

**Psychology graduates in the transition  
to employment: Negotiating  
employability, identity and the  
meaning of higher education**

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**Doctor of Philosophy**

**Aston University**

**January 2016**

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## **Summary**

**Aston University**

### **Psychology graduates in the transition to employment: Negotiating employability, identity and the meaning of higher education**

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The experience of psychology students and graduates in the transition from higher education to employment is examined using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) and thematic analysis (TA) of in-depth semi-structured individual interviews. Four students were interviewed near the beginning and again near the end of their sandwich placement year, and five graduates were interviewed shortly after graduation and again two years on. A literature review of studies of the graduate transition revealed a relative lack of qualitative studies and in particular few studies reflecting the circumstances of contemporary British psychology students and graduates and few longitudinal studies. The research is located additionally in literature concerned with graduate employability, the psychology of change and transition, vocation and identity, development in early adulthood, the development of epistemological reasoning, participation in communities of practice, the development of epistemic virtue, phronesis and ontological development.

Graduate interviews are analysed case-by-case and placement student interviews are grouped thematically. Ambition to enter clinical psychology is discussed as part of a strong career focus as well as issues of power and identity. The role of work experience, both as a graduate and on undergraduate placement emerges as a transformative force, much more so than higher education, which is experienced as enabling at best rather than transforming. Higher education is experienced in a range of ways from a source of a career credential to training for enframing in the Heideggerian sense, but rarely as ontologically significant. In conclusion the advantages of professional level work experience and a vocational direction are advocated to facilitate a transformative ontological turn in undergraduate education.

**Key words:** Graduate transition, interpretative phenomenological analysis, thematic analysis, experience of higher education, employability, ontological development, psychology education.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction and overview

### Preamble

In order to fully understand this thesis and its context it may be helpful to know something of psychology teaching at Aston University and my own role in it. Psychology has been taught at Aston since 1965, a year before the then College of Advanced Technology received its University Charter. Promoting year long work placements as part of a sandwich degree is a long-term policy at Aston and reflects both the University's Charter of 1966 and the aims of the original 1895 institution, Birmingham Municipal Technical School. Recently there has been renewed commitment to these aims, perhaps unusually so given the discussion that follows about academic drift in universities, and it has been decided that all Aston Bachelors degrees will eventually incorporate a compulsory sandwich placement year. Currently the two joint-honours psychology degrees are of four years duration with a compulsory placement year and the larger single honours psychology programme can be taken in either three-year (no placement) or four-year (with placement) form. The majority of single honours applicants are admitted to the three-year version but most subsequently change to the four-year programme and 75-80% of single honours students take a placement year.

Employability work starts in the first year (starting a personal development plan with a personal profile, two occupational studies - one must be a career path outside professional psychology - and a career action plan) but the bulk is in the second year *Employability and Interpersonal Skills* module delivered by myself and placement team staff. This includes academic and practical briefings on placement and employability issues, work on effective CVs and applications and successful interview technique followed by mock interview workshops in which students take part in interviews as both panellist and candidate. There is also an interdisciplinary component. There is a November Psychology Placement Fair where final year students display posters (part of the placement assessment) summarising their work placement experience. It is also attended by local employers and is timetabled for first and second year psychology undergraduates. Semester two includes health and safety and other practical pre-placement advice and much individual casework by the placement team. Students have placement mentors available to them, receive a regular placement bulletin, access to a placement jobs website, one-to-one appointments and a document check service for CVs, cover letters and application forms. Placement year assessment in psychology asks students to focus on developing awareness of their own

competencies, interests and aptitudes and on recording evidence of competency development. Regular logs are required as well as a poster presentation. Policy has varied as to whether placement year mark counts towards the degree. They will count in future and additional academic assessment for the placement year is under development.

My involvement in the placement year dates back to 1999 in which year I became a Teaching Fellow at Aston having left a management career in further education. I took charge of the psychology placement as psychology was transferred from Aston Business School, which had a central placement service, to the newly created School of Life and Health Sciences, which did not, and found a take-up rate of about 30%. As an Aston graduate (BSc Behavioural Science 1977) I had taken a placement year myself and remembered some mixed views as to its costs and benefits. I therefore initiated some research into it that revealed strong student support for the placement year from those who had taken a placement and considerable regard for it amongst students who had not (Reddy and Hill, 2002). I went on to develop support and preparation for placements in psychology, to advocate it to students and to undertake further research into aspects of it (Reddy and Moores 2006, 2012; Moores and Reddy 2012). My own views on higher education have become less certain as my career has progressed but loosely accord with those of Newman (1852; 1873/1982) discussed below as well as supporting education for employability. These potentially contradictory views also include a concern for social mobility and a Rogerian prizing of the importance of individual development.

### **The UK Bachelors degree in psychology**

Psychology is one of the most popular degree subjects in the UK and across Europe (Reddy, Dutke, Papageorgi and Bakker, 2014) however its relationship to the psychology professions varies and is a source of confusion to British students. In some European countries, for example in parts of Scandinavia, degree entry is severely restricted and student intake broadly matches vacancies for professional entrants. Graduation is at professional-entry Masters level and the degree includes some professional training (Scanlon, 2011). Few if any students graduate with a Bachelors degree. A psychology degree in this fashion is thus in a similar position to Medicine in being vocational and in integrating academic foundations and professional training. Professional selection is at 18+, few psychology graduates seek careers outside, and pay, status and reward are high. In other European countries however, such as Spain and France, entry to undergraduate study is more open and graduate numbers greatly exceed professional vacancies. The UK is distinctive in that there are large numbers

leaving higher education and entering the job market with a Bachelors qualification only. In the UK there are also large numbers of Bachelors students studying psychology and little restriction on recruitment to undergraduate courses, but professional entry requires advanced Masters or Doctoral study and entry to these courses is competitive. A strong academic track record and considerable work experience, some possibly unpaid, is required. Money eases the way into the psychology professions by funding unpaid work experience and course fees, although deep pockets are required to fund professional qualification, especially in Clinical psychology if an intensely competitive NHS bursary cannot be obtained. Routes to clinical, counselling, forensic, health and occupational psychology all differ in important details. The UK Bachelors' degree in psychology is thus a non-vocational academic foundation, and professional training is disaggregated from it with professional entry at 21+.

The Bologna process has led to the widespread but not universal adoption in Europe of a three-year bachelors and two-year Masters pattern. For much of Europe this has meant the hesitant and sometimes unwilling introduction of Bachelors' degrees in psychology. However the majority of psychology students in Europe study for five years and leave with a Masters' degree. This accords with the European Federation of Psychology Associations (EFPA) EuroPsy standard which suggests five years of study and one year of supervised professional practice as the minimum requirement for professional practice in Psychology (Reddy, Dutke, Papageorgi and Bakker, 2014). Nowhere in Europe does a Bachelors' degree qualify the graduate for professional practice or allow them to be regarded in a formal sense as a psychologist. Thus there is confusion within psychology about whether psychology education is, like medicine, a five-year plus route into a profession with entry at 18+, or a social science or STEM subject allied to medicine that does not necessarily lead to a profession but can be studied as an academic discipline perhaps as biology, sociology or economics is, or in a loosely vocational way as business studies is. Students, applicants, teachers, parents and advisors may be wholly or partly unaware of these nuances and of the widely cited estimate that only 20% or fewer of UK psychology graduates will become professional psychologists (QAA 2010; Trapp, Reddy, Spinath, Marques and Sümer, 2012). Students may also have a number of misconceptions about psychology (Lantz and Reddy, 2010; Reddy and Lantz, 2010) and find that their sense of what the subject is about developing and changing (Rowley, Hartley and Larkin, 2008).

### **What is higher education for?**

Universities are recognisable in Europe from the thirteenth century onwards, in Bologna, Paris and Oxford for example. However 600 years later during the industrial revolution there were still only two in England (although more in Scotland) and they played no part in industrialisation. Oxford took perhaps 200 students per year and concentrated on teaching the classics. Only male Anglicans were admitted, there was no academic entrance requirement and Peers could get a degree without examination (Collini, 2012). The medieval university taught the seven 'liberal arts' of the trivium (grammar, logic and rhetoric) and the quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy) that prepared candidates for church and state administrative careers and for advanced study in philosophy and theology. The 'practical arts' of architecture and medicine were also taught.

From this low base growth has been continuous and recently almost exponential. Collini (2012) reports that there were 50,000 university students in the UK in 1939, just over twice that number in 1961, 300,000 in 1980 and about 2,500,000 in 2012 with growth especially marked in women, postgraduate and part-time students. Two-thirds of current universities did not exist as such 20 years ago, and when the Thatcher government cut university funding sharply in 1981 nearly half of the then 46 degree-awarding universities were less than 20 years old (Collini, 2012). There are now nearly 350,000 students studying subjects allied to medicine and medicine itself, more than the total student population 35 years ago. Recent growth has been particularly strong in psychology and not only in the UK. There were 310,000 psychology students in the 32 EFPA countries in 2005 (Honkala, 2006). In the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries 37% of the age cohort entered higher education in 1995 but the proportion in 2009 was 57% and in Finland, Iceland, Poland and Sweden as many as three-quarters aim to graduate (Trapp and Upton, 2010).

Despite much growth the purpose of higher education is not entirely clear or uncontested. Collini (2012) points to tension between a teaching agenda to train professionals to meet local or national needs, more engineers, accountants or medical practitioners for example, and a research agenda aiming to pursue the fullest understanding of a subject driven by the intellectual logic of the discipline. Research has long carried the greater prestige and potential for staff promotion. Institutions created primarily to meet local needs (successively municipal red-brick universities such as Birmingham, colleges of advanced

technology such as Aston, and polytechnics such as the now Birmingham City University) have, suggests Collini, succumbed to academic drift and become like the pre-existing universities. All suffered jibes at their more practical 'mickey-mouse' subjects; the ditty '*He gets degrees in making jam at Liverpool and Birmingham*' mocked the then-new red-bricks, and low status initially attached to such staples of the current university curriculum as Medicine and English Literature. Inverse snobbery and hostility to this academic drift and mission creep saw universities criticised in turn as ivory towered bastions of privilege staffed by leisured, sherry-sipping savants; an image that dies hard in the world of Inspector Morse and academic crime fiction.

Traditionally university education was for a male elite characterised by ability and high socio-economic status and until the 1960's was a fairly stable undertaking with small numbers of students, high levels of academic autonomy and relatively little interest or financial support from government or industry (Coaldrake and Stedman, 1999). Collini (2012) calls the political ideology behind UK university growth in the 1940's *welfare state cultural diffusion*, but more recently it has been thought that the wealth of nations will depend not only on what can be mined, grown, manufactured or traded, but on knowledge, innovation and ideas. Growth has also embraced an explosion in funding for scientific and medical research and higher education has come to be seen as a key factor in wealth creation. The university has thus come to be viewed as a *...driver of national economic and social development through the formation of human capital* (Coaldrake and Stedman, 1999, p. 3). In some ways this is a renewal of the founding idea of the modern university beginning with Humboldt in the Prussian ministry of education 200 years ago; that university research and education is an investment in the future economic and cultural vitality for the state (Elton 2008; Humboldt, 1970). Knowledge has been the core business of universities for 800 years and Brink (2007) suggests that academics are like a newly discovered tribe sat on huge mineral wealth with its exploitation threatening their lifestyle.

This focus on the strategic importance of higher education and 'knowledge' (perhaps in reality academic and transferable skills; knowing how to find out more than simply knowing, but more on this later) foregrounds higher education for a purpose, perhaps loosely employability. The aim of preparing students for employment has a long history and is not without controversy. Across many advanced industrial economies, the emphasis has shifted towards courses that are primarily concerned with preparing students for specific

occupations and away from the liberal arts (Lomas 1997). There are fears of commercialisation, loss of academic freedom, requirements to be accountable to business or political agendas, and the loss of traditional subjects, course content and of methods of teaching. The notion of the 'triple helix' of government, industry and university (Etkowitz and Leydesdorff, 2000; Leydesdorff and Meyer, 2003) illustrates the strategic importance that higher education may now be invested with politically and economically and the growth of the notion of higher education as soft power. Biesta (2006) suggests that higher education is gradually changing from *learning to be*, an ontological and loosely liberal educational aim, to *learning to be productive and employable*. However Billet (2009) points out that these different purposes are not necessarily irreconcilable. Professional practice requires the constant adaptation of knowledge because it is subject to constant change. Professional work goes beyond technical knowledge and requires the exercise of critical faculties within occupational practice.

The notion that students should be learning to be productive and employable, and universities should be useful draws attention to Newman's (1852; 1873/1982) celebrated justification of liberal education in which he defends the university against the utilitarian requirement for it to be useful. Utilitarianism (Bentham, 1823/1907) in education is targeted by Dickens in *Hard Times* (1854), these are the opening lines spoken by Gradgrind, the headmaster:

*Now, what I want is Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the mind of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them.*

For Newman the aim of university education was not to teach facts but to develop students' critical faculties so that they could see things as they really are, get to the point, discard irrelevance and detect sophistry.

*It [higher education] educates the intellect to reason well in all matters, to reach out towards truth, and to grasp it. (Newman, 1873/1982, p.95).*

Newman saw undergraduate education as important not for providing technical skills for work or accumulating knowledge for its own sake but for educating the mind and cultivating understanding (Graham, 2005). He had little to say about what should be studied and acknowledged that many subjects provided appropriate material for educating the mind. The essence of this is the ability to weigh evidence and critically evaluate. Despite Newman

the idea of liberal education remains elusive however (*notoriously ambiguous* says Barnett, 2009, p.433) but includes the idea that the attainment of true knowledge brings liberation or emancipation from the world and its dogmas, from illusion and ideology. Newman was a clergyman writing from a religious standpoint, he later became a Catholic Cardinal and has recently been beatified and hardly fits contemporary notions of liberal education. Nonetheless, although he can be seen as defending Oxford and Cambridge as finishing schools for civilising elite young gentlemen, he can also be read as suggesting that liberal education has the real and practical value of training good members of society. In a knowledge economy this may be a significant part of employability. Thus values associated with traditional elites can be appealed to as justifying liberal education.

### **Employability**

Since the Browne report (2010), and in the context of rising student fees, employability has become a buzz-word within higher education. The term is widely used and its definition is the subject of a number of papers (e.g. McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005, Eraut, 1994). One definition is:

*...a set of achievements - skills, understandings and personal attributes - that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy (Yorke, 2006, p8).*

For Yorke employability refers to the achievements of the graduate, and their potential to obtain a 'graduate job'. Lowden, Hall, Elliot and Lewin (2011) review difficulties in defining employability and distinguish between a narrow approach with a focus on skills and attributes, and a more inclusive approach which, while including skills and attributes, is based on values, intellectual rigour and engagement (Hinchliffe and Jolly, 2011). Harvey (2004) suggests that employability is an on-going developmental process that does not stop once the graduate is employed and that it is much more than the acquisition of key skills or getting a job; it is about developing graduates as critical, empowered learners. This holistic and inclusive approach to employability places the learner at the centre of the approach and engages them as partners in learning. In summary there are a number of aspects:

- A set of skills, understandings and attributes that are achieved over the course of a degree;
- Engaging in an on-going process of professional and personal career development;
- Developing the ability to bring critical reasoning to bear;

- Applying these attributes across the lifespan, not just within employment.

There is no single dominant and comprehensive model of employability, however the USEM model (Yorke and Knight, 2004, p5) has been influential:

- U      Understanding of disciplinary material and broadly how the world works;
- S      Skilful practices in context, whether discipline-based or more generic;
- E      Efficacy beliefs, including a range of personal attributes and qualities;
- M      Metacognition, including the capacity for reflection and self-regulation.

What would Newman say about employability? It's an impossible question given the passage of time and the overwhelmingly religious focus of Newman's thought, but his defence of liberal education fits quite well with broader notions of employability. As argued above, employability is not only about providing technically skilled labour but includes educating the mind, cultivating understanding, developing efficacy, metacognition and the capacity for reflection and self-regulation. University teaching is not concerned only or even primarily with the transmission of established knowledge, but with ways that assumptions can be questioned, problems solved and boundaries extended. Newman is surely right in arguing that universities are not only about turning out the next generation of workers. The contemporary employability agenda is not necessarily a reassertion of utilitarianism and it may be possible to portray it as an ally of scholarship, the values of liberal education and the university tradition as defined by Newman. The attraction of employability is that it defines 'useful' in ways that fit well with Newman's agenda. It embraces self-knowledge and awareness, skills in research and analysis, the construction of adult professional identity, the development of more sophisticated epistemological awareness, and aims at the development of reflective, critically aware and ethically informed global citizens.

Employability then is not just about having knowledge and being able to slot into a niche. It is about bringing research and critical thinking skills to bear on the superabundance of knowledge increasingly at our disposal. Universities should arguably be equipping students for jobs that do not yet exist, that may, as many jobs already do, require Newman's critical capacity rather more than purely factual knowledge. Overall Newman's exercising and enriching the life of the mind can be seen both as an end in itself and as useful in developing intellectual capacity of economic value. Other factors also draw attention to the broader



importance of the educational output of universities. Globalisation, sustainability and the desire to propagate democratic values have led universities to take ethical positions and a more active role in promoting global citizenship. With concern over the environment and extremism, the value of a reflective, critically aware and ethically informed young graduate goes beyond simple economic calculation.

### **Employability and university league tables**

Utilitarianism may be something of a spent force but lives on in the assumptions of some students that university is simply the learning of useful facts, along with credentialism; seeing university as no more than the socially ordained step necessary to enter a career. Higher education offers far more than this, including the potential to open up social mobility. The placement year in particular is a way for students to network and develop contacts and confidence as well as skills. Its existence at Aston University with its socially and ethnically diverse student body, and its absence at all but one (Bath) of the more exclusive Russell Group universities, may allow Aston students from non-traditional and widening participation backgrounds to enter careers that would otherwise be hard to reach. The marketplace of university league tables also has the potential to challenge the circular system of university status and prestige. Unfortunately this potential has been little realised, and the forthcoming Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) is thought likely to continue the pattern of league tables reproducing elites and reinforcing the neo-liberal assumption that individual ability is the determining factor in career success and life chances (Gibbs, personal communication). The placement year has the potential to subvert this but may not necessarily deliver social mobility. The paper by Allen, Quinn, Hollingworth and Rose (2013) reviewed in the next chapter explores this. One way to view the politics of higher education is to see it as about families in pursuit of position and power.

### **Graduate employment**

Purcell and Elias (2004) have classified graduate jobs and report that 85% of graduates progress into graduate jobs over seven years from graduation even though 50% may start in non-graduate jobs. More recently Purcell, Elias, Atfield et al (2013) have re-classified graduate jobs into: 1) Traditional graduate occupations (solicitors, medical practitioners, teachers, scientific and technical specialists); 2) Modern graduate occupations where a degree has been required since the 1960s (management, IT and creative, primary teachers, journalists and graduate-entry administrative level posts); 3) New graduate occupations recently requiring a degree (marketing and sales managers, physiotherapists, occupational

therapists, management accountants); 4) Niche graduate occupations where most do not have degrees but there are specialist graduate niches (leisure and sports managers, hotel managers, nurses, actors, senior administrators in education). They note overall growth in graduate employment and that this is much greater in occupations requiring the highest skills and qualifications. Traditional and modern graduate jobs grew by 56% and 61%; new graduate jobs by 45% and niche graduate jobs by 31% compared to just over 8% growth in non-graduate jobs. Growth is concentrated in full-time jobs with the growth of part-time employment mainly in non-graduate jobs. They also note greater growth of what they describe as women's jobs at all levels except for non-graduate jobs. However they also note a continuing gender pay gap with wages for psychology graduates placing them 17th for men and 21st for women out of 25 disciplines. Bromnick and Horowitz (2013) however found that psychology students are less motivated by salary and more by aspirations to pursue a 'helping' career.

### **Change and transition**

Oatley (1990) discusses role transitions and emotional life. He argues that a thread runs through literary classics on role transition from Apulius through Tolstoy, Robert Louis Stevenson and Primo Levi; it is the relationship between our sense of ourselves being the same person, and the sense of being changeable and dependent on forces outside our control. He suggests that roles are collaborative joint plans and that loss of role can make a whole structure of well-practised interactions obsolete with tumultuous emotional consequences. The loss of the student role involves a loss of a way of being and a way of relating that is both long practised and suddenly redundant. This loss also calls into question the plans that are part of the student role and the imagined continuity of becoming; suddenly what seemed like a simple and automatic progression may feel anything but. Graduates may feel that the ground has been cut from beneath their feet as they face the scale of loss and the unreality and lack of detail of their dream of becoming stands exposed. Arnold (1990) however takes a less dramatic view. He suggests that the graduate transition is so well signposted that 'anticipatory socialisation' (Merton, 1957) may have taken place and cites Glaser and Strauss (1971) who suggest that far from being taboo, such public transitions of status are marked by *astonishingly frequent and free discussion* (p.4). However the necessity of retaining focus on final examinations can mean that students may suspend exploring their options and, when it comes, the transition may be abrupt. It can also be difficult to withdraw from a role that has required such a lot to be put into it, however the very intensity of the final examinations may in themselves act as a rite of passage.

Attention has been paid to the transition from school to university but rather less to the transition from university to work (although see Tinto, 1975, 1988). The graduate transition is easily equated to that between adolescence and adulthood and seeing it in a lifespan context highlights its personal and social significance. Many theorists (Erikson, 1963, 1978; Super, 1957, 1980; Savickas, 2010) see this to a greater or lesser extent as a time of exploration and development of identity and self-concept and the notion of developmental tasks suggests that the transition is seen as a positive step to an adult role. The loss and emotional turmoil suggested by Oatley may therefore be balanced by seeing leaving education as a welcome positive step and tackling it with purpose. This also must come with the caveat that failure to make the transition, or anxiety about it, may be powerfully unsettling.

### **Vocation and identity**

The term 'vocation' has two separate meanings (Billet, 2009). Firstly is the idea of paid work corresponding to particular needs for goods and services. These are differentially valued and rewarded and historically most people have been 'called' to their occupation by birth, only recently has occupational choice been available for most people. Secondly however a vocation can be seen as a personal journey, a trajectory and an identity. Here one is called to one's vocation by disposition and interest, talent or ability, or by social pressures, including reward and status. For Dewey (1916) vocation emphasises the development of the individual and he sees the value of work as being as much in individual development as in meeting needs for goods and services. Dewey (1916) argues that:

*A vocation means nothing but such direction in life activities as to render them perceptibly significant to a person, because of the consequences they accomplish, and are also useful to his [sic] associates. ... Occupation is a concrete term for continuity. It includes the development of artistic capacity of any kind, of special scientific ability, of effective citizenship, as well as professional and business occupations, to say nothing of mechanical labor or engagement in gainful pursuits. (p307, cited in Billet, 2009).*

Thus a vocation is of value to the individual and the community and a key difference between work simply as employment and work as vocation is the degree to which the individual identifies with that activity. This is certainly meaningful to undergraduates most of whom will be working for money as students and on unpaid placement but will not regard this as their vocation.

## **Self and identity**

William James began the study of self and identity with a chapter in his *Principles of Psychology* (1890). Ashmore and Jussim (1997) note a resurgence of interest in the latter part of the twentieth century and report 31,553 psychology academic publications on self and identity between 1974 and 1993. As they go on to say, self and identity are not simple concepts and have been used in a bewildering and overlapping variety of ways that defy hard and fast definition. Different sorts of researchers study different aspects from differing perspectives at individual and societal levels of analysis across psychology, as well as in sociology and social anthropology, a diversity of approach reflected for example in Stevens (1996).

The approach taken in this programme of studies follows that taken in the literature reviewed in chapter two and underpinning this research. For example Dahlgren, Handal, Szkudlarek and Bayer (2007) and Nyström (2009) and the journeyman project team in general, and before them Teichler (1996), and discussed in theme four in the synthesis of findings in chapter two below. The root of this approach is Erikson's (1950/1968) psychosocial theory in which identity is a central theme, characterised as a fundamental task of adolescence and of the transition to adulthood. Erikson is clinically oriented and abstract as well as of his era, leading to a number of more recent neo-Eriksonian identity approaches, such as that of Marcia, reviewed by Schwartz, Zamboanga, Luyckx, Meca and Ritchie (2013) who conclude that the potential of Erikson's approach is only just beginning to be realised (p.107). The timing of the resolution of this task has also shifted, as discussed below, leading to what Arnett (2000, 2007) refers to as emerging adulthood, an 'in-between' period. Emerging adulthood includes a focus on oneself, feeling in-between adolescence and adulthood, openness to a range of possibilities and some instability. Time and space is thus available for identity alternatives to be considered in areas such as careers, relationships, sexuality, philosophy of life, and spirituality (Schwartz, Donnellan, Ravert, Luyckx, and Zamboanga, 2013).

This research is interested in identity pertaining to careers and employment. In doing so it reflects previous research but is also naïvely realist in approach. This naivety is apparent in not unpacking the breadth of perspectives available on self and identity and in the assumption of both researcher and participants that identity is necessarily largely about career and employment. This of course also reflects the context aims and position of the research; its focus is on psychology graduates in the transition to employment and

negotiating employability through higher education. It also accords with Giddens (1991) who argues that as traditional social patterns loosen and choices widen the construction of self is increasingly reflected on as an 'identity project', a term also associated with Harré (1983) *to refer to efforts to achieve self-directed development and expression of self* (Stevens and Wetherell, 1996, p.345).

### **Developmental perspectives on the graduate transition**

As outlined in the previous paragraph, it is easy to see the graduate transition in an adolescence-to-early-adulthood lifespan-developmental context and there is much literature, some of it quite venerable (Erikson, 1963, Super, 1957) that can support such a view. However the ground has been cut from beneath some aspects of these models by changing education, employment, domicile and child-rearing arrangements. As outlined above, enormously increased numbers now attend university, including far more women, and in the UK there has also been a decline in employment opportunities for school leavers and rising house prices that together can delay setting up home and extend dependence on parents well into the 20s or later. These changes, read in conjunction with older developmental stage theory, show how gendered and temporally and culturally specific they are and point to the importance of social and cultural norms and to cohort effects (Rosenfeld and Stark, 1987).

Levinson (1986; Levinson et al, 1978, Levinson and Levinson, 1996) is the best-known theorist of adulthood and his interview-based research led to a stage-crisis model that also owes something to the earlier psychoanalytically inclined model of Erikson (1963). Levinson sees early adulthood as between 17 and 45 with an 'early adult transition' from 17 to 22 involving greater self-sufficiency, followed by 'entering the adult world' between 22 and 28. Transition between eras can take three to six years to complete. Within the broad eras are periods of development, each characterized by a set of tasks and an attempt to build or modify one's life structure. In the Early Adult Transition the main tasks are to move out of the pre-adult world and to take a first step into the adult world. The timing of the transition in this model accords well with undergraduate education. A start at 18, with a three to six year variance, covers most undergraduates and as most Aston students take a placement year graduation is typically at 22, right at the transition to entering the adult world. The model makes sufficient sense for me to use in teaching students in preparation for their placement year and also fits my sense of my own development with some significant development akin to 'entry to the adult world' happening for me at 28.

A key feature and theme throughout every period is the 'Dream'. This has a vision-like quality and is an imagined possibility generating excitement and vitality. It is a projection of the individual's ideal life and we are always becoming in relation to it. The place and nature of the dream is modified and revised throughout life as the imagined self is compared with the world as we live through it (Tennant and Pogson, 1995). A dream of the future towards which we are always becoming links well with Heidegger's idea of temporality (1962). Heidegger and hermeneutic phenomenology is discussed in chapter three but, briefly, he argues that the present involves both past and future and we project forward our imagined future possibilities, we are what we are to become. For Levinson, according to Brown (1987), men and women have different types of dreams about their lives. Men typically dream about work and occupational roles, while women are torn between dreams of occupation and dreams of marriage and family. In beginning this study the idea of 'the dream' makes sense to me and seems to me to feed student interest in professional, especially clinical, psychology. Nearly 30 years on from Levinson and from Brown, it will be interesting to see if there will be any evidence that participants in this programme of work have similarly gendered dreams.

In my own teaching on early adulthood development for students returning from placement and entering their final year I ask them to generate a list of developmental tasks and this typically leads to a list including: Identity; financial and personal independence; career; own home; partner and possibly own family. This is a frightening list to be confronted with at age 21 and I suspect that many are unable to see, as I was at that age, how these targets and the trappings of conventional middle class success can possibly be achieved in ten years or so. It is of course not only about consumption, possessions and 'having' a career but also about values, being and becoming yourself, finding out who you are. I also ask students 'What will success look like to you?' and offer a list including: Achieving a career with professional status or pay? Having the kinds of things your parents have? Being a psychologist? Feeling fulfilled? Living with all of yourself? Making a contribution? Being comfortable with yourself? Finding your own values? Having your own family? When others such as parents, grandparents and friends are impressed?

### **The development of epistemological reasoning / cognitive development**

Another way to look at the graduate transition is to consider the development of epistemological reasoning and scholarship and cognitive development generally. Piaget's

(e.g. 1964) seminal work on the growth of logic in the child, particularly the transition to the concrete and then the formal operations stages, locates change in middle childhood, but Kohlberg (1981) locates the final stage of reasoning related to moral development rather later and overlaps this into adulthood. Perry (1970) pioneered a model of epistemological reasoning about how students develop an understanding of knowledge, the ideas they hold about knowing, and the ways in which knowing is a part of the cognitive processes of thinking and reasoning; in short, students' assumptions about the nature and acquisition of knowledge. He aimed at description, although there are clear implications for learning and teaching, and identified nine stages that group into three broad areas.

Perry has been criticised for basing his work on a small and all-male sample and there have been numerous (see Hofer and Pintrich, 2002) alternative variants. The version I turned to, wishing to see if the benefit of the placement year might be associated with cognitive development specifically addressed epistemological development in women students, is by Baxter Magolda (1992, 1999, 2002) and broadly follows Perry. Baxter Magolda's model, in brief, distinguishes between: 1) Absolute knowing - knowledge is certain, teachers and books are absolute authorities, learning is about facts. 2) Transitional knowing - some knowledge is uncertain, more information is expected about applications with more focus on understanding and more confidence in expressing knowledge. 3) Independent knowing - knowledge is mostly uncertain, teachers are expected to provide an environment that rewards thinking and logic, own views may be different from the text or the teacher. 4) Contextual knowing - the legitimacy of knowledge claims are determined contextually, the individual constructs a point of view, but now requires supporting evidence.

As models both Perry and Baxter Magolda offer insight into intellectual growth that can relate to Piaget, Kohlberg and even to the development of theory of mind in much earlier childhood. Both suggest that grappling with poorly structured problems can lead to development but the complexities and difficulty in producing consistent outcomes identified by the contributors in Hofer and Pintrich's (2002) edited book do not offer an adequate explanatory or predictive framework for understanding the benefits of work experience.

### **Knowing, becoming, ontology, epistemic virtue, phronesis**

Barnett (2009) suggests that Higher Education has moved almost by stealth from a focus on knowledge to a focus on skills and competencies. He argues that as we move into a world of further and further complexity neither knowledge nor skills offer the learner a secure

foundation. He suggests that we need in addition to focus on ontology, on our students' being and becoming. He argues that encounters with disciplinary knowledge through teaching and curricula, such as that in psychology, support the development of epistemic virtue. In drawing on the classical and medieval notion of epistemic virtue Barnett is responding to a fairly recent revival of interest in the concept of virtue amongst moral philosophers. It is difficult to generalise about epistemic virtue however, it may refer to truth-conducive cognitive powers such as vision, memory, and introspection. Others see intellectual virtues rather as good intellectual character traits, such as inquisitiveness, fair-mindedness, open-mindedness, intellectual carefulness, thoroughness, and tenacity, and this seems to be the meaning Barnett is referring to. Reasoning along these lines, a demanding curriculum can help resilience to form; contrasting perspectives help to promote openness; requiring attendance and engagement develops self-discipline; space encourages authenticity and integrity. Teaching that requires students to engage with each other helps to foster respect, generosity and preparedness to listen; explicit standards support carefulness and restraint; encouragement helps to keep students going forward and to be open to new experience; enthusiasm gives new spirit and encourages the will to learn; being required to put forward one's own views helps students to find the courage to stake a claim and to own a position; requiring students to give of selves and be active helps to develop the will to engage.

Educating means getting people to be excellent scholars, and translating this into the skills and competencies that employers seek in graduate recruits, helping students to see that psychological literacy and an appreciation of the dialectic in psychology and our methodological pluralism offers valuable ways of seeing and understanding, and helping students to learn from and understand the central importance of being and becoming through study. The importance of a constructivist approach is championed by Biggs;

*As we learn, our conceptions of phenomena change and we see the world differently. The acquisition of information in itself does not bring about such change, but the way we structure that information and think with it does. Thus education is about conceptual change, not just the acquisition of information.* (1999, cited in Brockbank and McGill, 2007 pp 17-18).

And by Barnett (1990);

*The learning that goes on in higher education justifies the label "higher" precisely because it refers to a state of mind over and above the conventional recipe or factual learning.* (1990, cited in Brockbank and McGill, 2007 pp 17-18).



However what Perry (1970) and Baxter Magolda (1992, 1999, 2002) tell us about the gradual development of epistemological reasoning over an undergraduate career suggests that students will take time to come to these views. Dall’Alba (2009) suggests that to focus on epistemology and overlook ontology (or being and becoming) is inadequate and she argues that ontology is central to becoming a professional. The same point is made by Benner (1984) throughout her classic account of development from novice to expert in nursing. Knowing is not enough, becoming is also essential. Both Dall’Alba (2009) and Barnett (2009) argue for the reconfiguration of professional education as a process of becoming. Learning to become a professional involves the integration of knowing, acting, and being and Dall’Alba, and by implication Benner, argue that when a professional education programme focuses on the acquisition and application of knowledge and skills, it falls short of facilitating their integration into professional ways of being. The tendency to focus on knowledge and skills in undergraduate courses is understandable, but *it is insufficient for skilful practice and for the transformation of the self that is integral to achieving such practice* (Dall’Alba, p34).

Professional education programs lead to transformations associated with the process of becoming, for example, from student to engineer, historian, or medical practitioner. However, do these transformations apply only to professional and vocational education as Dall’Alba implies? Ontology may be especially important in psychology, perhaps because it is a meta-discipline in that hard and clear content is fairly marginal and professional outcomes relatively obscure in comparison with some health care professions, or engineering, or architecture. If we accept that ontology is central to the educational transformation that Barnett and others argue higher education should provide, are we arguing also that only vocational, professional education enables the process of becoming?

Su and Feng (2008) take this a stage further using the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis*. This is defined as practical judgment or wisdom grounded in being-in-the-world, rather like the Heideggerian idea of *dasien* (1962) discussed further in chapter three. Phronesis is not simply knowledge, but also must include action (Aristotle, 1985). Su and Feng argue that phronesis focuses on process as well as outcome and engagement in action. Phronesis;

*...makes an ontological turn in the practice of higher education, away from learning for the sake of the subject discipline itself to learning for oneself and the world, from the advocacy of instrumentalization and fragmentation to the exploration of integration and creation, and hence from rigid, fixed knowing to dynamic acting and being* (Barnett, 2004; Dall’Alba and Barnacle, 2007). (Su and Feng, 2008, pp. 4-5).

In several ways these concepts are all linked; phronesis with dasien, with ontology, with epistemic virtue, with employability, with identity, with Newman and with the core of what higher education is seeking to achieve, and these perspectives will be returned to further into this thesis.

### **Communities of practice**

A final, and in some ways the most important perspective to introduce is the idea of situated learning proposed by Lave and Wenger as a model of learning in a community of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991, 2002, Wenger 1998). Lave and Wenger argue that learning is a fundamentally social process situated in a social and organisational context and takes place through a process of 'legitimate peripheral participation' through which the learner moves towards full participation in the sociocultural practices of a community. Learning is not solely in the learner's head. 'Legitimate peripheral participation' is concerned with the relationships between new entrants and old hands in the community of practice, and with their activities, identities, knowledge and practice and with the artefacts of all kinds that are produced. The communities that Lave and Wenger (1991) discuss are midwives, tailors, quartermasters, butchers, and recovering alcoholics, but they suggest that the processes by which participants in these communities learn can be generalised to other social groups. The model implies that what students learn while being university students may not be how to be a psychologist but how to be a student of psychology. This has a bearing on the apparently transformative power of the work placement experience. This power manifests itself on occasions such as graduation when students often say that they learned the most important things of their university careers on placement. At work on placement, students may truly take part in professional life, often for the first time, and feel themselves to be real participants in an organisation and in professional life.

### **Why psychology graduates in the transition to employment?**

This research aims to contribute to understanding the experience of students as they negotiate the transition out of their undergraduate degree and develop their employability and graduate identity. It also aims to understand how they construct for themselves the meaning of their higher education experience. It arises as the culmination of academic practice and research, mostly quantitative, into the employability and employment of Bachelors graduates in psychology and of the value of a sandwich placement year taken between the second and final years at Aston University (Reddy and Hill, 2002; Reddy and Moores, 2006; Reddy and Lantz, 2010; Moores and Reddy, 2012, Reddy and Moores, 2012;

Reddy, Lantz and Hulme, 2013; Reddy, Dutke, Papageorgi and Bakker, 2014). It is distinctive in seeking to investigate lived experience and therefore takes, as discussed in chapter three, largely an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) alongside a thematic analysis (TA) approach.

Studies reviewed in chapter two suggest that some key aspects of the graduate transition have not been fully addressed. Abrandt Dahlgren, Hult et al. (2006) note that the relationship between higher education and employment has attracted increasing interest over the last twenty years, but this has not led to research into student experience. They cite Brennan, Kogan and Teichler (1996) who point out that the graduate transition is often described in general terms and the lived experience of students and graduates is little explored. They also cite Johnston's (2003) review suggesting that there is still little research into the graduate transition from the graduates' point of view. Teichler's (1996) review concludes that there is a shortage of longitudinal studies applying qualitative research methods to the transition between higher education and working life. Murakami, Murray, Sims and Chedzey (2008) also claim that there is little empirical research linking social competence with students' accounts of working life and that research into social competence generally ignores '*ordinary people*' above adolescent age experiencing a major transition.

### **Objectives**

Previous quantitative research (Reddy and Moores 2006, Van Laar and Udell 2008, Moores and Reddy 2012, Reddy and Moores 2012, Jones, Green and Higson, 2015) has indicated that modest but reliable academic and early career employment benefits are conferred on psychology undergraduates taking a year-long sandwich work placement. However little is known in depth about the mechanisms by which these benefits are enacted, how they relate to notions of employability, to early adulthood personal and emotional growth, to developing epistemological and academic sophistication, or to how they are understood by participants in the context of the increasing identification and implementation of higher education as preparation for employment. In particular, insight into the lived experience of taking sandwich placements, completing final examinations, graduating, and negotiating decisions about employment, domicile and identity is lacking. A further broad context is to examine the aims and practices of undergraduate education with changing university funding and the role of psychology education in relation to career entry, career credentials and discourse on employability from a lived experience standpoint.

### **Research questions**

- How do individuals experience the transition from being a student to becoming a graduate professional?
  - How does undergraduate education shape being, and becoming a professional?
  - How does a sandwich placement shape being, and becoming a professional?

## **Chapter 2: Study one, a systematic review and meta-synthesis**

### **Rationale**

The aim of this programme of research is to better understand the graduate transition in psychology, be better able to aid students as they negotiate employability, identity and the meaning of higher education and find their way forward into professional careers and to further illuminate the concept of employability and being and becoming in young adulthood. The previous chapter has laid out the peculiar position of the UK Bachelors' degree in psychology, the complexity and contradiction in the meaning and importance of higher education in general to students and other stakeholders, and discussed how an improved understanding of the graduate transition necessarily involves consideration of graduate employability, the vocational/non-vocational distinction, the psychology of change and transition, vocation and identity, development in early adulthood, the development of epistemological reasoning, situated learning in communities of practice, the development of epistemic virtue, phronesis and ontological development. This first study, a systematic review and meta-synthesis, has a dual goal. It seeks to identify theory, likely to come from quantitative empirical work, to provide background and context. It also seeks to synthesize existing qualitative empirical work in order to make sense of the evidence base and to inform the empirical work envisaged. This further empirical work is posited on the assumption, subject to this first study, that qualitative research, specifically interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), will add to our understanding by giving voice to the lived experience of psychology students in graduating and starting work.

### **Method**

A meta-synthesis approach was adopted using a modified procedure based on Bennion, Shaw and Gibson (2012) and Taylor, Shaw, Dale and French (2011). An additional stage was added to their four-stage process to allow for a two-stage analysis. This was so that both non-empirical and quantitative papers that might contribute to a theoretical understanding of this area could be collated before focusing on papers reporting qualitative data. A search strategy was devised, papers were identified by reading abstracts and selecting for deeper reading. Retrieved papers were then further screened for relevance, papers selected from this stage were then appraised and finally synthesised into a thematically arranged narrative.

## Search

After consulting Aston University specialist librarians the following recommended databases for learning and teaching research, were searched. They were:

- ERIC (Education Resources Information Center) a resource of 50 years standing that provides access to more than 1.4 million bibliographic records of journal articles and other education-related materials.
- SCOPUS, Elsevier's large (53 million records, 21,915 titles and 5,000 publishers) abstract and citation database of peer-reviewed literature in science, technology, medicine, social sciences and the arts and humanities.
- SocINDEX with Full Text, a sociology research database, searched together with other bundled EBSCO hosted indices including Business Source Complete.
- Web of Science which provides access to the Science Citation Expanded, Social Sciences Citation Index, Arts & Humanities Citation Index, and Medline.

These databases include those recommended for research in psychology. Searches were conducted in July 2014. Keywords included:

1. Qualitative research terms
  - a. Qualitative findings
  - b. Interview\*
  
2. Employability related search terms:
  - a. Employability
  - b. Graduate attributes
  - c. Skills
  - d. Competencies
  - e. Work
  
3. HE related search terms
  - a. University
  - b. Higher education
  - c. Undergraduate education
  - d. Graduate(s)

4. Thesis related search terms:
  - a. Employability
  - b. Early adulthood
  - c. Personal development
  - d. Developing/development of epistemological reasoning
  - e. Ontology
  - f. Ontological development
  - g. Being and becoming
  - h. Identity
  - i. Epistemic virtue(s)
  - j. Apprenticeship
  - k. Communities of practice
  - l. Lived experience
  
5. Applied educational and action research terms
  - a. Action research
  - b. Applied educational research
  - c. Applied research
  - d. Vocational

Search terms were combined in a number of ways with a range of Boolean operators. For example using ERIC the following search string identified 45 peer-reviewed papers.

*Qualitative findings OR interview\* AND employability AND (Higher Education) OR university*

All abstracts were read and 15 papers, from this search, were selected for further review, none however were selected for the final stage. The process continued over a number of days, with fine-tuning of the search strategy and search string construction, until no further results were found. Grey literature was also searched.

#### **First stage screening**

This area of enquiry is one in which theory, research and practice overlaps a number of approaches and disciplinary research traditions so that a contribution from one area may illuminate aspects of interest for those with other perspectives or areas of expertise. Both

*employability* and *graduate transition* are difficult to define, and in the case of employability very widely used, complex and somewhat vague, and cannot easily be used as discriminators in selecting research. There is no simple metric, such as whether research includes participants with age-related macular degeneration, used by Bennion, Shaw and Gibson (2012), which can help to select studies.

First stage screening sought to capture papers that had useful contributions to make in theory or analysis but might fall beyond the strict scope of the literature review. For example Su and Feng (2008) offer no data but do use the Aristotelian idea of 'phronesis' in discussion of the limitations of graduate skills as an explanatory framework for understanding employability and the graduate transition. Views from a breadth of academic disciplines, all of whom grapple with the elusive and multi-headed concept of employability, and the wider socio-political-cultural context were sought including from educational theory and philosophy; sociology; developmental and occupational psychology; business; careers and career counselling; anthropology; cultural history and phenomenology. Search strings and operators were adjusted to produce results in manageable numbers (no more than 100 hits) and titles and abstracts read to identify both papers for review and of conceptual interest. Once screened, duplicates were removed and reference checking and citation searches were conducted. Sixty-four papers were identified, however Cranmer notes that *'the elusive quality of employability makes it a woolly concept to pin down'* (Cranmer, 2006, p.172). Thus between a confused, imprecise and contested *'Chameleon concept'* (Knight, 2001, in Cranmer, p.173) on the one hand and the specificity of an IPA approach on the other, a course had to be steered between including everything, and quite possibly nothing.

### **Second stage screening**

In stage two, the 64 papers identified were read. Notes on each paper were made, selected passages highlighted and pasted or typed into a review document and a preliminary evaluation into two categories was made. The categories were:

- 1) Papers not directly relevant because they report quantitative data, or data not bearing on the student experience of the graduate transition, or not reporting data but making a theoretical contribution to the area (48 papers).
- 2) Papers reporting qualitative data bearing on experience of the graduate transition (16 papers).

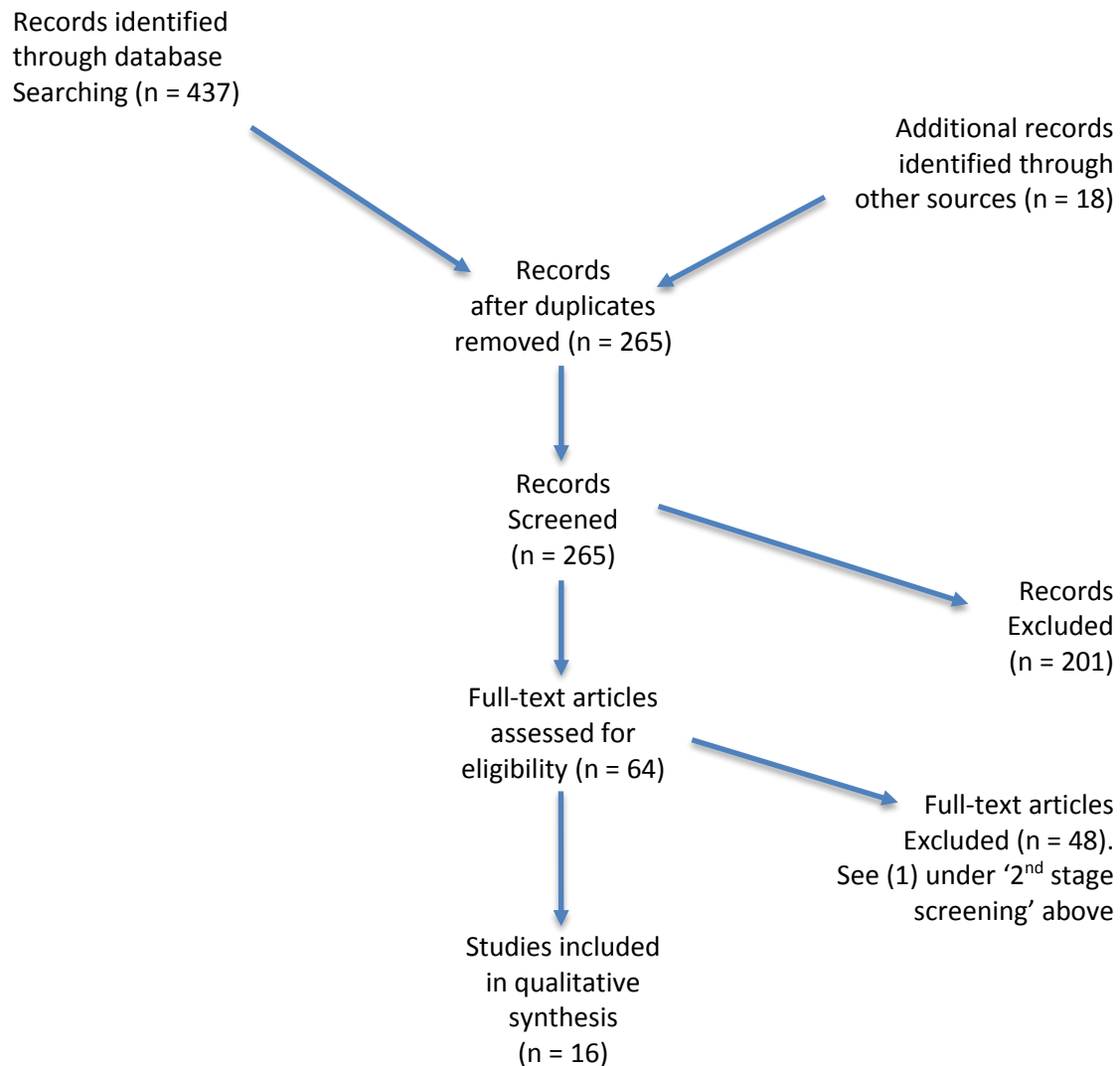


No IPA studies were found, although three locate themselves partly in the Swedish phenomenographic tradition of Marton (1981), one writes of the advantages of a phenomenological approach but actually uses thematic analysis and one is a phenomenological case study of a single individual. The 'Journeyman Project' includes psychology as one of the disciplines studied, but strictly speaking the review has drawn a blank. Six of these 16 articles are linked through a research team at Linköping University in Sweden and connect to a European Commission FP5 funded project *Students as Journeymen Between Communities of Higher Education and Work* (Dahlgren, Abrandt Dahlgren, Hult, Hård af Segerstad, & Johansson, 2005 – the journeymen project). This collaboration was led by Linköping University and included German, Norwegian and Polish university partners. Its final report was followed by a number of journal articles and book chapters and a doctoral thesis by publication (Nyström, 2009). The study by Nillson (2010) was also carried out at Linköping University. The journeyman project is not the first major EC funded project to investigate the graduate transition to employment and justifies its qualitative approach by reference to an earlier project that '*...in a review of the research on the transition between higher education and working life concludes that there is a shortage of longitudinal studies applying qualitative research methods*' (Dahlgren, Handal, Szkudlarek, & Bayer, 2007, p. 308, citing Teichler, 1998)

## **Results**

Grey literature was not initially included but a PhD thesis and a European Commission FP5 project report were subsequently added, as were a number of book chapters. These were all identified from references in the selected papers.

**Table 1: PRISMA flow diagram** (Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff and Altman, 2009)



## Appraisal

The 16 studies were assessed for quality using prompts reported by Bennion, Shaw and Gibson (2012) and developed by Dixon-Woods et al (2004) and designed to enable critical assessment from a neutral methodological standpoint – see table 1. The 16 studies are:

1. Abrandt Dahlgren, M., Hult, H., Dahlgren, L. O., Hård af Segerstad, H., & Johansson, K. (2006). From senior students' to novice worker: learning trajectories in political science, psychology and mechanical engineering. *Studies in Higher Education*, 31(5), 569–587.

2. Allen, K., Quinn, J., Hollingworth, S., & Rose, A. (2013). Becoming employable students and “ideal” creative workers: exclusion and inequality in higher education work placements. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 34*(3), 431–452.
3. Andrews, J., & Higson, H. (2008). Graduate Employability, “Soft Skills” Versus “Hard” Business Knowledge: A European Study. *Higher Education in Europe, 33*(4), 411–422.
4. Dahlgren, L. O., Handal, G., Szkudlarek, T., & Bayer, M. (2007). Students as Journeymen between Cultures of Higher Education and Work: A Comparative European Project on the Transition from Higher Education to Working Life 1. *Higher Education in Europe, 32*(4), 305–316.
5. Gillies, J. L. (2007). Staying Grounded While Being Uprooted: A Visual and Poetic Representation of the Transition from University to Community for Graduates with Disabilities. *Leisure Sciences, 29* (2), 175–179.
6. Holden, R., & Hamblett, J. (2007). The transition from higher education into work: tales of cohesion and fragmentation. *Education + Training, 49* (7), 516–585.
7. Johnsson, M. C., & Hager, P. (2008). Navigating the wilderness of becoming professional. *Journal of Workplace Learning, 20* (7/8), 526–536.
8. Leach, T. (2012). Researching graduates’ lived experiences of vocational learning. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education, 17* (2), 261–275.
9. Murakami, K., Murray, L., Sims, D., & Chedzey, K. (2008). Learning on Work Placement: The Narrative Development of Social Competence. *Journal of Adult Development, 16* (1), 13–24.
10. Nabi, G., Holden, R., & Walmsley, A. (2010). From student to entrepreneur: towards a model of graduate entrepreneurial career-making, *Journal of Education and Work, 23* (5), 389–415.

11. Nilsson, S. (2010). Enhancing individual employability: the perspective of engineering graduates. *Education + Training*, 52 (6/7), 540–551.
12. Nyström, S. (2009). The dynamics of professional identity formation: Graduates' transitions from higher education to working life. *Vocations and Learning*, 2(1), 1–18.
13. Nyström, S. (2010). Graduates “doing gender” as early career professionals. *Career Development International*, 15(4), 324–337.
14. Nyström, S., Dahlgren, M. A., & Dahlgren, L. O. (2008). A winding road – professional trajectories from higher education to working life: a case study of political science and psychology graduates. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 30 (3), 215–229.
15. Perrone, L. and Vickers, M. (2003) Life after graduation as a "very uncomfortable world": An Australian case study. *Education + Training*; 2003; 45, 2/3; pg. 69 -78.
16. Stiwne, E. E., & Jungert, T. (2010). Engineering students' experiences of transition from study to work, *Journal of Education and Work* Vol. 23 (5), 417–437.

