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**Women Being and Becoming  
Academics:  
Exploring gendered career journeys and  
their implications for Academic  
Development.**

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Education  
University of Sussex  
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**UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX**

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**DOCTOR OF EDUCATION**

**Women Being and Becoming Academics:**

**Exploring gendered career journeys and their implications for  
Academic Development.**

**Abstract:**

Whilst the literature of academic identity is well represented in the sociology of Higher Education (HE) in the UK, personal narratives of journeys through the process of being and becoming an academic are less present. The potential of narrative methodology to produce different knowledge by producing knowledge differently (St. Pierre, 1997) is used as a conceptual framework to co-construct case stories of the career journeys made by five women academics within a globalised academy in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. The study draws on two principal theoretical frameworks to contrast the dynamic relationships between gender, structure and agency and their implications for Academic Development. These are: the critical realist theories of Margaret Archer (1995; 2000; 2003; 2012) and Judith Butler's work on gender 'performativity' (1990; 2005; 2004).

In terms of senior roles at policy level the Academy can be seen as a male dominated sphere. My thesis focuses on women's journeys to foreground the effects of wider social relations and how they impact on women's academic identities and careers to continually reproduce dominant discourses of a male hegemony and neo-liberal socio-economic climate. The consequential distortions in academic development practices are framed in the light of this knowledge. This contributes knowledge to the literature of Academic Development in Higher Education and has implications for my own professional practice as a Head of Continual Professional Development (CPD) for Teaching and Learning in a pre-92 University.

Three broad research questions guided this exploration.

1. What are the experiences of women academics in developing their careers and academic identities?
2. How can case stories of the career choices made by women academics help academic developers understand gender inequalities in higher education?
3. What are the implications of gender equalities in the academy for the practices of Academic Development?

The stories at the centre of this thesis speak of grand narratives; the ontological puzzles of structure and agency; class and gender oppression finding symbolic expression in women's lives and institutional structures. There is no lack of agency in the voices of these women, and the first person narrative highlights that sense. However, from the narrative can be seen identity formed by individual struggles within macro and micro sociological forces.

By theorising academic women's lived experience at the micro-level, this thesis makes an original contribution to the field of Academic Development and affords opportunities for the widening of debate within the macro policies and micro practices of Academic Development; it supports counter-hegemonic gender discourses of HE which have been established from global studies of equalities in Higher Education. My study accords with feminist standpoints which conclude that policies based on polarised understandings of equalities which focus only on agency rather than structure will not redress the wider nor internal social inequalities which women face (Morley, 2012).

I argue that the subsequent distortion in equalities policy making in the academy has implications for Academic Development. A significant finding in my study is that academic development practices cannot be seen as a dominant influence in the career journeys of my respondents. This finding supports the counter-hegemonic discourses of Academic Development which suggests that Academic Development and practices, promoted through managerialist agendas are inevitably seen as part of the masculinist, neo-liberal hegemony, and are more likely to reproduce hegemony rather than contest it.

In conclusion, looking for strategies whereby Academic Development may better support gender equalities, my thesis suggests that academic developers, caught in the eternal dilemma of 'straddling' personal values and hegemonic discourses become more explicitly aware of the game (Lee and McWilliam, 2008) and make more creative use of the ways in which non-formal value-based approaches and dialogue can replace monolithic initiatives.

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## **CHAPTER 1: Introduction and Context**

### **1.1 Summary: Purpose and Contribution**

Whilst the literature of academic identity is well represented in the sociology of Higher Education (HE), personal narratives of journeys through the process of being and becoming an academic are less present. My study explores five women's own stories of their academic careers and identities within a globalised academy in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The women are not intended to be representative of particular disciplines or stages of career, but all have made transitions into the academy from professional fields and /or have experiences of work in other professional fields. The disciplines they now belong to in the academy are: Social Work; Sports Science; Hospitality Management; Biological Sciences and Psychology. It is hard to define these women as 'stages' in a career, as they have all had significant careers outside the academy. However, in terms of their length of service within the academy they could be said to range from early to mid-career.

My interest focuses on women's journeys; it foregrounds the affects and effects of wider social relations and how they impact on women's academic identity to continually reproduce dominant discourses of a male hegemony; attendant distortions in policy making and practices of Academic Development. This addresses a gap in the literature of Academic Development, and in my own professional practice as Head of Continual Professional Development for Teaching and Learning in a pre-92 University.

Three broad research questions guide this exploration.

1. What are the experiences of women academics in developing their careers and academic identities?
2. How can case stories of the career choices made by women academics help Academic developers understand gender inequalities in higher education?
3. What are the implications of gender equalities in the academy for the practices of Academic Development?

I have used the potential of narrative methodology to produce different knowledge by producing knowledge differently (St. Pierre, 1997) as the conceptual framework to explore these questions. The knowledge produced is presented through the co-construction of case stories of the career journeys made by five women academics. These stories which form the core of this thesis speak of grand narratives; the ontological puzzles of structure and agency; class and gender oppression finding symbolic expression in women's lives; the influence of institutional structures and the no less powerful if more fluid contexts of tribal academic departmental territories (Becher and Trowler, 2001). There is no lack of agency in the voices of these women, and the first person narrative highlights that sense. However, from the narrative can be seen identity formed by individual struggles within macro and micro sociological forces.

The narrative study is inspired by feminist standpoints and in sympathy with a position which recognises gender as ontology and that gender can also be construed as epistemology (Wickramasinghe, 2006). In the more traditional view of epistemology, I draw upon socio-cultural, critical realist and post-structural theoretical perspectives in order to pay attention to a nuanced analysis of complex social power relations and notions of identity. The central theorists I call upon are Archer (1995; 2000; 2003; 2012) and Butler (1990; 2005; 2004).

The co-constructed case stories themselves form the first part of a reflexive, interpretative analysis which present and discuss micro-political understandings of the pain and the pleasure of women's academic careers. The stories are co-constructed from the transcripts through means of identifying significant events and personal values referred to by the women during the interview. These values are those which appear to have most influenced their various approaches to career-making and characterise to greater or lesser extents their responses to the academic structures and their conceptions of their own agency within the structures.

Archer's (2003) theory of identity is used to draw meaning from the processes which appear as the women's own sense of purposeful agency, and a post-

structural lens (Butler, 1990; 2005; 2004) is used to identify the relationships with gender performativity and the limits of agency in this context. A heuristic device is used to discuss a micro-political understanding of the ways in which this agency, and its limitations, dynamically interacts with, and has potential for transforming the structures. I am taking my definition of micro-politics from Morley (1999):

Micro-politics has been read as a subtext of organisational life in which conflicts, tensions, resentments, competing interests and power imbalances influence everyday transactions in institutions.

(Morley, 1999:4)

The findings uncover the wider, gendered social conditions which impact on women's career trajectories, and how these are replicated and reinforced within the formal and informal structures of the academy, itself shaped by a neo-liberal policy environment. This study illustrates how women's academic identities are deeply and often painfully rooted in gendered structures of society, continually being socially reproduced within the academy, partly through an 'executive culture of virile performance indicators and vernacular positivism' (Dunne, Pryor and Yates, 2005: 16).

Although there are only five case stories, the power of the narratives serve to highlight important dimensions of the being and becoming of women academics within dominant power relationships in the academy. Drawing on these findings, in order to establish the implications for Academic Development, the thesis provides insights which support the counter-hegemonic discourses established by global studies of gender equalities in Higher Education, and further justifies the call for a widening of debate in the field of my own practice. My findings support a feminist standpoint which concludes that policies based on a polarised understanding of equalities and that focuses only on agency rather than structure will not redress the wider or internal social inequalities which many women face (Morley, 2012).

The practices and identities of Academic Development are clearly wide ranging, but certainly include supporting career development, particularly where academic development units are situated in HR, as many are. A significant

finding in my study is that academic development practices cannot be seen as a dominant influence in the career journeys or decisions of my respondents. This finding supports the counter-hegemonic discourses of Academic Development practice which suggests that academic developers, promoted by managerialist agendas are inevitably seen as part of the masculinist, neo-liberal hegemony, and will therefore be more likely to reproduce hegemony rather than contest it.

In conclusion, looking for strategies whereby Academic Development may better support gender equalities, my thesis suggests that academic developers, caught in the eternal dilemma of 'straddling' personal values and hegemonic discourses become more explicitly aware of the game (Lee and McWilliam, 2008) and the interactions between gendered structures and the limitations of agency. I suggest that Academic Development practices make more creative use of the ways in which non-formal value-based approaches and dialogue can replace monolithic initiatives.

## **1.2 Origins of the thesis: intellectual and professional beginnings**

My research has explored women's individual and personal experiences of their careers in Higher Education; it arises from my interest in personal conceptions and contexts of the academic role and the impact of policy shifts - often the given imperatives for my own practice of Academic Development - on real lives and career paths, and particularly those of women academics. My own identity and experiences as a woman cannot be ignored in accounting for this focus of interest. I will discuss more fully the feminist perspectives which have influenced this study in Chapter 2.

The elusive nature of the construct of academic professional identity in Higher Education (HE) compared to other professions was explored in a previous study (Clayton, 2008). This investigated the tensions between techno-rationalist institutional policies and the values of my own practice in supporting Academic Development and student learning. That study set out the ensuing conflicts of a transformative view of development and education clashing with the values of reactive policy making, driven by funding determined by themes set by government strategies for transforming HE. My practice was seen as constantly

negotiating mundane and weak frameworks of professional standards, in the face of powerful structural relationships. I came to question how it is possible to act as an individual or a professional in this environment. Consequently, I became interested in how to give voice to individuals; the process of being and becoming an academic, and what significance this had for my practice as an academic developer and the nature of academic professional development.

In the dominant policy discourses of higher education the scope and creative potential for critical rather than domesticating discourses and practices of professional development clearly exists. It is also clear from my own work within the field of Academic Development that people do continue to make creative and committed judgments about what is valuable. However, it is not the instrumental objects of academic practice development (e.g. UK Professional Standards Framework or the Researcher Development Framework) which will define this potential. I have argued (Clayton, 2008) that these are limiting frameworks which have not yet inspired the engagement needed to support either the purposes of its own neo-liberal foundations or the empowerment ideal of individual personal growth. What is needed are insights which might contribute to a new engagement with re-evaluation of the complexities of higher education, and a consideration of agency beyond initiatives which seek to prepare subjects for the uncertainties of globalised markets. I am convinced by my own professional instincts, and initially by some aspects of critical realist perspectives, that a better understanding of individual agency and the “interior dialogue” (Archer, 2000: 319) is an important and under-researched aspect of my professional practice.

The forces which limit agency within the field of academic practice are powerful ones (Barnett, 2003; Morley, 2003). Therefore, the development of my interests through a narrative methodology associated with micro level research requires further ontological perspectives of agency and identity. Poststructuralist feminist stances provide, for me, a more compelling epistemological analysis of social relations (Butler, 1990; 2005; 2004; Hey, 2004; 2006; Hey and Leathwood, 2009; Wickramasinghe, 2006).

There are a number of well known tensions between critical realism and poststructuralism. Critical realism, for example, conceptualises structure and agency as distinct, albeit interdependent, domains which can be analysed separately (Archer, 2000). Post structuralism, in contrast, has been criticised for its inadequate theorisation of agency. I am attracted to the insights that post-structuralism offers in the study of power relationships. Critical realism, although helpful in defining agency as the scope of the individual in interactions with the forces of structure, offers less to the questions of power relations and its associated hierarchies. I explore these epistemologies further in Chapter 2.

For me, the implication for gender equality emerges foremost here, both for the Academy and my own practice as an academic developer supporting career development.

Feminist research begins from the premise that the nature of reality in western society is unequal and hierarchical

(Skeggs, 1997:77)

Although this definition could be said of other standpoints e.g. Marxism, Skeggs suggests that feminist research should involve the study of 'what is not' by disrupting prevailing notions of what is inevitable. The key ideas of disruption and deconstruction place feminism as a marker of an oppositional challenging stance. Do feminists ask different questions?

In my study it is not so much the questions that are different but perhaps the interpretation of the ensuing dialogue. I would argue that my position draws on a feminist relationship between epistemology and ontology (Wickramasinghe, 2006), and this is discussed further in 1.2.1 below. The researcher and researched are placed on the same critical plane, not simply to adopt a method but also to apply a theory of knowledge for an actionable purpose. That is, in this case, coming to challenge existing practices of career development for women in the academy and question institutional structures within which my own identity and practice as an academic developer operate.

I am positioning that the world (the academy) is masculine but coded as universal (de Beauvoir, 1949). Whilst my respondents clearly have some status

and privilege as academics and generate knowledge within their disciplines, they are an excluded group in terms of their personal experiences as women of career progression within the academy.

### **1.2.1 *The painful paradox: Academic Developer Identity***

Lee and McWilliam (2008) amongst others (Brew, 2002; Rowland, 2003; Hicks, 2005) have given accounts of academic development as a highly contested domain:

...a field involved in a major struggle for self-definition in an environment of tension, growing complexity and competing demands

(Lee and McWilliam, 2008)

My identity as an academic developer has many orientations (Land, 2001) but essentially my role is seen as supporting institutional policy, and institutionally prescribed notions of academic practice. It is a role created ostensibly to contribute to a cultural change in the development of academic practices in HE riven with conflict and tension between policy and practice at both institutional and national level. Clayton (2008) previously discussed the ‘un-homeliness’ (Manathunga, 2007) of the concept of professional identity in HE, both from the standpoint of an academic developer and the professionalisation of academic practices in Higher Education. Dominances and absences in the discourses of Academic Development are important to my study because these account for notions of evidence which influence my practice. The dominant discourses can be seen to be rooted in power relations produced by institutional responses to neo-liberal reform agendas, and I trace this in my review of the literature in Chapter 3.

Academic developers, often described as ‘New Professionals’ (Gornall, 1999), widely espouse socio-cultural standpoints which situate ‘professionalism’ as a ‘socially constructed contextually variable and contested concept’ (Troman, 1996). However, a pervading culture of naïve realism (Scott, 2000) still requires Academic developers to discover what is ‘out there’ and import something ‘in there’ by superficially quantifiable means, supporting largely monolithic strategies which struggle to survive in the complex social world of academic



tribes and territories (Becher and Trowler, 2001). In this cultural environment, individual notions of professional development can be narrowly understood, and be in tension with the different agendas of institutional policy making. As a practitioner I have to negotiate and mediate these systemic tensions, but am largely powerless to resolve them.

Studies have been done in the primary and secondary schools sectors (Day et al, 2006; Goodson, 2003) which demonstrate that educational change cannot properly be understood without engagement with the experiences and practices of individual teachers. These studies have shown that changes in practice are difficult to achieve and can often lead to confusion and tension with deeply held beliefs. But, whilst there is a burgeoning literature around change in Higher Education, little has been written about the individual experience of career progression and micro-political understandings of that experience.

The weak power base of Academic Development is illustrative of the difficulties of policy and strategic alignment, and can be seen in the arrangements for the professional development of lecturers in Higher Education, which remains the most recalcitrant aspect of the drive to professionalise academic practices in HE. For example, since 2012, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have been under pressure to publish numbers of staff possessing a teaching qualification, whilst the definition of a teaching qualification is negotiable, and includes many options. Knowledge of what constitutes meaningful individual engagement in professional development in HE is often obscured by the technocratic approaches of institutional policy making.

As an academic developer I continually grapple with intransigent conflicts and contradictions of purpose. On the face of it, this purpose, although in my case located in academic structures (rather than HR /Administrative), is seen by most executives to serve as agents in transforming academic practices in accordance with institutional policies and strategies. The driver for the existence of academic developers, together with a range of other professional / para-academic roles, is to fulfil the targets of government-led funding regimes which

views knowledge as a product and students as consumers (and a product) in a marketable knowledge economy.

This is a painful paradox for most developers, who usually espouse a more transformative view of teaching and learning, and professional knowing. Dunne, Pryor and Yates have characterized a similar dilemma for researchers in the field of public policy research:

Throughout the public service there is a pervasive culture of vernacular positivism that constructs the social as a single measurable and knowable reality. For many researchers this provides an ideological arena within which they must operate but with which they may not necessarily concur'

(Dunne, Pryor and Yates, 2005: 16)

In her work on the epistemology of gender, Maithree Wickramasinghe (2006) focuses on gender as epistemology with regard to the ways in which Sri Lankan feminists use gender as 'political aspirations, theoretical constructs, analytical categories and methodologies' (p.606) As a practice researcher, and a woman, I have become more interested in approaches to development which have regard for the ontology of individual women and their experience of being and becoming developed. I am interested in how the policy discourse of professional development intersects with the lived experience of individuals; how the relationships between structure and agency are involved at this intersection, and my role as an agent here. How do I negotiate a predominately positivist paradigm of institutional development? Can there be a re-imagined approach to professional development? I am interested in how stories of personal engagement with notions of professional identity can illuminate these questions in my practice.

### ***1.2.2 Academic Identity Management***

At issue for my practice as an academic developer is the position I inhabit as an identity manager, and the regimes of truth embedded within policy positions which accords status within these regimes.

The techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true

(Foucault in Rabinow, 1991)

Notions of professional standards in Higher Education to a large extent situate academic developers as identity managers. It perhaps can be seen as part of a 'science of management' concerned with the prediction and control of behaviour and also the requirement to refer to concrete, tangible and measurable phenomena (Elliott, 2005). In this environment Academic Development can only shape practice by reinforcing the neo-liberal hegemony.

The standards express sets of values, knowledge and skills which academics, directed by academic developers, are asked to espouse, demonstrate and pass, in order to be conferred with the identity of an academic teaching professional - in addition to the traditional entry qualification usually conferred by a doctorate. The identity of academic professional is not one which is usually encountered prior to entering the academy as a lecturer. For mid-career academics, it is not an identity which they will necessarily have considered greatly at all.

However, power to shape identities in the academy is more obviously situated in the discursive practices of the academy itself. The notion held of academic identity is still one rooted in the hierarchy of academic achievement which places a premium on the prowess of scholarship and research output.

An interesting dimension in unpicking these relationships is how the power discourses of individual institutions (themselves implicated in global structures) connect to the shaping of individual academic identity. How do the stories that institutions tell themselves impact on individuals, and vice versa in a process of institutional and individual self construction? In spite of the adoption and dominance of strategic planning in institutional discourses, the rational alignment of individual, departmental and institutional missions is by no means straightforward or assured. Organisations do not necessarily behave rationally (Mintzberg, 2004), and can be conceptualised in many ways, in particular as social or political systems with their own cultures and values. There is a sense

from the narratives presented in this thesis, that academics do form strong attachments to particular institutions, and there is a drive for belonging.

### ***1.2.3 Male hegemonies in the academy***

If an aim of a neo-liberal socio economic establishment is to transform the academy to meet its market vision, it can be seen that this produces resistance, and not only to my practices as an academic developer. It would appear though that even in resistance, inequalities are being reinforced as a male-dominated hierarchy inhabits the high status positions in University Executives, leadership and management positions and research-led promotion regimes.

A large part of my practice as an academic developer is concerned with negotiating with academic leaders either as Heads of Faculty, PVCs, and Chairs of Committees. Within the tribes and territories of academic disciplines where there is a premium on research; communities of academic leaders are very often male-dominated. Although Deem et al ( 2001) and Morley (2012;2013) have shown that there has been an increase in roles for women in the growing sector of academic support, my own included, I have been struck by the lack of representation of women in institutional policy making. The roles where women dominate (Academic Development, teacher and student development) are, even with the rise in the 'Student Experience' movement, seen as lower status compared to high status research positions. Morley (2012) reports that in spite of the increases in female student and graduate populations, the She Figures (2009) demonstrate that women's careers remain characterised by strong vertical segregation, and that "high rates of women's participation in higher education have yet to translate into proportional representation in the labour market or access to leadership and decision-making positions" (Morley, 2012:3).

Reay (2000) has shown that since their entry into the academy, women have been discriminated against in a variety of ways.

Academia in Britain ....is a territory ruled by men; where the vast majority of women, if they count at all, count for less. It is also a territory which is

heavily discursively policed; where, for example, the prevailing discursive hegemony means modernist statements that assert gender and class inequality can be discounted as simplistic, reeking of old discredited meta-narratives. The ruling principles which guide all discursive hegemonies, namely that they present elite interests as everyone's interests, are rarely explicated and discussed

(Reay, 2000:14)

The concern of these writers is that the neo-liberal performative agenda affects women disproportionately for a variety of reasons. I will return to these in relationship to my own findings discussed in Chapter 11.

My thesis has aimed to contribute knowledge which provides insight into *how* the patriarchal structures of male hegemony, arising from those in wider society, exert recurrent power over women in the neo-liberal academy. These structures reproduce themselves within institutional hierarchies and practices and impact on women's academic careers. It can be seen in the women's case stories that their interactions with patriarchal institutions represent a painful struggle into which not all women are prepared to enter; when they do, it is not often on their own term and can result in isolation in power or marginalisation out of power. To this extent there is a clash of values which disincentivise women; policies aimed at generating more numbers of 'women into' leadership, or supporting women in leadership roles, will not be enough without transforming the structures themselves. Understanding the socio –cultural meanings of this at the micro level is, I believe, a neglected aspect of knowledge needed to take forward Academic Development policies and practices, and wider equalities agendas in the academy.

### 1.3 The structure of the thesis

The thesis is divided into 11 chapters. This **first chapter** has set the scene for the thesis by locating it in the context of the work that has been done for the professional doctorate to date and my own practice as an academic developer and novice researcher. It has identified the genesis of the thesis topic and traced the beginnings of key methodological and epistemological considerations that have informed the choice of the research questions and the design of the

project. The chapter has also established the importance of the topic and positioned it within the relevant discourses around my own practice, identity, equalities and the affect and effect of a globalised neo-liberal policy environment.

**Chapter 2** introduces the development of the conceptual framework of the thesis together with the theoretical and methodological underpinnings. It begins with an overview and analysis of how my methodological position was approached. I then explain how my ontological and epistemological orientations produce an overarching narrative approach to gathering the data. I suggest this is an appropriate methodology to capture social interactions of academic career journeys and to locate them within the micro-political context. The chapter includes an account of the specific methods that have been used to select participants; collect and analyse the data which form the basis of the empirical element of the thesis. I discuss the tensions and dynamics of critical realism and poststructuralism; the two contrasting theoretical frameworks I have used to interrogate the data.

**Chapter 3** further explores the literature related to questions for my professional practice which have provided a useful and necessary foundation for the focus of my thesis and my methodological approach: feminist, critical realist and poststructuralist discourses of power relationships are linked to my topic of women's academic identity and career making. It begins with a discussion of the neo-liberal pressure on HE before identifying and discussing relevant literature contributing to the development of my conceptual and theoretical framework.

The literature review explores the relationship between Academic Development and gender inequality through a discussion of the counter-hegemonic literature which is contributing to the practice of Academic Development.

**Chapter 4** presents an overview of the research participants. This chapter presents a short description of each subject to give further methodological context to the stories which follow, capturing an overview of the participants at the moment in time when the interviews took place. The purpose is to

acknowledge my relationships with the participants in the 'three dimensional narrative enquiry space' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) of the interview encounter.

**Chapters 5 to 9** present the case stories co-constructed with the participants from the original interview transcripts. The transcripts are the raw data in my research while the co-construction of these stories represents the first part of a process of interpreting these data. Each chapter is dedicated to one story, followed by initial reflections on the epistemological and ontological resonances of the story, linked to my two principal theorists, Margaret Archer and Judith Butler. These expositions recognise the tensions between critical realism and poststructuralism but use them both to juxtapose the women's own sense of agency with an understanding of its limitations. This juxtaposition serves well to produce a more nuanced understanding of how gendered structures reinforce inequality within the academy, and point to the discussion which follows in Chapter 10 and 11.

**In Chapter 10** reflexive interpretative analyses are used to take forward and discuss micro-political understandings of the pain and the pleasure evident in women's academic careers, and the dynamic relationships between their sense of agency and the dominant hegemonic structures of the academy within neo-liberal policy environments. This chapter concludes by explicitly addressing the implications for Academic Development.

There are three sections to this discussion: first, the themes which express common values referred to by the women and which appear to strongly affect the lived experiences of their academic careers; second, discursive themes of academic identity construction with reference to my epistemological and theoretical standpoints; third, a heuristic device is drawn to discuss the approaches these women employ in order to negotiate their encounters with the academy and position themselves with respect to the hegemonic neo-liberal academic structures. With reference to my data, I suggest that the ways in which these women view and enact their potential for changing the structures and how the structures respond, represents a powerful illustration of how gendered structures of society produce and reinforce the dominant male neo-

liberal discourses, and continue to inhibit the transformation of the academy the women desire, but which the academy only partially allows.

**Chapter 11** provides a concluding commentary on my findings; this summarises the key issues identified by the research against the three research questions and the contribution to knowledge.

The chapter concludes with a final reflection on the research journey in terms of my own professional development.



## CHAPTER 2: The Dynamics of Methodology

Dunne, Pryor and Yates (2005) suggest that the process of research is given shape and coherence by decisions we make about how to proceed. I'm attracted to their conceptualisation of methodology as an 'elastic plane' constantly reshaping as it is stretched by concerns associated with epistemological and ontological issues, the practicalities of methods and ethical and political considerations. I was aware that an exploration of academic identity at the micro-level concerned the process of ontology itself. However, I did not want my thesis to become a purely methodological piece.

This chapter will discuss the ontological and epistemological considerations which have influenced this study, and the basis and challenges of these positions.

### 2.1 Researcher positionality

Dunne, Pryor and Yates (2005) draw parallels between methodology and researcher identity and even suggest that sometimes it might be possible to substitute for 'methodology' the words 'researcher identity'. In this dynamic relationship, a researcher identity is made and remade throughout the process of the research, influenced by the pulls and pushes of the nature of ontological and epistemological self-discovery. As a novice researcher this is very much how the process felt as I struggled to make sense of its various stages. It also explains, as the study was interrupted by various life, health and career circumstances, how over an extended period the writing up stages struggled with the experience of a research process and life having to be lived forwards but understood backwards.

The position I took at the outset was that research as an attempt to identify essential knowledge is a false undertaking, as Drake (2010) states:

There is nothing outside the text, no extra 'truth' that the text approximates to. Partiality in an account is therefore inevitable, given that invariably there are multiple perspectives on any situation or event. So for research to have any meaning it is not a matter of looking harder or more closely, but of seeing what frames our seeing; of exploring the spaces we construct, of looking critically at what the research chooses to make visible.

I find all research traditions have relevance to the way the world can be viewed, but I have taken a narrative approach to tell stories at the micro level where complex relationships might best be seen and understood. James and Biesta (2007), show that cultures exist in and through interaction and communication. Cultures are both structured and structuring. My study in broad terms takes a socio-cultural position, drawing on two principal theoretical frameworks to contrast the dynamic relationships between gender, structure and agency. These are: the critical realist theories of Margaret Archer (1995; 2000; 2003; 2012) and Judith Butler's poststructural position on gender 'performativity' (1990; 2005; 2004). Discourse, subjectivity and identity are central terms of post-structuralism. I draw on these concepts to illustrate the relation between culture and identity. I use narrative as a conceptual framework to produce an account of the power relations impacting on women's academic careers within the neo-liberal academy.

### **2.1.1 *Feminist stance***

My thesis arises from the social condition of being a woman, as well as an academic developer, situated at the centre of a number of colliding worlds of multi-identity; academic, professional, policy developer, and quality assurer. In exploring the formation of academic identity in others, I am inevitably seeking to understand that journey in myself. To that extent it is perhaps an ontological quest. The process of undertaking a doctoral degree is in itself a process of my own becoming as an academic. I was aware of how a critical engagement with the dominant discourses of institutional policy and practice had come to change my perspectives on my practice. I reflect on these implications of the research in my final chapter

Roberts (1988) identifies sexism as an ideology which is happy to generalise from the experience of one section of society (men) but this ideology sees any reverse generalisation as perverse. So, it is often seen as acceptable to have a sample composed entirely of men, but one composed entirely of women is not. I

chose an entirely female sample, not just to challenge that ideology, but because I was interested in my own perspectives as a woman talking to other women. However, although I do not claim to generalise, my purpose was to increase the visibility of women's perspectives and what influences these, and to this extent my research has a feminist stance.

Feminism is in the first place an attempt to insist upon the experience and very existence of women. To this extent it is most importantly a feature of an ideological conflict, and does not of itself attempt an 'un-biased' or 'value free' methodology.

(Roberts, 1981: 15)

Hitchcock and Hughes (1995: 64) identify a range of distinctive features of feminist research which leads to the rejection of androcentric epistemologies and research practices and accords with a stance whereby:

- a) Disciplinary boundaries are ignored in favour of a unified understanding of the social realm.
- b) The claim of neutrality within positivist methodologies is rejected as a denial of the political nature of knowledge
- c) Recognition of gendered nature of social research and development of anti-sexist research strategies that are fully participatory
- d) Emphasis on qualitative, introspective, biographical research techniques.

My project has been enacted with respect to these features in that I have not been limited by hierarchical notions of boundaries around what can be thought of in terms of knowledge (Bernstein, 1990, 1996). I have recognised that disciplinary cultures are clearly important to academics but tend to be governed by an 'epistemological essentialism' (Trowler, 1998:64) which serves to ignore concerns with the inequalities which women face. My ontological position is anti-positivist in that it recognises multiple realities and that varied accounts are all valid knowledge (Oakley 200; Letherby 2010). It also recognises feminist approaches to 'being', 'knowing' and 'doing' which suggests a circular relationship between a feminist ontology and feminist epistemology (Wickramasinghe, 2006). I have not seen my respondents as providers of data to be collected, but as participants in a project to co-construct case stories which offer perspectives on shared aspects of our realities. The emphasis has

been on creating safe, shared spaces for participants in my research to tell their career stories.

