that the world, could be um, explained and quantified and solved and understood through the application of good scientific theory and an objective understanding.	
And, um I decided that actually perhaps I'd made a terrible mistake	
Because there was nobody in S--- doing Arts degrees of any sort	
And I suddenly felt I wanted to experience more of an alternative way of viewing the world	
I can't remember a trigger point for that.	*Reframed, but no fixed point
Except that I wanted pottery and I wanted pictures, and I wanted people to talk about aesthetics	
And it just, I had a terrible experience with the science person	
Where we had to turn up for our first big science practical, in swimming trunks or a bikini, wearing a white coat.	
And I remember feeling incredibly vulnerable and that this was very very wrong.	Disillusion with study – rejection of view?
My feeling is it was all suspicious and threatening, and all wrong.	
So I asked if I could change to philosophy, psychology and sociology, this was during the first term.	

(pause) Which I did, but I was changing towards the end of the first term of university and I felt I never fitted in (pause)	
I don't know, I felt I was behind, always behind, never grasping it.	
I got 0% in the statistics exam in psychology at the end of the year.	Expectation - failure
I got, I, I made a whole mess of it.	
It was all wrong.	
I don't like where I am, I don't like the degree.	
(pause)	
If I could turn back the clock, I would've stuck it out, philosophy, psychology and sociology, but I didn't.	
And ah the only degree that I could possibly consider taking was a humanities degree at Bristol Poly, as it was then.	
(pause) So I applied for that and Dad told me that was all very well, but it was a complete Mickey Mouse degree.	
I struggled on and I teamed up with a tutor who I, who was one of those boring stories, somebody you will never ever forget who was suddenly interested in what I was interested in.	
Which was truth and fairytales.	
And I had decided that fairytales had something absolutely substantial to offer.	
And were being used and abused throughout the world in which we lived.	
So I did my dissertation on, it was called 'truth miscalled simplicity' which was a quote from Shakespeare,	
And it was all about fairytales	
And I looked at different versions of Cinderella	
Through, right back to an early Chinese version.	
And how, um, you know the question of truth came up a lot.	
I did what was apparently an absolutely outstanding piece of work, which the tutor was bowled over by.	First note of success
Um, I loved.	
And I was totally immersed in it.	
I just went bananas over fairytales and feminism and all that kind of thing.	Link to success?
I wrote a piece once about career and I looked back on my life and everything seemed to be a series of interruptions where there was sort a trajectory on the way and then something happened.	
And they always seemed to be things that were out of my control, allegedly.	Positioning – interruption
We went overland for as far as, and they dropped me off in Pisa I think and I made my way across to the island, to live with this family.	
So they decided that I had to go into the family home to see the coffin	
Which was tiny, tiny little coffin	
And I had to um lead the funeral procession from the village to the church	
All walking through the streets, with me right behind the coffin.	

And I remember writing home to my parents at that time, that there was more to life than just existing.	Experience – understanding emotion/sense Interpreted through PS eyes
That there was something,	
I think I remember saying something like, I think I called it love, but I wasn't sure what it meant.	
That life wasn't just about existing.	****
That human beings needed something more than that.	
Um, and I think the architecture in S---- had an impact on me, um	Aesthetics
We were on a university campus which was outside G----, so we very rarely went into G-----.	
I can remember it now, it was a bit like a factory	
With just laboratories.	
Concrete.	
Really hard and unpleasant.	
And then full of demonstrations by Iranian students about wanting the revolution that was happening there.	
I was going 'oh it's pottery, that's what life is all about.'	
You know that's what matters.	
And they bought it.	
Um, so that was kind of a sort of symbolic thing.	
And I was always a great maker as a child.	
I used to make loads of things	
I'd make anything.	
It was a massive kickback at my dad	Reactive
You know to say that the world could be	
Was answerable.	
My dad, as you probably know was a vicar	
Um a priest, whatever you want to call them.	
So to say to him that we would get to a position where we could understand the world.	
But understanding was what, seeking some kind of, mmm, seeking some kind of understanding about an incomprehensible place that I always seemed to find myself in.	Reframe – understanding, reactive
I've had years and years of psychotherapy over my childhood which I like to think of as one big scribble, black horrible thing that I don't want to go back.	
A lot of it is about, um not making sense of what's happening around you.	Making sense
That, there was an awful lot of confusion and conflicting messages	
And I think that kind of uncertainty and fear tends to drive, or drove for me, a sense making mission.	Purpose