The prompts used (Dixon-Woods et al, 2004; cited in Bennion, Shaw and Gibson, 2012) are:

- Are the research questions clear?
- Are the research questions suited to qualitative enquiry?
- Are the following clearly described...
  - Sampling?
  - Data collection?
  - Analysis?
- And appropriate to the research question...
  - Sampling?
  - Data collection?
  - Analysis?
- Are the claims made supported by sufficient evidence?
- Are the data, interpretations and conclusions clearly integrated?

- Does the paper make a useful contribution?
- Rating of the paper using the coding: *KP* (key paper which is conceptually rich); *SAT* (satisfactory paper); *IRR* (irrelevant paper); or *FF* (fatally flawed methodology) (Bennion et al, 2012).

**Table 2: Appraisal of studies selected for review using prompts from Dixon-Woods et al (2004)**

Study	Are the research questions clear?	Are the research questions suited to qualitative enquiry?	Is sampling clearly described?	Is data collection clearly described?	Is the analysis clearly described?	Is sampling appropriate to the research question?	Is data collection appropriate to the research question?	Is the analysis appropriate to the research question?	Are the claims made supported by sufficient evidence?	Are the data, interpretations and conclusions clearly integrated?	Does the paper make a useful contribution?	Rating of the paper
Abrandt Dahlgren, Hult, Dahlgren, Hård af Segerstad & Johansson (2006)	No, not clear or succinct.	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	KP
Allen, Quinn, Hollingworth & Rose (2013)	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	KP – for theoretical insight only
Andrews & Higson (2008)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes, marginally	SAT
Dahlgren, Handal, Szkudlarek, & Bayer (2007)	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes, marginally	Yes	Yes	Yes	KP
Gillies (2007)	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	IRR
Holden & Hamblett (2007)	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	SAT
Johansson & Hager (2008)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	KP
Leach (2012)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes, marginally	Yes	No	Yes	SAT

Murakami, Murray, Sims & Chedzey (2008)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes, marginally	Yes	SAT
Nabi, Holden & Walmsley (2010)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes, marginally	Yes	Yes	Yes, in a specific area	SAT
Nilsson (2010)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	KP
Nyström, Abrandt Dahlgren & Dahlgren (2008)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes, marginally	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	KP
Nyström (2009)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	SAT
Nyström (2010)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	SAT
Perrone & Vickers (2003)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	SAT
Stiwne & Jungert (2010)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	SAT

Using the Dixon-Woods quality prompts revealed that their application was not unproblematic and difficulties with reliability and validity were experienced. Like 'employability', the concept of 'quality' is multi-dimensional and muddled by everyday usage. Two usages apply here, quality in the quality assurance sense of assuring conformity to specification, and quality in the sense of superiority. The quality prompts in table one take a quality assurance approach derived from quality superiority factors and some difficulty was found in applying them. Firstly they require categorical responses to continuous phenomena. For example the first prompt, '*Are the research questions clear?*' requires the reviewer to make a judgment of relative clarity. The first paper to be considered, Abrandt Dahlgren, Hult, Dahlgren, Hård af Segerstad and Johansson (2006), list their aims in their abstract:

*The specific aims are to: (i) identify aspects of identity and knowledge formation as reported by informants, both as senior students and later as novice workers with 18 months of work experience; (ii) identify features of discourses of knowledge and competence operating in the programmes and working life; and (iii) to relate the results to differences in the way the programmes are designed. (p. 569)*

The first two aims lack clarity in using the vague terms 'aspects' and 'features'. More detail is given in the introduction:

*The aim of this article is to further examine and compare the transition from higher education to working life in three different study programmes at Linköping University: Political Science, Psychology and Mechanical Engineering. The specific aims are... [repeat of above] (p. 570)*

The aims are broad and exploratory but are they clear? The use of the terms 'aspects' and 'features' lack the precision that would be expected in quantitative research and are certainly not hypotheses in the terms of the hypothetico-deductive model advanced by Popper (2002). The overall exploratory direction is however apparent enough. A decision to respond yes or no to the question '*Are the research questions clear?*' then depends on the epistemological position taken. Abrandt Dahlgren, Hult, et al (2006) are not explicit about their epistemological position, indeed journal articles are rarely explicit in this regard perhaps expecting their readers to share similar assumptions about the paradigm in which the research being reported is located. However Abrandt Dahlgren, Hult, et al can reasonably be thought to be working abductively.

Abductive reasoning is appropriate at the beginning of a research process or at the starting point of enquiry into a field of study. It is a form of logical inference that starts with



observed phenomena and develops a hypothesis that accounts for the observation. It is probably a traditional form of reasoning but was introduced into modern thinking by Pierce (1903, cited in Hiles, 2014) in the late nineteenth century. In effect a series of educated guesses are made in an attempt to find one or more rational explanations for the phenomena in question. Arguably it is the creative first stage of a two-stage process, the second stage being the testing of the hypothesis. In hypothetico-deductive reasoning the testing of the second stage prediction is essential to avoid the potential logical fallacies of which the first stage taken alone may be at risk. For example the *post hoc ergo propter hoc* and the *base rate* fallacies. The first stage is however essential both to creatively generate alternative explanations to test, and to guide this pragmatically so that further research is focused and economic. Abduction is discussed further in chapter three.

Is abduction appropriate here given a history of research into employability? Yes because enquiry into the graduate transition, rather than employability in general, is at an exploratory stage in which phenomena are being drawn together from a number of areas and traditions of enquiry. It is also an explicit feature of the paper by Nyström (2010). There is evidence of diversity in that the 16 studies are drawn from 12 journals, although most are education-related titles.

*British Journal of Sociology of Education*

*Career Development International*

*Education + Training* (3)

*Higher Education in Europe* (2)

*Journal of Adult Development*

*Journal of Education and Work* (2)

*Journal of Workplace Learning*

*Leisure Sciences*

*Research in Post-Compulsory Education*

*Studies in Continuing Education*

*Studies in Higher Education*

*Vocations and Learning*

If it is accepted that an abductive approach is appropriate then the use of the Dixon-Woods' prompts is undermined somewhat. Before exploring this, a further difficulty was found with

the reliability of the judgments made in the 12x16 grid in table one. A test-retest repetition by the reviewer of the judgments required showed an unacceptable level of reliability. This revealed that not all of the quality prompt categories were securely grasped by the reviewer and the final category in particular, the quality rating of the paper, could vary considerably on re-test and many of the papers might be at risk of being judged as fatally flawed or irrelevant. Further reflection brought forward the recognition that the 16 papers were selected for the insight they offered to the experience of psychology students in graduating and starting work. While it may then be reasonable to judge their 'quality' against criteria, ultimately the quality that mattered was their ability to give voice to student experience as a phenomenological approach requires and as previous reviews (Dahlgren, Handal, Szkudlarek and Bayer, 2007; Teichler, 1998) had called for. This is further supported by reflection on the papers by Holden and Hamblett (2007) and by Johnsson and Hager (2008). These two papers offer more detailed, perceptive and insightful accounts of the graduate transition to professional employment than the other 14 papers and are the closest in spirit to IPA. Yet neither emerges well from a quality assurance analysis. A glance at table two reveals that Johnsson and Hager include little detailed information about their participants and table one confirms the lack of information about their analysis. Similar issues are present with Holden and Hamblett. Table one is therefore included but little weight will be given to the judgments it captures in further review and analysis. It is worth noting that it is the reporting of studies that is being judged rather than the quality of the studies themselves, by virtue of only having the published work to go on.

A summary of the reviewed articles is given in table three giving brief details of aims, sampling method, participant ages, number and gender, data collection type and duration, analysis and results and themes.

**Table 3: Details of reviewed articles**

Study	Aim	Participants: Sampling method	Participants: Age	Participants: Number and gender	Data Collection: Type	Data Collection: Duration	Analysis	Results and themes
Abrandt Dahlgren, Hult, Dahlgren, Hård af Segerstad & Johansson (2006)	(i) identity & knowledge formation in students & novice workers; (ii) discourses of knowledge & competence in programmes & working life; (iii) relate results to differences in programme design.	Not clear	24-37	12 students from each of MA Political Science, Psychology, Mechanical Engineering. Gender distribution 'representative'	Interview	Interviewed twice, for 45 – 90 minutes during their final year and after 15–18 months of professional work.	Multi-layered, combination of stage 1 phenomenographic and stage 2 discourse analysis	Continuity between university & work for vocational psychologists, other groups experienced discontinuity or transformation. Vocational programme eased transition.
Allen, Quinn, Hollingworth & Rose (2013)	Explore work placements in the creative sector to understand how some are seen as 'fit' for the sector, and how relate to wider inequalities within HE.	Not clear	Not given	26 (6 men) participants, 5 HEs + 9 staff and 11 employees.	Semi-structured interviews	45 to 120 minutes	Thematic analysis	Placements not simply to ease transition into the labour market. Placements as where inequalities are (re)produced - students are evaluated through practices that privilege the middle-class.
Andrews & Higson (2008)	Conceptualise key individual & business related skills required by employers of business graduates & to see if HE business edn. is	Not clear	Not given	50 people interviewed across 4 countries, 30 business graduates and 20 employers	Semi-structured interviews focused on individual's experiences of making the transition	One hour	Grounded theory	Similar employer expectations; similar graduate & employer views of core of business graduate employability: hard business-related knowledge and

	meeting the needs of the marketplace				from education to employment, themed into 5 areas			skills; soft skills; work experience
Dahlgren, Handal, Szkudlarek, & Bayer (2007)	Describe student experience of transition from HE to professional life. Understand relationships between HE cultures and those of work	Not clear	Not given	20 freshmen & 20 senior students from Political Science & Psychology in 4 countries. Senior students also interviewed after 1 year at work. Gender not given	In-depth interviews	Not given	Multi-layered, combination of stage 1 phenomenographic and stage 2 discourse analysis	HE leads to discipline-based identities in students
Gillies (2007)	Illustrate how recent graduates with disabilities experienced the transition from university to community	Not clear	Not given	7 women & 3 men with varying disabilities 6 - 36 months post graduation from University of Waterloo, Ontario.	Semi-structured interviews	Mean 1.25 hours	Elements of grounded theory & phenomenological approaches + 'hurricane thinking' analysis to create a tree in ecosystem model/metaphor. 2 poems also created using transcripts of 2 graduates who had polarized transitional experiences	Transition was smoother when graduates remained involved in many facets of their university lifestyle.
Holden & Hamblett (2007)	Explore transition from HE into work using case studies to get beyond the reductionism of the skills agenda	Not clear	Not given	4 interviews over 12 months with each of 5 students (3 women, 2 men) completing study & progressing	Semi-structured interviews	Not given	"Common sense" approach meaning the way people talk to each other when in a shared community and feeling at home – led to constructed	Case studies record the uneven path of 'self' in search of cohesion & power in a new community. Difficulty of relevance &

				into work			narratives of the most substantive matters & preserving tone of transcripts.	developing reflection & self-awareness in HE.
Johnsson & Hager (2008)	Examine the learning of graduates in an orchestra development program to nurture transition to professional orchestral musicians	Not given, Sydney Symphony Fellowship Program members.	Not given	Not given	Semi-structured individual & small group interviews with developing & professional musicians; rehearsal & performance observation.	Not given	Not given	Learning is an embodied, constructed experience with others in context. Competency is learning how to become, forming an identity, emerging from the wilderness to understand what it is to become & be a professional
Leach (2012)	Exemplify the value of a phenomenological approach; graduate experiences & perceptions of world of employment; workplace learning, job prospects & employability; impact of educational processes on employment outcomes; interplay between career decision making & context	Not clear	Not given	35 graduates within the last 10 years. All are, or were at some stage teaching assistants in schools	Email interviews	Not given	Thorough phenomenological context, thematic analysis	4 themes reported - Lived apprenticeship; Teams and teamwork; Job demand/job control; Moving on. Study appears to be more about illustrating phenomenological research; not really about the participants

Murakami, Murray, Sims & Chedzey (2008)	Explore development of social competence through UGs on work placements - examinable as situated discursive practice, essential to understand career development.	Not clear, but 14 business students, others design and tech. students	Not given, but undergrads	32, gender not given	'Active interviewing' (Holstein & Gubrium 1997) semi-structured interviews	Not given	Discourse and conversation analysis. Membership categorisation analysis identifies participant's fluid positioning in narrating experiences of work & university	Social competence is a situated discursive achievement. Shown by ability to differentiate and move flexibly between work and university identities
Nabi, Holden & Walmsley (2010)	Develop a typological framework that captures key person-environment dimensions in the transition from student to graduate entrepreneur.	Graduates with range of disciplines & businesses selected on pragmatic basis of available & willing to participate	22 - 33	15 graduates (10 male, 5 female)	Narrative story-telling approach as advocated by career construction theory (Savickas 2002)	45-60 minutes	Thematic - NVivo used to identify themes. Conceptual typology building (Seale 2004) used to surface emerging key dimensions and map types of graduate pathways onto this typology.	2 dimensions in student-to-entrepreneur transition: (1) the entrepreneurial maturity of the individual; and (2) the complexity of the business idea. Offers basis for an enhanced understanding of the graduate entrepreneurship process.
Nilsson (2010)	Illuminate engineering graduates perceptions of employability and explore how they perceive, invest in, manage, and develop their employability.	Not clear, recent MEng IT graduates.	Not given	20 graduates who had had been working for 1-9 months at 1 <sup>st</sup> interview & 3-4 years at 2 <sup>nd</sup> interview	Semi-structured interviews	60-90 minutes	Thematic analysis from inductive viewpoint	Hard formal & technical vocational skills are declining compared to soft skills & personal attributes. Employability is relational and contextual to the workplace. Individuals are

								responsible for employability.
Nyström, Abrandt Dahlgren & Dahlgren (2008)	Explore the trajectory of politics and psychology graduates from HE to work & how they construe their professional trajectories as senior students, novice and early-career professionals.	Re-uses interview data from Journey-men project & adds another interview	24-44	11 psychology & 8 politics students (14 women, 5 men)	3 semi-structured interviews (1) in last semester (2) 15-18 months of work. (3) 30-34 months of work	45-90 minutes	3 stage thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998)	Professional identities & vision of future work change over time non-sequentially. 6 themes identified: Learning continuously; Establishing oneself; Mastering a tool-box; Fulfilling a commitment; Searching for a professional field; Changing directions
Nyström (2009)	Explore student and novice professional psychologists' and political scientists' professional identity development & relationship between professional and personal identity in transition from HE to work.	Re-uses interview data from Journey-men project & adds another interview	Not given	11 psychology & 8 politics students (14 women, 5 men)	3 semi-structured interviews (1) in last semester (2) after 15-18 months of work. (3) after 30-34 months of work	45-90 minutes	3 stage thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998)	3 different forms of professional identity; non-differentiated, compartmentalised & integrated - show different relationships between professional, personal & private life. These are sequential.
Nyström (2010)	Explore how early career psychology and politics graduate professionals "do	Adds an interview to Journey-men project participants -	Mean age 30	11 psychology & 8 politics students (14 women, 5 men)	Semi-structured interviews after 30-34	45-90 minutes	A process between identifying similarities & differences & emerging themes	Work identity is gendered identity constructed in gendered work practices &

	gender” in their new professional context & how they acquire legitimacy in relation to their colleagues and clients	randomly selected from year 4 MSc students. Gender in accordance with population.			months of work		inspired by template analysis (Zikic & Richardson, 2007).	influencing how m & f early career professionals encounter working life, are perceived as professionals & how they position themselves as knowledgeable and competent.
Perrone & Vickers (2003)	Extend understanding of the experience of graduate transition to work & identify questions for further study	‘Exemplar case was selected because it vivified strong instances of particular patterns of meaning’.	Not given	Single case study	In-depth semi-structured interviews	Not given	Data was ‘analysed for clusters of common themes’	4 broad themes emphasizing uncertainty, inflated expectations, paradox of coming from HE but being expected to have relevant experience and ‘a low time’ – painful rejection
Stiwne & Jungert (2010)	What knowledge & skills made graduates employable? What knowledge, & skills do employers seek? Do graduates find education relevant? How satisfied with present job & future plans?	Maximum variety sampling (Patton 1990) to get heterogeneous sample.	Early to mid-20s, one mature student	Original sample 13 men, 10 women	112 Interviews with 20 students (4-7 each)	Not given	Critical turning points identified & related to employability. Data organised longitudinally to follow expectations, experiences, job search & first professional experiences	Many individual differences. Conceptions of future changed over time. Students did not have a clear view of what they wanted to do when they applied for the degree



## **Aims of studies**

As this was a criterion for their selection it is not surprising that the studies reviewed share similar aims of illuminating the graduate transition to professional careers, but there are also clear differences. Andrews and Higson (2008), Stiwne and Jungert (2010) and Nilsson (2010) work within the skills tradition in which becoming employable is seen largely as the acquisition of the skills and competencies sought by employers. Andrews and Higson aim to conceptualise the key individual and business related skills and competencies required by employers of business graduates and to see if Business education is meeting the needs of the employment marketplace. Similarly Stiwne and Jungert ask what knowledge and skills make graduates employable and are sought by employers. Stiwne and Jungert, like Nilsson (2010), work with engineering graduates where there is an expectation that entrants will have engineering skills and competencies. The enduring focus on skills and competencies carries with it expectations and assumptions that will be examined elsewhere. These include epistemological and methodological considerations, the 'triple helix' (Martin, 2011) of government, industry and university collaboration, a rather mechanistic view of the university-professional work transition, what Holden and Hamblett (2007) call the reductionism of the skills agenda, and acceptance of neoliberal assumptions about the individual student and his/her personal responsibility for their own employability.

Johnsson and Hager (2008) also work in a context where highly specific skills are required but set these aside in their work on graduate learning in an orchestra development program that aims to nurture young musicians in the transition to becoming professional orchestral players. They conclude that learning is an embodied, constructed experience with others in context and that this is different to developing the proficiency that gets the musician to having the potential to play in a professional orchestra. In music education there are many years of work on individual instrument skills and techniques, but other dimensions become important in a professional environment. Learning to be a professional is about becoming part of a community, about learning how to work with rather than against or in comparison to others. Students wishing to impress may play a difficult passage as quickly and loudly as possible to assert their individual ability, but being a member of an orchestra requires the novice to fit into patterns of performance that respect other members;

*'The etiquette that comes with playing in an orchestra is just as important [as the musical interpretation] because obviously there's a hierarchy of older players who need to be respected and expect you to respect their ways of doing things. And ...they want you to learn the way they've done it. And yes definitely not tread on*

*anyone's toes, which means not playing before anyone, not playing while people are speaking, to take it seriously but at the same time, not to be stiff so-to-speak.'* (A participant quoted in Johnsson and Hager, 2008, p 529)

*'...It's a lot more competitive when you're younger actually. [At Music School] you want to show you're better than other people and you're going to make it; you show off by playing the hard bits louder and faster.'* (A participant quoted in Johnsson and Hager, 2008, p 529)

Competency for these young orchestral players is learning how to be, forming an identity, coming to understand what it is to be a professional. This challenges the traditional notion of employability as being about skills, attitudes, competencies and attributes, and Johnsson and Hager prefer the term 'graduateness'. Their conception of graduateness relates to the idea of 'soft' interpersonal skills but goes beyond this to the broader idea of graduate attributes (Barrie, 2007) and to ideas of being and becoming and identity. For Johnsson and Hager graduateness is also about commitment to a form of lifelong learning that is relationally based, a critical part of which is developing fitness for professional practice and the persistence to become professional.

Johnsson and Hager's inclusion of identity formation as part of the graduate transition links their work to the studies reviewed that derive from the 'journeymen' project at Linköping University (Dahlgren, Abrandt Dahlgren, Hult, Hård af Segerstad and Johansson, 2005). All five of these studies take a broader view of the graduate transition while not abandoning the skills and competencies approach. Abrandt Dahlgren, Hult et al (2006) are concerned with identity and knowledge formation in students and novice workers, and discourses of knowledge and competence in academic programmes and working life. They relate their results to differences in design and structure in the political science, psychology and mechanical engineering programmes whose students they interview. Dahlgren, Handal et al (2007), Nyström, Abrandt Dahlgren et al (2008) and Nyström (2009) are also concerned with the centrality of identity development. Nyström (2010) also explores how early career psychology and politics graduate professionals 'do gender' in their new professional contexts and how they acquire legitimacy in relation to their colleagues and to clients.

Allen, Quinn, Hollingworth and Rose (2013) explore work placements, precursors to the graduate transition, in the arts/creative sector to understand how students are produced and produce themselves as 'fit' for this sector, and how this process relates to wider inequalities within HE. They interview students, staff and employers in search of discourses

and practices through which this is shaped. The focus of the paper by Gillies (2007) is also specific, in this case to illustrate how recent graduates with disabilities experience the transition from university to community. Two studies have partly methodological aims, illustrating that this research area does not have a settled empirical paradigm and approaches are both uncertain and debatable. Perrone and Vickers (2003) in their single case study aim not only to extend understanding of the experience of graduate transition to work, but also to identify questions for further study. Similarly Leach (2012) aims to exemplify the value of a phenomenological approach as well as to investigate graduate experiences and perceptions of the world of employment; workplace learning, job prospects and employability; the impact of educational processes on employment outcomes and the interplay between career decision making and context.

Nabi, Holden and Walmsley (2010) focus on how entrepreneurship develops and aim to develop a typological framework that captures key person–environment dimensions in the transition from student to graduate entrepreneur. While appearing quite specific this study links to broader questions. Debate about graduate skills and competencies suggests links to entrepreneurship and Apple (2001, cited in Allen, Quinn et al 2013) argues that neoliberalism *'creates policies and practices that embody the enterprising and constantly strategizing entrepreneur ... [as] the ideal citizen'* (p 196). They go on to suggest that the discourses of entrepreneurship; flexibility, self-sufficiency and individualism; now pervade higher education (Hay and Kapitzke 2009; Olssen and Peters 2005, both cited in Allen, Quinn et al 2013). Nabi, Holden et al have a more specific focus on the transition to actually becoming an entrepreneur, rather than acquiring the employable quality of entrepreneurship or its relatives such as proactivity or engagement. It is nonetheless as Apple points out, a key idea within the skills discourse.

Many of the studies reviewed suggest that some key aspects of research into the graduate transition have not been fully addressed. Abrandt Dahlgren, Hult et al (2006) note that the relationship between higher education and employment has attracted increasing interest over the last twenty years or more, however this has not translated into research that gives voice to student experience. They cite Brennan, Kogan and Teichler (1996) who found that much research concerned either the match between HE output and demands for manpower at a systems level, or else was a retrospective look at the value and usefulness of their university studies by recent graduates who were now novice professionals. Brennan, Kogan

and Teichler point out that the lived experience of the impact of education and of the transition to becoming a novice professional is lacking and that the transition is often described in general terms. Abrandt Dahlgren, Hult et al also cite Johnston's (2003) review suggesting that there is still little research into the graduate transition from the graduates' point of view. Johnston goes on to argue that this is needed in order to understand graduates' expectations, job satisfaction and work commitment, and the relationship between what employers say that they expect of graduate recruits and the graduates' experience of what employers expect on the ground.

In justifying the 'journeyman project', Dahlgren, Abrandt Dahlgren, Hult et al (2005) cite Teichler (1996) who in a review of research into the transition between higher education and working life, concludes that there is a shortage of longitudinal studies applying qualitative methods. Murakami, Murray et al (2008) also claim that there is little empirical research linking social competence with students' accounts of working life and that research into social competence generally ignores '*ordinary people*' beyond adolescence experiencing a major transition. Nabi, Holden and Walmsley (2010) locate their work on becoming an entrepreneur in a tradition dating back to Super's (1953, 1957) theory of vocational development through to Savickas's (2002) career construction theory, but conclude that transition from the entrepreneurial intentions of university students to actual graduate start-up remains under-researched.

### **Methodologies of studies**

All the studies gathered data with semi-structured face-to-face interviews, except Leach (2012) who used email interviews. The analyses reported as being used included a combination of phenomenographic and discourse analysis (Abrandt Dahlgren, Hult et al, 2006; Dahlgren, Abrandt Dahlgren, Hult et al, 2005), discourse and conversation analysis (Murakami, Murray, Sims and Chedzey, 2008) and grounded theory (Andrews and Higson, 2008; Gillies, 2007). The other studies used variations on forms of thematic analysis with the exception of Holden and Hamblett (2007) and Johnsson and Hager, 2008. Holden and Hamblett are from a Business School and write at some length about their 'common sense' approach that seems to be intended to defend their realist analysis in opposition to 'critical management theorists' (p. 519). Despite their prolixity it is not clear how their data has been analysed and constructed into case presentations. Johnsson and Hager supplement their individual interviews with their developing musicians with small group interviews and with observation of rehearsal and performance but give very little detail of their analysis.

Methodology and epistemology is prominent in some of the papers but under-specified in many. A lack of detail so that sampling, data collection and analysis are not clearly explained may be because of the difficulty in fitting a qualitative study into the constraints of a journal article. This difficulty is illustrated paradoxically by Holden and Hamblett (2007). Their 79-page paper on the transition from higher education into work reports a series of interviews with five participants, but with limited information on methodology, data analysis or reference to literature. It is not surprising that Andrews and Higson (2008) for example, suffer similar difficulties in a cramped 11 pages.

Authors respond to lack of space in different ways. Some papers read as theoretically driven with the empirical element designed to illustrate a point-of-view. This seems to be the case with Allen, Quinn, Hollingworth and Rose (2013) whose well-argued critique of the hegemonic pervasiveness of 'neo-liberal' assumptions in arts employment and how these operate to falsely pin class, gender and ethnicity disadvantages to individual inadequacy shows convincingly that such a process operates even while being obscured, even by its victims. This theoretical perspective could usefully be deployed to illuminate employability in psychology, however the point here is that little attention is paid to data and how it has been collected and analysed. Data seems to be used deductively to illustrate a pre-existing 'hermeneutics of suspicion' analysis of neo-liberalism. This is very different to the more inductive, or perhaps abductive 'hermeneutics of empathy' approach more typically taken in IPA.

Murakami, Murray, Sims and Chedzey (2008) also outline a theoretical position at some length at the expense of space to explain methodology or to explore the data. The paper is, unusually, in a developmental psychology journal and the authors seem at pains to offer a context appropriate for this area of study. Andrews and Higson (2008) also prioritise a literature review over reporting other aspects of their research. Johnsson and Hager (2008) on the other hand offer more discussion and analysis of their data and their meaning, and make points that illuminate becoming a professional musician and the professional transition generally. As already mentioned, Leach (2012) has a partly didactic aim and this paper on *Researching graduates' lived experiences of vocational learning* reads, as the title implies, as an essay on phenomenology as much as a research paper. Thus there is well-argued epistemological justification for the approach taken but little detail on the process of

data analysis and little depth in the results or the discussion of them. The case is made for phenomenological research but it is not exemplified to persuasive effect.

The journeymen project studies begin with the phenomenographic approach to analysis popularized for educational research by Marton (1981), but then add to this with a form of discourse analysis. The aim of phenomenographic analysis is to generate descriptive categories portraying similarities and differences about how the phenomenon in question is conceived (Marton, 1981; Dahlgren and Fallsberg, 1991). Raw interview transcripts are read and re-read for familiarisation and then condensed into short versions. Significant dialogue excerpts are then selected and compared to find variation or agreement. Based on the resulting grouping, the categories that form the result are developed. Finally, these categories are compared and contrasted at a meta-level.

Abrandt Dahlgren, Hult et al (2006) describe their approach as transcending the scope of phenomenography by viewing these categories obtained as provisional, and as only the first stage of analysis and interpretation. They go on to link the individual and social constructions in their data interpretation by a discourse analysis like procedure. Thus they search for inconsistencies and contradictions in particular interviews as they may reflect subject positions related to power structures and the discourses operating. They also re-read their transcripts focusing on recurrent tropes, such as descriptions, explanations, arguments, etc. and try to articulate the assumptions on which they are built. A third way they identify discourses is to look for utterances that attribute certain ideas to other locations than the personal, e.g. when an informant refers explicitly to ideas being transferred from peers, family, or a particular formal regulation. The same approach is taken by Dahlgren, Handal, Szkudlarek and Bayer (2007); however Nyström, from the same research team and using the same data and extensions from it, uses variations on thematic analysis.

### **Theoretical standpoints**

The distinctive theoretical position taken by Allen, Quinn et al (2013) has already been mentioned. It belongs to a sociological tradition of enquiry deriving ultimately from a Marxist perspective. A hermeneutics of suspicion approach (Ricoeur, 1970) is taken with which to reveal the underlying economic and class-based foundational sub-structure of a phenomenon that determines the manifest superstructure of opportunity, achievement and reward. Again in a Marxist tradition the distribution of opportunity and reward is revealed to

be both unfair and to be obscured by a neo-liberal ideology that locates them purely as the result of individual talent and hard work. The hegemonic power of neo-liberal discourse is also shown by the 'false-consciousness' of those oppressed by it who not only fail to see how they are systematically disadvantaged by it but also invest in it and reproduce it. The approach is compelling.

The most pervasive theoretical standpoint illuminating the 16 studies in this review is the idea of situated learning proposed by Lave and Wenger as a model of learning in a community of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991, 2002, Wenger 1998). This idea recurs in four of the five journeyman project publications and in Johnsson and Hager (2008), Leach (2012); Murakami, Murray et al (2008) and in Nilsson (2010). Lave and Wenger argue that learning is a fundamentally social process situated in a social and organisational context and takes place through a process of 'legitimate peripheral participation' through which the learner moves towards full participation in the sociocultural practices of a community. Learning is not solely in the learner's head, legitimate peripheral participation is concerned with the relationships between new entrants and old hands in the community of practice, and with their activities, identities, knowledge and practice and with the artefacts that are produced. The communities that Lave and Wenger (1991) discuss are midwives, tailors, quartermasters, butchers, and recovering alcoholics, but they suggest that the processes by which participants in these communities learn can be generalised to other social groups. The model carries the interesting implication that what students learn is not 'how to be a psychologist' (or business specialist, economist, optometrist or whatever) but how to be a psychology student. This sheds light on the transitions to becoming a student, becoming a young professional and a member of an organisation, and the transformative power of the work placement experience.

Abrandt Dahlgren, Hult et al frame the journeyman project in the idea of communities of practice and the process of legitimate peripheral participation. They also note that reification is a complementary process in this participation commenting that *reification refers to abstractions such as tools, symbols, terms and concepts produced by the community to reify something in this practice in a congealed form.* (p. 572). Johnsson and Hager (2008) focus on their young musicians moving from legitimate peripheral participation towards full or other forms of participation but are also critical of the idea of stages ('legitimate

peripheral' and 'full' in this case) and suggest that learning is more complex than this and *remains essentially a collective and relational phenomenon* (p. 528).

Leach (2012) also uses situated learning and notes that the power of this theory of communities of practice lies in it highlighting the importance of the relationship between social participation and learning in the workplace. Citing Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998), Leach argues that social participation is a process of learning and that interactions within working groups may be the primary source of learning experiences, social practice, meaning systems and identity. Murakami, Murray et al (2008) also suggest that learning can be seen as being progressively more able to participate competently in the social and cultural practices that a particular community sees as important (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and that peer interaction is a major source of cognitive as well as social development.

Nilsson (2010) notes that a gap between higher education and the working world may be because *knowledge is contextually situated (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and needs to be re-contextualised (Smeby and Vågan, 2008) or re-situated (Guile and Griffiths, 2001) in professional practice* (p. 541). For Nyström (2009) the concept of identity has a central role in professional development since work is so important for the individual's sense of self (Billett 2007). Nyström links the journey from peripheral to full participation to identity formation and also looks at the development of differentiated roles and identities after graduation. Wenger (1998) suggests that we may belong to many different communities, in some we are full members and in others we are more peripheral. Nyström suggests that the role of student is sufficiently all embracing, perhaps a sort of all-pervading total institution, as to make the 'life spheres' non-differentiated. Being a student thus involves a special kind of multi-membership so that what Wenger (1998) calls 'work of reconciliation' is required to maintain one's identity across boundaries. Nyström found that her senior students expressed strong identification with being a student and that it had become integrated into who they were and their sense of self (Billett and Pavlova 2005; Billett 2006).

### **Synthesis of findings**

Synthesising the findings of the 16 studies in review generated 11 thematic clusters. These are listed in table four and are then discussed in turn. Work to identify and synthesise themes was undertaken later in the analysis after a degree of familiarity with the papers had been achieved. The main structure emerged over the course of a single day but was revisited



and revised several times. Themes are presented in their order of emergence and they will also be synthesised in table five as a student-to-graduate professional time line sequence or journey.

**Table 4: Summary of results by theme**

	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Papers in which themes found</b>
1	<b>Out of the wilderness – the graduate transition as difficult, uncertain and painful.</b> The graduate transition as a discontinuity, as difficult and uncertain, as a low and painful time, as a wilderness	Abrandt Dahlgren, Hult, Dahlgren, Hård af Segerstad & Johansson (2006) Nyström, Abrandt Dahlgren & Dahlgren (2008) Perrone & Vickers (2003) Johnsson & Hager (2008)
2	<b>Unevenness in transition, individual differences.</b> Individual differences in transition; the unevenness of the transition experience	Abrandt Dahlgren, Hult, Dahlgren, Hård af Segerstad & Johansson (2006) Holden & Hamblett (2007) Nyström, Abrandt Dahlgren & Dahlgren (2008) Nyström (2010) Stiwne & Jungert (2010)
3	<b>Continuity in transition.</b> Transition eased by holding on to university	Abrandt Dahlgren, Hult, Dahlgren, Hård af Segerstad & Johansson (2006) Gillies (2007)
4	<b>Identity.</b> Identification with a discipline; the search for self; forming identity & becoming; identity, work & university; identity change over time; identity and multi-form sequential stages; identity and gender	Dahlgren, Handal, Szkudlarek, & Bayer (2007) Holden & Hamblett (2007) Johnsson & Hager (2008) Nabi, Holden & Walmsley (2010) Nyström, Abrandt Dahlgren & Dahlgren (2008) Nyström (2009) Nyström (2010)
5	<b>Vocational education and work experience.</b> Vocational education, work experience and the graduate transition	Abrandt Dahlgren, Hult, Dahlgren, Hård af Segerstad & Johansson (2006) Allen, Quinn, Hollingworth & Rose (2013) Andrews & Higson (2008) Murakami, Murray, Sims & Chedzey (2008) Perrone & Vickers (2003)
6	<b>Being and becoming, embodiment and relationships.</b> Being and becoming as embodied, constructed, contextual, situated; learning as a product of relationships	Johnsson & Hager (2008) Murakami, Murray, Sims & Chedzey (2008) Nyström, Abrandt Dahlgren & Dahlgren (2008)
7	<b>End point or moving on?</b> The graduate transition as an end point or as moving on; a developmental sequence; changing direction	Johnsson & Hager (2008) Leach (2012) Abrandt Dahlgren, Hult, Dahlgren, Hård af Segerstad & Johansson (2006) Nyström (2009) Nyström, Abrandt Dahlgren & Dahlgren (2008) Stiwne & Jungert (2010) Murakami, Murray, Sims & Chedzey (2008)
8	<b>Expectations.</b> Expectations of the graduate transition; inflated; unclear; vision of future changes over time and with experience; employers expectations	Perrone & Vickers (2003) Stiwne & Jungert (2010) Nyström, Abrandt Dahlgren & Dahlgren (2008) Andrews & Higson (2008)
9	<b>Power and position.</b> Positioning and the search for power and position	Nyström (2010) Holden & Hamblett (2007) Johnsson & Hager (2008) Allen, Quinn, Hollingworth & Rose (2013)
10	<b>Relevance of higher education.</b> The relevance of HE; how to develop self-awareness	Holden & Hamblett (2007) Nilsson (2010)
11	<b>Skills and competence.</b> Graduate skills; tool box; soft skills link to competency; social competence	Andrews & Higson (2008) Nilsson (2010) Nyström, Abrandt Dahlgren & Dahlgren (2008) Johnsson & Hager (2008) Murakami, Murray, Sims & Chedzey (2008)

**Theme one: Out of the wilderness – the graduate transition as difficult, uncertain and painful.**

This is perhaps an obvious theme but it does not emerge as strongly supported in the review. Perrone and Vickers (2003) present a phenomenological case study of one individual, and their four broad themes emphasise uncertainty and inflated expectations on graduation, the paradox of coming from education but being expected to have experience, and that the period of transition as 'a low time' containing much painful rejection. Abrandt Dahlgren, Hult et al (2006) looked at the transition from higher education to working life as a trajectory between different communities of practice in three Master's programmes: political science, psychology and mechanical engineering. Each differed in the extent to which it was vocational. Unlike British BSc Psychology experience, psychology was the most vocational programme with most graduates progressing directly into the clinical services that they had planned and prepared for on a problem-based-learning programme. This continuity was not without later difficulties however, as subsequent research (Nyström, 2009) revealed. This will be discussed in theme seven. While there was continuity between university and work for the vocational psychologists, both other groups experienced discontinuity.

Johnsson and Hager's (2008) research is with recent graduates participating in a symphony orchestra development programme and they use the metaphor of *emerging from the wilderness* to describe the process of becoming a professional orchestral musician. Their analysis shows the gulf that exists between being a music school graduate and a professional player, and this is explored further in theme six. Nyström, Abrandt Dahlgren and Dahlgren (2008) explore the professional trajectories from higher education to working life of political science and psychology graduates in terms of their envisaged future work both as senior students, and as early-career professionals. They found that some participants' professional identity and vision of future work changed over time. One of the six themes they identified was '*searching for a professional field*', characterised by uncertainty and by knowledge and competence being described generically, as if it was a case of competence seeking a field of application.

**Theme two: Unevenness in transition, individual differences.**

If theme one suggests that the graduate transition is difficult or uncertain, theme two adds the gloss that there are individual differences as well and that experience is uneven. Holden

and Hamblett's (2007) case studies record uneven and individual paths of 'self' in search of a place in a new community. They argue that all are linked by a search for cohesion and power but there is no single pattern or necessarily shared experience. Dahlgren, Handal, Szkudlarek, and Bayer (2007) find that university experience leads to discipline-based identities in students. Nyström (2010) finds that work identity is gendered and is constructed in gendered work practices, and as already mentioned, Nyström, Abrandt Dahlgren and Dahlgren (2008) found that professional identities and vision of future work changed over time. Stiwne and Jungert (2010) found many individual differences and that their graduates' conceptions of the future changed over time. They also found that students did not have a clear view of what they wanted to do when they applied for their degree.

### **Theme three: Continuity in transition.**

Although apparently in contradiction to theme one, continuity in transition is best thought of as illuminating ways to mitigate discontinuity rather than suggesting that it does not exist. Gillies (2007) found, with her visual and poetic representation of the transition from university to community for graduates with disabilities, that the transition was smoother when graduates remained involved in many facets of their university lives. As already mentioned, Abrandt Dahlgren, Hult et al (2006) found continuity between university and work for the psychology graduate in their research whereas their other participants (politics and engineering graduates) experienced discontinuity. It may suggest that vocational programmes in general may ease the graduate transition, however the Linköping University psychology programme may be particularly distinctive in its focus on preparation for practice through problem-based-learning, and in the close correspondence in Swedish psychology education between the output of graduates and the intake of professional entrants.

### **Theme four: Identity.**

Identity is a central theme informing the work of the journeyman team. Dahlgren, Handal et al (2007) found that students developed discipline-based identities and possibly a major dimension in the graduate transition is coping with how this may or may not translate into professional life. Johnsson and Hager (2008) suggest that learning for professional practice is more about seeking and identifying connections to forms of identity (Billett and Somerville, 2004). More specifically they suggest that graduates are at a stage of life where they are in search of occupational identities (Kram, 1988) or of broader social identity (Delanty, 2003). The need for a broader identity is underlined by Nyström's (2009) point that

student identity is all pervading so that when it is gone there is a life-wide vacuum to fill. For most students their role in education will have provided a major plank of their identities for as long as they can remember.

Nyström (2009) suggests that identity has a central role for professional development since work is important for the individual's sense of self (Billett, 2007) and that students' potential future profession contributes to their 'sense of being'. She goes on to differentiate three different forms of professional identity; non-differentiated, compartmentalised and integrated. These emerge sequentially and represent different relationships between professional, personal and private life. Initially she suggests graduates adopt a work identity that is as pervasive and all-defining as the student identity with which they are familiar, but adjust to the demands of a private life that may offer more roles and more identities, involving for example life-partner relationships and parenthood. Holden and Hamblett's (2007) case studies are also records of a search for self, the forming of identity and becoming. Abrandt Dahlgren, Hult et al (2006) cite Bauman (1991) who claims that people are no longer firmly rooted in one location or social system, but are socially displaced. There is therefore a need to establish a stable identity to differentiate between the inner self and the outer world, and that this needs the affirmation of social approval. Wenger (1998) also suggests that identity is neither a coherent unity nor is it simply fragmented. He describes identity formation in a community of practice as a nexus of multi-membership, identities are at the same time one and multiple. Murakami, Murray et al (2008) argue that social competence is shown by the ability to differentiate and move flexibly between work and university identities. Nyström, Abrandt Dahlgren and Dahlgren (2008) suggest that professional identities and the vision of future work change over time.

#### **Theme five: Vocational education and work experience.**

A fault line running throughout the literature under consideration is the extent to which university education is positioned as vocational preparation on the one hand or as a more general 'liberal' education on the other. Nyström (2009) notes that the connection between education and working life is far from evident to students and this must be more the case for non-vocational degrees. As discussed above, Abrandt Dahlgren, Hult et al's (2006) participants were psychology students taking a vocational programme and engineering and politics students whose degrees were respectively partly vocational and hardly vocational at all. Allen, Quinn et al (2013) focus on work experience in the creative arts. Key factors they identify are that students are competing in an overcrowded marketplace and that work

experience is a strategy to gain advantage. Students do not merely identify with their discipline, they are passionately attached to their creative work and the pleasures it brings in autonomy, creativity and freedom of expression to the point that they may be willing to do anything for the love of their work, including working overtime or for free. Allen, Quinn et al (2013) point out that these practices may produce an ethic;

*...of self-reliance and personal culpability whereby those who do not – or cannot – ‘give everything’ risk being read as not committed enough (p. 434).*

It can be argued that the search for identity discussed in theme four may leave students vulnerable to exploitation, as well as providing the circumstances for discrimination to flourish.

### **Theme six: Being and becoming, embodiment and relationships.**

For Murakami, Murray et al (2008) social competence is a situated discursive achievement. Similarly Johnsson and Hager (2008) argue that learning is best seen as embodied and organic using cognitive, emotional and conative senses rather than a transfer of knowledge and skills or working through stages of competency. They cite Bokeno and Gantt (2000) who argue that it is not learning that leads to relationships at work, as a by-product, but that it is the relationships themselves that are the site of learning, we learn through social participation, through the relationships that cultivate, disseminate and maintain learning. They support this by referring to research on mentoring which re-frames it as less of a role and more of a relationship which may lead to co-learning or generative learning in both parties (Bokeno and Gantt, 2000) and to guided engagement and learning at work (Billett, 2000). Becoming a professional orchestral musician is a helpful focus as a musical ensemble, has an embodied quality to it. Johnsson and Hager suggest that learning to become professional is about becoming part of a community, about learning how to work with rather than against or in comparison to others. This point could be made about many or even all professions, but is perhaps physically embodied in an orchestra where musicians must subjugate the self in relation to a greater whole. Johnsson and Hager point out that this is an experiential process that is very difficult for educators to provide. The sense of embodiment is also to be seen in the sense of the stewardship that preserves and passes on repertoire and practice and that transcends individual practitioners, as this participant explains:

*The musician is just one link in the chain . . . part of a much greater thing. Because of this link with musical heritage, all musicians have a responsibility with regard to education, both self-education and the education of future generations. After all, the great composers of the past were teachers, composers, players and so on. (Johnsson*

and Hager, 2008, p. 531)

The constructed nature of musicianship is also apparent in the roles that an individual might play. Besides being a performer he/she may also become a specialist interpreter of particular types of music, a chamber group player, a composer, a teacher or mentor, a cultural advocate or the owner of a small business. Success and fulfilment are tied inextricably to others, both as individuals and as communities.

### **Theme seven: End point or moving on?**

The papers reviewed differ as to whether the graduate transition is a singularity, or the end point of a progression, or part of a continuing process. For Johnsson and Hager (2008) the transition is such a change that it represents a singular process. The process of becoming an orchestral musician may never be complete, but the discontinuity with music school is so great that learning how to become, forming an identity, emerging from the wilderness to understand what it is to be a professional might be thought of as a big bang, a defining moment, with developmental echoes throughout one's career. Leach (2012) however implies that the graduate transition is longer term and more continuous, and that change and development is an on-going feature of life itself. The themes reported - lived apprenticeship, teams and teamwork, job demand/job control, and moving on - all suggest a gradual and cumulative process ending with 'moving on', a further discontinuity. While lacking the drama and illustrative power of becoming a professional orchestral player, Leach's categories probably fit the reality of changes in direction and portfolio careers that many graduates, especially those with non-vocational degrees, are likely to experience.

Stiwne and Jungert (2010) found that their graduates' conceptions of the future changed over time suggesting a process of continuous development. Similarly Nyström, Abrandt Dahlgren and Dahlgren (2008) found that their graduates' professional identities and vision of future work changed. The six themes that they identify (*Learning continuously; Establishing oneself; Mastering a tool-box; Fulfilling a commitment; Searching for a professional field; Changing directions*) also speak of a continuous process that may take some time and involve false starts and shifts in direction. As mentioned in theme one, the psychology graduates who made the smooth vocational-degree-assisted transitions to their profession did not necessarily find it plain sailing from then on and a number found the demands of their work to be too taxing as their professional identities developed. All three of these papers also suggest that the developmental sequences typically seen as fairly

invariant in childhood development, but less apparent in adult development, are more individual and contextual than strictly sequenced in graduates.

#### **Theme eight: Expectations.**

Inflated or unfulfilled expectations are mentioned in a number of papers and this theme might alternatively be thought of as a sub-theme to theme one (discontinuity and difficulty). Perrone and Vickers (2003) mention it while Stiwne and Jungert (2010) and Nyström, Abrandt Dahlgren and Dahlgren (2008) conclude that expectations may change. Andrews and Higson (2008) consider employers' expectations from a business graduate skills point-of-view and found them to be similar in all four European countries that they investigated. They also found graduate and employer views of core business graduate employability to be similar; all expected graduates to have hard business-related knowledge and skills, well-developed soft skills and work experience.

#### **Theme nine: Power and position.**

The search for power and position is addressed in Holden and Hamblett's (2007) case studies. They argue that each of them can be read as recording;

*...the uneven path taken by a 'self' in search of cohesion within a new community, the struggle to understand and assimilate 'conventions'. ....'conventions' can be thought of as the means by which social relations in a hierarchically ordered work environment are regulated. Not to put too fine a point on it, then, we might suggest that the 'natural' subject of reflection for new graduates is 'power'. (Holden and Hamblett, 2007, p. 581)*

It is interesting to think that entering a new community necessarily involves participating in power relations, but it is at least implicit in Lave and Wenger's work on legitimate peripheral participation in a community of practice. Power is not mentioned in many of the papers reviewed but Nyström's (2010) paper on how work identity is gendered and constructed in gendered work practices addresses it. She suggests that gender is a key factor influencing how male and female early career professionals encounter working life, are perceived as professionals, and how they position themselves as knowledgeable and competent. The work of Allen, Quinn et al (2013) also has much to say about power and the use of work experience.

#### **Theme ten: Relevance of higher education**

The idea that higher education may be irrelevant to graduate employment is explicit only in Holden and Hamblett's (2007) paper but is never far away in others. Abrandt Dahlgren, Hult et al (2006) cite Brennan, Kogan and Teichler's (1996) view that research on the transition



from higher education to working life has often focused on the expediency of higher education assessed retroactively by professional novices. The implication is that higher education is in search of relevance and justification, similarly Andrews and Higson (2008) can perhaps be thought of as seeking this. This relates to theme five (vocational education, work experience and the graduate transition) and there is also no doubt that some aspects of professional life are very difficult to prepare students for. Johnsson and Hager (2008) for example point out that understanding the very different demands of being a professional orchestral player requires an experiential process that is based on personal and positional relationships and a very different ethos, and is very difficult for educators to provide.

Holden and Hamblett pick up this theme because they conclude that students need to be more self-aware, to learn more about themselves, if they are to make the graduate transition successfully. As they point out this is far from a new insight and they trace it back to Dewey (1916/1997). Holden and Hamblett argue that it must surely not be difficult to educate and develop students' self-awareness. In their words;

*...one might then be forgiven for thinking that problems concerned with 'Learning about self' can be rectified in a pretty straightforward way by the proper application of one of the many modules designed to develop such things in institutions of higher education, or within the workplace, under the auspice of those bodies concerned with continuous professional development (CPD). In the experience of our respondents, however, such institutional programmes had been of little value.*  
(Holden and Hamblett, 2007, p. 581)

One of their participants was scathing about his introduction to reflective learning in his first year at university although three others noted the value of the process. Indeed, all of them experienced the process as a positive contribution to the development of 'self-understanding'. This topic is explored further by Dahlgren, Hult et al (2006), and is at the heart of debate about the point, value and proper direction of university education.

### **Theme eleven: Skills and competence**

The final theme identified is graduate and/or employability skills. As discussed above, Andrews and Higson (2008) found similar employer expectations of graduate skills, and graduates and employers holding similar views of business graduate employability. Nilsson (2010) found with engineering graduates that formal and technical vocational skills are declining compared to soft skills and that employability is relational and contextual to the workplace. Nilsson also found that individuals are seen as responsible for their own employability, a point that links to Allen, Quinn et al's (2013) point about the ethic 'of self-

*reliance and personal culpability...*' made in theme five. Nyström, Abrandt Dahlgren and Dahlgren (2008) also mention skills development, one of their six themes is mastering a toolbox.

### **Graduate time-line**

A further way of representing the results of the review is to consider them as a journey or developmental progression from student to young professional and this is represented in table four. All 16 studies contribute to this (table 5 below).

**Table 5: Graduate time-line**

Starting university	Students did not have a clear view of what they want to do when they apply for the degree (Stiwne & Jungert, 2010).
First two years at university	Higher Education leads to discipline-based identities in students (Dahlgren, Handal, Szkudlarek, & Bayer, 2007).  Students find difficulty in seeing the relevance of higher education and in developing reflection and self-awareness (Holden & Hamblett, 2007).
Sandwich placement year	Individuals learn that they are responsible for their employability (Nilsson, 2010).  Placements are not simply to ease transition into the labour market, they are where inequalities are (re)produced - students are evaluated through practices that privilege the middle-class (Allen, Quinn, Hollingworth & Rose, 2013).
Senior years	Senior students express strong identification with being a student (Nyström, 2009).
Graduation year and after	Social competence is shown by ability to differentiate and move flexibly between work and university identities (Murakami, Murray, Sims & Chedzey, 2008).  Learning how to become, forming an identity, emerging from the wilderness to understand what it is to be a professional (Johnsson & Hager, 2008).  Uncertainty, inflated expectations, experience expected, a low time of painful rejection (Perrone & Vickers, 2003).  Professional identities and the vision of future work change (Nyström, Abrandt Dahlgren & Dahlgren, 2008).  Vocational programmes ease the transition between university and work, discontinuity and transformation for others (Abrandt Dahlgren, Hult, Dahlgren, Hård af Segerstad & Johansson, 2006).  Transition smoother if remain involved in university lifestyle (Gillies, 2007).
Longer term post-graduation	Three different relationships between professional, personal and private life and identity emerge in sequence (Nyström, 2009).  Positioning self as knowledgeable and competent in gendered workplaces (Nyström, 2010).  An uneven path in search of cohesion and power in a new community (Holden & Hamblett, 2007).  A lived apprenticeship, teams and teamwork; job demands, job control; moving on (Leach, 2012).  Establishing oneself; mastering a tool-box; fulfilling a commitment; searching for a professional field; changing directions (Nyström, Abrandt Dahlgren & Dahlgren, 2008).  Soft skills and personal attributes are most important (Nilsson, 2010). Employers and graduates agree on importance of both hard and soft skills (Andrews & Higson, 2008; Nilsson, 2010).