### ***2.1.2 Ontological and Epistemological issues***

My ontological position takes an anti-positivist stance (Lather, 1991) which rejects the Enlightenment's positivism, does not recognise a fixed and exterior social world, but engages with multiple realities and identities. Knowledge of social worlds therefore, particular in my context of insider research, had for me to be a project of co-construction between researcher and participants. I recognised that I was researching women who inhabited a shared world and this would influence my interactions in the research process.

In response to the challenges posed by positivist/empiricist paradigms, I am in agreement with feminist scholars (Harding, 1993; Stanley and Wise, 1983; Skeggs, 1997, 2004; Wickramasinghe, 2006) who argue for the legitimisation of subjugated knowledges. In other words, the recognition that aspects of women's experiences of realities, though often contested, form the foundation of feminist knowledge making. Wickramasinghe (2006) reminds us that in doing gender research, feminists are applying/reconstructing an aspect of being into a way of knowing. "The experiences of gender are at the crux of conceptualising realities in knowledge" (p. 607). Wickramasinghe acknowledges these are slippery concepts, but in positing gender as ontology she argues that in the context of the political projects of feminism, an aspect of being is a way of knowing while that way of knowing also counts as a sense of being. In her words, "gender ontology as epistemology is a circular explanation of gender; and that gender as epistemology is also ontology" (p. 607). When it comes to conceptualising gender as ontology, Wickramasinghe acknowledges the contribution of post-modernist perspectives which do not emphasise universality or commonality; but concentrate on differences. Numerous variables exist here, such as time, age, location, class, race, sexual orientation, transgender status, external conditions and events. Consequently, gender as ontology must be envisaged as "fundamentally relative, fluid and in a state of flux" (Ibid: 608). I also recognise that my epistemological journey has been varied, and my literature review in Chapter 3 reflects this.

The adoption of a narrative method and interpretative analysis suited my feminist ontological and epistemological position. The co-construction of case stories of women becoming academics reflects the way in which different ontological orientations of both researcher and respondents are refracted within the dominant positivist HE discourses of a neo-liberal HE environment we all shared. All have different ontological and epistemological positions which have a bearing on their accounts in the telling, but the stories become my stories in the analysis.

All my respondents presented in their narratives an agentic sense of themselves throughout changing times for them, being and becoming academics. I therefore decided to use Archer's (2003) critical realist theory of identity and agency to acknowledge this and act as an interpretative framework to discuss the ways in which the women appeared to be making decisions to negotiate their careers.

### **2.1.3 Archer's theory of identity**

For Margaret Archer, personal identities are changing constantly because they are formed through the way we monitor, prioritise and moderate our social reality. Prioritisation of concerns shapes our behaviour and actions. Archer (2003: 135) proposes that all humans – or agents – strive towards a *modus vivendi* which she defines as a set of practices which acknowledges the unavoidable and privileges what matters most to the person concerned (Archer 2003: 149). She puts forward the following sequence as a framework for all social activity: Concerns → Project → Practice. In other words, the *modus vivendi* is the process through which humans express agency in terms of how they have determined to live in view of their concerns and in the light of their circumstances. Being human means having to negotiate realities and always striving for a *modus vivendi*, the medium through which our subjective concerns intersect with our objective conditions of life. This process has the potential to constrain or to enable different courses of action (Archer 2003: 201). Archer argues that agents have to diagnose their situation (Concerns), they have to identify their own interests (Project) and they must design projects (Practice) they decide appropriate to achieving their ends. At all three stages they are

fallible: they can mis-diagnose their situation, mis-identify their interests, and mis-judge appropriate courses of action. (Archer 2003: 9)

Archer draws attention to an internal conversation (Archer 2000; 2003); the negotiation we have with ourselves when confronted with new situations. The internal conversation is an emotional as well as a cognitive process and involves three distinct stages: discernment, deliberation and dedication. Archer talks about a 'sifting process' (Archer 2003: 102) through which individuals make choices and decisions. Discernment is about the choices and priorities individuals make with regard to those projects they find compelling enough to choose. The discernment stage is guided by dreams, hopes and imaginings and will be pressed by fear of the ever present elements of risk in the options individuals are drawn to and which may not be possible. At the deliberation stage individuals start to weigh up the positive and negative sides of the scenarios they feel drawn to. Finally, at the dedication stage the concerns that need to be accommodated or subordinated in order to embark on a particular course of action are identified. This internal conversation is continuous, and the process is guided by reflexivity.

She defines four modes of reflexive characteristics which will mediate socio-cultural constraints and enablements in different ways, and represent different stances towards social structures and cultural systems; autonomous, communicative, meta and fractured reflexives (Archer 2003: 165).

*Autonomous reflexives* are characterised by decisively relying on their inner deliberations when acting in the world. Archer describes them as 'economically articulate' (Archer 2003: 211) in that they provide short, self-confident answers without seeking affirmation from others or other people's views. These people also tend to regard concerns as responsibilities and much of their internal conversation is about societal structures and how these aid or prevent individuals from realising their project. Consequently, when it comes to constraints and enablement for agency, autonomous reflexives behave strategically. They are independent and believe that ultimately we all have to take responsibility for our own actions and seem less dependent on their

immediate environment. Autonomous reflexives operate a *modus vivendi* which tends to be balanced around work and performance.

In contrast, *communicative reflexives* share problems and discuss options with other people before deciding how to act. They need to get affirmation that they are making the right choices. To communicative reflexives their immediate environment is very important both for deliberation but also as a guiding factor for their *modus vivendi*. They do not like to make decisions and to act alone. All their inner deliberations are centred on the social domain. Their aim is to achieve contentment and they will evade constraints and enablement in order to maintain this contentment. While the autonomous reflexives focused on work and performance for their *modus vivendi*, communicative reflexives prioritise people close to them.

*Meta-reflexives* question their own actions and their inner conversation is characterised by self-interrogation. Archer sees this category as society's critics who hold a deep concern for those less fortunate than themselves. They are idealists who try to draw others with them in their own direction, and in the process will, if necessary, behave subversively in relation to constraints and enablement. They tend to judge causes of actions against their ideals rather than consider them in relation to what is achievable. For a *modus vivendi*, rather than prioritise, meta-reflexives will try and align the three orders of reality – performative competence, physical well-being and self-worth.

Archer also includes a fourth category, the *fractured reflexives*. They are individuals whose reflexive powers have been suspended in that they are unable to hold an internal conversation that leads to action. In Archer's hypothesis, they have – perhaps temporarily - lost control over their lives. Fractured reflexives have difficulties with purpose and are disorientated and passive subjects. The fact that these people's internal conversations are blocked means that they are unable to confidently monitor themselves or their environment. All of my participants were highly purposeful and did not fall into this category.

Archer's proposition is that each mode of reflexivity adopts its own stance towards society and its constraints and ennoblements. The autonomous reflexives will adopt a strategic stance, the communicative reflexives will adopt an evasive stance, and the meta-reflexives will adopt a subversive stance.

Archer focuses on the internal conversation and how it shapes agency, but she is analysing conversations – not individuals speaking to themselves. The inner conversations have been made public. The case stories in my thesis could also be described as inner conversations made public, the interview process being between known and equal parties, non-formal and conversational. In this study, for purposes of respecting and interpreting the agentic accounts of my participants, my reflections on the case-stories in Chapters 5-9 will apply Archer's first three reflexive dimensions. The intention here is certainly not to categorise the women as 'types' but to offer an interpretative framework.

For women, placing the social we live within and which lives within us involves an attempt to identify and make sense of gendered micro-politics. Critical realism does not seem to me to entirely account for this. A post-structural analysis sees agency in terms of *actionability*, but de-centring the subject removes the assumption that the individual controls their own world. Structure is the pre-set forces, discursive power as well as structural power, which control actionability.

I therefore adopt a poststructuralist perspective to develop the implications of the case stories and discuss the limitations of agency in the gendered worlds which bear upon the micro-politics of the academy. Poststructuralist feminist philosopher Judith Butler takes up a different position when it comes to the shaping of personal identity of the self. Alongside Archer's framework, I juxtapose Butler's theory of identity performance.

#### **2.1.4 The Feminist influence of de-centering the subject and feminist frames**

The central poststructuralist idea that the subject is an effect rather than a cause is the key to Judith Butler's theories of performative identities (1990; 2005; 2004). I have used this theoretical position in the discussion of the stories



to produce the meanings discussed in Chapter 10 and in the reflections which follow each of the individual stories.

Butler (1990) takes Foucault's position on discursive power further by seeing the body as already discursively saturated – including with our own desires. The body is not prior to discourse. So, Butler does not recognise that body = sex and gender = culture, but places the body's sex as itself governed by the cultural circulations of norms that make up the 'heterosexual matrix'

There is no gender identity behind the expression of gender ....identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results.

(Butler, 1990:25)

Butler problematises the ways in which individuals give accounts of themselves and their practices in terms of them being producers of narrative scripts. Butler rejects the concept of a core sense of self (2006: 529) distinguishing between speech as communication and speech as performance when individuals give accounts of themselves and their practices. To her, identity is fluid and ruptured because of the temporality and contingency of individuals' account of themselves. She argues that identities are shaped by norms and conventions that have emerged independently of the self and as a consequence, an individual's account of self will never truly reflect her or his identity. Instead, individuals will need to present themselves in a way that is recognisable to society (Butler 2005).

Butler deals with the concept of 'performativity' as a paradoxical issue of identity appearing as apparently fixed but inherently unstable, revealing gender norms requiring continual maintenance. Butler introduces a new conceptual grammar in the inter-related concepts of performativity and citationality. In this reading gender is neither essence nor socialisation but a consequence of recurring citations of gender thought as actions that institute 'girling'. Thus social and cultural norms are sculpting femininity and masculinity on the body and psyche; it is the incessant replication/repetition (citation) of norms (e.g. how girls ought to walk, talk, look) which operate ideologically to structure the fictive solidity of gender and sustain our lived sense of inhabiting a gendered body and psyche.

As such, performativity is the discursive mode by which ontological effects are installed (Hey, 2006).

Archer's and Butler's theories of identity have both informed my own understanding of how self-narrative operates and applies in my analysis of the co-constructed of career stories and their meanings. I have espoused a feminist position which recognises the effects of inequality in women's position in the academy, and this allows for the possibility of change through politically agentic means. However, my data demonstrates how discourse works to form gendered worlds and identity performances which limit agency.

Butler's approach to postmodern knowledge production which troubles knowledge and encourages dissident readers has inspired my approach to deconstructing the agentic case stories through to meaning making. I have approached the construction of knowledge through a deconstructive process.

### **2.1.5 The dynamics of theoretical frameworks for exploring academic practice**

Whilst poststructuralism and critical realism are usually seen as incompatible and therefore not disposed to a joint framework of analysis, I have used both as lenses to analyse the women's narratives in contrasting ways which afford a viewpoint from the women's own sense of self agency but also show the limits of agency within the prevailing neo-liberal, gendered and hierarchical structures of the academy

Butler's contribution to poststructuralism comes from her attempt to theorise subjectivity through the notion of performativity, whereby identity is performed and enacted rather than pre-figured. This conceptualisation is powerful because it concentrates attention on actions and allows for creative imagination of the ways people do gender in an ongoing process of the constitution of the self. (Davies, 1997)

Clegg (2008) discusses the tensions between and critical realism and poststructuralism is critical of the poststructuralist notion of dissolving selfhood into the continuous presence of performativity. However, she does not necessarily see them as opposing theories in terms of potential in research

(Clegg, 2006). Archer (2000) in her exploration of being human and the conditions of human agency insists on the embodied human being, the primacy of practice and the emergence of the self in relationship to the environment. In this she distinguishes between the concepts of the self which are necessarily social, and a sense of self which is not. For Archer, this makes possible the proliferation of concepts of self which are continually enacted in performativity.

Butler (2004) understands poststructuralism as a means of understanding the human condition and extending ideas of understanding what political interests are served by notions of selfhood. Butler concludes that the term 'deconstruction' can occupy very different political aims. Hey (2006) argues that we should not get too hung up by deconstruction – deconstruction is what we do to texts.

I have concluded that these seemingly disparate theories all lead to ways in which people enact their being and both traditions can be used to sustain a critique in a research context. Both poststructuralism and critical realism are used therefore to explore the academic women's career journeys and the implications for Academic Development.

In distilling the interview transcripts into co-constructed case stories, I used the women's own words and their emphasis on what they saw as the significant features of their stories. I did not apply a poststructuralist deconstruction at this stage. I was struck by the strong sense of self agency in these stories which lent towards a critical realist perspective, and decided this needed to be recognised and respected in the process of co-constructing the stories. However, I found that this perspective did not provide a nuanced understanding of the interaction of their career-making with the prevailing structures of the academy, and my own experience of these as an academic developer.

A poststructuralist analysis has been used to deconstruct the narratives of the women to explore the interplay of gender performativity and career decision making; how assigned roles have been chosen and what role Academic Development has, if any, in the process of career making.

### 2.1.6 Researcher presence: the crisis of representation

Atkinson and Hammersley (1998) suggest a framework to look at the researcher presence, as follows:

- *Acquaintance*; the extent to which researcher is acquainted with the subjects/participants;
- *Knowledge of research*; subjects' knowledge of what the research is about;
- *Research activities*; activities in the field and the way that these cause subjects to position the researcher.
- *Insider-outsider*; the extent to which researcher positions herself as outsider-insider.

These relationships were considered during the interviews and as part of my analysis as these interactions impacted on the choices made in co-constructing the case stories in terms of what features both researcher and subject felt significant.

This process recognised my own identity as part of the data and brought to the fore the issue of reader as well as writer of the text.

It is also about mediation between the worlds of the subject, the researcher and the reader, and acknowledging the implication of all three of these 'characters' in the research process  
(Dunne, Pryor and Yates: 58)

The issue of power relationships arises here. This is particularly important when the subjects of the research are from relatively powerless groups, relative to both society as a whole and the researcher. In these contexts who are we doing the research for? Are we doing it for ourselves, professional colleagues, or for and with the subjects of our research? These questions influence the process of the research and have an impact on how results are presented. I have been guided by feminist research literature which holds that findings should be presented in a way to be as clear as possible to participants (Oakley, 1988).

My participants do not see themselves as powerless in most of the dimensions in which this might be classified (cultural capital, class, occupation, ethnicity or

gender). This indicates that perhaps academic status leads to a transcending position of cultural capital. Neither would they necessarily see themselves as powerless in relationship to me with respect to our relative positions in the academy. In the context of these encounters I am the novice researcher to their more experienced researcher. My participants are embedded in established professional disciplines compared to my position in one that is less established, and being an 'academised professional' to their 'professional academic'.

In the issue of relative equality between researcher and researched then, my academic and professional status would not be seen as more powerful, although I did not explore this specific issue with them. However, the dynamics of identity power relationships did arise in the settings of the interviews and in the co-construction of the stories. This will be analysed further in the preceding discussion of the research participants in Chapter 4.

What arises from the researcher/subject interactions are not amenable to being 'frozen or captured' they have to be made into useable text. Flick (2002) draws on Ricouer-Ricouer (1981) to point out that text tell different kinds of stories. The process of mimesis is identified to characterise the process of making sense from action through research. Triple mimesis describes the process by which texts are created and implicates the three characters of researcher, actors and readers mediating between their different worlds. *Mimesis 1* is the pre-understanding of what human action is – by which we are able to know what is going on e.g. the interactions at interview stage. *Mimesis 2* is the transformation of action into text, in the case of this thesis, through a transcript and co-construction of a story. *Mimesis 3* is then the interpretation of text into report, or in this case, the thesis.

In acknowledging that claims to knowledge are socially constructed and based on situated accounts, it follows 'the presence of the researcher, with the usual complement of human attributes can't be avoided' (Stanley & Wise, 1983, p.150).

No research is carried out in a vacuum. The very questions we ask are always informed by the historical moments we inhabit  
(McRobbie 1982:12).

It therefore becomes necessary for the researcher to situate themselves in the knowledge production process and to reflect upon the effect of their presence on the collection and interpretation of the data.

Although concepts of reflexivity are contested and troublesome, a professional doctorate requires an emphasis on reflexivity in researching in the context of professional practice. This reflexivity includes a consideration of how to write about the research. The 'crisis of representation' raises difficult questions about how research accounts are constructed and the narrative techniques employed to represent the researcher and the researched. Bourdieu (1988:1) notes that in choosing to study a social world in which we are ourselves located, there are 'special difficulties involved first in breaking with inside experience and then in reconstituting the knowledge which has been obtained by means of this break'. This requires problematising taken-for-granted concepts and to theorise one's own practice through trying to make the familiar strange. My poststructural approach to co-construction of narrative attempts to do this.

The process of 'making the familiar strange' and 'making the strange familiar' was evident in the reactions of respondents in the process of iteration when co-constructing the stories. All commented on being surprised at what they had revealed to themselves as much as to me.

I have attempted to produce a narrative which is multi-voiced to the extent to which it can engage the reader. The readers here are:

- a) My respondents
- b) My thesis supervisors and examiners
- c) Academic developers
- d) Policy makers
- e) Women academics

## **2.2 The Conceptual Framework: narrative inquiry**

I am concerned then with how women express their career journeys and what this tells us about how academic identity is formed in relationship to the wider social worlds inside and outside the academy.

The use of stories as a way of discussing change and individual responses has become a recognized qualitative research method. In any study of culture it can be seen that 'story telling' is a powerful tradition. The stories that are told, and that we tell ourselves in our professional lives, the stories indeed that institutions tell themselves, are a relatively little heard aspect of research into the sociology of HE and in particular any investigation into notions of identity and development. The rich picture and the centrality of storytelling – and listening – has been a dominant feature of my own professional experience. Stories are everywhere.

I am drawn by the ways in which a narrative approach gives voice to human feelings and human experience from the perspectives of the participants, but interactive and embedded in a collaborative relationship with the researcher. It has the potential to unfold depth and complexity by broadcasting voices excluded in dominant politics. – or excluded aspects of those voices (as academics per se are not lacking in power in the dominant cultures of the Academy)

My thesis sought to use a conceptual framework which troubled common sense understanding (Clough, 2002) to challenge techno-rationalist paradigms of institutional policy-making and development practices. The underpinning purpose was to investigate the significances of academic women's stories for Academic Development.

### **2.2.1 What is narrative inquiry?**

There are considerable differences in the ways in which narratives are used in research. Narrative inquiry could be said to be both a method and a methodology and is linked to new forms of inquiry in a number of related fields; anthropology, psychology, psychotherapy, and organizational theory.

The philosophic concern with life as narrative involves an emphasis on dialogue, conversation, story and the processes of inquiry and reflection on experience that allow the individual to identify what has personal significance and meaning for him or her personally  
(Taylor, 1989:52).

My study has been influenced by 'narrative thinkers' such as Clandinin and Connelly (2000). These researchers have their roots in the work of John Dewey, whose work examined experiential learning as key to educational transformation (Dewey, 1938). For Dewey experience is always both personal and social, with people as individuals but always in relation to a social context. For Clandinin and Connelly, the study of experience is central to the study of the social sciences and situated in an experience continuum of past present and future. This leads to a key concept in their research framework, which is the idea of the three dimensional narrative inquiry space. Temporality in relationship to experience is not seen just as that which happens in the moment (and therefore has to be captured and analysed as such) but as an expression of something happening over time. Stories therefore have a simultaneous past, present and implied future. I was aware of this in the research interviews and the co-construction of the stories.

I have found Clandinin and Connelly particularly helpful in situating narrative research in a non-linear and non-formalistic framework where thinking narratively creates a narrative space which allows for a stories to go backwards and forwards, inwards and outwards. Stories are always changing direction and therefore multi-layered. However, it is a challenging space to navigate.

My reading of Clandinin and Connelly, allowed me to feel less anxious about having to begin with a tight theoretical framework to structure the inquiry too rigidly at the outset, but this does not imply that there is no theoretical position. My position is that data are socially reproduced so come through the theoretical relationships to be seen in the co-construction of the stories and meaning making.

I am conscious that it is important to acknowledge that the stories do not represent the whole person. 'This is not all that you are' (Snow Patrol, 2011). I have made decisions about representation through a participatory approach



within a process of co-construction of the case stories. In this way the participants in this study have contributed to the decisions on representation. The detail of this process is discussed below in 2.3.3 and a brief methodological context in Chapter 4 precedes the stories presented in Chapters 5-9.

This study has sought to create narrative spaces for respondents to tell rich and multi-layered accounts of their perspectives and experiences in Higher Education. It is situated in a non-linear and non-formalistic framework using unstructured interviews.

## **2.3 The Research Process**

### **2.3.1 Doing feminist research**

At the beginning of this study, although I did not set out to do feminist research, I was aware that in the telling of women's stories I was acknowledging that social processes are affected by gender as much as any other factor. Taking account of women in research affects the research process as well as merely making women more visible within sociological accounts (Oakley 1988).

My study aims to illuminate how gender inequality interacts with women's lives and careers in the academy. Morgan (1981) argues that men should be aware of their own hegemony and brought back in by striving to work against the grain by always taking women into account in social research methodology. I was not concerned about bringing men back in to my study to the extent of exploring this aspect with male respondents. I felt that this was not my task.

### **2.3.2 Feminism and data-led theorising**

The term 'data-led' theory refers to a research process which generates, selects and uses data to construct theory in a rationalist epistemological paradigm tradition. Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) is one such methodology which espouses this 'tabula rasa' approach to data collection. Whilst on one hand this might be viewed as a way to avoid andro-centric theoretical imposition, feminists in particular reject this in favour of recognising that all research is theoretically grounded (Morley, 1991).

As feminists, we cannot argue that theory emerges from research since we start from a theoretical perspective that takes gender as a fundamental organiser of social life.

(Kelly et al., 1992:156)

My choice of a narrative method was consciously made to avoid theoretical imposition in terms of influence on participants and design of questions which structured the interviews. My narrative method allowed respondents to lead the account rather than impose pre-determined rigid questions. My methodological position recognises and uses theory to make sense of the experiences, not to construct grounded theory. Texts cannot be allowed to pose their own meanings without reading into them; there are clear dangers of turning talk into text and text into sociology. Interpreting implies there is a knower and a known (Henwood and Pidgeon, 1995).

I recognise that interpretation is a social process and as such is a 'political, contested and unstable activity' (Maynard and Purvis, 1994:7); an interview is a specific account given to a particular interviewer at a particular time. My data does not reveal generalised truths about women's academic careers, but draws out for attention how social power relations impact on women's' careers within neo-liberal HE environments and male-dominated social hierarchies.

### **2.3.3 Data collection: selecting participants**

I chose to focus on a small sample of five women academics with a range of continuous experiences of working in an HE environment in the UK. Since my aim is not to 'prove' but 'illuminate' I did not deem it important to try to achieve any sort of representative sample.

I wanted to avoid mixed gender narratives leading to a comparative discourse which would be too large a project for this study. I was interested in pursuing insights which would contribute a counter-hegemonic narrative to set besides the policy discourses which drive my practice as an academic developer in H E, by providing understandings of how hierarchical structures created by a masculinist hegemonic discourse interacted with women's agency.

I made a conscious decision, as a novice researcher in a complex area of study, to work with respondents where trust and common understandings existed and could be explored with an easy rapport. In order to render the familiar strange, there first had to be something familiar.

A shared understanding of the world through occupation and social class underpins practices of interviewing, and that at least some of the meaning of the interview is constructed through this shared lens.

(Drake, 2010: 87)

When I presented my research progress to the Ed.D group, and at academic conferences, the issue of an absence of consideration for ethnicity was raised. Drake does not include gender and ethnicity in her observation above, but those aspects of shared – or transectional - understanding are clearly important. I recognise that consideration of transectional issues is not specifically addressed in this thesis, and I did not consciously seek to create such a transectional representative sample of respondents. This is not because I do not think it an important aspect of women's' experience.

I decided, from a practical point of view, to choose participants I thought would talk freely to me on an equal basis and who knew me from a range of contexts both socially and professionally. As my own career had taken a recent trajectory which involved working in three institutions in as many years, and leading to numerous contacts both within those institutions and outside them, I was therefore able to access respondents from a range of 'types' of institution and disciplinary background, which added difference, richness and breadth to the stories. The respondents are from three 'research intensive' and two post-92 institutions. The absence of ethnicity here is actually indicative of the lack of women of diverse ethnicity in the immediate professional environment I inhabited during the period of this study, in either academic or academic support roles which I had immediate access to.

#### **2.3.4 The interviews**

The approach to the interviews was to let the respondents lead the story about their own experience of academic career development. As such responses were not directed too closely and the exchange which took place resembled

much more a conversation. However the conversation was framed by my research interest in the ways in which they constructed their academic identity and how the notions of 'professional' and 'development' interact with career paths and life experiences.

The opening to the discussion was common to all interviews. Respondents were asked to describe their current role and then present a timeline of their academic career journey. Significant moments to them were identified and explored during the interview. I found that this was all that was necessary to start a story flowing, and the ensuing narrative then formed the major part of the interview.

A number of prompt questions were used at various points to give analytic depth to the narratives as necessary in the natural flow:

What factors do you think supported/influenced these developments/your development?

What do you consider academic identity to be?

What do you consider professional identity to be?

What does professional development mean to you?

Is there anything else you would like to say?

I was conscious of leaving my respondents to frame their stories as openly as possible and of not wanting to influence the data with my own conceptions. I was clearly interested in references to Academic Development but did not force this if it did not emerge naturally.

I did not wish to frame my respondents as a homogenous group. I was aware that gender is only one of many components which may emerge as factors in the women's stories. Other elements such as class, age, religion and sexual orientation may contribute. However, I was aiming to produce women's stories, and although transectional barriers are experienced also by men my feminist position is that women experience them differently by virtue of structural

inequalities whereby men can be said to have inbuilt positive discrimination in their favour.

I was conscious of the notion that story telling has a therapeutic dimension and therefore this method brought implications for the interview-interviewee relationship and arising ethical implications, (Elliott, 2005). This dimension was acknowledged at the time with the respondents. No difficulties arose in this respect.

### **2.3.5 Insider researcher ethics.**

I have been aware throughout of my responsibility to my participants and in particular not exploiting informants for my own endeavours. The issue of access to respondents who were known to me brought about particular ethical challenges, not least around not making assumptions about shared tacit knowledge and internalised hierarchical thinking. In this case my own status would not have been seen as holding greater power but personal knowledge would inevitably imbue the interview and present a challenge in selecting elements of the final story. The co-construction of stories thus became incredibly important in the research process.

My research is insider research in that I have worked in all but one of the institutions concerned, and all my respondents were known to me. One central ethical issue relates to the naming of the department and the institution in the thesis. Anonymity has become the default position in educational and social research, which presents a particular problem for insider researchers.

In this case, access was facilitated by the interest of my respondents in the potential of the research to directly inform professional practice. Professional development and approaches to this are highly contested issues within higher education and my respondents were keen to contribute to research which might provide insights into how better engagement might be achieved. All my respondents shared a wish to contribute to research which might present less heard perspectives of academic life, particularly women's academic life and career paths.

These practical advantages of conducting insider research were, however, offset by some of the ethical issues relating to consent, deception and confidentiality that might arise (Mercer, 2007). Mercer makes the point that the researcher's relationship with the researched is fluid and contingent, it 'fluctuates constantly, shifting back and forth along a continuum of possibilities, from one moment to the next, from one location to the next, from one interaction to the next and even from one discussion topic to the next' (Mercer, 2007:13). I present the methodological contexts associated with these relationships in Chapter 4.

### **2.3.6 Ethics and affective dimensions**

It is important to recognise the complexities surrounding conceptualisation of emotions. Definitions of emotions are problematic in that they differ greatly; emotions are seen as having a physical dimension and consequently having implications for physical and mental well-being. However, sociologists and social anthropologists would argue that emotions and their physical effects are rooted in socio cultural contexts. These perspectives have been well documented in the literature (Boler 1999; Ahmed 2004; Beard, Clegg and Smith 2007; Woods (2010) Zembylas and Fendler 2007). These conceptions are discussed with respect to the literature in Chapter 3.

The women in my research spoke of their concerns about their own well-being with respect to the career demands they faced. In that dimension the treatment of affective dimensions becomes an ethical consideration for this study in terms of what might be described as a 'close-up and personal' research method, where respondents are telling often painful career stories rooted in the life-course and the construction of identity.

The most powerful impression left with me from time spent listening to my respondents and co-constructing their stories was the striking dichotomy of pain and pleasure running throughout. There has been pleasure in the aspiration and pain in the struggle of becoming an academic. The socio-cultural origins are evident in the fact that almost all of them begin their story in early childhood.

Reflexivity demands emotional literacy and theoretical literacy – but also a capacity to accommodate these literacies at any point in the process of the research. The difficulties I encountered here were less from my participants but more in terms of emotional impact of stories in relationship to my own career and personal experiences at a time of considerable turbulence as well as being able to sensitively engage with my respondents. In this respect I recognised the research as an activity which intruded on my life as much as my respondents' lives. Hesitancy, uncertainty and caution in complex theoretical contexts created blocks in my own personal and theoretical reflexivity.