And when I came across the possibility that science could actually be an easy way of doing that	
Because there were answers	
You know, and there were indisputable answers and there were facts	
And there was certainty	
An armour, a little armour	****
I hadn't thought of it like that until just now	
And I started there the year it opened and I worked with the children in the nursery.	
And then I gradually realised that I had um other skills	
And that my Dad was struggling with some of the amount of work	
Paper work and things like that	
And it turned out that actually we could work together quite well	
And my Mum did all the education stuff	
And my Dad and I did all the thinking about how education	
You know how education and management can sit together	
And it was like woah, this is easy and I'm good at it	SUCCESS – Reflexive my knowledge of EY
It was a completely different experience	
And I was particularly interested in, um, um, the politics of discrimination	
And I then did Management, um Institute of Personnel Management	
At UWE	
Um. Then I started to be asked to go and do talks.	
So I did an NVQ Level 4 in um adult teacher training	
Seemed to be, I dunno, I seemed to be getting really successful.	
I left the and went and worked at the college of care and early education as a full time lecturer.	
And within about 2 months I was asked to apply for a management position there.	
Which again was like ooooh,	
.	
I don't think I've never not been doing a course or something.	
.	
But when I went to the interview, they said 'you have to understand, if you come on this course, this is management where our research is at the extreme end of interpretivism.'	
I thought well that's interesting.	
She, she.. had up on her wall, pieces of tapestry, and art work that she said were her research.	
You know her academic research was done through textile.	
And she said she had written a piece about Cinderella and Marks and Spencer.	

And I went off and read this piece of research that she'd done, which was written making sense of what had happened at Marks and Spencer by using the Cinderella fairytale.	
And I was in love with it.	
Absolutely in love with that.	
And I went on that degree and I have never in my life experienced such fantastic teaching, subject matters, ways of looking at things, exploration.	
The whole thing was just life changing, I think.	POST GRAD
I realised that sense making was still really important for me	
And that perhaps there was some way...	
If I think back now it makes (inaudible)	
That science was a way of sort of healing a um...	
A frightened place in the world.	
That looking at theory to try and understand why things might be seen as they are	
Or could possibly be interpreted as they are.	
Without necessarily committing	
Because the whole thing about the way that I was learning, I was just opening up possibilities of explanations, rather than certainties.	
There were no certainties.	
I think life had shown me that.	Link – life methodology
There was these traumatic events,	
Really traumatic events.	
Which actually started out with my son when he was 4 years old.	
Um, pause	
That shatter your understanding of the world.	Change
And how,	
And your place in it.	
I think from childhood, I was always trying to sort of find somewhere.	
Find somewhere, puhhh, it gets blown apart.	
So sense making is really important.	
And here was an opportunity.	
Because I worked in a family business that had got this complicated history to it and I was able to use theory to explore an understanding, or a possible understanding of it.	
So that's what my entire dissertation was about.	
I used, unbeknown to me, without planning at all	
Nothing whatsoever,	
I was using poetry as a form of research.	
And made sure that, the whole thing was so academically underpinned	
As you do if you're using arts based research.	
Because it's so open to criticism.	
And got such an accolade,	
It was just amazing.	Success
I think one of the problems sometimes with having these big successes	

connected with big failures is the terror that someone's either going to take that success away	
Or you're never going to be able to live up to it again	
But I knew that I had been bitten by um, deconstruction, mostly deconstruction and post modernism.	
That's a very loose term to use.. (inaudible)	Position – 'loose term'
I just go, pragmatist, no I'm an idealist	
I'm stuck up there in the...	
I went right to woolly end of arts.	
I felt that, that we had to subvert the academy.	
That knowledge had to be.	
There were other ways of knowing,	
That we weren't tapping into.	
That if you like, the academic academy is an institution which is just reproducing it's own stuff, according to it's own rules.	
So I went off and did the um Ed.D	
Which was the narrative pathway.	
I did this amazing piece of work you know wow this brilliant, this is great.	
And then, I don't know what happened.	
I suddenly decided I don't know what the hell that they're talking about once it moved to narrative.	Tension
And there were tensions between the lectures which I didn't like.	
And one of them took me straight back to old school days.	
The way that he spoke, the way that he,	
It just evoked all sense.	
Didn't understand what he wanted, he didn't like my style.	
I moved here so that I could um	
Concentrate more on the doctorate	
And so I hated the house because the doctorate wasn't going well.	
And it took me about a year to decide that I ought not to be doing it.	
And that was really hard, because I often thought back to	
You know that little five year old who said she wanted to be a doctor	
I described it once, or my experience of narrative research.	
As a, it's like a mist.	
And it shoots around, this mist.	
And it doesn't become anything, unless it hits something.	
It needs like a pane of glass in order for you to actually, 'ah that's what it is'	
I realised I didn't have the pane of glass	
And the pane of glass to me, was more, more understanding, more knowledge	
About a better breadth of research methodology	

Stage**Early Life History/Childhood****Education****University****Professional****Reflections****Post Graduate****Methodological Reflections****How told?**

Fluctuating – stories to emphasise and highs and lows = slide of failure – illustrate position e.g. poetry example

Personal purpose – ‘research’ is about understanding

Clear plot and thread

Reflective – how do I think about this now? At the time I thought...

Life History

Links to an understanding of failure & success - ambition

Understanding life, key references to childhood

Unstable, uncomfortable

Post Grad

Negative experience of positivism/Positive experiences of ‘extreme interpretivism’ – relatively rapid shift

Main successes link to current understanding

Still searching for understanding – constantly shifting

Reflexive:

Professional understanding of Early Childhood

Understood from a similar perspective – would an alternative perspective see this as opting for what is more comfortable?

Does this reflect the anxiety and disruption? – Has reduction summarised and lost some of the emotive elements?