## Conclusion

A key finding from this meta-synthesis is that no IPA or other qualitative studies specifically of British psychology graduates negotiating employability, identity and the meaning of higher education in the transition to employment were identified. Sixteen studies that explore or shed light on the graduate transition in a variety of disciplines, including psychology have been selected and discussed in relation to eleven themes of which issues of identity, being and becoming, situated learning, the search for power and position and the value of higher education are particularly salient. However in the strictest sense there is no literature investigating the precise topic that this programme of research seeks to address in the manner (IPA and TA) proposed. Calls for qualitative studies that will give voice to student experience are noted. Teichler (1998) reviews research into the graduate transition and concludes that there is a shortage of longitudinal studies applying qualitative methods. Dahlgren, Handal, Szkudlarek, and Bayer (2007) also call for further qualitative research into the graduate transition. Thus it appears that insight into the lived experience of graduating, and negotiating decisions about employment, domicile and identity is lacking. Also lacking is an understanding of how the benefits associated with taking an undergraduate sandwich placement year are brought about. Little is known about how and why work experience is so powerful, or of the mechanisms by which benefits are enacted, or how they relate to notions of employability, to early adulthood personal and emotional growth, to developing epistemological and academic sophistication, or to how they are understood by participants in the context of the increasing identification and implementation of higher education as preparation for employment. Overall this meta-synthesis highlights the relative weakness of qualitative research in this field and shows the range of issues and breadth of perspective that relate to the graduate transition and underscores the persistent calls for more such research. There is thus a clear rationale for qualitative empirical work that addresses the on-placement and early graduate experiences of a specific population of graduates and for this to be related to the themes found in this meta-synthesis.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology for empirical studies**

### **Epistemology**

As discussed in chapter one, this research is concerned with the experience of the graduate in transition out of university on into young adulthood, 'graduateness' and graduate employment. It arises from long-term interest in the value of a placement year in a psychology degree and from consequent interest in the employment and the employability of psychology graduates. This developed further into interest in the value of a Bachelor's degree in psychology and of higher education in general. Value was initially approached from a positivist cognitive-experimental perspective with a realist assumption that a knowable set of objective truths could be identified that would enable it to be quantified. Previous largely quantitative research (E.g. Reddy and Moores 2006, Van Laar and Udell 2008, Moores and Reddy 2012, Reddy and Moores, 2012) indicated that modest academic benefits, and possibly some early career benefits, are conferred on psychology undergraduates taking a placement year. More striking is the informal observation by graduates and returning placement students that their work placement was the most powerful learning experience of their undergraduate education. However, as indicated in chapter two, little is known about how and why the placement is so powerful, or how work experience relates to employability and to personal development or to how they are understood by participants and their sense of the meaning of higher education in their lives. In particular, insight into the lived experience of graduating, and negotiating decisions about employment, domicile and identity is lacking.

The desire to understand lived experience has moved this research away from the previous positivist approach in which a real world is assumed to be accessible for objective, value free, detached truths to be discovered. In its place a phenomenological approach has been adopted focusing on experience and narrative. Phenomenology has been arrived at because it offers a focus on experience in its own right; because it is concerned with meaning and how it arises or is made in or through experience; and because it focuses on description and relationship rather than causality (Langdridge, 2007).

### **Abduction and strategy of enquiry**

Hiles (2014), in advocating a model of 'disciplined enquiry', points out that the traditional distinction between qualitative and quantitative research is a false one that confuses and obscures differences between research paradigms, strategies of enquiry and methods of

data collection. What has traditionally been referred to as qualitative research is typically inductive and data driven but research within that logic of inquiry could easily generate quantitative data for statistical analysis, just as what is traditionally described as quantitative research is generally hypothesis driven and concerned with making predictions. In exploring the logic of enquiry further, Hiles suggests that there is a third model of enquiry that is not data or theory driven but explanation driven and is based on abductive inference, or 'abduction'.

In abductive enquiry no specific prediction is being tested and it is not intended to generate theory from the data. Instead the focus of the research question is on how the data and theory may fit together. This type of question often arises in research into areas of practice such as professional educational and clinical work. The focus is on the two-way interaction of data and theory and seeks to understand and explain (Hiles p.54). The term abduction was first used by the North American philosopher Pierce (1903) over 100 year ago and Hiles suggests that interest is growing in the work of this still-controversial (Kaag, 2015) figure. Hiles translates abduction as '*inference to the better (or best) explanation*' (p.55, p.60) and suggests that in a discipline that may still be at a pre-paradigmatic stage explanation-driven research is an important counterweight to the 'normal science' described by Kuhn (1962/70). Normal science Hiles suggests can strangle new ideas at birth and become over-restrictive or even irrational as Feyerabend (1975, 1978) argues. Although the familiar shorthand 'qualitative research' will continue to be used here the research questions posed at the end of chapter one are intended to be abductive in nature and abduction will be returned to during the discussion in chapter eight.

### **Phenomenology**

Phenomenology aims to deal with human existence as it is lived and experienced, the focus, famously so as Langdrige (2007) notes, is on 'things in their appearing'. It is the name of the philosophical movement that began with Husserl and has been developed subsequently by Heidegger and others and has become influential particularly in psychology as well as elsewhere. Husserl, a mathematician by training, began by seeking to establish the meaning and structure of experience of the basic concepts employed by the different sciences. He aimed at a rigorous alternative to natural science methods that would be grounded in our experience of the world, and therefore what was truly knowable, rather than in the notion of objective reality (Brooks, 2015; Langdrige, 2007). We are so used to the idea that the world truly is objectively knowable that it takes a moment's pause to recognize the force of

Husserl's argument, that reality is not objective, 'reality' is our internal representation of our experience of the world. Husserl was concerned with questioning what we take for granted in our experience and advocated going 'back to the things themselves' - the phenomenologist's rallying cry says Langdrige - and attempting to get to the very heart of experience. The phenomenological focus on experience is a key idea for all phenomenological approaches. However the field is now considerably wider; the philosophical movement that Husserl began took an existential and hermeneutic turn, or perhaps re-turn, with Sartre, De Beauvoir, Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger.

A key concept in phenomenology is intentionality, referring to the idea that whenever we are conscious we are always conscious of something. The older Cartesian sense of consciousness is of being self-aware, conscious of oneself and therefore inner directed. This however raises the problem that if we are inner directed how can we come into contact with the world? This is the 'egocentric predicament'. It is the relationship between our consciousness and the world, revealed as problematic by the egocentric predicament, which is at the centre of phenomenology. Thus the intention is not to look inside people, but to look at the way that things appear to us as we focus our attention on them. To offer an example, this research seeks not to see inside individuals to identify and measure their employability, but to understand their experiencing of themselves in the world of graduate young adult self-discovery and self-creation. This approach to the egocentric predicament has an important consequence: Mind or consciousness, the traditional dualist ghost in the machine, cannot therefore be exclusively private or individual. Understanding mind is based not on a search for patterns in the brain, but on what happens between the individual and their world. Furthermore, insofar as other people are central elements in our world, inter-subjectivity becomes an important part of understanding mind, experience, self and becoming and the creation or awareness of meaning.

Another way of thinking of intentionality is as the correlate between what is experienced, *noema*, the *object* of study, the thing that can be perceived; and *noesis*, the way that it is experienced, traditionally by the person or *subject* who thinks, acts or perceives. Nothing can be perceived entirely separately from the *way* that it is perceived and vice versa. Husserl conceived the 'lifeworld' of lived experience as pre-reflective. In other words we focus on what we perceive rather than on how we are perceiving it (Brooks, 2015). A distinction however emerged in Husserl's later work (Langdrige, 2007) between two different aspects

of experience. Firstly the moment-by-moment live and unreflective engagement with the world, for example following a lecture and trying to capture it in notes. Secondly the act of thinking about or reflecting on yourself doing this. However the act of reflecting on your experience, while still an experience in itself, implies a transcendental or 'God's eye view' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) in which one stands outside the noema-noesis correlate.

In order to achieve Husserl's aim of identifying what made a particular phenomenon distinctive or see the essence of it, he argued that it was necessary to adopt an attitude in which we as far as possible abstain from drawing on our preconceptions about it. He called this attitude *epoché* (Greek, 'suspension') and it requires us to bracket-off or suspend pre-judgement, perhaps further, to divest ourselves of the schemas, assumptions and attitudes that we have built through our own experience. The core of *epoché* says Langdridge (2007) is doubt; doubt about our 'natural attitude', our experiencing of the world with our taken-for-granted assumptions in operation. The extent to which it is thought possible to transcend the *epoché* is a matter of debate (Brooks, 2015). While acknowledging the necessity and value of the attempt, Heidegger, along with Merleau-Ponty and Sartre, rejected Husserl's later transcendental and descriptive (eidetic) phenomenology and took it in an existential and interpretative (hermeneutic) direction suggesting that it may never be fully possible to transcend subjectivity and stressing the grounded and embodied nature of our being-in-the-world. In doing this Heidegger and the existential phenomenologists, seem to have taken a descriptive enterprise related in time and aim to introspective psychology, leapfrogged the turn to behaviour and positivism of Watson in the early twentieth century, and created a phenomenological psychology of great relevance to many areas of contemporary psychological enquiry.

### **Hermeneutic phenomenology**

Heidegger (1962) continued with phenomenological method but in a more interpretative and more psychological way. Rather than focusing on the essence of the experience of something, he was interested in what it means to live and be amongst a world that we each experience in our own way (Brooks 2015, p628), perhaps a core aim of this research. For Heidegger our relationship with the world is always grounded in context and is both interpretative and relational. The importance of both individual elements and broader factors such as language, culture, history and time in the life-stage sense interrelate and cannot be understood without reference to each other. This is captured by the concept of *dasien*, or being-in-the-world, used instead of person or subject, to emphasise the



indivisibility of being and the world. This is also captured by the idea of the hermeneutic circle (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009), a way of marrying up the part and the whole, the detailed experience and the bigger picture at different levels. Heidegger also distinguishes between the *ontic*, facts about entities that exist that can be ascertained empirically, and the *ontological*, meaning 'being' that is not accessible empirically. Thus *dasien* is only capable of ontological exploration philosophically.

The idea of *temporality* is also important for this research and for understanding *dasien*. For Heidegger the experience of time is at the heart of what it means to exist. The present involves both past and future and we project forward our imagined future possibilities. We are what we are to become – a key point in the making of the meaning of self and graduation as we engage in *selving*, (Heidegger, 1962) a process that continues throughout our lives but is perhaps especially salient at such a significant transition marker as graduation. We are meaning makers and we create our existence as we live it and in order to live it. We have to make meaning Heidegger argues because of the temporality-related idea of *being-towards-death*. Our finite existence is inescapable and this brings with it anxiety and a need to create meaning. For Heidegger life is not intrinsically meaningful and the pursuit of meaning or meaning-making is absolutely central; we need to create meaning as a way for us to face the limits of our existence. Both temporality and being-towards-death align with the developmental perspective in this research and the making of meaning that is so central to ontology in the graduate transition.

## **Methodology**

### **Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a research method that is rooted in phenomenology and attempts to put some of its principles into the service of empirical research in psychology. Although initially taken up by health psychology because of its coherence with research questions about diagnosis with long-term conditions (Smith, 2015) it has been widely used and developed since the late 1990s (Smith, Harré & van Langenhove, 1995; Smith 1996; Willig, 2008; Forrester, 2010). It draws on a range of phenomenological thinking and attempts to *go back to the things themselves* as Husserl intended and to engage with personal lived experience on its own terms (Smith, 2015). Nonetheless IPA as a method sets out to interpret rather than describe and thus draws particularly on Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology. Although the in-depth semi-structured interview is much the

most common way to collect IPA data there is no single set way to do so, for example Mercer (2012) explored using focus groups and Elmi-Glennan (2013) used photo elicitation alongside interviews and IPA is not a rigid set of procedures either in data collection or even in analysis. One reason for the popularity of the interview is that it allows the interviewer to take a 'live' part in the creation and interpretation of the participants account as it unfolds. Being concerned with participants' private and personal experiences and their analysis and interpretation, the researcher needs to immerse him/herself in the participants' life-world so the interviewer's listening skills are important and verbal and non-verbal interactions influence and tune the creation of the account that is captured. Both the creation of meaning and its interpretation take place in a connected way and the presence of the interpreter as interviewer adds insight as well as the opportunity to choose when, if and how to probe further.

IPA, in line with the assumption of inter-subjectivity, gives a role in the creation of meaning to both the researcher, especially where acting as interviewer, and the participant. There is also a double role in analysis, referred to in IPA as the double hermeneutic. Firstly the researcher seeks to bracket-off (epoché) their expectations and assumptions and to encapsulate and represent the participant's interpretation of their experience. The second part of the double hermeneutic requires the researcher to interpret the participant's interpretation. Smith describes IPA as *...meticulously idiographic, requiring the in-depth examination of each case on its own terms before moving to the next case.* (2015, p.644). Shaw (2010b) also emphasises the idiographic case-by-case nature of IPA. The linear process of examining each case proceeds in a series of steps and is accompanied in parallel by engagement with the hermeneutic circle such that *...pieces of text are seen as parts and whole offering mutual illumination.* (Smith 2015, p.645).

Being strongly data driven (Shaw, 2010b) and seeking in the first instance to understand the participant's lifeworld and meaning making, IPA fits well with an empathic and client-centred interview style and approach. An empathic approach is generally dominant largely because of the idiographic approach and need to understand meaning making at the individual level. IPA generally does not take a hermeneutics of suspicion approach, as Ricœur (1970) called the work of Freud, Marx and Nietzsche, in which our conscious understanding of our experience is regarded as suspiciously superficial and as disguising deeper structures and currents. However the second part of the IPA double hermeneutic

approach allows freer rein as the researcher seeks to interpret the participant's own interpretation.

### **Thematic Analysis**

For reasons discussed in chapter five the interviews for study four were carried out by a confederate rather than myself. My intention was to analyse the resulting data from the same IPA standpoint as the other two chronologically earlier empirical studies. As I began to approach this analysis however the fact that that I had not carried out the interviews myself and consequently did not feel that I knew the interviewees personally became a barrier to carrying out a phenomenologically based (IPA) analysis. As discussed above, interviews permit the researcher a 'live' part in the creation and interpretation of participants' accounts and the researcher needs to immerse him/herself in the participants' life-world, including non-verbal as well as verbal interactions, as and because they influence the creation of the account that is captured. Although I listened to the audio recordings and read the transcripts this did not allow me to feel the same intimate connection with the interviewees that I had experienced in analysing my own interviews for studies two and three. I did not feel that I could achieve the same depth or quality of analysis and to attempt to do so would be false. I therefore looked for an alternative approach that would do justice to the richness of the data while avoiding falseness. This was an intuitive decision rather than an analytically reasoned one but I felt that a different and less theoretically tied approach to analysis would be more appropriate. The data seemed to me to be rich and relevant to the aims of the study but not best approached phenomenologically, and this may possibly apply to the analysis of any interviews not carried out by the analyst.

Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that thematic analysis (TA) is a foundational method in qualitative research but it is sometimes dismissed merely as a tool rather more than as a specific method or approach. They argue that it should also be seen as a method in its own right and note that it has the advantages of flexibility and independence from theory and epistemology that allow it to be applied across a range of approaches. Braun and Clarke describe it as a *method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data* (2006, p.79) that can also go beyond rich description to interpretation and it is this interpretative capacity that it is intended to use here. The *phenomenological* may have been lost in the analysis of the study four corpus but *interpretation* will be retained, and IPA of course also seeks patterns in the data. TA can report participants' reality and experience, and can also look at how broader discourse and social factors drive, contextualise and

nuance meaning and experience. It is important to note that themes do not simply reside in the data to emerge without the active construal of the researcher who must search across the data set rather than seek for illustrative quotes to garnish pre-conceived notions. However a disadvantage of TA is that I was unable to hold on to the sense of continuity and contradiction in individual accounts that the IPA analyses in studies two and three allowed.

A rich and interpretative description of the data is aimed for and, as will be seen in chapter five, themes are identified that are inductive and strongly linked to the data, the perhaps meta-level theme three concerning the coherence, sophistication and fluency of the interviewees is an example, as well as those that derive in a more top-down way from existing theory and discourse such as theme one (situated learning) where it can be seen less to emerge than to slip easily into the pattern that my reading of the idea of situated learning had prepared me to find. As Braun and Clarke point out, it not possible to free oneself from *existing theoretical and epistemological commitments, and data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum* (2006, p84). The approach adopted follows Braun and Clarke and moves from immersion in and familiarisation with the data set, to the systematic generation of initial categories, collating these into possible themes and searching across the data set to gather data relevant to them, to reviewing and then refining them. The final review and revision takes place at the point that the chapter is written, reflected upon and revised and checked against Braun and Clarke's checklist (2006, p.96).

### **Research design**

The research was conceived of in qualitative terms from the start and is in three parts. Firstly a set of five individual in-depth semi-structured interviews carried out with BSc Psychology graduands (one) and graduates (four) over the summer and early autumn of the year in which they graduated. Data from these interviews is reported in chapter six. Secondly the same participants engaged in individual in-depth semi-structured interviews for a second time approximately two years later. Data from these interviews is reported in chapter seven. Thirdly, four BSc Psychology students taking sandwich placement in year three of their four-year course took part in individual in-depth semi-structured interviews twice each, once near the start of their placement and again near the end of the placement or shortly after its completion. To follow a developmentally logical sequence data from these interviews is reported in chapter five.

### **Interview schedules, locations, recording and transcription**

Interview schedules for the three parts of the empirical research are included in appendices six to eight respectively. The first schedule was created using a mind map over several revisions and acted as a template for the second and third schedules. These were also each adapted and revised several times before first use. The first schedule began with a broad open question to encourage participants to talk generally and openly and then proceeded to the main areas that I wished to cover with prompts used as seemed fit. The development of the mind map and subsequent interview schedules drew on my previous research into employability (Reddy and Hill, 2002; Reddy and Moores, 2006; Reddy and Lantz, 2010; Moores and Reddy, 2012, Reddy and Moores, 2012) and in particular the Higher Education Academy publication *Employability in Psychology, a guide for departments* (Reddy, Lantz and Hulme, 2013) which was in preparation at this time. It also drew on my reading of IPA research and with an intention to capture the lived experience of the graduate transition and of being on work placement. For example the question '*Has Uni changed your relationship to family and friends*' towards the end of the first interview schedule for graduates and graduands (see appendix six, lines 30-31) derives from my reading of Smith's (1995, 1999) work on changing relationships in the transition to motherhood that I first came across and found revelatory in studying for an Open University MSc in Psychological Research Methods in 2003.

More generally the schedules emerge from my tutorial experience with undergraduates in discussing their placement and career options. This emergence from an aspect of my professional practice may account for the tutorial feel of many parts of the interviews and also makes this a difficult area for me to reflect and introspect on. The schedules were not designed in the same methodical way that I would have adopted had I been investigating a new area from the start. The original schedule feels as if it sprang forth almost effortlessly and fully formed because of my familiarity with employability and my role with students in relation to it. This may have advantages in some aspects of the research but it makes it difficult to reflect on the creation of the schedule or to see it as a construction reflecting a chosen set of viewpoints and a series of decisions. The viewpoints had already been chosen and become such a part of myself it is difficult to see them as chosen or recognise the choices made and rejected.

As the researcher and the participants for parts one and two of the study were quite familiar with each other and were already used to meeting and talking for tutorial, research supervision or other academic purposes, it was assumed that conversation would develop easily and this proved to be the case. Smith and Eatough (2006) suggest that interviews are guided by the responses of the participant and the unfolding of the interview as well as by the schedule in order to elicit in-depth thoughts, reflections and ideas. In this way the schedule acts as a guide for each interview rather than as a straightjacket. The interviewers rarely consulted the schedule during the course of the interviews but reviewed it towards the end of each interview to check coverage.

The location and scheduling of interviews had to take into account the availability and locations of both parties. Care was taken to ensure that appropriate private rooms were available to enable in-depth discussion without fear of interruption. Four out of the five interviews in the first set took place in my office during working hours. One took place in the kitchen of the participant's parents' house on a Sunday. Three of the second set of interviews took place in my office with the other two taking place at a participant's workplace and a participant's parents' sitting room respectively. All locations were satisfactory but each interview not conducted in my office was at some point interrupted by a parent.

For ethical and practical reasons a confederate second interviewer carried out the third set of interviews. The interviews have a different tone and emotional feel for a number of reasons and comparing them with those carried out by myself has illuminated both sets of interviews. Reasons for the use of a second interviewer and the issues arising are outlined in chapter five. The protocol used with recent graduates was adapted to suit placement student circumstances by myself and the second interviewer. All but two of the interviews took place at the students' workplace. Eight interviews took place, four near the start of the participants' placements and another four with the same set of participants near to the end of each participant's placement.

To obtain useable recordings two digital recorders were purchased and an Apple iPad was also set up to record hour or more long interviews with the intention of having two independent recordings for each interview. Despite this care in planning on one occasion I had to borrow a recorder from a participant and only six of the eight interviews in study four

were successfully recorded. Unfortunately two of the first four recordings suffered from severe distortion due to a faulty recorder and cannot be heard clearly enough for transcription.

I listened to all the recordings in full at least twice at different points in the analytic process. Transcription in all cases was undertaken by an agency (Janco Ltd) and recordings subsequently listened to again while reading the transcription in order to confirm and clean up the transcriptions. Transcription was verbatim in an orthographic style into a word document that was subsequently formatted into landscape orientation with wide margins on either side of the text to allow for analysis of the printed transcript. Orthographic transcription produces text in the style of a play script without details of false starts, hesitations or non-verbal vocalisations. This is the most commonly used style for IPA purposes as the focus is on the meaning of the participant's flow of description and reflection (Gibson, 2010) rather than on the social interaction itself as in conversation analysis. It is also suitable for TA.

### **Participants**

Volunteers for the first set of interviews were sought by emailing graduands attaching an advertisement about the research (see appendix one). A similar process was followed for placement students. For the second set of graduate interviews previous participants were contacted by letter (see appendix two). For the first set of interviews participants were selected from those who volunteered and those who had been either one of my personal tutees or a final year project supervisee were preferred as it was thought that pre-existing relationships and familiarity would facilitate the research. The ethical and other implications of this are discussed below under *Ethics and governance*. Pen portraits of the five graduand/graduate participants from the first and second set of interviews are at the start of chapter six.

Another reason contributing to the selection of participants was to achieve 'maximum variation sampling' (Polkinghorne, 1989) by selecting volunteers who shared the common experience of graduating that year but who varied in other characteristics. This, according to Langdridge (2007) is the primary sampling method used in descriptive phenomenology, however at the time of selection I was unaware of the distinction between descriptive and hermeneutic phenomenology, and of the usual practice in IPA of aiming for a homogenous sample. I was interested in talking to a range of people and thus the participants, although

homogenous in age, university and degree course, date of graduation and gender, differ in a number of ways. They include a student who did not take a placement alongside four who did, students from two ethnic minorities and one with additional needs, some who were home-based throughout their degree and some who were not or who changed domicile. Despite this variation the homogeneity of the participant group is not inappropriate for IPA.

For the ethical and practical reasons discussed at the start of chapter five, I chose not to interview participants in the sandwich-year placement cohort. Selection from those who volunteered was done on a pragmatic convenience basis. Participants whose locations, accessibility and availability were convenient and facilitated interviewing were preferred without regard to other factors. Participants were homogenous in stage of degree and age, all were unpaid and working in clinical settings, by far the most common type of placement.

All participants completed a consent form (appendix three) after receiving a participant information sheet (appendix four) and subsequently received debriefing information (appendix five). Expenses payments were offered to participants where appropriate.

#### **Analysis: The step-by-step process**

Step-by-step guides to the interpretative phenomenological analysis of transcripts are offered by Langdridge (2007), Shaw (2010b) and Smith (2008). The approach taken for studies two and three draws on each of these. As analysis took place over a prolonged period (interviews in parts one and two took place two years apart) and has been revisited at several points, there is potential for methodological drift to have taken place. However a degree of consistency is thought to have been maintained from the second analysis onwards aided by returning to the annotated transcripts. IPA is a dynamic and data-driven process and the researcher is learning continually, about the participant's lifeworld, about the research topic, about oneself and one's understanding and conception of the topic, and not least about the method itself. Thematic analysis is less theoretically prescribed and followed Braun and Clarke (2006) while being broadly similar to the stages described below.

**Stage 1:** Transcripts for studies two and three were analysed on a case-by-case basis with all first interviews in part one analysed before returning to the same participants to analyse the second interviews for part two. No set sequence for analysis was observed as the researcher preferred to take on each analysis according to personal interest and preference. The transcript was formatted into landscape orientation and wide margins created on both sides. The original recording was then listened to again before the transcript was read and



re-read and the process of adding comments in the left-hand margin was begun tentatively. This was repeated on two or more occasions for all transcripts with the intention of becoming familiar with the data, working from a data-driven perspective (Shaw, 2010b) and entering as far as possible into the participant's lifeworld.

**Stage 2:** Notes of preliminary emerging themes were made tentatively in the right hand margin and links between sections of text noted. Care was taken to work in the first stage of the double hermeneutic and seek to understand the participant's sense-making of their experience.

**Stage 3:** Transcripts were returned to and cross-referenced as themes began to be developed and firmed up. Some emerged as related groupings and could be ordered into themes and sub-themes in a fluid and iterative process.

**Stage 4:** Themes were extracted in broader and more abstract terms and put into logical, temporal and/or hierarchical relationship. They were linked to specific quotes. The process remained iterative and themes were re-named and re-ordered and quotes re-assigned. The process was then repeated for the next transcript.

As discussed at the start of chapter five, the tone and feel of the six interviews with placement students carried out by the second interviewer were different from that of the ten interviews with graduates carried out by myself. Analysis of all was carried out entirely by myself and followed the same stages as above but the interviews were processed in a slightly different order; person-by-person (i.e. participant one interview one, then the same participant and interview two) rather than all first interviews before all second interviews as was done for the graduate interviews. Study four interviews are presented thematically in chapter five while study two and three interviews are presented on a case-by-case basis in chapters six and seven.

### **Ethics, integrity and governance**

This research was carried out after approval by the Aston University School of Life and Health Sciences Ethics Committee and in accordance with the university's Research Integrity Code of Conduct. Ethical approval was thus obtained and regard was given to the issues of power in relationships, protection from harm, informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, deception, dissemination of results and data protection.

Participants were not recruited by being approached directly, they responded to an advertisement (appendix one) and then received an invitation to participate (appendix two) and subsequently a consent form, participant information form and debriefing (appendices six, seven and eight). No deception was involved in the study and participants were in a position to give informed consent. The issue of power is salient as the research participants were students and graduates of the university where the author works and is in a position of power in relation to them. To reduce the risks arising the author did not interview current students but engaged a second, external researcher to do so. The issue of power is discussed in chapter four.

The wellbeing of participants was a principle consideration in carrying out this research. It was not anticipated that participants would be exposed to harm and no physical risks were identified, but an in-depth semi-structured interview is probing in nature and given the ease and familiarity of participants with the author there is a risk of distress and regret at inappropriate self-disclosure and of distress being caused by being too intrusive. These risks were borne in mind while designing the interview schedules and a balance steered between depth and intrusion. The author's background in pastoral, clinical and social work was thought to be helpful in ensuring sufficient sensitivity, as was the second interviewer's extensive pastoral care experience in education.

The related issues of confidentiality, anonymity, dissemination of results and data protection are also important in the well-being of participants and have caused the author some concern. The nature of in-depth interviews and IPA means that considerable personal detail is captured. With graduates and students being from only two cohorts of a single university course, participants may know and be able to identify each other. Furthermore some participants are members of what are from the author's viewpoint, tight knit, geographically contiguous communities with shared cultural and religious beliefs and values. These factors make protecting the anonymity of participants more demanding. All participants were asked to choose a pseudonym, or to allow the researcher to choose one on their behalf. Participants are referred to by pseudonym throughout the process of analysis and reporting. The names of some locations and employers have been redacted and replaced by anonymised versions. For example 'Seatown' has been used for to disguise a particular location and employers have been referred to generically rather than by name, for example

'a supermarket', 'a school'. Consideration has been given to changing or omitting additional details, but after careful consideration this has not been thought necessary.

All data has been stored securely electronically in a password-protected environment with regularly updated security features in accordance with data protection legislation. Paper records have been stored in a secure environment in the author's office. All names have been removed and replaced by pseudonyms. Regular supervision took place to enhance reflexivity, discussed in chapter four below, and to avoid misrepresentation of the data. Data will be destroyed within four months of the thesis reaching a final form.

## Chapter 4: Reflection and Reflexivity

### Introduction

As outlined in chapter three, this was primarily interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) research although study four was in the event analysed thematically. IPA, and qualitative research in general, places the researcher in a more central position compared with research undertaken from a natural sciences standpoint. In the natural sciences positivist tradition, objects and their representations are distinct and the researcher is positioned as an expert knower who reports findings that are regarded as objectively true (Shaw, 2010). In qualitative or abductive research by comparison, Finlay (2002) notes that the researcher has a much greater, more explicit and more acknowledged role in how data is collected, selected, interpreted and understood. Qualitative research is not the reporting of objective reality or true essences but can be thought of as a three-way joint product of the participants, the researcher and their relationships; it is therefore co-constituted (Finlay, 2002, p531). Thus qualitative research takes place in an inter-subjective realm in which objects and their representations are not distinct but are intimately connected (Woolgar 1988, p.20). Inter-subjectivity perhaps ultimately derives from the recognition that language constructs objects and meaning and is communal rather than private and so it is difficult to view the researcher, or any of the participants, as inhabiting a private world where meaning is defined purely individually.

It is therefore important, as Finlay points out, to find ways to analyse how intersubjective and subjective elements, the researcher's predispositions and own agenda for example, influence the research in order to be able to claim a degree of trustworthiness and integrity for it. Reflexivity is a way to approach this necessary analysis and enable the research to have credibility. It enables the reader to make up her or his own mind about the research in the context of who the researcher is. Reflexivity is essential if we do not have an expert knower who can tell us the facts. As Etherington (2004) puts it; *'If there is no objective truth.... There can be no findings. What we have are the voices and experiences of our participants and ourselves and a need to find new ways of representing them'*. (p.83)

In considering what reflexivity is and how it can be practised there is a continuum of perspectives. These run from on the one hand from benign reflection or introspection that retains the positivist distinction between object and representation and seeks to ensure that an 'accurate' account of participants' views is presented; to a post-modern radical constitutive reflexivity that views reality as constructed contemporaneously and in which no

one account is privileged over any other. *Reflection* therefore refers to general thoughts regarding process and verification and *reflexivity* means a more explicit evaluation of self, a re-flection, turning one's gaze on oneself (Shaw, 2010) and assumes an interpretivist ontology, being engaged in a dialogic relationship that co-constructs versions of reality. Reflexivity adds validity and rigour and guards against the danger of prioritising the researcher's voice and blocking participants' voices. Thus '*reflexive analysis is precisely the route to ensuring an adequate balance between purposeful as opposed to defensive or self-indulgent personal analysis*' (Finlay p.542). The double hermeneutic approach of IPA involving a second analysis or interpretation by the researcher makes reflexivity particularly important.

Reflexivity is not necessarily easy or formulaic; Finlay (2002, p.541) regards it as challenging, difficult and potentially painful and also suggests that the experience can be complex, ambiguous and ambivalent. Nonetheless she argues that it is a valuable tool with which to examine the position and power, the perspective, role and the person of the researcher and to prompt insight through the examination of personal responses and interpersonal dynamics. Etherington (2004, p.531) suggests that it requires the '*...capacity of the researcher to acknowledge how their own experiences and contexts... inform the process and outcomes of enquiry.*' It requires self-awareness and challenges us to be more aware of our politics, ideology and culture, and perhaps also those of our participants and audience. Etherington goes on to argue that if we can become aware of '*...how our own thoughts, feelings, culture, environment and social and personal history inform us as we dialogue with participants, transcribe....and write our representations....[we] can come close to the rigour ...required..*' (2004, p.531-2). Finally it is worth recalling that Heidegger (1962) regards interpretation and meaning making as central to *dasien* (being-in-the-world) and that the limits of our conscious awareness suggests that reflexivity can be only partial and tentative so it is something to be honestly grappled with rather than definitely achieved.

### **Power, role and position**

My role placed me in a position of considerable power relative to graduate participants. As an academic teaching and administering aspects of the programme that they had been recently studying I had been in a formal position of authority. This was added to by the authority and status accorded to academics by students generally, by the research supervision role I had had in relation to some participants and my tutorial role in relation to others. There is also the power and deference habitually offered based on my gender and

age, the continuing influence I could exert by writing references, making introductions and recommendations and offering, or withholding, information, advice and support, and the knowledge and expertise that was probably ascribed to me. The mere fact of acting as a researcher may also carry power, especially with recent psychology graduates (Orne, 1962) who may have adopted the familiar participant or 'subject' role of credulous acquiescence. Before teaching in Higher Education I spent 16 years teaching A level students in colleges where students would treat teachers in a casual and familiar way as if they were relatives. I found the awe and respect offered to academics at universities a considerable contrast. I had taken the power of my position with the participants for granted but I realised how much I may have been treated with exaggerated respect when at the start of the second interview with Louise she asserted something (on the location of certain consultancy businesses) in a context that showed that she was comfortable being an expert to my novice. I realized with a shock that this was the first time she had done this and that previously she had taken an exclusively subordinate and novice role with me. It was a clue to her enhanced stature and confidence as well as a reminder of the authority and power that I had taken for granted.

As explained in chapter three, I sought volunteers for this set of studies by emailing graduands, and later placement students. Volunteering by someone who had been either a personal tutee or a final year project supervisee is linked to the network of patronage of a senior academic extending from PhD student, to research fellows and junior faculty that is so influential in research careers. It is related to the medieval idea of being of the 'affinity' (Walker, 2006) of that member of staff. Former tutees and project supervision students were the majority of volunteers, and volunteered quickly. I selected four out of five graduate participants from this small pool as I thought that the pre-existing relationship would facilitate the research, although later I became aware that this may bring its own complications. A small cash payment and interest in keeping contact with a familiar place and person may be factors in motivating participants but I sense that volunteering was also part of a mutual patronage relationship whereby a student who puts herself out to be part of my research is both rewarding me for my previous interest and support, and investing in future patronage by placing me under a tenuous obligation to be interested and supportive. It also works the other way. By my selecting tutorial and project students I am aware, and it is uncomfortable now to think of this, that I am exploiting an existing relationship and perhaps imposing an expected loyalty, and drawing on my own investment of time and interest in the student. Given this, are they true volunteers? Yet further, I also treated

participants as people in whom I invest ambitions; I want them to succeed, partly as this validates me.

### **Politics and ideology**

Liberal political economic assumptions seem to be taken for granted by the participants and I. They are so much a part of everyday mental furniture, that they are almost invisible. The issues raised by Allen, Quinn, Hollingworth and Rose (2013) and discussed in chapter two on the reproduction of structural inequalities are not raised or reflected upon. This may be important as none of the five graduate participants entered the graduate world from a position of established privilege. Louise perhaps hints at awareness of class and culture.

### **Culture and gender**

In my first interview with Nadia I avoided following up her introduction of the topic of family and cultural expectations of future marriage and its impact on her choices, career and construction of herself. Immediately after the interview I felt that I had evaded the issue and that she may have valued an opportunity to talk through these issues. My immediate thought at the time also was that the interview might be becoming too intimate and I was also concerned to avoid representing a view that might be construed as insensitive or racist and might foreclose the topic as out-of-bounds. By not responding however I thought myself to be colluding in a patriarchal and potentially oppressive way. In the event both Nadia and Amina took the opportunity to return to or raise this topic in their second interviews and I overcame my qualms about discussing such intimacies.

### **Personal history and perspective**

I was not aware that my distant background in counselling and social work still exerted an influence but my supervisor noted that my first interviews had a counselling feel to them. Certainly my interviews seem intimate and personal in tone in comparison with the second interviewer. My position and educational philosophy, influenced by my counselling and pastoral care experience (Rogers, 1951, 1969) influenced my priorities so that I felt myself to have some responsibility for the welfare and success of the interviewees. By interviewing them I felt myself to be continuing a relationship with them as students in which my support to them in transition was part of the bargain. This probably links to my experience and value base as a teacher as much as to counselling and also links to the careers counselling function that I also see as part of my role. This is a long term university tradition; I was welcomed to consult my undergraduate university careers service six years after I graduated. University careers services informally, and often now formally, offer their graduates a life-long careers

service and are increasingly moving into post-graduation outreach work with individual follow-up of unemployed graduates and low cost 'boot camp' short courses.

This is the practitioner rather than exclusively researcher mind-set with which I approached this research and there are a number of points during my interviews when my tutorial relationship with each of the participants becomes prominent and over-rides the research purpose of the interview. This may reflect not only my own skill set and sense of priorities but also the familiarity of both parties with this role. It is perhaps a consequence of selecting students with whom I already had a tutorial or supervisory relationship to interview. It is a trade-off for possibly richer data and interpersonal ease, hopefully to the benefit of the research and also of the participants. The tutorial role is apparent when for example with the first interview with Suzie I digress into graduation tickets (lines 382-412) and also when talking about grades. However grades probably loom large for graduands and recent graduates whoever they are talking to.

#### **Personal responses and interpersonal dynamics**

It is possible to argue that a sexual theme may be detected in an older male spending two or more hours each interviewing a series of young women in their early 20s, indeed it would be an occasion for ribaldry amongst men in a public bar. Nor would the implications be lost on Freud and his adherents. Not being a psychoanalyst I am scarcely qualified to detect or comment on transference issues but I am aware of aspects my own countertransference. (Hinshelwood, 1989). I found myself to be interested and attracted to all the participants in a paternal way and felt keen to help them to achieve their goals. This may or may not be attributable to other sublimated interests but I felt overall that there was a parental dimension to all five relationships. This probably reflected my tutorial style and also the familiarity of the participants with this and with the role that this placed them in.

I would not have noticed any dynamics beyond this were it not for the contrast apparent between my interviews and those carried out with placement students by the second interviewer. This is discussed further in the introduction to chapter four, but in brief, my interviews seem intimate and personal in tone seeming to reach back into adolescence and childhood. With the second interviewer the interviewees, although younger, are more adult. I am aware that I have a tendency to patronize and that I enjoy the intimacy of personal relationships in a tutorial context as elsewhere and tend to 'adopt' my tutees in the sense of becoming their loyal supporter.



There are also different currents in each relationship. As mentioned elsewhere and above, the theme of power is more salient with Louise than with others. My relationship with Amina was founded on good-humoured disagreement and my relationship with Suzie changed between the two interviews with the second feeling more characterised by therapeutic supervision. With all, and with Toyah and Louise especially, I felt a sense of responsibility to help them to succeed. My sense of Toyah's vulnerability was my own interpretation I think but Louise was inhibited from expressing explicitly her sense of betrayal by the university, and me as its representative, and I think that I responded to a degree of passive-aggression. Perhaps the emotionally closest interviews were those with Nadia.

Finally I note that I am re-visiting familiar interests in human growth and development, including and perhaps especially my own, throughout this research. A number of references, for example Broverman, Clarkson, Rosenkrantz and Vogel (1970), are to readings that were significant to me up to 40 years ago and I remember that the first book I read and re-read after my own graduation was Gail Sheehy's classic on adult growth and development, *Passages* (1976). Reflexivity is re-visited in chapter eight.

## Chapter 5: Study four, placement students

### Introduction

This first empirical chapter is concerned with undergraduate placement students interviewed twice at either end of their placements. This adds a prequel to the aim of understanding the experience of the graduate transition to professional employment on the basis that for most Aston students the transition is prefigured, trialed or even begun with the placement year taken between the second and final years. It also directly addresses the subsidiary aim of enquiring into how a sandwich placement year shapes the transition to professional life. For reasons that are explained below, a second interviewer (pseudonym, Sid) carries out these interviews. Sid is a retired Sociologist with experience of semi-structured interviews and of being a placement visitor. He interviewed the placement students as it would have been inappropriate for me to do so. I was in an overt position of authority over placement students and would continue to be in a position of authority in their final year. Interviewing them would thus be unethical and it would also have been difficult for interviewees to be open about their experiences, or disclose any problems or difficulties. Furthermore I prepare students for placement and recommend a placement year. Students may have felt expected to endorse the placement year and to sweep any problems or dissatisfactions under the carpet. Sid was able to position himself at one removed from the university, as acting purely as a researcher and possessing interest, experience and some expertise but with incomplete knowledge.

Four placement students were interviewed twice, once near the start of their placement and again near the end. The interview schedule used with recent graduates was adapted to suit placement circumstances (see appendix eight). All but two of the interviews took place at the students' workplace. Six of the eight interviews were successfully recorded and transcribed, but unfortunately two of the first four suffered from severe distortion due to a technical fault and cannot be heard clearly. These interviews feel different to those I carried out and the comparison illuminates both sets. Sid's interviews do not draw on existing personal relationships, he was unknown to the interviewees, and the transcripts reveal slightly formal interviews without the personal edge of those that I carried out. Sid does not fall into a tutorial or careers counselling mode as I sometimes do, and the dynamics and emotional tone differ. My interviews appear intimate and personal in tone and I seem to take a somewhat paternal role, perhaps 'nurturing parent' in transactional analysis terms (Berne, 1964, Harris, 1996). My approach, influenced by counselling and pastoral care

experience, is non-directive in a Rogerian sense and this is thought to encourage reflection, self-awareness and personal growth (Rogers, 1951, 1969). In transactional analysis terms, 'nurturing parent' positions the other person in a child position; 'natural child', perhaps 'free child'. In comparison the interviews with Sid I see the students more in adult states, or perhaps in the 'adaptive child' state where they respond to the demands of the interviewer as 'controlling parent'. My interviews reveal anxieties and conflicts and at times seem to reach back into adolescence and childhood and view the graduate transition from the student position, which is of course the context of their relationship with me. With Sid the interviewees are more adult, perhaps because they are treated as such, perhaps because they are at work and are responding in work mode, perhaps because this is an appropriate way to respond to an unfamiliar older adult.

With the first interview with Rada, Sid strikes a brisk tone that feels suitable for a quality audit. It is as if he is probing for unhappiness and dissatisfaction, perhaps because I had primed him to be aware of a tendency to report only success. However he rather positions interviewees to defend placements against what may have felt like an independent audit. This sense of check and audit may have overwhelmed the original IPA aim of exploring lived experience. Around line 220 of Rada's first interview it becomes apparent that the interview, and possibly others, is driven quite strongly by the interview protocol. There seems to be less scope for emergent material to be elicited and this may lead to circularity where the themes that emerge in analysis are the themes that are offered in the protocol. Such confirmatory data seems out of sympathy with the exploratory aims of the study, and the more abductive nature of IPA.

The order of analysis for these placement interviews was person-by-person (i.e. Ella interview 1, then Ella interview 2) rather than all first interviews before all second interviews as for the graduate interviews. This was done as the intervals were shorter than between the graduate interviews and to capture placement experience and individual development. No clear distinction was apparent between the first and second sets of interviews. This is perhaps due to the relatively short intervals between interviews; the first interviews not taking place early enough to capture participants' immediate responses on starting their placements; close adherence to the interview protocol; the unfamiliarity of the interviewer and style of the interviews. On listening to the interview recordings I did not feel that I was close enough to the process, not having carried them out myself, to be able to carry out a

satisfactory case-by-case interpretative phenomenological analysis. I was disappointed at not being able to carry the interviews out myself and at the consequent sense of emotional distance from the interviewees. I therefore chose to analyse and present the data thematically. This still takes place in a qualitative and broadly IPA informed context but is in reality thematic analysis, a widely used foundational method in qualitative analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006), perhaps better conceived of as a process for accessing and aggregating meaning rather than as a fully-fledged and theorised analytic approach in its own right. Despite this different way of presenting data in this chapter my approach remains rooted in the epistemology and methodology and the analytic process described in chapter three.

### Participants

All four participants are aged between 19 and 21 during their sandwich year placement. None were paid, at least initially. All participant names are pseudonyms.

Rada	Honorary Assistant Clinical Psychologist
Dave	Assistant Psychologist in a forensic setting
Ella	Honorary Assistant Clinical Psychologist
Marie	Honorary Research Assistant

### Themes

**Table 6: Placement student themes**

1. Situated learning - legitimate peripheral participation in a community of practice
2. Broadened or crystalized career outlook
3. Coherence, sophistication and fluency of interviewees
4. Connecting and reconciling work and university
5. Personal development, competency
6. Break from education
7. Supervision
8. The challenge of placement

#### ***Situated learning - legitimate peripheral participation in a community of practice***

This was amongst the strongest themes to emerge in all six interviews. It is my interpretation of the interviews in line with the idea of situated learning proposed by Lave and Wenger as a model of learning in a community of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991, 2002, Wenger 1998). Lave and Wenger argue that learning is a fundamentally social process situated in a social and organisational context and takes place through a process of

'legitimate peripheral participation' through which the learner moves towards full participation in the sociocultural practices of a community. Legitimate peripheral participation is concerned with the relationships between new entrants and old hands in the community of practice, and with their activities, identities, knowledge and practice and with the artefacts of all kinds that are produced.

Participants build relationships with practitioners at several levels. Ella talks of making useful professional connections through sharing an office with trainee clinical psychologists (129-34). Sharing an office gives opportunities to interact and build relationships, gives a message about status, and a sense of entrée to the world of professional practice. It also enables direct communication with practitioners.

*I came onto the placement wanting to do clinical psychology... so he's given me a lot of first hand advice and experience and stories and... things like that (131-3)*

Rada, in her second interview, is able to compare herself to others at different levels in the community of practice.

*...the office that I worked in had two other psychologists... I had the lead clinical psychologist, my supervisor, a new clinical psychologist that had just come into the service at the same time as I did and a trainee as well. So I was working with different, kind of, levels of professionals.... the trainee psychologist, she was just as much nervous as I was because she had never done group work... the new clinical psychologist was very helpful, we done a one-to-one with a client, we would do home visits and things ... (Rada 2: 225-37)*

This participation seems to be the foundation for her skills development and for changes in Rada's sense of self as others respond to her as a professional, there is also a sense of how she has had to face her fears and put herself forward.

*I was much more confident in like running some of the sessions ... I was given more responsibility over time. So I was able to present in front of a huge group... there was probably about 10 or up to 13 ...before the placement, I would get really nervous presenting in front of groups...*

*...I think the clients saw me as a professional because I was running the sessions with my supervisor and the other co-workers. So because they saw me as a professional as well, I, kind of, accepted that role of being the professional and so they were always asking me questions if there were any queries or what-nots.*

Dave also comments on being part of a community of practice.

*...I had a variety of colleagues to work with ...people who are training to become psychologists, people who are fully doctorate-trained and ...assistant psychologists, and people... just volunteering in the environment ...I think that helped me to mature*

*and become more confident as well... I had a lot of support from them and they shared their experience with me... (Dave: 270-8)*

The interviewer touches on this directly later commenting; 'so you feel you were really integrated into a professional community?'

*Definitely. I feel like I made connections... I feel like I was part of a team. And it wasn't just that, 'Oh, you are a student here for five months, goodbye.' But I actually felt like I was really involved and a part of the team... (Dave: 536-9)*

By her second interview Ella has the confidence to seek out jobs. It is as if she is now an insider rather than an outsider. It has also made her more sympathetic towards clients, seeing them more holistically. Being treated as professional and being seen as a colleague, changes Ella's view of herself and her self-awareness.

*...I look quite young... but people were talking to me in quite a professional way, expecting me to do things and that. That made me feel older and more mature... (Ella 2: 264-7)*

*...when I started the placement ...in my head it was kind of like I was a pupil and ... there would be a, kind of, like 'Yes Miss', 'Yes Sir' kind of feeling. But then, as you get into the placement, you realise that they're not looking at you like that they're looking at you as a fellow colleague and you do feel that sense of, like, growth as a person to be like, kind of, on the same level as them,.. (Ella 2: 272-9)*

A less positive side of work for Ella is that she underestimated the administrative side of work, finding it larger than expected (Ella 2: 106-7) and the work not to be as practical as she thought (Ella 2: 128). Rada seems to exemplify legitimate peripheral participation and enjoys her new occupational status.

*.... when you are stuck studying for ages, you are just seen as a student. But it's nice being seen as an assistant psychologist, it's like an actual occupation. (Rada 1: 239-44)*

At the end of her first interview Rada comments on how hard she sees her supervisor working and returns to the theme of participating in a community of practice.

*...sometimes I forgot I was a student ...I got caught up in that professional, kind of, bubble... the clients ...see me as a professional so I, kind of, fulfil that role... (Rada 2: 413-34)*

*...it was just like you were one of them (Rada 2: 473)*

Marie's placement went well with academic success, developing knowledge and expertise, a senior role with volunteers and acknowledgement of her value with a paid role at the end of

the placement. Participation in her team seems central to the idea of a community of practice.

*I just have had so many different valuable experiences throughout it and it's like... I feel like I've been given a really good amount of responsibility and they have now offered me a part time job... (Marie 2: 7-10)*

*I've now been co-author on three different papers... and the last one, it's very much my input, I'm writing it and they are just overseeing it. So it's really a lot of responsibility ...I think I sort of grew as a member of the team, a very sort of valuable member, especially amongst the voluntary staff... because there was quite a lot of turnover, so I ended up being one of the most senior... in that office and I was always the one that knew where everything was or what to do... So... I became quite an important member of the team. (Marie 2: 18-27)*

Early on Marie did not have enough work to do, but this picked up when she started work on a research paper. By the end of the placement she has accumulated an academic role and is seen as the 'go-to person' if anything needs doing.

*...mostly I'm working for a post-doc now... And then I'm doing a lot of general admin work and stuff for the team and [I am] my boss's go-to person if he needs something random... He'll say, 'Can you look up this' or can you call this person or do this? (Marie 2: 89-96)*

Marie found a niche that gave her an informal supervisory role with others and a key link role with volunteers.

*I was in an office which had a large turnover ...gained a more senior role that people look up to me for different things... I just got everybody better, whether it was the PhD. students or the post-docs or whatever. And I felt like confident to talk to anybody... (Marie 2: 137-42)*

*...I feel I've really got a role. I am like a research associate... I don't feel like a placement student anymore, it's more a job than being a student and learning. (Marie: 217-22)*

She felt more like this when offered a paid job.

*...they are keeping me longer than they need to and they are actually going to pay me, I must be a valuable member of this team. And I think that was really when it sort of kicked in that, yes, this is a job and this is something that they are valuing me doing. (Marie: 227-31)*

Marie has gained academic skills and taken part in an academic community of practice as a legitimate participant, not as a student. She has seen how academics talk to each other as well as learning about SPSS and advancing her literature search skills. (402-10).

Dave reports that his participation changed over time, bringing more responsibilities and improved confidence.

*First of all, it was more ...an observer, sort of role... as I was there more often, I got more responsibilities, I would have to set up groups and activities for the patients ...and I also got involved with scorings and psychometric testing... the longer I went on, the more responsibility I got and the more confident I got in doing things there. (Dave: 26-40)*

*I would do sessions by myself, I would write reports by myself and hand them in at the end... Or I would write up notes based on interaction with patients and go, 'Can you validate this note for me, please?' (Dave: 65-9)*

He too was kept on at end of placement.

*I was actually kept on for a few months paid contract. (Dave: 79)  
I wasn't expecting that and it was very nice. (Dave: 93)*

Dave's knowledge of psychology and the forensic system have also increased, his knowledge is now more nuanced, stereotypes have been broken down and his initial fear and anxiety overcome, although they were clearly vivid when he started.

*It's definitely removed stereotypes that I had. Like when I first went on placement, I thought, 'I'm not going to make it out of here alive', at one point. But I think that the stereotype that everyone is going to be dangerous and crazy, but it's removed quite quickly. (Dave: 405-9)*

In general the placement interviewees report that they are seen as a professional and have participated in a community of practice such that colleagues see them as legitimate actors and insiders rather than outsiders. This process of being accepted seems to have surprised and delighted all of them. To achieve this mini-transition is not always easy but no failures are reported here. There are some hurdles to be overcome, Rada notes that you have to attend full-time every day and this 'learning to labour' aspect (Willis, 1977) can be a shock to start with. Participating in a community of practice has clear implications for identity and links in turn to competencies. As Lave and Wenger (1991, 2002) describe, becoming (identity) reflects your relationships and your knowledge and practices. New participants need to work at finding or creating a role that enables them to participate and have power, a process that Marie describes above. It is also worthy of note that academic work as a participant is a very different experience to being a student. An undergraduate is not part of a work community of practice. Participation has removed stereotypes of both professionals and clients, both are seen differently from the inside.



### **Broadened or crystallized career outlook**

Ella reports that her career ideas have opened out.

*I actually think I was quite naïve when I went into the job... and that has opened my eyes to a whole load of other careers that I can have... (Ella 1: 148-52)*

She also reports finding out about other professions and about what she does not want to do. For example (163-76) she found her work with anorexia was quite challenging and shocking. She says that she would have said beforehand that she was ready for this, but now (four months in).

*I don't think that you can prepare... yourself for it. Because you can read books on anorexia ...but until you are actually there, I think that it's a different experience (Ella 1: 184-88)*

Ella reports learning about the business side of the organisation she is working for (276) and is more flexible about her careers aim. Her ideas keep shifting and this perhaps marks a move away from the quest for the single 'right' career that perhaps obsesses and confuses younger students.

*I started wanting to do clinical psychology. Now that is still something I want to do but I'm thinking about educational psychology or even teaching or nursing... So, yes it has shifted... it keeps shifting actually. (Ella 1: 290-3)*

Ella is confident that she can actually do the jobs.

*I do feel more professional... I can apply for jobs and actually feel like I can do them (Ella 1: 350-4)*

Ella remains committed to clinical work but has some doubts (...this is what I want to do, 113-4) but,

*...it does show you the realities of things ...I do feel like I need to have a backup (Ella 2: 120-2)*

*...I started to consider that just in case this doesn't work out, I need a back-up. So I changed to 'psychology of work' just so I might be able to equip myself with more of a business psychology mind... (Ella 2: 484-8)*

Rada is now open to clinical work having been a reluctant placement student.

*...some people...they really want to do clinical work then when they go to do it they don't really enjoy it... the opposite for me ...it's not as bad as I thought. So, much more open minded to it. (Rada 2: 443-8)*

*...at the beginning I didn't even want to do a placement and then I suddenly found one and went on it, so it was all very last minute ... and it's all, kind of, worked out ... I'm much more open minded now to clinical work and occupational, so it kind of*

*helped me. I would probably consider working in both those fields instead of just occupational... (Rada 2: 517-21)*

Marie also has crystalized her career ideas.