I was very aware of the therapeutic and affective dimensions of collecting and telling intimate stories. As a novice researcher, this was a factor in my selection of respondents, as there were pre-existing relationships of trust and openness. No difficult affective responses occurred during the process, although some aspects of the narrative were clearly painful.

Indeed, the process of interview and co-construction of the story seemed to be interesting to my participants' own understanding of their experiences. There was a common reaction of "now it all makes sense" during iterations, together with surprise that the process had revealed so much that they had not articulated before.

In this respect I believe that the feminist principle of the researcher and researched placed on an equal plane was fulfilled and produced benefits to both. I was anxious to honour my participants trust and be true to them in a situation of making the familiar strange. My respondents expressed the value of looking at their stories in a different way.

### **2.3.7 Data Analysis: the plot thickens**

The gathering of stories as a means of understanding individual responses has become a recognized qualitative research method providing connections between theories and practice (Connelly and Clandinin, 2000, Goodson, 2003). However, the power of narratives can appear fragmented when the data set is constructed as a 'case study' often because only snippets of transcript are used to present the data or third person accounts are constructed. A sense of the

whole person can be lost. For this reason I chose to present first person accounts using the women's own words, from their perspectives, in co-constructed case stories.

Interpretation not only makes a reading but makes a writing – the linguistic turn whereby a narrative analysis forms another narrative that, in order to become a fully-fledged story, needs to be emplotted. 'Theory is the plot of a dissertation' (Czarniawska, 2004:101). In co-constructing the stories feminist theory influenced the process, creating an equal partnership in the gathering and the telling. My part in the co-construction of the stories, could be described as the plot. At the interview stage I was struck by the women's sense of purpose and agency, and decided to honour this with a critical realist lens in the distilling of the transcripts into stories.

There are well-known difficulties, as discussed above, involved in identifying emerging themes and I wished to avoid a naive realist or emancipatory position of 'giving voice' to powerless participants. I decided therefore to attempt to distil a whole narrative for each respondent as a means of discussing the interconnectedness of events, realities, meanings and experiences (both my own and the respondents).

This approach has difficulties in as much as everything in the data appears relevant and there are clearly decisions and choices being made in the distilling of a two hour interview transcript into a short story.

The issue of crisis of representation arises in narrative research. I dealt with this through a process of co-construction with my participants at every stage. The interview accounts were recorded, professionally transcribed, and then distilled through the process of co-construction. My respondents were shown the transcripts. The first stage was to identify topics in the account which appeared to have particular significance to each of my respondents, often by the length of time spent on it – and/or how that topic re-occurred in the account. These topics appeared as pivotal experiences and/or decision points in their account of their careers in Higher Education. I then produced a draft which was sent to participants and agreed by them. I used their own words from the transcript.



The strength of my methodology is that it allowed the participants to talk about the things that matter to them in an open and self-directed way.

In this way the process of story-making and production of case stories in my thesis can be seen partly as a process of analysis, in that together we decided the most relevant parts the text. My respondents also saw the transcripts. However, I did not involve the respondents in the interpretative part of the analysis – although I asked them all if they would like to be involved. All were happy for their accounts to become my stories at the point of reflection following agreement on the text. The respondents did not see each other's stories. The theoretical lens critical realism guided my part in the co-construction of the stories, to reflect the strong agency in the women's accounts. The lens of poststructuralism was not applied until my interpretation and analysis of the stories.

My various drafts of the whole narrative were presented to the Ed.D cohort at Sussex and a number conferences. I used these occasions to get feedback on methodology and the theoretical frameworks I planned to use in the interpretation.

I have not attempted to fictionalise the accounts as in the approach developed by Clough (2002). The transcripts were reconstructed into first person accounts by selectively using the actual words from the transcripts. I correspond with my participants at each stage of the drafting and invited them to contribute. However, apart from matters of syntax, no major problems were raised and my participants were happy with the accounts which now appear in the thesis.

I precede the case stories with short profiles of my participants in Chapter 4 in order to provide a backdrop of relative stability to my meaning-making of the experiences of multiple selves at work over time. This approach is not taken to represent objectivity (i.e. a third person objective account to set against subjective first person accounts); neither are the profiles an attempt to produce a picture of 'coherent selves' from an 'unchanging core'. As McNay (2008:116) has said, coherence of the self 'rather emerges from the attempt, on the part of individuals and societies to make sense of the temporality of existence'.

## **2.4 Summary**

In this chapter I have presented the methodological approach to my research focus and process. My thesis presents the stories of five women academics making sense of their lives as they negotiate their career trajectories, followed by my interpretation of what this tells us about the ways in which agency is constructed, enacted, the limiting social conditions which impact on these trajectories, and the implications for Academic Development .

I have included my reflections at the end of each story in Chapters 5-9 to add further methodological context and apply the perspectives of Archer and Butler to contrast the dynamic relationships between gender, structure and agency and the implications for Academic Development.

The next chapter will review themes in the literature, in addition to those included in this chapter, that have led to the development of my ontological and epistemological stance and the relationships – often in tension - with my practice as an academic developer and novice researcher.

## **CHAPTER 3: Literary Journeys**

The focus of my thesis is an exploration of five women's academic gendered career journeys within a neo-liberal policy environment and the implications for Academic Development my practice as an academic developer. The following question for my professional practice has provided a useful and necessary foundation for my study of the literature. What is the dominant hegemonic discourse in HE policy making in general and what are the affects and effects on my practice as an Academic Developer?

I will now discuss the literature with reference to the dominant influences on Academic Development and the domains of counter-hegemonic literature which have informed my methodological and epistemological journey.

### **3.1 The Neo-liberal pressure on Higher Education**

Neo-liberalism, to summarise, can be understood as more than a political or economic system; it can be seen as operating as a virtue ethic, whereby all human action can be guided by market principles. In this ideological position (as distinct from older liberalism which combined culture, values and ethics with economics), the virtue is entrepreneurship and competition is a core doctrine. As an ideology it is not tied to any culture or language but Anglo-American liberalism has had the most influence on neo-liberalism. The promotion of the English language, neo-liberal policies, and pro-American foreign policy, usually go together.

It has been argued by Ball (2003) Deem (1998) and Morley (2003) that managerialism (the term used to express the ways in which the neo-liberalist state exerts pressure on institutions) has determined the shakeup of the sector, making institutions more accountable, less financially secure and increasingly subject to the market and consumer choice.

Economy, efficiency and effectiveness and an obsession with competition and assessment of performativity, now dominate the discourse and can be seen to

have reached every corner of academic life (Morley, 1997). The Research Excellence Framework (which measures research performance), teaching excellence schemes, quality audits and the ranking of institutions in performance league tables have all led to universities needing to aggressively market themselves to attract new groups of students, and to receive the funding which follows on from this. The implementation of the Brown Report (2009) and the subsequent introduction of student fee structures in 2012 in the UK, has only intensified these effects.

It is important to recognize, as Skelton (2005) does in his thorough review of the excellence movement in Higher Education, that recent HE reforms have not been all bad:

Teaching has clearly been the 'poor relation' of the teaching/research relationship in higher education for many years.....There is no doubt that the performative discourse has in one sense raised the status of teaching.

(Skelton, 2005: 6)

It would be wrong to think that academics are simply captured by the discourse (Trowler and Knight, 2000). They are aware of the role of discourses, and can use them selectively, to subvert or oppose them. Nevertheless, in the literature, there remains a distinct sense of loss expressed by academics around academic purposes, identity and values. The performative culture can lead to 'values schizophrenia' whereby they doubt their academic purpose. (Skelton, 2005). The tension between teaching and research has been heightened by the performative discourse and begs the question: what is the purpose of Higher Education?

Connected to this are issues of how academics view the construction of professional identity within contested notions of the roles of universities and academic practice. In one sense a notion of academic practice might reasonably recognize that the professional formation and development of academics is much broader than teaching and learning. However, the neo-liberal driven policies of professional development place impossible demands on academics for performatively measured excellence in teaching and learning, research and administration.

Trowler and Knight (2000), in their study of how new academics in the UK and Canada are inducted and socialized into their roles, highlight this pressure on new academics, illustrated below in a quote from one of their respondents:

because you are in a competitive university world you have to actually construct yourself to be good at all three of these things [research, teaching and administration].....You have to present yourself as ....being good in all these three areas and then it's actually hard to take yourself back out of that and say 'well what originally was I interested in', or 'what did I think I was good at?....You have to have this very fluid identity.

(Trowler and Knight, 2000: 162)

This condition is amply illustrated by my participant's accounts of the demands of academic life and the building of an academic identity.

### **3.1.1 Professional Standards Frameworks**

HEIs have been brought under pressure to respond to government policies to professionalize teaching in Higher Education, with a recently revised UK Professional Standards Framework articulating a set of standards which extend to experienced academics as well as those new to teaching in HE. The notions of professional development being used to implement accredited Continuing Professionalise Development (CPD) Frameworks are mainly instrumental or strategic; allying CPD to institutional development themes and Human Resource (HR) processes. Formal learning approaches remain the dominant method of CPD in most HEIs with accredited frameworks, offering a wide variety of CPD activities in the form of workshops and courses. Whilst an acceptance of a professional identity might in most professions be key to engagement in professional development, professional academic development programmes rooted in the government agenda for educational reform haven't yet produced widespread engagement (Poole, 2007).

The question arises: what sort of identity, whose identity, is reflected in notions of Professional Standards? When the UKPSF was published in 2005 and welcomed for its unencumbered brevity, it was left to institutions to define the detail in such a way that met the strategic objectives of the institutions. It was up

to institutions to clarify how the criteria would be used to judge the achievement of these standards.

All of which suggests that a strategically-led 'domesticating' discourse (Clegg, 2003) is not yet achieving much impact. It has not been able to engage experienced academics or establish a strong teacher-identity across the HE sector.

### **3.1.2 The modern university: academic values and citizenship**

Unifying discourses have emerged in the attempt to connect notions of the academic professional to ideas of the purposes and values of the modern university.

Macfarlane (2007) puts forward a view that academics need to reconnect with a notion of academic citizenship. He links the concept of the disengaged academic with the perceived civic disengagement in wider society and the moral panic created by government perceptions of 'worrying levels of apathy, ignorance and cynicism about public life (QCA, 1998:8) which, amongst other effects, has led to the introduction of citizenship education in English schools.

There has been an ensuing debate in HE internationally with a number of academics proposing that:

....higher education and community colleges in particular, (should) be evaluated not solely on their functional merits, but on their value in promoting what Dewey (1966) called, 'an active citizenry'.  
(Kempner and Taylor (1998:301)

Macfarlane explores the dichotomy between calls for students to become active citizens and the erosion of citizenship responsibilities of academics within the university community. In doing so he applies the three main components of the Crick committee's concept of citizenship (Crick Report, 1998) into university life as follows:

**Table 1 Elements of academic citizenship (after Macfarlane 2007)**

<b><i>Elements of citizenship</i></b>	<b><i>Implications for academic life</i></b>
Political literacy	Understanding of decision–making processes at all levels within the university
Social and moral responsibility	Appreciation of responsibilities towards students, colleagues, the university ,professional bodies, local communities and wider society
Community involvement	Skills in nurturing students, supporting academic and professional colleagues, developing and applying knowledge, communicating with the public

These parallels perhaps suggest a return to ‘collegium’, one of the four possible models of university organization identified by McNay (1995). However, the collegial ideal cannot be regarded as the defining model given the history of elitism and gender-bias associated with it (Blackmore and Sachs, 2001; Clegg and McAuley, 2005; Morley, 2003). These authors attest to the exclusivity of the concept of collegiality operating within universities. In more traditional universities, in particular, it tends not to include professional service roles or indeed many part time teachers or contract researchers. The gender, class and race inequalities of university organization are exposed in a number of studies (ref)

McNay (1995)) suggests the categories of Collegium, Bureaucracy, Corporation and Enterprise as four models which continue to co-exist in various complex relationships, but with a significant shift to a Corporation model. The Corporation model most closely aligns to the managerialist analysis which posits that the culture of managerialism has destroyed collegiality forever (Deem, et al, 2001). Others, whilst attuned to these arguments, suggests that collegialism can still appeal as a more humane alternative to managerialism, and argue that it continues to influence the values of universities (Lucas, 2006). It has at least an emphasis on collectivism rather than individualism and

competition. Even then, traditional universities will use this to distinguish between themselves and 'new' universities, where managerialism is seen as more prevalent.

The notions of academic citizenship and collegialism are clearly not value-free but hold some potential in the task of reclaiming the agenda of professional development from the policy discourse. By focusing attention on what values, rights and responsibilities are implied here, perhaps a better balance between the responsibilities of the individual to the institution and vice versa can emerge. Individual adherences to social and moral codes or community need to be explored for their importance in the relationship between individuals and institutions.

### **3.1.3 Discourses of Academic Practice in HE**

The core business of my practice as an academic developer is the provision of Continuing Professional Development (CPD). The term CPD is in common usage across a range of professions and is a major research area. HEIs have been major providers of CPD for other professionals for some time but CPD has not emerged as a discourse for the professional development of academic staff working in Higher Education until relatively recently (Nicholls, 2001). The common factor perhaps for all forms of CPD is the notion that it is crucially linked to career development and promotion frameworks. As such it has a role in academic identity management.

These developments have created a hegemonic discourse focusing mainly on teaching and learning and the quality of the student experience to the exclusion of wider academic roles and identities, and little reference to alternative discourses and scholarship of professional learning. One effect of this was to situate the discourse of professional development in HE in the context of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement policies which filtered into HE in the early 1980s and continued to grow through the 1990s with the establishment of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) in 1996.

This propelled the relationship between teaching and learning as a knowable commodity (Morley 2003 ) and inferred that professional development, linked to



formal programmes, was equally knowable, and essentially measurable. Skelton characterises the dominant discourse about teaching *excellence* in UK Higher Education in a similar way. According to him, it comprises ‘performative understandings of excellence which emphasize measurement and control’ (Skelton, 2005: 25).

Skelton’s three characteristics of a performative understanding of excellence are:

1. “its ability to contribute directly to national economic performance through teaching which is relevant to commerce and industry” (p. 29);
2. “its ability to attract students on to courses which compete in the global higher education marketplace” (p. 30); and
3. “the way in which teaching is regulated by the state to maximise individual, institutional and system performance” (p. 30).

These characteristics have been intensified in the intervening years and combined with scarcity of resources in a new age of austerity, exert even more pressure on staff and students to perform to these neo-liberal norms of excellence as league tables continue to dominate the landscape of Higher Education.

Certainly, these characteristics have intensified top-down institutional and quality agendas which shape the context for defining Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in Higher Education. The Higher Education Academy, established by the White Paper in 2003, imported high profile, male, academics working in the field of learning and teaching in Australia, where the development of learning and teaching was seen to be more advanced. Much of the research which underpinned the early work of the HEA is influenced by Australian-based (though not necessarily Australian in origin) academics in this field such as Trigwell, Prosser, Ramsden, and Biggs, who generated their own research industry around the notion of the Scholarship of Learning and Teaching (SoTL), which I shall return to briefly below.

The greater policy focus of the Higher Education Academy, compared to the membership approach of its predecessor the Institute for Learning and

Teaching in Higher Education (ILTHE) was reinforced by the formation of a strategic alliance for the development of a national Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and the Support of Learning (UKPSF). The HEA joined forces with Universities UK (UUK), the Standing Conference of Principals (SCOP) and the UK HE funding bodies. The dominant discourse here can be seen in the reference page of the National Consultation 2004 document 'Towards a framework of professional teaching standards' (UUK et al, 2004). It consisted of policy documents of the above government bodies. There was one lone scholarly reference in this section: Eraut, M (1994) *Developing Professional Knowledge and Competence*, London, The Falmer Press. It is not clear which part of this document was influenced by Eraut's work, which is not referenced in the main body of the text.

This consultation document, in its introduction offers the following definition of professional standards:

'Professionalism' is commonly understood as an individual's adherence to a set of standards, code of conduct or collection of qualities that characterize accepted practice within a particular area of activity. It can be applied or measured in a variety of ways, though most usually this is linked to membership of or recognition by a professional body. The professional body may hold a register of approved practitioners, and administers - and often sets - the standards required of the area of activity, monitoring individual practice and approving or providing training meeting the standards.

(Para.3)

At the same time the complexity of the academic role is acknowledged as more difficult to define, as one profession when any number of professional allegiances may appertain:

Who will define and own professional teaching standards? Teaching in HE is a complex and demanding process. Typically, HE 'teachers' are also scholars and researchers, managers and administrators. Many academic staff and specialist staff who contribute to student learning are also members of other overlapping subject and professional communities. Some of these have their own, explicit practitioner standards that impinge upon academic practice, and influence how staff view their teaching role.

(Para.4)

However, the dominant discourse during the consultation on the UKPSF was one driven by central government policy. The consultation was not advocating a member-controlled professional institution which maintains professional standards through membership, publications and CPD, free from political interference. Neither did it seem to think HE teachers could actually command a status. It certainly did not intend to challenge the seemingly more powerful and relevant authority of the subject and professional communities.

The UKPSF was published in 2006, and deftly shifted the responsibility (and inherent problems) from central government agencies to institutions. It provided the broad flexibility called for above in a set of minimal descriptors but not the legislative teeth to compel engagement. The relationship between the development of teaching and research continued on separate planes.

A set of guidelines were subsequently developed by the HEA (HEA, 2007) to help institutions develop accredited CPD frameworks. They hint at the tension between top-down 'control' agendas and bottom-up 'reflective' approaches. Where possible, continuing professional development frameworks should meet simultaneously the following types of objective:

- Personal (career and personal interests)
- Professional (quality enhancement, professional capability, subject knowledge )
- Institutional (strategic and operational plans)

Institutions were free to set the context of CPD in relationship to their own institutional strategic plans, but this still left open a narrow technocratic view of CPD as the dominant discourse, now replicating itself within institutions with little critique applied at any stage.

One might expect a common and dominant discourse of CPD led by the educational Development community. Instead it is very fragmented. David Gosling, in his report on Educational Development in the UK (Gosling, 2008) posits that the main factor influencing this fragmentation is that Educational Development Units (EDUs) are more exposed to the dominant policy discourses

of external agencies such as the QAA and HEFCE than other HE departments. Most EDUs are resourced by funding or policy initiatives linked to set areas of national priority, and this has pushed conceptions of professional development towards the institutional need to orient staff to respond to these themes, rather than consideration of a more person-oriented, research-informed view of professional development.

The policy driven discourse appears to establish an instrumental, outcomes-based view of professional development linked to institutional targets guided by extrinsic forces and limited theoretical underpinnings. It is not a discourse perhaps which inspires individual engagement.

That is not to say that the policy discourse does not have any theoretical underpinnings drawn from a wider discourse, but does appear to privilege particular theories and harnesses them to a policy agenda, resulting in more fragmentation in practice. The dominant theories in this respect are the discourses of reflective practice which are conflated within the hybrid literature associated with the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL)

### **3.1.4 Discourses of reflective practice and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning**

The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) is a hugely influential discourse in the Educational /Academic Development communities. The term itself derives from Boyer's attempts to bring the idea of research out of the ivory tower and extend definitions of scholarship, which he reframes as the four scholarships of discovery, application, integration and teaching (Boyer, 1990).

A major theme of the SoTL literature which began to emerge during the late 90s claims that teachers' conceptions of teaching influence their students' approaches to learning. (Prosser and Trigwell, 1998; Biggs, 1996; Gibbs Coffey, 2004). These authors, and this premise, have influenced the design of most professional development programmes in HE. It has emerged as a constructivist orthodoxy which urges teachers to develop personal understandings from observing, reflecting on and researching their own practice. Certain research

paradigms follow from this, the forefront being phenomenography and action-research, and these methodologies join the dominant discourse couched in terms of CPD through scholarship, such that they are now often seen as part of the policy discourse (Rowland, 2003). It has the effect of alienating academics whose origins arise from other research paradigms and epistemologies, and possibly accounts for the limited or tokenistic engagement in professional development frameworks.

Institutional imperatives and perspectives on teaching and learning are particularly well served by this instrumental character of dominant academic development research practices

(Webb, 1996:94)

The SoTL is popular perhaps because it appears to counter the perceptions of many academics that teaching is primarily a practical rather than theoretical activity, and that teaching and learning are the special concerns of educationists and educational researchers who develop educational theory (Rowland 2003). It doesn't satisfactorily address the issue of the existence of research paradigms which are often difficult to reconcile with pedagogic research, and the fact that expert researchers are not always easily able to construct research-based and research-oriented teaching methods at all levels of undergraduate study. Kreber (2005) argues that despite the increase in the literature of SoTL, the scholarship of teaching movement has not yet fully recognized its potential to become a catalyst for curricula changes in higher education.

SoTL is a central premise of the UKPSF, and the discourse of teaching and learning. It suggests that academics take a scholarly approach to teaching by reflecting on the knowledge gained from educational research in relation to particular contexts in which they teach. It emphasizes that there is an important relationship between theory and practice, and the value of the practitioners' experienced knowledge. This approach relies on the transformative nature of reflection and the central role of the reflective practitioner.

### **3.1.5 The reflective professional academic**

I haven't the space here to include a full discussion of the notion of reflective practice in the academic - professional identity formation. Its relevance to my

thesis is that the dominance of reflective practice in the discourse of professional development can be seen to link to the neo-liberal philosophy of the market and the production of not just employable subjects, but subjects who can negotiate their identities in response to the world uncertainties. Uncertainty as a policy projection is characterised by Morley (2003) as the There Is No Alternative (TINA). This phenomenon has occurred in the predominance of Personal Development Planning (PDP) for both students and staff in Higher Education. Barnett (2003) argues that Higher Education is experiencing “a pedagogical displacement in which the weight of the pedagogical challenge is shifted from the presentation of disciplinary culture to an interest in the self-generational capacities of students” (ibid: p.148)

In this analysis, developing the capacity to reflect becomes an important aspect of the policy discourse, which demands the development of flexible career trajectories in globalised markets. The trend of personalized learning can be seen in education more widely in the schools sector. Individualization, the rise of the autonomous self, has been discussed by Beck et al (1994) who see the shift toward reflexivity as a constant need to re-invent the self when faced with the ‘unfixing’ of stable social relationships and gendered, racialised and class location. Identity becomes a task to be accomplished.’ how one lives becomes a biographical solution to systematic contradictions’ (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 6)

This is a compelling analysis in its revelation of the modern condition. However Clegg (2005) highlights the inherent paradox. The task of creating an autonomous self is not accomplished. Practitioner research and my own extensive experience working with reflective discourse as a practitioner and a postgraduate student, shows that both students and staff find reflection very difficult. The linguistic practice of reflection constrains what can be included (Archer, 2000); it can be grounded in class privilege (Charlesworth, 2000. Skeggs, 2004) and therefore the idea of a fully cognitively aware subject is inadequate (Eraut, 2000, Claxton, 1998.)

### 3.1.6 The academic professional identity

It can be seen from the literature that professional development occurs in relationship to a complex set of systemic factors in situated social practices (Knight, Tait and Yorke, 2006; Trowler and Knight, 2000; Eraut, 1994, 2000, 2005). It is within these practices that individuals not only acquire professional knowledge, skills and techniques, but undergo changes in their conceptions of themselves as professionals which equip them to keep on developing to meet new challenges in their professional practice and career.

The compact with society referred to by Dearing (1997), has cast academics in many different roles in relationship to the student experience. The development of subsequent professional development frameworks underscores this by referring to the ways in which learning is supported outside classroom situations and in other direct and indirect relationships: personal tutor, mentor, and leader. They can be seen as a thrust to develop a stronger teacher-identity, but also the roles in which that identity must perform.

However, the notion of identity is a powerful and complex one. Role is not necessarily the same thing as identity, and identities have been seen as social constructions involving reflexive awareness which shift and take different forms in response to different situations. Taylor (1999) suggests that there are three levels at which academic identity is constructed:

1. the site of work;
2. the person's discipline; and
3. the universal understanding of what it means to be an academic.

For Kogan (2000) the first of these three types of identity comes from being a distinctive individual with a unique personal history, striving for esteem, security and recognition. The second identity is embedded in communities and institutions which have their own 'languages, conceptual structures, histories, traditions, myths, values, practices and achieved goods' (Kogan, 2000:210). The third is a professional identity that is both individual and social and brings together personal value commitments and roles largely determined by

communities and institutions. Gosling and D'Andrea (2005) also recognize three types of identity but emphasize that they occur in different combinations and have different complexions and influences for individual academics, which vary over time. The individual identity has cross-cutting categories such as gender, ethnicity, class, age, personal values, ideologies and history. These personal identities can, for some academics, be pre-eminent and collective, relating to specific activist groups formed within departments, institutions or more widely. Institutional culture is also very influential in the academic's identity, along with the roles assigned within those cultures (McNay, 1995)

### **3.1.7 CPD: domestication or empowerment?**

Land (2001) suggests that domesticating tendencies are ones which act to align development to the needs of the institution, whereas those based on critique have an emancipatory purpose. However, caution is to be exercised when equating ways of working with individuals with emancipatory practice. Clegg (2003) and others have pointed out that bottom up approaches associated with reflective practice can be a form of surveillance, and broader institutional agendas can have a commitment to social justice.

A Bourdieuan analysis of these relationships demonstrates that this apparent dichotomy is the result of complex and dynamic forces between 'habitus' and 'field'. Surely, the powerful forces controlling the institutional agendas for teaching and learning must bring the empowering ideal of professional dialogue into question.

if a structuralist and post-structuralist conceptualisation is taken where patterning is considered as an intersection of presence and absence, where underlying codes have to be inferred from surface manifestations, a clear view of the government's position can be seen

(Giddens, 1995:37)

Peer observation of teaching is an example of this tension in action.

Professional development and training in teaching and learning promote peer observation as an important developmental process. However, in an earlier Ed.D assignment involving research with novice postgraduate assistant teachers, the following response was not uncommon:



.....it [peer observation of teaching] is control, it's not peer review, it's making sure you are doing the right thing, in a way I find it legitimate but I don't think one should pretend it is a helpful thing, it's for the convenor to make sure it's being taught the way he wants it to be taught.

(Clayton, 2007)

Becher (1999) points to the way in which theories about professional learning fail to address the role of the state, and many writers have since recognised the ways in which academic developers are 'colonised' by neo-liberalist ideology which pervades education, emphasizing competition and an audit culture (Manathunga, 2007). They may question the privileged position governments have given to the market in determining global economic, political, and social policies, but remain powerless to challenge it.

Whereas in the traditional university, teaching excellence would have been assumed or thought of as idiosyncratic and ephemeral, today it is named, celebrated, and subject to measurement and control. Within the performative university, it can turn teachers into capable but docile subjects, disciplined by the constant calls for information and endless paper trails (Skelton, 2005: 6)

Some educational developers happily adopt policy orientations into their practice to achieve systemic institutional change (Land, 2001: 9). But this produces a "developmentology" which helps characterise developers as management agents.

McWilliam (2002) and Lee and McWilliam (2008) develop a coherent critique of the academic practice industry. They point to the dilemmas academic developers are caught up in as they attempt to balance the support of the individual against institutional demands. They make the link between common binary discourses of 'balance': the professional and the personal; teaching and research; work and family.

Metaphors of 'balancing' and 'straddling' indicate no small discomfort to the body of the developer. And while the work of synthesis, reconciling of differences and the embracing of diversity, appear to offer alternatives to simple oppositional contradictions and competing agendas, they are, we suggest, often caught up in the same binary logic

(Lee and McWilliam, 2009: 68)

The stories of my participants also resonate with this notion of 'straddling' in their academic lives. I will return to these issues in Chapter 11 where I discuss the implications of my study for the practices of academic developers.

### **3.1.8 Organisational Learning**

If institutions driven by neo-liberal policy making are producing stratification and elitist effects in terms of hierarchies and male dominated structures, what does this say about the ways in which systems are replicated and socially re-produced?

In the neo-liberal driven cultural environment discussed above, we have seen that notions of professional development can be narrowly understood, and certainly hard to achieve in terms of agency in the development of a learning organisation theorised by Senge (1990) and Argyris (1993) whereby individual development must cascade purposefully and systemically with cross-departmental and inter-functional collaboration and development in order to effect change, directed by common goals. However, the notion of Learning Organizations, though mainly directed at commercial business organizations, has been influential in education which could possibly be seen as better placed to enact these theories.

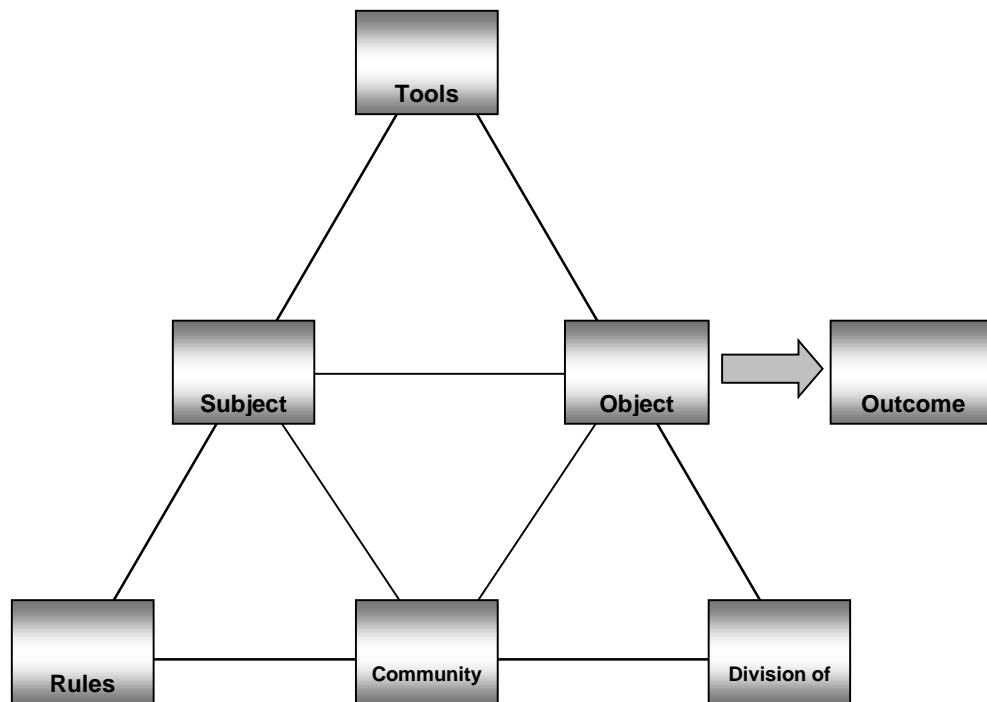
In higher education it is not hard to find the residues of this thinking espoused in institutional human resources and staff development strategies; the notion of individual development aligning with institutional and departmental goals and priorities being a commonplace assumption. These notions can be linked with organisational system's theory such as *Activity Theory*.

The literature (of educational development) has been recently informed by notions of organizations as activity systems, and the developmental transformations within these which are made through cycles of expansive learning. This is an approach which distinguishes between short-lived goal-directed actions and durable (although also dynamic) object-oriented activity systems", (Engestrom, 2000: 960). It focuses on any particular defined purpose of an organization and the interactions which impact on this. A cycle of expansive learning would involve questioning the standard practice, analysing

its contradictions, modelling a vision for its development, examining and implementing a new model through negotiated 'knotworking' across boundaries. This theory maintains that all this necessarily involves the widening of collective expertise and conceptualizations, and individual development can be seen as interacting with this wider notion of a learning organization. The framework perhaps could usefully be used to analyse the systems and identify disturbances which block development.

It has potential as a useful framework for analysing the cultural conditions within which situated professional learning takes place. The success of interactions will be influenced by, for example:

- The **tools** or expertise which professional mentors have to guide colleagues in teaching and learning practices.
- The departmental conventions and **rules** which influence, and perhaps maintain particular teaching and learning practices
- The departmental peer groups or **communities of practice** which influence conceptions of academic professional formation and approaches to teaching and learning.
- The way that tasks or teaching are allocated – **the division of labour** - within the department which e.g. might convey the message that teaching is of lower priority in the development of an academic career.



**Figure 2: A basic activity system diagram (after Engestrom, 2000)**

Engestrom (2000) posits that all elements of the activity system are connected (as depicted by the lines drawn between them) which makes the system inherently unstable as disturbances occur between these lines. Activity theory provides a wider unit of analysis to try to identify and explain these disturbances and effect improvements by exploring the arising contradictions.

the identification of contradictions in an activity system helps practitioners and administrators to focus their efforts on the root causes of problems. Such collaborative analysis and modelling is a crucial pre-condition for the creation of a shared vision for the expansive solution of the contradictions

(Engestrom, 2000, p.966)

Within the above theory of activity systems, Bernstein date refers to the strength of boundaries separating categories of discourse which make up division of labour, and the strength of social rules which mediate discourse and determine what is addressed and how it is addressed. (Bernstein, 1990). Bernstein's work suggests that where framing is weak, the rules

becomes invisible and impact on performance. Hence the notion of invisible pedagogies.

Knight, Tait and Yorke (2006), McAlpine et al (2008) and others have usefully used this theory to promote a shift from a predominant focus generic event-based professional learning to situated learning in non-formal contexts, thus linking with research by Becher (1999) and Eraut (2000 and 2004) to conclude that professional learning is as dependent on the workplace context as on the educational content of professional development programmes or activities.

Clearly, by focusing on expressions of individual professional development, the UK Standards Framework is unable to seriously articulate related systems development and allows organizations to escape this level of scrutiny in its practices. Nor does it encourage them to creatively explore the relationships between individual and organizational development which produce major tensions. At the same time it neither inspires nor requires the level of individual engagement necessary to be effective at this level.

Systems theories do not in any case address a number of factors impacting on the complex relationships between individuals and their environments; the relationship between structures and individual agency and wider power relations. Systems theory is not set in a political or moral framework; it pays little attention to the political and social impact of organizational activity. Systems theorists, in general, make no attempt to address a vision of wider society or address issues of the relationship with social justice and exclusion, or the individual's relationship to these factors. As these concerns are central to my research questions I have not called on such a theoretical framework to increase an understanding of the lived experience of women academics or engagement in notions of professional development in Higher Education. However, Pryor and Crossouard (2007) have suggested further possibilities for it to do so in their poststructuralist analysis of Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT).

### **3.1.9 The Counter-hegemonic literature of Academic Development**

My own career as an academic developer over the last 14 years has struggled with the position of Academic Development as a vehicle of soft power, through which positivist policy discourses are transmitted and implemented. The idea of hegemonic power suggests that certain concepts become hegemonic in their own right, and I have argued that this has happened in Academic Development; directly or indirectly, it has come to serve and support the neo-liberal environment. It does this partly through ingraining concepts with specialised language and frameworks. I have positioned the UKPSF as an example of such a framework.

Counter-hegemonic discourses against neo-liberal managerialism are well represented in the literature and have come to influence the literature of Academic Development through, for example: Barnett (2003); Henkel (2000); Sikes (2006); Deem, Fulton, Hillyard, Johnson, Reed and Watson (2007); Clegg (2008); Mercer (2009); Mercer and Zhegin (2011); Acker (1997); Langan & Morton (2009); Airini et al (2011).

As Academic Development has established itself in the neo-liberal performative environment of the university, it is at the same time undergoing an identity crisis. This is reflected in my own struggles to locate my personal, professional and academic identity in the academy, moving in the last 10 years through three very different institutions, each of which has positioned Academic Development very differently.

Many authors have referred to the fragmentation of Academic Development; Gosling (2009); Brew (2002); Lee and McWilliam (2008). Academic Development practice can be seen as “straddling both institutional policies and (supportive) academic development (Brew, 2002:5). A discourse of balancing and re-balancing emerges in this literature and a systematic exercise of mapping, describing and classifying the field of Academic Development is reflected in the work of Eggins & Macdonald (2003); Elvidge et al (2004); Harris (2005); Land (2001, 2003); Rowland, (2003); Sorcinelli et al (2006).

What is evident in these accounts are the painful discourses of insider/outsider within the field of Academic Development; in terms of complex shifts in identity and belonging between academic developers, academics and the academy. The tensions occur as they attempt to define and accommodate the binaries inherent in the practice.

Alison Lee and Erica McWilliam (2008) present a powerful critique of the practices of Academic Development as it struggles to establish itself as an academic field in its own right. They employ an 'Ironist' perspective (Rorty, 1989) using Foucault's ideas of game and play (Foucault, 1985) to re-describe the field of Academic Development, which they largely see as paralysed with an anxious preoccupation with identity and categorisation. They propose that rather than trying to reconcile the tensions in the practice, these tensions can be kept in play and contribute to a critical scholarship of Academic Development that can engage productively in an ongoing reinvention of the academy. Their convincing argument is that synthesis is not the answer because reconciling differences and embracing diversity of roles is often caught up in same binary logic of 'being caught in the middle' (Hicks, 2005), and only serves to fragment the field even further.

Lee and McWilliam position the obsession with the production of categories of Academic Development as games of truth rather than truth itself. Classifications of Academic Development serve as both the search for self-knowledge and identity and the need to define the rules of the game of what can be thought and done. In other words: Who are 'we'? Who are 'you'? Who are 'they'? (Ashworth et al, 2004). Academic Development can be seen therefore as a set of games, whereby what academic developers come to believe about the field is something that can and must be thought. These techniques of the self produce texts which reproduce discourses of 'us' and 'them' as subjects and contribute to the idea of Academic Development as identity management, providing the script for turning academics into 'professional' subjects. In this sense Academic Development can be read as both a site of hegemonic knowledge production and a system of power relations.

Whilst categorisation of Academic Development provides useful thinking tools, Lee and McWilliam posit there are more powerful ways in which to view the complexity of the field. The lens of 'ironic scholarship' can help Academic Development see the game for what it is, one of 'truth and error' whereby it is necessary not just to describe how things are, but consider how things have come to be thought. (Foucault, 1985; McWilliam, 2002)

Lee and Mc William (2008) insist that Academic Development is ripe for re-description of this ironic kind.

Profound and unremitting contradiction is not resolvable as a problem of professional practice – it's a lived condition. Irony allows us to re-imagine ourselves. (Ibid: p75)

They conclude that there is a need for academic developers to be players rather than pawns in the games of the contemporary academy; giving a new direction and leadership the field, not trying to tidy it up with categorisation. They point also to the, need for a critical history of the field – not 'unity in diversity' 'which is more likely to proliferate the field rather than grow it.

a criticality needs to be directed towards mapping the field in multiple ways that allow its diversity to be deployed knowingly in the ongoing re-invention of the academy

(McWilliam, 2008:76)

I will return to this idea in Chapter 11 in discussing the implications of my research for Academic Development.

### **3.1.10 Counter-hegemonic inequalities discourses and significance for Academic Development**

My study is exploring the position of women's academic careers within a prevailing masculinist and neo-liberal hegemonic discourse, and the relationship to and implications for academic development practices.

A significance for Academic Development lies in understanding how the dominant discourses exclude women and reproduce inequalities by



proliferating roles for women in what are seen by the masculinist hierarchy as less prestigious capacities of administration and teaching. Academic developers are often working in tandem with HR professionals seeking ways to promote teaching routes to promotion as a way of recognising women and supporting 'women into' initiatives aimed at increasing the presence of women in leadership and management roles, often in STEM disciplines where women students and staff alike are in a minority.

Reay (2000) encapsulates the feminist position with regard to the male hegemony and its impact:

Academia in Britain ....is a territory ruled by men. It is also heavily discursively policed. The ruling principles which guide all discursive hegemonies, namely that they present elite interests as everyone's interests, are rarely explicated and discussed

(Ibid: 14)

Mercer (2013) identifies the challenges for women academics in terms of the effects of discrimination which result in lower publishing rates and under-representation at senior lecturer and professorial levels.

It is recognised that personal choices may impact on this under-representation, but the concept of personal choice requires further exploration and poststructuralism makes an important contribution here with its emphasis on deconstructing discourse. Institutional norms can be seen at play. Deem and Lucas, (2007) point to the situation of women being given heavier workloads, assigned less prestigious tasks and are seen to devote more time to nurturing their students – either through choice or expectation (Langan & Morton, 2009). As a result women can be seen to have less time (and in some cases confidence and/or inclination) to pursue the performative research agenda which determines academic careers.

The gender gap is well documented: 48% of eligible women (permanent academic contracts) were entered for the Research Excellence Framework (REF) assessment in 2008 as compared to 67% eligible men (HEFCE, 2009: 25). Failure to play the performative game is seriously damaging to promotion

chances and yet according to participants in Mercer's study the rules of the game are not made explicit. "I don't think we are taught how to play the game" (Mercer, 2013:129).

Less experience of writing for publication leads unsurprisingly to lower publication rates. Mercer highlights the experience of women academics in being expected to privilege teaching over research are therefore subject to greater stresses of probation, tenure and promotion. These factors are a particular issue for Education academics, where few enter with a PhD, but have previous highly successful teaching careers in school sector. They hold strong professional values associated with traditional commitment to teaching and service which are exploited by the academy. Women are often seen as not needing help, particularly women from strong professional fields like Education, and Social Work.

Mercer's work calls for more effective forms of support for early career academics and the development of stronger departmental communities of practice, but recognises that this is neither easy nor straightforward

***The possibilities of women's' agency: pain and pleasures.***

In her search for the possibilities of agency Sue Clegg (2008), acknowledges an accommodation with Butler's work on gender performativity (as discussed in Chapter 2) but also employs the discourse of the intellectual to look at how women do 'being an academic' thus aligning agency with a sense of self.

Clegg draws on Toril Moi's (1999) exposition of de Beauvoir's 'I am woman' which recognises that the positioning of woman as 'other' does not allow her a universal voice. Beauvoir gives voice to herself, and this has become a fundamental aim of feminism, with parallels in the struggle for racial equality, and all transectional aspects of inequalities. Beauvoir's insistence on taking on the voice of woman makes the intellectual argument from the place that has been traditionally denied to them: posing the paradox of woman as universal intellectual.

The feminist counter-hegemonic discourses associated with the idea of the intellectual as a site of positive gendered personhood recognizes the ways in

which women pleurably and painfully claim the intellectual life for themselves within a masculinist environment.

Clegg (2008) sets out the creative possibilities inherent in performativity and reminds us of the symbolic significance to feminism of the life of the mind. There are possibilities here of re-defining intellectual work in opposition to, as Clegg posits, the anti-intellectualism of masculinist performative cultures of the academy. In this way alternative ways of being, knowing and doing in the academy are claimed through the sociality of women. Like McWilliam she is speaking to the playful and transgressive possibilities as a way of countering the 'charming absurdities' of academic life (McWilliam, 2002).

Clegg (2008) finds that the idea of scholar and teacher continues to have resonance in the academy and that intellectual pleasure is not confined to specific roles but offers a form of sustenance and a way of being that crosses teaching, research and administrative/managerial functions.

Categories of the 'lifeworld' (Ashworth, 2003) are used to analyse women's accounts of academic life.

- Selfhood – what does the situation mean for social identity, agency and voice?
- Project – how does the situation relate to ability to carry out activities central to life?
- Discourse – what sort of terms are used to describe the situation.

Clegg counters the idea of an academic being about subject expertise and sees it as valueing critical skills – intellectual skills. She uncouples an intellectual approach from that of mere expertise, discipline or research. The description of 'manager intellectual' captures a way of being an academic – a way of thinking. Clegg maintains that sense of self and intellectual values can be sustained in the hostile social environment of university management.

As an academic developer I have found the feminist discourse of the intellectual a fruitful resource in thinking about my own identity in tension with dominant structural conditions. However, although Clegg is optimistic about the

possibilities of counteracting the masculinist cultures of the academy and the emphasis feminist writers give to the pleasures of the intellectual life, the pleasures are perverse and complicated, interlocked with neo-liberal performativity within dominant patriarchal structures.

The significance of the life of the mind for women – important for first and second wave feminism presents a strong counteraction to the mind/body dualism whereby women are consigned to the body and masculine purity of mind is promoted. However, mind /body dualism, heavily policed in society in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, has retained its force in positioning women. In the academy it can be seen that the intellectual life is still understood in masculine terms.

Universities can be seen as anti-intellectual in their encouragement of students towards neo-liberal employability agendas. The project of critical intellectualism applies to pedagogy, seen as a key domain of academic developers. Burke and Crozier (2013) have shown how inequalities are deeply embedded in institutional structures and that developing inclusive teaching and learning practices, beyond the limited conceptions of individual learning and teaching styles, are key to widening participation. They suggest that academic developers, as well as lecturers, managers and policy makers, need to critically reflect on the complex processes in which inequalities and exclusions might be reproduced through current teaching and learning practices.

.....feminist work has emphasised the important historical context of higher education, in which men from certain (privileged) social backgrounds have shaped the practices that are often taken for granted in contemporary universities. Such practices have been produced through particular ways of being and doing, which tend to exclude those identities and forms of knowledge which do not conform or fit in.

(Ibid: 6)

The experiences of gender are therefore seen to be at the crux of conceptualising counter-hegemonic realities in knowledge, and Wickramasinghe (2006) develops this theme of ways of being as a woman as also a way of knowing, in a process of circular epistemology. She

acknowledges that these are slippery concepts, and that ontology is also intersectional, therefore gender as ontology must be envisaged as fundamentally relative, fluid and in a state of flux. However, she suggests that these concepts are essential for purposes of actionable change; gender as both an adjective and a verb. The actionability she suggests is in the potential of processes of gender sensitive policies and gender mainstreaming. I will return in Chapter 11 briefly to consider the potential of this form of actionability in the context of Academic Development.

The implication for academic developers is whether they can contest hegemonic discourses or whether the practices of Academic Development merely serve to maintain and even create hegemony.

Postmodernism has been a major theoretical influence in the academy in terms of providing new ways of understanding the processes of power and change (Morley, 1999:43). Poststructuralist approaches which deconstruct discourse and meanings of equalities and gender appear to me essential to any study in this area. I found that a Poststructuralist lens helps understand women's gendered ontology and how 'thought into' constructions of gender and social conditions play out in the academy.

### **3.2 Postmodern and poststructuralist discourses of power and identity**

Poststructuralism shares with postmodernism a rejection of universal theories or universal truth, the questioning of the status of knowledge and epistemological claims, and a concern with problematising conventional ways of seeing and understanding the world. Both approaches also dispute reductionist and essentialist explanations of the social world and emphasise the complexity, multiplicity and fluidity of power, identity and knowledge. However, there are distinctions. Whilst postmodernism has been associated with an 'apolitical pluralism' (Hughes, 1995, p.219), post-structuralism leaves open the possibility of resistance to hegemonic discourses. Post-structuralism also places more emphasis on the central role of language in the social construction of reality. A key feature of poststructuralist analysis is therefore the deconstruction of texts.

For poststructuralists, the role of discourse is a central explanatory construct in framing what can be said, by whom, and in what circumstances.

Foucault has powerfully shown that the enlightenment concept of the growth (capacity) of the individual and empowerment is not as simple as it seems. Building the capacity of individuals does not necessarily produce a better society or increase individual influence in the work field. In his *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969) Foucault argues that it is through discourse that social power is established, maintained and modified. Social control is not possessed by individuals or by social institutions, but is created by what he calls technologies of production, technologies of 'symbolology' (systems which permit the use of signs, meanings and symbols), technologies of power (which determine conduct through types of domination) and technologies of the self (which allow individuals to behave or not behave in different ways). He traces from the late eighteenth century what he regards as a key shift from arbitrary external control to internalized self-control in social institutions such as crime, punishment and prisons, madness and psychiatry. Foucault explores how concepts and social cultures emerge through historical analysis of discourses.

Foucault's legacy has been such that it is always necessary in any analysis of social phenomena to examine not only what can be said at any given time, but also what is being excluded, what is not being said or cannot be said. This perspective allows us to see, for instance, that the practice of academic development and its instruments e.g. the UK Professional Development Framework for HE is located in a dominant policy discourse of neo-liberal global viewpoints. It can be seen that there are significant issues in the debates about academic practice which have excluded much of the theorising e.g. race, ethnicity, feminism and power relations between staff and between students and staff.

The anthropologist/sociologist Bourdieu conducted substantial research in the area of Higher Education (Bourdieu, 1988, 1989, 1994). Bourdieu was concerned with the elitism of higher education and in its role as a reproducer of privilege within society, and insisted on a reflexive study of higher education.

Bourdieu's framework of 'thinking tools' provide a useful framework to understand the UK modern university system, organisation and cultures, even though they were based on research in the French system of the twentieth century. His ideas are particularly influential in identifying the ways in which educational institutions generate social structures, and are pertinent to the debates around the ways in which binary systems of HE and Widening Participation (WP) policies are not achieving inclusion and equality in society but may rather be contributing to its stratification. Bourdieu's concepts of 'habitus' and 'field' illuminate the interplay of power relations. These concepts express a dialectic, non-deterministic, relationship between structure and agency, whereby individual disposition and identity ('habitus') shapes and is shaped by any particular set of social relations or context ('field') to which the individual is either assigned a position or seeks strategically to position themselves.

Using a Bourdieuan framework of analysis we might see the ways in which key policies driving my practice as an academic developer may reproduce this stratification, for example by being mostly taken up by newer HEIs perceived to be teaching oriented and delivering vocational courses linked to employer agendas, and to which students from low-participation socio-economic and ethnic groups are largely recruited.

### **3.2.1 Micro political considerations**

The exercising of power in organisations can be overt and identifiable, but also subtle, complex and confusing. Blase and Anderson (1995) suggest that in a postmodern world, power is used and structured into social relations so that it does not appear to be 'used' at all. Morley (1999) shows how the mantra of 'the personal is political' is useful to expose that legitimization of knowledge-claims is intimately tied to network of domination and exclusion (Lennon and Whitford, 1994).

Micro politics focuses on the ways in which power is relayed in everyday practices. Blase (1991) characterizes micro politics as being about power and how people use it to influence others and to protect themselves. It is about

conflict and how people compete with each other to get what they want. It is also about cooperation and how people build support among themselves to achieve their ends. Morley posits that a micro political perspective “recognises control and conflict as essential and contradictory bases of organisational life “ (Morley ,1999: 2) and hence research at the micro-level identifies ‘subtle and overt practices which leave women feeling undermined, confused and disempowered’ (p.1)

Morley (1999) points to the hegemonic struggle between feminism and postmodernism. Postmodernism can be seen as nihilistic, leading to relativism, hopelessness and political inaction and an obstruction to feminist agenda for change, even as a new version of white male academic dominance.

In allying themselves in postmodern positions, feminists, willy nilly, are getting themselves entangled in a set of assumptions which make their position untenable

(Benhabib, 1992: 210)

However, I would concur that through a study of micropolitics, postmodernism and feminism can be complimentary paradigms for the analysis of organisational life. Both can label un-named feelings, experiences, practices and transactions often rendered irrelevant by dominant discourses

Feminism’s most compelling epistemological insight lies in the connections it has made between knowledge and power

(Lennon and Whitford, 1994: 1)

Feminists are not of course a monolithic group. Postmodern feminists challenge the assumptions of divisions in feminist ideological positions, suggesting that identity is not fixed or stable but contingent and continually in flux. However, it can be argued that the only form of feminism allowed in organisational equalities discourses echo liberal feminism – working from within to reform rather than revolutionise.

My epistemological position is in accordance with Morley’s in its view that feminism and postmodernism are compatible in showing how power relations at the micro level both enable and reflect global effects of domination. In this respect the workplace has become a major site of gender politics and my thesis



supports evidence that urges women in the academy to read organisational micro politics and evolve their own micro- political strategies for intervention and change. Paying attention to the micro political enables emotional as well as intellectual readings of feminism to surface. The affective dimensions apparent in my research will be discussed in Chapter 11.

### **3.2.2 Critical realist v poststructuralist theories of identity**

In this study I am bringing together two theorists from different research paradigms – the critical realist Margaret Archer and the poststructuralist feminist philosopher Judith Butler. Both women produce what might be described as dense and difficult theory, and I am conscious of the fact that I am only a novice in approaching their work. I am referring to both in my study for two specific hermeneutic purposes: a) to acknowledge and discuss the agentic selves presented by my participants in terms of Archer's theory of identity and agency; b) to contrast this with the challenges to agency represented by the power that gendered discourses exert on women's identity, compatible with my feminist stance. I have described in Chapter 2 the specific aspects of both theoretical frameworks I have applied. However, a broader overview of critical realism and post-structuralism merits some discussion here.

In considering the possibilities of human agency critical realist perspectives are attractive. Critical realism suggests that there is a 'real' world, but that our knowledge and understanding of it is socially constructed. Unlike feminist discourses (Wickramasinghe, 2006) which suggest a symbiotic relationship between ontology and epistemology, critical realism rejects the conflation of ontology and epistemology, which Bhaskar calls an 'epistemic fallacy' (1998: 28). He proposes a stratified ontology which differentiates between the empirical (things that can be experienced), the actual (events that happen regardless of whether they are experienced), and the real (generative mechanisms that are independent both of mind and society).

Bhaskar's model of critical realism (1998) defines agency as the scope the individual has in interactions with the forces of structure. He posits that people do not create society because it always pre-exists them and is a necessary

condition for their activity. Rather, society must be regarded as an ensemble of structures, practices and conventions which individuals reproduce or transform, but which would not exist unless they did so. Society does not exist independently of human activity (the error of reification). But it is not the product of it (the error of voluntarism) (Bhaskar 1998:36). This is a criticism of the poststructuralist notions of identity which understands the subject as being constructed mainly through discourse and therefore constrains the capacity for individuals to effect change.

In poststructuralist theory, discourses are situated and performative. That is, discourses represent particular systems of power and knowledge which are open to contestation, but they are also constitutive of both society and the self. Although writers such as Foucault and Derrida provided a broad theoretical account of the production of discourses and how these might be deconstructed, Luke (199:52) suggests that both 'assiduously avoided offering more than broad theoretical directions for the study of discourse in specific local institutions'.

Post-structuralism is a useful device for highlighting the social and historical limitations of scientific claims to truth. It explains how individuals are constituted through discourse but not necessarily how individuals are part of discourse. There is a danger, for example, that the categories such as gender and race will be seen as simply discourses to be deconstructed rather than as the source of inequality and oppression. These concerns have been particularly evident in the feminist movement, where Clegg (2006: 315) notes that the 'poststructuralist legacy continues to haunt attempts to think productively about agency'. One response has been to attempt to reconcile post-structuralism and feminism by exploring how agency is discursively produced. Butler's (1999) work on performativity and identity suggests that aspects of identity are enacted and re-enacted through performance. The subject is constantly in a state of becoming rather than being and there is therefore scope to perform identities differently. Clegg (2006) acknowledges the importance of poststructuralist thought to feminism, particularly in its deconstruction of the category of 'woman', however she argues that critical realism might provide a richer and more productive basis for theorising agency because of the scope for action and change.

Whilst Bourdieu's work has increased in influence and seems to offer a radical resource in theorising multiple social identities (Reay, 2004), according to Archer (2000) his concepts insist on a break between practice, that has its own logic, and theoretical discourse. She also argues that habitus could be seen as over deterministic. For Archer practice is supreme, and is the basis for discourse. Archer (2003: 20) defines reflexivity as 'a generative ability for internal deliberations upon external reality', and human beings' ability to reflect on their social situation is key to her theory of identity.

Archer (1995, 1996, 2000) is concerned with human agency, she argues against the upwards, downwards and central conflation in social theorising which obscure the real emergent powers of human agency. In her thesis:

- Downwards conflation over-emphasizes the role of society and confers no agency;
- Upward conflation over - emphasizes individualism – perhaps famously expressed by Margaret Thatcher: there is no such thing as society.
- Central conflation (as expressed by Giddens' structuration theory (1979) limits the world to that which can only be seen in the actions of the present.

Archer argues that these conflations cannot sustain human agency, which then is either left to psychology, or needs a coherent account of the emergence of social agency from personal identity and self-hood. Clegg (2005:151-3) offers a helpful summary of Archer's arguments concerning the development of a 'full range of personal powers – those of self, agent, actor and particular person' (Archer, 2000: 295)) and identifies a re-newed engagement with the notions of agency, which Archer considered had been abandoned by the academy.

Clegg (2005) adheres to a critical realist perspective which recognises that as agents we all have emergent powers and understandings. Drawing on the work of Archer, she identifies that whilst postmodern theories do not offer individuals a role, still the problem of agency persists. We therefore need a better understanding of the processes of theorising which are grounded in 'more robust accounts of the ontological and epistemological status of subjects'

(Clegg, 2005: 151). She identifies the hub of the issue at which I began my study:

The question of how we theorise the mundane, therefore, requires a detour into issues of epistemology and ontology, and in particular a return to the vexed question of agency, in order to be capable of rendering intelligible our own mundane practices.

(ibid: 150)

Archer argues that it is necessary for individuals to have a continuous sense of self in order to unite a variety of life experiences and expectations (Archer 1995: 284). This continuous sense of self is separate from, but may still influence, the social identity an individual may have. But it is the 'core self' which makes it possible for individuals to live through changes in structure and culture.

Hey, posits that the compulsive performativity of academic work is productive of academic identity as a state of being, but that it is capable of disruption

the de-ontologising of gender as a fixed in biology allows for the interrogation of the ways in which being an intellectual might become unfixed from particular forms of hegemonic masculinity (citation ref)

Butler concurs with this possibility but only within limits. Whilst she recognises that discourse operates on real embodied human beings, she has no way of theorising it (Hey (2006). Hey argues that performativity needs to pay closer regard to the audience for action – the 'we' not just the 'I'.

### **Masculine femininities and feminine masculinities**

The discourse of feminization is becoming heard in various fields of public life, and also in the academy, as girls are seen to succeed academically above boys, and women increasingly occupy large swathes of the academy in teaching and support roles. With this comes the pressure for women to absorb 'masculine' behaviours of neo-liberal performativity.

The idea of female masculinity is highly problematic (Paechter, 2006) To reject femininity is to reject the disempowering attributes of 'normal' femininity. No such symmetry occurs in rejecting masculinity which does not imply any loss of power.

Poststructuralist deconstructon is useful because it allows us to think of various ways in which women might relate to various masculinities and femininities. – not as a fixed attribute of self but as performatively enacted in different situations.

I have acknowledged in Chapter 2 the tensions between the two theoretical perspectives of Postructuralism and Critical Realism. I have justified my use of them in terms of their potential in my research to sustain a critique in exploring ways in which women enact their being in the academy.

The narratives which follow present stories of lived experiences through which stories of the construction of identity can be seen in terms of Archer's *modus vivendi* but will be discussed also in terms of Butler's theory of gender identity performance.