*...eventually, I would like to do a PhD there. But I think I would like to work first... I would like to maybe spend one year doing some sort of work and then go back and do the PhD. Just need a bit of a break... I would like to do something completely different like be a care worker... Something quite hands on because... I think that's a really important experience to have. (Marie: 421-31)*

*...it's made me think, 'Yes, I could do a PhD'. It's hard work but I'm capable and my supervisor agrees. (Marie: 451-2)*

Initially fearful about his placement work, Dave is now more open to different career paths.

*It's made me question ...my options ...before I went on the placement, I wouldn't have gone into forensic at all but now that's a viable option... (Dave: 146-8)*

Interviewees in general report moving on from identifying 'the career' and being more open minded about their career options. For some this has clarified their aims and ambitions.

### ***Coherence, sophistication and fluency of interviewees***

Ella begins an impressively coherent and informed ten-line response about the nature of her work. She is clear, analytical and reasoned and continues to speak fluently and at length (e.g. lines 61-82) about her supervision and gives a sophisticated example illustrating her learning (Ella 1: 86-100). The coherence may relate to the nature of these placement interviews. As discussed above they are relatively challenging in tone and style and perhaps place the interviewees on the defensive and bring out fluent and 'adult' responses. It is as if the interviewer is probing for unhappiness and dissatisfaction but that he succeeds more in positioning interviewees to defend their placements. Certainly Ella says that she is satisfied with her placement and gives a defensive, definite and even combative response, implicit in the interviewer's repeated and defensive 'right, right' to a line of questioning about placement preparation and organization.

(Interviewer) So, you don't think your course at the University could have, in some senses, informed you better about what...

*No, I think it did exactly as much as it could have done.*

(Interviewer) Right, right. So, generally, you've talked about you've got these two supervisors, do you feel supported on the placement yes.

*Totally supported, yes.*

(Interviewer) Right, right, and not just through the supervisors either, through other colleagues there that you're mixing with?

*Yes, yes, I do feel like if the supervisors weren't available, for whatever reason, I would have someone to talk to. (Ella 1: 190-204)*

Ella makes well-reasoned points about the value of the placement but the tenor of her comments hinges on the rhetorical question embedded below and she seems to be justifying her University to an outsider.

*...I think placement is useful because ...you kind of step back ...outside your University course so I think I'll go back into final year ...with a clearer view of what I want to do and where this degree is actually taking me rather than just sitting and doing my degree... What else can I say? I think it is really useful to have a placement here in Aston being Aston has been a really, really great University for me. (Ella 1: 265-71)*

Interviewed firstly after three months on placement, Rada is also impressively coherent and shows detailed knowledge of her work. Rada's second interview features many questions and few reflections or continuation prompts, this seems to place her on the defensive and does not allow or encourage her to take the time for reflection or exploration (circa line 100).

#### **Connecting and reconciling work and university**

Ella gives examples of university learning and placement practice connections (210 on) but she implies that the two are quite different and possibly incommensurable. She struggles to pin down the value of her degree in other than prosaic factual-content terms, there is nothing here about liberal education or epistemic virtue.

*...depending upon what a job was ...some of the modules would be quite helpful... Developmental psychology, for example, that would be a good help... (Ella 1: 483-94)*

Ella struggles with idea of 'work culture' and works at understanding the value of academic theory and analysis.

*I don't ...remember myself thinking back to lectures the whole time I was there... it's a new experience on its own... I think the ...Uni work that we've done for the past two years give us a feeling of knowing that, yes, we're psychology students and so we have that base knowledge... in some ways it's not comparable... it's additional but it's not comparable... (Ella 2: 332-9)*

Ella is keen not to dismiss university as irrelevant and sees university and work as not comparable and that university gives a sense of identity and a knowledge base. Interestingly the interviewer, a Sociologist, notices a lack of awareness of everyday sociological concepts such as stereotypes and work culture. This prompts the idea that the students' knowledge

base in psychology is subject-specific and also too taken-for-granted to be aware of. This is akin to Heidegger's idea that the traditions that we are a part of may be taken for granted, as Dall'Alba (2009) puts it, the fish is the last to discover water.

*... the lectures ...to me it's two different things. You've got all the knowledge that you've built up over the two years and they help you start out in the job. But I feel like the job was just a different... element. (Ella 2: 418-22)*

Rada also saw work as a different experience but found that writing was an area of connection.

*I think the only relation I probably had was with the writing. But not during when I was doing client work... It probably didn't disappoint me. It's just a different kind of experience. (Rada 2: 355-64)*

Her placement has changed Marie's sense of work and will change her approach to her final year.

*...next year I'm going to work much harder because... it's amazing how much time I have actually in my day. To think that I can work 8 hours a day and still get loads of stuff done outside. And before I would be like, 'Go to a lecture and that's it for the day' (Marie: 285-9)*

It has also transformed her sense of her role in education, she has become more active and embraces a wider view of education.

*...it's also made me realise that... you do have to go outside just what you're learning in the lectures and stuff... if there's any opportunity to do something like go to a seminar or a conference or something, just take it because you can find out so much. (Marie: 299-303)*

Marie's experience is less of education preparing her for work and more of work transforming her approach to education, or perhaps her approach to life. When asked about being prepared for her placement Rada responds.

*I think the only shock was working every day. Like fulltime, hours. (Rada 1: 91)  
...the long hours and [getting up?] yes getting up in the morning. It takes some getting used to. Being there on time... (Rada 1: 99-100)*

This draws attention to the 'learning to labour' and work discipline aspect of the placement. Rada found it to be a shock despite having had a part-time retail job for some time. This links to the personal development role of the placement and is also part of joining a community of practice.

Dave's placement was a positive and motivating experience.

*...it rekindled my enthusiasm... before I went on placement, I was feeling a bit like, 'I don't know if I can do this' and I wasn't doing as well as I had hoped due to my lack of effort... I approached placement thinking that I'm quite good ...working hands-on and I thought that to get practical experience, it would be good for me to see that I can do it... I'm more sure of my knowledge and more sure of my skills than before I went on it. (Dave: 157-66)*

Rada, Marie and Dave all feel that their degree studies to date have little direct relevance to their placements.

*There are some terms that I am familiar with like autism and dyslexia... but it's not something that was deeply learnt in the studies (Rada 1: 133-6)*

*...every now and then I come across some terms that I do remember... (Rada 1: 139-40)*

*I think a lot of it was still learning on the job. But the statistics and the research methods were really important. (Marie: 279-80)*

*...they weren't completely relevant to what I was doing. (Dave: 421-2)*

### ***Personal development, competency***

This could act as a superordinate theme for all the interviews in this chapter. Ella identifies personal development benefits and the value of the whole placement experience. It is not that her course has prepared her for work, but the opportunity built into her course to work for a year has provided an opportunity for work to prepare her for adult life, to be independent, focused and to push herself.

*...it's definitely made me more independent ...more focused because, to gain the placement and that, you really have to push yourself, you have to sell yourself... and Aston really ...helps you to do that... being on the placement itself ...it's a great opportunity for me to kind of prove to people that I can work and I can be a good colleague... (Ella 1: 248-55)*

Pressed on her competencies Ella is aware of her strengths and the discourse of competency.

*I'm more confident in general. I can adapt to different situations. Working with children, you always have to switch to different situations. I am proactive. What other competences do I need? I guess I can work well with a team... Because I'm working around other teams so you've got to communicate (Ella 1: 475-80)*

In her second interview she offers a detailed account of her personal development.

*...I've got a more mature attitude to life in the way I am. I met up with a couple of friends who'd been on placement and we all just seemed older... We seemed different. I think I'm more pro-active now ...anything professional I feel like I could*

*take it on better, I could... be more reliable and I can be more punctual and things like that. (Ella 2: 429-35)*

*...I can make my voice heard more, I'm more confident in what I'm saying if I'm thinking something or I want to raise something... I can be taken more seriously now. (Ella 2: 444-6)*

She has had to get out of the City-Centre student bubble.

*...having the confidence to call in and arrange [interviews] myself, travel around Birmingham, I was quite used to this little City-Centre bubble... A lot of the observations were in the south of the city... so getting around... that developed me as a person. Meeting new people... seeing clients one-on-one (Ella 2: 247-52)*

Asked what she has got to offer an employer, Ella repeats and expands on the above. Now, these sound less like individual competencies and more like the epistemic virtues that Barnett (2009) argues are a consequence of Higher Education as a vehicle for effecting change through encounters with knowledge. However Ella is talking about knowledge through work experience rather than knowledge from the classroom.

*You can rely on me to get things done, I'm pro-active, I'm organised, I can be trusted, you can depend on me and I will take the work on and get it done well. I'm confident... I can clearly express what I'm thinking or, if I have any concerns, I can clearly bring them to the table. I'm more analytical... more punctual... (510-8)*

Rada's communication, confidence, organisational skills and time management have improved, she is not afraid to talk to professionals.

*...I've gained a lot of interpersonal skills and I've found it easier to develop relationships with people that I've never met before. And I think it's made me a bit more mature .... (Rada 1: 239-44)*

In her second interview Rada also highlights her more developed communication skills with clients, and being more adaptive and organized.

*...working under pressure and being more organised. ...I've learned to... do things on time and even if I'm running out of time I'm able to work under pressure... being more adaptive as well and quick, being efficient in places as well and communication and confidence skills ...probably my writing abilities as well. (Rada 2: 453-63)*

Marie highlights her confidence.

*Much more confident. Especially now writing this paper, I feel that I'm playing a big role and that I'm very comfortable about it. (Marie: 107-8)*

And her close working relationship with a particular PhD student.

*...with her especially, I think really grew. (Marie: 173)*

Closeness to research has meant real academic growth for Marie; she has become confident enough to identify and point out errors.

*...my confidence is one thing that's really grown... being able to talk to people at different levels and being able to do the presentation... confident... enough to be able to say, 'OK, I'll do this paper' and have a lot of independent work and then go back and say, 'What do you think?' rather than having to ask all the time what I need to be doing. (Marie: 203-10)*

*...really boosted my confidence and given me an identity (Marie: 566)*

Dave has also grown in confidence.

*...I've learnt and I've grown..., my confidence has increased because the experiences that I've got ...on placement. (Dave: 230-2)*

He also reports significant personal change.

*...it's also... changed how I view people and how I involve myself with people... before, I was a lot more shy and reserved ...it's helped me to develop my assertiveness skills and my confidence ... I'm... a stronger version of myself where I can more freely discuss things or identify problems I have with people. ...before I would be very passive and very quiet. I am more assertive and able to deal with situations more easily. (Dave: 329-38)*

*...my organisational and presentation skills have increased (Dave: 342-4)*

*I've been able to work to a more strict deadline and hand in high quality pieces of work (Dave: 355-7)*

*I'm a lot more talkative and more confident. (Dave: 392)*

His sense of self and identity has changed.

*...work experience itself has made me a lot more self-assured and confident in my abilities and my knowledge that I have ...made me a lot more assertive and... improved me as a whole, in a way. It has matured me. (Dave: 491-5)*

He has also developed academically.

*My report writing skills have increased well on placement. ...I have a lot more confidence when it comes to writing a high quality piece of work... (Dave: 516-18)*

### **Break from education**

A placement also gives a break from study.

*It gives you a bit of a break from the course, it's not straight learning, learning, learning.... you're out there ...in the real world, you're applying what you have learnt. It's quite refreshing... (Ella 1: 388-92)*

It has helped Ella to appreciate student life.

*I will, kind of, hold on with both hands to being a student for the last time this year when I go back (Ella 2: 334-5)*

In her second interview Ella reveals a changed attitude to work, in contrast to her appreciation of student life. It is as if she has been socialised into professional life.

*...my summer's been long enough and ...I want to get back into doing something. I think that's one of the things that placement's done to me... Before ...I might have been lazier... But now I feel like I want to do something with my time, I want to get back into the lectures, I want to be studying again or I want to be working. I want to do something with my time. (Ella 2: 471-7)*

Rada has also enjoyed a break and found the transition back difficult.

*...nice having a break from studies (Rada 1: 213)*

*...it was, kind of, difficult mentally to get back into complete student mode after the placement (Rada 2: 554-5)*

Marie offers a different view. She is looking forward to study but also wants to get back to the wider world.

*I'm looking forward to the new modules... because it's so much more in depth in the final year. I am looking forward to that. But then ...I just want to get it over with and get out there in the world. (Marie: 438-43)*

### **Supervision**

Ella's supervisor is an inspiration to her and offers the apprenticeship relationship that is thought to be so important (Chickering and Gamson, 1987, 2002) but is so hard to provide in mass Higher Education. Like the graduate interviewee Suzie, Ella wants her supervisor's job.

*I kind of would like the role of my supervisor. So I would like to be doing her job. So I would be seeing clients and I would be supervising someone else. (Ella 1: 524-6)*

Rada emphasises the importance of supervision to her. She gets consistent mentoring and tutoring that greatly exceeds that provided at the university.

*I think it's going really well because she is so easy to talk to, she's approachable. Every week, we have a supervision session where, for an hour... (Rada 1: 53-5)*

Interviewed after completing her placement, Rada has a positive view of it – she gained skills and experience and allowed her to show her creative side and work with clients.

*...my writing skills developed throughout the placement because, my supervisor, she allowed me to write a paper with her. (Rada 2: 18-19)*



Rada goes on to explain in detail how her writing and scholarship were coached by her supervisor and developed in a tutorial-like process, she seemed to be able to submit several drafts for review and got much more individual support for her writing and scholarship than would be available at university.

*Very supportive, yes. So she didn't just kind of completely leave me to it. But I did write most of it, it's just the continuous looking at the drafts that helped a lot. (Rada 2: 53-5)*

...it is significantly different from writing, say, an essay for the university isn't it?  
*Yes. Because you don't get so much help from...you do it by yourself. (Rada 2: 58-61)*

Rada emphasizes the closeness, approachability, quality, regularity, structured nature and sheer quantity of interaction.

*...I was much... closer to her by the end of the placement. So we were able to, kind of, speak to each other and easily. She was approachable ... a very friendly character... we always had supervision sessions every week, so if there was anything wrong, anything I wanted to tell her about, I was able to. ...we talk about each client and then how they did in the sessions of the group and what we can do to help for the next sessions. (Rada 2: 190-205)*

For Marie supervision was not a formalised system, more as-and-when, but she had an informal supervisory role with others. Dave had a mixed experience of supervision.

*...like a weekly correspondence with my supervisor. It was regular supervision (Dave: 88-9)*

*...I always knew as well that's when there were problems and things that didn't go to plan, I could always talk to my supervisor... (Dave: 109-12)*

But this positive experience changed over time.

*...as it went on, it degraded... when I first went there, she was very supportive ...very helpful, I was involved a lot with her... as time went on... it went from like work involvement to just polite conversation ...in the corridor. Her involvement decreased as time went on and our relationship deteriorated... communication between us just stopped happening. (Dave: 237-54)*

This is not evidence of dissatisfaction as he is offered a paid contract extension but it does illustrate the importance of the supervisory relationship to the placement student.

### ***The challenge of placement***

It is a challenge to take a placement, Ella picks out being unpaid as the most challenging aspect.

*...what's challenging is the fact that it's unpaid... coming from Aston where a lot of the courses are business orientated, most of your friends would have a paid placement... (Ella 1: 41-4)*

Ella also says that her work with psychiatric patients was quite challenging and shocking at first and Dave found starting his placement terrifying.

*...when I first started the placement, like, 'Do you want to do this next week, you can be in charge of this'. I was terrified. And ...when I got to the point when I had to do all the organising myself... (Dave: 104-7)*

*I think my confidence with [secure unit patients] increased as time went on... when I first met them... I was terrified what are they were going to do. (Dave: 299-301)*

He experienced more than one incident of aggression and learned to cope through supervision after the first incident. He reports that he coped with the second much better (Dave: 128-40)

## **Summary, chapter 5**

This chapter of interviews with undergraduate placement students at either end of their placements offers further light on the experience of the graduate transition to professional employment. It also sheds light on how a sandwich placement year shapes the transition to professional life. All participants are pleased and sometimes surprised to find that they are seen and treated as professionals rather than as students. A key theoretical perspective that makes sense of their experience is the idea of situated learning proposed by Lave and Wenger as a model of learning in a community of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991, 2002, Wenger 1998). All interviewees have been legitimate peripheral participants in a community of practice such that colleagues see them as legitimate actors and insiders rather than outsiders. Marie for example develops a far more than peripheral role for herself by the end of her placement and both feels and acts as a key participant in her community of practice.

This sense of legitimate and real participation and the feeling of belonging that this develops relates to the more sophisticated thinking about careers and identity that the interviews reveal and to the personal development that they lay claim to. The interviews are studded with claims of enhanced confidence, independence, maturity and organisation and these are evidenced by examples and by the fluency and sophistication that interviewees display. All are enthusiastic advocates of their placement experience but struggle to reconcile their work experience with their university learning. For all, work experience appears to be transformative, and university education more routine. Marie is not alone in feeling that her

work has transformed her approach to future academic work and to life itself. Her experience is less of education preparing her for work and more of work transforming her approach to education.

## **Chapter 6: Study two, graduands and graduates**

### **Introduction to the first set of graduand and graduate interviews**

These interviews were very interesting and very enjoyable to carry out and to analyse. The participants; Suzie, Nadia, Louise, Amina and Toyah (all pseudonyms) were Aston University graduands or graduates of the same cohort and were interviewed in the order listed over a five month period. They are distinct and different individuals and equally so as interviews and I have analysed them on a case-by-case basis. This chapter is a second-order analysis aimed at understanding and presenting them grouped as an 'interview one' set. This is in contrast to the placement student interviews reported in chapter five, which were analysed as a set and fit into thematic categories fairly easily for reasons discussed there and subsequently. In attempting to capture the interviews in this chapter in a thematic structure they initially seemed to defy reduction to categories beyond the very general and interrelated ones of 'identity', 'work' and 'education'. For this reason the interviews are presented here first as case studies, in the order in which they were analysed, before bringing them together later in the chapter.

### **Pen portraits of participants**

The interviews aim is to give voice to the lived experience of the participants by taking an IPA double hermeneutic perspective. They are rooted in existing relationships with me, strongly so for Louise, Nadia and Suzie, less so for Amina and Toyah. Demographic and socio-economic factors have not been collected, but nonetheless intrude. All of the group are to some extent non-traditional students, which fits the Aston demographic, all are women, which fits the psychology demographic. Four took a sandwich year placement, three are from ethnic minorities, all were interested in professional psychology, particularly clinical psychology. Four had an existing tutorial relationship with me, three as final year research dissertation supervisor, one as a personal tutor. Four were awarded upper second-class degrees, one was awarded a lower second. Three students lived at home and commuted to university, one lived independently throughout and one started in campus accommodation but switched to commuting from home in her final year.

#### **Nadia**

Nadia had an unhappy experience as a placement student and explored this in her final year research project that I supervised. Through doing this I got to know her quite well. She had much of interest to say and I was very pleased when she volunteered to take part in this

study. Nadia is from a South Asian background and I formed the impression that her family background was well resourced. She is academically accomplished and graduated with a very good degree. Despite her placement experience as an Honorary Assistant Psychologist in a clinical setting she was very interested in a career in clinical psychology.

### **Louise**

Louise is from a white British background and I got to know her through supervising her final year research project. She too had a placement year as an Honorary Assistant Psychologist in a clinical setting and was also passionately interested in a clinical career. During her final year she greatly enjoyed a work psychology module so she switched her ambition to this slightly less competitive and more accessible area. She was also insightful and academically able but had to work hard to improve her writing to allow this ability to shine through. She graduated with a good degree and I interviewed her at the start of October as she was facing decisions about an unhappy internship and possibly taking an MSc place. The sense of crisis at this point influences the interview.

### **Amina**

Amina was interviewed in the November of her graduation year. She had just completed her first PGCE primary education teaching practice and was feeling successful and settled. Amina and I knew each other as I had been her personal tutor. Amina is the only interviewee in this study who did not take a placement year, unlike most of her cohort. As a woman from a South Asian ethnic minority, a home-based student with a semi-professional part-time job, no placement and a self-contained approach to study, she seemed to me to be amongst the least visible of undergraduates. Amina and I had different views about a sandwich placement year. Her view, expressed politely but with clarity and self-assurance, that this was not advantageous in her case. I admired her *savoir-faire* and felt that her view was challenging and interesting. Amina achieved a very good degree, was amongst the highest placed non-placement students and got a place to start immediately on a PGCE primary education course. She was from a non-traditional background and a lack of financial resources seems to have had an impact on her choices throughout.

### **Suzie**

Suzie was also a student whose final year project I supervised and she was also passionately committed to a career in clinical psychology. Suzie commuted from home and is from an African ethnic minority. I do not think that she had many financial resources behind her but it may be wrong to see her simply as a non-traditional urban student. I formed the

impression that she had more cultural capital to draw on than might be expected. Suzie found her highly successful placement year as an Honorary Assistant Psychologist in a clinical setting to be inspiring and a wake-up call in terms of how academically competitive her aim of clinical psychology would be. She worked very hard in her final year and achieved a good degree.

### **Toyah**

Toyah is the odd one out in these interviews in that she did not have an existing tutorial or supervisory relationship with me. We knew each other through working together on a filming project however and she responded to a general request for participants and I chose her as her circumstances (she has a disability, she also achieved lower grades than the other participants) meant that she might be able to offer a different experience and viewpoint. She had taken a successful undergraduate placement as an Honorary Assistant Psychologist in a clinical setting and was committed to a career as a Clinical Psychologist. Toyah was interviewed five months after she graduated at her home. She is from a white British background.

### **Nadia**

#### **Placement experience**

Nadia had much to say about her placement, an experience that was both highly significant for her and troubling.

*I had such a terrible placement experience I thought I don't want to go into clinical. ... It was about the supervisor ... it was so many times when I wanted to leave the placement. I stuck at it ... I'm an extremely conscientious person... and to have my supervisor... not like me was very, very, difficult for me. It just like felt very personally attacked ...I felt so self-conscious, I felt uneasy, I couldn't speak to her about the problems I was having and she was supposed to be the person I went to if I had any problems and she was a person I couldn't speak to. I just found it so... I found it so funny because she was a clinical psychologist and she was making me feel really incompetent at my job, making me feel...really worthless as a person. So, really everything down to very personal things like how I was dressing ... there's so much control and... it was so difficult for me, and that was my first real experience of work in the world, very traumatic... (289-311)*

*...reflecting back in hindsight ... I remember being ill, just not wanting to go in and just having days off because I just didn't want to see her ... and I'm thinking that's not me, I wanted to make such a good impression ... (327-40)*

Despite this dreadful experience Nadia had much to say that was positive about her reaction to the experience and especially in relation to her university grade.

*I don't think I would have got as high mark as I did having not gone through that experience. ...it really focused and drove me ... it was kind of proving myself and that I'm not stupid, I'm not incompetent, I can work. (366-9)*

Later on in the interview Nadia echoes the view, frequently expressed by graduates, that the placement was the most valuable learning experience of her university career.

*I think definitely my placement, without a shadow of a doubt, was one of the main things I learned a lot from and then the final year's been a massive learning curve ... it has opened up my eyes... (528-32)*

Nadia sees the placement as a pivotal moment in moving from studying a subject because she was good at it and enjoyed it, to seeing its practical application and perhaps seeing the whole subject and herself in it differently. It suggests that the placement is so transformative it may pre-figure and ease the graduate transition; Nadia may have already done what students without placements have to do in their first year of graduate employment.

*And I kind of just picked psychology because I got a very good grade in A level and I enjoyed it ...I think you do the degree and you enjoy the subject and you don't think that much of it. But then when I did my placement it sort of puts it all into practice and then coming back into my final year I learned a lot, just in terms of the modules I picked and really being able to like see how you would apply... how doing a psychology degree is so useful to wanting to go into clinical ... it was just really, really interesting and I really enjoyed learning about it and, yes, I think my final year ... and my placement year have definitely been the most influential... (539-50)*

*...what have I learned most from? [echoing the interviewer's question] my placement, without a shadow of a doubt ...has opened up my eyes... (528-32)*

*...just seeing how professionals work, how they are around each other ...just keep going back to placement, it really has taught me so much. (517-8)*

I wondered if Nadia was being ironic in her comment about “...has opened up my eyes... just seeing how professionals work, how they are around each other” as she had had such a poor experience and other placement students have also occasionally expressed surprise and disillusion at the petty immaturities and office politicking of graduate professionals in the past, but the context does not support such an interpretation.

### **Value of university education**

At the time of the interview, not long after graduation, Nadia was greatly enjoying work as a care assistant and articulated the classically liberal education views below about what she had to offer as a graduate, and by extension the value of her university education. She is also aware of having some vocational skills. Her suggestion that she has gained empathy and open-mindedness on her degree is worthy of comment. Skills or strategies for clinical practice are not taught to undergraduates and although the aim is to teach open-mindedness in terms of evidence and theory this is not done in terms of interacting with people. However I interpret her as claiming that she has gained some of the intellectual or epistemic virtues introduced in chapter one, which include open-mindedness, which Barnett (2009) suggests result from encounters with disciplinary knowledge. However her degree also included a placement year as an assistant clinical psychologist so Nadia may be referring to her degree in totality and not just to the exposure to disciplinary knowledge aspect.

*They (the other care assistants) don't understand sort of certain things ... talking to a patient for instance, it's simple things like oh... One patient, for instance, you know when she's very anxious and having flashbacks, and it seems like, ok, what can we do to distract you and just strategies and very CBT and, because I've done this in my degree, I'm coming at it in that perspective but, obviously, somebody who hasn't got a degree they won't know how, what strategies they need to employ ... to try and help them. I think having a degree really one of the main things is empathy and open-mindedness. I think it's one of the main things I've gained from just doing a degree. I think some people, it's a massive stereo-type to make ... who haven't done a degree ... they're very stuck in their ways ... and especially working in the mental health sector it's very difficult to hear people talking about a patient and it's oh, they're just making it up, ignore them... When you've actually understood and learned about the disorder and know how debilitating it is and the fact that, you know, it's not just they're playing up. (450-75)*

Nadia also found an opportunity to use her education in a therapeutic and personally developing way.

*... you know what, the fact that I did a dissertation based on that (her traumatic placement experience) and the fact that I got a first ... I completely feel I've come 180 degrees ... and I've taken something so negative and made it into a positive. (315-8)*

### **Work, freedom, becoming and the pressure of expectations**

Nadia made some quite profound comments on themes of work, freedom and becoming. She is definitely no longer a student and is enjoying the adult world of work, and feels that work and career will define her.



*I don't really feel defined yet... that I've really carved out anything for myself...I think your career definitely defines you. ...it's almost like, ok, it's time to step up and prove yourself and be the person that you say you want to be. (1085-8)*

*... I don't want to stay there forever because it is a health care assistant ... and I'm hoping to become a clinical psychologist, but just meeting people and feeling, like, an adult and, I don't know, I'm really, really enjoying it... (147-51)*

Nadia was very aware of the pressure of expectation on her, certainly as a woman and also as a member of her cultural community. This was something I chose not to pursue, feeling uncomfortable with this material and concerned not to represent a particular cultural view. This may have been a mistake and she may have valued an opportunity to talk through the issues she was facing, I felt immediately after the interview that I had avoided the issue and rather failed her.

She constructs her focusing on her career as selfish and both work and university appear as forms of freedom.

*If I was just left alone to just focus on my career... I would love, ideally, to focus on myself and on my career ... but ... you can't do that around your needs realistically, the culture you live in, you can't be giving 5, 6, 7 years to just go off and do what you want to do. (775-9)*

*I wish I could just give myself the next couple ... like 5, 6, 7 years just to focus on myself and my career and that and go travelling and just be selfish and just live my life before becoming a wife and a mother (789-92)*

*...you're so free at university, you make your own decisions, you don't have an authority, you don't have somebody telling you exactly what to do...*

Nadia hinted at an awareness of the possibility of defying this 'authority' and how it could be done. I perhaps should have given her the opportunity to follow this up. These issues led into her plans for the future and the frightening uncertainty and need to make profound decisions and face expectations from others about career and identity. It also showed her relationship with her mother (perhaps one embodiment of the 'authority' referred to above) in a supportive light and also the ambivalence (being both 'scared' and 'enjoying it') of uncertainty.

*I was so scared initially. ... because I was thinking I don't know what I want to do... I didn't like the uncertainty of it, I like smaller goals and goals I can ...reach ...but now I'm just enjoying not having it completely mapped out ....*

Nadia's fear led her to begin to apply for an MSc course as a panic measure to stay on at university and put off the decisions facing her. She did not go through with the application.

*I'm having to learn to become a little bit more chilled out and just let things be because my mum says to me ... just let that happen ...and in a couple of years' time you might not want to go down the career you wanted to at 22, and that's fine but just don't... I'm having to change that about me.*

She is also having to cope with expectations from everyone.

*...as a graduate it's the pressure from everybody else as well .... as soon as you leave it's like, ok, what are you going to do...? They'll want to know everything... your whole 10 year, 15 year life plan... and they just think well why did you do psychology ... I don't have all the answers yet and it's ok not to have all the answers.*

Nadia also had interesting things to say bearing on authenticity, relationships and inter-subjectivity. She is really enjoying work, which must have been a relief after her placement experience, and has moved on from the panic she felt when she finished her final exams.

*...so I started working and I absolutely love it ...and I no longer feel like a student ...I'm really looking forward to like my journey into like the world of working, finding a career, doing something that I enjoy and I've got my first pay cheque as well, brilliant. ...meeting people and feeling like an adult and ...I'm really, really enjoying it.*

Nadia was also very pleased to be earning some money and calls it a massive incentive.

*I've got my first pay cheque as well, brilliant. I'm actually making, like, a lot of money compared to ... hardly anything as a student. Yes, it really is a massive incentive ...people were saying to me, Nadia, you don't know the incentive of money. Money will drive you. ...and I've got my first pay cheque as well, brilliant.*

### **Clinical Psychology**

There is a risk that clinical psychology dominates undergraduate career aspirations and in 2014-15 over two-thirds of Aston University psychology students on placement were working as Honorary Assistant Clinical Psychologists. The widespread availability of these unpaid placements, together with the scale of competition for this career, creates a risk that students are misled and exploited. I was concerned that it was positioned as the best career for the best students and thus acts as a red rag to the able, committed, focused and successful. The placement year may be seen as a unique opportunity to short-cut the intense competition for graduate assistant posts and therefore offer a route to a clinical career. While it may be the case that becoming a graduate assistant is immensely competitive, clinical placement experience alone still leaves many hurdles to face and the reality is that only a small proportion of those taking a clinical placement will reach their career goal. Students may also see the psychology professions as the only truly valid outcome for a psychology degree and this exposes the poverty of students' careers thinking.

Staff want their students to be ambitious and to have opportunities, but perhaps we need wider models. Nadia's interview supported these concerns.

*... I remember the first year we had a careers talk and I think so many of us went to that ... it was an Aston graduate [who] came in to talk about it and he'd become a clinical psychologist and... very inspirational... I think that's when it started and I remember that was very, very early on in my degrees first year, definitely, and in talking to people, when you're talking to the first year student you're going ok, ok, and, to be fair, they do put you off in terms of how competitive it is. I think it's only when you come out, when you do your placement, yes, and you see people who are in that career ... and they're telling you, you know, we've done it, you can do it, and it's having those people telling you that, that really pushes you into what I'm doing. (843-8)*

*It definitely ... was put on a pedestal as ... this is one of the big jobs you can do... ...one of those jobs that it's so rewarding. ...it can grow into you that clinical is the best of the best and if you achieve that you really have made it. (866-71)*

*It almost is like clinical is the best deal because it can grow into you that clinical is the best of the best and if you achieve that you really have made it. (903-5)*

Although still very interested in clinical psychology as a career Nadia introduces some notes of flexibility and also talks of being influenced by friends.

*...people are saying to me try becoming a nurse, and I thought ... It's weird because you never think...and just somebody saying to me why don't you think about becoming a nurse (1003-4)*

Nadia also reflects on the difficulties in aiming for a clinical career and what may be required to achieve success, perhaps she is also reconciling her placement experience with her ambition.

*...do I really want to be around them (clinical psychologists), they don't seem to be that nice. But maybe you have to be really ruthless ...really determined and competitive and driven and all that ...you might not be such a nice person to be around but maybe you have to, to make it in the world... (943-50)*

### **Summary and discussion - Nadia**

Nadia was a pleasure to talk to, full of life, joyful, reflective and aware. She also had experience of IPA research and this may have helped her to be comfortable with the interview. She is concerned with the transition that she is negotiating, from an identity as an undergraduate to a more multi-faceted identity that she nonetheless feels will be dominated by her employment status. She hopes to make meaningful progress towards becoming a graduate professional in her chosen but intensely competitive field of clinical psychology. She looks both backward to her student life and forward to a new identity.

Although this is dominated by work, she has no illusions that she is a completely free agent and family and community expectations, husband and children are all mentioned. This pressure seems to be in part common to all graduates; graduation prompting an open season for questions of the 'and what are you going to do with your life?' variety, that is also in part gender and culture specific.

The dominant theme is 'placement experience'. This is such a powerful experience for Nadia, liberating, empowering and toxic all at once. It seems to be the most important aspect of her degree and has prompted painful reflection, ambition, a kind of academic exorcism and a developing sense of who she is and who she is becoming.

### **Louise**

Louise and I knew each other well as I had been her final year project supervisor. We had previously discussed her career aims, and this probably helped her to switch direction from clinical to occupational psychology. This was prompted by her enjoyment of the final year 'Psychology and Work' module and her awareness of the intense competition for clinical psychology. Although the existing supervisory relationship was thought likely to help the interview, it may have overshadowed it. I was aware of the influence that I had and felt a sense of responsibility to help Louise succeed. Her relationship with me may have led her to feel obliged to me as my support and good opinion were important to her future. It is unlikely that she felt entirely free to speak her mind about the university experience. For the first half of the interview, carried out in her parents' kitchen, I felt it to be lacking in depth and likely to be short. However from line 395 on it seemed to take on a new life and become more personal and meaningful before declining into tutorial support.

### **Passivity – things 'materialise'**

Initially I thought that Louise's repeated use of the word *materialise* was a clue to a passive approach but as the interview progressed it became clear that although Louise had some passive expectations and perhaps felt constrained to be passive in relation to me, her use of the word is largely a verbal habit. Louise seemed to expect a career to simply happen to her, for it to *materialise*, but she was also aware that she had to work at it. Both expectations seemed to co-exist, perhaps at differing emotional and rational levels.

*I only want to be there for a year so for things to materialise I'd need to be there for more than a year (55-57)*

Later in the interview however she uses the word in more active contexts, firstly she admires business students who have the drive to make things happen or materialise.

*...but I think what strikes me with people when I talk to a business student and my perception of them is that straightaway they've got the drive, they'll make whatever they want to materialise, materialise like if they've got enough behind it. (702-705)*

And here she reveals that she sees herself as having that power to make things happen, so she is not so passive after all.

*I was going to be an entrepreneur and ... work part-time in the NHS and part-time private, that's just the type of person I am, like, if I make a decision I'll stick to it and I'll push and push until it materialises. (882-886)*

Earlier in the interview Louise contrasts searching for a placement with searching for a graduate job.

*I think with [the] placement I had, I ...had a lot more support because it was almost like Aston University had instigated that placement. .... so you're coaxed into it, there was a build up to it and so it was almost like I was guaranteed to get that placement..... [now talking about searching for a graduate career] I did visit the careers service a fair few times but it was almost like, it was you know, it was down to me to find a job. (90-97)*

The phrase *it was almost like...it was down to me to find a job* expresses surprise and implies that she expected the university careers service to have progression to a graduate career laid on for her. This is not the first time that I have heard such sentiments, most recently in 2015 at a two-week university 'boot camp' for unemployed graduates. The idea seems initially bizarre but in other contexts it might not be so unexpected. Schools smooth the paths of pupils to university to the extent that pupils are *coaxed* (a word Louise uses in the passage above) into applying to particular universities according to expected A level grades. It is possible that close university-employer links exist and are known to Louise in business or through her brother, in engineering.

### **Contacts, networking and who you know**

It is not surprising in this context therefore that Louise comments on the importance of contacts and who you know.

*... what I realise is that it's who you know because, like, Aston Uni are approaching this clinical psychologist she was like definitely 'come work for me'. Went and worked with her and then I got an interview for another clinical job through her. So it wasn't just because I'd got my Bachelors, I'd done quite well, things like that. It was actually... she was like oh I've heard about (personal contact) yes and it was an*

*internal vacancy and because I was working [as] an honorary assistant with her, I was an internal member of staff so I could go for it and... but it's all these little loopholes like you can jump straight through because you've got someone behind you that's got a reputation, you know their name, they know you. (915-925)*

And again when talking about which university to attend for her MSc. She seems to equate employability to networking opportunities.

*So ...has it got the reputation, like what networking opportunities am I getting? And then that's where the employability factor comes in so like not only have I graduated now and how employable am I now, but then if I do go back to Uni how employable will I be in a year's time? (561-565)*

Despite expectations of jobs being found for her she is also aware that she has to work at it but is disappointed with the level of support she received.

*Yes, which ultimately it is [my responsibility] ..... I just didn't feel like I was monitored that much and that's what I kind of needed initially, just like coax me into it and have a go. (99-102)*

The intense competition for graduate positions as Assistant Psychologists is actually reversed where placements are concerned. Here the positions are unpaid and employers compete to find a student and a number of employers are disappointed each year. It is not surprising therefore that Louise feels a difference between the two situations.

### **Disappointment and social comparison**

A sense of disappointment, that the university has failed her and her friends is detectable here and elsewhere.

*Yes, I've stayed in touch with a handful of people to see what they're up to, the majority of them haven't found employment from what I can gain. (238-239)*

Louise evaluates higher education against work experience on several occasions, the first here when reflecting on how she might advise someone younger.

*So, if someone said to me should I go to college after high school, I'd be like yes..... Now with Uni I'd say definitely go but I wouldn't be able to pick out specific bits so this is why .... I would definitely recommend a course that involves a placement... But what I would recognise now is that the actual work experience is equally as important..... Yes, so I think in 10 years' time what I probably will suggest is.... If you can go to Uni then by all means go but also make sure you ...keep in hand the work experience. (332-351)*

A few lines later she comments that she needs a longer perspective to be more detached and objective and suggests that that her advice might change.

*So, I think what I've said now and what I'd say in 10 years' time may actually (...) be different... (382-384)*

Louise compares herself with a non-graduate friend, uses the term 'invest' for the second time (also used in lines 316 and 432) and hardens her stance to the extent that she might advise not going to university.

*...my friend ... she dropped out of college and has worked full time ... since then and she's in a very good position now and she's getting promotion after promotion and she's doing really well and in comparison to me, whereas I've been at Uni and the jobs that I've just got into I'm earning a lot less. Despite having the qualification behind me [and] investing time and money I'm not really matching her and in my eyes I thought ok I've got my degree now, ... I thought that I would be on the same level as her because my qualifications ... and I think that's what I initially struggled with accepting that I still do need to work my way ... So, that's one thing at the moment it's probably telling me to say that in 10 years I'd suggest not doing a degree because, for me, it hasn't helped me as much as I thought it would. (396-411)*

In summary a few lines later responding to the question '... so as a credential then it hasn't put you to a level which was only accessible with a degree'...? She also refers to the anxiety and insecurity she feels at this point.

*So, it ... has made me question its value. But, maybe that's just my outlook on things being a bit insecure. (416-418)*

A few lines on she articulates her disappointment that despite high expectations nothing has 'materialised'.

*... I was kind of disappointed... because... I had such an expectation that wasn't fulfilled. ...and then I decided well maybe I should go back to Uni then because nothing materialised to the extent that I thought it would ... (446-452)*

And.

*Yes, it makes me question ... did I, like, go to the right Uni, did I opt for the right subjects, should I not have done a placement after all and it just makes me question everything. (458-461)*

She then rationalises that her degree has at least opened some opportunities.

*... I wouldn't be able to do a Masters without the degree that I've got so it's already taken me further. If I sit down and be a bit more rational ... then I know that I've done the right thing and it is going to put me into a career path that I'm going to enjoy and ...it's already helping me. (468-474)*

I am drawn into defending the benefits of university and ask about her personal development relative to her friend. I am cueing Louise to consider wider liberal education

benefits to university education and she partially picks this up but perhaps 'success' and 'training' in a career is more tangible perhaps because it's vocational or paid or is explicitly attached to a specific career. I imagine that Louise and her friend have exchanged views on this and that a degree of rivalry exists.

*Yes, well, she would say ... she's got loads of professional development ... But ... I think I'm getting a lot but then she's not really experienced what I've experienced so you can't make a direct comparison..... So, in my eyes, she hasn't got anywhere near the personal development as what I've got, but then she's said the complete opposite..... in my eyes what I've got is fantastic but in her eyes what she's got is fantastic and they're very different. (481-500)*

So Louise is confident that she has got something 'fantastic' in personal development but so, in a different professional development way has her friend at work. The value of Louise's investment, both in fees and lost salary, is again in the spotlight, along with the lack of experience, which her friend has plenty of. A few lines on and Louise again questions if she has done the right thing and has to sit down and accept, perhaps with regret, that she 'has done what she has done'.

*... it's so uncertain and it's so unpredictable that is just makes you question like what you've invested in ... and it's only until I take a step back and I sit down and I'm like, no, I've done what I've done let's just use it. (516-520).*

The conclusion seems increasingly clear, that at this point university looks to have been a bad investment, which makes the decision to leave an internship and invest further in education for an MSc an interesting decision, although this is not exposed in the interview. Louise's discomfort, including in social comparison terms, is extended when she brings her brother's career into the discussion.

*... my brother... he graduated just before I started, he went straight into employment, job after job after job and he's as successful as he probably thinks he's going to be in his career ... (588-592)*

This extract above of apparently effortless and seamless career progress reinforces Louise's expectation that openings should have 'materialised' but also shows that university education has a value for some. It also crystalizes quite clearly what Louise thinks that University is for. It is to give access to graduate level careers. This section ends with Louise noting in passing that lack of immediate success may not be a permanent barrier. An entrepreneurial family member.

*...had a mixed background and didn't quite find that area of work until probably she was about 30 but then... set up her own company. (648-650)*



This links to the next theme to emerge, Louise's ambition.

### **Ambition**

Louise jokes about her ambition.

*I think I'd go back to Uni, do my Masters... get my chartered with my occupational psychology ...get some experience behind me, set up my own company, excel, take over the world... that kind of stuff... (607-611)*

But there is serious intent behind this.

*...I only said the other day that I don't think I'm going to be happy until I'm my own boss and ... speaking to my aunt, who owns her own company, we're very much on the same wavelength and everyone says that ... very similar in mind-set ... So, yes, I do think that, hopefully, one day that will materialise. (615-625)*

The link to her aunt is interesting and includes a similar period of uncertainty (lines 648-650 above). Louise had not mentioned entrepreneurship before, although she goes on to do so later (883), and when asked about this she said that the route into being an entrepreneur was not appropriate for a psychology student, but more suitable for business students.

*No, it's not something that I considered... much as I'd love to have my own company... I didn't really have the feeling that doing psychology would give me a good enough background to become an entrepreneur ... psychology, you know, you pick your field and you're specialist in it. ...So I didn't really see studying psychology had something that would materialise into, you know, a multi-million pound company or anything like that. ... So, no it was never anything that I'd considered. (667-682)*

Later Louise makes it clear, in a quote already included above, that 'drive' is what is needed, what she admires, and what she does not yet feel that she has sufficiently. There is a real contrast here between the passivity implied earlier as going with a professional career in which the student is coaxed into a role, and the activity implied in her different use of 'materialise' needed to be ambitious as an entrepreneur.

*...what strikes me ... when I talk to a business student ... is that straightaway they've got the drive, they'll make whatever they want to materialise, materialise ...I know they'll achieve it regardless whereas psychology ....you question it so much that it'll probably never materialise ... it dampens your drive and your ambition... (702-713)*

Ambition is also apparent when Louise talks about her internship and contrasts a full HR recruitment role with a more administrative role and it becomes clear that her use of passive language is not a guide to how she is but to what she expected to happen. She is

ambitious here explicitly to apply psychology, and also implicitly to be creative, decision making and in charge. To be directing rather than just operating.

*Whereas with HR it's very much like right this is our policy, this is the disciplinary procedure and this is what needs to be done and you just do what you've got to do. ...There's not much psychology thinking, you know there's loads of thinking behind it...*

(Interviewer) But you don't need to do it, somebody else already does it

*Yes, that's it, yes. The psychological aspect isn't available to me. (804-816)*

Louise comments that her internship company, offers 'fantastic progression' (818) to an MBA and leadership roles, but she returns to the theme of expecting more applied psychology and perhaps being in the wrong job, although it is never clear quite how this is so.

*... the relationship between the work that I'm doing now in psychology, I thought it was going to be a lot more than it is ... So maybe, like, I'm just not in the right position. (839-843)*

### **Anxiety**

Another theme that emerges at several points is anxiety, not surprisingly as the post-graduation period is full of uncertainty. It also became clear later in the interview that Louise was troubled by uncertainty about whether to leave her internship and take an MSc. At this point term had begun but an MSc place was available, a place that she later took up. Here Louise talks about her feeling immediately after her BSc examinations.

*...a week ago I was so stressed, like thank God it's ended, so it was a mixture, fifty/fifty. On one hand I was over the moon and then when I sat down and thought about it I thought well what am I going to do now ... reality kicks in I'm like I might actually have to get a job and it's just that uncertainty and all these negative emotions (217-222)*

Anxiety can also be inferred from her talk about loss and her uncertainty about identity, conceived of as primarily an occupational identity.

*... I think the reason I feel a different person is because I don't know what person I am. Like, I know I'm different but like why am I different and to what extent, there are still things I need to discover ... being at work and getting into a role and enjoying it will, hopefully, develop who I am and what I'm going to be in like, in a business. But I don't think I've experienced a long enough period of work to establish, like, who I am in that situation. I know who I am as a student and I know what I'm capable of like that, but no, at the moment... I'm in limbo, it's like trying to put some roots down... I haven't quite done that ... (255-265)*

Louise compares the temporary nature of a placement with the yawning permanence of a graduate career, and connects her thoughts about returning for an MSc. She also implies that she is not enjoying her job.

*I held on to ... on placement; [the] comfort [of] knowing that I was going back to Uni so, yes, I was 9 to 5 and there was days that I didn't like it, there was days that I loved it, but I always hung onto the fact that ... it's not for evermore ... I had that faith ... of going back to Uni, which is why now when I'm at work and I'm having a bad day, like, ...I can't see .... which may be why I'm considering doing a Masters ... something that I know I'll enjoy and it's become a light at the end of the tunnel. (274-288)*

Louise's anxiety leads her to reflect on and question *everything* that bears on her career (lines 458-461 above). Further on she returns to questioning the value of her university education relative to the importance of experience. As noted above in relation to the theme of social comparison, Louise uses the term 'invested in' and talks of 'uncertain' and 'unpredictable' consequences, language reflecting a return on investment approach, suggesting again that she expected her degree to entitle her to apply to a higher grade of job and that there would be few barriers to entry. These credential based expectations run against the careers advice that is offered, suggesting that the careers advice is not explicit enough or that Louise's expectations are deeply rooted, or perhaps that a simplistic credential model of graduate entitlement is promoted in the admissions process. Her model is analogous to military recruitment where entry is at private soldier or at commissioned officer level. Graduation, she seems to think, entitles the credential holder to enter at the higher rank. A better model might be police recruitment. Graduates are especially welcomed but compete at the single entry point with everyone else for the same rank. A successful graduate entrant can expect accelerated promotion, but graduate status offers added value only, it does not compensate for lack of the 'right stuff'.

*...it feels like I'm a step behind although I've got a degree which in theory might, really should, put me, ...ahead of the game, I'm not. ... it's predominantly ...experience that they've got. ...maybe I shouldn't have gone to Uni then, maybe I should have just got some proper experience .... (509-515)*

Later on she notes disconsolately that in engineering, her brother's career, '*they'll snap you up*' (867). Another element here is her discomfort with the uncertainty of her position, which reflects both her pressing need to make a decision about whether to continue her internship or return to university to take an MSc course in occupational psychology, and the existential reality of being a recent graduate in need of a direction.

*...as scary as it is being away from Uni, the realisation is there's so much out there and it's not about it all caving in on me and being impossible. (986-988)*

### **Staying in psychology**

Another theme that emerges in the interview is seeking an explicit use of psychology. Louise makes it clear early on that this is what she is committed to. As about 80% of psychology graduates do not have specialist careers in the discipline, and these opportunities are strongly competed for, this requirement raises the bar. Strictly Human Resources Management (HRM, or HR) is not professional psychology, only those with Chartered Occupational Psychology status could make such a claim. Louise is struggling to find the HR-psychology connection.

*...I'm struggling to ... find the application in psychology to it and I think that's what I'm missing the most ....I know there's a lot of people that do a degree and don't necessarily find a job that is related to their degree, but I've always said to myself, from day one, that I want to stick in psychology... the relationship between HR and psychology isn't as strong as I thought it was being compared to other areas... (66-76)*

The interview returns to this topic later. Louise acknowledges that

*you're doing like psychological tests and ... you're structuring questions so that you get certain responses ... You're having to actually think from day one when you're recruiting, like what questions are you going to ask, like what is the response an ideal candidate would give us, and you're having to put psychology into it... (795-801)*

She goes on, as already noted under 'ambition', to connect what she wants to do in psychology with leadership and notes that she is only operating procedurally, not leading or creating policy. A key insight then is that the 'psychological aspect' necessarily involves policy direction or leadership for Louise. It seems that for her that being a leader or a business person necessarily involves psychology but that working in HR does not. This is not an approach to defining psychology that is likely to have been offered in her degree, except in her work psychology module, but her reasoning and personal awareness is impressive.

*... with HR it's very much like 'right this is our policy, this is the disciplinary procedure and this is what needs to be done' and you just do what you've got to do. (786-806)*

*The psychological aspect isn't available to me. ...a leadership programme ... to do an MBA, ... it's at that stage that I would be involved in psychology and leadership ... (816-820)*

*so, the relationship between the work that I'm doing now in psychology, I thought it was going to be a lot more than it is ... So maybe I'm just not in the right position. (839-843)*

### **Clinical psychology**

Louise reflects on her employability preparation and her early focus on clinical psychology.

*... at university ... preparation for certain areas were really good, but, where I went wrong is during those talks I opted for the clinical ones when in hindsight I should have gone for the occupational ones. Like, realising where I really want to be it's only happened since graduating. (120 – 163)*

In talking about what she has to offer an employer her preparation is evident in her awareness.

*I think my analytical skills are the best ... that's something I feel confident in and knowing how to apply them, ... from past work experience ... through Uni I'd say my teamwork skills... through placement I've worked with so many people, different professionals that really helps me work in a team... Throughout Uni I was involved in projects and course work that meant working with other colleagues so I'll say teamwork skills is really good... (179-187)*

Despite this Louise is aware how much she lacked knowledge about careers and how much her current direction has been influenced by unplanned events.

*...I was going to go for clinical, do my placement, came back, wanted to do clinical modules and I would have done clinical modules, wouldn't have touched 'psychology and work' wouldn't have even considered occupational psychology. But then, because I didn't get ... [her first choices of option modules] that I wanted that had to [take] 'psychology and work' and I'm so glad I did because I didn't even know that module existed. ... I hadn't even heard of chartership, I hadn't even heard of occupational psychology and it was all about clinical... I knew so many people that did that Psychology and work module that now want to do occupational ... (726-740)*

### **Summary and discussion - Louise**

The interview with Louise is dominated by her sense of disappointment at not being 'snapped up' by an employer, ideally for an Assistant Clinical Psychology post, as she was for her placement. There is a real sense of anguish that she has been betrayed by a system that she thought would deliver her chosen graduate career automatically. That it has not done so is a real shock to her that undermines her assumptions about an aspirational world that she thought that she had achieved access to. It also causes her to re-assess the choices she has made and, less explicitly in the interview, to re-examine herself. The interview took place at a moment of crisis for her as she faced a decision and I felt myself to be welcomed as a resource to help her but also to be slightly accused as a representative of a system that had

seemingly promised so much but failed to deliver. A degree of bitterness was not far below the surface. She had seen the promised land but been rejected. It was as if the university world had made her glib promises and left her spurned and confused.

## **Amina**

Amina was interviewed for the first time in the November of her graduation year. She had just completed her first teaching practice as part of her PGCE in primary education.

### **View of university education**

The interview begins with Amina responding to a question about her decision not to take a placement year. Amina's response is reasoned, or perhaps rationalised, and with the idea of saving a year, she hints both at an instrumental view of university education as a means to obtain a credential and a career, and at constrained financial resources.

*I think it was the right choice for me because I knew what I wanted to do and I thought if I take a placement year, it's not going to advantage me in any way because my chosen career is teaching. So if I was to take a placement year that would be based around psychology and that would be irrelevant. So instead of using one year as a placement year, I thought I'd rather save that year and just finish my degree quicker and then I can use that one year to do my PGCE... (17-23)*

She goes on to say that she is doing well which emphasises that she has made the right decisions.

*I got the best mark that you can get on the first [teaching practice] placement, so I was really, really pleased. (35-6)*

Amina is very proud of becoming a graduate.