## **CHAPTER 4: The research participants**

### **4.1 Methodological contexts**

This chapter presents a short description of each subject to give further methodological context to the stories which follow, capturing a snapshot of the participants at the moment in time when the interviews took place. The purpose is to acknowledge my relationships with the participants in the three dimensional narrative enquiry space of the interview encounter.

I am not seeking to present a meta-contextual researcher position and recognise the instability and ambiguity of meaning in the process of attempting to make sense of our lives without framing the researcher as the final arbiter. In other words, meanings are fluid. I do not consider my own position to be outside of the relationships.

In deciding upon a template which might best serve the purpose of setting out a stable backdrop to the stories, three broad headings have guided the summaries: a) a profile of each person's current stage of career and background to that career. Personal and family status details are included because they were referred to in the interviews; b) the nature of my relationship with participants; c) where the interview took place.

### **4.2 Nicola**

Nicola is an early career academic in her mid forties, working at the research-intensive University of Green Campus, where she is a Senior Lecturer in Green Campus University. She defines herself as 'very working class' and experienced what she considered to be early academic failure at university, despite having strong intellectual aspirations. Nevertheless, following university she flourished in her chosen profession in public sector services and entered academia following a highly successful professional career where she rose rapidly to senior practitioner level.

Professional life overlapped with further academic study and in a relatively short time, Nicola began publishing and eventually gained her first academic position

in the University of Green Campus, where she has remained, achieving a Senior Lectureship after 5 years. She has been married and divorced, is now in a Civil Partnership and has no children.

I first met Nicola whilst I was working at the same University, so her first knowledge of me would have been in my role in the University's Academic Development Unit. However, we came into more contact when we both embarked on a doctoral programme, and our interest in developing as researchers coincided. She was amongst a small group of Green Campus community of doctoral students with whom I continue to enjoy a peer friendship.

I selected Nicola as my first participant because I knew she would be a willing participant and she was within the stage of academic career in which I was interested. Much of our interaction as research students involved discussing each other's research methodology, and I knew she was interested in narrative approaches. We were mutually sympathetic in a shared struggle, grappling with the role of novice researcher and academic identity. So there was some benefit for both in the interaction. I had decided that my interview approach would include interaction and would not avoid intimacy, and the principle of 'no intimacy without reciprocity' (Oakley1988) would be more easily explored with a known and trusted respondent, willing to learn with me from the experience. At the time, Nicola also lived very close to me, so it was easy to arrange a suitable venue for the interview. Nicola chose to be interviewed in her own home.

### **4.3 Amanda**

Amanda is a mid-career academic in her early 50s, working at South Cambria University, also a Senior Lecturer in Hospitality. Amanda does not see herself in terms of class but comes from a large middle class family with a strong work ethic in terms of vocational /professional aspiration. Therefore, Amanda valued and aspired to a vocational training with employment prospects and chose a Business discipline at University. She entered employment in the hospitality industries after her degree, and worked successfully in various organisational roles. Amanda made a decision to change career in her early 40's and went into

teaching in the post –compulsory sector, where she also developed her teaching materials into text books. A move to the HE sector followed at a time when metropolitan universities were recruiting highly skilled and experienced vocational teaching staff to develop academic profiles in industry related areas.

I first met Amanda when we were both living in London in the early 1980s. At that time I had taken a decision to make a break from my first career as a history teacher in a secondary school, and was working as a Costume Dresser at the BBC. I moved into a flat in the same building as Amanda, and we have remained in touch on and off ever since. By 1985 I had returned to teaching, but although my identity as an educationalist is dominant to me, and we have both been working in Higher Education for about 10 years, Amanda's view of me is still strongly situated in that earlier era of our friendship – as is my view of her. As I moved to work in a University in the same region and had more occasions to see Amanda in our HE roles, our relationship is becoming re-situated. I decided she would be suitable respondent for my research, and in a sense our interview was part of becoming reacquainted in our academic identities (intimacy and reciprocity again). Amanda had recently completed her own doctorate, and was enthusiastic about being the subject of research. Amanda has never been married, is single and has no children.

Our interview took place in the garden of her home

#### **4.4 Josie**

Josie is an early-mid career Senior Lecturer in Sports Science in her late 30s working at Collegiate University. Josie was an undergraduate and postgraduate student at Collegiate University, gaining her first lecturer post there following a brief period as a school teacher. Josie does not emphasise her class background but indicates that her early schooling was poor, improving only with a family move, from which time academic success followed. Josie quickly became identified as a high flyer in her lecturing post and has progressed quickly to Directorship roles within her faculty and across the university. She is highly focused and committed to the University, where she feels an established



part of her discipline, department and community of colleagues. A role in University academic leadership is within the scope of her aspiration, but she prefers to better establish her research profile beforehand.

I first met Josie three years ago when I went to work for Collegiate University as Director of the Academic Development Unit. Josie was one of the first people to take an active interest in my area of work. It was an interesting relationship in terms of power relations because Josie was Director of Teaching and Learning in a Faculty led by a Head who was very hostile to my Unit, which she herself was not. We established a rapport from the beginning and found mutual respect in each other's knowledge and skill base. Josie feels she has credentials in the area of educational development and has been recognised as a University Teaching Fellow. Interesting power play exists in our dealings with each other. Our agendas, whilst appearing in common, were often divergent in their need to satisfy various constituencies. Josie's constituencies at the time were located in her discipline and faculty, mine seen to be located in the rather nebulous policy area of 'compliance'. I was a little anxious about how this would manifest itself in our interview, and indeed Josie did express surprise in how intimate an experience it was, and how much of herself she felt she revealed.

Unfortunately, our first interview suffered from a bad tape recording and had to be repeated. In the repetition, Josie's responses were more guarded. In discussing this afterwards, Josie attributed this to the act of repetition acting as a filter and the interview losing the spontaneity of the first hearing and telling.

At the time of our interview, Josie had started to develop her career beyond a faculty role and was moving into the realm of university-wide management. Josie is married with no children. Our interview took place in Josie's office at Collegiate University.

#### **4.5 Moira**

Moira is a Faculty Teaching Co-ordinator at Collegiate University, she is in her early 50s. Moira has made two career changes in her life, originally training and working as a nurse, before returning to academia and eventually becoming a

researcher and then shifting her career focus to teaching. Moira, like Josie, works in a faculty that has traditionally had a culture of hostility towards academic development and the PGCertHE in particular. Unlike, Josie, Moira has no ambitions to progress in university management roles but is passionate about her faculty –wide role and determined to make a difference in moving a research-led culture towards one which recognises and rewards teaching.

Our professional relationship has developed recently through working together on strategies to address cultural shifts in her faculty by favouring non formal local disciplinary –based development alongside the central formal PGCertHE. Moira has been recognised as a University Teaching Fellow, and is actively engaged with supporting many of the development groups I work with in my role across the University. I did not identify Moira as a potential respondent immediately because her contact with my unit did not develop until relatively recently. I was also unsure whether this form of social research would be of interest to her. Moira seemed to me quite a shy person and I thought she might be uncomfortable with this form of quite intimate interview setting. Of all my respondents she spoke least about her family or class background, and I have no personal knowledge of this.

Moira was the only woman academic from the physical science discipline that I had any access to at the time, and I was keen to try to achieve some disciplinary spread amongst my respondents. At one of our routine meetings, I had occasion to discuss my research and was surprised how interested she was in it. I therefore took the opportunity to ask her if she would be willing to take part as a respondent, and she agreed. I think out of curiosity as much as anything. Of all my respondents she was perhaps the most hesitant about the experience and her interview was the shortest. Moira said she found the process interesting, but unnerving. She had never spoken about herself and her career in those terms to anyone before. Moira contributed more feedback than my other respondents and was more active in the co -construction of her story. Moira is married and the only one of my respondents with children, she has one child. Our interview took place in my office at Collegiate University.

#### 4.6 Vivienne

Vivienne is the youngest of my respondents, highly energetic and prolifically engaged in every aspect of her role as a Psychology lecturer at Collegiate University. Like Josie, she was an undergraduate and postgraduate student at the University. Following a period of teaching in the post compulsory sector, where she also trained as a counsellor, Vivienne progressed quickly through a post-doctoral researcher position into a teaching post in the largest department in the University. This department was the first to introduce, controversially, teaching only contracts. As such, there is an intentional gap between the community of teachers and researchers, with pressure now growing to address the attendant inequality in career opportunities. Vivienne is passionately committed to teaching and active in building bridges between research and teaching communities. She believes the opportunities to some extent have to be individually inspired. On top of a very heavy teaching load and a cross institutional counselling role in Student Services, she has undertaken the PGCertHE, recently been recognised as a University Teaching Fellow, contributes to teaching on the PGCertHE and mentors colleagues undertaking the programme in her department. She is active and published in the field of pedagogic research, but is ambivalent about the status of this in terms of a researcher identity.

Vivienne described herself as 'coming from a rough estate' with a troubled family background. Family relationships and loyalty are very important to her, as is her passion for educational opportunity and the potential for social transformation through education. To this extent, she believes good teaching is a social responsibility. She is married, with no children, but her family commitments bind her closely to the area, and she is happy to remain at the University for this reason, but also because she loves her work there.

An opportunity to interview Vivienne arose through our recently increased contact in her role as a new University Teaching Fellow. When I described my research to her and invited her to participate she was very keen to be involved. Vivienne was an engaging interviewee, and happy to admit her love of talking about herself and her work.

Our interview took place in my office at Collegiate University.

#### **4.7 Use of theoretical lenses in reflections on each story**

In the following chapters 5-9, I have presented each co-constructed story, followed by brief reflections using the critical realist lens of Archer and her first three reflexive dimensions (Autonomous reflexives; Communicative reflexives; and Meta reflexives) to pose initial interpretations on the women's sense of agency. The intention here is certainly not to categorize the women as 'types' but to offer an interpretative framework.

Butler's poststructuralist theory of gender identity performance will be used to juxtapose the stories of agentic selves with an interpretation which counters the heroic nature of successfully negotiating careers in adversity. The notion of how gender is performed is used to reflect on how dominant masculinist hegemonies affect the women's experience of career making in the academy and limits their agency.

## CHAPTER 5: Nicola

### 5.1 Nicola's Story

I am from a very working class family and the first to get to university. I was recognised as clever and felt the weight of family expectations. The idea of becoming an intellectual, of writing books, was thought into me by the age of 10. There were few children going to university in my school and a lack of clarity about courses. I ended up doing Music which probably wasn't the best choice.

During my first degree any sense that I was quite bright and successful disappeared. I felt very working class when I went to university. I struggled in a kind of spiral down, feeling under-confident and then not working. I got a 2:2 and was left feeling I had let everyone down. Even though most people in those days got 2:2s, it felt shocking to me. I had started getting involved in feminist politics and by that point wanted to be a social worker. Careers advisors said I needed to first get a load of experience. So that's what I did for two years, followed by a PG Dip in Social Work. I didn't even apply for a Masters because I thought I wouldn't get on one with a 2:2. But then suddenly I found myself doing really well and by the end of that two year course started to feel more confident in my abilities again.

When qualified, I worked as a social worker for three years before advancing to senior practitioner. In 1995 I got a job as Senior Practitioner Consultant at a nationally known multi-disciplinary unit working with children and families where there's abuse and neglect. It was very high profile. In 1996 I did my first conference presentation, an international conference paper with a consultant psychiatrist colleague. I'd started to become identified as a high flyer and went on to get an MA at University of Green Campus in 1997 where recognition from academics began. It was really important to me. I'm terrified I'm not good enough so I work really hard and never under-prepare. All through this I was still working as a Senior Practitioner, so I do put myself through an awful lot. There's constantly a backdrop of terror.

My mother died of cancer in 1999, and that had a huge impact. I suddenly started feeling I hadn't done enough with my life. It started to become apparent to me that I might never have children. I subsequently haven't had children, and so always feel I need to do better than other people to compensate. That has nagged away at me. Sometimes people call me driven, that's what I'm driven by. In 1999 I started another four year MA and trained as an arts psychotherapist. That gave me an added string to my bow, but also a sort of added layer of theoretical richness as my sense of an academic identity began to grow.

When I had my first interview for a full-time job at University of Green Campus I didn't get it. That was my first realisation that being a very good practitioner wasn't good enough for a 'research university'. It left me with an uncertainty about what next. By the time that job came up again there was also a job at University Y which was an institution which would just expect you to be an educator and not a researcher and writer. But in the end I decided to go for the interview at Green Campus .I got the job, without any publications, simply I think because nobody better applied.

At first I was actually very confused by the obsession the institution had with research. I said "but surely teaching the students is the most important thing?" I was genuinely bemused. We had a team building day; people were in tears in the toilets about who had written good enough things. It's been a battle to ensure I'm able to meet both the research and the teaching side. There's all this jargon, it's the language and the culture, it's like gentleman's club stuff, you've got to be in the know and learn. I must have done it because I've just got my Senior Lectureship. Colleagues I know have taken 15 years to get this. That little bit of paper that said Senior Lecturer meant I'd succeeded in a new career, I'd been accepted as good enough. Symbols of recognition are very important to me, which is why I'm doing a doctorate now.

For me social work is a discipline and a profession. I have always felt deeply caught in the tension between professional and academic identity. It's really important that social work academics are grounded in reality of what the job is. I'm very frightened about losing that. What I write about is practice. In

medicine, nursing, psychotherapy, you've got to remain in practice. In social work you don't and it's not recognised how important that is. I continued to maintain a small private practice as an expert witness and psychotherapist. But I became exhausted and something had to go. You're allowed to pause professional registration so I decided to do that.

Teaching is a dimension of professionalism. Ethical commitment comes in here too. You need to be ethically committed to running a decent programme well for the benefits of the students. There are people in university that take the full range of professional responsibilities seriously and others who don't. There's a gender thing that goes on there, a lot of women take and feel a much more personal sense of responsibility about getting things done well. However, there is something very unhealthy about the University environment for everyone. It feeds an insecure sense of self, you're constantly under pressure. There's terror around, you're going to be judged, and you could be out. There's never an opportunity to relax. I think that's really erosive and I think it stunts creativity and authentic ambition, and impacts on collegiality.

My colleagues sometimes see me as an extremely ambitious person, but I'm driven by anxiety not by ambition in the sense of status and position. I want to do something I feel makes a difference. If ambition's anything it's to feel that I helped transform the nature of social work so that it made a difference. That's ambition to me and academic endeavour at its best can achieve that. If I had have thought that 10 years' ago I would be a well published academic at a top university I would not have believed it. I will always be grateful to colleagues who put into my head the possibility I could achieve this. I find it very difficult recognising what I've done. It's a mix of hard work and luck. I do think in my career I've sometimes been the right person at the right time.

I am at a key transition point at the moment and could settle for and achieve some life-work balance rather than climb the treadmill further. It feels like the university is this big ravening beast who is just going to gobble up everything it can to build itself bigger and bigger. None of us want that actually.

## 5.2 Reflections

Nicola's narrative conveys strong emotion and reveals some pain in recalling her career journey. My interview with Nicola started - at her suggestion - with drawing a pictorial timeline, which she called a career river. This invoked the three dimensional nature of the enquiry space in terms of events in time but also the currents, twists and turns in the story as it was remembered. Nicola was best able to surface her journey through this artefact. In the telling, her story went backwards and forwards until all the significant events which shaped the journey were identified. In co-construction, the elements included represent those where the impact of the memory of the event was deepest. At the time of the interview, as Nicola herself puts it, she felt she was at a "key transition point" in considering the next stages of her career. The process of looking back at this point possibly enhanced the intensity of past events remembered in the present.

Nicola is clearly a highly reflexive individual whose interior dialogue can be seen in the way she presents the events in terms of choices and decisions she has made during her career journey. Archer's (2003) theory of identity formation resonates in Nicola's intense self-account of someone negotiating the structures of her social reality and striving towards the *modus Vivendi* she desires. Nicola discerns the projects she finds meaningful e.g. a successful academic identity in terms of research prowess and 'being an intellectual' the idea of 'being an intellectual' is an interesting feature of Nicola's story. It perhaps offers an insight into the relationship between Butler's notion of performativity, as repeated citations which fix identity, and the possibilities of disruption – and therefore agency. (Clegg, 2008); Hey (2006).

The intellectual life is still seen, largely, in masculine terms. However, the significance of the life of the mind for women emerges here. All my respondents refer to it. It appears to represent, as Clegg (2008) suggests, an enduring sense of an intellectual self which although subject to masculinist universalism and performativity, also has its own values and existence.



Nicola deliberates the positive and negative sides of the ways of the academic life she is drawn to and dedicates herself intensely to the process of achieving her desires by accommodating what she sees as needing to be done to achieve her goals. She is acutely aware of the risks involved and at the time of our interview appeared to be weighing these up further in terms of what she was prepared to personally sacrifice to 'the big ravening beast' – which can be seen as not only a metaphor for the academy, but perhaps also her own sense of her ambition.

In terms of Archer's (2003) modes of reflexivity, Nicola might be viewed as a *meta-reflexive*. She transforms her inner conversation into self-interrogation and expresses a desire for an equal alignment of professional competency, physical well-being and her own self-worth.

Nicola cites class origins as a significant factor in her 'becoming' an academic. Hers is not an uncommon story of the drive to widen social participation in Education generally over the past 50 years. What is perhaps more unusual is the early childhood awareness of aspiring to an academic identity, the desire of 'becoming an intellectual', and even more interesting the notion of it "being thought into me" and the impact of those high expectations. In being prompted to recall how she became an academic, Nicola, without hesitation, went immediately to origins in early childhood. Although not specifically referring to her gender identity Nicola's reference to being 'thought in to' suggests she is aware of a process of responding to repeated expressions of expected behaviour from her family, themselves responding to the post-war wave of social aspiration and mobility promised by successive governments through educational opportunity. The notion of performativity developed by Butler (1990, 1993, and 2004) resonates here. Butler asserts that performativity is the discursive mode by which ontological effects are installed (1990). In this context performativity is seen as producing ontological effects in terms of class as well as gender.

There are hints of the effect of Butler's theory of performativity in the emergence of what Goodson and Sikes (2001) refer to as a 'narrative script'.

Contact with the family of origin was kept through a 'same old girl' storyline, whilst a new institutional milieu led to the construction of identity as a 'new professional woman.

(Hoerning 1985: 109)

In Nicola's case the 'same old girl' storyline is 'the same old clever girl'. This has had a profound effect and affect.

Maintaining the 'same old clever girl' has some cost as a constant fear of failure fuels her relentless work ethic, and considerable success. However, she herself attributes this success in part to the powerful impact of her mother's death, which triggers in her a realization that she herself might not have children. "So I always feel I need to do better than other people to compensate". It is not clear what is meant by "other people". However, there is an ontological dimension here in the context of 'career learning':

It (learning) necessarily involves an encounter with an Other. At the ontological level it therefore involves either performing new identities or performing old ones differently

(Pryor, 2009. 276)

The 'other', which Nicola's narrative script seems to simultaneously embrace and reject, represents an aspirational identity which she is uncertain about i.e. the highly competitive nature of an academic career and the gender positions within it. Nicola feels perhaps that she has to out-perform other women academics who have children, in line with her 'script'.

Nicola is confounded by the differentiation between 'professional' and 'academic' identity when she attempts to get her first post in academia. The 'not good enough' script is ever present but passes from her professional identity, where she feels a sense of security, to the academic identity she is struggling to recognise and be recognised within. She assigns symbolic value to outward signs of academic status, as stepping stones in the transition. "That little bit of paper that meant I had succeeded in a new career". There is a conflict present in her valuing these symbols, and at the same time recognising the learning process as a cultural game with male rules, "it's like gentleman's club stuff".

As a successful professional practitioner Nicola has no trouble in performing an identity as an academic professional and places the teaching role firmly in this

sphere. “teaching is a dimension of professionalism” She describes the relationship between research (academic) and teaching (professional) as a battle and similarly describes the relationship between her academic discipline original profession. ‘I have always felt deeply caught in the tension between professional and academic identity’.

Professionalism has been characterised as a power secured by and through administrative regimes with professionals as those tasked with forms of governance and regulation. (Deem et al., 2007). In other words professionals are implicated in identity management. In the transformations of Nicola’s educational and career journey, her identities appear to be in constant tension. Her characterisation of the Academy as ‘the big ravening beast’ seems to reflect this insecure sense of self at this point in her career. There is also the question of how the University is perceived in terms of a strong but predatory relationship

Nicola’s sense of professional development is not located in the field of Academic Development practice and practitioners, which do not get a mention, but in her professional field and in asserting those values in the environment of the academy , where her values struggle in the neo-liberal policy environment and masculinist concerns with career progress based on competitive research prowess.

## CHAPTER 6: Amanda

### 6.1 Amanda's Story

I'm a senior lecturer at University South Cambria. I teach Hospitality. I used to work in industry, but it was really quite unchallenging; you never felt mentally stretched. I was looking for a change and thought teaching might be interesting. In 1990 I got a post in F.E. I had an HND and completed a degree whilst in the FE job. My first experience of teaching was horrendous, the chaos was dreadful. No serious training or mentoring, nothing like that; extraordinary. I would have left, except my mother got ill with cancer and I needed the flexibility the job offered. Eventually, I got into it and I enjoyed the interactions involved in teaching.

I decided I would move into HE so I could progress without moving into a managerial position. I'd been a manager in industry and this didn't appeal to me. I went for a job in Hong Kong but completely messed up because I had little experience of academic interviews. I applied for the job at South Cambria University for the interview practice. I said exactly what I would like in a perfect job, and they offered me the job I described rather than the one I was interviewed for!

University South Cambria was working towards university status, and they wanted people from industry who wanted to develop as academics. At that time it was only necessary to have industry professional qualifications, but I'd written a couple of text books. No one now could enter HE or progress within it without a Ph.D. However, we would still be incredibly wary of employing anybody without industry experience. I think our students benefit hugely from people like us.

I think everybody's a bit naïve when they first go in, because nobody really knows what being an academic's like. When I moved into HE I just thought that I would be able to develop my own knowledge, teach in a different way and to a different level. My first year was horrendous. To be fair the F.E.college had put me through a PGCertHE which was helpful when I went into HE But there was

a senior lecturer who set out to make my life extremely difficult because I had come in straight in as a Senior Lecturer rather than as subservient to him. People knew his behaviour was dreadful, and eventually he was made redundant, but it took a while for all those things to work through and I nearly left. However, I managed to create a positive team with new colleagues who came in at the same time as me. After a while, trust started to build back up and information sharing started to develop. A new philosophy of trust and openness began.

The university wanted me to develop my research and do my PhD. The UK is the biggest wine importing country in the world, but there's little research on wine consumers. What people in the trade were saying about how people behave and interact with wine, didn't correlate with my experience at all, so I was curious. It worked out very well because my curiosity came up with my whole area of research and the more you get into it, the more interesting it becomes.

I did value the PhD, and got mine in 2006. We're very lucky in our department, because our department started a scheme called Time for Research. If you're a lecturer who is doing a PhD, you get six hours remission. It has been incredibly beneficial, but it's incredibly hard work. I'm single, but watching people with families struggle to get one is painful. I often found after a really heavy week, it was hard to switch mode. I used to get really worried about this, until I realised I could work flexibly over the weekend. If I was somebody with children, weekends would not be as available. I've seen one marriage fall apart because of it. There's a very big stick in our School to fulfil research obligations, it's quite shaming if you don't deliver.

I decided I wouldn't publish anything whilst I was still doing my PhD, because I didn't want one of my Supervisor's to put her name on my work. I presented conference papers and before I'd really had anything published, I was asked to join a team to do some international research. That's when you really feel that people are recognising your work. I'm very lucky my research area is so specialised I can get work published without too much difficulty. I continue to get time for research, because I've been writing articles and getting work published,

it's like a reward. However, within the department my research area is not widely understood. One of the Directors of Research was incredibly scathing about it. I feel that there isn't a huge amount of internal recognition, but externally there is.

There used to be a lot of research freedom but with the REF things have got tighter. If you don't fit into a hub your research has no value. I find that quite sad. I'm very lucky, because I came through with what I wanted to do before it started tightening up, and I'd got to a point where I'd built up my area of research and got PhD students coming in. Other members of staff who come in from industry are not getting the support to build new areas.

I never plan my career, so it's very difficult to say what professional development would be. I think most colleagues would say professional development is getting recognition from your peers from the academic world, whether teaching or research. I'm not one of these people who would go and learn about an improved assessment process or something like that.

I'm going to apply for a Readership because I have nearly satisfied all the criteria and have received a lot of encouragement to do this. But I have to admit my motivation is not academic. It will get me into the next pay band for pension purposes. The difference in pay is quite significant. I don't want to be a head of department, because I want to continue researching and teaching. Whether I'd apply for a professorship, I don't know. I just don't think I want to put that much effort in. I'd have to get to a point where I was sure that my academic profile was sufficient to be able to do that.

I would aspire to produce a piece of work that actually made a difference towards formulating government policy. Being an academic for me is about having an interest in what you do, and thinking that it has some grounded value. I would say an academic professional is somebody who actually has the students' interests at heart. Research is part of that but good or poor performance there reflects mostly on individuals. Being a professional for me is about your impact on student lives and careers.

## 6.2 Reflection

Amanda's account presents a sense of a confident and agentic self in an arbitrary world, where events arise and are responded to pragmatically, and where she also feels able to overcome structural obstacles and construct an identity at will. Amanda's 'narrative script' suggests a 'can do' philosophy which lends itself to the neo-liberal stance of individualism and meritocracy.

Amanda communicates her self-narrative in a manner resonant with Archer's category of *autonomous reflexive*. She is decisive in her deliberations and appears to be 'economically articulate' (Archer 2003: 211) to the extent that she regards her concerns as responsibilities. Although she sees her career path has having been largely unplanned, she is forthright about her individual approach to the obstacles of societal structures and how to negotiate these strategically to progress her goals. The 'sifting' (Archer 2003:102) process she undertakes to determine her goals responds deliberatively to each life event.

Amanda's self-narrative, in terms of Butler's theory of speech as performance (2006), is perhaps indicative of the way in which individuals have a need to present themselves in a way that is recognisable to society (Butler, 2005). For Amanda, the sense of her professional self is very important as a work ethic, she does not question the origins of this or the authority which imposes it. Therefore, she presents as highly competent in these terms, which she is, and constructs a self-narrative which privileges this aspect of her identity.

Amanda has had several changes in career over the period she is describing. Her account presents these as pragmatic choices but also reflects her approach to reconciling the ruptures in her sense of core self. Amanda does not dwell on the norms and conventions that have shaped her identity, or the emotional dimensions to her own painful experiences. She transfers these dimensions to characteristics she has observed in others but for herself presents these as obstacles to be negotiated and overcome.

Amanda's sense of a professional self developed in a sector of industry where identity management is accepted as a standard of behaviour and leads to strictly regulated progression. However, Amanda characterizes her experience

there as ultimately intellectually 'unchallenging', which suggests a frustration with that controlled notion of professionalism, and a rejection of managerial roles. Here, the sense of the intellectual as something recognisable in her sense of self propels her forward. Amanda appears to have developed a critical view of managerialism and recognised it as a false promise in terms of career development. Her values do not accord with it and she is able to withstand the pressure of joining a career path which has been identified for her by others.

Amanda reports an experience of chaos when she first encounters her new identity as an education professional. Here she finds that her role is woefully unsupported and ill defined, and where the relative freedom of academic role also meant a lack of organised structures and guidelines. Whilst enthusiastically engaging with a new academic identity, she still retains her industry persona 'people like us'. This persona appears to confer to her a sense of 'the professional' which she does not find present in the academy. Amanda is a highly organised person and does not like disorder. She conveys a strong sense of control.

Amanda's first experience of this culture clash is characterized by a significant personal battle with an established Senior Lecturer. She is evidently 'saved' from abandoning her new career by an apparent act of luck – the redundancy of the individual antagonist. Amanda's story does not dwell on her own part in this event, although it is likely to be a symptom of the structural forces present as the institution is consciously changing its direction with 'new blood', of which Amanda is part. She quickly develops a community of practice with new colleagues who entered the university at the same time as herself and 'a new era of trust and openness began'. This is an era which Amanda has had a large part in creating. She seeks to draw others into creating her agentic vision of this new era. Unlike Nicola, who speaks of a lonelier, individual mission.

Amanda is immensely proud of her academic achievement, gaining her PhD and the forging of a completely new area of research in her disciplinary area, and seems very conscious of the 'shaming' involved in not producing the expected research output. She does not question this but accepts it as part of her notion of 'academic professionalism'. However, she attributes much of her



success to luck and the fact that she is single and does not have children Nicola also cited childlessness as a spur to her academic endeavour for different reasons.

Both Amanda and Nicola feel subject to the structural pressure on institutions to 'perform' to the limitations of the REF produces constraint, restraint and oppression against their notion of academic freedom and creativity. Their performance of academic identity is evidently highly successful but still at odds with their notions of an intellectual life.

Amanda, whilst having prior experience of a 'managed' professional identity in a highly regulated environment, demonstrates ambivalence towards it in the Academy. Amanda does not necessarily believe that professional development leads to career advancement and thinks that professional development confers its most valid meaning as a product of peer recognition. She adheres to the notion of chance in a career which she describes as 'unplanned'. However, she has acquired the skills to accumulate the academic capital and does not find it as anguishing as Nicola to place her own boundaries around personal cost, which she calculates according to material benefit as well as academic kudos. Amanda does value the aspect of academic development which might be described as training or preparation for a role e.g. the PgCertHE, but beyond that has little notion of how that field will support her career aims. The qualification that really matters to her is her Ph.D.