*... just being a graduate in itself, it just gives you a boost of confidence. It really, you know, increases your self-esteem, it makes you feel worthwhile, it makes you feel as if you've done something with yourself and, you know, you haven't just, you know, wasted your life doing nothing. ....you've got that qualification. So, you know, nobody can take that away from you (493 – 501)*

University is important but, personal achievement and satisfaction apart, by reason of the qualification enabling her to have the career she wants.

*I think my degree has been really, really important because, obviously, I want to be a primary school teacher and you can't really go down that route without having a degree and so the PGCE that I'm doing now, I wouldn't have been able to do that without my degree. (70-4)*

When pressed further, Amina struggles to identify other sources of value in her degree. I may have been falling into the trap identified by Brennan, Kogan and Teichler (1996) of seeking justification of the value of university studies, but the fact remains that Amina is not able to articulate the liberal education points that Nadia offers unprompted and this quotation ends with long pause at line 99.

*I think, maybe, just being a student at Aston Uni has helped me to get onto my PGCE course because it's such a good University. PGCE courses they... look at what University you've come from ...I think modules in my degree, I think they helped me because we do a bit of educational psychology which is very useful for, you know, being a primary school teacher. ...I'm just trying to think if there's anything else (pause....) I don't think there is, really. (86-99)*

Later in the interview Amina reinforces the sense that for her university is not a source of enjoyment, not a pleasurable time of self-discovery or indulgence but a hardship to be endured, a necessary journey.

*....completing that degree, just makes you feel that you're one step closer to a career. So, in that sense, it was good and you do feel relieved once you have got your degree. I didn't feel confused because I knew what I wanted to do... and I knew where I was heading. ...I was just thinking, "Oh no, one more year of education to get through before I can actually..." [get a job] (464)*

Taking a more interpretative stance, I think that Amina sees herself very much as the author of her own success, the credit belongs to her, there is little sense in which she sees herself as the product of the university. I think that she perhaps sees the university as self-referential, not as particularly student focused, as an institution with its own agenda to be treated and engaged with on her own terms, with caution. Not as the empowering, student embracing place I might like it to be or try to position it as. This is quite a distinctive view, and certainly not unrealistic. It is also perhaps an outsider's view and Amina is an outsider for a number of reasons as already discussed. This also links to her independence, her taking what she finds on her own terms, her voluntary work and her use of the university careers service are examples. In many ways she is a model student but she is not perhaps the ideal student.

Amina's independence allows her to be quite critical and evaluative of the university and what it offers. She is critical of careers support as quite reactive.

*... if you want advice you just sign up and you kind of go. But I think they should have, like, a compulsory session... (353-5)*

So you can get good things out of the service if you go and if you know the right questions to ask. But she argues that it should be more proactive and build careers activities into the

academic programme. Earlier she admits that she knew of the Personal and Professional Development (PPD) programme in the second year but she did not engage with this as it was not compulsory. Amina also echoes Louise's view in implying that university should be about preparation for professional life.

*But it [university education generally] doesn't really prepare you much in terms of your communication skills, how to be on that professional level ...I am aware that there was a module or something called professional development or something but I don't think I did that... that wasn't compulsory, that's why. (125-30)*

She goes on to ask for what was offered in PPD but that she dismissed as only for placement students. She notes that students tend to focus only on getting their degree and reflects on the tension between meeting the assessed academic demands of the course while also holding on to longer term aims, issues that also emerge in the literature review in chapter two and are discussed further in chapter eight.

*It wouldn't have been much use for me because I didn't do a placement year. But maybe if the University introduced something which focuses on how to get your C.V. noticeable, you know, what factors to...what things to put in your personal statement, what to look for when you're looking for jobs, how to present yourself, just.. all different aspects of professionalism. I think, maybe, that would help with being more employable. But then again, I can see if from the University's point of view, you know, you're here to get your degree and as long as, you know, you pass the exam and you get your mark, then I suppose it's down to you, really. (133-142)*

*...when you're at University, you just tend to focus on getting through you degree, you can't really think about being employed until maybe you're in your final year (152-5)*

Later in the interview Amina echoes Louise in asking for more careers provision in the practicalities of how to go about it rather than in finding a direction.

*...it's quite difficult deciding what you want to do as a career in itself, but once you've decided, I think that you should have more guidance from the University as to how to go about it. (345-8)*

### **Focus, planning and determination, enterprise and independence**

There is evidence of Amina's focus, planning and determination over a long period. University has not necessarily been a transformative experience for her, it has enabled her to do what she had planned to do by giving her the necessary credential. Possibly this is a retrospective construction, although this does not seem very likely, but it explains the credentialist approach to higher education that emerges above and in the theme on professional competencies and employability below.



*When I left college, I had a gap year when I was trying to decide what I wanted to do at Uni, so I got that job [her long-term part-time job with a mobile phone company] in my gap year and I worked throughout my degree for three years as well. So I was there four years in total. (224-227)*

Amina goes on to explain the effort that working throughout her degree involved, including working evenings and weekends and having to book holidays to allow her to sit exams and work on her dissertation. She also took on voluntary work and is proud that she could manage all three activities.

*I've had to, [manage her time professionally] I did voluntary work as well during my final year. So literally, final year, I had no time to myself. It was quite hectic but ...I managed my degree, having a job and doing the voluntary work, which was quite a lot because some of my friends could just about cope with having their degree. (240-4)*

The extra voluntary work she took on, aimed at staff rather than students, demonstrates her enterprise and independence.

*Oh, it was a bit strange really. ... so it was asking for staff volunteers who might want to just give up a bit of their extra time to help children with their reading. And then...there was an email address, so I emailed the person asking for more information and they said it was actually aimed at Aston University staff but you can do it as well. It's open to anybody... (305-15)*

## **Money**

A possible source of Amina's focus and planning may be money, a concern to avoid debt and to achieve an income. This is not explicitly discussed, and I know little of Amina's circumstances but it becomes apparent in places; the discussion of her difficulty in continuing to work during her final year (lines 229-237 and 240-244), the sense of struggle in undertaking her PGCE and the lack of financial support.

*I should have my job as a primary school teacher ... and then... this year of suffering will pay off then. ... And also it's...due to Government cuts on funding, the PGCE course up until now has been receiving a bursary of £4,000 and it's this year that they've decided to cut it.*

So you've not got anything this year?

*No. ... It's really a bad time... (255-65)*

Amina also mentions that a benefit of doing voluntary work was that her CRB check was paid for.

*A lot of schools are not willing to pay for a CRB check ... if you're only there for a short amount of time. But then, this organisation, they paid for my CRB check. (321-3)*

Amina uses the terms 'struggle' and 'this year of suffering' referring to working in her final year and to the financial strain of her unfunded PGCE. Both draw attention to the financial aspect of higher education and the idea of investing in education with the struggle leading to a pay-off.

*It is... quite a struggle... I would probably say that's the only downside to this year... I had my grant for doing my degree but then I had my income as well like my job. But it's the first time, really, I've not had an income this year, so it does feel really strange. But then, I have to kind of just put up with it because I know that, next September, I should have my job as a primary school teacher and then, you know, this year of suffering will pay off then. (292-5)*

She goes on to explain her choice of voluntary work, and it may be that with her part-time job and her voluntary work taken together she has something equivalent to a placement year in work experience with sustained commitment and responsibility in both her voluntary and paid work.

*I needed something that's more specific to teaching when I applied for my PGCE course because my degree's not really that specific. So I needed some kind of voluntary work or, you know, to show some other commitment as to why I wanted to be a teacher. So instead of taking a one-year placement year in my degree, which wouldn't have been relevant to teaching, I just went straight on to third year and then did a bit of extra voluntary work, which is what helped me to get on. (295-9)*

Amina could have taken an educational placement as a teaching assistant. I think that Amina would have been aware of the option, but it is not discussed here. Such placements are rarely paid and I imagine that this would have been a factor in her not taking a placement.

### **Professional competencies and employability**

Amina explains in detail that her professional attitude, competencies and employability were developed at work rather than at university. She shows that she knows about skills and competencies and can be reflective. Her view is that university education offers little preparation for employment and reinforces a view of it as a hurdle to be overcome in achieving a credential. Being and becoming an adult in professional employment is about work practice.

*University it's pretty much independent study... But it doesn't really prepare you much in terms of your communication skills, how to be on that professional level (123-7)*

*Personally I think I've picked up more professional skills from the job that I had during my degree, rather than the degree itself. Because in the degree, you tend to come to lectures, you socialise with your friends, there's not much done on a professional level and everything's all independent. I would probably say in terms of, say for the [teaching practice] placement that I'm on now, I'd probably say that my previous job has helped me more on a professional level than my degree. The reason why I'm saying that is because my job was dealing with customers, it was retail, but it was focused on communication, customer experience, you had to focus, you had to listen carefully, take things on board, work in challenging situations, you had to work under pressure. So, I'm not saying that I didn't have any pressure in my degree ... a different kind of pressure, it's more of a people kind...it's more of a pressure you have to, kind of, think about things on your feet and do things really quickly. Whereas, with Uni and your degree, it's more like.. OK, course work pressure, exam pressure, which builds up over time. (180-97)*

*So I would probably say that my job helped me more in terms of helping me with my communication and being confident, just being a confident speaker to people that you don't know because, say, as a primary school teacher, I will come across parents. So, in my job, I came across aggressive customers, I will come across aggressive parents. So, then I can see a correlation as to why that's happening but I wouldn't have really experienced that in my degree. So I wouldn't know how to deal with those kind of situations. (199-212)*

From her point-of-view university is credential focused, and it may even infantilise mature young adults such as herself who are already being professional at work and have had, as she says below, the reputation of a company in their hands.

*...you have to be professional at all times because, as they would say, that the reputation of the company is in the hands of each individual. So we had to be professional at all times. (216-218)*

Amina, like Suzie, is both mature and aware of her own maturity and this emerges in comparisons she makes with friends, another example, like Louise, of social comparison.

*I managed my degree, having a job and doing the voluntary work, which was quite a lot because some of my friends could just about cope with having their degree. (240-4)*

*... friends who have, you know, finished their degrees... feel confused because they don't know what they're doing next ... have got ...retail jobs which you don't even need a degree to get. ...they're finding it really difficult but, you know, I could have been in that same situation. But I was more focused and I knew what I wanted to do and I did everything that I could to make sure that I got onto it. (473-81)*

The fact that she had a gap year before coming to university (224-227), effectively a pre-university placement year, may have contributed to her maturity, self-possession and assurance.

Amina sees her work as a source of professional development and work-related skills but does not find it intellectually demanding. She refers to gaining knowledge and skills at University but she may have been trying to justify university education for my benefit, and it is perhaps damned with faint praise.

*I think with the mobile phone company, like, I would have developed all those things that we talked about that I have developed on a professional level. But ...it's not been intellectually demanding, so, in terms of... learning and knowledge... that's obviously one thing that job would have been lacking. So I think, in terms of like social development, maybe I could have... enhanced my communication, social skills, these other skills, confidence and so on. But I wouldn't have gained the knowledge and the skills that I have from my degree. So, for example, all the things that I've learnt on my degree, but also research skills which I've learnt from doing my dissertation in my final year... (576-87)*

She argues that a degree indicates that she can cope with intellectual challenges and develops time management, but this seems still unconvincing as a rationale for higher education beyond obtaining a credential.

*I think it does contribute towards employability because, for example, if I was just applying for just any job and if I had just been working at the mobile Phone company and I still had, you know, had all these social skills and everything, that's fine if that's what the company was looking for. However if they knew that I had a degree and I was working at the mobile phone company, they would know that I'm able to cope with intellectual challenges. So I would definitely say the research skills and the knowledge that you have, that you learn on an undergraduate course, that does make you more employable because it shows that you can cope with pressure. You know, a lot of companies know the challenges that students face at University with assignments, meeting deadlines, being organised, carrying out a dissertation. (591-602).*

Amina does endorse the process of learning and begins to take a more liberal view, but while she acknowledges the development of implicit skills and knowledge, it is still framed as skills and knowledge rather than more metaphysically as qualities or values.

*I would probably say just the whole process of learning at University is just a valuable experience in itself because you learn so much and you learn things on a daily basis that you don't realise at the time. And then, even after you've left University, you still remember some things that you've learnt at Uni, so I'd probably say the process of learning and knowledge is probably the most valuable. (538-44)*

Amina also agrees that university has influenced her personal development.

*It's been intellectually demanding, especially final year. So it has made me more...what's the right word...it's helped me become an adult ... So, definitely, you kind of see that transition from, you know, being a student to...by the end of you*

*degree, you're an adult and, you know, you're kind of out there and you take responsibility for everything. (563-8)*

Amina also notes that not wanting a professional psychology career may exclude you. This is in the context of the careers service but she implies that she feels marginalised.

*I am aware that there was some seminars about careers and you know if you want to go into certain sections of psychology, but then what if you're doing the psychology degree but you don't actually want to go into psychology, then that kind of excludes you. (376-80)*

### **Summary and discussion - Amina**

Amina is like the other participants in articulating the importance of work experience in developing professional skills and competencies and in seeing the central function of undergraduate education as being to prepare students for professional life. She is unlike them in that her work experience took place outside a placement year and was semi-professional, a sort of half-way house between a placement year and a student job. This may be something that is unique to mobile phone sales where the product and the target market may require young staff with technical and interpersonal skills and sales competence so that younger staff have more responsibility than is usual in a retail job. Amina is also different in being focused on a specific career throughout her degree. Amina's experience places student part-time work as a source of learning and development, to the extent that it seems more important than university. This links to the experience of the other interviewees who found their placement year work experience to be powerful and transformative. It suggests that psychology programmes might usefully consider using their students' work experience as an explicit source of learning as advocated by Wrennall and Forbes (2002) and applied in a Business module (Butler and Reddy, 2010).

There may be an underlying factor for Amina, lack of money. Amina does not seem to have the resources behind her to allow her to dawdle and to indulge in traditional student life. She is a non-traditional student in a number of respects and challenges the student stereotype. She is perhaps a vocational student on a non-vocational course. I think that she finds it difficult to trust her own sense of what her education should be about but she challenges the traditional stereotype of what it means to be a student and the traditional stereotype of what undergraduate education is for. She is planned, organised, purposeful, poor and very hard working and expects of herself adult standards of effort and standing on her own two feet. All the participants are heroic figures to me negotiating epic transitional journeys, but none is more heroic than Amina. She is like other participants in wanting a

more vocational education but also enjoys the smorgasbord of choice of the traditional university, rejecting what she is told is good for her but selecting and benefitting from opportunities that were not necessarily aimed at her.

## Suzie

Suzie was interviewed two weeks before her graduation in 2011 and was thus a graduand and in the first flush of the transition out of student life. I got to know her through supervising her final year project and I was delighted that she volunteered and I felt that my existing relationship would facilitate a deeper exploration of the graduate transition. Like other participants Suzie was passionately - an overused term but justified with Suzie I think - committed to a career in clinical psychology. The depth of her passion and commitment becomes apparent in the interview, along with her rigorous honesty, clarity and realism. Academically Suzie did well, not quite as well as three others in the group, but well enough to assure that she was taken seriously. I think that there were things in her background to draw on that distinguished and may have inspired her. Suzie found her placement year as an Honorary Assistant Psychologist in a clinical setting to be galvanizing and it showed her what she wanted to do, what she could do and what she needed to do to get there. She worked very hard in her final year and in exit velocity was doing better and better after an undistinguished start to her degree.

### Work / employment focus

This is present in the first things Suzie says on being asked how does it feel to be a graduand.

*To a certain extent it doesn't feel any different but it's slightly depressing at the same time because I work part-time at a supermarket and to think I'm there and yet I know my grades now and I'm graduating in about two weeks' time. It's depressing to think, although I'm different and I've got these results now, technically I can really start looking, I haven't moved anywhere... I'm still with people who haven't really gone to university .... (14-19)*

This theme persists and interweaves with other themes, for example identity.

*I don't really know what to call myself and you're just supposed to go out there and be in full time employment (45-47)*

And lines 54 and 55 below suggest that employment status is a key focus for her sense of who she thinks she is;

*... I gave myself a personal deadline, I don't want to be at the supermarket after September. (54-55)*

Later I broaden the interview, but the response comes back to work.

What about other things that you might consider, things like partners, families, money, these kind of issues. Do they figure on the horizon...?

*I'm laughing because my life is going to be so sad. I am willing to move to get a job, I'm willing to do what it takes.*

If there was a job in Scotland, you'd go for the job in Scotland!

*I've applied to a job in Manchester. I'm willing to move, you know, I just feel like, this is what I've been fighting for and, obviously, if my family is behind me and if my partner's behind me then they'll be willing to wait for me to get back after I've sort of done what I needed to do... In the long it would be worth it because I'll be on £30,000, a nice house, nice car and support everybody, but for now, you know...*

There is self-deprecating humour here as well as the confidence and self-assurance discussed in the next theme. All of the other themes relate to Suzie's work and employment focus.

### **Self-assurance and confidence**

Suzie's self-assurance and confidence are apparent at a number of points, including lines 54 and 55 above and

[it's ... a very tough time to graduate], *it is very tough but I think I've got what it takes* (88-89)

It also emerges here in response to my question about a 'plan B' in case her clinical ambitions fail, with a fairly strong implication, based on earlier tutorial work that a plan B is essential.

*No, it will work. I'm optimistic about that one thing* (151)

Listening to the recording I remember that this assurance sounded foolhardy at the time, as it would for any graduand, but as the analysis continues it seems increasingly well grounded, although as I write this analysis it is impossible to bracket-off my knowledge that by the second interview Suzie had successfully achieved a succession of clinical assistant posts and a place on a D Clin Psy training course. Her confidence and long-term commitment is also apparent further on.

*...that's what the plan is, get experience in loads of different areas but there's no rush if I get there in 10 years, fine. You know, I'm 22 in August and if I get there when I'm 30 fine I'll have no problems, I haven't got any responsibilities. So I'm pretty content with things just carrying on...* (267-271)

Here again there is no plan B. This might read as desperation or empty bravado in some, but in Suzie the confidence and assurance are plain. She is also aware of her own ability and skills, discussed later, but the quote below illustrates her confidence.

*... yes I can do it, yes I'm very capable, give me the money and I'll do it for full time. (294-295)*

*... well I think I'm willing to take those kinds of gambles; I'm willing to take those risks to get to where I need to be ... (309-310)*

She is also unusually aware that it is very difficult to get into clinical psychology and that failure is much more likely than success. It is unusual to come across someone wise to this but who still retains confidence in her ability.

*... but no, I think clinical psychology is definitely for me. You've got the record if five years down the line I've changed my mind completely, you can reference me to be a teaching assistant, you know, then we can talk. I think for now it's that ... definitely. (331-335)*

#### **Focus and dedication, proactivity, planning and ambition**

This is one of the two largest themes and shows that Suzie's self-assurance and confidence may be soundly based. Her focus on achieving a clinical career is remarkable; very thorough, thoughtful, reflective and mature.

*Well, because I work there (a supermarket) Tuesday and Wednesday seven till two, then I work Friday seven till two and Saturday eight till five, but Monday and Thursday I'm doing voluntary work as an assistant psychologist for a private organisation doing autism work so it's different experience to what I have so far and there's quite a lot of emphasis on CAMHS [Children & Adolescents' Mental Health Trust] and autism research and all those sort of things. So, I feel like I've got two ...areas ...if I see a CAMHS job, yes, I can apply. If I see IAPT stuff, I think yes ... I can apply. I'm just trying to maximize my opportunities as much as possible. Better yet, they're actually recruiting where I am. They've got an advert for three assistant psychologists in six months £18,000 and a lot of people keep giving me nods to edge me onto that ... (97-110)*

This level of analysis at this stage shows that she takes her career very seriously indeed. She is also not letting the grass grow under her feet in terms of effort and workload, and she is not yet a graduate.

*... I'm working six days so I'm pretty exhausted. I only started last week, you know, doing that but... When I think of it I did a placement for nine months working at the supermarket two days, working at the placement for four days, so I did six days a week for about nine months so when I think about it, you know, it's do-able and when I get my application in, if I get short listed and if I get a job then that's better. (119-125)*



This is a taken-for-granted focus on hard work. The next quote illustrates her level of planning and organisation.

*... I had to do what I had to do to get this experience I mean, I started setting this up from August. (At the end of her placement year, over 10 months earlier) As soon as I came out of my placement I was out there looking for more stuff. It's only recently that they recruited some people then I thought they could start my induction at the same time with these people and, also, I didn't want to be doing this while I had a dissertation and exams and ... So actually I'd got my CRB in March ... and only got in touch in the exams to say ok I'm finally ready now. (138-145)*

So Suzie had arranged her voluntary work, including her CRB check nearly 12 months in advance in order to be ready to start as her exams ended. She has also done her homework on clinical course requirements with her degree grade in mind.

*...as soon as I got my results I hurried off on to the clearing house which is, of course, the place where you apply for apply for the doctorates, clicked on and read the courses that would be in the West Midlands, so Birmingham, Coventry, Staffordshire and Leicester just to look and see what the requirements are. None of them really specify a high 2-1. I was pretty certain Staffordshire did when I last checked. They specified a high 2-1. That's what I was really concerned about, you know, what's high, what's low. I'm fine at 65. (168-174)*

Further into the interview Suzie again shows her proactivity, attention to detail, dedication and planning. This passage is remarkable also for its length and the depth of knowledge shown. She is so well-informed, it is as if she already has a professional identity in waiting, a point returned to below.

*Basically, the place where I was working has sort of changed and are now part of the Birmingham Healthy Mind Service which is sort of like where the PCT's have merged just like, you know, the Primary Care Teams have sort of merged with, you know, the clinical psychologist service. It's kind of to facilitate the whole referral process so it's all one team, so if you are at low level, you are seeing an assistant to a low intensity worker or slightly higher, high intensity, if you're a lot higher then you'll see a clinical psychologist, well they're pretty much one team now and three weeks ago I saw an advert for a psychological ... practitioner in the Birmingham Healthy Mind Service. Actually, there were two adverts. Two were permanent and two were temporary for six months, so there were four jobs up for grabs so I quickly submitted for both to maximise the chance and so I'm waiting to hear back and I don't want to keep pestering them because I've been doing that every week. So when I leave here you know, I'll wait for that NHS chance... But I so happened to bump into a clinical psychologist who worked at the places where.. , she was sort of like... 'if do get short listed let me know and I'll give you some idea beforehand'. It is really two good potentials that are coming up. It'd be really good if I get offers for both, you know, so I'm already dreaming about which one to take. I'm so far ahead. But, hopefully, getting some experience it's sort of weighing up whether I'm going to stick in Primary Care, anxiety, depression and stuff or go into a bit more autism and go into older adults. (226-250)*

As the interview progresses I note that I seem not to be asking her anything that she has not thought about in some depth already. This is not to suggest that there is anything glib about her response, rather that she is deeply focused, reflective and engaged.

Later Suzie notes, in response to my question about how well prepared she feels for the graduate job market, that.

*... I don't think that much jobs have been advertised if I'm to be completely honest. (421-422)*

But, in relation to a research opportunity that a friend encourages her towards and that she is not really interested in, she also comments that she feels overwhelmed.

*... sometimes I just feel so overwhelmed by all these opportunities that keep coming out of nowhere and keep jumping out. ... well I've kept all the possibilities I like, but, I mean, it's the CV's and once you've said, "can you send me a CV", I couldn't, I've got so many, I've a folder that's just called a job, with so many CVs in it, I wouldn't know which one is the best one to send. ...*

*So, I've got CV's and cover notes for where I am now, I've got CVs for every other job I've applied to and I keep those so that if the autism research assistant comes up, then I'll be able to, sort of like, add to the experience I've got now to the one I've sent the autism people but that's obviously tailored, I'll send that off. (440-459)*

This is the only point where a sense of anxiety or not being in control emerges, although it may be anxiety related to time rather than her confidence in her ability. I am not sure how truly overwhelmed she feels, the quote ends with a reassertion of organisation.

### **Professional identification and identity**

This is the second large theme. Suzie starts the interview by finding it '*slightly depressing*' (15) that she is still working at the supermarket and that '*I haven't moved anywhere*' (18-19) and '*I don't really know what to call myself*' (45-46). When asked later in the interview about her identity now, she responds crisply '*No idea*' (668). Despite this it seems to me that she strongly identifies with her chosen profession of clinical psychology, has considerable awareness of, and cherishes evidence of her own competence, but is denied full identity by her non-professional status, an in-between-ness that is common to all graduates aspiring to professional psychology until full chartered status and appropriate employment is secured by the successful minority. This identification with professional status is perilous as full identity may be denied her if she fails in her quest – hence the safe '*no idea*'. She is supported, and I suspect also a little discomfited, by the evidence of her considerable competence. This discomfort is uncertain and hard to pin down, but may

include some embarrassment that she is so much on the ball when so many other aspiring but less focused competitor-colleagues are so weak. There may also be some distress at the conflict between being both colleague and competitor, between the professional need to empathise and care and the imperative that to get the next job and the cherished clinical training place, ruthless competitiveness is needed. This may lead the able and organised to have to blame the unsuccessful for their fecklessness as a defence against the discomfort of having to acknowledge their own success as highly organised and competitive, and perhaps even ruthless. There may even be an element of Groucho Marx – not wanting to be a member of a club that would accept someone like me as a member; clinical psychology may be less worth aspiring to if they are so impressed with or even taken in by me! This analysis comes from a hermeneutics of suspicion standpoint and is debatable, however it is rooted in my experience of the interview with Suzie.

Suzie both cherishes evidence of her achievement and competence and deprecates her success.

*... everyone where I am at the autism place keep saying you are so lucky to have got even an honorary post so soon after graduating. I mean, you haven't even graduated you've only just got your results. (273-276)*

The quote above both celebrates her precocity, 'you haven't even graduated', and treats it as good luck, perhaps to avoid being seen as big headed, perhaps to avoid hubris and ward off nemesis. The next quote reveals competence and achievement and more 'luck'.

*I only started last week, Monday, so I've only been there three times including this Monday just gone and I've already been on two visits. ... so I'm serving cognitive assessments, the WISC, the WASI, the WPPSI, all sorts of things. I was just, you know, interviewing teachers so I get their idea of what the child is like ... so it's really good, I mean, I just can't believe how lucky I've been. (281-287)*

Later in the interview Suzie responds to my comment on how active she is and is surprised at the lack of knowledge and strategic reasoning of others, an issue that links forward to the second interview two years later.

*...I don't think I know too much but I do think I know a considerable amount compared to people on my course, so it's quite interesting when I speak to even people who are working as paid assistants at the place I'm working. You don't really have any ideas what's required, you know. I know a girl with 10 years' experience in autism. There's a flat assistants post, you know, congratulations for getting there and everything but if you're going to keep sticking to autism, if you're only going to keep replying to autism jobs, your applications are going to be limited. (340-348)*

Later she responds to my noting her team-work skills in seminars by seeing it as her being selfish.

*Well I kept stealing the floor all the time I know that's selfishness going again. (503-504)*

Suzie's professional identification is implied and illustrated in theme five, 'caring, empathy, professional and clinical skills', and is also shown here where she ends with a story about responding to a customer in her supermarket (see next theme below) and how her placement experience has changed her.

*... I do think that it has definitely changed me because then it's like when I'm not on duty I'm still very much thinking like a psychologist ... (716-718)*

This passage ends with a poignant reminder of her identification with psychology still being incomplete, denied, to be competed for and in the balance.

*Still very much, you know, looking into things and thinking, ah, you know if only, if only, if only. (718-719)*

Later Suzie reports an encounter with her placement employer that also reinforces her competence and her developing identity.

*... when I ran into the psychologist she was telling me that she actually thought of me the other day. She said, you know, thought we could really do with an honorary assistant, I would like you to come back as honorary, I'd like you to be paid ... but we could really do with you running groups and all sorts of things but I said to her but like I haven't actually got great experience. She said of course you can do it and I thought... You say this right after I've sent off my application for the job, don't you. ... And I had to put down, although I haven't got experience of running groups, I'm quite positive I can do it. Ah, I should have just said I did it, she would have said yes. (738-747)*

Suzie's professional identification is also apparent in her ability to take her placement employer's perspective and understand the nature of the organisation and work and how it related to her.

*What was a downside? Somewhat slightly disorganised in a sense, on the placement part, not on Aston's part. In the sense that there wasn't a kind of designated workload which is one thing that I think is sort of like weak in the application. You know, I didn't really get much one-to-one myself, but, you know when I sit down and reflect at it, there wasn't anything to do, they would say oh you know they didn't really have any placement students before, which isn't really true because Emma was [previously] a placement student herself. But I think the real problem was the fact that they were working with such complex people there wasn't someone "safe"*

*enough for me you know. It doesn't reflect anything to do with my general competence it was to do with the fact that it was quite high risk. (634-645)*

### **Caring, empathy and professional clinical skills**

This theme overlaps with the theme above on professional identity and first emerges in response to a question on the kind of skills and qualities she has to offer.

*Well, it's kind of like empathy and just being able to relate to people being able to understand what people are going through but not, ... completely but I don't want to pretend... You can never really be in someone's shoes so if someone's telling you that all these terrible things that have happened to them, you can't say that I understand because actually you don't because none of them have actually happened to you, so it's empathising and really striking a balance between what's happening, comprehending and just listening to somebody, you know, making sure that they've been heard, sometimes they just want to be heard. (466-476)*

Suzie is able to not only claim a conventional skill but also to reflect on its application and limitations. She elaborates further a few lines on.

*...it's also just having the resilience to all the stuff that's happening there as well, it's being able to sit there and, obviously, reflect back the feelings. You know, I read this interesting book that says sometimes there is nothing wrong with crying with a client because then you can really show that you know, you can empathise. But, you know, again it's not letting that go home with you and not let that get to you. So I think those are the kind of skills I can offer, obviously, communication skills, being a team member, most people I think I'm a team player, I haven't really seen that yet. But, yes, it's all those sorts of skills I think. (483-492)*

In talking about her mentoring work before going on placement she identifies skills she developed.

*...even to get the placement I did, I was working as a mentor with "Aim Higher" with the university outreach office. So I sort of started to get those ...advising kind of skills, those one-to-one sessions, planning, organising, getting new materials ready before a session, kind of prep work. (597-601)*

Suzie's professional and clinical way of thinking also emerges in a long passage in which she reflects on an incident at her supermarket check-out and how it relates to her clinical work and skills.

*...customers form sort of like an attachment with you, you know. ...you always say to them well I'll see you next week and actually they are going to come next week and the week after and the weeks after. You've seen them for quite some time now and then strangely I just stopped seeing this particular customer and then after two months or so ...I just saw her and I said oh like she's back, you know, I thought you'd left. She said no, I've been going through a rough patch, I lost my mum. And then all of a sudden it's like, you know, as a professional I felt like I needed to stop everything*

*else, drop everything else and sit down and have some... [Turn the conveyor belt off, that's right.] There you go, you know, so you felt like you had to stop and really show, you know, without paying attention to the next customer. I didn't want to hurry her off you know, I felt like I just wanted to sit down with her and I haven't seen her again since. It's only been two weeks since I last saw her but, you know, as I walked away I thought I should have hugged her. Sometimes, you know, crossing professional boundaries can actually somewhat help, it's like the crying thing. Sometimes crying, although it's something like crossing a boundary that you're supposed always to show a stone face and be strong, it can really help someone connect with you. ...I just didn't know what to do it's like if I'm in the supermarket uniform. I just needed to ask her because I once heard a clinical psychologist say, you know, 'you've done really well, would you mind if I gave you a hug' and it completely helped, it completely changed the whole tone of the room, everything has changed. She just looked like she needed a hug you know, how she was talking about her mum and that, you know, it's your mum and you can't lose your mum and you know, yes, but it's your mum. She just kept saying that. Then it made we think what would happen if I mean I lost my mum ... (678-715)*

Suzie's ability to apply clinical ideas, to relate professional and everyday experience and use this to reflect on a professional dilemma (to hug or not to hug) and to empathise with a customer, says much about her maturity and her developing professional identity. Later still she comments;

*I need to know that when I'm working with people I'll feel confident enough to work with people and they're safe in my hands. (773-775)*

Her concern that she will be confident that people will be safe in her hands expresses professionalism and maturity.

### **Learning, becoming and growing, not being a 'student'**

Suzie reflects early in the interview that;

*I very much want to be a student still, I want to be able to get away with things sometimes, I want to be able to have an excuse for why I'm only doing 20 hours as opposed to 39... (32-34)*

Like much of the interview however this is in relation to work, an excuse for not being full-time at the supermarket, and does not express regret at not being a student in any other way. Much later she responds to a question about what she might remember about her time as a student when she is 40 and she replies;

*I don't actually have many student experiences, it's strange, ... it is about sort of like getting there, it is about sort of like getting the jobs you need ... so when I look back at 40 it's not memories of all the awesome parties I've been to or anything like that, it's sort of like, I think, somehow how naïve I was when I was a student. (792-800)*

She clearly sees herself as no longer a student, even though she has no firm identity to replace it yet. This also emphasises how work focused she is, and perhaps has had to be, quite apart from her career ambition. She is not a typical student in many ways but, when asked about the meaning of her experience as an undergraduate she sees learning and becoming as important;

*... I like to think of it as a journey yes, so, I guess if you look at the meaning, what it's meant for me, it's a transition, it's learning, it's been a learning experience, not just academic; life, placement, everything, I've just learnt. Does that make sense? (756-759)*

As we explore this further she settles on 'growing' as her metaphor of choice;

*It's sort of like that journey, story, kind of metaphor evolving, developing, changing..., growing, that's it. (782-784)*

It is interesting that Suzie is not a 'student' in the sense of participating strongly in the student lifestyle but is very focused on learning, especially in the sense of growing and becoming in relation to work and professional identity. This calls into question the popular lifestyle stereotype and reminds us that in these high fee times, living at home and working 19 hours in a supermarket may be more accurate than visions of gilded youth and drinking games. Also, as will be seen in the next theme, she is very like other students in her concern with grade and performance.

### **University grade, expectations of self**

Suzie is very concerned with her grades. This is partly because her overall grade is critical in relation to her clinical ambitions as the quote in theme three above (lines 168-174) about what a high 2.1 actually means makes clear. Grades seem also to be critical as ways for students to evaluate their progress and themselves against their peers and the period immediately after final examinations is probably when graduands are chewing over what they mean and how they feel about them. In response to a question about what she would change Suzie suggests that she '*... would change my first and second year grades*' and discussion of her grades occupies her for lines 832-900 as this quote illustrates;

*Yes, but I mean when I look at my grades in final year, the only three that I think I did not so good in, health behaviour I got 54, nutrition and neuroscience I got 60, which was a shock for everyone. Everyone on the module I know did not do well for that and lots of people got 62 who studied with me. Jan and everyone, they got firsts in everything else. (858-862)*

## **Placement experience**

The placement is perhaps the most significant part of her course for Suzie and quite a profound experience;

*The course has really prepared us, you know, and alongside the placement experience, of course, let's not forget that, that's been really good. (558-560)*

*Placement ...I think it was an eye opener and it reassured how you applied theory to practice. It's completely different learning about it in the books and things like that ... but then when I was on placement the expectations just shot through the roof. I mean, I was treated like a paid assistant, there wasn't any hierarchy ... I didn't feel any less like, you know, appreciated or valued you know, it wasn't just the unpaid aspect it was just the fact that I was a student. I was expected to do what anybody else would have done, you know, obviously a lot lower level but I mean getting stuff read, yes, check, turn up on time if you have a 9 o'clock session, most definitely yes, sitting down and having a debrief after sharing your opinions, everything, everything. (590-611)*

The availability of a placement also influenced her choice of course;

*I wanted to use the best course because they had the placement experience ... Birmingham's very reputable but they didn't have the placement experience. (567-572)*

## **Summary and discussion – Suzie**

The most salient feature of this interview is the maturity, sophistication and depth of Suzie's commitment to a career in clinical psychology and the extent to which she seems to have become a 'legitimate peripheral participant' (Lave and Wenger, 1991, 2002) in that community of practice. She clearly ticks the right boxes for the Clinical Psychologists that she works for and it is easy to see that she has clinical skills, maturity, a proactive approach and a sense of respect for her colleagues as well as rigorous honesty, clarity and realism. Suzie's passion for the career matters less by comparison. And for Suzie it is not a passion to be a member of a prestigious profession, it is a deeper passion that I think comes from an identity with the real caring nature of the role and compassion for people in distress that it requires.

## **Toyah**

During this interview I repeatedly sidetrack into offering tutorial advice. My voice is a stronger presence in the transcript than in any other interview and I do not always follow up points that seem obvious in the transcript. I felt that Toyah was in need of support. She had achieved a lower grade, had a more forlorn hope of reaching her clinical psychology aim, and I saw her as being more vulnerable by virtue of her disability. Carrying out the interview



at her parents' home, may also have influenced me in that I felt under an obligation to assist. In retrospect the theme of isolation and loss that emerged may have been implicit and contributed to a sense of need. Toyah also had some weaknesses and areas of blindness in her thinking and planning that I felt cried out for intervention.

Toyah's sense of disability comes not from her embodied physical disability but from the stigmatising barrier that she feels is created by her lower second-class degree. She thinks that;

*...when somebody reads my application form, they are just going to see a 2.2 and then just put it aside. (660-1).*

A second irony is in her desire to contribute...

*...using my brain..., because I can't really do many physical things like stacking shelves... I'm better to sit down and think about things, I'm a thinker ...that's what I bring to the table. (739-48).*

Yet this clashes with her sense of herself as...

*...academic, that's not the kind of person that I am. Because I'm not somebody that just sits and reads books. I don't like reading. I learn through doing things ... I'm not that type of person to be reading books and good at academia... (522-30).*

### **Career - Not getting a job**

Toyah is concerned with her career throughout her interview and with becoming a professional and being someone who contributes by thinking. She sees her below average degree as a serious barrier.

*I found it very difficult to get a job because... as soon as somebody reads that you've got a 2.2... (47-9)*

*I know, it's horrible because you've gone through all of that and then you've come out and you don't get the job. (155-6)*

*I did feel prepared for the placement year because I actually really wanted to get into work as soon as I could. But what I wasn't prepared for, was how difficult it was going to be to get a job. [As a graduate] (146-8)*

### **Career aims**

Toyah holds fast to her aim of becoming a clinical psychologist and the broader context of becoming a professional;

*It will always be in the psychology field. I know that it will be. (491)*

*I like to be a professional, I always want to do... that as my career, I wouldn't ever want to do anything that's too basic. ... I think because, being disabled, I know that I work better using my brain... (739-43)*

She implies that life is stressful and she is *panicky* now about her future. Her ideal is clear;

*Life would look less stressful because... I would hopefully be more content... And I would feel like I had achieved my ultimate goal. That's always my ultimate goal for so many years now. ...before I even went to college, I wanted to do it. So it would just seem less stressful and...when I'm chartered, I would hope to be working part time then. So I would have more time on my hands to concentrate on other things, I think. ...but I would still have my career, but I wouldn't be as panicky about it. (448-56)*

She wants to be content and her stress is from a lack of a clear way forward. Her *ultimate goal* is not perhaps simply a career goal, the career is part of her broader life goals. I think that the point she is making is linked to the idea of full adulthood that typically arrives in the 30s and involves an adequate income, independent adult status, making a meaningful contribution in a career, a home of one's own, an intimate relationship and perhaps changed power relations with parents. Toyah's disability may also make her independence more salient and precious and this emerges at other points and helps to make the university experience such an important one for her. Her goal is a projection of her ideal life, a dream. At this point for Toyah, like Louise there is a breakdown between the dream and reality, neither can see how it will be arrived at. Toyah does not see a simple way to get past her 2.2 degree and reach her aim – but she takes a step-by-step approach, perhaps to keep momentum and avoid confronting the size of the task she is facing, and she is open to possibilities;

*It makes me wonder am I making the right career decision, carrying on down this road. Like I said, I'm just going to aim for that and see what happens. (222-4)*

*I'm very open to like just going whatever direction it takes me. Like the clinical doctorate is my ultimate goal, but if I end up doing something completely different, as long as I'm still happy and I'm enjoying my job, that's all I care about (485-8)*

Toyah's flexibility within a long-term aim means that she is open to opportunities, as here where she embraces a specialist option

*It's something that I'm using just to gain experience and I'm using it also to get into mindfulness because they are going to pay for me to do the mindfulness teaching qualification (84-6)*

*And I'm just going to have that under my belt... I just want to keep going until I get on to the doctorate course. (89 - 91)*

*As long as I enjoy what I'm doing, then that's fine and then I'm just going to get a job that I like doing and see what happens with it. (102-3)*

Toyah's vision of her future recognises the difficulty of clinical qualification and also adds realism in relation to her own capacity for full-time work. Like Louise she would like to be her own boss

*In five years' time, I'd hope that I would be getting closer to getting on the doctorate course... I doubt that I'll be on it. But I'll be closer to it. I see it being quite a long road. ...But I'm quite happy with that. And, yes, I'd like to become a clinical psychologist... I'd like to work part time in the NHS but also have my own private practice because I think that would be easier for me because I find it difficult to work fulltime. I'm not working full time at the moment. I've never worked full time. So, I'd like to work part time and have my own practice. (250-8)*

### **The University experience**

Toyah talks about the value of her degree and she prioritizes career benefits but also talks about academic skills, personal development and independence. She has a broad cultural model of the university experience;

*Yes, it's career... that's the whole point. ... but also, personally, it's helped me to develop as a person and become independent and have that independence that I'd have always wanted with the support of university life because that ...university life really helps you. It's not like you just go and move somewhere and have to get your own flat and then start a job. It's not like that ...it's more supporting. (810-6)*

Unlike Louise who feels that professional identity is bestowed by your graduate career, Toyah feels that she has this from her degree

*...because of university, it's given me that professional identity which I wouldn't have got. And, like, that sense of pride, I think. (753-5)*

She is able to explain how university has benefitted her in personal rather than career terms. Living away from home, a two to three hour journey away, for the first time with a disability has been a great learning experience and she recognises how it has inspired her and helped her to develop. Like the other interviewees practical experience, in this case voluntary work, has been really important

*I did that [voluntary work] whilst I was in the first year... and that has really given me a base for really good communication. ...really good practical experience. ...it is so difficult to think about what exactly my degree has given me. ...there are so many aspects. It could teach you how to survive independently, that's one main thing that I took from it. And how to be proactive. And to aim high... (364-72)*

Toyah also gives examples of skills that she has picked up

*There is that other thing that I did, CPD ... that also helped. That taught me how to be like reflective and things like that. ... And then that makes it easier when you're writing your job application... (178-82)*

*And the degree itself, you learn lots of skills, like research skills... and communication skills. And knowing how to write well and everything like that. (184-9)*

Asked if more should be done to promote employability she is in accord with Holden and Hamblett (2007) in suggesting that it is not something that can be taught, and suggests that it can be picked up from the university culture

*Because I think it's not something that you can teach. I think it's something that you just pick up from the whole, like, culture. (383-5)*

She describes the university as an inspiring, mutually supporting community that was inspirational partly because it is in a city and invigorated her with drive and dedication.

There is also a sense of loss here, a point picked up below.

*...because Aston Uni is in a city as well, you are seeing a lot of successful people and big institutions and everything all around you all the time. If it was just a little college somewhere, it might not be the same. And when you are in that frame of mind... I was very dedicated in being successful and getting the grades I wanted and getting the experience that I needed and all of these type of things. So that gave me that drive. And because ...all of my peers were doing exactly the same thing as well, so we each supported each other with that. And obviously the staff helped you with it and everything like that. And you could see the staff had their own good careers and were very successful as well. So it was very inspiring. (404-15)*

### **Achievement / disappointment / relief**

Toyah reveals that she did not think that she would go to university, not a reference to her disability I think but to her sense of herself as not conventionally academic. Elements of pride in achievement, disappointment at her poor grade and relief that it is over are articulated here;

*It felt really strange graduating. I never thought that I would ever go to Uni and graduate but I did. (18-9)*

*I did feel a little bit disappointed with myself because I didn't get a 2.1 and I wanted to get a 2.1. I got a high 2.2 instead. So I was a bit gutted about that. (26-9)*

*I felt really relieved actually that I'd managed it in my final year [it was] so challenging. So much work to do, had a lot of things that I was juggling in my personal life as well. And I think I just took on too much. So I was relieved when I finished my degree and then I could just move on to the next chapter. (55-9)*

*...because of university, it's given me that professional identity which I wouldn't have got. And, like, that sense of pride, I think. (753-5)*

Toyah is proud of her success at work and aware of her strengths;

*...I know that I'm a very determined person and that's a personal attribute that I've always had. And so, in any job, I always put my all into it and I work very hard. I've always had a very good references come out of jobs. And employers have always said that I'm very conscientious. And I know that, from the job that I've been doing, at the moment my supervisor tells me that the level of communication that I have is excellent, his words. And the ability to form relationships with the children, that's the main thing that I have tried to do so that they open up to me. And he said that I'm very good at that, because they are not very trusting children. And so, to get them to trust me is a big thing. And I've managed to do it with a lot of them. So communication, good relationships... (501-12)*

### **Not being academic**

There is a contradiction between Toyah's aim and her sense of herself as not very academic, as someone who does not read but learns through doing and who has a 2.2 degree. She is self-aware and reflective, but has not made all the connections, perhaps because this would mean losing her dream. It may be important to communicate to students just how small the world of clinical psychology is and how academic some of the work is;

*...I think I thought that it [the degree] would actually be harder than what it was. I thought that... I'm not clever enough to deal with a degree and go to Uni. And it's going to be so academic, that's not the kind of person that I am. (522-7)*

*So that might be why I only got a 2.2. Because maybe I'm not that type of person to be reading books and good at academia, I don't know. (534-5)*

She is aware that this is not a good grounding for a doctoral qualification

*...if I'm going to do doctorate then that might be what holds me back. (545-6)*

*I'm struggling because my aim is to do a Masters next year. And I'm struggling to find courses that will take people on with a 2.2. (565-6)*

*...with psychology there's this whole, like, fear of getting a 2.2 if you want to get on the clinical ...because people think that it's the end of the world when you get that. ... But that's what keeps you going, that's what makes you keep thinking I've got to get a 2.1, I've got to keep pushing it, I've got to keep trying harder. Yes. And you do, like, look at your friends and say, "What did you get for that"? And keep comparing yourself to them. (423-31)*

Her view that she is a thinker contrasts with her sense of herself as not academic. She seems to me to use some quite sophisticated ideas about the nature of learning and development and to be able to reflect at some depth, but I was also quite horrified at how little she knew about clinical psychology. So she is academic in perhaps an important or even the most important sense, but is undermined by not reading and therefore by simply not knowing.

## **Placement, rising to the challenge**

Toyah flourished on her placement after a difficult start and is very positive about the experience;

*My self-esteem went so high. It [the placement] was really good. (208)*

*It was amazing. I would recommend it to anybody. I can't imagine going into the big wide world without it, I really couldn't imagine my graduation without it. If I hadn't done my placement year, there is no way that I would have got the job that I've got now. (66-9)*

*The placement really helped. If I hadn't done my placement, I really don't know what I would have, like, written in my CV, in my job applications, talked about in interview and ...I really wouldn't have felt prepared for work. (168-71)*

*...they really wanted me to learn as much as I could in that year so that I could really use that to my advantage. They wanted me to work as a paid assistant psychologist when I graduated and that was going to be what happened. But then, because they made a load of cuts to the department, they couldn't afford to take me on. (199-203)*

Despite her retrospective enthusiasm she found her placement challenging and did not understand everything. This brought back to me the sense of strangeness and panic that I felt on my undergraduate placement and also perhaps underlines her academic weakness, although it is clear that she also rose to the challenges;

*...at first, there wasn't anything going on at all and I was getting a little bit annoyed because I was commuting from north of Birmingham... to Coventry every day. Getting up at six thirty in the morning and leaving at half past six in the evening and I wasn't doing anything. I was literally given a book to read and I was getting really frustrated. Sometimes, I would do data input which is just as boring. And I ended up emailing the university saying that I don't like the placement. ...And so they spoke to head of services and he gave me a service evaluation audit to do. ...I didn't even know what that was... I had to work out what it was and then I had to do all of this, massive like, gathering of data and had to liaise with all of the staff who... that's what got my face known in the department. And so then I was asked to do all of these other things. That actually worked out in my benefit, in the end but, at the time, it felt so challenging and I hated it. But it worked out well... My supervisor kept thinking that I was a trainee, you see, and so is she kept giving me things to do which I hadn't a clue what she meant. And, so she kept pushing me. (763-802)*

## **Isolation and loss**

Toyah feels a loss of direction and this aligns with Louise's concern at the failure of a job to 'materialise'. Both feel in need of support and encouragement

*Since I've been out of university, I've lost it a little bit and haven't been as proactive as I would have been when I was at Uni ...trying to get a placement, for example, I had to write so many applications... And I knew exactly what I was doing, and then,*

*when I came out of it, I'm now... looking to maybe a one day a week honorary placement just to get back in there. And I feel ...a little bit lost ...and I'm not as sure on what exactly I should be doing. Because I've come out of that whole university life and that academia side of things. (390-9)*

She describes the transition out of university as a suddenly being free but without direction

*...I did feel a transition when I left Uni ...because I have always been in education. And then going into, like, the adult world, I was amazed, the working world which I hadn't really experienced apart from my placement and I felt.. I felt very.. I felt like I had a lot of freedom suddenly but I didn't know if I liked that because I didn't know what to do with it. And I didn't really have any direction of where to go now because I've got all this freedom suddenly. So it's like a mixture of feelings with that. (127-34)*

*A loss of direction...? Yes, that's exactly right, yes. (137-8)*

There are also some surprising gaps in Toyah's knowledge and the contrast with Suzie is considerable. I felt that she was drifting away from being part of her cherished clinical psychology and was more and more peripheral to the world that she had experienced on placement and aspires to;

*[About clinical training applications] Do you know when in the year that would be? (241)*

*What you are competing for is the funded place on the clinical doctorate. Yes, oh, right, I didn't realise that. Oh, right, OK. (594-6)*

These last three passages are about Toyah's experience of her degree, but they also illustrate her sense of paradise lost

*...you're doing a degree and you are working with people who are successful, you have like that sense that you can be successful yourself as long as you work hard and you are proactive and you're determined enough to do it. (372-5)*

*[employability] I think it's something that you just pick up from the whole, like, culture. (383-5)*

*... in a city as well, you are seeing a lot of successful people and big institutions... So that gave me that drive. ...you could see the staff had their own good careers and were very successful as well. So it was very inspiring. (404-15)*

### **Summary and discussion – Toyah**

The notion of paradise lost seems an apt metaphor for this first interview with Toyah. She has had her academic weaknesses, or more strictly the weaknesses of her approach to academic work, exposed and been left without the good degree that was almost certainly required for her dream of a career as a Clinical Psychologist. It is small consolation that her dream is broader than a career alone and that potentially some other related and

meaningful career may be found. So paradise lost in the sense of the dream of becoming. There is also paradise lost in leaving university. She has lost an inspiring community of successful people and friends, lost an independent life and had to return to live with her parents, lost the meaningfulness and the licence to dream of a future that came with being a student. Of all the interviewees Toyah describes her university experience in the most positive terms so she has lost the most. She has also made little progress compared with the others, although this is confounded by the different points at which they were interviewed.

### **Summary, chapter 6**

The interviews in chapter six took place in the weeks over the summer and early autumn in which the participants graduated. All seemed pleased to have an opportunity to talk at length about their experiences and prospects. There is optimism from Suzie and Nadia, loss from Toyah, crisis, acute disappointment and even betrayal from Louise and pride in success from Amina. Re-read at leisure the interviews feel like a continuation and extension of tutorial work, however there is perceptible tension and uncertainty for all. University grades crop up repeatedly and all except Amina see their future and identity tied to their discipline. Work experience, for four interviewees in their placement year but most interestingly for Amina in a long-term part-time job, is extremely important and quite transformational for Suzie and Nadia. It also seems to be a life-line to hold on to in the crisis of transition. In addition to the stress associated with the scale and nature of the graduate transition, the problem of access to professional psychology is perhaps the root of the tension and uncertainty and perhaps partly of the concern with grades. In the next chapter the same participants are interviewed two years later. It will be interesting to find evidence of personal growth and career progression, to hear their further views on placement experience and their university education in general and, most importantly, to hear about their experience of the graduate transition.



## Chapter 7: Study three, graduates two years on

### Introduction to the graduate interviews two years on

These interviews are with the same graduates interviewed within the first few months of completing their Bachelors' degrees, now two years on into their graduate lives.

Respondents seemed pleased to re-connect with the interviewer and it was most interesting and enjoyable to talk with them. As before, the interviews are presented as case studies.

### Nadia

Nadia was interviewed for the second time close to the second anniversary of her graduation. When first interviewed she had just started work as a care assistant and she had experienced a difficult placement year during her degree as an Honorary Assistant Psychologist. She subsequently failed to get shortlisted for local jobs as an Assistant Clinical Psychologist, but months later she was shortlisted for a job over 100 miles away. Her decision to go to the interview and then to accept the job as an IAPT practitioner at 'Seatown' was quite a difficult one but Nadia describes herself as now having a greater sense of entitlement and worth.