For both Nicola and Amanda the idea of 'making a difference' is crucial, and for both this is about advancing the professional knowledge for the benefits of society and students. Interestingly, they do not identify the Institution as necessarily sharing these aims. The institution is seen as a body that only wishes to advance its own reputation.

## **CHAPTER 7: Josie**

### **7.1 Josie's Story**

I currently have three roles within the university: besides being a researcher and Senior Lecturer in the School, I am also the Deputy Head of Faculty, responsible for teaching and learning, and Director of Postgraduate Study, responsible for strategy across the university.

Education has been very important to me so I am aware of my journey as an academic starting at a young age. My schooling in Scotland wasn't particularly good but transformed when my family moved to England. I was very fortunate in my secondary school, although it was a comprehensive, it was streamed. I was put in the top set and went on to do A Levels and to Collegiate University to do an Honours Degree. At that point there wasn't really any perception in my head that you could be an academic in my subject, so I did a PGCE and taught in a school for a couple of years.

I kept in contact with Collegiate University and was friendly with the Head of School. When my mum died and I was struggling on a number of fronts he offered to fund an MPhil. I then went on to a Ph.D. Through my PhD, I taught on the B Ed degree and modules in the Sports Science department. So I was sort of doing the dual role of an academic while doing my PhD and then a position came up in the department.

I think key factors in my career have been the opportunities presented to me by people watching out for me. I've just fallen into them really. On the research side, it's been a natural progression from undergrad research projects to Masters project, then on to my first project from the PhD presented at a conference and accepted in a journal. On the lecturing side, because of the background that I had in teaching, and setting up courses in local schools, that gave me a facility for course design which matched the School's need to develop Masters courses. So I suppose it was a matching of my experience with opportunities provided in a developing vibrant department. It wasn't the PhD per se that projected me into Higher Education; it was the processes that

went on during doing the PhD. I submitted in 2000 when PhDs were moving from big thick chapters to an ethos which valued the writing of manuscripts to be submitted to journals. I did my PhD part time, and by the time it got to my fifth year, I'd already presented all the data at conferences, had two papers in journals, one in press and one under review. It's the process really, not that thing on the shelf.

I wouldn't have been stimulated by just being a researcher. Similarly I couldn't be on just a lecturing contract; it's a holistic thing for me. In terms of an identity it's the lecturing and the research and professional accreditation as a practitioner in my discipline. On the research side, conferences and networks are important as well. The people that I did my PhD with remain a cohort of friends, so we're all progressing and we'll meet at conferences, so you have an identity within that sphere as well. I think that helps me because I've been at this university for so long, I actually see other perspectives from other universities as well.

I would say 95 percent of academics don't identify with a notion of professional standards through the Higher Education Academy/UKPSF. I think it depends very much on the academic that you speak to. I would think that they don't think about it in terms of a profession, I think they would think about it in terms of quality but they would align that quality to up to date research and delivery of that information, rather than teaching qualifications.

I would say I have a strong professional work ethic. That comes from the sort of person that I am, the way that I've been brought up. I've had very good role models. I see what human beings can achieve work wise, in terms of the amount of time and effort they put into work. That's sometimes at the detriment to other aspects of their life, but I also have a good role model in terms of where the line is, and so I am able to set boundaries.

It's a very stressful environment for young academics and there isn't much guidance. Often the academic will get to a breaking point and will then seek support. Sometimes it would just be an in the corridor, "you look exhausted, are you okay?" and then they'll either be "no I'm not", then the tears will well up and

it's "come into my office" . A lot of academics are perfectionists, so they want to do a very good job and it's actually making them realise that in the hours of the day you can't do a perfect job in everything.

A lot of academics now are coming straight into an academic role without the opportunity to teach in the way that I did. I think it's difficult for them. The massive expansion in HE requires a different set of skills, to be able to stand up in front of 170 students and keep control for two hours. Many academics are quite selfish but they're also quite introverted, they just want to sit at their computers and look at their data. Students, if they see a bit of weakness, can be pretty cruel. I think with the fees coming in, there's going to be a big shift. We're going to get better students and the teaching environment will improve. I think that there'll be a change in culture.

Academics don't have a picture of institutional policies; it just doesn't feature on their radar. For those that are in leadership roles, I think policies do feature but often they're tweaked to fit in with the culture of the university. No one responds well to top down policy consultations. I generated the PG Strategy by asking the Schools to write their own. I've been pleasantly surprised with the response from schools and their engagement, so that's worked quite well. I think that was because I took a very hands on approach to it. It was exhausting, going round all the schools, but it worked.

It's often about goodwill and relationships. Getting a response is easier for me in Schools where I've known the person. I'm now not just somebody on the end of an email; I've seen them face to face. I've helped them with another situation and then you know, that Monday morning first thing, they're then apologising for not having done the strategy. So it's a human thing isn't it?

## **7.2 Reflection**

Josie, like Amanda, projects a 'can do' approach to success in terms of individual effort and meritocracy. However, her identity appears projected in the role she has with others and the strength of the internal conversation evident in her story revolves around social encounters with colleagues who have variously become mentors and collaborators in her academic identity. There are aspects

of three of Archer's (2003) reflexive categories in Josie's account of herself: she doesn't interrogate her own actions too deeply, accepting of serendipity as an explanation for her successes, and appears decisive and independent to the extent that she sees it as her individual responsibility to negotiate adverse structures (autonomous reflexive); however, in order to achieve her *modus Vivendi* she tries to align rather than prioritise the three orders of reality – performative competence, physical well-being and self-worth (meta-reflexive). The guiding factor though in her *modus vivendi* is the desire to operate in the social domain (*autonomous reflexive*). Nicola seeks out others to share and resolve problems and prioritises the people closest to her, usually colleagues in her department, or friends from her own field now working in other institutions. When Nicola assumed a cross institutional role, she sought first to establish personal contact with key staff in every faculty in order to involve them and thus personalise her goal.

Like, Nicola, Josie takes us back to her childhood when thinking about her career trajectory. Class background isn't explicitly referred to, but an emphasis on the importance of education in her life is, together with mention of a lack of early good schooling. This is by chance alleviated by a move to another region, allowing access to a better school and a path which led to University. However, unlike Nicola, Josie did not have 'any perception in her head' of the possibility of being an academic, and her subject choice was not a traditional academic one. Nevertheless, this state of being 'un-thought into' perhaps had as much of an impact as Nicola's 'being thought into'. The strong work ethic she cites as a product of 'the way that I've been brought up' leads to a reverence for good role models which she recreates in herself in her dealings with others. In this sense, Butler's notion of citation of norms (1990, 1993, 1997, and 2004) can be seen to be having an impact on her identity.

The central 'agent' in Josie's story appears to be the role of a sponsor. In this case the Head of School in the University where she took her first degree and went on, under his guidance and affordances of opportunity to progress to a PhD and eventually a lectureship.

There is a male -dominated culture present in Josie's discipline and institution, the narrative script here may be one of being seen as remaining 'one of the boys'. The benefits accruing from this sponsorship and mentoring may have led to the strong sense Josie has of the value of developing individual relationships with colleagues when in a policy development role. This relationship appears to be dominant in her career but she does not position this as problematic or paternalistic in nature. However, she adopts quite a 'mothering' stance with respect to her male colleagues, although they are in fact mostly the same age or older than herself. A Butlerian analysis would see this as illustration of how gender norms are transferred, performed and regenerated, constantly imprinting themselves on identity.

The conditions not only make possible the subject but enter into the subject's formation. They are made present in the acts of that formation and in the acts of the subject that follow.

(Butler, 1997:14)

Josie, unlike Nicola, does not appear to value the symbols of status. She cites the stages in the process of doing her PhD as much more influential than the product.

Her espousal of a holistic academic identity incorporating teaching, research and practitioner accreditation in her field, seems important to her sense of securing cultural and social capital amongst the networks she values. She is conscious about having a fluid identity in order to re-produce herself in terms of transferability across the sector.

Josie positions 'academics' as 'other' in her discussion of professional standards. Josie constantly refers to academics as 'they', signalling to me perhaps the divide between the 'academic' and the 'developer' and her own career trajectory away from an academic identity and into an administrative realm of policy implementation. However, Josie does not recognise that academic development practices per se influence her development. Rather, she rejects it as a centralist top down technology of power. She emphasises her own position as in opposition to this and offers a strategy which positions her as

an equal among equals, calling on colleagues to collaborate at a grass roots level.

Josie recognises the affordances to her career of moving into a cross institutional role and how she is well equipped to succeed at that level. The sponsorship she has received by her department has led to a long- term relationship with the institution and she can now sponsor others. She does not doubt her own agency and is optimistic about both the academy and her future within it.

## CHAPTER 8: Moira

### 8.1 Moira's Story

I've taken a very circuitous route to becoming an academic. At first I thought I wanted to do Medicine, but without appropriate A levels, I went into Nursing. I enjoyed this but rather than follow promotion into management, I decided to retake A levels and then although I wasn't looking for a career switch, I decided to do a degree in Ecology and fit this around agency nursing. I didn't at first enjoy being a student again. After working co-operatively in large clinical teams, being a student seemed a selfish thing to do and I felt as if I lost confidence during that time. However, I went on to Masters and a PhD, loved my research and decided I would like a career in academia. My field work took me to Africa where I met my husband who was a post doc working in the same field. I followed my husband's career for the next few years and got post doc posts in the Universities where he worked. After the birth of our child I went part time, decided that teaching would be the way forward and did a PGCertHE. I was still employed as a research post doc post but getting more interested and involved in teaching. The last institution I was at acknowledged the importance of teaching and gave promotion on that basis, so I was given a full lectureship on the strength of my teaching rather than research. I was still dabbling in research, but when my husband moved to an institution which was restructuring, I took the opportunity to take a break from research and go for a teaching-only post.

So, that's how I came to have my present role as a Teaching Co-ordinator. I was hired to be directly answerable to the new Head of College and take the lead in setting up and co-ordinating interdisciplinary modules and developing outreach links. I like to think that I find it easier than many colleagues to be sympathetic to the learner's point of view. You have to do a lot more in teaching to convince people that you're doing something worthwhile, it's seen that research is the main point of a university. In my early days as a researcher I was very passionate about the research, but didn't like the politics associated with it. I don't like confrontations very much and had some bad early



experiences with my Supervisor. I find scientific research is very male dominated and competitive, and when there's one group competing with another there is a tendency to over-inflate confidence and results. I prefer to work in a more supportive environment and I think this is the same for many women. Some senior women try to conform to this culture by suppressing what may be seen as "feminine" attributes, but the only solution to this seems to be cultural change. Without the competitive culture I might have done more research- I found it really exciting and thoroughly enjoyed it.

I haven't really given any thought to professional academic identity before. People are usually brought into academia because they've got a good research track record and yet they're expected to perform well in a wide range of roles. I think that we should allow for division of labour- some people are better teachers, some administrators, others capturing research income. It is about time that we had minimum standards of expectations for all these different roles and that people are offered training and support. I don't think we should encourage a culture where we all put too many hours in; I think we'd all be a lot healthier and happier if we actually knew when to say enough's enough. What helps is being made aware of alternatives, having a good community where people talk about what they are doing and where we appreciate each other's different strengths.

I still find management roles an unattractive prospect. Policy making hasn't been part of my role and I don't really have any responsibility for management decisions and implementation. I guess when I first came here, a lot of my ideas were dismissed and it's disillusioning to feel that you're in isolation and that nobody else agrees, you start to question yourself. Before it was my own personal development and teaching that I was interested in, rather than the bigger picture. What I thought was limiting me before was myself rather than anything else, whereas now I think the system can be quite limiting. That made me feel quite frustrated and aware that there needed to be change at a higher level. My approach has been to find more like minded people and then together we can try to challenge policy makers to make improvements. Now, with major changes in senior management, I suddenly feel that there is potential to move

forward with things that I strongly believe in, and this is a time for optimism. I'm not sure everyone feels the same. There's been too much change for change's sake.

Time should be made for things that are important –teaching, outreach, research, collegiality, quality of life- and it doesn't necessarily take long to change people's attitudes, it just takes a sustained acknowledgement of the importance at higher levels. I am feeling more optimistic over these past few years because I have met more like-minded people. I think we need better communication, more explicit objectives and better structures within the university so that we can feel we are all working together towards a common goal.

In terms of my own career I guess I'd make all the same decisions. When I became a mother I accepted limited freedom of choice in my career. I have no regrets about my choices, but if the system had been different I would probably have done some things differently. I feel I'm just starting to forge an academic identity now. It's coming together more now than it has done in the past. Now my daughter is older and increasingly independent, I've got more freedom to actually develop my own interests. When people say "wouldn't you like to retire soon?" I'm surprised- I feel like I've got a lot more to offer now and I would appreciate a challenge.

## **8.2 Reflection**

Maira's opening statement describes her route to academia as being circuitous, however it displays a great capacity for flexibility and mobility which characterises perhaps how women succeed in their careers. Maira's career is actually no less circuitous than any other of the stories here, but because she appears from the outset particularly conscious of this a sense of 'uncertain identity' emerges within a context of discomfort with positional power. There is no account of her background, and the ideas which have formed her view of herself, however there is a transition in this story from a narrative script which aligns perhaps with a liberal feminist perspective, to one which is now

questioning the power relationships which have shaped her career both from an institutional and individual perspective.

Maira's *modus vivendi* displays perhaps a lack of trust in her internal conversation and this may have been a factor in her mis-diagnosing her goals early on in her career. Archer accounts for this condition of adjusting in her theory of agency:

Agents have to diagnose their situation, they have to identify their own interests and they must design projects they deem appropriate to attaining their ends. At all three points they are fallible: they can mis-diagnose their situation, mis-identify their interests, and mis-judge appropriate courses of action.

(Archer 2003:9)

However, Maira seems to have recently found a clearer direction for establishing status for her identity as a teacher in Higher Education – and a pre-92 institution - rather than researcher. In her present situation Maira's guiding *modus Vivendi* might be said to be in the *communicative reflexive* category of Archer's theory. This in part may have been the result of the focus on her family concerns. As her child has now reached a more independent age, she is finding a new *modus Vivendi* which will move towards the meta-reflexive position of aligning all three concerns of performance competence, physical well-being and self-worth.

Moria is the only one of my respondents with children. Whilst it is surely the case that there are any number of women academics who also have partners and children, Moria's story appears to be a familiar one in terms of the many women who in balancing a career with a family life find early ambitions tempered by decisions which favour a more dominant male partner. Maira does not overtly question the assumptions behind her choices; she compares herself with her partner and is careful not to blame him for perhaps not affording her more opportunities to develop her own career. She claims on balance that she has no regrets, however, in reflecting on her life she acknowledges that 'the system' has constrained these.

The system she is referring to is not made explicit or discussed, but in using this expression Maira seemed to assume we both knew what this meant, i.e. a

dominant culture in society, and in particular the Academy, which privileges male careers, evidenced by the dominance of males in senior positions. Moira is particularly critical of the competitive male culture which dominates research prowess in Higher Education, and feels strongly that women who succeed on this world do so by assuming male attributes, or rather by denying 'feminine' attributes. Feminine attributes are defined as an inclination to work in a less aggressive and more 'supportive environment'. To that extent it might be taken as a preference for feminist approaches to collaborative and participatory research, which in a positivist science discipline culture is hard to achieve. Although Moira draws comparisons between male and female career structures, she does not describe herself as a feminist or attempt to unpick her stance. It is clear that she feels that she has struggled in a male-dominated work environment, even though she enjoyed her own research and sees herself as having been capable of a research career.

Moira's idea that there are male and female 'attributes' is one commonly expressed, and this is an interesting issue. In the context of this thesis, I take forward the notion of women's 'values' rather than 'attributes'. However, Butler's position on gender norms arises here. Butler (1990) points to the effects of power which work on gender identity, and her position would reject any notion of feminine attributes or values, and we must be wary about these terms. As Hey (2006) points out, 'Butler is a particularly insightful commentator on the complex powers of language to 'name', wound, challenge and shift meaning' (p.442). In breaking with the idea of an immutable female, feminine or feminist subject, Butler challenges how conventional meanings of gender identity can be seen as fixed. 'Performing the self entails the obligation to 'do' gender not as an act of intentionality, but as 'performance' already set up by a pre-scripted rehearsal' (Hey, 2006: 444)

Like, Amanda, Moira rejects managerial roles and seems purposely to change her career to avoid these. Her chief motivation, which perhaps signals an ontological 'narrative script', appears as a desire to have a role of value to society. When Moira changed her career path from Nursing and returned to student life, she characterizes this as 'a selfish thing to do' She was clearly a

successful research student and post doc, but disliked the 'competitive' male-dominated research culture in academic life as a whole, preferring instead the teaching role which she sees as more worthwhile and of ultimate value.

She has a strong sense of a change occurring in the culture of higher Education, and sees this as an opportunity to rebuild her career in teaching. There is a sense of emancipatory zeal in her vision of re-imagining the Academy as a world where humanist well-being dominates and a wide range of academic roles are recognised and rewarded. She identifies the current expectations on academics as placing unreasonable stress on all concerned, although presumably the successful male academics she speaks of have managed to avoid the more administrative and 'caring' roles in order to progress their own careers.

Maira's chief relationship with me is as a 'teacher developer' and as someone she feels can help to shape institutional policy to support the vision of the student-focused Academy she projects, and as a woman she feels I will support. Now that she has begun to question the systems and power relationships which have shaped her career, she is looking for allies in an emancipatory quest. The recent changes in institutional management and executive give her some hope in this quest. The 'change for change's sake' possibly refers to what she believes is the institution's reactive and reactionary responses to neo-liberal forces. Maira expects there to be a more progressive, holistic and meaningful response to changing the cultures of the academy.

Maira is drawing hope and strength from meeting more 'like-minded' people as she embarks on rebuilding her career now that her family commitments recede. However, the spectre of age discrimination looms as she finds that now she has the time to devote to her career, she identifies that there is a discourse of ageism to deal with.

## CHAPTER 9: Vivienne

### 9.1 Vivienne's Story

I've been at Collegiate University since I was 18; I came here to do my undergraduate degree and am now a lecturer. My third year project supervisor suggested that I apply for an ESRC funded PhD, which I got, and at the end of my PhD I applied for a postdoctoral fellowship. Unfortunately I applied too late so had to get a job that year. I worked at various schools and FE Colleges teaching kids who had been excluded from secondary school. That was possibly the biggest learning experience in terms of how to engage students, because if you don't engage them they would get up and walk out the room. I also had a weekend job working as a youth worker and consultant for a local children's charity, and took a Counselling qualification during that year as well.

I thought I would continue teaching but then I was informed that I'd received the postdoctoral fellowship. The fellowship didn't involve any teaching but I had enrolled on a PGCE and needed some teaching to complete the second year. I volunteered to take over all the lectures and marking from a colleague on the Psychology degree. This was a good career move because the student feedback was so positive that it came to the attention of the Deputy Head of School. He suggested that I apply for a Teaching Associate post that was coming up and I was successful in achieving this post.

During my first year in this post, there was a distinct feeling of inferiority and the impression that some of the students and other lecturers viewed us as teaching assistants. We didn't feel that we were getting the credit or the respect.

Two years later, after a campaign by the Head of Faculty, everybody who was a Teaching Associate became a Lecturer for Teaching and Scholarship. It made the world of difference. It sounds very superficial to be affected so much by a title but it is something that becomes quite important. The title lecturer is absolutely essential in order to be taken seriously right across the world. It's

made a massive difference to the morale on the team and the sense that a career is possible even if you're going to pursue teaching excellence rather than research excellence.

It is possible to focus on pedagogic research. My discipline lends itself well to the study of education and learning methods. I have 300 students in my class, which gives me an opportunity to work with 300 potential participants. I've just had a publication accepted in two respected journals. Last year I won an award for a research paper that I'd had published. It seems a real shame that the things that I do aren't entered into the REF but I think the system will change. Having said that, it does take a lot of the pressure off. There's a lot of pressure for researchers who are expected to excel in both areas.

I work incredibly hard which is probably why opportunities arise, but I don't feel like I ever had a plan. I'm the only person in my family to go to university and, apart from my Grandma, who brought me up. I'm the only person in my family to have a job. We come from a very rough council estate. It's just not in our family history to go to university. Despite this, I always knew that I would go to University. I was always very academic and driven in school, and my grandma always supported me in every way possible. Even though we struggled to find enough money on many occasions (I went without birthday presents when I was ten because we just didn't have any money at the time), my grandma would somehow always find the cash to pay for a private tutor for one hour a week when I was struggling with my schoolwork. My grandparents have a strong work ethic and I have inherited this from them. Even though many others in my family do not work, I have always been encouraged to see the value in making a contribution to the world. Having said all of this, my grandparents never pushed me. My grandma always said that she was happy as long as I was happy, and that she didn't care if I became a professor or a shop assistant so long as I could smile when at work. In a strange way, I think that this lack of pressure has somehow made me more determined to make her proud of me. One of the happiest days of my life was seeing her holding back tears after I was awarded my teaching fellowship this year!

Although I always intended to go to University, it certainly wouldn't have occurred to me that a PhD would be something I was even capable of. I think options now are more open and it really helps when I talk to students to be able to say, look, this is where I come from and I did it. If I can do it surely anybody can do it. It's about the effort that you put in and the paths that you forge ahead.

I was poorly a couple of weeks ago and my colleagues refused to let me come into work and banned me from checking emails, they think I take too much on. They are under the impression that I do more than they might do. I'm also a counselling tutor for the counselling service so I do a couple of hours a week with students right across the university. I'm the head of year one, I'm the international students advisor and I edit the teaching website. I've really cut back this year because last year I just took on far too much.

Having said that, I don't have children. I think children take up a lot of time; I work in place of children. I am very close to my family but I don't have the obligations that go with having children. I quite happily stay in work until seven, eight o'clock at night and then go home. It doesn't feel like working hard because I'm not going home to ironing school uniforms and putting kids to bed. I am very close to my grandparents and live across the road from them. I specifically bought my house so I can just pop in after work and make sure everything is fine. Working and living somewhere else would be an awful wrench.

I suppose my next goal is senior lecturer, that is definitely something that I'm working towards and I'm very aware of what I would need. It would be the ultimate aim for most academics to become professors. I don't know of any professors on a teaching and scholarship contract and I'm not sure that I would be willing to go over to research. I never enjoyed research as much as teaching and don't think I would be happy changing my contract in order to progress. What I would like to see is more doors opening for teaching as an academic career route. The impression that I get is that if I want to progress in my career it's not going to be enough to be a really good lecturer. I have to be a member of committees as well as research. I'm very aware that the more administration I do, the more I have to drop my teaching load and move further and further away



from the thing that I really love. I'm very happy to stay as I am for now, but I am rather ambitious and I think that my long-term goal is to become one of the first psychology professors specifically focused on teaching and learning!

Everything that I've done I fell into accidentally. It seems to have been a series of coincidences and chance events and help from key people at critical times. I very rarely turn anything down, which is probably why I do so much. The way I see it, you never know when something wonderful might come out of it.

Teaching has always just been something that I really enjoy doing. Lecturing doesn't feel like work, I can't believe they pay me to do it, to be honest.

## **9.2 Reflection**

Vivienne is the youngest of my respondents and her career has progressed rapidly in the same institution from being an undergraduate and postgraduate to her appointment as a lecturer.

Like Nicola, she acknowledges her working class roots as a significant influence in her approach to education and a career, but is less burdened by family demands or expectations and displays no angst around this.

Vivienne has been brought up by her Grandmother in challenging circumstances and the bond in that relationship appears as the key factor which has influenced her desire to succeed. There is a strong emotional dimension to her motivation.

Vivienne indicates that her Grandmother, whilst supportive of her education, did not wish to burden her further with ambitious expectations. A goal of social mobility does not appear to be a driving force per se, a strong work ethic most certainly is and this may be attached to an identity as the breadwinner in her family, and the development of an obligation to use her academic capital for the common good. Vivienne comes across immediately as an activist, although does not attach this to any particular social, political, religious or feminist ideology.

Vivienne appears highly agentic; she is confidently reliant on her own interior dialogue, which is very strong and equates with Archer's (2003) *autonomous*

*reflexive* category. She accepts her idea of her responsibilities towards her students, family and institution as her prime concern and engages forcefully with structural obstacles to her goals in a highly strategic manner.

Vivienne has a strong identity as a teacher deriving from her work with schools and colleges whilst working her way through University. She has a strong sense of contributing to society and view of the empowering impact of education. She targets her efforts initially on the socially excluded, but when success in academia leads to a teaching post in her university, she embraces the teaching role as an area to apply her activism. She perceives that teaching has a lower status in the Academy, but not to herself. Vivienne views student learning and welfare with no ambivalence in terms of its parity with research, and derives her own career esteem from being recognised by peers and students as an excellent teacher. She successfully campaigns for equal recognition of staff on teaching only contracts and underplays what a significant achievement this is in one of the most research focused areas of the University.

Vivienne has been successful in producing a prodigious amount of pedagogic research, and whilst she has campaigned for parity of teaching and research in terms of career progression, she does not appear to think she can achieve a research career. She regrets this to some extent and thinks this might change, but nevertheless accepts the lack of parity pedagogic research has with pure discipline-based research. This perhaps demonstrates the power that empirical discipline based research wields on academic careers, and continues to present barriers to the ways in which Universities conduct research, project their research identity, and how this is sustained by research funding regimes which shape the system.

Vivienne recognises that the pressure to produce research outputs put undue pressure on 'active researchers' and seems reluctant to fully embrace that as a choice. Although it is evident that she works at an incredible pace and output, her deference to the current research regime perhaps demonstrates how embedded the research –teaching divide is and how more valued research labour is. However, Vivienne, perhaps more than my other respondents, feels

her own agency in this. She really enjoys teaching, as well as viewing it as a social responsibility,

Vivienne does not think that her achievements are extraordinary and she is uncomfortable with blowing her own trumpet. She conveys a sense that it is individual merit and effort which can bring reward 'If I can do this surely anybody can do it'. She sees this as a rallying call to her social class and an inspiration for her students, but also aligns with the neo-liberal agenda of individualism. Vivienne embraces emotional labour as very much part of the teaching role, and there appears to be some tension with her colleagues over this. However, she is not deflected or unduly troubled by it.

The notion that achievement in the work sphere is derived in part from a lack of having children is repeated in Vivienne's account of her success, although she does have dependents in her Grandparents. There is a sense in all these accounts that women can't have it all, but Vivienne appears less pained by this at this stage of her career.

Vivienne is not shackled to an idea of academic success linked to research success, and is seeing the opportunities afforded by a shift towards the Student Engagement agenda, growing in importance with the new student fees regime. Vivienne sees affordances of career progression possibilities in this agenda, encouraged by the rapid trajectory she has forged through teaching success, and the moves the University is making to afford parity of esteem to teaching progression routes.

Vivienne sees her career as a serendipitous rather than planned series of stages, with an overall philosophy that 'rarely turning anything down' usually leads to 'something wonderful' coming out of it. However, she now has the aim of becoming the first professor of teaching and learning in her department firmly in her sights. For Vivienne, the Higher Education policy structures are producing institutional shifts which perhaps perfectly align with her agentic goals.

However, this begs the question of why she has to work so hard to achieve this.

Vivienne engages in a huge amount of emotional labour in her department, and sees the task of taking over the entire teaching load of a colleague in favour of

his research as a 'career move' ,as it brought her to the attention of her Head of Faculty at an early stage. This not only reveals the paternalistic hierarchy, but here we can perhaps see the ways in which 'subject' identity is formed (Butler, 1990). As Vivienne sees her emotional labour rewarded she continues to increase it. It enables the institution to imprint its own idea of identity on her career. Vivienne accepts this identity, which fits with her sense of a core autonomous reflexive self, grounded in a working class work ethic.

## CHAPTER 10: Discussion

The broad research questions which have guided my research have been:

1. What are the experiences of women academics in developing their careers and academic identities?
2. How can case stories of the career choices made by women academics help Academic developers understand gender inequalities in higher education?
3. What are the implications of gender equalities in the academy for the practices of Academic Development?

The stories in the previous chapters have provided a powerful illumination of the lived experience of the women participants as they have constructed their academic careers and identities. The discussion in this chapter will develop the plot of my thesis by using a poststructural interpretative analysis to draw out perspectives which illuminate gender inequalities imposed by wider social structures and how these are replicated within the academy to impact on women's sense of agency, career choices and positions within the academy.

These are complex relationships and an analysis of these data can represent only a partial view. However, the view presented has theoretical significance in displaying a vivid example of how wider social structures are replicated within the academy and interact with individual agency to offer opportunities for women whilst simultaneously continuing to restrict them. A micro-political analysis of these effects on the women's academic identity produces a heuristic in 10.4 below with which to discuss the implications for Academic Development practices in 10.4.1.

My research questions correspond to the headings which guide the discussion in this chapter and build on the reflections in Chapters 5-9 in terms of a) The women's experiences in developing their careers and academic identities; b) how the case stories help Academic developers understand gender equalities in Higher Education c) Implications of gender equalities for the practices of Academic Development .The further meanings I draw from the themes identified

here – particularly for my own practice as an Academic Developer - will be expanded on in the concluding chapter of the thesis.

## **10.1 The lived experience of women academics**

I have identified significant aspects which run as narrative threads through the women's accounts. These are the key themes in terms of their lived experiences in the academy, and around which they identify and prioritise their concerns in terms of Archer's construct of *modus vivendi*. In a poststructural analysis these themes, sometimes cruelly, also represent the conditions of their environment which are imprinting themselves on their academic identities, and through which can be seen to be performing gendered academic identities in the Butlerian sense. These appear as commonalities in their academic career journeys. I have named them as: 1) Pain and Pleasure; 2) Chaos and Order; 3) Status Symbols; 4) Professionalism, and 4) New Institutional Agendas.

### **10.1.1 Pain and Pleasure.**

The pain and pleasure in these accounts revolve around the things which women lose in their building of academic identity, set against the gains they achieve. They, unlike their male colleagues, negotiate a career ladder which is not set up in their favour. The women ascribe their experiences to their relatively under-valued position in a dominant institutional hierarchy where a masculinist culture prevails.

Although much is made of the issue of childcare in the gender equalities discourses, the women in my case stories do not express losses merely in terms of not having children (Nicola, Josie, Vivienne), or the limitations that having children brings to career building (Moira); losses are also acknowledged in terms of the suppression of values they all espouse e.g. professional concerns for transformation (making a difference through emotional labour) and the lack of recognition and reward for this work; or it being the only aspect of success that is rewarded and potential for a research career as subservient to this (Vivienne, Moira and Josie). The stories evidence the predominance of the individualistic research ethic in Higher Education, reflecting the neo-liberal

performative culture. The pleasure of success is afforded only by the predominant ethic, which for these women produces pain and struggle. They counter this by finding pleasure in winning, resonant of “illicit pleasures of competition” (Hey, 2006) and finding their own ways of developing research interests which are not always recognised by their own institutions. These close-up pictures of what it feels like to have an academic career convey the socially produced – performative in the Butlerian sense – effect of power relationships within the academy and resonate at its most painful with notions of symbolic violence .

Much of the sense of struggle which is expressed in these stories arises from affective responses which are gendered in terms of the ways in which society predominantly expects women to perform these caring roles. The death of a mother, the expectations arising from particular social backgrounds and the sense of debt owed to family, mentors and colleagues. The emotional impact of these events act on the present as well as the past, and loom over the future. The duality of pleasure and pain derives from success in overcoming the odds, underpinned by a driving sense of responsibility to significant others in their lives. This sense of responsibility to others transfers to colleagues in the work place and responsibility to students. Within a very strong work ethic, teaching is expressly prioritised as a social value over research, although all have research interests and derive considerable pleasure from success in research. The pain comes from the women trading away significant values, part of their sense of being, in order to achieve success on the academy’s terms.

Nicola’s story perhaps conveys the most vivid struggle with a great deal of personal pain in living up to the vision of academic identity she on one hand recognizes as having been ‘thought in to ‘ her, but on the other hand, is not able to escape. The more she sacrifices to her singular drive to fulfil her aspirations, which she positions in terms of a destiny, the higher her stake in the system she recognises as oppressive. She derives pleasure in her considerable achievements, but is at a stage where she questions the cost of it. Although she questions the demands of the academy as ‘the big ravenous beast’, its symbols of power and status have become paramount to her sense of identity.

It is interesting that Nicola and Vivienne, the two women who self-declare as working class, seem the most concerned with acquiring the status of academic identity and strive ardently to collect these symbols. Both Nicola and Vivienne embrace the punishing work ethic as part of a responsibility they feel they owe to their class origins; that is to succeed on behalf of their class and make their families proud. A sense of guilt is reinforced through this responsibility, and possibly contributes to Nicola's 'constant backdrop of terror'. In this way it can be seen how class continues to act symbolically on their academic identities even though it has been transcended in their social mobility, conferred by considerable success in their educational, professional and now academic careers.

A much desired entry into the academy comes as a shock when they encounter a privileged culture represented by, as Nicola puts it, the 'obsession the institution has with research'. Nevertheless, they do not reject this but acknowledge its pleasures as well as its pain, desire it and attempt to embrace it. Moira had originally begun by envisioning a research career, following her PhD. However, to varying degrees all the women struggle to accept what they experience as the singular and individualistic nature of the research culture, which is a male dominated area, reflected by the largely male executive directing institutional policies which privilege research careers over teaching. It could be said that the women are disposed towards the collaborative nature of teaching as opposed to the competitive nature of research and publication.

Any success the women achieve with their own research is attributed to personal sponsors or champions, which accords with the main thrust of the 'women into' strand of gender equalities policies and proliferation of faith in mentoring schemes. However, Vivienne's pedagogic research success is completely ignored in a high profile Psychology Department, and she is assigned a teaching only contract. Amanda's research is also initially ignored inside her institution. Amanda has managed to gain a foothold by establishing her research reputation outside the institution at a time before the neo-liberal devices of the Research Assessment Exercise and the Research Excellence Framework were established. Amanda points to the damaging and reductive



effects of this and the difficulties new academic staff will have in comparison to the affordances of her own journey: “If you don’t fit into a hub, your research has no value”.

However, although the women express the career imitations they face it is clear that these are successful women who are identifying pleasures in academic life which sustains them in the struggle. The case stories show how women value ‘being an intellectual’ (Nicola). This resonates strongly with the agentic idea of intellectual selfhood which emerges as a strong force in feminism from Beauvoir onwards. (Clegg, 2008). It is also acknowledged in poststructuralist authors, who refer to the ‘perverse pleasures’ of intellectual life (Hey, 2004).

### **10.1.2 Affective dimensions**

Clearly, pain and pleasure are experienced in these stories as strong affects. I have not attempted to explore this aspect of Archer’s model in great detail but she recognises that the internal conversation is emotional as well as cognitive, and associated with risky areas in the *modus vivendi*. A Butlerian position would be that emotions are social effects.

However, it is important at this point to declare how I am viewing affective dimensions in the context of my thesis; my concerns are the implications for well-being. The socio-cultural conditions in the academy produce physical responses not just symbolic ones.

In her work on employee well-being in higher education, Woods (2010) draws on a conceptual framework for studying emotions, developed from the work of the psychologist Richard Lazarus. She distinguishes between feelings and affects in her definition of emotions. For Woods, feelings are sensory responses to the environment (feeling cold or hot, feeling tired), and are usually regarded as neutral. Affects, in contrast, include attitudes, beliefs, opinions and motivations, which she determines as evaluative (Woods 2010). Ahmed (2004: 9) refers to the ‘sociality of emotion’ and both Wood and Ahmed regard emotions as social and cultural practices rather than psychological states. Ahmed (2004) emphasises what emotions do rather than what they are.

These distinctions between feeling and affect in defining emotion are useful because in defining emotions as both a physical response and a social practice they help to resolve the dilemma of whether emotions are one or the other.

Woods' emotional categories also raise the element of risk connected to emotions. Negative emotions will occur when someone perceives a danger or barrier to achieving set goals, while positive emotions will emerge when such dangers are absent or overcome. So, emotions can be viewed as psychological aspects of personal experience. In Woods' model the key characteristics of emotions are that a) they have a physiological dimension and b) they have implications for personal goals and, consequently, for well-being. This model ties in with the accounts of emotions and decision -making which come through in the case stories here.

There is also a resonance in these stories of pain and pleasure with Lauren Berlant's exposition of the affective. She posits that a condition of 'cruel optimism' exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing. Berlant (2011) describes the cruel optimism that has prevailed since the 1980s, as the social-democratic promise of upward mobility has dissolved into austerity. People have remained attached to unachievable fantasies of the good life—with its promises of upward mobility, job security, political and social equality, despite evidence that liberal-capitalist societies can no longer be counted on to provide such affordances. Berlant argues that the historical present is perceived affectively before it is understood in any other way, and traces affective and aesthetic responses to the dramas of adjustment that unfold amid talk of precarity, contingency, and crisis. Berlant's understanding of emotion is that it has a profound relationship to the body.

In the telling of stories with personal significance this study reveals a strong affective dimension whereby affect, in Woods' and Ahmed's terms, can be seen in relationship to and as a product of a social structure. The visceral effect resonates with Berlant's notion of cruel optimism, as the women struggle to reconcile their hopes for the future. I will return to this in my discussion on the implications of my research in Chapter 11.

### **10.1.3 Chaos and order: “the well run ship**

The tension between the research environment which is seen as competitive and individualistic and the alternative values of co-operation, sense of organisation and social responsibility, can be seen in how the women undertake their work. They value “getting things done well”. This is important to the women and is in contrast to the seeming chaos they encountered in the academy compared to the more ordered environment of their previous professional fields. Their prior conceptions of an academic career being about being an intellectual, writing, knowledge creation and high level teaching, dissolves into confusion: “my first experience of teaching was horrendous, the chaos was dreadful”. The pursuit of individual research careers is equated with the undervaluing of administration and teaching, aspects they felt were actually the most important. The stressful environment though is recognised as something that all young academics encounter; Josie has taken the support role in negotiating this for the young academics in her department, most of whom are male.

Although an ordered environment appears to be necessary, none of the women have consciously transferred this into an ordered career plan. They mostly assign their successes to good fortune, happenstance, and the sponsorship of others – although the support of family, friends and colleagues is a significant factor for them, emphasising their value of collaborative versus competitive ways of working.

Order is typically considered to be an administrative function performed by women, as evidenced by the roles which women typically hold in the academy. Male colleagues are better able to insulate themselves from it because they are able to consider it less important or beneath them. Women appear in these accounts to take a more holistic view of their work. They respond to their environment and are concerned if it is not ordered.

These developments seem not just to impact in women’s career journeys but reflect the ways in which knowledge production itself is performed within the academy as constructed through a masculinist tradition.

#### **10.1.4 Status Symbols**

There are clear tensions between the dominant symbols of success (research), and the women's achievements in the areas they value (teaching). The relative lack of recognition of the aspects of academic life which women value and mostly occupy is evident. Women in these stories have to choose between chasing the dominant status symbols which lead to promotion and the ways of being, knowing and doing that they value. The question arises, why are these choices so stark? What does the academy gain by maintaining the structures that produce these effects and effectively exclude women unless they choose a painful career journey? This can only be explained by the vested interest of the academy in maintaining hierarchical structures to exercise control. This is administered through the distribution of status symbols. The rewards offered by the academy are through recognition of research.

Unsurprisingly, the women do seek recognition for their work. Nicola in particular specifically says "symbols of recognition are very important to me". However, this is accompanied by a "backdrop of terror" that she might fail. As such the acquisition of status goes hand in hand with her narrative script of pain and pleasure. Although she is astonished to find herself a "well published academic in a top university" and proud of that status, she denies ambition and attributes success to anxiety and her core values are linked to professional values of 'making a difference' to society through her discipline. Although this feature is more highly dramatised in Nicola's account, it is a strong thread in all the narratives.

#### **10.1.5 Professionalism**

The women have all progressed to the academy through careers in caring or customer-focused professions. Nicola has entered the academy in a professional academic discipline, Social Work Education. All the others, to greater or lesser extents, have pursued academic disciplines linked to an already established professional identity which emphasises social responsibility. A process of identity management has already been established. Their commitment to teaching, mentoring, supporting colleagues, creating support

networks, social responsibility, have been re-enforced through these professional routes and the training associated with them. These aspects represent a student/client focused mission held by all the women and appear as their chief sites of pleasure in their roles in the academy. The relationships they foster in their networks, supporting colleagues and students, is in a sense a parallel experience to building a family. Only Moira has any children, but all have dedicated commitments to a wider family and seek to build 'work families' in their relationships with colleagues.

However, in spite of their dedication to a professional outlook, there is a rejection of managerialism and management roles as a route to promotion in the academy. The business of managers is seen as reductive and about only valuing what can be measured and controlled. Management involves the unpleasant effects of vertical, hierarchical authority – which the women largely reject. There is a tension between central control and organic networks of collaboration. However, whether in formal management roles or not, the women do 'manage' – with reference to the well run ship above.

It is striking that although at the interview stages I was looking out for what the women said about the role of Academic Development in their conceptions of professional and career development, no mention was made of this.

#### **10.1.6 New Institutional Agendas**

Student centred policy agendas are now greatly increasing in the age of austerity with new funding regimes where student fees have tripled since 2010. Whereas the business of teaching, at least in pre-92 institutions, has previously been seen as secondary to research, the emphasis on the student experience is rapidly becoming predominant across all types of institution. Indeed new teaching oriented institutions are being created and the HE landscape is being reconfigured. This is a cause for optimism for my participants as the values which the women express in terms of social transformation as a purpose in teaching and learning, dismay in managerial hierarchies which privilege research, may now provide opportunities for their careers to improve. These women have struggled to achieve their successes to date, but may now be in

the vanguard of a significant change which they can welcome in terms of how women's careers might now develop and be rewarded. This leads to the question of to what extent women are able to transform the values of the academy or is the academy merely continuing to mould the women for institutional purposes. Even where promotion frameworks are nominally expressing a teaching route to promotion, there are very few professors in pre-92 institutions promoted for services to teaching. So, teaching may become better rewarded, but women will still largely inhabit the teaching roles and the 'para academic' roles as teaching and research becomes even more polarised.

It is not clear whether the academy will change its value systems, but the new institutional agendas are in fact seen by the women here as an emerging framework which provides opportunities for change. These agendas have heightened the tensions latent in the system.

In Table 10.1 below I have distilled the values identified above from the data/case stories in order to broadly illustrate:

1. Institutional values which currently dominate academic career journeys
2. The values espoused by the women and exploited by the institution
3. New institutional agendas which have emerged and appear to favour women's values.

This analysis identifies values which the women ascribe to the dominant culture of the academy set against the values which characterize their own approaches.

It is important to distinguish between attributes and values here. I am not suggesting that there are such things as 'women's attributes', or an unchanging core of institutional values, but certainly common sets of values can be seen in the women's stories which are significant in influencing choices made and consequently impact on the lived experience.

**Table 10.1: Women's Values v Institutional Values and Agendas**

<b>1: Institutional Values</b> <i>accepted steps to career progress</i>	<b>2: Women's Values</b> <i>exploited by the institution</i>	<b>3: New Institutional Agendas</b> <i>appearing to favour women</i>
Managerialism	Teaching/ Caring	Promotion frameworks which explicitly reward teaching and managing teaching
Competitive research culture - individualism	Social responsibility – collaboration	Student Engagement/employability
Symbols of status/achievement	Order out of chaos	Student Experience
Performance indicators	Family / Supporting colleagues	Proliferation of 'administrative' 'para-academic' roles

I will incorporate these elements into a heuristic device to discuss the implications in 10.4 below

## **10. 2 Understandings of gender inequalities:**

The case stories in my study are contributing powerful personal stories which illustrate how inequalities are operating in the careers of women academics. The use of a poststructural lens aids understanding of the ways in which gender is performed and embodied in career choices and the Critical Realist lens explores the sense of self agency the women have, as seen through their own perspectives.

### **10.2.1 The discursive construction of identity and agency**

My data accords with the existing literature, reviewed in Chapter 3, which views identity as a complex concept. At the theoretical level, identity as a sense of enduring self would appear to be a prerequisite of 'agency'. The ways in which the women in this research have expressed their academic identity through career journeys resonates with the theory of agentic identity espoused by Archer (2003) and discussed in Chapter 2 and 3. In their accounts a *modus vivendi* can be discerned which guides their decisions as they negotiate their

realities. The values which I have distilled from their accounts has recognised their expressed sense of a 'core self' which makes it possible for them to live through changes in structure and culture. However, in poststructuralist theory, identity is not an essential core of the person – but a set of social performances. Each of my respondents pointed to various identities which were important to them: daughter, granddaughter, child, professional, manager, teacher, academic, wife, friend, and colleague. The tensions between these identity performances are apparent. We have also seen that these realities are experienced within a neo-liberal policy environment which maintains an institutional hierarchy in the academy which is still a predominately male hegemony. What can be seen are the pressures and tensions of institutional identity performance, influencing the academic identity formation of the women, judged by positivist traditions of a 'masculinist' research culture.

### **10.2.2 Gender identity performances**

A striking finding, which supports a poststructuralist interpretation of identity, is the extent to which the women in these stories locate the origins of their career paths in early childhood experiences, and the effect and affect of these as they encounter the academy. This supports the notion of performativity developed by Butler (1990, 1993, and 2004) where concepts of 'performativity' and 'citationality', operate to structure what is in fact a fictive idea of how they must behave as women. (Hey, 2006). Butler (1990, 1993) argues that gender identity is not attached to an immutable biological binary of male/female. It is the iterative nature of these performances that creates the illusion of the indelible self.

Butler's idea of identity performance can be recognised in the stories here. The women's agency is constrained by gendered performances, reinforced by the roles women are occupying in the academy. This citation of these norms replicates itself in the academy with gendered notions of how research, teaching, management, policy 'ought to be done'.

What can be seen in the case stories is women being and becoming academics and the way in which socially produced ontological orientations, expressed as



agency, interact with dominant positivist cultural structures of the academy, during a period of time when neo-liberalism has established itself as the dominant political-economic discourse influencing policy in Higher Education. However, the structures created by that discourse are also struggling with new institutional agendas being forged through scarcity of resources in a new age of austerity. The women are in danger of becoming the servants of the new institutional agendas at the very same time as they are seemingly being offered opportunities by it.

Thus, what we have is an academy that is grappling with the complexity of late modern life

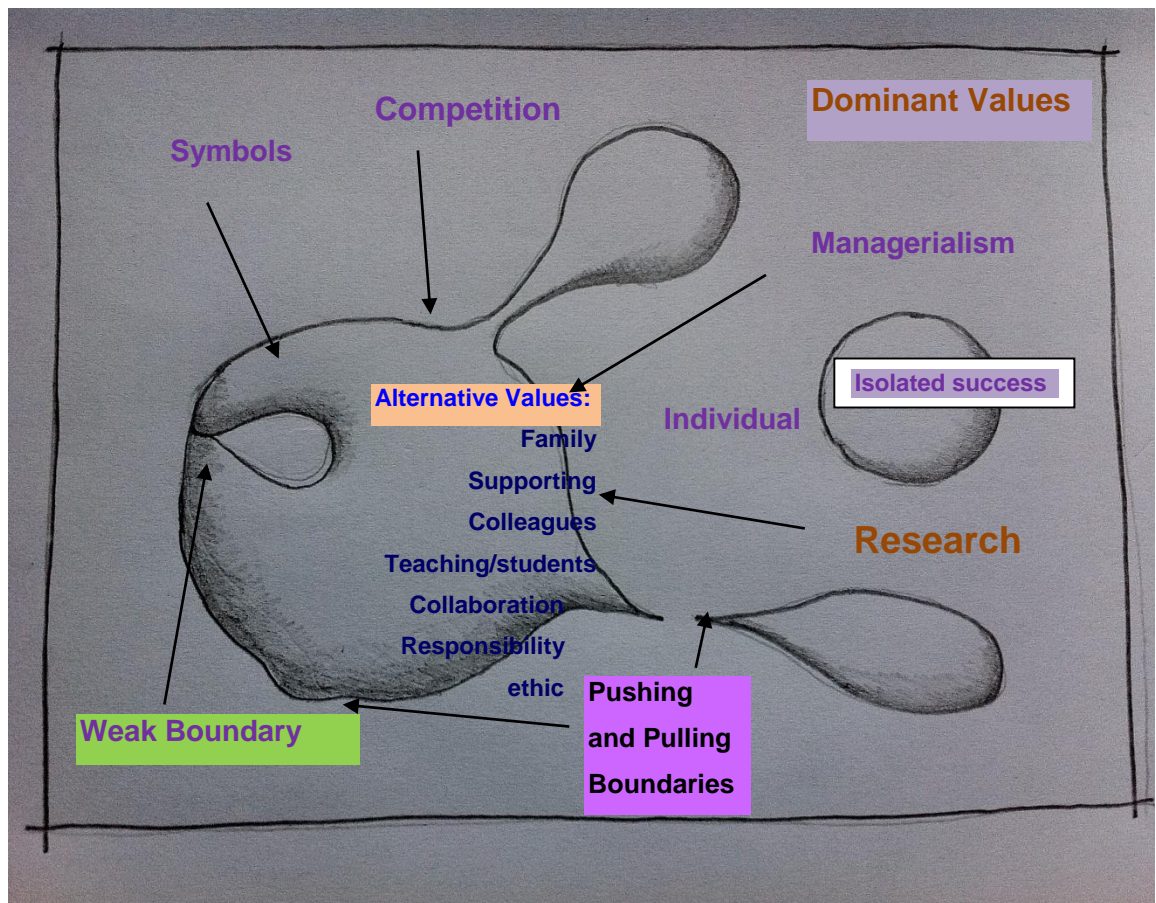
(Dunne, Pryor and Yates, 2005:16)

### **10.3 Implications of gender equalities for the practices of academic development: women transforming the academy or academy transforming women?**

This third section in the chapter presents and discusses the boundary relationships between structure and agency in the women's relationships with the academy and the implications – to what extent are the women's values and the values of the academy shaping each other in endless becomings? What are the implications for Academic Development?

The following heuristic device provides a visual picture with which to discuss women's positioning within dominant power discourses of the academy, using the characteristics set out in the Table 10.1 above.

**Figure 10.1: Women transforming the academy or academy transforming women?**



The drawn rectangle represents the dominant values of the neo-liberal socio-economic structures replicated within the macro (and meso) level hegemonic structures of the academy. The rectangular shape and the straight lines represent the rigid nature of academy hierarchy as experienced by the women. The organic shapes represent the dynamic relationships between alternative values as expressed by the women in my stories, and the ways in which the value sets develop and interact. The zone of alternative values is where the women feel more comfortable, powerful and agentic. They all, to greater or lesser extents wish that zone to expand to create a climate within the academy that favours more diverse 'ways of being, knowing and doing'.

The shapes are 'plastic' in nature constantly shifting as women encounter the dominant values, reject them or accept them. What can be seen is that it is extremely difficult to transform them. At the weak boundary women can find

themselves inside or outside resulting in various effects. At this boundary the dominant forces will easily follow inside. Moira, for example, occupies a position where she feels agency in the potential for her values to transform the structured institutional values, or that the values of the structures are changing to meet her values. However, she is limited to a specific role – teaching co-ordinator – within a large research focused Science Faculty which preserves its own male-dominated research culture and does little to promote women through the ranks on the basis of their teaching. Similarly, Vivienne's departmental structures and values assign her to a teaching only contract and awarded symbols of recognition which do little to encourage her as an early career academic to inhabit a full academic research career. She has it in her sights to achieve the first 'teaching professorship' in the University, but why is she having to struggle so hard for this, and indeed why does her research area afford so little cultural capital?

It is useful for the academy to recognise these alternative values, but they are controlled by the dominant values. It is hard for women to break out as they may be comfortable, happy and successful in these locations. As soon as they move out of the bubble of alternative values they will encounter values to which they do not subscribe and where there is considerable pain in the struggle to reconcile. Here there is much danger of failure and the 'constant backdrop of terror' continues. Those who attempt this – as represented by the free bubble - can find themselves rewarded by the institution, but isolated and insecure (sites of pain), relying on the symbols of success (sites of pleasure) but subject to symbolic violence of the system which demands performance on its own managerialist terms. Nicola achieves this, and finds pleasure in a discipline which is woman dominated and where she can feel support –but actually that support is all about achieving the symbols of the dominant values – and everyone potentially remains in the toilet crying over research rankings. The free bubble is floating in the prevailing waters and can do little to change the tide.

Amanda's strong organisational skills have forged herself a research niche where she can find a good position in the academy's valued structures through

her unique research subject and expertise, whilst still retaining her position in the networked community of shared values. Amanda is able to push and pull the boundaries. However, her position will remain inside the zone unless she is able to expand her research hub within the institution. Her location in a post 92 institution has to a large extent enabled her promotion as it is teaching focused, but as she says herself, her motivation to get to Readership is not 'academic' but pragmatic. She has absolutely no interest in transforming the structures.

Current attempts to address issues of women's representation in the academy by promoting them outside of the bubbles will be of limited effect. Real change will only be effected by expanding the bubbles until they occupy a critical mass and eventually deform the rigidity of the academy's rectilinear boundaries. The forces that the academy employs to control the alternative values as they gain credibility through the new institutional agendas are represented by the arrows; Symbols, Competition, Managerialism, Research.

The tension is at the boundaries where the traditional forces encounter the alternative values of the women. As the bubbles pulse due to the changing balance of these forces, the outcome is uncertain. To expect the elite to relinquish control is fantasy; all gains must be the result of struggle. As evidenced by the women's stories, the struggle ebbs and flows within an individual's experience over time, quite heroic gains can be lost. So, the individual's experience can be quite heart-breaking; and it is in the academy's interests to foster its competitive nature to preserve the status quo. This fractures the possible alliances that women could make.

However, the value zones held in tension are vulnerable in the current post-capitalist neo-liberal crisis. The dominant hegemony may have to negotiate. I will draw out briefly below the implications of my research for Academic Development and further develop these in Chapter 11.

#### **10.4 The implications for the practices of Academic Development**

These case stories, in providing up close and personal insights into women's gendered experiences of forging academic careers, have implications for the

practices of academic development and the career journeys of academic developers.

Academic Development is one of the areas of the academy which women have successfully moved into in large numbers. A similar study of women academic developers is very likely to present similar experiences in terms of negotiating the masculinist, neo-liberal environment of HE, with its attendant pains and pleasures. This study has certainly provided a better understanding of my own personal experiences, struggling with the irreconcilable binaries, tensions and clashes of values and identities as an academic developer.

There has been much attention in the field of academic practice to embrace the Widening Participation agendas and raise awareness of inequalities in terms of student access and barriers to learning in pedagogic practices. However, Universities – and therefore the practices of academic development rarely pay much attention to inequalities operating more widely in the academy. In particular, gender issues are often thought of as being largely addressed through the notions of meritocracy inherent in HR policies and /or through ‘women into’ approaches of mentoring schemes. .

I would argue that if academic developers are to move beyond a role which reproduces the neo-liberal positivist policy environment it is important for academic developers to understand how power works to exclude certain groups of staff as well as students. There is much potential and urgency for the academy to recognise structural inequalities within the academy more widely if it is actually to address Widening Participation for students in a long term sustainable agenda for change (Burke, 2012; Burke and Crozier, 2013; 2014). It is important that academic developers, as well as lecturers, managers and policy makers, critically reflect on the complex processes whereby inequalities might be reproduced through current teaching and learning practices, strategic plans and HR equalities policies, within all of which academic developers are implicated.

The counter-hegemonic discourses of academic development referred to in Chapter 3 are growing and this needs wider acknowledgement and discussion

within academic development practice ,particularly if the struggles of identity which are now well documented, are not to be replicated by a new generation (Lee and McWilliam, 2008).

My research suggests that whilst academic developers should, as McWilliam and others have indicated, focus more on being aware of the game. Women in all roles within the academy, are in the same game when it comes to facing structural inequality.

## CHAPTER 11 Findings: Concluding Comments

In this study I have used narrative inquiry to explore and co-construct case stories of five women's career experiences in Higher Education at a time of significant educational change. The 5 case stories provide insights into the life worlds of women academics developing their careers. The research has a feminist standpoint and two contrasting theoretical frameworks have enabled me to derive meanings from the data and to explore the women's own sense of agency in becoming academics and the limits of this within the neo-liberal and gendered academic environment.

What emerges are the dynamic relationships between performances of gender; academic identity; the gendered structures of the academy and the ways in which the women perceive the enactment of their own agency in a process of *modus vivendi*. (Butler, 1990; 2005; 2004; Archer, 2003). The key themes occurring in the stories have been taken forward in a micro-political analysis which contrasts the women's expressed values with those of the institution.

The findings illustrate the complex gendered socio-cultural relationships impacting on women's academic journeys set against the nature of privileged policy making within the academy, created through the dominance of a male hegemony and a neo-liberal global environment. The case stories contribute to the wider debate on gender inequality in the academy, and as such support the growing counter-hegemonic feminist literature which positions gender inequality as being a structural issue rather than a numbers game of 'women into' policies.

Whilst these conditions are well known in feminist literature, they are less well discussed in the practices of academic development. My research illustrates the need to create environments within which academic developers can more effectively acknowledge the structural nature of gender inequalities in order to contribute to progress in policy making for the benefit of all women in the academy; students and staff. This includes approaches to professional

development which situate academic developers in partnership with women academics in order to better support shared values.

In this chapter I discuss my main findings with respect to the research questions and discuss the implications for my own practice as an academic developer. Limitations of the study will be acknowledged. I will end with a summary of the contribution to knowledge and a short reflection on my doctoral journey.

### **11.1 *Women academics' career experiences***

The co-constructed case stories have presented the lived career experiences of five women academics. Whilst these experiences cannot be generalised, they bring to life the dissonance between the personal values and desires of my participants in contrast to those of their institutions, driven by the neo-liberal policy environment in Higher Education. Although the women accommodate the dissonance in various ways, both consciously (agency) and unconsciously (performatively), the struggle produces disproportionate pain alongside the pleasure of achievement. It would appear that they have to strive exceptionally hard to achieve status and promotion – or even a research career – and for some the goal is not attractive enough for them to move from the areas of the academy where they are accepted and have established what might be described as a way of being which suits their values.