*...when I was doing the research assistant job, it felt a lot better. (797-8)*

*And I had no idea where Seatown was, my geography was atrocious. ... I was so excited I had a job and then I... went on to Google and I saw that 'Oh, my God, it's literally all the way down south'. But... no question, I was going to go for the interview... a lot of people were very sceptical, ...my best friend of the time was, 'Are you going to go for that interview'? I was like, 'Of course I'm going to go to the interview'. I didn't tell my dad at the time, I didn't tell my mum. I just went for it. (831-44)*

*So scary. So scary to move down. But ... the job opportunity ... was amazing (898-900)*

### Pain of rejection and low status work

Nadia talks with feeling about her initial experiences after graduating, getting rejection after rejection, working as a health care assistant, later doing some voluntary work

*....when you got the rejection after rejection after rejection after rejection. The first month of rejection, hard-core rejection... It is very, very painful (753-7)*

*Right back to the bottom... and nobody takes you seriously, it's just a role where you are so undervalued, unbelievably undervalued. (765-7)*

*I learnt a massive amount and I did feel massively undervalued and I felt a bit like a skivvy. (777-9)*

*No one listens to you ...and you do just feel that you are the lowest and that is horrible. That is really, really horrible. And you're so highly stressed and it's not a nice environment to be around. (794-7)*

### **Satisfied, but not herself**

Nadia is satisfied with her progress but as the interview deepens it is apparent that all is not rosy in the garden of career development.

*...it feels really good actually, it feels really positive. I was walking through and seeing all the new graduates and I'm happy with where I am... And I'm really grateful as well as I'm still aspiring to do a lot more but I'm happy with the progress that I'm making.(30-4)*

*So, I'm currently working, I've just qualified. So I've just done the training course as a psychological wellbeing practitioner. (43-4)*

Nadia expresses her satisfaction with progress, but this passage can also be read with her concern with her time-frame discussed later.

*And a lot of my work colleagues, in the PDDP role, the trainees that I trained with were a lot older than me ... they were in their 30's. ...I remember thinking wow you've done really well because 3 out of the 6 of us were in their 30's. ...most of my colleagues ...are in their 30's and 40's so I am definitely one of the younger ones ... (133-8)*

Nadia reports both satisfaction and dissatisfaction with progress towards the clinical dream and reassures herself that her CV is improving.

*Well... it's so strange because I've been applying for clinical, like everybody seems to be, and I applied this year, got four straight rejections, ...no interviews. It's just... it's horrible. But looking back at my resumé this year ...I totally understand why I didn't get any interviews because I was looking through it and I thought by the time I graduated to the point I am now, it's been just two years. (103-9)*

She also reports growth and success and seems to be pleased to report back to her former final year project supervisor.

*And for me, Pete, public speaking...I was an absolute wreck, I would shake and I would stammer and I would be horrendously bad. So they, kind of ...they threw me into doing the psycho-educational group. And I think the second or third week in I just was literally totally fine and I actually got really good feedback from the session. ... And then patients came up to me afterwards and said, 'You know what, you did an amazing job, we would never have thought that you were...it was your first time running a group...' Things like that I'm learning a massive amount from. (147-61)*

She is pleased to have stayed in psychology.

*...everybody says to me you're the only one who stays in psychology... I am the only one who is still in a role that is psychology related. (477-81)*

And despite her conflict over what to do she feels 'blessed'.

*I'm so blessed and so fortunate that I'm in that position that... I can either re-apply for the counselling doctorate, which I know a lot of people are not able to, because I've got my [family support] and I can be at home ...which I'm so grateful for or I can stay and I've got this amazing job and I can ...further bolster my skills and be in a better position for 2014. (668-73)*

Her work is intense however.

*So I see on average ten new patients every week and then I have to have about 19-20 follow-ups within that week, so it is really intense. (76-9)*

Nadia makes her discomfort plain with the boundaries, time management and formal, rigid and regimented approach that is not naturally how she is. She also shows that she has a sophisticated critical awareness of therapeutic work and has a developed understanding of what she thinks she is best able to contribute.

*Well, we're supposed to spend 35 minutes but it's really difficult to manage it within that time. Because every client's different and sometimes, you know, in order to create that therapeutic bond and alliance ... you have to give a bit more time. But it's very much about being boundaried and I'm learning to be very much more boundaried. And I don't like...this is the thing I'm struggling with at the moment is how I am naturally...I like to listen and take the time and, kind of, build that. A lot of those are having to ...go out the window because I'm having to be so formal ...so regimented with my time. So with ... clients I wanted to go [to] certain areas and talk about things and I'm having to shift them back out.... I just feel sometimes it's a bit too rigid... which is... why I am already... starting to think about other avenues already even though it's only been a year... (85-100)*

*It's literally like your targets, what you have to meet ...and that's what I don't enjoy about the current role. (330-1)*

Nadia expands on her discomfort with her role, she sees herself in the rather broader and less constrained role of a counsellor and this contributes to her dissatisfaction with her current role and the decision she is making about her training. In using the term 'counsellor' Nadia is also indicating her preference for a more client-centred, client-led and humanistic set of values and a less prescribed approach.

*Always ...I've really enjoyed counselling and [in] this job... more than anything really...[I have] grown and that's helped me in terms of going down that route because a lot of my clients see me as a counsellor... (291-5)*

*It really pains me because ... the therapy bond is growing and that trust is growing. ...each week they're opening up to me and ...I feel like I'm ...almost handicapped in terms of I can't provide... I feel like I'm not doing them justice or... being able to do all those common factors and ...really build up a good bond with my clients. But then*

*it's like I'm stuck with ...the tools I've been given and that's really difficult for me. (300-13)*

Here she feels some guilt but is also learning to trust her own judgment.

*...sometimes ...I'll have a patient who will just go off and then ...I know I shouldn't really admit this, but I'll let them and ...we'll be having a kind of a counselling session. And then it's like...then I feel guilty because I'm not trained. But then I think I really enjoy this and I think at that point they needed to have that more... (316-21)*

Nadia is aware of her growing strengths.

*I really enjoyed teaching as well... I think I have a knack for reading a lot and then being able to synthesise it... condensate it in a way that a lay-person would understand it and I think that's one of my strengths. (538-41)*

### **Career, being and becoming**

For Nadia her career is a key factor in adulthood, self-respect and enjoyment and she is increasingly self-aware. She also wants to be herself, to do what fits her. However having a job at all is lovely.

*...this year the biggest thing that I've felt is having a job.... That's been lovely (455-7)  
...it felt nice because this is my first year that I've ever really felt like I am part of a workforce. (461-2)*

However there is a change from wanting to have a prestigious job because that gives her an occupational identity, to recognising who she is as a person and wanting a job that fits her personal identity.

*I'm passionate about doing something and really getting into a position where I'm financially where I want to be. And I'm in a position where I go to work and I feel like ...the job fits my background. I really want to have that match because you're at work so much that I want to be doing something that I enjoy doing and I'm getting gratification from and I feel like I've earned it and I've worked for it and I'm happy. I want to look back and be, like, you know, I pushed myself to the most I could be. That's how I am and I think that's how I've been with most things, I've always, always pushed. (280-9)*

Nadia talks of her job as not sustainable because of its demands and I think that she also means this in the sense that it is used as a bridge to reach a clinical career. She is looking to towards an established state, towards the 'forever' career and life, I think that she wants to 'be' and to stop 'becoming' - to get to the 'lived happily ever after' point in the story.

*..it's like a production line, ...it's like we have people drop... because it's not a sustainable career because it's so high volume and we do have a lot of psychology graduates that are using it as a spring board to get onto other things. (353-7)*

### Time pressure and expectations

It becomes clear that Nadia has a fairly rigid time frame that is influenced, even determined, by her parents and her community and the requirement to marry, but she does not make the external pressures clear immediately. In the first quote I read her, as in her first interview, as owning her time frame as a personal commitment;

*...I'm very much a realist and... people laugh at me because they say you're only 24. But I'm one of those people that have this time frame that I have to have and I have, like, certain goals that I want to achieve at certain time frames (126-9)*

Here she reflects on coming back home to visit, and being aware of the time it can take to achieve a clinical training place, and she feels pessimistic.

*But coming back this week ...touching back home, I've ... kind of thought quite hard about what I want to do with my career... And clinical, as much as I really obviously would love to get on to clinical, I'm starting to feel a little bit pessimistic about it, just because it's one of those things where it's never guaranteed ... you can tick a, b, c, d, e, f, ... and it still doesn't guarantee you that you'll get on. And for me, I don't want to be a person who is pushing ...35 plus, because I know there's so many people that I come into contact with who are a lot older than me that are still applying and have got years of experience. ... so... I'm being a lot more realistic about the actual doctorate... (161-80)*

*Now I'm getting that pressure so, you know, you can't just peruse [sic - pursue?] your career for the rest of your...like the whole of your twenties... (275-7)*

*I mean, what the hell. I was actually, kind of, hoping that I'd have another year but, in terms of my rigid time frame, actually getting on to that counselling doctorate would be amazing now. (407-9)*

Nadia reflects on marriage and children as a time constraint and where she wants to get to first. Like Amina but unlike the other interviewees she faces a timetable and wants to get her career and career identity to an established point first.

*The way I see it is that I'm so young and how much more... years I shall be working, that's too scary but the way I see it now is that my twenties, I just want to get to the point where I do as much as I can then I'll get married and then, kind of, think about children and then, after I've done that, then maybe...it's almost as though I want to get to a point where I'm on the career ladder and then I could be happy to take my foot off the brake, [the brake on marriage] ...and then, you know, focus on maybe getting married and family and children. (557-67)*

*Yes, I just want to leave it in the place where I'm like I'm happy with the kind of position that I've left it... That's my main kind of focus at the moment. (570-2)*

She makes promises to her family, her family make promises to the community; the power of the felt community, the weight of expectation, seems massive.

*...I've had that conversation with dad and he said, you know, 'For you to come back in September'. Because he's getting a lot of pressure from the community saying, 'Well, you know, your daughter's still out and you did tell everybody that it was going to be for a year, so you did promise she was going to be back in September'. ...So he's under pressure... To have his unmarried daughter all the way down there is quite a big thing for him. (418-25)*

Later in the interview I ask if she has room to negotiate another year and community expectations are explored further.

*I'm not sure. Because we had a verbal contract where I did say I would return in September ... and he's told everybody that. Everybody was like, 'Oh, my God, you are letting your daughter go' and he was saying, 'It's only for a year'. ... I could ask him but I feel like... I've made a commitment (619-31)*

Marriage is looming.

*...that's probably another driving force in terms of the time-frame because I know I have a very restricted life. My parents want to see me married by the time I'm 27 ... yes. I mean, I'm pushing, like, ideally 24, like, I've gone to so many of my best friends' weddings this summer because they're all getting married. (468-72)*

### **Parental power - support and control**

Nadia has begun to consider a self-funded alternative to clinical training, a Doctorate in Counselling Psychology. This would work with her time constraint and is bound up with negotiations over family and community expectations and responsibilities. The counselling programme would be at a local university and would be funded by her family and she would live at home. This sounds very neat but comes at a price in terms of independence. Much of the rest of the interview is taken up with talking through this possibility, so like Louise in interview one, Nadia is at a crisis point and is able to use the interview as an opportunity to explore a decision, in this sense then the interview is 'live' not just reportage. In talking about this Nadia reveals the deal that she has made with her family. From this point on the interview deepens and I feel that Nadia is exploring herself as well as reporting work that she has already done.

*I've actually started an application form for the counselling doctorate. ...and, obviously, it's a massive financial commitment... They're charging £9,000 a year. ... So my dad's adamant that I come back ...he stipulated that I'd be able to go to Seatown on my own, ...I went with a friend, but still kind of on my own... My dad said, 'I'll let you go for the year' because it was going to be the year training and once I'd qualified I'd be back. And I didn't think my dad realised how competitive it is. I had to go... it was the first job I got after applying that whole 2011, the first year we graduated and that was the first big job I'd got. And it just so happened that the first interview I ...get the job, which was amazing. But... my dad was saying to me,*

*you know, 'I want you to come back'. And I was saying, 'Dad, I'm not going to come back if I haven't got a job to come back to'. (187-213)*

Nadia accepts the constraints she faces, not necessarily happily, she loves her first taste of independent living.

*And plus I love living... I love being a 24-year old living out for the first time. (213-4)*

*...my dad was saying to me, 'Nadia, you know, I'm happy to pay for clinical.' He said, 'I just want you to get on... in terms of ...our specific culture, 24 is kind of quite old to not be married'. (271-5)*

She is happy that she has financial support but it is double edged.

*...because my mum and dad are in a position where ...they're happy to fund me ... But to be fair, Pete, they want their daughter to be coming back home (370-3)*

Nadia has conflicting views over returning home, the joy of independence versus financial relief, independent living on a tight budget is a strain *...moving back home is going to be a huge financial relief (362)* and conflict over what to do;

(Interviewer) How do you feel about coming back home?

*...this is this war that I've been having with myself. Because it's like you're giving up so much... I am really enjoying it and home life is really difficult because it's that whole thing about mum and dad not really treating me like an adult... They just can't seem to take off their, kind of, parental role and I appreciate that they're there to care and love you. But it's like you want to be treated as an adult and you want to, kind of, be respected and you want to be...and that doesn't happen at home, and it is really difficult. (376-87)*

*There's a lot for me that I need to seriously think about. I've literally just ...thought about this the other day and I've done the application so I'm going to submit that. I haven't really thought about it and the funny thing is, Pete, I called up the university thinking I'd try and get another year... working... But they've said that they've actually got places for this September still.*

(Interviewer) And you are, kind of, thinking that's good news and bad news...

*Exactly. I'm in a bit of a dilemma with that, I'm like, 'What do I do'? .... I mean, what the hell. I was actually, kind of, hoping that I'd have another year but, in terms of my rigid time frame, actually getting on to that counselling doctorate would be amazing now. (397-409)*

Nadia really emphasises the conflict she feels between staying in her job for another year and returning home to her parents;

*...that's another huge gamble. A huge sacrifice that I'll be making (444-5)*

*... it will be a huge sacrifice. It's the money, moving back home with the parents and...yes; those are the two massive things. (453-4)*

And the joy of independent life;

*...this year the biggest thing that I've felt is having a job.... That's been lovely (455-7)*

Later Nadia is more accepting of the constraints she faces and notes that few of her friends will have had her opportunity.

*...but then I know that a lot of people, it's not feasible for them to go... halfway down the country for a job. (483-4)*

She is grateful that her father has given her the opportunity she has had. That he has the power to approve or not passes without comment, it seems that the rules can be challenged only so far. She is certainly aware of a factor influencing him.

*...my dad's kind of given me a bit but he's like, "Come back now a little bit" and I'm really grateful for him for being able to stand up and say, "OK, you have the year off". Because, for my dad, he just... I think really he wants me to succeed and be proud of his daughter... Really the way I settled up with him was like, he was up for a doctorate really. That was the thing that sold it to him. And that's probably the thing that's selling the counselling doctorate, it's got the doctorate attached to it. ...because if it was any other kind of, any other job, he wouldn't...no, I wouldn't be able to...he even said that the reason why I'm letting you is because of the career and because of everything that comes with it. ...to do the kind of HR marketing role, that wouldn't have worked with my dad. (489-505)*

Nadia is pleased to know that she is impressing her Dad.

*The fact that he had told [someone]... that I was training and wanted to be a clinical psychologist, that was the bit of 'Wow' like. (514-6)*

Despite this Nadia is clear what she would ideally like.

*...in an ideal world, Pete, I'd simply be saying to you, 'I'm enjoying this job, I'm loving living away'. ... Ideally, I would stay for another year. (615-8)*

However she is a believer in fate (kismet)

*I'm a big believer in fate. I'm a big believer in things... when things are right they all seem to fall into place... (196-7)*

Fate also crops up with Nadia's discovery that a postgraduate place might still be available at the local university as her sister would still be there in her final year. It also links to her career breakthrough in Seatown;

*I was also lucky and, it goes back to kind of fate, that everything working out, one of my closest, closest girlfriends ended up randomly at Seatown University ...at the*



*exact, same time. So I ended up going down with her, having someone to live with. (888-92)*

### **Joy of independence**

Nadia expresses great joy as well as an awareness of the loss in compromising her independence.

*But, at the same time, I really... love the idea ...of going into... further education. And ...I love learning, I absolutely love learning... (178-80)*

Nadia lived at home as an undergraduate and really enjoys a first taste of what is both independent adult life as well as student life.

*...I love being a 24-year old living out for the first time. ...I mean, Pete, I'm actually like paying rent, I'm paying bills, paying council tax, I've learned to cook. They're all the things that you do as, like, an adult as well, I've really got to experience it. And also I've got to experience, kind of, Uni life as well because I'm living with a mature student as well so she's, kind of, had loads of links to students from Seatown University. So... yes, so really, really enjoyed my time out of home. (214-25)*

This is not entirely clear in the transcript but my sense at the interview is that Nadia is also motivated to succeed because women in her family have not had the opportunities to be independent or have careers.

*...that's another thing that's pushing me... I know people, my mum... even my grand mum, my granddad, to them of that older generation, even more so having your daughter, because my grandmother got married when she was 14, 15, so for them, it's even more... they think that a man's going to be a doctor... Even for them, I feel that pressure to succeed in my career and... does that make sense? (520-26)*

### **Money**

Despite the joy she has in independence and paying her own bills, Nadia finds money tight.

*...in terms of me financially being able to [cope]...moving back home is going to be a huge financial relief. Because at the moment, Pete, most of my wage goes to rent and fuels and food and it is an absolute nightmare. I literally just have enough ...I don't really have enough to go shopping or anything. My dad's like, 'What do you do with all your money'. I'm like 'I promise you, dad, I don't have any luxuries'. ...even the train fare up here is £60 or something ridiculous. ... It's just an absolute nightmare. So ...I'm very fortunate this is a viable option for me, I know it's not for a lot of people, because my mum and dad are in a position where they can... they're happy to fund me. (361-71)*

Earning her own money is important and means both symbolic and literal independence.

*...although a lot of my money was going to rent and stuff, I still felt like an adult, you know, I still had money, I'm still earning. (439-40)*

### **Career pessimism**

Nadia reports both satisfaction and dissatisfaction with progress towards the clinical dream and reassures herself that her CV is improving (p453-4). But she also is pessimistic, and her concern with timing seems to be behind it (p161-80). Nadia is also ambivalent about the sacrifices that pursuing a clinical career requires. She has enormously enjoyed her year away from home and moving to another part of the country, but is not comfortable with the prospect (or perhaps the various consequences) of doing so without the prospect of definite reward. The potential fruitlessness and risk of not finding happiness and fulfilment bring to mind the Lewis Carroll nonsense poem 'The Hunting of the Snark', and this symbolises the dilemma that many psychology graduates face, how far do you go, if and when do you give up, what do you do instead?

*I was still, deep down, kind of, pessimistic that I was going to get... any interviews, even at this stage... But I came back this week and, I don't know what it was, it was speaking to a friend of mine who actually went to Aston Uni and I said, you know, 'I feel like I'm... I don't want to just spend my whole, kind of, 20 years just chasing this doctorate'. And really don't want to be one of those people that jumps around the country for assistant psychologists jobs. ... It's not for me, I understand people who do it. ...I don't want to revolve my life around, you know, pursuing something that has no guarantee. That's what's the hardest thing for me that there's no guarantee that even if I get x amount of experience I will get onto the doctorate. And I think that's the hardest thing to swallow for me... (230-43)*

### **Placement**

Nadia stresses the value of her placement year.

*I could not stress the importance of that placement year [enough].*  
Interviewer: 'Even though it was such a tough year for you?'  
Yes. (682-3)

She also reevaluates her difficult relationship with her placement supervisor, surprisingly given the intensity of her distress about it previously. Is this evidence of growth and maturity, perhaps an identification with the adult supervisory role? She makes a favourable contrast with her current supervisor.

*Actually, looking back on it... if I saw my supervisor again, I would thank her immensely because, actually, being older now, I can see that having a supervisor that pushes you and is demanding, yes, she was micromanaging... but they do that because, actually, you become a better clinician, you become a better, more rounded person... at the moment, my supervisor I love her, but she lets me get away with... she's the opposite of somebody who is very demanding.. (687-93)*

This leads her to reflect on her own growth and how her placement contributed.

*...having somebody who pushes me and makes me think clinically, she's not one of those supervisors. ... So I know that, actually, I'm not growing and developing as*

*much as I could be, whereas when I was on my placement, I was... emotionally, I was so anxious, I was so stressed, it was a difficult time for me. But I grew so much. Not only in my clinical work, clinical understanding, but also as a person. And so, having that placement year, I think was absolutely immense for me in terms of making me feel that not only was I more prepared but, actually, I deserved to have a job. I think that was the difference... (707-19)*

She goes on to say.

*You know, having that self-belief and confidence, a lot of that came from my placement year. And, as well, with Aston, I was really encouraged to do loads of other work as well. So I remember [charity telephone helpline], I started using it as a result of... and I did support work, I did mentoring, I did all of this through the Uni and all of that just bolstered up my CV. ... Because you can't rely on [just] having a degree to get you... [a job] (726-32)*

*...even now I still with the current job... a lot of it went back to my placement, and what I learned from my placement year. (751-2)*

The placement year seems important in widening her horizons.

*And I think having done the placement year... That made me realise actually, you know, that your scope needs to be a lot greater. You can't just expect to have a job right by... (869-72)*

*I think that that was the only reason that made me realise, actually, how competitive it is and the placement year, actually, was what made me realise if you want to go down this career and you are really adamant that you want to go down this career, you have to start making some real, like, commitment... (874-8)*

Nadia adds quite a few comments about how the placement year could be improved and suggests more on helping students

*...to have more of a realistic idea of what to expect.*

And a second mid-placement meeting opportunity.

*I think having more peer support and having something that you can truly empathise with what you're going through would be massively beneficial. Especially during the Christmas time because that's when you feel like I've got so many more months left. (1023-6)*

Having something organized to come back to engage in ideas, to debrief returning students and build on their experience, and easier access to the careers service for recent graduates.

### **Summary and discussion – Nadia**

The interview gradually unveiled Nadia's conflicted feelings about her desire for personal freedom, to live independently, and to pursue her career on the one hand; and, on the other

hand, her loyalty to her parents, her father in particular, and the values that they hold and are in turn accepted by her. Nadia would like to achieve qualified professional status before marriage, which is likely to be by age 27 at the latest. Her career and career identity are important for her personal satisfaction and to enable her to return to professional work after having children. There is no suggestion that her professional status might have implications for marriageability, but she does say that her family are attracted by the idea of her having a doctorate, as any family would be. Nadia has achieved much but as she is aiming at clinical psychology she is only part-way to an unsecured goal and acknowledges that she may not have time to do so before her fate closes in. This much may be unique to a particular cultural background but in common with other clinical aspirants she has to regularly reassess whether she should look elsewhere. This is bound up with her experience of independence and anxiety over the double-edge of support and control that returning home offers. Nadia's transition thus encompasses tastes of professional life, personal independence and student life as well as the bitterness of rejection and low status work and a managed retreat from her first ambition. Ultimately she is in the hands of fate. Her ringing endorsement of her placement year experience and the focus on personal and career development and work experience is profound as is her depth of reflection and self-awareness.

## **Louise**

Louise was interviewed for the second time at work in June 2013. The interview begins with Louise recounting her progress since the first interview. I have taught her as part of her Business School MSc since but at this point I have not seen her for over a year. Her explanation is a retrospective review and she seems initially well rehearsed and cautiously pleased with her progress. She is working towards Registered Occupational Psychologist status (Chartered status with the British Psychological Society) and is making good progress. She is more confident, knowledgeable and in charge; at the start of the interview I notice that she has the confidence to tell me something, it is trivial but it is the first time that I have noticed her do this and it reveals her enhanced stature as well as being a striking reminder for me of the authority that I had taken for granted.

*So, in terms of the large consultancies, they're a bit further towards Oxford and then down south predominantly. (52-4)*

## **Happy with progress**

In contrast with the first interview Louise is not in crisis and feels that she is moving forwards.

*...it feels great, ...I'm happy with where I am. I suppose initially it probably felt slightly overwhelming... So it was a bit of a kick really up the bum to, you know, stop getting out of bed so late and stuff. So, at first, it was a little overwhelming but now I've settled into it and, yes, it's a really good feeling. (75-84)*

In contrast with interview one.

*Yes, I'm not, like, agitated at all... (757)*

### **Identity, not a student anymore**

Louise notes that she is not in education anymore and is therefore more accountable and no longer her own boss.

*...education is something that I've had all my life... it's always been school. So, I mean, that was like 9 to 3ish anyway but then you develop into your own habits at college and then Uni especially. ... you plan your own time ... although you know you've got the same goal as everybody else, how you commit to it and stuff it's...well, you're your own boss in that sense. Whereas here I have a line manager who is on to me every day. ...the accountability, yes, has an effect... (88-99)*

[about the business] *...you just really cannot let the side down (131-2)*

She is wistful about her lost student identity.

*...it's me clinging onto something because when we met previously my identity was 'student' and everything that comes with student; lifestyle and oh, you know, you were a binge drinker and all that, you know. It's the stereotypes that people probably have in their heads, and I think part of me still holds on to that now. It's just, you know, when someone says "student" they think of you a bit more laid back... And I like that feeling that I'm my own boss and stuff, so I think that's probably why I liked that identity of being a bit lackadaisical and just getting on with things in my own little way. (584-94)*

Her identity now is from her job and her professional status. She contrasts this with the 'social' role of students.

*...I'm a professional now, so my identity has changed. I've grown up, I think, really and so my identity has just matured with me. So, instead of being a student... I'd say I'm now a Psychologist in Training and so my identity is very much about my job...my job role as opposed to, like, a social aspect... (594-99)*

There is both pride and regret here. Louise is happy with progress but perhaps a little overwhelmed and aware of loss. Exploring identity a little further clarifies issues around professional identity and status and being and becoming.

*Putting it like that makes it a little clearer to me that, yes, it's the psychology and it's the focus on who I am and who I'm going to become (611-3)*

Becoming a professional psychologist is a key ambition.

*...on my signature is says, like, HR Adviser... But that pains me to write that, you know, I really want to put Business Psychologist or Practitioner in Training... yes, I think that the discipline, you know, is something that is still important to me... And I really want to shout about it all the time... (622-9)*

### **Change from clinical to occupational psychology**

For Louise the change in career aim from clinical psychology to occupational psychology, is very important to her. In this extract she positions this crisis as now overcome and also refers back to her unhappiness at the time of the first interview.

*I was so committed to doing clinical psychology and pursuing that and I'd undertaken several unpaid placements and made, like, financial commitments and stuff like that and had to maintain several part time jobs to get me through. In my mind I was, like you know, I've got to see this to the end now. And then because it wasn't going to materialise with, like, the lack of jobs and experience and stuff, that's when I was in that little bit of a transition ... what was I really going to pursue. And so I think that's probably why I was slightly unhappy because my first goal ...I knew it wasn't going to materialise. ...I eventually came to accept that it's OK to change, you know, your career path and you can always go back and stuff like that. ...I think it was a bit of naivety really on my part of not really realising that there's more out there and just because you go for something different, it doesn't necessarily mean you can't retract or you know, just swerve back so... Yes, at that point I wasn't too happy and, yes, transition is the right word. But now I think I've come through it... (146-163)*

Her comments that she can always go back or change direction may be accurate to an extent but once Chartered Psychologist status has been achieved it may no longer be easy to change specialism, however Louise may also be rationalizing the bitter truth that she has been deflected from her original aim, as so many psychology graduates are. Louise accepts that she has lost her dream but she holds on to parts of it; that she will be a professional and a psychologist if not a clinical psychologist. The loss of the dream is also the loss of the nightmare of rejection and means that now, although still in transition, her way forward looks clear. She also notes that as one transition is surmounted another one takes its place.

*...I feel like I'm on a track that I can see going forward... I can see it going pretty straight now. So yes, I'm a bit more settled...I suppose, inevitably, I'm in another transition in that I'm training and will eventually be a qualified practitioner. But, yes, I'm much more settled in it, so... yes, I can take my time with it now. So, yes, in a better state now. (167-172)*

Asked if she would ever go back to the clinical route she replies.

*I don't see at the moment it's something I'm still open to... (232)*

But later in the same passage she talks about her consultancy ambition taking her in a broadly clinical or social care direction.

*I think deep down I think that's something that I'm probably clinging on to because ... in the back of my head, like, work like with dementia and stuff like that, it's something that I've had an interest in. ...if I'm truthful, like, it's probably something inside me that's like "OK, let's keep with health and social care and things" (242-7)*

And later still she returns to the clinical theme when discussing the placement year and how rewarding her degree was.

*Well, it was rewarding...how was it rewarding though? ...at the time it was very rewarding... But, in terms of where I am now, a couple of years on..., it's not as rewarding and beneficial to me. And I think the reason is because I've gone through that change. (From clinical to occupational). (640-7)*

Despite this repeated focus on career, on professional psychology as a key ambition, on the lost opportunity of clinical psychology, and wanting the BSc to be more vocational, Louise recognises the intrinsic rewards of studying and offers a different viewpoint when asked 'if you were able to go back, what would you say to yourself?'

*I'd give myself a good shake and I'd probably tell myself not to worry as much. ...I had big concerns about, you know, where I was going to go and...and I've always had a focus ... on what would happen in the next year or two. ...and it's not relevant. I've gone down a totally different path ...I didn't even know this path existed, so I didn't worry about it. ...so I'd probably just tell myself to de-stress and enjoy it a little more. (669-78)*

This is a little incongruous with the rest of the interview where she is almost arguing that she, and certainly the university, should have been focused (worried) some more. Perhaps she is adopting another voice or discourse in the Bakhtinian sense of dialogicity (Wetherell, Taylor and Yates, 2001a, 2001b), a discourse of an older person talking to the driven young and taking a rather parental position of longer-term sagacity. An ability to take multiple positions that can have dialogical relationships with each other is a feature of Dialogical Self Theory (Hermans, 2001). Dialogics often do not lead to closure and remain unresolved, enabling Louise to productively retain and be attuned to multiple perspectives.

When the contradiction between saying 'Enjoy it, you're only an Undergraduate once' and on the other hand 'Think about your job, think about what are you going to do' is pointed out, Louise again notes the pain of the loss of her clinical ambitions but also recognizes that education may be a process of being and becoming by discovery and development rather than simply vocational training.

*...the reason I would say to myself 'Oh, just chill out a moment' is because at that point I had so many options available to me and I was just stressing about one. Like, one, the Clinical route was potentially not going to materialise and I knew that so I*

*was really, really agitated about it. But then what I really needed to do was to take a step back and say 'Look, there's other things out there and, you know, the world is quite a big place'. And, by trying to get us to focus on what do you want to do,...that kind of made me a little worse really. ... I think having a focus on what do you specifically want to do and you need to drive for it, would probably force people a little too much... (702-14)*

*...an Undergraduate, it's more about finding out who you want to be and stuff like that. So chill out a little more in terms of getting yourself a job, although it's important. But I think it's more important about finding out what, you know, keeps you going every day. (719-23)*

Further discussion elicits a hierarchy of needs idea and the metaphor of transition as a series of levels.

*...right now I'm in a good position, I've got a secure job ...and I'm doing stuff that I really enjoy. So my point of view is, ...you know, enjoy other things in your life but that's because I'm settled in my career right now. ...if I was ...hunting for a job and I was trying to schedule interviews and prepare for them, I would probably say that, you know, graduate employment is key, it's crucial. ....nothing else would be important other than graduate employment and making it work. (735-44)*

*...had you probably caught me maybe eight months ago when I wasn't sure if I was going to be able to secure a position here, I'd say yes it's 110% important and you've really got to drive yourself. But because I'm settled, yes, I'm on to the next level... (752-5)*

Whatever her career Louise still wants to be her own boss, to be in control.

*I'll be a practitioner ... in the back of my mind I hope to eventually, you know, maybe have my own consultancy or... (110-15)*

### **Value of university education**

When asked about her thoughts on the value of university education, and given some tacit encouragement to be critical of it, Louise returns to her non-graduate friend who she had felt behind at her first interview. Now she feels differently but this seems due to her MSc rather than her BSc.

*... my friend, she's still in the same employment as when we last met and I would say that now I'm in a similar position to her in terms of working 9 till 5 and in an office environment. But I assume that I am more satisfied because my decision to come into employment now is a little more informed. Like, her decision was just something that happened ... it wasn't necessarily the role that she wanted. ...she would say..., she doesn't want to be in the role but it pays the bills,.. Whereas... I am very satisfied and I get a lot out of it. So, yes, my decision is a lot more well-informed because of Uni (192-205)*

Louise warms to the theme of her having more choices, being more informed and satisfied, and she sees herself as pro-active rather than passive.



*... the doors that I had opened to me were my doors... (208)*

*...I made my choice. ...other people were opening those for her... My informed decisions ... have been a bit more pro-active ... finding out what makes me tick and stuff like that really... (211-19)*

Louise picks up the vocational value of education and its value in terms of return on investment in discussing if university is more than 'just a brilliant time'.

*Yes, well, it set me up but then it doesn't set everybody up because there's people that have done what I did at Uni, you know, who did placement years, you know, got a relatively good 2.1 and stuff like that. But they've still not got the job they wanted ... So they've invested their time and some money and they've got a student loan etcetera but there's not been a return on it... (479-86)*

Her conclusion is that with higher fees it may not be worth it;

*...you like to think that as a consequence of that Uni you'll get a committed career and stuff. For me that's how it's been but, yes, I don't think for everybody... And going forward, if someone was to say to me 'Do you think I should go to Uni and pay £9,000 a year or shall I go to College and go through like a Diploma route...' I would suggest College now because I certainly would not have paid £9,000 for my undergraduate... (490-7)*

*...I value it but not that much. (499)*

University was rewarding at the time but questionably so in vocational terms.

*Well, it was rewarding ...at the time it was very rewarding and I don't want to forget that. But, in terms of where I am now, a couple of years on which is what this is about, it's not as rewarding and beneficial to me. And I think the reason is because I've gone through that change. (From clinical to occupational). At the time I had a focus and my Undergraduate was helping me to achieve that goal. So that's why it was rewarding. (640-9)*

Asked how university (for undergraduates) should be different Louise talks of community and hints at loss and regret for relationships not made or not sustained.

*It would be nice if it was a little more like a community. (508)*

*...like a communal area where you can get together and forge those relationships... (514-5)*

*I'm not in contact with many people from my Undergraduate and ... I didn't really have the environment around which encouraged that. ...I kept myself to myself really ... I made a few key friends but... there's quite a few people that, you know, 'Oh I wonder what she's up to' but I haven't got her contact details. So it would be nice if Uni was a bit more of a community rather than just a learning place. (517-25)*

She also feels ignored.

*...when I left ...my College would often send ...follow-up emails 'How you getting on', 'What is it that you're doing now' and stuff like that, and it was just nice to have that connection. ...I hardly ever really hear from Aston... [So there's no sense of alumni...?] No...well there is like in...from my Postgraduate Degree but from Undergraduate Degree it... I don't know what's going on at the Uni and, you know, what awards have won and stuff like that. I don't get that anymore... (547-57)*

*...it's a time of my life that I'll always remember, I'll never forget it so it would be nice to, kind of, hang on to it a little bit really. (570-1)*

### **BSc / MSc comparisons**

When asked further about the value of her education Louise distinguishes between UG and PG in relation to employability. The MSc is clearly a much more career-focused and vocational programme.

*Undergraduate Degree I would say that it was broad ... But then, in terms of like employability and how you can try and apply stuff to the workplace, I would say that I had a lot to learn even after my placement year. (269-74)*

*...with the Masters it was very much like we were constantly being asked 'What will you do with this when you leave us' kind of thing. And, from the very beginning, we were thinking about the end. Whereas with the Undergraduate that was never really instilled in us until probably ... the final year. (281-6)*

*Undergraduate wise, we'd have a practice interview, for example, with a potential employer ... and there'd be like a dummy scenario there. Whereas, Postgraduate, you know, we'd have that at least every three months and building up to that we'd have to do xyz in terms of a workshop... (288-92)*

Louise is impressively knowledgeable and concise about the benefits of the MSc.

*...it was about presentation skills, team working like inter-personal skills and stuff. So they were very much skills that, at interview, you would probably be asked about and so not only did I know what I was saying but I knew why I was saying it... I had a clearer understanding of what an employer would be looking for. ...not just what I wanted... but what the employer would be looking for me to contribute. So, yes, the Undergraduate was quite vague but I think that's because I'm reflecting upon it having done a Masters now. (294-303)*

She is also aware of how intimate the career-focus is.

*... I don't know if that was because of the content, it was work psychology and HR and so there was a heavy focus on processes in the workplace and stuff like that, and recruitment and selection. And, especially with Graduate intakes, a lot of people on the course were looking at Graduate programmes so we were not only studying them but we were eventually going to be applying for them. (305-10)*

Given her concern with cost, value and return on investment in the UG programme it is interesting that she sees the MSc as money well spent, at least in comparative terms.

*... I would say so [it was worth it?], yes, yes, although it cost a lot more. I do, yes [think it was worth it]. I never ever doubted in my mind whether I should have gone to the other less expensive university, no, not once... I think it's probably gone through my parents mind because they have helped with part of it as well. But, no, no, it was a good decision that I made, yes, definitely 110%. (315-28)*

Given an opportunity to consider if the BSc could have been more employability focused Louise identifies practical issues that made the MSc experience so successful for her but are probably not feasible for larger undergraduate cohorts. She does not explore possible alternative benefits of undergraduate education.

*I think it probably could have been more focused. But then I think it would have been quite challenging for them because ... there was 12 to 14 people on my ... Masters course. Undergraduate wise there was 100 odd, so if there's... employability workshops for just, you know, clinical psychology, they wouldn't have accommodated for everybody... (334-9)*

Later Louise suggests that the BSc could be more focused on preparing students for careers in clinical psychology by making it more like the D Clin Psy programme, but does not say that this would require selection for professional psychology at 18 plus rather than 21 plus. It does follow her fairly consistent theme of vocational HE being seen as the ideal.

Asked to reflect on the placement year, Louise talks about her personal development on placement.

*...for me ...it was the right time and I thoroughly enjoyed it and I would say that it really helped me as a person... I really came out of my shell at that point and I wasn't just sat in the lecture room being, you know, in my own little bubble I was having to interact with professionals and senior, like, clinicians and stuff, so... Yes, it's quite daunting. (450-7)*

### **Summary and discussion - Louise**

Louise is emotionally in quite a different position in this second interview compared with her first. She is not 'agitated' and in crisis as she was in the first interview and has grown in stature. For the first time I can see her leadership potential and this helps me to believe in her entrepreneurial ambition. She is relaxed, brisk, more explicit and less in awe of me. Like Amina she is on a clear path and has moved on from the initial transition crisis. She is reconciled to her change in career aim from clinical psychology and is becoming an occupational psychologist. She has completed a successful MSc and while she faces new challenges she seems much more at ease with herself. Unlike Amina and Nadia, she is not yet ready to contemplate, or perhaps just not to discuss with me, other young adulthood issues around possible life partnership or parenthood. She has hardened her view that her

undergraduate education was not worth it and contrasts it with the more vocational, more personal and smaller MSc programme that she acknowledges was expensive but thinks was entirely worthwhile. She looked and sounded very much the young professional, possibly the interview location may have contributed to this, the first interview was in her family home, the second in her workplace, although both involved meeting her family.

## **Amina**

Amina was interviewed almost exactly two years after she had graduated and 22 months after her first interview. During this time she had successfully completed her Cert Ed and was well on the way to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). She was interviewed two days after the last day of term at the end of the year of her first teaching job, a one-term temporary maternity cover post. The issues facing Amina gradually emerged and in some respects are similar to those of Nadia. Amina had been a fairly reserved tutee but seemed to value an opportunity to participate in this second interview. As in other interviews I skated round more personal issues but the interview becomes more personal as it develops and brings together many of the main themes.

### **The pace of change**

Amina, asked how it feels to be two years on from graduation noted both that

*In a way, it seems like it's such a long time ago (22)*

and that

*everything's just fast moving and everything happens really quickly and so...it doesn't even feel like it's been two years (24-5)*

Taken together both perhaps communicate how busy and involved she is, how quickly she has moved on and has changed, and the scale of her transition.

### **Work, status and identity**

Amina talks about work and her occupation as a key feature determining her identity and adult status.

*I think it's more in terms of occupation. I think that shapes a lot of things now, because when you are a student, you're viewed differently, as having a student life and not being mature. Like, by society... (34-7)*

*And so I think mainly it's my occupation that's made me into an adult more than anything (45-6)*

She also implies that it gives her long-term independence, particularly when she has children and has taken a career break.

*I know I can go back to teaching as a supply teacher. I know I would never, ever be without a job, which is something really positive for me. (697-9)*

*...which is really positive because there are people out there who don't have the qualifications or who don't have a degree and things. For them, it's difficult because a job for them, if they leave that job, they might not be able to get back into work afterwards. I'm glad that I don't have that worry. (727-31)*

She is proud of her maturity and status particularly as she is so young.

*...in my school ...I'm the youngest so... when the other teachers know how old I am they say, "Oh my goodness, you're still a baby". ...but the way I come across, they were quite surprised that I'm actually that young. (63-7)*

She is also quite clear that this is the right career for her.

*Yes, definitely, I've loved it ...absolutely. (93)*

*...because I had such a lovely team and such a lovely class, I really enjoyed it. So I know it's definitely the right career. (106-7)*

Her aims are to complete her newly qualified teacher (NQT) year and achieve QTS and a good grading and move on in her career.

*...at the moment it's securing a permanent position ...my short term aims are to complete my NQT year. (319-22)*

*...I want to be graded as a good or outstanding teacher by Ofsted (325)*

*And then, once I've secured a position, I'd like to have... be in charge of a specialist subject. So, maybe, I was thinking of science... (338-40)*

*So, in the future I would like to be, maybe, like a specialist head of science or specialist science teacher. (344-6)*

Later on in the interview she seems less confident and she talks about the advantages of supply teaching. This is in the context of workload, which ties in with her thoughts about the university experience.

*...there's less workload when you are on supply. ...it's daunting because you are going to lots of different schools. You don't know what class you're going to have, you don't know what the behaviour is going to be like. You don't know what planning the teacher has left for you ...there are gifted and talented pupils that will really test your knowledge, so it can be daunting in a way. ...and also you don't know what kind of pupils you're going to meet. But, in terms of workload, it's far less stressful*

*because you just go in, you follow what the teacher has left, you teach the children, you mark the work at the end of the day and you go home and you relax. ...you don't take any work home, you've got no assessments to do .... I would probably say that day to day stresses is probably just a bit higher because you don't know what to expect, that's all. (460-83)*

This is contrasted with having your own permanent class;

*...it's nice to have your own class... You know what to expect from them and it's less stressful in that sense. The only thing is, you're constantly taking work home ...I feel as though I've been working 6 days a week because I'd take work home in the evening and then I normally rest on a Saturday, I normally work on a Sunday. (488-95)*

Later Amina reveals anxiety about her progress.

*...I'm constantly worried about not being able to get a permanent position. Even when I am in a permanent position... I really have to prove myself. Because, in your NQT year, you really have to prove yourself that you are a good teacher. (633-7)*

She returns to the idea of supply teaching first mentioned in line 460 as offering family-friendly flexibility and a way forward if she could not find a permanent job.

*...when my children are old enough to go to school, I would go back to my career ...because teaching is always there, I know I can go back to teaching as a supply teacher. I know I would never ever be without a job which is something really positive for me. Because there's always going to be a need for supply teachers. ...also, if I really struggled to get a permanent job, I could still do supply teaching. Supply teaching is so flexible that it could work around family life. So I could say to the agency, "You know, I only want to work three days a week, Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays". Then I have the option because then, you know, I can manage home life, manage my children and things... So teaching, one of the positive things about teaching is its flexibility. (695-709)*

*...if I'm struggling to manage or to cope, I could always give up my career for a short amount of time until I get back on top of things. And then I know I can always go back into supply with there will always be work... (724-7)*

Towards the end of the interview I am surprised to find that she has not actually applied for any permanent positions.

*I have not applied for a permanent position because of being so busy with my class and end of year assessments and writing reports and so many things to do... So I haven't had a chance to apply for any permanent positions. Most of them are probably taken up now. ...another reason why I'm not applying ...is because there's too much competition. ...you spend lots of time typing up these application forms and then, you know, because there are so many, I think randomly, they just select some. It's not... I feel as though I'm wasting my time. So I don't... I've, kind of,*

*stopped applying for long-term positions because I'm going... I want a long-term position through supply. (797-810)*

It is hard to decide if her interest in supply and failure to apply for jobs is a rationalization or a temporary response to overload, a withdrawal from the employment mainstream to take a more traditional feminine role, but she ends the interview with a plan and acknowledges that she has had too much to do in her first job, I guess a common experience in a first teaching post.

*...what I'm going to do is... start September with supply and... I can use my time to be applying for jobs. So, you know, those evenings and weekends that I've got free... fair enough, weekends I can enjoy but evenings, I can really look and apply for jobs. Because it's just, in this term, I was not able to do that because there were so much going on. (835-51)*

She is proud of being mature and of her professional status but is also aware of the responsibilities and restrictions it carries. It may be a burden.

*But now that I'm a teacher, it shapes everything now because I have to be professional at all times. Even when I'm not working I have to be professional because you don't know really who you might come across, you might come across parents or pupils or... And also ...Facebook and things, you have to be professional on there (37-42)*

Much later in the interview Amina sounds more anxious about the burdens of responsibility in the context of worrying about getting a permanent job.

*And then you have that responsibility where you don't want to let the school down. You know, where you need to try and maintain this high standard of teaching. Also a responsibility where you have lots of children... you know, you have parents that have left their child in your care which is a huge responsibility because children fall, children say mean things to each other, they hurt themselves, all kinds of things happen in school. And then that can be quite stressful as well. (640-7)*

### **Not a student anymore**

Amina mentions not being a student any more three times in the first sixty lines and that this may be both a source of pride but also a loss of a more carefree pre-adult state. Being an adult means not being a student anymore and by extension, being a student means not being an adult. Occupational status is therefore a key part of adulthood. Broverman, Clarkson, Rosenkrantz and Vogel (1970) showed that gender stereotypes identified adulthood with masculinity and that femininity was not associated with adulthood. Given that 1960s gender stereotypes may have eroded to a degree, occupational status may nonetheless be more important for women in order for them to establish adulthood.

*I don't know that I am a student any more. (30)*

*...when you are a student, you're viewed differently, as having a student life and not being mature. (35-6)*

Amina returns to this theme later in the interview when asked about her identity.

*I do see myself as a professional ... I think it's just learning to accept that you are not a student anymore even though you want to carry on being a student. ... I do miss being a student. ... I miss the fact that there was no responsibility, there is not much of a responsibility because ...your only priority is doing well at Uni. (615-23)*

And she identifies what she misses about being a student, implying that this has all gone.

*...you can still have a social life... enjoy a family life, ...enjoy going out with your friends. ...it is a lot about socialising at university. ...and the only thing that you need to worry about his doing well at Uni. (623-33)*

In particular she misses friends and the opportunities for friendship. She is not established in a permanent work environment and may find differences in age (hinted at) and culture (not mentioned) leave her feeling isolated and in-between. This points up how challenging the transition is.

*...the main thing that I miss is ...enjoying university life and your social life and your family life... I do see my friends but not very often. ...I've probably cut out a lot of my friends... at university you tend to meet up with lots of different kinds of friends, university friends, just any friends that have free time, spare time but now, it's more like you have to make time for your friends, especially the ones that are close to you, the ones that are important to you. (647-58)*

Amina also misses studying.

*I do enjoy studying, I do miss the learning aspect of my life as well where, even though you are a teacher, academically you are always learning things... But it's not psychological things and I do miss the psychological aspect of learning ...I do miss that side of things, of new research, and things like that. (737-44)*

### **Value of undergraduate degree**

Amina has positive things to say but I feel that she is clutching at straws to put a positive gloss on the value of her undergraduate experience and her examples do not convince, for example there was only one presentation required of students in the final year.

*...presentations ... Especially in your final year and when you have to be formal and professional. ...in that aspect, it prepared me professionally. (29-34)*

*Academically, the course content in human psychology, some of it is relevant to teaching, like child psychology, and things ... which is quite useful. ... But I think the*



*degree itself, in the way that it was organised, definitely helped me become more confident verbally. And also helped me to be more professional as well. (34-41)*

She also suggests that she has benefitted more broadly (*more intelligent*) and more convincingly she suggests that her psychology degree helped her to be research literate in her professional training.

*...it's definitely made me more intelligent ... more aware of things that I probably wouldn't have known if I hadn't done a psychology degree. ...research wise, it's definitely made me more aware... (151-4)*

Amina also argues that she learned to work hard, perhaps in a time-management sense.

*...university has helped me ...you have to really work hard at Uni and ...that hard work has been embedded into me now. So, as a teacher, I don't feel so overwhelmed... (401-5)*

*...you're always revising, sitting at a computer, typing up your dissertation, researching. ...having experienced that now, I don't find it overwhelming, so I know how to cope with it because I've done it at Uni before. (418-21)*

Nonetheless university is relatively easy compared to teaching.

*But, you know, sitting at a computer... it's not that difficult compared to what I've done here. (437-9)*

Asked whether the degree focused too much on professional outcomes such as clinical psychology, Amina suggests that clinical psychology is the essence of the subject.

*I can see why it would focus on that because that's, kind of, the main body of psychology. (181-2)*

And she recognizes that she chose psychology because she was interested in it.

*I felt as though that was probably the most interesting; the clinical psychology side of things. ...I didn't feel as though it was..., emphasised... But even if it was I wouldn't mind because that's probably ... the reason why I chose psychology because ... it is interesting. (185-91).*

*...it's psychology that... I was interested in... Because I thought three years of education that's going to bore me to death ... so I'd rather do something that I'm really interested in. (275-6)*

She does return to clinical psychology later in a passage that brings together some of the themes throughout the interview and reveals the pressure that she feels under. The assertion that she would have liked to go towards clinical work is startling given her

previous insistence that a teaching career was planned all along, and I interpret this as relating to the cultural, gender and financial pressures that must have experienced.

*So when I left university, I would have liked to have gone towards clinical. But the need for me to start earning as soon as possible, I think that was probably one of the reasons why I... didn't go towards clinical psychology because I needed to ...get in to a job quicker and I knew what job that would be and I just needed to think of the quickest route to that job. And also, because I'm looking to get married... I need to save up. So getting a job quickly...and that kind of puts more pressure on securing a permanent position as well. Because of the need for money... Because I'm not a student anymore and when you are an adult, you were expected to, kind of, provide for yourself and, you know, be able to pay for your wedding and put a deposit down on a house and things like that. Which is a huge pressure. (747-61)*

Amina and her cohort were unhappy at the final year module selection process that left her taking modules that she had not selected. She noted that *structure-wise, I think everything was fine* (541) but more interestingly she brought a teacher's eye to undergraduate teaching.

*...from a teaching point of view, you know, even though I'm primary and this is higher education, Ofsted view effective teaching as the learners being actively engaged and from a university point of view... most of it is lecture-based where you sit listening and you make notes. It just makes me think about how effective that is and whether learners will actually pick up a lot of things through that. Because I found myself having to go over things quite a lot because, even when you're sitting there and you are making notes, it makes sense at the time but when you come back and you read it, you don't have the same understanding. ...it might have been better if some lessons were more practical which helps you to remember things... (543-56)*

*But then I don't know how willing university students are at are being actively engaged at the same time... Some university students enjoy sitting and making notes and they don't mind. I didn't mind either. But it's not effective. (565-70)*

This seems to me to be quite correct, but perhaps also to imply a limited view of education as only about factual transmission.

### **Time pressure**

Amina has a consistent issue with the length of time it takes to achieve qualified status and professional employment. This might be a personal issue but it may also be because of the other pressures crowding in on her.

*...I really enjoyed clinical psychology, I really, did. But the thought of continuing my studies for another God know how many years, that's something that really put me off. I would have loved to go down that route and... Can you go down that route with a 2-1? (232-5)*

Her last comment here implies that she might have felt outside a charmed circle of people who could aim so high, although she contextualizes this afterwards.

*... I didn't really research a route into clinical psychology because I knew teaching was what I wanted to do anyway. (240-2)*

Despite her interest in qualifying quickly she chose a longer route (she could have taken a B.Ed course and saved a year) and this undermines the idea that speed is all she is interested in, unless perhaps she is rationalizing her choice after the event;

*I did consider doing a three-year degree in education because it would have been a shorter route and I would have had QTS ...a year earlier. However, it's psychology that... I was interested in. Because I thought three years of education that's going to bore me to death ...even though it meant I have to wait an extra year before I can start teaching, I've done something I've enjoyed. (271-8)*

This introduces the idea that Amina is highly organized and has planned thoroughly.

### **Money**

Money relates to time pressure, Amina notes.

*Because I worked, I don't have any student loans to pay. (426)*

Money also comes into taking on the roles and possessions that embody adulthood.

*I have bought a new car as well, so ...it's that financial pressure of, you know, me having to pay my own way now ... because I'm working now. I pay my own car insurance and have to ...run ...my car now (774-8)*

The prospect of marriage and wanting to get established may relate to her sense of time pressure, but she sounds to be firmly in charge, rather than having to work around someone else's timetable and while respecting tradition she is aware of the importance of having her career and education and being able to be independent.

*I'm looking to get married and have children but ...I want to do my NQT before I get married... Because, then, that way I've always got my career behind me and I've got my education. And I think that's what makes me really strong as a person. ...because, in Asian culture, the female she moves in with her husband and his family and you don't know what the future holds. But if I had to get my own place, at least I know I've got my education, I've got different doors, different route that I can take... if I was to have children, I probably would give up my career to... I don't know if it's a cultural thing or a personal thing but I don't agree with having my child in child-care with somebody else looking after my child. ...I would give up my career to bring up my children and then, when my children are old enough to go to school, I would go back to my career then... (679-96)*

*Because then you are expected to provide for your husband, so it's the responsibility of cooking, being a housewife... Yes, keeping the house clean at all times, doing all the cleaning, doing the washing and then it's hard to, kind of, manage all that along with a career. ...if I had children, it would be even more difficult. But if I didn't have any children, I think I could manage a career and a home life. ...when you have children, things get a bit complicated. (715-31)*

Marriage also links to money.

(Interviewer) ...getting money. ...has that changed you, at all?

*For me, definitely. Because if I'm looking to get married, I need to save up. (735-7)*

### **Strengths and qualities**

Amina has her strengths and qualities to offer an employer at her finger tips and offers an impressive and extended list.

*...being professional. ...being highly adaptable to ...any age group ...I've done from nursery to year six ...I'm always willing to learn... up for a challenge and ... looking for ways to improve ...acting upon advice and feedback. So I'm always looking for ways in which I can be a better teacher. So...yes...I'm highly organised and my main priority is getting children to progress and I'd probably say I'm really motivated to do that. ... I've only had a term but [if] I had a class or a permanent position for a year then... I would really be able to see their progress from the beginning to end of the year. ... Lesson planning is fine... My classroom management is very good... And I've had feedback ...where they've said that, you know, that class was a tricky class but you've managed it quite well ... I would say I communicate very well with parents, with children, children know what's expected, they know what's allowed, what's not allowed. ...me and the other reception teacher, we always communicate really well... (354-95)*

Amina sees herself as capable and hard-working and makes a similar point to her first interview about managing her workload.

*...I've got friends who have done a degree at Aston University and they've said, you know, the workload is too much... it is a lot of hard work but I know how to deal with it. ...I had a part-time job as well. And I did some voluntary work as well because I had to get into my PGCE with something classroom based ...I had to do something additional. ...you're always revising, sitting at a computer, typing up your dissertation, researching. ...having experienced that now, I don't find it overwhelming, so I know how to cope with it because I've done it at Uni before. (407-21)*

Connecting with her sense of herself as capable and hard-working, Amina sees herself as highly organized and well planned.

*Because I'm highly organized... (436)*

However this is undermined by her failure to apply for any permanent posts.

### **Summary and discussion - Amina**

Amina has progressed on track as planned and is an NQT and moving towards QTS. She emphasises how much hard work is involved and was clearly not entirely happy about opting for supply work when she had previously liked the idea of becoming a specialist science teacher. Amina was very frank about her expectations of marriage and children and the gendered role that this would entail. She certainly does not present herself as a victim and embraces a mixture of personal and cultural values that perhaps reflects her growing confidence. She celebrates success and adulthood but also mourns a lost stage of life. Her concerns now are with the next stage and the challenges it will bring. To me Amina's story is one of a transition as work-in-progress and already partly assimilated, and reminds me that we are always dealing with transition and change to some degree and are always becoming throughout the lifespan.

### **Suzie**

The salient feature of Suzie's first interview was the maturity, sophistication and depth of her commitment to a career in clinical psychology and the extent to which she seemed to have become a 'legitimate peripheral participant' (Lave and Wenger, 1991, 2002) in that community of practice. Given her clinical skills, maturity, proactive approach, sense of respect for her colleagues as well as rigorous honesty, clarity and realism it is not a surprise to find that two years on she has achieved a funded clinical psychology training place. Suzie was interviewed for the second time shortly before she left work to join her clinical psychology course, coincidentally also at 'Seatown'. She was confident and relaxed and seemed much more mature than two years previously. She was previously the best prepared of the group aiming for clinical psychology and has successfully achieved relevant employment as well as a training place at the first attempt.

### **Still a student**

Suzie is happy with her progress and is still learning. She is coming to terms both with lifelong learning and perhaps to the 'back-to-the-floor' sensation that accompanies transition.

(Interviewer) How does it feel to be almost two years on from graduation?  
*Strange. ... I think I still, sometimes, feel I'm still a student. (27-31)*

*I think there isn't really that much of the shift. And I think, even when I speak to other colleagues, I think that that is a recurring theme that would happen, even post qualification. I think when you are even newly qualified, you still feel like you are learning. So I think, technically, I have got my undergraduate but that doesn't mean that it stops there. (33-6)*

She is also thinking of her personal development and emerging from the undergraduate cocoon.

*...it's almost like you've come out of the other end of the cocoon and then it's all like plucked in and it's better to have all these skills but you always still feel like you could do with further development. (39-41)*

### **Identity challenged**

Suzie is challenged by the psychodynamic model and talks confidently and academically about Cognitive Analytic Therapy (CAT). Initially I felt that this was because I had been her tutor in this area but later I feel that she is approaching me less as a former tutor or a researcher but as a sort of alternative supervisor. Early on she indicates that her supervisor is an influence.

*Well I've never been really keen on psychodynamic. ...but it seems that... forensic services, particularly, are thinking about the ...transference relationship is really key. But also thinking about just relationships in general. It's really key. Because, obviously, in forensics, there is always a relationship between an offender and the victim. In whatever capacity, there still was a relationship to a certain extent. And I think it's made me start to consider, actually, because my supervisor at the moment is quite keen on CATs (71-8)*

She then reveals that theoretical orientation has been a difficulty for her, the implication is that her orientation is a central part of herself, and that she has perhaps not consciously considered her choice before, implying a naivety, inadequacy or lack of awareness perhaps.

*But this has just given me a different perception and, actually, have you really thought about what other models are out there before you decided you're changing life. And I think that's been quite difficult for me. (88-91)*

This perhaps throws her back into becoming rather than being, and calls her identity and previous learning into question.

*It's made me question.... Again, a bit of identity. So it's made me question which models I thought I would be able to identify with. So it's almost like I'm having to really self-take a back-track in "why have you done that"? Almost to the point where I actually bought a basic introduction to psychology, just to understand the different schools, just again. So I'm not just quick to dismiss a school without actually looking into it. (95-100)*

The key idea supervisor power emerges for the first time here.

*Is this me again just adopting whichever supervisor's model...?*

(Interviewer) And that's uncomfortable too, isn't it?

*...that another dilemma... identity. I keep changing every time (109-13)*

It threatens her sense of independent selfhood if she is just a straw in the wind being blown about by powerful supervisors, this led me to think how little she may think she knows that she may feel vulnerable and powerless, how much her identity is bound up with work generally and her theoretical orientation (and personal philosophy) specifically. Being obliged to change her theoretical orientation offends her sense of self, her integrity. Suzie is quite relaxed and reflective saying this, very adult. She suggests a parental transmission model of theoretical transmission; that practitioners do what their supervisors teach them to do. She remains very urbane but there are implied issues of authority and power, and no place for evidence-based rationalism;

*And undoubtedly, whichever model supervisors have had an allegiance with, it's perhaps because of their supervisors and their supervisors before that. So it, really, I think just depends upon where you've worked and what the dominant model was. (118-21)*

I miss the point in suggesting a self-discovery personal development model, the point being power. Suzie rationalises the need to change to accord with her supervisor;

*I think to try and not to be too critical of yourself... I have sat down and thought, "Well, actually, it's quite understandable that I would want to actually like the model that my supervisor is using because... think about just the supervisor relationship, even then". If you are constantly rubbishing the model that your supervisor is using, that's poor. ... So you would have to develop a liking for it. Because like it or not, they are going to be using it every time they do joint sessions. So you might as well read into it. (134-43)*

She sounded less sure of herself than she did a year and a half ago and she agrees that this is the case. She seems more vulnerable, smaller and less assured than at the first interview, or perhaps more comfortable with being vulnerable, less defended, more at ease with this, more open, as one might expect with her clinical experience. Perhaps this is where my sense of the interview as like clinical supervision comes from. I also related personally to these ideas as I have my own attachments to theoretical models and have experienced feeling threatened by a supervisor with a psychodynamic perspective. I felt uncomfortable with the power of a model that takes a demystifying hermeneutics-of-suspicion approach compared with the hermeneutics of empathy (Gadamer, 1975/1996 cited in Langdrige, 2007) that characterizes a humanistic approach and aspects of CBT (see Langdrige pps 50-1 for discussion). I found the unfamiliarity was uncomfortable and I also feared exposure. There is also something terrifying about the invulnerability and certainty of adherents to hermeneutics-of-suspicion approaches, be they Marxists or Psychoanalysts they seem so

certain that because their models interpret beyond the given, they must be completely correct. Suzie returns to the issue of being easily influenced:

*I think I'm less sure of myself because it's made me question whether actually I'm quite easily influenced.*

If you were quite easily influenced, what would that mean for you? *I think it would mean that I wouldn't have a sense of identity or the sense of identity that I thought I did. I would have thought I was quite a confident person. I would have thought that, yes, a confident person and I think, not being sure of yourself or actually, being in that limbo goes against this idea of myself that I had. (187-96)*

*I just think that it's going to be the case wherever I go where I'm constantly going to be flipping from one thing to the other. (198-200)*

I take this further and Suzie focuses her discomfort on being prepared to do anything to maintain the supervisory relationship. She does not see herself as driven by willingness to please but notes that her behaviour contradicts who she thinks she is.

*Sometimes it feels like it [being blown around like a straw in the wind]. I think sometimes it does. I think I've noticed, perhaps, that not only am I... I don't know if necessarily I think that I'm easily influenced. I think it's more actually about willingness to please. Which again contradicts who I think I am because I don't think that, actually, I care to please others. That's not really something that I can identify with. But I found that almost I'm a yes man when it comes to the supervisory relationship. I'll do everything I can to maintain that supervisory relationship. And it's just like, "Why"? (219-35)*

She gives a current example where she is over-riding her needs in order to complete a research task for her supervisor in a ludicrous time scale *Just to maintain that supervisory relationship* (252). There is something profoundly uncomfortable here. The young, vulnerable and powerless supplicant feeling obliged to kow-tow to supervisors whose power of patronage can, in the eyes of the assistant, open or close the door to a career. This has echoes of the casting couch, power corrupts in subtle ways and the intense competition for clinical careers generates a potentially dangerous power imbalance. However Suzie acknowledges that it is herself who creates the pressure;

*I think it's pressure I give myself because I think my supervisor is very understanding and I think that, actually, when it comes to it, she would tell me, "Look, when are you going to do this, when are you going to do that"? Today I am on annual leave and I said, "No, I can quickly find out about ethics". You know, I'm going to pop down to the university, that's right, I'll pop down to the university, it's OK. She said, "It's your annual leave day". I was like, "No, we need to find out more about ethics otherwise we can't start the research. We've only got eight weeks to go. So how will we get it done." It's just not feasible. And, again, I find myself doing all these things just to try and make sure it happens and, at the end of it, I don't even know if it's going to happen. (261-72)*



The pressure comes from the competitiveness of the situation and Suzie's determination to succeed, in this case perhaps to impress her supervisor, perhaps to participate in the research.

### **Organisation**

Suzie is impressively well organised and the depth of her thought and preparation for clinical career emerge during the interview. Here she lists her achievements since graduation culminating in her getting a place on a D Clin Psy course.

*...my aim was to... get at least a 2.1, of at least 65%. Because I knew that certain universities want that. ... When I met that, the next thing was, "Quick, get a job". So even like as we were writing exams, I was volunteering. And then, by September, I was full time, paid in an Assistant Psychologist job. A bit of travel, so OK, let's see if we can get somewhere closer. By the January, I'd got somewhere closer. Nine month contract, OK, next aim and was to get a job at the end of this nine month contract. Got that. Again, the long-term goal has always been to apply, let's give it a shot. Got that. Then there was a bit of a... what happens now...what's next? So there is a bit of that. I think my, sort of, goal now is shifted to the next five years perhaps.... A lot of ideas spring to mind... I think the primary thing I've really been concentrating on is wanting to be a good supervisor. It's weird. (281-98)*

Suzie's organization also emerges at the end of the interview.

*And when I say that I was so prepared, I met with quite a few clinical psychologists who basically handed me over their folder of what things they had prepared and they, basically, gave me the recipe of what you have to prepare for an interview. There was no way I wasn't going to get on. There was no way. And every question they gave me, I almost had to smile to myself in my mind and, of course, show that, "Well this is really tough, I didn't know this was coming up". ...the same recurring themes have been over and over again. ... They asked about reflection. I was so prepared, I could talk about different reflecting models... (660-72)*

### **New ambition**

Suzie has moved on from just wanting to be a Clinical Psychologist to wanting to be a good clinical supervisor as a Clinical Psychologist. Bearing in mind the discussion on power and supervision above, I wondered if she is identifying with the source of power in a psychodynamic way, but her conclusion at the end of the next passage seems more real – she would like to be a key figure for someone else, to be a good supervisor;

*I'm more concerned about wanting to pass out of whatever little knowledge I have to someone else. Or, I think it's really shown me the influence on the supervisory relationship. ....And I think I've reflected on key influences of my life, in terms of my own growth and my own development and I'd like to be that key figure to someone else. (301-6)*

*And I would like to help people grow. ... I shouldn't care, I shouldn't care but, actually, it's really important, I want to be a good supervisor (313-20)*

Later Suzie reveals that this area also relates to research she is involved in that might be taken forward for her thesis.

*...talking about being easily influenced, my supervisor, sort of like, hinted look, this research that we are doing, how's about you just build on it and do it for your thesis. There you go. It's boxed, it's packaged, you know what it is, just do it for a different client group, I'll be able to supervise you. Do it. OK. My thinking has been, sort of like, exploring...this need to please within professions. And I think also, some assistants, again, would have that need to please. There's a difference between having a need to please and not actually believing yourself and just I really need... I don't think I have that need to please, in a sense.*

*I mean, the idea I have is sort of like exploring...quite like how I'm exploring now. Sort of like, looking at assistant psychologists' perception of, sort of like, their own personal growth and what they think is important for personal growth.*

### **The Birmingham yardstick and self-doubt**

Suzie is ambitious and self-critical. She has some doubts about her entitlement to success although she is able to articulate very well what makes her such a success. She is from Birmingham and Birmingham University was the focus of her ambition and she castigates herself for chickening out of applying;

*My goal was to get into Birmingham. But when it came it, I didn't want to apply to Birmingham, there's a bit of a dilemma at the moment. When I was driving here, I thought, "You are such a coward, such a chicken. Why didn't you apply to Birmingham, you'll never know". For undergrads you considered wanting to go to Birmingham, you didn't apply there either through UCAS. Then it comes to this, you didn't apply there. It's not exactly like next year I can apply to Birmingham and see if they ever would have considered me. It doesn't matter, I've gone on now. It's not like you'll never have known.*

(Interviewer) So is Birmingham like the magic mountain?

*It is, it's that... that hill I wanted to climb and get on top and say I conquered Birmingham. I got into Birmingham, such a prestigious university and I completely chickened out of even applying. God, kick yourself. (333-46)*

This is water under the bridge, except that it raises doubts about her success in getting into clinical training and her entitlement. She heard back from Seatown in a few days.

*Not only did I get on, I was in the top three. I thought that was a bit of a boost until somebody said, "Well, actually, Birmingham do things a little bit differently. They'll have meetings and meetings and meetings to make sure that they've made a right decision". I(t) was implying as if that to make the wrong choice. So I think that*

*perhaps me wanting to know what Birmingham would have thought, is simply really to prove to that colleague that, actually, Birmingham would have considered me too.*

Later she comments.

*You have to have a Masters. And I think that's why, still, it's a bit overwhelming for me to have got on without a Master's. Still, I know what it's like, someone out there has been robbed by me. I feel quite undeserving.*

### **Undergraduate degree**

Reflecting on her UG experience, Suzie advocates a course much closer in spirit to the D Clin Psy and by implication is arguing for clinical selection at 18+. Her ideas echo those of Louise and both have drawn on more vocational PG training that they have, or are about to, experience. Both can perhaps be taken as either or both a reflection of their current life stage, and a preference for vocational education.

*I don't think it's possible.. But I wish the undergrad was set up a bit more like the clinical course in a sense. ... I think 12 months or a year's placement, out of the whole three years, probably isn't enough.*

(Interviewer) So more placements, smaller placements?

*I think so. Why can't we have probably four-month placements or five-month placements? Two five-month placements for example after you've had a block of teaching. (386-96)*

*...I've wanted [it] to be more like the clinical masters. But obviously, it's not. ... I'd like it to be probably a bit more applied. I think I'd like it to be less text-booky. ... Logically, that isn't really feasible because not everyone who does the undergrad actually wants to end up doing clinical psychology. (776-84)*

She again echoes Louise, here advocating an undergraduate journal as an aide to employability, or at least clinical entry.

*Actually, a key thing, it's just really brought in, Manchester University has their own (undergraduate) journal. I think Aston University needs their own journal. I know someone who has published in the Manchester University journal and that counts as a publication. That's an extra point. (787-93)*

### **Placement**

Suzie emphasises the importance of reflection and reflective logs, and the continuity across the graduate transition. There is a link with the idea of epistemic virtues (Barnett, 2009), that if we are promoting employability we are also really promoting growth and personal development.

*It's still almost like you are only still starting a journey despite your placement experience. I think it's what you are able to apply. I think the courses need to have a bit more of a reflective component because I don't think that reflection comes naturally to some. I think reflection is a skill but I think that some really need to be taught it. (478-83)*

*...I don't know how many people have actually sort of like kept the reflective logs... I mean I stumbled across reflective logs from when I was on placement. And I was almost amazed at how the same recurring themes are still happening even now. (549-52)*

The placement year is a key feature of her experience and transformed her. Her comment about the stage she was at however is important for the context and timing of graduate vocational learning, it may not only be the placement but the timing of it and its relation to earlier learning and development.

*I almost owe it all, kind of, down to the placement, yes, essentially because I think I did learn quite a lot from that... I didn't acknowledge the, sort of like, academic side. It really did feel, sort of, like a tick-boxy thing. (718-21)*

*I think everything up until the placement year, didn't really have much value to me. But I think that reflects the stage I was at, at the time. I think, in the first year, I didn't do well at all. In the second year, I didn't do well either. And I think when I got to the placement year, that's when I really started researching clinical psychology. And then it really occurred to me that, right, I really need to put my socks up for the final year. (731-6)*

*I think it was almost like a transition, I went to placement and I started thinking, "Right, you have to focus". Because you had training psychologists there, so they could tell you about what it is that you need to do. The other ones kind of gave me their forms. And that's when I thought, "OK, I'm going to have to address X, Y and Z". (748-53)*

She thinks that they could be structured differently however, but is again reflecting the needs of those aiming at clinical careers. This may be fine if selection takes place earlier, otherwise it risks adding to the hoops that undergraduates need to jump through.

*... the placements need to be structured differently, again, I think I reflect on the fact that I think I made the most of my placement whereas others didn't. ... I just think that if there was an option to really go to, you know, networks with local providers, to make it that structured where you would have to sort of like do and meet certain particular objectives, not just do reflective journals but, perhaps, to do a case study. ... perhaps either give them a formulation exercise that they have to submit as part of their case study you know, to show that they've been able to apply psychological theory to clinical practice. And, presumably, they would get the theory from the academic undergraduate side... (805-32)*

*So I think that there is just a lot more that could bring the academic closer to the clinical. (837-8)*

### **Competition for clinical training**

Leading on from advocating reflection and personal development Suzie comments on the difficulties encountered and shows her maturity and the depth of her thinking, and again, her ambition to be a supervisor who develops her staff.

*I'm a bit annoyed because we have peer supervision...where, essentially, it is supposed to be a reflective space. And people are using it to just to boast as to how much they know about a particular model and it's kind of like...OK, we are coming here to reflect to be actually exposing ourselves and actually it's quite some...you know, quite a big thing to be vulnerable. (565-70)*

*...we have a qualified supervisor, a clinical psychologist chairing the peer supervision and I think that their job is to, kind of like, really deconstruct and to break down some of these barriers... I think that hasn't really been achieved and, again, that's something I'd want to do when I'm qualified. ... I would really like to emphasise to the assistant cohort where I am working, that it's actually okay to show that you are vulnerable. In a safe space. ...it almost feels like you can't say what you would like to say. (577-92)*

This leads back to the structural / power issues in clinical psychology and the envy and tension that can also be present amongst the comradeship and support.

*...and yet it's almost like there is this envy essentially. You can kind of sense it. You can sense the tension... She hasn't even got a Master's. She's only got a mid 2.1. She hasn't got any publications. She's only got three posts. Why has she got on? (595-609)*

Suzie values real contact, goes out of her way to ask others for help but is dismayed and surprised that those who are not successful do not ask her for more help, she is also aware of the isolation that success can bring.

*I'll be very keen to give them all my form. To say, "Look, this is how I write it". I have a folder of past forms, dating back to even 2007. The questions have changed but at least I know the language is the same. ... But they've got 600 forms to look at and you're writing reams and reams of paragraphs. They are going to put that in the bin. They are not going to care. (626-38)*

### **Summary and discussion – Suzie**

At the end of her first interview I concluded that clinical psychology for Suzie was not a passion to be a member of a prestigious profession, it was a deeper passion coming from an identity with the real caring nature of the role and compassion for people in distress. This second interview confirms this perception of someone who has found her true vocation. In places the interview felt like a clinical supervision rather than the tutorial feel that

characterised the first interviews, perhaps reflecting her shift in her experience from dealing with tutors to dealing with supervisors. It also, on second or third reading, feels more of an intellectual conversation (compared for example with the interview with Nadia which also has much depth to it, but at a more personal level). Suzie is still in transition, she starts by saying that she still feels like a student, but it seems to me that she is a very different kind of student. In many ways she has moved on, including in her ambition from just wanting to be a Clinical Psychologist to wanting to be a good clinical supervisor as a Clinical Psychologist. Other issues connect with other interviewees, particularly the issue of supervisor power and the power that the intense competition for entry to the profession may exert on all the players in the system. Despite her success the interview left me slightly sad at the end, perhaps her success and her insight both have left her feeling a little isolated.

## **Toyah**

We left Toyah at the end of interview one with 'paradise lost' as an apt metaphor. She had had the weaknesses of her approach to academic work exposed and been left without the good degree that was needed for her to achieve a clinical psychology career. However her dream was broader than a career alone. There was also paradise lost in leaving university. For her second interview Toyah met me in my office on her way back from a mindfulness course. Overall she seemed more mature and at ease and sounded analytic, reflective and aware, much more the young professional than a rather lost former student.

## **Personal development**

Toyah has had an intense personal development experience.

*It was a really intense week ...you're in your own bubble ... So it was like personal development, I guess. And so that's why it was a roller coaster. There was good days, there was bad days ... And now I just feel really different and really relaxed and...it was really amazing actually. (20-35)*

She feels that she has grown up and entered the real world, although she is still in transition.

*I don't think I'm there yet. No I don't think I'm completely there but I know that I have grown up in the last few years (78-9)*

*I am in transition yes, because up until January I was on the training course and so I've been trying to find me feet since then really and I'm starting to find them now. (82-3)*

She is also more relaxed and able to go with the flow.

*I think that that's something that I've learnt over time, that that's OK to just give it to go and see what happens. And if it doesn't, if it's not for you, then be honest and try to score a different route. (288-90)*

She is also able to reflect on her original ambition.

*I was wanting to be a psychologist for the wrong reasons and it was for like status and prestige and, thankfully, I'd worked it out really early on and I was honest enough with myself to think that that's not a good enough reason to continue down the path. (294-303)*

*That is another reason, a thing that I worked out through my personal training that it was glamour... That was drawing me to it as well and I realized that really, it wasn't. In practice, it wasn't glamorous at all. (491-4)*

### **Career**

Toyah's career is no longer such an intense focus for her and she now takes a more holistic approach to her future that recognises her needs and embraces the idea of work-life balance. Her family are mentioned as a source of support, not of control.

(Interviewer) ...is the graduate career the main focus for you?

*...at first, it was and now it's not. So when I first graduated, my career was everything and that was my main focus in life to a fault, really. I was a bit narrow-minded. And the only thing that I had my mind set on was being successful in psychology. .... And so, even if it meant that I moved all round the country and lived on my own all the time and didn't really have a social life, then that would be fine as long as I had my career. But now my focus is completely different. It's more broader. Now it's more about getting the right balance between everything. ...what's more important is to have a good work-life balance and to look after myself. So I will only ever work part time and I don't want to be rich. ...And I need to also have a support network around me. So, I really need to stay in [her own county]... Its home and I have my family there and they can help me. So that's again about looking after myself. (746-71)*

### **Has a direction, empowered**

There is a different feel to Toyah's second interview and she has found a direction.

*...what I want to do is teach mindfulness to disabled people and people with illness and carers (44-5)*

*I learnt ... that I was most passionate about... mindfulness and disability. So I thought if I can blend those two that would be an ideal situation. (104-9)*

*In five years' time, I would hope to be teaching mindfulness and have my own private practice, specializing in all aspects of disability... (230-4)*

Toyah is confident enough to think of innovation.

*And I'd like to be quite a playful with it and really adapt it to what I think it's going to work. (278-80)*

She is also proud of her current work.

*...I'm the leader of this programme. I'm the one that does everything for it... I have to go and fight with the director for everything... I'm the one that makes all the decisions and has to be creative. I find the clients, I find volunteers. (552-6)*

And is being stretched;

*It really is demanding... But, again, my degree helped me out with it. So I'm literally just guessing and that, for me, is quite a struggle... I like to have things planned out.... (563-7)*

### **Degree grade – still uncomfortable, stigmatised**

Toyah's discomfort with her lower-second degree comes up repeatedly.

*...when I graduated, I was really disappointed that I got a 2.2 and so I just thought, "What am I going to do now". (158-9)*

*But... I'm going to go back to the 2.2 thing again. My skills were [there] but, with applications, I just felt that with a 2.2, they would have just pushed it aside. (419-20)*

Here Toyah talks about being really close to a good degree and she feels it has had a *huge impact*.

*If I had done better in those two, then I would have got a 2.1, I was really close. And it's so weird how just that has made such a huge impact on my life.*

But she feels less strongly now.

*...it's not really frustrating now. (447-8)*

### **Is a degree worthwhile?**

Despite her disappointment with her grade Toyah thinks that her degree was worthwhile, in personal development terms as well as academic skills and knowledge.

(Interviewer) Do you think your degree was worthwhile...?

*Yes, I do, because I learnt so much in my degree and I do always go back to it, especially in the job that I'm in now. It's really relevant... I'm, kind of, the only person that knows anything about mental health in my department... (175-83)*

*I think I needed to fly the nest at home, so doing a degree was really good for me for that as well. (187-8)*

*...the self-development began building confidence and socialising and experiencing a different place, like the city life and if I hadn't have done the degree, God knows*



*what I'd be doing. ...I don't regret doing it at all.... It's probably the best thing that I've ever done, really... (190-5)*

Toyah lists what she has to offer an employer.

*All of the things that I learnt in my degree ...especially the research skills ...doing focus groups and knowing how to ...evaluate. ...knowledge that I've learnt with mental health and how to actually read an article and evaluate it yourself... And also, just how to get on with people. (505-19)*

Toyah also mentions how much she valued writing support and reveals that her writing had weaknesses that contributed to her degree grade.

*... one of the things that definitely let me down... My ability to form a good argument in an essay and to do it based on research. ...there was... a professional writer and I went to her to show her my dissertation. Obviously, she didn't read all of it but those particular parts that I wasn't sure about, she looked at me and said, 'You don't get very good grades for your essays, do you?' ...And I was like, 'Mmm, not really'. My magic number was 58. I always got 58%. ... And she said that it's because you are using too many words. And so she rewrote something and it sounded so much better. So it was the way that I was writing it that was letting me down. (722-40)*

### **Placement**

Toyah values her placement experience.

*...how equipped did you feel for the graduate job market? I didn't actually.. I don't feel that equipped really. My placement definitely was the thing that I felt most secure with... (392-5)*

Despite this Toyah is aware that it was quite a passive role, suggesting that moving on from this area is based on experience and not just a rationalization.

*...it's very different when you are an assistant to being a trainee because it's so much more passive. ...when I look back at my placement year ...really I was doing a lot of admin stuff and I was like picking up the flavour of things and I was observing but it was very passive. And you don't ...get involved at all. When you are a trainee... Things are completely different then. Very different. (462-8)*

*And it's much harder when you are a trainee and so people kind of think they can work as an assistant for quite a long while and think it's quite nice. (470-2)*

### **Summary and discussion – Toyah**

Compared with her first interview Toyah is more mature and at ease and sounded analytic, reflective and aware, much more a young professional than a rather lost former student. Her ability to reflect and evaluate her experience is impressive and she takes a broad view of education as a developmental process. Vocationally it has not led her directly to a career

but she has found ways forward that fit with her circumstances. I feel that she has made a transition out of being a student and an unrealistic prestigious-career-as-identity ambition. She has also assimilated her experience into a coherent narrative about who she is and who she is becoming. There is a comfortable awareness and acceptance of who she is and of her strengths and weaknesses and an embracing of her future. This recognises and embraces the idea of work-life balance and is much broader than a career-at-any-cost approach. I feel that the embodied reality of her disability may lie behind this and her acceptance that she will work part-time (746-771). Perhaps just as Amina and Nadia accept the reality of their cultural constraints so Toyah accepts the reality of her embodied constraint. For all three these inform their vision of who they are becoming and perhaps prompt insight, awareness and maturity as well as some regret.

### **Summary, chapter 7**

The interviews in chapter seven, the third of the three empirical chapters, undertaken two years after the first interviews with the same five participants, shed further light on the experience of the graduate transition to professional employment. All were pleased and eager to talk about their lives and experiences and there was no difficulty in arranging for their second interviews. Compared to the first interviews there is more reflection, maturity and insight, and real depth. There is little sense of loss, fear or confusion, all have moved on, matured and developed, and the issues are different. Louise, so much in crisis and so betrayed at her first interview is now calm, settled, mature and at ease. She is comfortable placing herself in an adult position relative to me as interviewer and does not show the unwonted deference evident in the first interview. Vocationally Louise links to Suzie in that both securely are on their way to professional psychology.

In contrast Nadia is now facing a decision about whether to take a place on a doctoral training programme based at home with her parents or to stay away in her job for longer. She greatly enjoys her independent life but she fears for her career advancement and the timing of the training programme fits well with future marriage meaning that she could get her career established to a point where she could take a break and perhaps have a family. Only Amina also talks of issues of marriage and family although Toyah talks more broadly of life-work balance. All three show that they are aware of the probable shape of their future lives under the influence of personal circumstances, culture and gender. Suzie and Amina, although at different points in their respective professional qualifications, are united in facing new challenges. Both no longer aim to simply become a member of their chosen

profession, they have specific ambitions within them. Both also find new concerns. Amina faces a decision about choosing to be a supply teacher or to apply for a post, a choice that may have profound career consequences. Suzie finds the power of supervisory hierarchy has consequences for her sense of self and aspires to a similar role and power for herself.

All look back on their undergraduate careers with greater distance, and value their placement experience if anything even higher. They also increasingly see undergraduate education as a developmental stage and emphasise growth, self-awareness and becoming. Louise illustrates this in both continuing to advocate, as does Suzie, a more vocational undergraduate focus, but also arguing that she would tell her younger self to relax and enjoy the process and not to worry so much. This has a Mr. Micawber (Dickens, 1850) quality to it; it is easy to reassure your younger self that something will turn up when with the benefit of two years' hindsight you know that something has. Reconciling messages to on the one hand to relax, reflect and grow, and at the same time on the other hand to become employable, and focus on a career if you don't want to be left behind, is a task for the discussion in the next chapter which will bring together this empirical work with the theoretical and contextual perspectives from chapter one and the results of the systematic review and meta-synthesis from chapter two.

## Chapter 8: Discussion

### Introduction

The introduction and overview to this programme of research in chapter one and the systematic review and meta-analysis in chapter two suggest that despite attention to the student transition into university and much interest in employability and graduate employment, there is little research into the student experience of the transition out of university – the graduate transition. Abrandt Dahlgren, Hult et al. (2006) found little such research other than their 'Journeyman' project and Brennan, Kogan and Teichler (1996) note that the graduate transition is often described in general terms with lived experience little explored. Johnston (2003) also found little research into the graduate transition from the graduates' point of view and Teichler (1996) concluded that there was a shortage of longitudinal studies applying qualitative research methods to the university-employment transition. Murakami, Murray, Sims and Chedzey (2008) also find little empirical research linking social competence with students' accounts of working life and suggest that research into social competence generally ignores adults experiencing a major transition. These gaps in research are more pronounced given the specific focus of this programme of research on the UK experience and on psychology. The UK is distinctive in the large numbers leaving higher education at Bachelors level, while psychology is one of the largest undergraduate subjects and there are structural difficulties for bachelor qualified leavers seeking to access professional psychology careers.

Insight into the lived experience of UK psychology students taking sandwich placements, completing final examinations, graduating, and negotiating decisions about employment, domicile and identity is therefore lacking. This programme of research has attempted to address this lack and also to consider the aims and practices of UK undergraduate education and the role of psychology education in relation to career entry, career credentials and discourse on employability from a lived experience standpoint. The aims of the research are to enquire into;

- How individuals experience the transition from being a student to becoming a graduate professional
  - How undergraduate education shapes being, and becoming a professional
  - How a sandwich placement year shapes being, and becoming a professional

The discussion aims to bring together the themes from the systematic review and meta-synthesis with the themes emerging from the empirical investigations and the theoretical perspectives encountered in the introduction and methodology chapters and so to examine what has been learned in relation to the objectives and research questions. The topics, issues and theoretical perspectives examined in chapter one are:

- The UK Bachelors degree in psychology
- Employability
- Employability and university league tables
- Graduate employment
- Change and transition
- Vocation and identity
- Developmental perspectives on the graduate transition
- The development of epistemological reasoning / cognitive development
- Knowing, becoming, ontology, epistemic virtue, phronesis
- Communities of practice
- Why psychology graduates in the transition to employment?

In chapter two, the systematic review and meta-analysis identified the following themes that are listed in further detail in table four.

- Out of the wilderness – the graduate transition as difficult, uncertain and painful
- Unevenness in transition, individual differences
- Continuity in transition
- Identity
- Vocational education and work experience
- Being and becoming, embodiment and relationships
- End point or moving on?
- Expectations
- Power and position
- Relevance of higher education
- Skills and competence

The case studies in chapters six and seven of five graduates interviewed in the summer of their graduation and again two years later produced 30 and 35 themes respectively. Some are common to all or most participants; *the placement experience, the value of university*

*education, clinical psychology, changing identity* for example. Some are shared by a smaller number of participants; *time pressure and expectations*, and *money* are examples. Some are unique to an individual but nonetheless powerfully illuminate experience; *disappointment and betrayal; isolation and loss; focus, organisation, planning and determination* are examples here. The interviews in chapter five are presented thematically:

- Situated learning - legitimate peripheral participation in a community of practice
- Broadened or crystalized career outlook
- Coherence, sophistication and fluency of interviewees
- Connecting and reconciling work and university
- Personal development, competency
- Break from education
- Supervision
- The challenge of placement

Taken together the three empirical chapters (five, six and seven) report on analyses of 16 interviews with nine individuals. Five are interviewed in the summer of their graduation, and the same five again two years on. Four are interviewed on placement, two near the start and two more plus the first two interviewed again near the end of their placements. The graduation interviews capture the experience of transition out of undergraduate study and point up the sense of crisis for some, the focus on grades achieved or missed, the uncertainty and intensity of change. Two years on the interviews have more depth and reflection and offer an account of individual progression, of hurdles overcome and new transitions faced or expected, and the wisdom of post-graduation experience. The interviews with placement students are perhaps best characterized as capturing personal transformation as students become legitimate participants in professional work, perhaps on the periphery but nonetheless transformatively.

### **Abduction re-visited**

In abductive enquiry, as Hiles (2014) drawing on Pierce (1903) explains, no specific prediction is tested and it is not necessarily the intention to generate theory from data. Instead the focus is on the two-way interaction of data and theory and the aim of enquiry is to understand and explain (Hiles p.54). The focus of abduction or abductive inference is therefore on explanation-driven logic, on the best-fit of data and theory. Hiles translates abduction as '*inference to the better (or best) explanation*' (p.55, p.60) and suggests that explanation-driven research is an important counterweight, perhaps an essential first stage,

before the 'normal science' described by Kuhn (1962/70) which may be restrictive at a more exploratory stage of research. Abduction may be particularly appropriate in research into areas of professional practice such as educational and clinical work. This is the case here where we seek a better understanding of the experience of the graduate transition and to do so need to examine and understand the dialogue and 'fit' of the empirical data (chapters five to seven), the findings of the meta-analytic systemic review (chapter two) and the review of existing theories and concepts (chapter one).

The discussion that follows is based on an abductive approach and attempts a synthesis of interviewee experience, educational theory and philosophy and previous research. The six headings below are based on the dialogue between empirical data, findings of the meta-analytic systemic review and existing theoretical concepts.

## **Career and vocational focus in the graduate transition**

### **The dream of clinical psychology**

Emerging from all the graduate interviews, and perhaps implicit in the placement interviews, is the power of clinical psychology, pre-eminently among psychology professions and applications, to inspire ambition as a career aim. All graduate interviewees refer to it and four of the five graduates are, or were, passionate about it. All the placement students are also working in clinical settings. In analysing this, a starting point is Dahlgren, Handal et al's (2007) observation that students develop discipline-based identities and this is evident in all five of the graduates, notably with Louise and even with Amina although she aims throughout to be a primary school teacher. It is also evident in the theme of situated learning in the thematic analysis of the placement interviews. Identification with psychology as their undergraduate discipline leads to an ambition to become a psychologist and clinical psychology is seen as the specialism that best exemplifies what psychology at core is about. Its very competitiveness is a source of attraction. As Nadia points out, it is seen as the best job for the best people and it also perhaps benefits from its proximity to one of the most prestigious and competed-for professions, Medicine. The popularity of clinical psychology also suggests that students are over-confident of their ability to excel in the face of competition and that the idea of 'the dream' (Tennant and Pogson 1995) is important. It also shows that Heidegger (1962) is surely correct in that 'selving', and the making of meaning is a core part of human experience as we grapple with temporality and the awareness of mortality, at some level facing the finiteness of existence and 'being-towards-

death'. In constructing their own futures, however naively and unrealistically, participants are grappling with the transitions they face. The popularity of the dream of clinical psychology also perhaps tells us that student vocational selection at this stage may be on the basis of consumption and identity rather than on insight and self-awareness. In other words students pick what they see as the most attractive career, selecting from a small range of familiar or salient options but with little regard to, or perhaps awareness of, their own interests, strengths or inclinations, a point to be returned to below.

### **Career focus**

All the interviewees, the graduates especially, focus on their career. This may or may not be surprising to the reader but as discussed in chapter one, a generation ago Brown (1987) reports that Levinson found in his interview-based research that while men typically dreamed about work and occupational roles, women were torn between dreams of occupation and dreams of marriage and family. Nearly 30 years on from Levinson there is no evidence that the women participants in this study are similarly torn in their dreams, paralleling Burke (2015) who found gender to be relatively insignificant compared to class and strategic approach in his Northern Irish study of the working lives of graduates. Initially I was quite resistant to participants talking about personal relationships, as previously discussed in relation to Nadia, and focused attention on careers, but in the second set of graduate interviews I was more open to and encouraged wider discussion of life and work. Suzie made it clear that relationships would have to wait for her to establish the career that she wanted. Nadia and Amina both talked about marriage but the context was not one of a 'dream' of marriage and family, rather their career plans and choices were presented as being constrained by family and cultural expectations of their marrying in their mid-twenties. Neither appeared to be either enthusiastic or resistant to this, it was presented as a fact of life, but it was clear that Amina's choice of career was made in her gap year with a marriage timetable in mind and the desire to establish a career that would fit around childcare and allow her some independence. She also talks about her approach to work and childcare, but does not present motherhood as dreamed about or longed for. Of course the topics and manner of talk both here and with Levinson will have been framed by expectations of what it is appropriate to talk to the interviewer about. My own focus on careers, and my age and gender will also have influenced participants.

The focus then for the graduates is on vocational identity. Nyström (2010) suggests that gender is a key factor influencing how male and female early career professionals encounter



working life, and are perceived as professionals, and how they position themselves as knowledgeable and competent. This is interesting given the growth of psychology, the preponderance of women studying it and occasional note being taken (e.g. Ostertag and McNamara, 1991) of the 'feminisation' of the discipline and the psychology professions. It is also possible that it may be more important for women than men to establish their professional adult identity in a culture that can, as discussed earlier in the context of research by Broverman, Clarkson et al (1970), still belittle women and deny them professional status and full adulthood. How this is achieved and the extent to which it is successful would be interesting to explore in future research.

Career focus is not a theme found in the placement interviews, the participants are perhaps at an earlier point. Ella, Dave and Rada are aware and pleased to find themselves being treated as professional and being seen as colleagues rather than students, and are perhaps a little surprised as well as being grateful. Ella is aware of making connections and being accepted as part of a community of practice and Dave of building skills and competencies, but none articulate the assumptions about readiness or entitlement to professional entry that the graduates do. The career focus of the graduate participants, such that they dream of becoming in vocational terms, rather than for example in terms of personal development or marriage and parenthood, has implications for higher education, and specifically for non-vocational Bachelors' education. The emphasis on higher education as a route to a high-status, well-paid and secure middle class career and as an investment by the student and their family has been a companion to the gradual drift in Bachelors' education towards more vocational courses (Trapp, Banister, Ellis et al, 2011) although there may also have been a parallel drift towards more academic vocational education (Burke, 2015). This research began with unexamined and unstated enthusiasm for the benefits of non-vocational liberal education and saw vocational education as the occupational world trespassing on higher education's turf. The traditional view is that university provides academic skills and hones sharpness of mind to produce 'graduateness', indeed we have already seen in chapter one that Newman (1873/1982) acknowledged that many subjects provided appropriate material for educating the mind. Application in the workplace and the detail of occupational procedure is for the employer to provide training in. Education relativizes and calls into question what training simply transmits, this is the traditional education and training divide. Thus in graduate recruitment schemes employers select the students that have the qualities

they want to begin in-house training programmes so that they can fill graduate posts and be prepared to rise higher.

However the student view emerging in this research challenges this championing of liberal and non-vocational education and a moment's reflection reveals that it is also clearly not reasonable to dismiss vocational education, in medicine for example, simply as the training of high status technicians. Professional training in clinical psychology includes both academic and clinical skills, builds on the foundation of bachelors study and requires further high-level academic study. Secondly, as already noted, interviewees regard their placement work as a highly significant learning experience and have a near-uniformly positive view of their placement experience. There are some challenges; Dave is terrified at times as he starts his placement work in the mental health field and Ella talks of the pain and difficulty of placement work without pay. Nadia in her first interview reflects on being almost bullied by her supervisor on placement, but by her second interview feels that she should be grateful for the high standards set and compares her placement supervisor favourably with her less demanding current supervisor. Despite the challenges, the placement year emerges as a hugely significant experience whose benefits include being a legitimate participant in a professional adult world, a broadened career outlook and significant personal development. This positive view of work experience and graduate employment is also supported in the literature review. The first theme in the literature review, 'the graduate transition as difficult, uncertain and painful', refers not to struggling *in* work but to the struggle to *find* work. Work itself is generally transformative as Johnsson and Hager (2008), for example, make clear in their study of young orchestral musicians.

As discussed in chapter one, vocational and professional education leads to transformations; for example from student to engineer, historian, musician or medical practitioner and Dall'Alba (2009) implies that these transformations apply only to vocational education. Given that Barnett (2009), Su and Feng (2008), Thompson (2005), Dall'Alba and others argue that education should aim at being transformative and that ontology is central to the transformation that higher education should provide; an argument emerges that only vocational education enables the process of becoming. Su and Feng use the Aristotelian concept of 'phronesis' and advocate *an ontological turn in the practice of higher education* (p.4). By this they mean a move to add *acting and being to knowledge and skills*. The process is paralleled in Pharmacy, an example of vocational education, where the professional body

has successfully included 'does' as well as 'knows how' and 'shows how' in their requirements (General Pharmaceutical Council, 2011). Knowing something and being able to demonstrate it are not the same as being and doing in practice which requires practical judgment or wisdom grounded in being-in-the-world. Furthermore, Johnsson and Hager (2008) argue that learning is embodied and organic rather than a transfer of knowledge and skills or stages of competency and illustrate this persuasively in their account of how different the world of the professional orchestra is to that of music education. Skill in playing and musical knowledge is only part of what is required. They cite Bokeno and Gantt (2000) who take a position similar to Lave and Wenger's ideas on communities of practice in suggesting that it is the relationships formed at work that are the site of learning. They argue that we learn through social participation, through relationships that cultivate, disseminate and maintain learning. This is supported by the analysis of the placement interviews where relationships and participation are key features.

In summary vocational education, both in theory and in the experience of interviewees, adds something transformative that non-vocational education seems to lack. What is added can be conceived of in different ways. It may be simply the conferring of an identity-in-waiting and the avoidance of uncertainty. However for the interviewees the year-long work placement is clearly transformative in offering the ontological opportunity to learn, grow and become, to act and to be through work, and this is captured by the idea of situated learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and by phronesis (Su and Feng, 2008). Possibly the impact of graduate-level placement work experience is overstated by participants and education understated because work is unfamiliar and associated with independent adult status in comparison with education that is very familiar and harks back to childhood. To argue however that the interviewees have simply undervalued their education and fail to see its true intrinsic value and relevance flies in the face of both theory and the consistent data reported here. Students and graduates *may* undervalue their academic education, and this is a topic that will be touched on again in chapter nine, but this research is not a trawl of evidence to defend university education of the kind that Brennan, Kogan and Teichler (1996) warn against in chapter two. Extrinsic value is noted however by Louise and Amina who suggest that they value their education for the credential, status and consequent opportunities it confers, and this leads us to the notion of power.

## Power

Power as a theme emerges out of the abductive process. It is a theme in chapter two, the systematic review and meta-analysis, also for Nadia and for Suzie in their second interviews and is also reflected on in chapter four and is evident in the placement interviews in chapter five. Holden and Hamblett (2007) suggest that each of their five case studies can be read as;

*...recording the uneven path taken by a "self" in search of cohesion within a new community, the struggle to understand and assimilate "conventions". [These] ...can be thought of as the means by which social relations in a hierarchically ordered work environment are regulated. Not to put too fine a point on it, then, we might suggest that the "natural" subject of reflection for new graduates is "power". (p. 581).*

To some degree all five graduate interviewees are reflecting on power as they reflect on their own being and becoming. As Holden and Hamblett suggest, the search for self is a search for a place in a work community. Such work communities of practice are ordered and finding a place or a role in one necessarily requires negotiation with power and the acquisition of power. This is clearly the case for Louise who relishes leadership and full professional roles and chafes a little in a more junior role as she works towards Chartered status. Her dismay at being behind her non-graduate friend, so evident in her first interview, is now replaced with quiet satisfaction at having caught up, and perhaps the anticipation of overtaking her when the return on her investment in professional chartered status begins to pay off. It is also the case for Marie who has acquired power and a place in her placement work community, finding a niche that gives her an informal supervisory role with others and a key link role with volunteers.

Suzie is uncomfortable with the power of her supervisor to influence her identity by schooling her in new models of psychotherapy. This power is not manifest simply in her being required to change or take on new views, but by the supervisor's experience, knowledge and authority which enables her to reveal and validate new perspectives on practice, and new truths that cannot easily be ignored. Suzie's discomfort is ontological in that she feels that being imbued with an alternative model, which may offer an alternative way of being in the world, means to her that she is become a 'straw in the wind'. Her identity is therefore less constructed by herself through rational reflection and choice, but more driven by the influence of the powerful supervisor, not only as an individual but as a representative of the community. Becoming part of the community of practice may mean giving up some autonomy, some ability to choose, to that community. Suzie meditates on the tendency of psychotherapy models to be passed on in apprenticeship pattern and goes

on to discuss her ambition to be a supervisor of junior clinicians herself. A similar process of socialisation and acculturation can be seen less explicitly in the placement interviews. Ella's supervisor is an inspiration to her and offers an apprenticeship relationship and Rada emphasises the importance of supervision to her. Like Suzie, Ella wants to be a supervisor herself.

Dave is annoyed at being ignored by his supervisor in the latter part of his placement. Nadia also reflects on the role of supervisors and, remarkably, appreciates and values the placement supervisor who she found to be so demanding and difficult when she was a placement student. Nadia is not fully part of the community of practice that she is aiming for and her issues with power concern her dilemma about returning to live at home. This will resolve her career progression worries and her struggle to get by financially, but risks losing adult power and independent status. Nadia suspects, as I imagine does every twenty-something returning home, that she will not be treated as a fully independent adult. She describes giving up her independent life as a huge sacrifice, but there is a trade-off to be negotiated between personal 'being' and professional 'becoming'.

Allen, Quinn et al (2013) also talk about power in arguing that work placements and internships do not simply ease the transition into the labour market, but are where inequalities are reproduced. They show how students' progression in the arts is mediated through practices that privilege those able to bring financial resources, professional contacts and cultural capital to bear. However it may be less clear-cut in psychology. Students may be passionate about clinical psychology and progress is certainly smoothed by the same financial resources, professional contacts and cultural capital; but it is possible that students are barking up the wrong tree? Status, pay and reward, and perhaps an easier life, may perhaps now be found more in management than in the traditional professions. Those with ability but without the capital to compete for the psychology professions may find emerging graduate opportunities of the sort identified by Purcell, Elias, Atfield et al (2013) that may be less prestigious but carry more reward and this may be driving social mobility.

Interestingly the placement students do not report becoming passionate about clinical psychology as a result of their placements. Ella has learned about the business side of the organisation she is working for and is more flexible about her careers aim and more confident and open to a range of jobs, she remains committed to clinical work but has

doubts. Rada is open to clinical work having initially not been, but unlike some of the graduates she has not nailed her colours to the mast of a clinical career, Dave is now more open to different career paths and Marie is interested in further study.

### **Identity**

As with the theme of power, identity recurs at a number of points in this research. It is a central theme in the work of Nyström and the journeyman team reviewed in chapter two. Dahlgren, Handal et al (2007) found that students develop discipline-based identities and this is evident in all five of the graduates, notably with Louise and even with Amina who aims throughout at a teaching career in Primary Education. This is less apparent in the placement interviews however. Identity is complex and multi-form (Billett and Somerville, 2004) and Wenger (1998) also suggests that it is neither a coherent unity nor simply fragmented. Billett (2007) sees it as important for the individual's sense of self. Nyström (2009) argues that the student identity is very broad, covering what will later be occupational and social roles so when it is lost there is a big gap to fill. The graduate interviews all feature the loss of student identity. Amina, not the most conventionally student-like of students, mentions no longer being a student repeatedly and this seems to be both a source of pride and also of loss. Suzie as a graduand does not know what to call herself, illustrating her need to find connections to forms of identity and supporting the contention that new graduates seek occupational identities (Kram, 1988) and a broader social identity (Delanty, 2003).

Nyström (2009) sees three forms of professional identity emerging sequentially. She suggests that graduates initially adopt a non-differentiated work identity that is as broad and all-defining as the student identity but this changes as professional life becomes assimilated and work/life distinctions emerge more clearly. This progression is also found in the graduate interviews. Toyah for example takes a mature work/life balance view in her second interview that is much more relaxed than her anguish in her first interview at her loss and her inability to access the career that she sought. This echoes Nyström's (2009) progression over time to different relationships between professional, personal and private lives. Both Nadia and Amina in their second interviews are concerned with wider aspects of their lives involving life-partner relationships as well as professional identity. This progression in identity can be seen by reflecting on the fate of the 'clinical dream' held by most or all of the graduates.

Amina revealed that she would have liked to have considered a clinical career, despite having planned her Primary Teaching career during her gap year. Her choice not to do so is bound up with her sense of time pressure and needing to start earning and to become established in a career as soon as possible. This in turn is influenced by the assumption of adult responsibilities and by the prospect of marriage. Louise has moved on from her clinical dream but it is echoed in the social care context in which she works as a trainee occupational psychologist and she has regrets at giving it up as well as pride in finding her way forward. Nadia is still weighing up the costs and benefits of staying with the dream of clinical psychology but is not optimistic after being rejected from all the places that she has applied to without any interviews. Like Amina, time pressure and the imminence of reaching the age at which she will be expected to marry constrain her and the uncertainty of the progression to qualification is disturbing. She sees people much older than herself still chasing round the country from one temporary job to another with no certainty of success. The clinical dream also extends to her parents whom she thinks value the status of the profession and its doctoral qualification. Suzie has achieved the dream of a clinical training place to take up later the same year. She has therefore moved on and her dream is now about what kind of clinical and supervisory role she will take. The dream for Toyah survives as a broad area of work and interest rather than as a specific career that she knows is probably out of reach. She notes that her placement experience was, in retrospect, quite passive and administrative rather than truly clinical. Overall, identity is a complex and multi-headed concept that interacts with most of the other themes. Interviewees' sense of their own identities, and of the concept of identity itself, seems to change, along the lines suggested by Nyström (2009).