The women in these stories, in spite of their struggles, remain largely optimistic about their future. The optimism arises from a growing confidence and self-awareness of their own potential and perhaps the impossibility of conforming to existing structures. Their optimism points to the will to forge new paths in the academy of the future and to faith in their own agency. But, how possible is it to oppose the dominant hegemonic discourses in a state of affairs where driven women have become the perfect workers for capital (Skeggs, 1997)? This seems to me to be the cruel optimism as defined by Berlant (2011) whereby attachment to a problematic object is maintained. My thesis provides an illustration of this condition. As significantly, there is also present in the stories a strong sense of the women's attachment to the 'intellectual self', which whether



‘thought into’ them or not resonates through the history of feminism as allocation of ‘perverse pleasure’ (Hey, 2006).

My findings have revealed significant challenges and risks involved in the women’s desire for transformation in the academy structures; recognition of inclusive modes of working and academic identities which acknowledge more diverse ways of being, knowing and doing. The ways in which the academy’s structures exclude them whilst at the same time seeming to offer opportunity (e.g. through new institutional agendas which favour teaching) is symptomatic of an equalities mission that, whilst in place at policy level, has certainly not been achieved in practice.

#### **11.1.1 How do these women construct their academic identities?**

The women’s own accounts resonate with identities shaped by continuous internal conversations in accord with Margaret Archer’s idea of the *modus vivendi* and her categories of reflexivity that can be seen in the decisions and choices they make. The co-construction of stories from dialogic interviews lends some insight into this process of the interior conversation. However, using Butler’s poststructuralist position, what is evident and more significant to me, is the tension between the women’s own sense of agency and the gendered structures of the social worlds they inhabit; continually generating an environment at odds with their own values and which has defined their career possibilities, both inside and outside the academy. Notions of agency are important at various levels, not least to avoid despair, and are also convenient to the discourse of neo-liberal insistence on meritocracy which hampers the equalities debates. The women in my study are constructing their identities in relationship to this discourse and are in constant tension with it.

My study has shown the powerful relationships which construct women’s academic identities within a web of social and political discourses. Whilst my participants see themselves as agentic, I have shown that agency is limited by gendered identity performances reproducing themselves within the academy through discourses of wider society and activities determined by a neo-liberal performative policy environment in Higher Education.

## **11.2 How can the case stories of the career choices made by women academics help Academic developers understand gender inequalities in HE?**

My thesis posits a critique of the positivist policy discourse from the perspective of gender, it shows how the discourses served by academic development practices, including those of equalities, have been infiltrated by a 'masculinist' performativity. As such women academics and academic developers – a field mostly inhabited by women – have to internalise a masculine performativity culture in order to progress their careers. These case stories have increased my understanding of how inequality is embedded structurally, and give insights into why equalities policies are limited in their outcomes.

A critical realist lens illuminates the women's sense of their own agency which has driven their success and the worlds they have carved out for themselves within the academy. However it can be seen how agency is over-emphasised and does not satisfactorily explain the pain evident in women's stories of driven career-making in a masculine culture. A feminist approach and poststructural theoretical framework has helped me to find a way to look sceptically at the heroic stories of these women. The women in my stories have achieved success in their own terms, but a poststructuralist interpretation illuminates the limitations women experience in terms of the worlds they are allowed to inhabit, and the difficulties breaking into the 'hallowed' areas of the dominant culture. This contributes to understandings of the lack of women in leadership roles in Higher Education.

### **11.2.1 Implications for gender equalities policy making in the UK academy**

There is increasing recognition that the problem for gender equalities policy is a prevailing notion of meritocracy that considers gender equalities as largely accomplished (Morley 2012). My research supports the position that organisational cultures and priorities of the academy are still geared up to the dominant group and apply to both staff and students. My theoretical analysis of

the power relationships reveals the intransigency of deeply rooted structural conditions and the limitations of individual agency to shift them. A central implication supported by my research, is that policies solely focused on supporting women into positions of esteem or power within the academy will not redress the wider inequalities women face, nor are they likely to increase the number of women in roles of positional power. My research shows that whilst women are finding success where their contribution fits in with institutional agendas (e.g. teaching and learning and the student experience), women's academic careers are potentially being limited in teaching only contracts and the restriction to areas of research in particular hubs. I would argue that what is required in the practices of academic development is a shift in emphasis away from supporting women into institutional behaviours to one of supporting change in the institutional behaviours which compromise women academics and students.

Literature analysing HE from a counter-hegemonic perspective has established the paradox inherent in the transition to neo-liberal marketisation in terms of the progressive discourses which have grown up alongside the upsurge of neo-liberal economic policies. Burke (2012) has pointed to the effects of this paradox with respect to the Widening Access policy debates. Morley (1999) has shown how Mass Higher Education is reinforcing inequalities in HE between pre and post 1992 institutions, producing insider /outsider discourses.

The value of qualifications is tumbling as more representatives from marginalised groups acquire them – a situation which challenges the very notion of equity in HE

(Morley, 1999: 36)

In an age when Higher Education is redefining itself, adherence to gendered perspectives of the wider social world continue to implicate the very nature of knowledge production itself (Calás and Smircich, 2009; Wickramasinghe, 2009). In the question of knowledge production in the academy, Morgan (1981) points to the dominant male rationality in Higher Education, linked to the history of knowledge production in the sociology of science and philosophy of science.

Morgan's notion of 'academic machismo' still resonates with my participants' accounts of the research-teaching tensions and the aggressive competitive nature of a research career. Burke (2012) and Burke and Crozier (2013) have powerfully discussed the internalisation of social structures, discourse and power inequalities whereby students are differentiated and mis-recognised, and difference is seen as innate potential and ability rather than about the interplay of embodied dispositions (McNay, 2008). Burke and Crozier (2012) also point to ways in which pedagogic knowledge, an arena which academic developers inhabit, is linked to sources of power and its acquisition part of the process of social reproduction.

Kanter (1977: 206-42) suggests that the introduction of women as tokens or minorities into large organisations has effects on both the minorities and majorities. The women find themselves adopting roles defined by the majority and accepting the rules of prescribed by the dominant culture. The way that women in my research have adapted – or not – to the dominant culture, as illustrated in Chapter 10 by Figure 10.1, would appear to suggest similar effects.

So, the dominance of sexist assumptions is less a product of the adoption or failure to adopt a particular equalities policy and much more a product of the social relations of knowledge production more widely in the academy. My study witnesses how power is relayed through seemingly trivial incidents and transactions; how patriarchal power is exercised rather than simply possessed:

The micro politics of gender oppression permeates intellectual frameworks, organisational cultures and women's psychic narratives.

(Morley, 1999:4)

The accounts of women in my research would support the position that although all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) espouse HR equalities policies, they are still wedded to an ethic of individual academic achievement which recognises few boundaries or barriers other than that of merit and ability; assigning lack of progress with a deficit view of women's confidence.

### **11.3 What are the implications of gender equalities in the academy for Academic Development?**

In the relationships between Academic Development and its role in academic career development, it is important for academic developers to develop a better understanding of the structural interplay which imposes limitations on equalities policy. The prevailing culture of meritocracy and a deficit model still defines the aspects of academic development practices concerned with supporting women's promotion prospects. The lines between academic development units and HR departments are increasingly blurred. This is only set to increase with the declared intention of the funding councils to publish data on the percentage of staff with teaching qualifications and incorporate such data into the Key Information Sets which HEIs are required to publish. This policy is enacted in response to the student fee regime, with attendant concerns about quality of teaching.

In 2014, the Higher Education Academy (HEA) restructured to reflect its full immersion into the marketization of HE as its public funding is set to be totally withdrawn by 2016. Part of its new mission is to target resources on priority 'Enhancement Themes', which include the embedding of the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) into HR promotion policies. Part of their intention is to produce further synergies between academic development practitioners and HR professionals within a 'Career Progression and Staff Transitions' initiative.<sup>1</sup> In the institutional context, it seems to me, now more than ever, that the implications are for academic developers and senior management policy-makers to recognise the risk of reproducing dominant institutional practices, and the particular risks for women in serving such policy agendas.

My thesis, whilst raising questions about the nature of agency, supports arguments for a balanced shift away from equalities policies which focus on supporting women to join the dominant hegemony of academic cultures and

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/workstreams-research/workstreams/staff-transitions>

practices, and for academic developers to work towards critical engagement with policy makers to embrace strategies which seriously consider wider understandings of knowledge production in the academy.

### **11.3.1 Academic Development: presence and absence**

The absence of references to Academic Development when co-constructing and interpreting the case stories produced a striking finding.<sup>2</sup> It suggests that Academic Development in its institutional form was not a significant factor in developing these women's careers.

I should stress at this point that from the outset my study was interested in exploring the role of Academic Development in women academics career experiences. Therefore, naturally, I was listening for the presence of Academic Development in the accounts. However, they were not there, even when I may have been guiding the interviews in that direction. Therefore, Academic Development features as an absence in the stories rather than a presence. The conclusions I draw derive not from the formal data set of these women's stories, in terms of what they say about Academic Development, but from what they do not say. The conclusions I draw and claims made from the study are based on reflection on my wider experience as an academic developer and my own career experiences, supported by my reading. It is this that enables me to create knowledge from the absence.

The careers of the women in my research have blossomed by driving through the pain of embodied discourses of masculine universalism, and in finding pleasure in a strong identity with the intellectual self. The support they value is to be found in references to non-formal departmental and/or professional networks, often in departments where women are more prevalent and which have a strong existing network of women academics. In departments where women succeed by absorbing male performative culture, acceptance of support from academic developers can be seen as a deficit, and to be avoided.

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<sup>2</sup> See clarification in 11.4 of my role as researcher in both co-constructing and interpreting the case stores

The study not only illuminates gender inequalities in HE but also the limitations inherent in the practices of academic development in resolving prevailing structural social conditions in the academy, which also haunt its own sense of 'un-homeliness'.

My findings contribute to the critique of academic development which identifies it as reproducing neo-liberal policy making and a masculine dominant culture of HE (see sections on the counter-hegemonic discourses in Chapter 3).

Academic Development discourses are limited in their capacity to change culture, and Academic developers themselves are very prone to suffer from the painful contradictions of the identity crises which characterise the field and Academic Development literature.

The important implication for the practice of Academic Development is that, whilst it continues to serve the dominant managerialist discourse, it is locked into a structure that reproduces gender inequality in terms of accepting ideas of meritocracy and the perceived universal nature of a masculinist discourses and structures. This is an implication both for the practices of Academic Development which claim to develop inclusive pedagogies for students, in the context of Widening Participation regimes (Burke, 2012; Burke and Crozier, 2013;2014), as well as in terms of working with HR departments to develop women's mentoring schemes and teaching routes to promotion. These initiatives usually located in HR, predominantly assume a 'metric-ocracy' i.e. the numbers game of 'women into' discourse which does not take account of the prevailing masculine structures and cultures of the academy.

Discourses, as we have seen, refer to the systems through which people give meaning to and make sense of the world. Academic Development can be seen as a hegemonic concept, with a set of practices and languages, operating through soft power. Academic Development is perceived to use specialised jargon which does not merely reflect but also reproduces and shapes the understandings and reactions to topics and events. This explains to me the fact that Academic Development in its institutional form is not mentioned by the women in my research as a significant factor in the development of their careers or academic identities. Lee and McWilliam's (2008) perspective on the

misrecognition inherent in academic development practice is relevant here; the subjects of academic development (developees) are not in the same game as the academic developers and do not see themselves as 'getting started' in teaching. They illustrate the tensions at play between developees and developers.

Whilst it is seen that women's career making is gendered and affected by the masculinist, neo-liberal hegemonic discourse, my research also shows that women respond by building successful careers, exploiting the opportunities afforded by an increasing emphasis on teaching routes to promotion, and/or by creating their own research niches. The feminist notion of the 'intellectual self' can be seen to some extent to override the pain of the neo-liberal masculinist structures of the academy. My case stories show how women find creative places of strength and support within their own networks, either inside the academy or outside it.

The poststructural analysis has shown how women are 'thought into' and assigned roles in the game, the Critical Realism lens shows how their perceived enactment of agency can reproduce or resist this. The lessons for academic developers are to understand that the practices of Academic Development can reproduce structural inequality by creating 'scripts' for behaviour change linked to positivist, masculinist neo-liberal policies; but also to recognise the ways in which women succeed within the system, and, ensure Academic Development practices support and learn from them.



### 11.3.2 ‘The importance of not being earnest’<sup>3</sup>: A new game for Academic Development?

My findings strongly suggest that there is a need for a ‘new game’ in the field of Academic Development, for the benefit of the field itself in its crisis of fragmentation, and for academic developers in their work with academics, torn between positivist managerial agendas and the often destructive tension with their own personal values .

In researching the counter-hegemonic literature in Chapter 3, I particularly found Rorty’s (1989) scholarship of irony and re-description, as applied by Lee and McWilliam (2008) useful in helping to both conceptualise, live and work with the contradictions and doubts I have experienced in my career as an academic developer. Ironical scholarship refuses a final vocabulary of explanation:

‘Ironists [are] ....never able to take themselves seriously because always aware that the terms in which they describe themselves are subject to change, always aware of the contingency and fragility of their final vocabularies and thus of their selves’

(Rorty: 73)

Lee and McWilliam’s work (2008) has perhaps been pivotal in critiquing the identity and boundary work prevalent in the literature of Academic Development. What is clearly useful and important about irony for academic developers is its capacity to keep ideas in play, challenging orthodoxy. It does not underwrite or dissolve doubt but insists on it as useful. (Ibid, 2008)

In this thesis I attempt to interpret my data and its relationship with my own practice as a woman and Academic Developer/novice researcher, I am aware that I have used two theoretical frameworks (Poststructuralism and Critical Realism) which are usually seen as incompatible. I have explained why I have done this to explore both the gendered structures at work in the data in juxtaposition with the women’s own sense of agency which produce heroic accounts. But there is also an aspect of the ironist present here, ‘holding

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<sup>3</sup> Lee and McWilliam ( 2008) p.74

incompatible things together because both or all are necessary' (Rorty, 1989: 149). Ironic scholarship allows us to see ourselves and others as more than one thing at the same time.

Using both theoretical frameworks has allowed me to see the impact of gendered structural inequalities that women academics face, embodied and reproduced in Academic Development practices within hegemonic culture and neo-liberal environment, whilst at the same time showing women academics pleasurably claiming the intellectual life for themselves.

There are clearly creative possibilities inherent in performativity, and the life of the mind has symbolic significance to feminism. This raises the possibility of counter-hegemonic practices in terms of re-defining intellectual work in opposition to the anti-intellectualism of masculinist performative cultures of the academy. As an academic/professional this insight can be applied to my own field as an academic developer. My analysis bears out the playful and transgressive possibilities as a way of countering the 'charming absurdities' of academic life. (McWilliam, 2002, 2004)

This leads to questions about the implications for my own work in the field of academic development policy and practice. I have shown academic development practices to be a form of identity management and the question arises: What end does this serve? A recommendation from my research is that academic developers must explicitly undertake to understand better their purposes and practices. This involves increasingly complex micro-political literacy and evolved theoretical frameworks for their daily engagement with hegemonic power relations. This includes developing strategies for self-care, because the endeavour has risks.

Lee and McWilliam (2008) have critiqued the identity crises in the field of Academic Development, which I would agree is now so divided that the term has almost lost meaning. Referring to the dominance of academic developer identity in the literature of that field, they point to the unhelpful straddling and balancing discourses inherent in academic, but suggest that too much inward-looking and self-examination can limit a move forward. They call for a 'new

leaderly disposition' to create academic developers as players in the new games of the contemporary academy, rather than as pawns. The timing of this is now urgent given the crisis of succession which is now occurring, a generation after Academic Development began to appear in the academy.

....the imperative should not be to tidy up the field or invent systems for this purpose.....players need a more critical scholarship. But it is not necessarily scholarship of the Marxian sort that pre-empts a transformative moment for academic development. Rather, criticality needs to be directed towards mapping the field in multiple ways that allow its diversity to be deployed knowingly in the ongoing re-invention of the academy.

(Lee and Mc William, 2008: 76)

All this indicates the changing of practices and questioning of received development frameworks, such as the UKPSF. I do not under-estimate the difficulties in doing this. It would indicate that academic developers will work best as collaborators with academics – and in the context of my thesis, with women academics in particular – in their own contexts. Academic development does not work best when imprinting a pedagogic ideology or transmitting 'development knowledge' and using neo-liberal frameworks as cover for its existence.

One area of exploration here, as Malcolm and Zukas (2009) suggest, is working with academics collaboratively in the research of academic work. A more holistic approach to supporting academic development is needed, one which recognises that academic practice is not sets of discrete practices of teaching, research and administration, but that all three are 'inextricably entangled with, and fundamental to academic experience and integrity' (p.504). My findings highlight the need for a counter-hegemonic way of being, knowing and doing of academic development practice. Academic developers caught in the middle 'straddling' is not a position that can be resolved or unified in some way by categorisation of the field.

For me, in spite of the limitations I place on individual agency, the 'so what' question to be faced at the end of any research project, implies suggestions for action. There is a dilemma in the relationship between research and action. Not least, whether it is possible to hold what might be characterised as an

Enlightenment belief in a relationship between outcome and intervention. The postmodern futility of structure versus agency is ever present in my own position as a feminist researcher, as well as academic developer, or as Fine (1994) puts it 'how best to unleash ourselves from our central contradiction – being researchers and feminists' – or in my case researcher, feminist and academic development practitioner.

My research was originally motivated from a desire to generate notions of actionability within an agenda for change in Higher Education policy and feminism offers a fine tradition for fusing together research and practice:

It is the political intent of feminists that drives the epistemology of gender research; in terms of conceptualising, strategizing, and advocating empowerment of individuals, and changes in power within policies, institutions, ideologies and social structures.

(Wickramasinghe, 2006: 609)

Wickramasinghe advocates gender mainstreaming as the most tangible strategy for action. Gender mainstreaming is defined by Wickramasinghe (ibid: 609) as a practical methodology for institutionalising structural change in social configurations, policies, organisations, disciplines and programmes. It involves gender training to create awareness which precipitates attitudinal change. For example, in Sri Lanka, research in this area has resulted in policy methodologies which have produced gender sensitive policy guides in the field of disaster management.

However, gender-mainstreaming has been criticised for itself potentially reproducing hegemony, particular in a post-colonial context. Morley (1999) summarises the argument clearly: 'The normative connotations of policies for equality can separate the individual from the wider social context and perpetuate hegemonic value, systems and hooks' (p.39).

### **11.3.3 Practical strategies**

It is not the purpose of my thesis to produce simplistic recommendations or 'toolkits' to offer advice to academic developers. I hope my study raises

awareness of the complex interplay of gendered career journeys in the academy with the practices of Academic Development, and more widely, the condition and impacts of masculinist, neoliberal hegemonies inherent in the hierarchical structures of the academy and directives of policy makers.

However, I will highlight below some practical approaches I will be reflecting on for my own future practice. These include:

- Working ‘ironically’ to break down the hierarchical relationships by seeking to open up the discourse of ‘Who am I?’ ‘Who are you? Who are we? Thus maximising opportunities to critically declare shared values and shared understandings of the development game, pedagogic knowledge and the embedded structural inequalities working to distort academic development.
- An increased emphasis on informal CPD – moving away from monolithic centralist approaches.
- Working collaboratively to learn from and with women in departmental communities of practice. The most successful women in my stories developed informal mentoring partnerships and a strong community of practice, which included external networks. Academic Development staff could facilitate these where they do not exist and work with HR to discuss the interplay of formal mentoring schemes and non-formal approaches, in terms of the emphasis of allocation of resources.
- Increasing dialogue with HR and within institutional committee structures to contribute as much as possible to integrate diversity initiatives critically as a holistic enterprise across the institution. This needs to include the review of teaching routes to promotion and the naïve unintended consequences which reinforce inequality in career choices for women.
- Seeking opportunities, within self-care strategies, as women academic developers, to create more space to pursue the ‘perverse pleasures’ of intellectual life. Identifying opportunities for Academic developers to collaborate with academic colleagues in researching gendered institutional and pedagogic practices. Exploring the affordances of being, knowing and doing as a woman.

- Expanding the possibilities of social media and digital resources to create diverse and safe, critical development spaces for women academics and developers.

#### **11.4 Limitations of the study: areas for further research**

Producing findings from co-constructed case stories where I, as researcher, have taken some responsibility for the nature of the account could be seen as problematic. Moreover, I have based conclusions about the significance of academic development for my participants not on what they say about it but rather on what they do not say. The arguments I make regarding implications for Academic Development, as emphasised above in 3.1.1, are derived not so much from the empirical data but on the implications from them supported by my reading of the literature and reflection on my professional experience.

It is important also to emphasise here, as outlined in Chapter 2, that during the co-construction process I paid attention to the absences and presences only in terms of using the women's own words to create narratives based on what appeared – by emphasis and /or repetition – to be significant to them. Their sense of agency emerges through that process. A poststructural analysis is concerned with absences in accounts, but it was only at the interpretative stage, not the co-construction stages, where I applied the poststructural lens to the stories.

##### **11.4.1 Transectional studies**

Equalities discourses have been criticised in terms of their relationship to social and organisational change. Franzway et al. (1989:96) pose the relativity problem: 'equal with what, or whom?' It is the case that men themselves are not all equal. Equalities policies which focus on gender often ignore the factors of ethnicity, class, sexuality, disability and age, and therefore could be said to represent an absence of transectionality in the equalities movement. It is not my intention to define women as a universal category or disregard issues of wider diversities.

My study concerns the accounts of white, able-bodied women, and whilst their accounts do touch upon the effects of sexuality, class and age there are transectional issues which remain unexplored in this thesis, and could be an area of further analysis .I recognize that all knowledge is partial, situated and potentially exclusionary and further research is needed to widen the scope and sample of women's stories. My position is that all normative discourses impact upon academic development practices in similar ways.

#### **11.4.2 Knowledge production in the academy – whose knowledge?**

The nature of knowledge production in the academy is an important element in the equalities debates discussed here. However, further research is needed into the role of academic developers in the production of institutional strategies (e.g. Learning and Teaching Strategies) which aspire to create evidence-based approaches to raising teaching outcomes. Currently many of these strategies ignore nuanced debates on what counts as evidence and rely only on quite flawed metrics and quantitative methods. My study has drawn on feminist literature to suggest that Academic Development practices which focus on merely supporting women into traditional structures (areas of teaching, administration and pedagogic research) marginalises wider conceptions of knowledge and reinforce inequalities. However, further research needs to be done to explore the roles academic developers have in policy making and how these are enacted.

#### **11.4.3 Affective dimensions and well-being**

This study has data which could have been used to pay more attention to the affective dimensions and their relationship to agency and identity performativity. This was not to under-play this dimension but is possibly a consequence of my own somewhat fractured reflexivity during the course of initially writing up the doctorate in extremely turbulent personal circumstances.

### 11.5 Contribution to knowledge

My thesis makes a contribution to knowledge in two ways:

First, it uses women's own words to bring to life *how* wider, gendered social conditions effectively operate in the academy to impact on women's career trajectories. The stories provide a vivid illustration of women's academic identities; although often positioned as agentic in a culture of meritocracy, they are shown to be deeply and often painfully rooted in gendered structures of society, continually being socially reproduced within the academy, itself shaped by the discourses of a neo-liberal policy environment which influence the discourse and practices of Academic Development.

The achievement of my poststructural analysis of the stories is not to deny the success of the women's careers because the narratives are indeed stories of success showing women who have been able to transcend the restrictions imposed by patriarchal structures. Rather it is to open up the narratives to more complex and nuanced analysis which demonstrates that their career success is still shaped and constricted by these structures, and the implications of this for Academic Development.

Second, by theorising women's lived experience at the micro-level, using contrasting theoretical frameworks, this thesis makes an original contribution to the counter-hegemonic discourses of academic development, using resources drawn from global studies of equalities in Higher Education. My findings support:

- a) a vision of Academic Development which is more critically aware of 'the game' in terms of interactions between gendered structures and the limitations of agency.
- b) Academic Development practices which demur from 'centrist' approaches to development and work 'knowingly' to acknowledge tensions rather than concern itself with trying (and failing) to resolve them.
- c) feminist standpoints to conclude that academic development practices based on polarised understandings of equalities which focus only on



agency rather than structure, i.e. how to support women in the male hegemony rather than transform the structures of that system, will not redress the wider nor internal social inequalities which women face (Morley, 2012).

### **11.6 Reflections: the personal journey**

When I began the Ed.D in 2005, I had been working in the Teaching and Learning Development Unit at the University of Sussex for 2 years, and before that in the Staff Development Unit, also at Sussex. My primary responsibility at that time was as Convenor of the PGCertHE, a programme I had helped develop at Sussex when I first arrived in 2000. I must have been particularly naive about this role at that time, as it seemed very odd to me that there was so much resistance to teacher training by academics. However, I discovered less resistance from postgraduate teaching assistants, and they became my main concern for a good deal of my time at Sussex, and were a focus of my early Ed.D assignments. I learned much from working with that inspiring group of aspiring academics and probably owe to them much of my interest towards critiquing academic development practices.

As the neo-liberal pressure on Higher Education tightened, the tensions in my role as an academic developer increased and every day non-formal approaches to my role came to be viewed almost as subversive by the administrative structures. Undertaking the Ed.D was my initial response to this tightening pressure, which seems paradoxical as it also placed a good deal more pressure on me at a time when I had three teenaged children and aging parents. In the early phases where there were regular workshops and weekend gatherings, it was a refuge and a delight. The thesis stage was lonelier and not so delightful, but by that time I had developed strong peer networks via social media, which sustain me even to this day. On line social networks became absolutely vital to keeping in touch with colleagues on the programme as I moved on from Sussex to take up promotions to academic posts. First, in 2007, at the University of West London, and in 2009 at Bangor University in North Wales, where I am still

working as Senior Lecturer in the School of Education and until May 2014, Director of the Academic Development Unit.

Since 2013, a new PVC Teaching and Learning has been appointed at Bangor and my unit has been re-structured. Following a long and protracted process during 2014, my post is now Head of Continuing Professional Development for Teaching and Learning, within a more centralised Enhancement operation which the PVC manages directly himself. However, the fact that I was able to insist on retaining my academic identity and title as a Senior Lecturer in Higher Education, on secondment from the School of Education, is perhaps evidence of my own adherence to the intellectual self, and is in no small part due to my development and confidence as an academic gained through undertaking the Ed.D.

Having persisted to overcome many obstacles to bring this thesis to submission, I have perhaps been driven by my own meta-reflexive *modus vivendi* which convinces me that the outcomes are not just important for the symbolic recognition of my academic identity and status, but also for the 'intellectual self' with which I strongly identify as part of the Beauvoirian tradition of feminism. Like the women in my stories, the enactment of this identity brings pleasure, and recognises the many affordances of life in the academy.

The Ed.D has had a considerable impact on my intellectual and professional development and on my identity as an academic-professional. I have entered more fully and widely into the scholarly discourses of research into Higher Education, which is where I now see my practice to be located. The research communities at Sussex, in particular the Centre for Higher Education and Equity Research (CHEER) have provided a sense of a research community home during my transitions, although in physical terms I am very far from it! I have been encouraged and supported to submit papers to Higher Education research conferences, in particular the Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE), which I have managed to do most years since I started the Ed.D. I am now being contacted by publishers inviting me to contribute to their journals. I

have joined research networks operating in Wales, where collaboration is a way of life.

However, the opportunities to develop my research interests have been severely constrained by extremely turbulent times for the increasingly fragmented fortunes of the academic development profession. In Wales, a university merger strategy, initiated by the Welsh Assembly Government's regionalisation agenda for Higher Education in Wales, led to two years of uncertainty for many institutions in this nation, and impacted heavily on my small unit at Bangor. This has made the thesis stage of my Ed.D very hard to sustain. I have had to take two intermissions, and in spite of adherence to my academic identity, it has been continually very hard to prioritise my thesis above the demands of many role transitions and work responsibilities.

A new PVC often results in a restructuring of academic development units, and is certainly a significant factor which contributes to the fragmentation of which the field complains. It is also an indicator of the rapid changes which have overwhelmed the sector during this period. In the fifteen years as an academic /educational developer, I have experienced five protracted processes of restructuring and worked with 11 PVC's leading the direction of the work of the various units. Only three of these were women, who stayed in their roles barely more than one year each.

My doctoral journey therefore has in many ways been a painful one. My experience can be understood in terms of the conclusions of my study from which can be inferred that the notion of an academic developer as reflexive researcher can be a problematic and risky one given the prevailing structures and discourses of Higher Education. Sometimes it has been a struggle to articulate the critique of my own field because I am so steeped in it, and affected by the hegemonic discourses which rule it. Add to that the condition of being a woman, and the struggle clearly intensifies. However, my doctoral study has given me a critical understanding which has helped make sense of the tensions I encounter every day in my practice and in the wider contexts of

Higher Education in the UK. The ability I now have to theorise these tensions, through the theoretical frameworks I have researched for this thesis and the earlier work associated with it, have been an invaluable asset in my array of professional coping strategies.

The literature of global inequalities has established the feminist conclusions which my study supports; however, I have developed significantly my own understanding of these debates through engaging with them in the context of my own practice of Academic Development. I would argue that they are not straightforward as far as being recognised sufficiently in the Higher Education policy environment central to the everyday practices of academic developers. My study contributes insight into how gender inequality operates in a particularly contested professional field within the academy. It has given me an invaluable insight into the lives of 5 academic women and the social structures acting upon their lives and careers. I have been sustained in the determined belief that my study, which has provided such insight to me, has something important to contribute to the literature and practice of Academic Development at this critical time.

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