### **Promoting ontological development**

To fully understand the changes that participants are undergoing it is necessary to see identity in conjunction with ontology, with the development from novice to expert, with a search for self, power and role in a community of practice (Holden and Hamblett, 2007; Wenger 1998), with the integration of knowing and acting into professional ways of being (Dall'Alba, 2009; Benner, 1984) and with judgement and wisdom grounded in acting and being in a professional world (Su and Feng, 2008; Heidegger, 1962). The development of epistemic virtue and self-awareness are also important. However it is difficult to identify what can be done through teaching to promote ontological development and facilitate the graduate transition, especially during a non-vocational Bachelors' degree. Maturation alone may be a factor, Piaget's work on the move to operational thinking in middle childhood

shows how important maturation is at that stage but nothing in research on the development of personal epistemology suggests that this is a sufficient explanation for development at the graduate transition. Does the social context of graduation and its expectations account for the change? The transition is multi-faceted. Work experience is hugely important and is a step into the adult world, as the placement interviews demonstrate, and it helps that this work is at a professional level as it involves issues of vocation, identity and community of practice.

Both the literature review and the interviews suggest that it is difficult to teach or promote reflection and personal development or to involve students in personal development work. Finlay (2002) notes how demanding honest reflection can be. Johnsson and Hager (2008) note that musicians must learn to subjugate themselves to a greater whole but that this is an experiential process that is very difficult for educators to provide. Amina comments that some of her friends ignored advice to engage in personal development opportunities and just concerned themselves with the academic requirements of their course and failed to look beyond this and take a strategic view of building social and cultural capital through voluntary work as she did. One of Holden and Hamblett's (2007) participants was also hostile to reflective learning in his first year at university. In Burke's (2015) terms, all students may aspire to vocational greatness, but far too many simply expect greatness to be thrust upon them - as Louise so clearly expected to happen. It is a paradox that students are focused on their vocation but have difficulty seeing the route to it as one of self-discovery, a journey inwards, rather they see it as a consumer choice. However work experience seems to have the power to bring ontological development about. Ella identifies personal development benefits in her placement that have helped to prepare her for adult life, to be independent, focused and to push herself. She is able to articulate some of the epistemic virtues that Barnett (2009) argues develop through encounters with knowledge. However Ella is talking about knowledge through work experience rather than knowledge from the classroom. Other placement students, notably Dave, report personal growth, developing competence and significant personal change.

Heidegger offers some challenging insights into how ontological development can be promoted. Heidegger (Thomson, 2005) distinguishes what he calls genuine education (or *bildung*) from an 'always already' received education in which students see everything, even themselves, as simply resources to be ordered and optimised, thus education itself is no



more than a means to achieve, to make more money (Thomson, 2005, pp.160-3) a view that seems to be endorsed at least to a degree by the data here. To get beyond this is to transcend enframing, and enframing to Heidegger represents a danger, the potential to forget our own essence as beings capable of revealing the world in different ways and finding ever-new ways of being. Enframing causes humans to see themselves exclusively as beings that order things and see everything, including themselves, as orderable commodities, and nothing more. Heidegger concluded that technology is fundamentally enframing (Scrivener, 2014) and he is often interpreted as being hostile to modern science and to technology. This contrast between *bildung* and enframing is challenging because up to this point we have seen the idea of ontological development as compatible with employability. But employability is utilitarian, it is about seeing the self as a resource to be ordered and optimised and the employability agenda is in good measure that of the 'triple helix' of government, industry and university (Etkowitz and Leydesdorff, 2000; Leydesdorff and Meyer, 2003), that higher education matters because it contributes to the future economic vitality of the community. Can the agenda of employability, competencies and skills development be reconciled with ontological growth or are the two ideas fundamentally opposed?

To explore how Heidegger suggests that we can get back to real education, we will visit Plato's famous allegory of the prisoner in the cave. The prisoner begins 1) in chains in the cave and 2) turns round to discover the fire that is the source of light and thus of the shadows on the wall that s/he has taken for reality. Escaping the chains the prisoner then 3) ascends to the light of the outside world and comes to understand that what is seen there is made possible by the light of the sun. Finally the prisoner returns to the cave and attempts to free the other prisoners, who violently resist (Thomson, p162). For Thomson, Heidegger's point is that entities do not show themselves as they truly are, as they are only seen through enframing as intrinsically meaningless resources to be used. To get beyond this, to achieve step three in Plato's analogy, we need to attune ourselves to the things themselves, to see and experience entities as being richer in meaning than to which we can do justice conceptually, not merely as objects of use.

Despite these insights there is no simple route to *free technologically anaesthetized enframers from their bondage* (Thomson, p.165). Heidegger suggests that *ontological education reaches its true culmination in the return to the cave* (Thomson, p.165) believing

that learning culminates in teaching, and he sees teaching as letting the student learn. To summarise:

- To learn to become, students need to be strategic and to order things (enframe) to make use of them in self-construction.
- To do this facilitates 'becoming' but true ontological education means going further to see oneself and one's 'being' at a deeper level of truth. To be able to do this requires reflection, self-awareness and an openness to seeing things as they are, not only as objects of use. (There is symmetry here in 'getting back to the things themselves' being both an approach to this research and a conclusion.)
- Getting students to be strategic is hard enough says Burke (2015), getting them to be open to ontological development is harder still, but professional level vocational work experience, immersion in a community of practice, has the potential to break the chains.

It is not possible to say if the employability agenda, which Heidegger would surely have disapproved of, can be truly reconciled with ontological development. I would like to believe that it is possible but the question has philosophical, political and economic dimensions, including the historical and political context of Heidegger's ideas. However a vocational element, including a work placement is strongly supported by the data in this thesis as a route to see oneself and one's 'being' at a deeper level of truth. By truly acting in the world, our interviewees seem to say, we can come to see who we are. Let us consider what the interviewees tell us about their self-creation and ontological development.

### **Self-creation and ontological development**

All of the graduates and placement students interviewed are impressive. The strategic planning and clarity of vision of Amina in the face of financial and other limitations is admirable as is the focus, drive, analytic skills, sheer energy and learning from placement of Suzie. All are brave and committed in following up opportunities, Nadia going for a distant interview against the advice of her friends for example. The drive and ambition of Louise, despite her initial expectation that a career will simply materialise, is praiseworthy as is Toyah's insight and self-awareness. The coherence and fluency of the placement students in the face of Sid's occasionally combative interviewing is also inspiring as are Dave and Ella in

overcoming their initial fear on placement and Marie's success in developing a role for herself.

All benefit from their work experience, in some cases, Dave for example, transformatively so. Amina benefits greatly from her work too, despite not taking a placement. All show evidence of growth through the transition experience, particularly the graduate interviewees as the interval between interviews is long enough to see this. Their experience is mixed and complex but generally positive. Only Suzie has a place on a clinical psychology doctoral course, and she has assimilated her success and talks and acts as part of the community of practice she is increasingly a member of, but is perhaps less composed than she was. Louise has completed another qualification and is more at ease with herself. She too has made much progress on a path to professional status and emerges as more assertive and confident. Nadia is enmeshed in family and expectations of marriage. Her self-awareness is more mature and she is making pragmatic choices with insight and clarity as she balances the forces influencing her fate. Amina is also most of the way to full professional status but like Suzie the clarity of her undergraduate aim is diluted by success which opens up new decisions and issues. Toyah was the most troubled at graduation but has also found her way forward and has perhaps come to terms with identity and work-life balance more than anyone.

How do they see that they have benefited from their education however, other than from the placement component? The graduates offer reasoned and reflective assessments adding emotional attachment to a course, university, friends and a time of life. None of the interviewees, placement students or graduates, except perhaps for Toyah in interview two, articulate benefits from their education that fit with the idea of higher education as transformative in itself, as enabling things to be seen as they truly are, as promoting epistemic virtue. They have all more-or-less learned to be strategic and to construct themselves in ways that help them to succeed but can find only limp arguments that their education has (merely) provided resources to use. Louise thinks that her bachelor's education was not worth it as an investment. The ambitions of herself and her friends were to achieve professional power, status, self-fulfilment and income, and to do something meaningful and worthwhile. Graduation was a rude awakening, a fall from the garden, a desert rather than a promised land. Opportunities to enter professions did not immediately materialise for her, instead she found a prosaic landscape of ordinary jobs, undistinguished

careers, unfamiliar work and employers, and starting close to the floor. The idea of university has perhaps over-promised glamour, fulfilment, money and power and not delivered. In contrast however Louise's MSc has delivered and she has much to say about the benefits of a more professionally focused programme.

Louise and Suzie advocate making BSc psychology more like professional training, along the lines of the Doctorate in clinical psychology. Suzie suggests that multiple short placements would work well. Both argue for vocational education but do not explore the implications of moving professional selection from 21+ to 18+. The case for liberal education and epistemic virtue developed through undergraduate study is absent. Suzie does make the case for the transformative power of the work placement. She feels that until this point her education had little value or point for her, she did not do well and she owes everything to the placement year, this was the key transition for her when she saw that she needed to take responsibility for her future. Like Louise, Amina values her postgraduate professional training more than BSc but also finds value in her undergraduate experience. She thinks that it made her research-literate, more intelligent, taught her to work hard and improved her time management. I feel that she is trying hard to find positives to please me however rather than giving voice to her true thoughts. She brings a teachers eye to her BSc noting how ineffective traditional university teaching is at promoting understanding. Toyah questioned the value of her degree when she got her 2.2 but finds some content relevant at work now. She also valued the opportunity to live independently and the personal development that gave her more confidence and skills. She also recalls a conversation about her writing that helps her to understand her degree grade.

In the terms with which we have been discussing it then, the bachelors' degree in psychology, if we exclude the work placement, is not a truly transformative education. If students benefit from their Bachelors' degrees it may be because of a number of factors; finishing-school gloss, time for further maturation, work experience, some experience of independence, some developed competencies and skills, some subject knowledge. But to take up the challenge posed by Louise, if graduates benefit from access to more interesting, better-paid and higher status careers relative to non-graduates how is higher education more than the socially sanctioned route to officers' rather than other-ranks' careers? Where is the *transformational* benefit of the higher education experience?

Leaving aside these questions, what this programme of research set out to do was to shed light on how individuals experience the transition from being a student to becoming a graduate professional. This has I think been achieved to a considerable extent. Of the two subordinate aims the second, which asks how a sandwich placement year shapes being, and becoming a professional, has also been achieved, there is much here that bears on this question. The other, which asks how undergraduate education shapes being, and becoming a professional, has not. As the questions above suggest, the contribution of higher education is multi-headed and remains as ill-defined and elusive as Barnett (2004) says the notion of liberal education is.

## **Reflection**

### **Reflexivity revisited - analysis, and analytic outcomes**

As Finlay (2002) points out, the predispositions of the researcher and his or her position, relationship to the interviewees and orientation to the subject will influence the analysis and analytic outcomes of their research. Reflexivity is necessary in order to be able to claim a degree of trustworthiness and credibility for the research and to enable the reader to make up her or his own mind about it in the context of who the researcher is. My position at Aston University, as well as involving the support for the placement year outlined in the preamble to chapter one, included lengthy spells as an admissions tutor and I was also an Associate Dean for learning and teaching when the National Student Survey (NSS) was introduced. These roles influenced my orientation as an advocate of the learning and teaching mission of the university and as having some responsibility for its corporate success.

I have tended to see success for individual students from a parental and other stakeholders position, and success for the university in terms of NSS scores and league table position. Both come together around student satisfaction and entry to graduate careers. This ingrained perspective has also been reinforced by years of tutorial conversations with students about wanting to be a counsellor or psychotherapist, or a clinical or forensic psychologist. This has influenced the assumptions behind this research and to some extent the analysis of the data. My analysis reflects my experience and standpoint, although not consistently, the second interview with Suzie for example feels markedly different and seems based on a different kind of relationship.

My relationship with the graduate participants has also influenced my analysis in a similar direction. I think that I brought a teacher mind-set to these interviews and carried over into

them my sense of tutorial responsibility. This is most apparent with the interviews with Toyah and Louise. It is clear that in the first interview with Toyah my sense of myself as teacher and even of parent substitute overwhelmed my research agenda at the time and in my analysis later. The interviews with the placement students in study four are different as a second researcher, Sid, carried out the interviews and the intimacy of a personal relationship with me is absent leading to an emotionally 'cooler' analysis. As discussed elsewhere, the lack of personal involvement in these interviews led me to prefer a thematic analysis rather than a case-by-case IPA approach and this is less emotionally involved. The contrast influenced my analysis and analytic findings; for example the theme *coherence, sophistication and fluency of interviewees* arose in analysis in contrast to the more emotionally intimate graduate interviews. Elsewhere I have attributed the difference to the contrast in interviewing styles between Sid and myself, however I also acknowledge that my analysis has not, and can hardly have been, neutral. In being somewhat critical of Sid's interviews I may also be revealing my own position and my commitment to it, as well as being perhaps unfair to Sid.

### **Limitations**

As is discussed in the section below on interview issues, the interviews with the placement students worked arguably less well than the graduate interviews. More care should have been taken to time the placement interviews so that students were interviewed within two weeks of the start of their placements and again immediately after they had completed their placements. It is also unfortunate that two interviews were lost due to faulty recordings. Carrying out an interpretative phenomenological analysis on transcripts of interviews carried out by someone else was also not entirely satisfactory. I am happy with the resulting data but carrying out one's own interviews is preferable. The study as a whole would perhaps have benefitted from a further round of interviews, the longitudinal element is the most successful and the second set of graduate interviews the most insightful, a third set would have potentially added yet more insight.

The close relationship between my employability teaching, my tutorial role and this research, and the parallel relationship between the participants in study two and three and myself has been a factor in the shape of this research. It is intimately connected with my professional practice and this has meant that I have had both privileged access to aspects of experience but I have also experienced some difficulty in reflecting on the way that I was approaching its design and conduct. It has been difficult for me to set aside the 'natural

attitude' of my ingrained assumptions. For example I found it easy to construct a mind map that led to an interview schedule but difficult to stand outside my professional experience to reflect on the choices that I made in its construction. The viewpoints had already been taken and become a part of myself so that it was difficult to recognise the choices made and rejected or even to see them as choices at all. The schedules I devised will have shaped the data generated in at least two ways; by positioning participants in a familiar 'employability tutorial' role and also into the assumption that the graduate transition was necessarily an 'identity project' (Giddens, 1991; Harré 1983). Creating and consulting an advisory group able to take a wider view in constructing the interview schedule might have been helpful, however my professional role would still have shaped interviews with my own students. An alternative would have been to interview students from another university and this would have guarded against the influence of my role on my own students. The research initially envisaged interviews with Bath University graduates but an over-ambitious design and concern over fitting this into my work schedule led me to focus on my own students only.

Qualitative research necessarily works with small numbers of participants, to do otherwise would result in such an unwieldy volume of data as to render it unworkable (Yardley, 2000). Questions nonetheless arise about the relationship of the research to the population the participants are drawn from. The eight 'big-tent' criteria proposed by Tracy (2010) and discussed in the quality evaluation below include the notion of 'resonance'; research that is capable of influencing, emotionally affecting or moving its audiences, and this perhaps corresponds to some extent to the quantitative criterion of generalizability. This research has a number of points of focus, most specifically on Aston University psychology students and graduates of the usual student age in the graduate transition at this point in time. It may also resonate for (or have some focus on) UK psychology students as a whole, psychology students more widely in Europe and elsewhere, non-vocational students in the UK and elsewhere, students taking a placement year, and the UK higher education sector as a whole. Participants are not however a sample of a population in any quantitatively meaningful way. Nevertheless it is worth considering how the findings may have differed if mature students, or students without an opportunity to take a placement year had been interviewed.

The term 'mature student' is a loose one. It embraces a range of second-chance entrants to higher education but many, probably the majority, will still fall into what Arnett (2000, 2007)

calls the 'in-between' period of emerging adulthood. If mature student refers to anyone starting higher education aged over 21, the distribution will be heavily skewed to the younger end. Although younger mature students may differ from the mass of 18 year-old entrants it may be more by virtue of their different route to higher education rather than simply in being three or five years older; they are still likely to be facing emerging adulthood issues. Those entering when older than this, perhaps aged 30 or over, may have markedly different expectations and experiences; it would be most interesting to know more of them, but this is not addressed here either in the literature reviewed or in the empirical research.

The results of this research may also have been different if participants had not studied for a psychology degree with a strongly promoted placement year. The ability to take a psychology placement year is not unusual but it is rare to find it so emphasised. Not all participants in this research however did take a placement year, Amina did not, but her experience is coloured by its existence. The point here I think is that the Aston psychology experience foregrounds work experience and graduate career entry and this is born out by a mass of league table and related public relations grey literature that help to set the expectations of students, staff and employers amongst other stakeholders. This suggests that the Aston psychology student experience will not resonate with graduates of other psychology degrees. However, the issues raised in chapter one about employability, fees, value for money and graduate careers are increasingly powerful in discourse about UK higher education. Other universities are, my colleagues in the Aston University careers service assure me, greatly expanding their careers services and adopting the employability agenda and are concerned to monitor the proportion of their students who enter graduate careers. Recent contact with a Russell Group University in the north of England on this very topic suggests that this is the case.

I learned a tremendous amount from carrying out the systematic review and meta-analysis reported in chapter two. As time has passed I have suffered persistent anxieties that I may have missed things. If I were to do this again I would devote yet more time to it, be even more systematic and keep yet more thorough records.

### **Interview issues re-visited**

Potter and Hepburn (2012) suggest that interviewing, overwhelmingly the most widely used IPA data collection technique (Smith, 2011), requires greater critical scrutiny and offer a number of challenges in the design, conduct, analysis and reporting of qualitative interviews.



This prompted a further review of the differences between the two interviewers here. Those carried out by myself with the five graduates, and then repeated two years later perhaps show more flexibility and are less bound by the interview schedule and are more exploratory. This probably reflects the continuation of an existing tutorial and supervisory relationship. As discussed earlier, these interviews are emotionally warm and confiding but fall in part into tutorial or careers counselling mode rather than a research mode of relating. The external interviews are driven quite strongly by the interview schedule offering less scope for emergent material to be elicited. There is a risk of circularity in reproducing the themes started with. Such confirmatory data seems out of sympathy with the exploratory aims of the study and the more abductive nature of IPA, although I do not think that circularity is much evident in the analysis of study four. Each set of interviews illuminate facets, arguably flaws, of the other and show the power of relationship and context in driving the construction of narrative and meaning and giving voice to experience. At a personal level I found the interviews that I conducted allowed me to explore issues of growth, becoming and development at a depth that is rarely possible in other contexts with students or even with family. I suspect that the satisfaction I found in them may have been echoed by the participants and it is interesting to note that Bourne and Robson (2015) report that their interview participants valued the opportunity to make sense of their experiences in a non-judgemental, honest and open context.

### **Quality evaluation of empirical studies**

The 16 papers reviewed in study one were assessed for quality using prompts reported by Bennion, Shaw and Gibson (2012) and developed by Dixon-Woods et al (2004). However their application revealed difficulties with reliability and validity and evaluation was not independent of epistemological grounding, a difficulty highlighted by Leonidaki (2015, p.5-8) and by Yardley (2000) who notes the diversity of approach in qualitative research and reviews the difficulties and risks in specifying evaluation criteria. Although controversial, some way of evaluating quality in qualitative research is important to assist the integration of findings and to demonstrate its value and intellectual integrity. Approaches that are general have been developed as well as those specific to particular methodologies. For example Yardley (2000) suggests four characteristics of good qualitative research, Leonidaki (2015) offers a nine-point scale specialising in the appraisal of interview studies, and Tracy (2010) details eight 'big-tent' criteria for excellent qualitative research.

The combination of IPA and TA in this thesis, and the earlier difficulties outlined above,

suggest that a general approach should be selected, despite concern that universal criteria may be problematic if not fruitless (Guba and Lincoln, 2005; cited in Tracy, 2010). Yardley's approach is scholarly and intuitive but lacks detail and is a little dated now. Leonidaki is current and relevant but also a little vague; Tracy's approach seems the most appropriate and accessible and is adopted here. Tracy (2010) suggests that high quality qualitative methodological research is marked by (a) a worthy topic, (b) rich rigor, (c) sincerity, (d) credibility, (e) resonance, (f) a significant contribution, (g) ethics, and (h) meaningful coherence.

### ***Worthy topic***

Tracey suggests that good qualitative research should be relevant, timely, significant and interesting. The large numbers now passing through higher education and the proportion studying psychology supports the relevance of this research, the case is set out in chapter one. Timeliness relates to the relative lack of similar research and to the recent funding changes to UK higher education leading consumers to focus on employability, graduate employment and cost-benefit. It also relates to the sector's increasing concern with student satisfaction and degree outcome. It is significant and interesting in Tracy's terms if it makes the reader think differently or has the power to turn assumptions on their head. I think it does, not least because it has changed my own views on vocational education. However to paraphrase Mandy Rice-Davies, *I would say that wouldn't I*, and this highlights that quality may be best judged by the reviewer rather than the author.

### ***Rich rigor***

Tracy suggests that richness and rigor are essential, *necessary but not sufficient*, for quality. I suggest that the studies here have face validity and the data have the necessary rich complexity and abundance. There are enough data, they are interesting and significant, and the participants are appropriate to the aims of the research. Appropriate procedures have been followed, however there are limitations in interviewing style and the construction of the interviewing protocol that are discussed elsewhere. The change from the intended IPA approach to TA in the analysis of study four also raises questions but these are discussed in the methodology section in chapter three and I contend that rigor is adequately maintained.

### ***Sincerity***

Reflexivity and transparency are marks of sincerity for Tracy and she notes that sincere researchers are self-deprecating. It is difficult to be self-deprecating while asserting one's

own sincerity, however I suggest that reflexivity and transparency is apparent in this research in chapter four and in the reflexivity revisited section above in this chapter.

### ***Credibility***

Credibility refers here to the trustworthiness and plausibility of the research and is established by thick description (in-depth illustration), much easier to achieve in a large-scale thesis as here than in a more restricted publication. It also can be established by triangulation, not in the sense of converging on a fixed truth but by allowing multiple researchers and approaches to have a voice and recognising that all research is shaped by the circumstances of its production. The involvement of a second researcher and a second approach to analysis can be seen as adding credibility through triangulation and through crystallization in the sense of opening up a more complex understanding of the issues.

### ***Resonance***

Resonant research for Tracy (2010) is that which is capable of influencing, emotionally affecting, or moving its readers, or audiences, through evocative representation. It is also capable of inspiring its readers to generalize its findings and transfer them to their own setting or circumstance. These are difficult ideas for an author alone to claim for his or her writing and research. I hope that I have created an engaging narrative. My presentation at the 2012 BPS/QMIP annual conference (Reddy, Shaw and Moores, 2012) of one of the case studies from this thesis attracted interest from members of the Psychology Postgraduate Affairs Group (PsyPAG). Two PsyPAG delegates reported on it; Owton noted it as *one of the three presentations that particularly captured my interest over the two days* (2012, p.41) and Norton thought it *very thought-provoking* (2013, p.17) so there is some evidence of resonance with recent graduates.

### ***Significant contribution***

Tracy argues that good qualitative research is theoretically, heuristically and practically significant. I feel that this research helps to make visible what I argue is inappropriately ignored, the experience of the graduate transition, and has implications for re-centring undergraduate education. It may also have a certain amount of methodological significance in helping to popularise qualitative research in a relatively neglected area.

### ***Ethics***

Tracy proposes that good research considers ethics from a number of perspectives. Procedural ethics are assured by the university ethical policies and procedures that this research has been subject to. Situational ethics may revolve around the utilitarian issue of

the means justifying the ends and here I have some concerns. I value the research but there is a potential cost in disclosure of participants' personal information, although it was given in an explicit research context and is protected by pseudonyms and some redaction of identifiable locations. Tracy cites Christians (2005) notion of feminist communitarianism that *stresses promise keeping, relationships, caring, collaboration, intimacy, emotionality, and connectedness* (Tracy 2010, p.847). I am to an extent distressed that the intimacy, emotionality and connectedness of my conversations with my participants should be exposed in published research, even though the research itself provided the occasion for the conversations and their value for any other than the participants and I lies in their analysis, writing up and publication. Perhaps this kind of cost-benefit calculation is always zero-sum, I am keenly aware of the potential costs.

### ***Meaningful coherence***

Tracy's final criteria does not require that studies should not be messy or jarring, but in her words; *(a) achieve their stated purpose; (b) accomplish what they espouse to be about; (c) use methods and representation practices that partner well with espoused theories and paradigms; and (d) attentively interconnect literature reviewed with research foci, methods, and findings.* (2010, p.848). These are clear requirements and I contend that, combining IPA and TA and two interviewers notwithstanding, they are apparent in this thesis which can lay claim to a sufficient degree of meaningful coherence. Overall this thesis emerges from the stress-test of the eight 'big-tent' criteria for excellent qualitative research in good shape. Excellence cannot be claimed but no major areas of unaddressed or unacknowledged weakness are apparent to the author.

### **Implications for practice**

This programme of research points strongly to the benefits of a placement year at work, and to vocational education. The benefits are both in developing employability, which is not surprising and accords with previous research (e.g. Reddy and Lantz, 2010; Reddy and Moores, 2012; Jones, Green and Higson, 2015) and in personal development, which is more surprising. The implication for psychology education in the UK, and for bachelors education generally is that students will benefit from making vocational links and making vocational experience a consistent part of programmes. Grappling with the complexities of vocational education in psychology is problematic however. There are far more undergraduates than there are professional psychology outcome opportunities and it is difficult to see how vocational selection at 18+ could now be introduced. There are too many undergraduate

programmes, students and staff and psychology is positioned as a STEM subject and not as a specific vocation or set of vocations. It is also a vastly more complex arena than are more tightly focused applied disciplines such as pharmacy for example. Psychology contributes to many areas of employment as the recent development of the idea of psychological literacy explores (Halpern, 2009, Cranney and Dunn, 2011, McGovern, Corey, Cranney et al., 2009) and has a diversity of professional specialisms beyond those in the life and health sciences. It may be possible to more explicitly frame bachelors' education in psychology in a more vocational way and this is something that further research could explore and that the British Psychological Society may wish to consider.

### **Recommendations for future research**

As noted earlier Nyström (2010) argues that male and female early career professionals differ in how they encounter working life, and are perceived as professionals, and how they position themselves as knowledgeable and competent. Holden and Hamblett (2007) also explore this topic. Given the growth in psychology and the preponderance of women studying it and the possible 'feminisation' of the psychology professions (Ostertag and McNamara, 1991) as well as the association of occupational segregation with the continuing gender pay gap (Purcell, 2002, Thompson, 2006) male and female graduates experience of establishing their professional adult identity is an area for further research.

As discussed above making bachelors education more vocational could be explored at several levels covering psychology, undergraduate education generally and in a single university, or in the context of a profession, the UK or Europe or internationally. This is not necessarily to undermine the academic foundation of undergraduate education, but to add greater transformative power to it. Higher education in the developed world is now a huge undertaking and further research into the student experience and into making it more effective, however we define this, may have great benefit. This could tie in with Haggis's (2009) review of research in higher education as well as recent and previously cited work on employability and ontological development by Su and Feng (2008), Barnett (2009) and Dall'Alba (2009). Although four of the five graduates interviewed took a sandwich placement year, it is noteworthy that Amina, who did not, found her work experience to be of great value to her. If further research found this single case to be generalizable this could also suggest ways of linking academic education with employability and personal development, as Wrennall and Forbes (2002) and Butler and Reddy (2010) suggest.

As discussed earlier students and graduates appear to value their work experience over their education. Universities, despite vast expansion and a constantly adjusted set of priorities cannot sit secure in the knowledge that their graduates clearly and explicitly value their education. Are graduates undervaluing their education? Further research to broadly explore experience and forms of value is called for. At a more philosophical level, exploring the contradictions and connections between Heidegger's idea of enframing and the employability agenda that it connects with, and ontological development (*bildung*) would help to shape future debate about higher education. It would also be interesting to know more both about the role of work placements in social mobility and the about the extent to which recruitment to the psychology professions, especially clinical psychology, reproduces inequality.

## Chapter 9: Conclusion

As we have noted in chapter one, Newman says that any subject is suitable for educating the mind and cultivating understanding (Graham, 2005). Students and graduates however have not greatly noticed or valued their minds being exercised and educated or their understanding being cultivated. They are interested in becoming something (identity) or someone (power). Interviewees do however agree that they have grown and that growth is important, but there is a contradiction, well expressed by Louise who offers contradictory advice to her undergraduate former self. On the one hand to focus on her career – in other words to worry more about the strategic and ‘enframing’ aspect. On the other hand to worry less and just enjoy the process of being and growing, the ontological development or ‘bildung’ aspect.

This contradiction is also noted by Billet (2009) who argues that vocation has two meanings, firstly the idea of paid work to meet needs for goods and services, secondly as a personal journey, a trajectory and an identity. Here the graduate is called to their vocation by disposition, interest, talent or ability, or by social pressures such as reward and status.

Dewey (1916) emphasises vocation as the development of the individual; the value of work is as much in individual development as in meeting needs for goods and services. This study of students and graduates in transition to professional work and status shows the power of vocation in individual development. For the participants it is much more transformative than their higher education. This does not mean that education does not have a part to play, but from a 21 year-old student’s point of view, it is what they have always known. The power of vocation shown in the experience of the graduate transition prompts a conclusion that work experience and a vocational focus for education is a vital part of higher education. From a European tradition point of view Bachelors education cannot be vocational as it is too brief, not thought of as a suitable exit qualification and is an integral academic foundation for further vocational study. In order to make UK bachelors education a transformative experience for as many as possible it needs to both incorporate work experience and to be as vocational as possible.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Advertisement (example)

#### **The Psychology undergraduate experience and graduate employment – a qualitative (IPA) study (Study 543.1 Recent graduates)**

##### Invitation

*You are invited to take part in this research study. Before you decide whether to take part or not it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information.*

This study uses an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach. The aim of this approach is to gain an understanding of your experience as you see it. What is of interest in this case is your experience of being a psychology student and recent graduate and how it relates to your sense of being employable and to your growth and development. In short it is your experience and the sense that you make of it that the research is interested in.

You will be interviewed individually and, with your permission, audio recorded. Your interview recording, along with others, will be transcribed and analysed in order to get a better understanding of participants perceptions of their readiness and preparedness for graduate professional employment; their sense of the competencies, abilities and strengths that they have to offer an employer and the relatedness of their undergraduate experience to their current and future employment. The interview will also cover the emotional aspect of graduation, its impact on your sense of self and identity, and on your aims, ambitions and direction. It will also ask for your thoughts on your undergraduate experience, its value, utility and meaning and its impact on your personal growth and development. After transcription the interview will be analysed by the principal investigator. Your anonymity will be protected by the use of a pseudonym, which you will be invited to choose, in the transcript.

##### What is the purpose of the study?

The study, one of a series, is to help to better understand how the experience of studying psychology as an undergraduate is related to employability and to early adulthood growth and development.

##### Are there any potential risks in taking part in the study?

The study is not thought likely to cause any harm or distress to participants, however it is possible that participants may recall unhappy or uncomfortable events. It is not intended to probe or to pry into such matters.

##### Expenses and payments:

Expenses of £15 per interview will be paid to you in cash on the day of your interview.

##### Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

Yes

## **Appendix 2: Invitation to participate (example, second interview)**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Quite some time ago you very kindly took part in an interview with me as part of qualitative research I was carrying out into the transition from university to graduate employment. I am still working on the same project and I am keen to add a longitudinal dimension to it, so I wonder if you would be prepared to be interviewed for a second time? If so I would be delighted to meet you sometime over the coming two months or so.

As before, the study uses an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach. You would be interviewed individually by me for about an hour and an audio recording made of the interview. We would need somewhere appropriate to meet, I would be happy to pay your travel expenses if you would like to come to Aston, or I would be happy to travel to meet you. There is also a modest 'expenses payment' of £25 paid to you for taking part.

I am not sure if you are still living at this address or receiving email from Aston so I have written to you using your old Aston email as well as in this letter, apologies for cross posting. If you would like to be interviewed please contact me by email at [p.a.reddy@aston.ac.uk](mailto:p.a.reddy@aston.ac.uk) or telephone on 0121 204 4076.

With best wishes,

Peter Reddy  
BSc MSc Cert Ed CPsychol AFBPsS FHEA  
Reader in Psychology  
Associate Dean for Learning and Teaching  
School of Life and Health Sciences  
Tel +44 (0)121 204 4076

## **Appendix 3: Consent form**

### **The Psychology undergraduate experience and graduate employment – a qualitative (IPA) study**

#### Invitation

*You are invited to take part in this research study. Before you decide whether to take part or not it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information.*

*This study uses an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach. The aim of this approach is to gain an understanding of your experience as you see it. What is of interest in this case is your experience of being a psychology undergraduate and how it relates to your sense of being employable and to your growth and development. In short it is your experience and the sense that you make of it that the research is interested in.*



*You, and other psychology students and graduates will be interviewed individually and, with your permission, audio recorded. Recordings will be transcribed and analysed in order to get a better understanding of participants perceptions of their readiness and preparedness for graduate professional employment; their sense of the competencies, abilities and strengths that they have to offer an employer and the relatedness of their undergraduate experience to their current and future employment. The interview will also cover the emotional aspect of graduation, its impact on your sense of self and identity, and on your aims, ambitions and direction. It will also ask for your thoughts on your undergraduate experience, its value, utility and meaning and its impact on your personal growth and development. After transcription the interview will be analysed by the principal investigator. Your anonymity will be protected by the use of a pseudonym, which you will be invited to choose, in the transcript.*

What is the purpose of the study?

*The study, one of a series, is to help to better understand how the experience of studying psychology as an undergraduate is related to employability and to early adulthood growth and development.*

Why have I been chosen?

*You have been kind enough to volunteer after being approached. A number of recent graduates have been asked to consider volunteering. Convenience is the primary factor in identifying people to approach.*

What will happen to me if I take part?

*You will take part in a semi structured interview lasting no more than one hour. For this study (part one of nine) four former placement students and four students who did not take a placement are being interviewed.*

Are there any potential risks in taking part in the study?

*The study is not thought likely to cause any harm or distress to participants, however it is possible that participants may recall unhappy or uncomfortable events. It is not intended to probe or to pry into such matters.*

Do I have to take part?

*You are free to withdraw at any time from the interview and your transcript will be withdrawn from the study on your request for up to two weeks after the date of the interview. No sanctions will be taken against any student of the University who refuses to participate in or withdraws from a project.*

Expenses and payments:

*Expenses of £15 per interview will be paid to you in cash on the day of your interview.*

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

*Your interview will be recorded as an MP3 file and stored for the duration of the study in a secure and password protected electronic store accessible to the principal investigator only and identified only by a pseudonym known only to you and to the principal investigator. CD copies will be made for transcription purposes only and then destroyed. Pseudonym protected transcripts will be shared with the other investigators. Analysis of the interview, and selected anonymised quotations from the transcript, will be used in writing an academic publication. The MP3 file will be destroyed within 12 months of the end of the project.*

What will happen to the results of the research study?

*The results of the research will be disseminated and published in one or more academic conferences and an academic publication. The anonymity of individual participants will be protected.*

*You may obtain a copy of the published research by contacting the principal investigator, Peter Reddy at Aston University (0121 204 4076, [p.a.reddy@aston.ac.uk](mailto:p.a.reddy@aston.ac.uk) )*

Who is organising and funding the research?

*The research is being organised by the principal investigator and is not externally funded.*

Who has reviewed the study?

*The research has been approved by Aston University's Ethics Committee.*

Who do I Contact if Something Goes Wrong or I need Further Information?

*Contact the principal investigator, Peter Reddy at Aston University (0121 204 4076, [p.a.reddy@aston.ac.uk](mailto:p.a.reddy@aston.ac.uk) )*

Who do I contact if I wish to make a complaint about the way in which the research is conducted?

*If you have any concerns about the way in which the study has been conducted you should contact the Secretary of the University Ethics Committee on [j.g.walter@aston.ac.uk](mailto:j.g.walter@aston.ac.uk) or telephone 0121 204 4869.*

I agree to take part in this study.

Name (Please PRINT) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix 4: Participant information sheet**

### **The Psychology undergraduate experience and graduate employment – a qualitative (IPA) study**

#### Invitation

*You are invited to take part in this research study. Before you decide whether to take part or not it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information.*

This study uses an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach. The aim of this approach is to gain an understanding of your experience as you see it. What is of interest in this case is your experience of being a psychology undergraduate or graduate, or an employer of psychology undergraduates or graduates. The study is concerned with student and graduate employability, growth and development. In all cases it is your experience and the sense that you make of it that the research is interested in.

You will be interviewed individually and, with your permission, audio recorded. Recordings will be transcribed and analysed in order to get a better understanding of participants' perceptions of student and graduate readiness and preparedness for graduate professional employment; their sense of the competencies, abilities and strengths that they have to offer an employer and the relatedness of their undergraduate experience to current and future employment. The interview will also ask for your thoughts on the undergraduate experience, its value, utility and meaning and its impact on personal growth and development. After transcription the interview will be analysed by the principal investigator. Your anonymity will be protected by the use of a pseudonym in the transcript and the removal or anonymisation of any references to named individuals or organisations that may compromise the anonymity of yourself or others.

#### What is the purpose of the study?

The study, one of a series, is to help to better understand how the experience of studying psychology as an undergraduate is related to employability and to early adulthood growth and development.

#### Why have I been chosen?

You have been kind enough to volunteer after being approached. A number of current psychology undergraduate students, recent psychology graduates and employers have been asked to consider volunteering.

#### What will happen to me if I take part?

You will take part in a semi structured interview lasting no more than one hour. Students on placement will take part in up to four interviews.

#### Are there any potential risks in taking part in the study?

The study is not thought likely to cause any harm or distress to participants, however it is possible that participants may recall unhappy or uncomfortable events. It is not intended to probe or to pry into such matters.

#### Do I have to take part?

You are free to withdraw at any time from the interview and your transcript will be withdrawn from the study on your request for up to two weeks after the date of the interview. No sanctions will be taken against any student who refuses to participate in or withdraws from a project.

#### Expenses and payments:

For students and graduates, expenses of £15 per interview will be paid to you in cash on the day of your interview.

#### Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

Your interview will be recorded as an MP3 file and stored for the duration of the study in a secure and password protected electronic store accessible to the principal investigator only and identified only by a pseudonym known only to you and to the principal investigator. CD copies will be made for transcription purposes only and then destroyed. Pseudonym protected transcripts will be shared with the other investigators. Analysis of the interview, and selected anonymised quotations from the transcript, will be used in writing an academic publication. The MP3 file will be destroyed within 12 months of the end of the project.

#### What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of the research will be disseminated and published in one or more academic conferences and an academic publication. The anonymity of individual participants will be protected.

You may obtain a copy of the published research by contacting the principal investigator, Peter Reddy at Aston University (0121 204 4076, [p.a.reddy@aston.ac.uk](mailto:p.a.reddy@aston.ac.uk) )

#### Who is organising and funding the research?

The research is being organised by the principal investigator and is not externally funded.

#### Who has reviewed the study?

The research has been approved by Aston University's Ethics Committee.

#### Who do I Contact if Something Goes Wrong or I need Further Information?

Contact the principal investigator, Peter Reddy at Aston University (0121 204 4076, [p.a.reddy@aston.ac.uk](mailto:p.a.reddy@aston.ac.uk) )

#### Who do I contact if I wish to make a complaint about the way in which the research is conducted?

If you have any concerns about the way in which the study has been conducted you should contact the Secretary of the University Ethics Committee on [j.g.walter@aston.ac.uk](mailto:j.g.walter@aston.ac.uk) or telephone 0121 204 4869.

## **Appendix 5: Debriefing information sheet**

The Psychology undergraduate experience and graduate employment – a qualitative (IPA) study

Thank you for taking part in this study.

### What happens now?

The recording of your interview will be transcribed and then analysed by the principal investigator. Your anonymity will be protected by the use of a pseudonym in the transcript and the removal or anonymisation of any references to named individuals or organisations that may compromise the anonymity of yourself or others.

### May I withdraw my interview transcript from the study if I wish to?

You are free to withdraw your transcript from the study for up to two weeks after the date of the interview by contacting the principal investigator by telephone or email (contact details below).

### Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

Yes. Your interview will be stored as an MP3 file for the duration of the study in a secure and password protected electronic store accessible to the principal investigator only and identified only by a pseudonym known only to you and to the principal investigator. CD copies will be made for transcription purposes only and then destroyed. Pseudonym protected transcripts will be shared with the other investigators. Analysis of the interview and selected anonymised quotations from the transcript will be used in writing one or more academic publications. The MP3 file will be destroyed within 12 months of the end of the project.

### What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of the research will be disseminated and published in one or more academic conferences and academic publications. You may obtain a copy of the published research by contacting the principal investigator, Peter Reddy at Aston University (0121 204 4076, [p.a.reddy@aston.ac.uk](mailto:p.a.reddy@aston.ac.uk) )

### Who do I Contact if Something Goes Wrong or I need Further Information?

Contact the principal investigator, Peter Reddy at Aston University (0121 204 4076, [p.a.reddy@aston.ac.uk](mailto:p.a.reddy@aston.ac.uk) )

### Who do I contact if I wish to make a complaint about the way in which the research is conducted?

If you have any concerns about the way in which the study has been conducted you should contact the Secretary of the University Ethics Committee on [j.g.walter@aston.ac.uk](mailto:j.g.walter@aston.ac.uk) or telephone 0121 204 4869.

#### **Appendix 6: Interview schedule – graduands and graduates, first interview**

How does it feel to be about to graduate / having just graduated?

Is this a comfortable or an uncomfortable time for you?

How / why?

Do you feel as if you are in a transition – that life is about to change? From what to what?

How will you be different in a years' time? Is this welcome? Worrying?

What do you have lined up to do?

Where are you planning to live?

How would you like to see things pan out for you in the next 1 – 5 years?

If you could sketch out a career and life plan how might you like it to look?

1, 3 years' time / 30 / by 40? What ambitions do you have, what direction would you like to take? What issues are there with this? Is there a plan B. Are there some clear alternatives you feel that are on offer or that you must choose between?

Are there any other things you perhaps might consider – e.g. partner? Family? Money?

You are about to enter the graduate job market – how ready, prepared, equipped do you feel for this?

What do you feel you have to offer an employer generally?

What about a graduate level employer compared to, say, someone looking for temp admin support or other jobs you have done already?

Are you as prepared for graduate employment as you would like to be / should be / could be?

When you came to Uni, what did you expect to learn?

Were you thinking about a career then?

Since leaving school or college, what, if anything, has prepared you for graduate employment? Are there any experiences that stand-out?

Do you feel that the right things have happened or not? How might it have been different?

How do you feel about this?

What is your identity now? How would you describe yourself? Who are you at this point?

Has your sense of who you are, your identity, changed since you have been at university?

Do you think it will change now?

Has Uni had any impact on how you see yourself? Has Uni changed your relationship to family and friends, aims, ambitions and direction?

What has been meaning of your undergraduate experience?

What has been the most valuable thing about coming to University?

What has been the most valuable thing you have learned?

When you are 40 or 50, what do you think will stick in your mind about University?

Has it influenced your personal growth and development? How?

What has been the role of your placement in all this?

What about your placement did you enjoy most?

What was most challenging?

Has the experience prepared you for graduate work in some way?

Nature of work, relationships at work – supervisor, colleagues, public, preparation. What about non-placement work experience?

If you could have your time again are there things you would change?

### **Appendix 7: Interview Schedule – graduates, second interview**

How does it feel to be almost two years on from graduation?

Have things changed? What? How much? As expected or not?

How comfortable do you feel about your life compared to when you were a student? Just graduated?

Do you feel in transition? Are major changes over so that you feel more settled, or is it just that new issues have now replaced older ones?

Have your aims, ambitions and expectations changed? How does this feel?

Last time we met I asked you how you would like to see things pan out for you in the next 1 – 5 years. If you could sketch out a career and life plan how might you like it to look the same or different now?

In 1, 3 years' time / 30 / by 40?

What ambitions do you have, what direction would you like to take? What issues are there with this? Is there a plan B – are you still on plan A or are we on G by now? Are there some clear alternatives you feel that are on offer or that you must choose between?

Are there any other things you perhaps might consider – e.g. partner? Family? Money?

Looking back – how ready, prepared, equipped did you feel for the graduate job market generally, and for what you have actually done these last two years?

What do you feel you have to offer an employer generally? Has this changed over the last two years?

Again in retrospect, did you feel as prepared for graduate employment as you would like to be / should be / could be? Have your thoughts about this changed?

Do you feel that you have moved forward since graduation or fallen back?

How has this happened, what have you done that relates to this?

When I was younger I used to meet people who had somehow never recovered from their experiences in WW2. Has university been a good platform or something you need to recover from?

Looking back at university, how useful, important, relevant, rewarding (or the opposite) does it feel?

What would you say, if you had the opportunity to go back, to your 20 year old self? Have your views changed, and how?

Since 18, what, if anything, has prepared you for graduate employment?

Are there any experiences that stand-out?

How important for you is graduate employment – it may not be as centrally important as I seem to be suggesting here!

Do you feel that the right things, useful, formative learning experiences, including on and off placement, have happened to you, or not?

Did you need more, or were you pushed perhaps too far?

How might or could university have usefully been different for you? How do you feel about this?

What is your identity now? How would you describe yourself? Who are you at this point?

Has your sense of who you are, your identity, changed since you have left university?

Has University had any impact on how you see yourself? Has it changed your relationship to family and friends, your aims, ambitions and direction?

What has been meaning of your undergraduate experience, is it a different meaning now?

### **Appendix 8: Interview Schedule – placement students, first and second interviews**

Tell me / update me about your placement

What about your placement are you enjoying most?

What are the most challenging aspects?

Tell me about the nature of your work, your relationships at work – with your supervisor, colleagues, public.

Do you feel that you were prepared for your placement?

How might your preparation have been better?

Did non-placement work experience or voluntary work help?

Do you feel supported on placement?

How might this be improved?

Is your placement a useful experience for you?

In what ways? What are you learning?

About the job?

About yourself, your interests, strengths and abilities?

What competencies, abilities and strengths do you feel that you have to offer an employer?

Are these different to before your placement / the last time we met?

How has your placement affected your career aim and direction?

How ready and prepared for graduate professional employment do you feel? (Compared with beforehand or the last time we met)

How well do your studies relate to your placement and vice versa?

Does your answer surprise you? To what extent should a degree course and work experience connect?

Has your placement changed you at all? In what ways?

A placement takes a year of your life and delays graduation – what have you gained, and will you gain, in return?

Would you recommend a placement?

How do you think your placement will relate to your graduate career?

A placement can be demanding. Has this been a good experience for you?

Is this a comfortable or an uncomfortable time for you?

How / why?

Is your placement having an impact on your sense of self, your identity, your sense of being part of a professional or academic community?

How has, and is, university and your placement impacting on your personal growth and development?

How would you like to see things pan out for you in the next 1 – 5 years?



If you could sketch out a career and life plan how might you like it to look?  
1, 3 years' time / by 30 / by 40? What ambitions do you have, what direction would you like to take? What issues are there with this? Is there a plan B.  
Are there some clear alternatives you feel that are on offer or that you must choose between?  
Are there any other things you perhaps might consider – e.g. partner? Family? Money?  
When you came to Uni, what did you expect to learn?  
Were you thinking about a career then?  
Since leaving school or college, what has prepared you for graduate employment? Are there any experiences that stand-out?

**Appendix 9: Worked transcript (Samples one to three)**

Ethical issue! Borrowing student in analysis - revealing whose 1 standard was?

MA21A1

Transcript - working about / working on 'story' - creating external narrative.

Bucci (1993) Perceptual

activity - use of language to bring together abstract, symbolic ideas, gut feelings into a story. (Subsymbolic processing - symbolic)

importance / intensity of experiential investment in achievement at university.

- why so powerful?
- identifying / self-orientation?
- social comparison?
- total institution?
- substance of grade out?
- Flower & University?
- determines this outcome

1 WS60005 Interview 2 Study 1  
 2  
 3 ...and one in the afternoon (yes), and the afternoon exam was one of my  
 4 lowest scores (oh, right) so it was things like.. you know when you break  
 5 up the transcript and you think ok where did I go wrong, why did I not do  
 6 so well (sure) it kind of makes you feel a bit better (ok) when you kind of  
 7 understand why you got what you did. Because I know from the  
 8 beginning of this year I kind of had an A (yes) and it was realistic for me, I  
 9 think the majority of people have that, they know how they perform  
 10 (sure) in their final year and they kind of know what they're aiming for  
 11 and yes...

12 I mean to get that close and not quite make it is frustrating (yes, it is) but  
 13 it is still a very, very good grade indeed and the mean is probably about  
 14 62 (ok). So it's like a normal distribution so you're probably, don't know  
 15 what the standard deviation is going to be, but you're going to be at least  
 16 well over one standard deviation, ok, probably two standard deviations  
 17 clear of the B so... (teacher being personal tutor / champion)

18 \*\*\* thinking of it like that

19  
 20  
 21  
 22 Yes and ...  
 23  
 24 It's just this anonymous person being able to go \*\*\*

(why get a high 2:1, yet the paper for 1st)

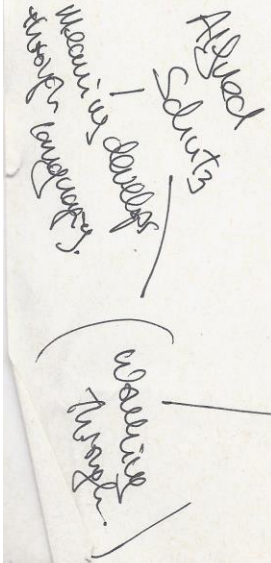
going over transcript - relating grades to circumstances.

- 2 exams in one day!  
 several very busy days  
 creating narrative - working from emotion to rational

(subsymbolic) (symbolic) processing - see Bucci (1993) - Psychology

like therapy. implies scale of experiential investment in final yr

? 69 overall



Relates to  
leave a longer  
commitment &  
practice

(clearly some good  
practice as)  
well as balancing

What learned most  
from - consistently  
for practice puts.  
What is it about it?

Putting into practice  
as cause to  
reflect.

- 518 they are around each other (yes) just the day to day filling out things like
- 519 the administrative tasks as well, the case notes (sure) letters, all of that as
- 520 well as the actual client contact as well. I think I'd be good... I think I've
- 521 got the ability to (yes) do all that.
- 522
- 523 Yes, I mean you sound confident (yes) and justifiably confident (yes) I
- 524 think, which is great. So, if you look back over the, kind of, the four years
- 525 (yes) what stands out in all that as being, perhaps, you learned from, or
- 526 the things you learned most from.
- 527
- 528 I think definitely my placement, without a shadow of a doubt, was one of
- 529 the main things I learned a lot from and then the final year's been a
- 530 massive learning curve, but I don't know whether... I think a lot of that,
- 531 again, is to do with placement, as a result of placement (yes) is has
- 532 opened up my eyes and I've come in it not because... coming from college
- 533 to university it's a normal, it's like the normal curve. We need to go on
- 534 the college and you go on to Uni that would be me.
- 535
- 536 You haven't got to make an active decision (no) because it's almost laid
- 537 out for you.
- 538
- 539 And I kind of just picked psychology because I got a very good grade in A
- 540 level and I enjoyed it (yes) and I didn't really think much of it and I think
- 541 you do the degree and you enjoy the subject and you don't think that
- 542 much of it. But then when I did my placement it sort of puts it all into
- 543 practise and then coming back into my final year I learned a lot, just in

despite placement  
negatives.

Learning by participating  
how professionals are  
around each other.

placement - v. deficits

placement is extra to the  
normal curve.

learned about herself,  
not obvious learner

easy to follow a path &  
not reflect.

what's checks



High achievement?

lucky

More on luck

- self-deprecating?

lucky

- 264 this. So they've got a sense of somebody who's a good team player. (well rounded)
- 265
- 266
- 267 Yes, definitely, but that's what the plan is, get experience in load of
- 268 different areas but there's no rush if I get there in 10 years, fine. You
- 269 know, I'm 22 in August and if I get there when I'm 30 fine I'll have no
- 270 problems I (yes) haven't got any responsibilities (yes). So I'm pretty
- 271 content with things just carrying on just and I'll be so much happier if I get
- 272 assistant post from that (yes, sure) for now, but from then on \*\*\* which
- 273 is really important isn't it? yes it is really important what I mean, everyone
- 274 where I am at the autism place keep saying you are so lucky to have got
- 275 even an honorary post so soon after graduating. I mean, you haven't
- 276 even graduated (yes) you've only just got your results.
- 277
- 278 It's a proper honorary post it's not just a bit of voluntary work, it's a
- 279 proper honorary post.
- 280
- 281 I only started last week, Monday, so I've only been there three times
- 282 including this Monday just gone and I've already been on two visits
- 283 (really). I saw <sup>my</sup> ~~my~~ schools (yes, incredible) so I'm serving cognitive
- 284 assessments, the risk, the wasi, the woopsie, all sorts of things (yes). I
- 285 was just, you know, interviewing teachers so I get their idea of what the
- 286 child is like and \*\*\* (yes, sure) so it's really good, I mean, I just can't
- 287 believe how lucky I've been.
- 288
- 289 Picking up some skills and contacts with it.

check!

not desperation, more assurance. Not a plan B (seville - 149-151) but prepared for a long game & can retoolise.

Overall sense that I am not actually as confident as you are not through though

Not lucky! I bet employer feels lucky!